**Course Assessment in a Box**

**Reporting Form for Course SLO Assessment Projects**

*Please submit this document to your Dean when completed.*

Revised August 2013

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**Assessment Date:** Fall 2013

**Faculty Name(s):** Barbara Duggal, KG Greenstein, Jenny Schmidt, Kathy Sparling

1. **Course Name and Number:**

   LS101: Steps to Successful Research, a 1-credit, online course.

2. **All Course SLOs from the Course Outline of Record:**

   Course SLOs from outline of record (since condensed in revised outline of record, but substantively unchanged):
   1. Formulate a research topic.
   2. Analyze information needs for a particular subject.
   3. Initiate a search for appropriate materials in both print and electronic forms.
   4. Critically evaluate information for quality in relation to a given research topic.
   5. Cite material correctly in Modern Language Association format (MLA, 7th ed.).
   6. Learn basic research strategies that can be applied in any research environment.

3. **Specific Course SLO(s) assessed as part of this project:**

   4. Critically evaluate information for quality in relation to a given research topic.

4. **Assessment strategy or tool used in the assessment.** (Describe below, and if applicable copy/paste any additional related documents at end of this form (i.e. Rubric, score sheet, test questions, essay assignment, etc.):

   Amongst the primary instructors of LS101, anecdotal evidence was shared to suggest the area frequently found most challenging for students to be the process of evaluating sources according to specified criteria.

   Students are required to demonstrate mastery of SLO #4 through source annotations in the final project, an annotated bibliography. Formerly, students were allowed to self-select 2 out of 5 criteria by which to evaluate a source. They gravitated towards "relevancy" and "purpose", which we felt were criteria that led to a summary of source content rather than a critical examination of why the source is authoritative and reliable.

   To address this, we revised lecture content and quiz questions, underscoring the evaluation process, and modified final project requirements having to do with evaluation criteria. The modification required students to grapple with more important indicators of quality, such as authority and credibility (accuracy).

   Our hypothesis was that this adjustment would demand greater critical examination and assessment of sources leading to evaluation as the standard.

**NOTE:** This will usually consist of things you are already using to evaluate student work, i.e. Final Exam questions, Final Essay, Final Presentation or Culminating Project, other Assignments, Portfolio Evaluation, Performance Assessment, Department Testing, Pre and Post
Tests, Vendor or Industry Certification Examinations, Indirect Assessments (Student Surveys, Focus Group Discussions, Interviews), etc.

5. Specific aspects of the assessment tool which link up to specific Course SLOs being assessed (i.e. Which specific test questions measured which Course SLOs? Note: May describe with #4 above):

| SLO #4: Please see appended material which provides samples of revised lecture content, quiz questions, and the specific modification to the final project requirement referred to above (#4). |

6. Results and analysis of the data. (Explain below and if applicable copy/paste any related documents, i.e. spreadsheets with data at the end of this document):

Baseline data was collected from two sections of LS101 final projects (one had been taught fall 2011, one taught fall 2012). Instructors tallied the number of times the various criteria was addressed to verify our anecdotal sense of how often “authority/accuracy” was self-selected by students to address in their annotations. We found that 374 (57%) of 652 annotations graded addressed the “authority/accuracy” criteria.

Significant improvement was seen following the modifications to lecture content, quiz questions, and the final project requirement which were designed to more clearly articulate the importance of engaging in an evaluation process and then demonstrating the results of that process in the final project.

Data from two sections (one taught fall 2012, one taught summer 2013) showed 427 (75%) of 568 annotations adequately addressed the “authority” criteria (this criteria had been revised to encompass the concept of accuracy as well as credibility, see appended material).

7. Describe any faculty dialogue that occurred as part of the assessment process (i.e. Were results shared at a department meeting? Was there discussion about changing any SLOs? Etc.):

Faculty engaged in dialogue to identify a targeted area in need of improvement, verified need through data collection and analysis, then agreed on an assessment strategy. Modifications were made to the course that we hoped would address the need; this was tested through a second process of data collection and analysis.

While the data demonstrates improvement, instructors are still not entirely satisfied with the level of proficiency with which students achieved mastery of this SLO. We have continued a dialogue on how we might fine-tune evaluation criteria in general.

Instructors of LS101 are currently engaged in a discussion of how to address the concept of objectivity. We are discussing how other terms, such as “perspective”, “bias”, or “point-of-view” might be used instead, how best to conceptualize and characterize these terms, and the most effective way of encouraging students to apply them as evaluation criteria.

8. Next steps (i.e. any planned revisions to curriculum or teaching strategies to promote student success, future assessment plans, etc.):

Once we have come to a consensus on the current topic under discussion, revisions to the course may be implemented.
9. Results of implemented changes, if available at this time:

While the data demonstrates improvement, instructors are still not entirely satisfied with the level of proficiency with which students achieved mastery of this SLO. We have continued a dialogue on how we might fine-tune other evaluation criteria (see #7).
Revisions to LS101 Quiz Questions, Final Project Requirements, and Lecture Content

**Quiz Questions**
In Week Two, when evaluation criterion is introduced, two questions were added to that week’s quiz. The first required students to distinguish between a summary and an evaluative annotation of a source:

- Which annotation is simply a summary of the source, and which annotation evaluates the source according to criteria you learned about this week?

The second question was added as a follow-up to another question requiring students to select a reference source relevant to their research topic. The follow-up question requires students to write an annotation that evaluates the source’s authority and credibility (essentially to do what is required in the final project):

- Use the reference source you selected to answer question 6. Cite this resource using the MLA format. Then write an annotation which evaluates this source. Using the criteria you have learned about this week, first evaluate the source's authority (who are the authors or editors and what are their credentials?). Next, evaluate the source according to at least one other criterion (relevance, purpose, objectivity, and/or currency).

**Final Project**
Among the original directions for the final project, students were allowed to self-select two out of five of the criteria by which to evaluate sources. The final project directions associated with evaluation criteria was revised to require “authority”, which now encompassed “accuracy”, allowing students to self-select at least one other criteria.

Original:
Each source should be annotated. The annotation should use at least two of the five evaluation criteria discussed in week two: authority, relevance, purpose, accuracy, and currency.

Revision:
Each citation must include an evaluative annotation. First, evaluate the author’s “authority”. Select 1 other criterion by which to evaluate the source: purpose, relevance, currency, or objectivity.

**Lecture Content**
1. In source annotations, students tended toward writing summaries rather than evaluative annotations. Lectures were revised to clarify the difference between summarizing a source’s content and evaluating a source according to specified criteria.

Original:
To see an example of a final project, go to the Course Content page and click on the "Example Annotated Bibliography" link. Notice that each source the student found includes an evaluation of the source (the annotation) and each source is cited using the Modern Language Association (MLA) format.
Revision:
To see an example of a final project, go to the Course Content page and click on the "Example Annotated Bibliography" link. Please notice that each source includes a description of it called an "annotation." Please notice the annotation is an evaluation of the source, not just a summary of the source’s content. (note: sample annotated bibliography was revised to visually demonstrate key elements of evaluative annotations in color coded notations, see appendix ____) 

Original:
What we will do now (and throughout the course) is to think about how we decide whether a particular source should be included in a paper. Once we have decided to include something, we also need to be able to cite it. These two steps will be combined as you write your annotated bibliography.

Revision:
What we will do now (and throughout the course) is to think about how we decide whether a particular source should be included in a paper; this requires a process of evaluation. Once we have engaged in this process of evaluation and have decided to include something, we also need to be able to cite it. These two steps will be combined as you write your annotated bibliography.

Original:
At the end of Chapter 1, Stebbins spends a lot of time discussing evaluation criteria. It is important to pay special attention to these criteria because you will use them heavily in your final project, the annotated bibliography.

Revision:
At the end of Chapter 1, Stebbins spends a lot of time discussing evaluation criteria. It is important to pay special attention to these criteria because they serve as the basis for the evaluation process you will go through to justify the inclusion of a source in the annotated bibliography--your final project for this class.

2. To encourage the practice of evaluating sources over summarizing sources, evaluation criteria terms were revised, descriptions enhanced and explicitly linked to the role each plays in an evaluation process, and extra content was added to underscore its importance.

Original:
First, though, a general note about evaluation from Stebbins: developing evaluation skills takes time and practice. For example, after reading through a number of journal articles and also a number of magazine articles, you will more quickly be able to pick out scholarly articles versus those intended for a general audience. This is an easier process with print sources; scholarly journals have a very different look to them than magazines targeting a general readership. However, when dealing with online sources, a more highly developed set of evaluation skills is required. Stebbins provides a good list of criteria by which to judge whether a source is scholarly or not on p.16. There will be more on this topic in the reading for week 4. Now onto the evaluation criteria:

**Authority:** Here you are trying to understand why you should believe what this author has to say about your subject. Is the author a scholar who has devoted her career to this subject, or a newspaper writer
who was told to spend two days writing an article about it? There are different methods for finding out about the authors of books, articles, and other items.

**Purpose:** This has to do with why the source was written. Was it to educate, to convince, to sell something, or to entertain? Who is the intended audience or readership? Understanding the author's purpose will help you evaluate the claims the author makes.

**Accuracy:** If facts are presented in the source, are they supported by citations and a bibliography? If the source is an article, has it been peer-reviewed and edited to check for accuracy? (for more on peer review, see Stebbins, page 7).

**Currency:** For some subjects, especially those in the sciences, currency is critical. For other subjects it is not. For example, if you are doing research on the War of 1812, is it absolutely crucial that your source be one published in the last ten years? On the other hand, if you are conducting research on whether or not the Three Strikes law has had an effect on violent crime, you would want to cite the most recently published information.

**Relevance:** A critical evaluation criteria. As you start your research, ideally you will have written down your questions about your topic. For example; how close is stem cell research to being able to make a real contribution to the welfare of persons with Parkinson's disease? As you do research you may come across some very interesting research about Parkinson's, but if this research does not answer your question, it is of little use to you.

**Revision:**

We will now take a more detailed look at evaluation criteria. Once you are alert to the idea of evaluating sources, you will notice a variety of different terms most often used as criteria by which to examine a source. Pay attention to how Stebbins introduces the topic by emphasizing the importance of challenging your assumptions on page 15, then her descriptions of evaluation criteria. While various terms may be used, they all attempt to get at the same thing: to provide a set of criteria by which to evaluate whether or not a source is suitable to satisfy your information need. Below are the criteria that you will apply to sources in this class:

**Authority:** *This is perhaps the most critical evaluation criteria.* Here you are trying to understand why you should believe what this author has to say about your subject. Is the author a scholar who has devoted her career to this subject, or a newspaper writer who was told to spend two days writing an article about it? How do you find out what an author's qualifications might be? Often enough, a quick internet search will reveal information about an author and his or her credentials. If the author claims university affiliation, you can go to the institution's website and verify this. Are the author's claims supported by citations and a bibliography? If the source is an article, has it been peer-reviewed and edited to check for accuracy? (for more on peer review, see Stebbins, page 7). You may also attempt to verify the credibility of the publishing source.

**Relevance:** This is also a critical evaluation criteria. As you start your research, ideally you will write down the questions you begin to have about your topic as you go. For example, is there evidence to show that stem cell research can make a contribution to the welfare of persons with Parkinson's disease? As you do research you may come across some very interesting sources about Parkinson's,
but beyond providing general background information, if this research does not begin to answer your question, it is of little use to you.

**Purpose:** This has to do with why the source was written. Was it to educate, to convince, to sell something, or to entertain? For example, if a big pharmaceutical company funded the research on a specific kind of medication, can you trust the results of the study? Who is the intended audience or readership? For instance, if it is geared for an elementary school student reader, it has no place in college level research. Understanding the author's purpose will help you evaluate the claims the author makes, or its relevance to your research.

**Currency:** For some subjects, especially those in the sciences, currency is critical. For other subjects it is not. For example, if you are doing research on the War of 1812, is it absolutely crucial that your source be one published in the last ten years? On the other hand, if you are conducting research on whether or not the Three Strikes law has had an effect on violent crime, you would want to cite the most recently published information.

**Objectivity:** Does the author present her findings in an objective fashion? Do you detect a bias, or a particular point of view in the author’s claims? Is the language free of emotion-arousing words? If facts are presented in the source, are they supported by legitimate studies, citations and a bibliography? Because a source appears to be advocating for a particular point of view does not automatically eliminate it from being useful to your research. But as a responsible researcher you are obligated to identify and understand what the bias may be, and present the information within its appropriate context so your reader can make up his own mind about its legitimacy.

**Hot Tip:** For the purposes of this class, train yourself to apply the evaluation criteria above while reviewing sources you are considering for inclusion into your annotated bibliography, and **take notes as you do this!** This will help you write your annotations later. Why? The annotations you will write for this project are not merely general summaries of what the source is about. You are expected to evaluate the source, using two or more of the criteria above, as it specifically applies to your topic.

That is important, so I'm going to repeat it and emphasize it in bold: The annotations you will write throughout this course, and especially for your final project, **are not merely general summaries of what the source is about. You are expected to evaluate the source; first evaluate the source’s authority, as it is discussed above, then by at least one other criterion, as it specifically applies to your topic.**

If you haven’t already, now would be a good time to take a look at the example of an annotated bibliography that appears on the Course Content page and see how those annotations have incorporated the evaluation criteria you are learning about now.