

# First Year Seminar Information Literacy Program

## Final Report for Fall 2017

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*Submitted by Christine Bombaro, Associate Director, Waidner-Spahr Library*

### Summary

Each year, the library participates in the First-Year Seminar (FYS) experience by assisting faculty members with integrating the college's information literacy (IL) goals into their courses. At the conclusion of each fall semester, we examine various elements of the program to identify areas that are working well and those we may improve the following year. Key results from this year's evaluation include:

- Librarians have increased involvement with the FYS program to nearly 100%. They worked in some way with 44 of 45 FY seminars, often designing research assignments with the faculty and participating in evaluating student work.
- Most FYS sections are providing students with opportunities to learn research skills as part of a recursive writing process.
- The most frequently observed challenges mentioned by students and faculty included:
  - Evaluating sources
  - Citing sources
  - Finding sources that are relevant to a selected research topic
  - Searching for research material effectively/efficiently

### Introduction

The First Year Seminar resolution passed by faculty vote in 2015 states that "All seminars will include at least one assignment that requires students to a) seek and evaluate information on a topic relevant to the seminar, and b) integrate that new knowledge into a project that allows students the opportunity to engage in scholarly conversation appropriate to the first-year level." It adds, "Revision is essential to developing the skills of critical analysis, writing, and information literacy. For this reason, all seminars will teach the research and writing process so as to provide opportunities for revision."

This report focuses on the various ways in which teaching inputs and perceptions of students and faculty members demonstrate that these important aspects of the FY mandate are being met. For this report, three areas were closely examined:

- Instructional data – Includes instruction statistics and the type of IL work conducted with each FYS. See page 2.
- Course evaluations – This data came from a questionnaire that was added to the FYS course evaluation packet. See page 5.
- Faculty survey – This annual survey asks faculty about their impressions of the IL program and their students' performance on research assignments. See page 10.

Also reviewed here are the results of the college's required Academic Integrity Tutorial, which is currently undergoing a complete revision after considering several years' worth of feedback.

## Instructional Data

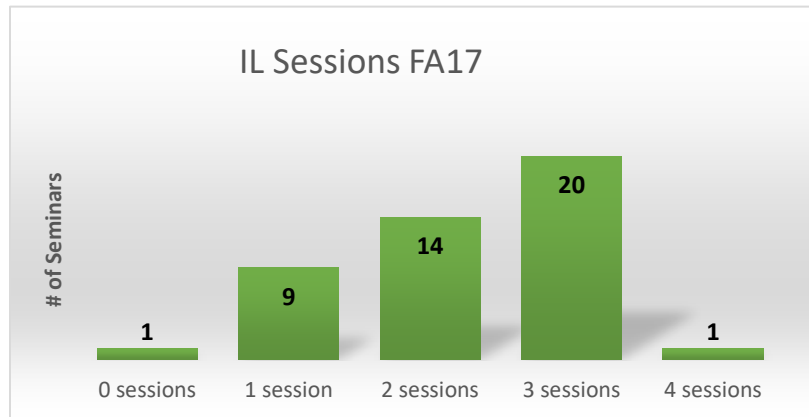
### Sessions

In fall 2017, 45 First-Year Seminars were offered and eight librarians were assigned as liaisons to them. As illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 1, all but one of the FYS instructors scheduled librarians for at least one in-person IL session. For more detail about IL classroom activity, see Appendix A – Class Visits and Activity by Instructor.

Table 1

# of IL Sessions	# of Seminars
0 sessions	1
1 session	9
2 sessions	14
3 sessions	20
4 sessions	1

Figure 1

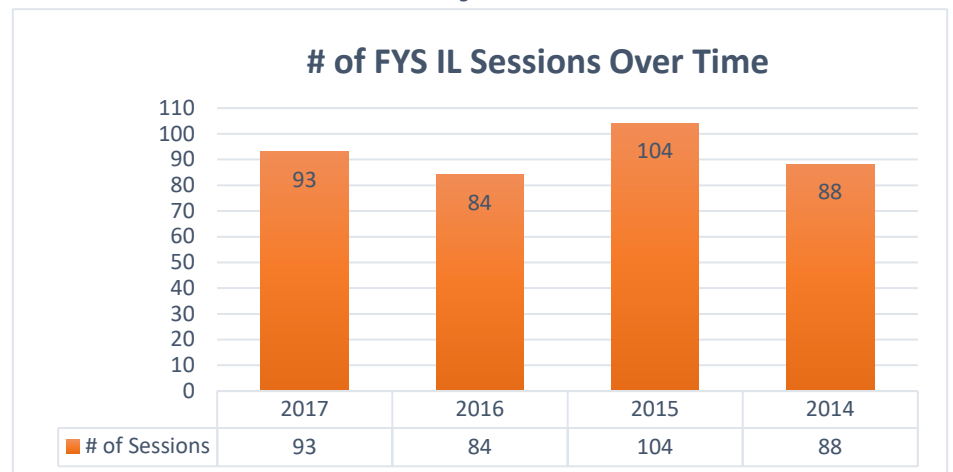


As shown in Table 2 and Figure 2, there has been a slight increase in demand for IL sessions over the past four years, including a spike in 2015 when the college admitted an unusually large FY class. There was a 10% increase in requests for FYS library sessions between 2016 and 2017.

Table 2

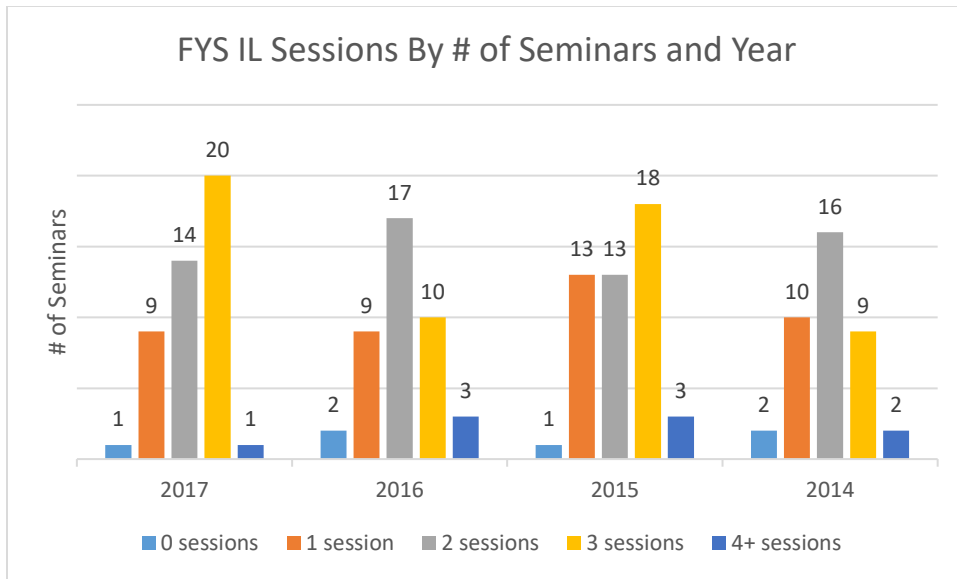
Year	# of Sessions
2017	93
2016	84
2015	104
2014	88

Figure 2



The number of IL sessions taught in individual FYS courses is illustrated in Figure 3. Of note is that the number of seminars requesting three IL sessions has increased by 100% over 2016 and more than 120% over 2014, when two sessions per seminar were most frequently requested.

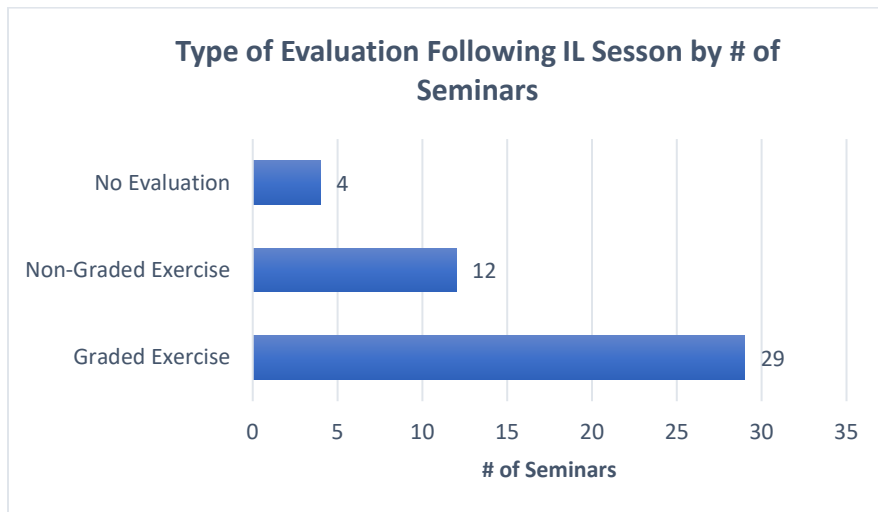
Figure 3



*Research Assignments Following an IL Session*

Many FYS instructors required graded homework immediately following the instructional session or graded in-class work. As noted in Figure 4, 91% of the seminars included a reinforcing exercise following the IL session; of those, 71% were graded either by the instructor or the librarian.

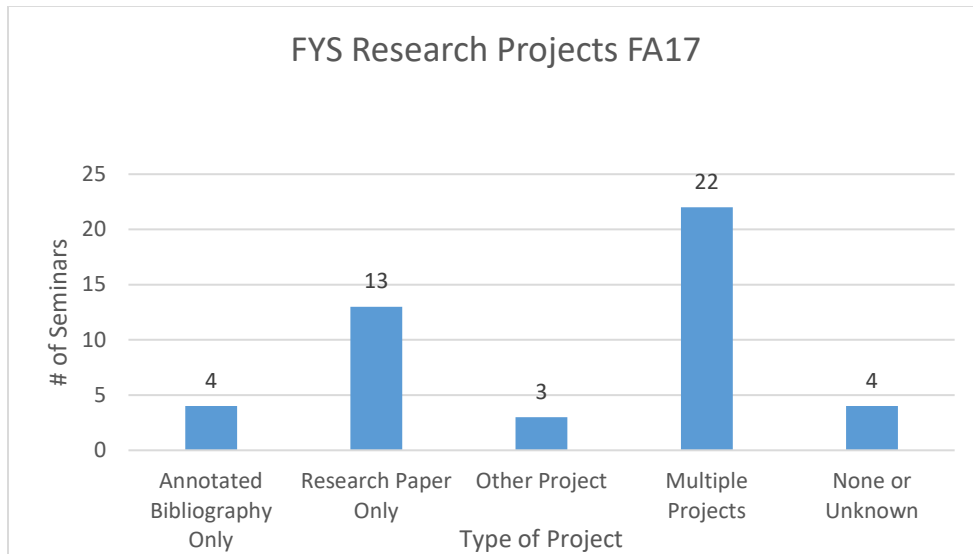
Figure 4



*Mid-Term or Final Research Projects*

Librarians were able to determine that 41 of the FYS professors required students to complete at least one mid-semester or final project that included the application of information literacy skills. Specific types of assignments are noted in Figure 5.

Figure 5



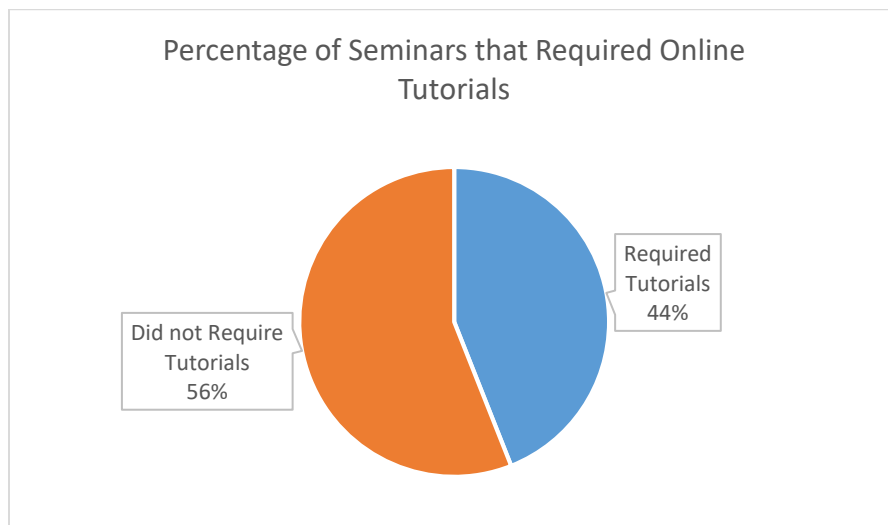
“Other Projects” included response papers, policy papers, and oral presentations. Librarians participated in evaluating research projects in 30 out of the 45 (67%) of the sections.

#### Online Tutorials

In 2015, the library staff developed a series of [information literacy tutorials](#) designed to help students learn how to do simpler research tasks so that librarians could concentrate on higher-order information literacy skills during their limited time in the classroom.

As shown in Figure 6, 44% of FYS instructors assigned their students to complete one or more of the tutorials.

Figure 6



The most frequently accessed tutorials were:

- [Distinguishing Among Source Types](#)
- [Choosing Search Terms](#)
- [Choosing a Database](#)

## Course Evaluation & General Student Comments

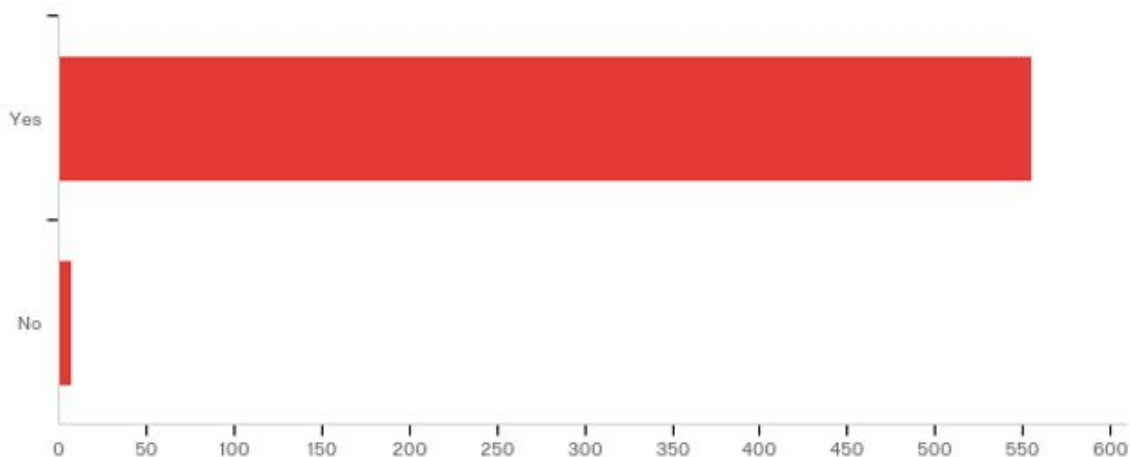
For the third year, a questionnaire on information literacy was added to traditional FYS course evaluations. The intent was for students to report on the extent of their IL experiences within the course. We received results from 565 students (93% of the Class of 2021)<sup>1</sup>. All seminars were represented; at least ten students from all but two seminars submitted a complete form.

### Course Evaluation

The course evaluation's first question asked students to recall if they had the opportunity to practice library research skills during the course. In agreement with our other data, nearly all the respondents (555 out of 565) answered affirmatively, as shown in Figure 7. A few individual students from various seminars answered "No" even though others in the same course answered "Yes." This may indicate that they did not understand the question or the task, or that for some reason these individuals did not do the required work.

Figure 7

**During this course, did you have an opportunity to practice library research skills?  
(For example, by searching databases, creating and analyzing a list of sources, etc.)**



Students were then asked to identify the types of IL skills that were required as they completed course assignments that included a research component. Possible answers for this question were:

- Use library databases to find research materials such as books and journal articles

<sup>1</sup> The official class size was 609 students:

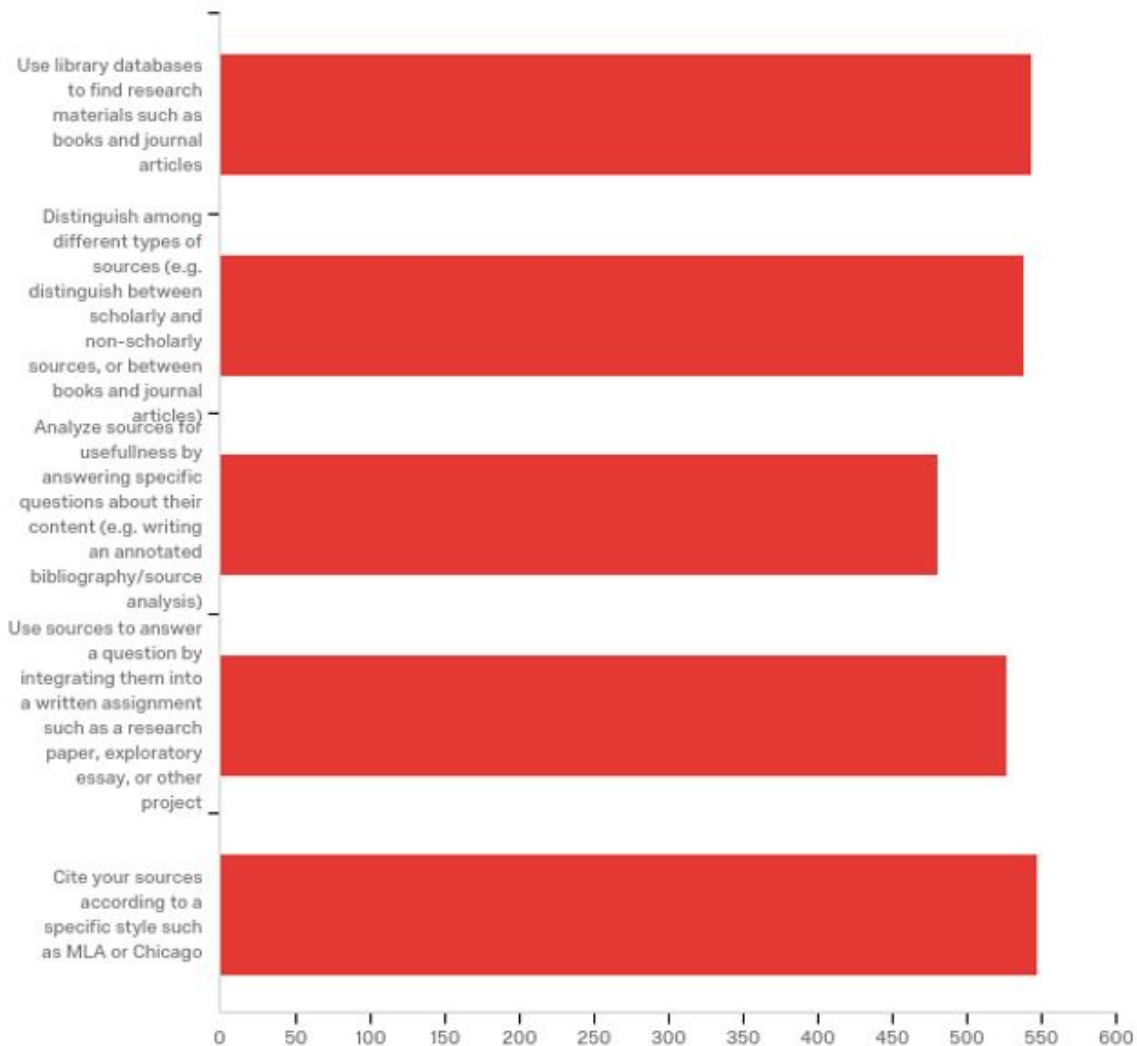
[http://www.dickinson.edu/info/20048/history\\_of\\_the\\_college/1909/quick\\_facts/2](http://www.dickinson.edu/info/20048/history_of_the_college/1909/quick_facts/2)

- Distinguish among different types of sources (e.g. distinguish between scholarly and non-scholarly sources, or between books and journal articles)
- Analyze sources for usefulness by answering specific questions about their content (e.g. writing an annotated bibliography/source analysis)
- Use sources to answer a question by integrating them into a written assignment such as a research paper, exploratory essay, or other project
- Cite your sources according to a specific style such as MLA or Chicago

As illustrated in Figure 8, most first year students reported that they engaged in a variety of research-related activity during their seminars.

Figure 8

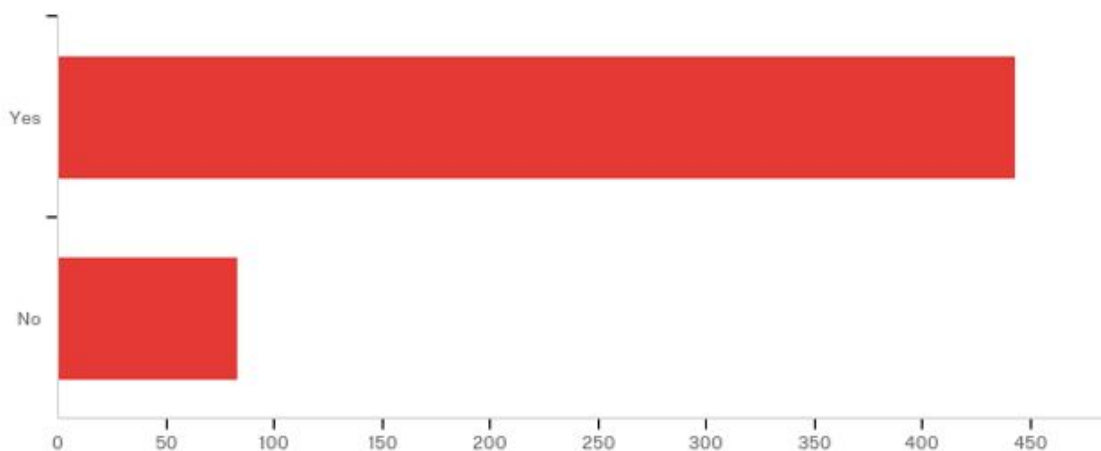
**During this course, did you complete an assignment that required you to do any of the following? (Check all that apply.)**



One important aspect of the FYS course is revision in research and writing. As shown Figure 9, 443 out of 526 respondents to the question “Did you revise your original research strategy after completing a first draft of a research assignment? (For example, by improving/adding to your source list or by revising an annotated bibliography/source analysis.)” reported that they had engaged in revision of an initial research strategy.

Figure 9

**Did you revise your original research strategy after completing a first draft of a research assignment? (For example, by improving/adding to your source list or by revising and annotated bibliography/source analysis.)**

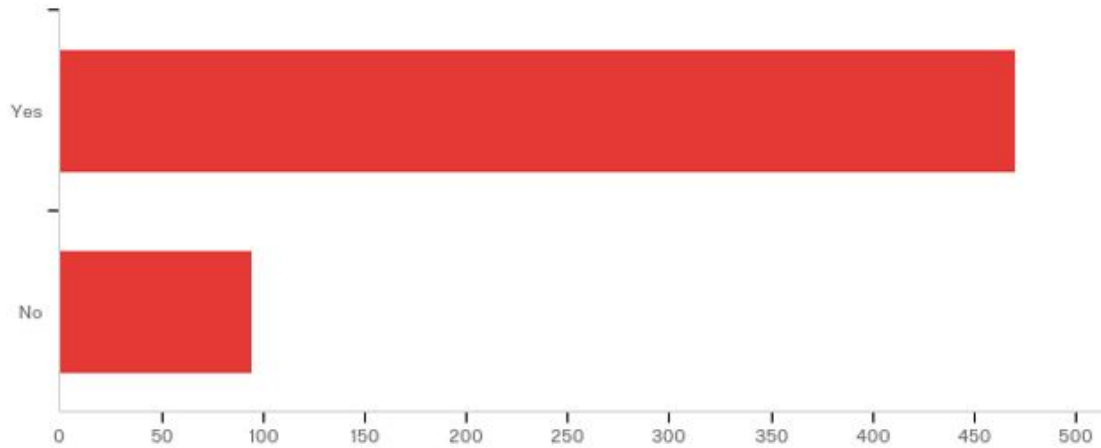


83 students from various seminars answered “No” to the question in Figure 9. Considering that other students from the same seminars answered “Yes,” it is possible that these students misunderstood the question, did not themselves engage with the work of revision, or did not understand that the task constituted revision. However, in three of the seminars, half or nearly half of the class answered “No” to this question. It may be worth asking in the future whether revision of research projects in each class is in fact an option, or if perhaps it is only offered to students who struggled on the first try.

The next question asked students: “Were the library research skills you learned needed in order for you to complete additional assignments during your first year seminar?” As illustrated in Figure 10, 470 students answered “Yes” and 95 answered “No.”

Figure 10

Were the library research skills you learned needed in order for you to complete additional assignments during your First-Year Seminar?



The penultimate question asked students: “What library research skills that you learned in your First-Year Seminar have been useful to you in other classes?” This was a free response section answered by 547 students, and many students listed more than one skill. Many students listed a number of skills that broke roughly into the broad categories shown in Table 3.

Table 3

What library research skills that you learned in your First-Year Seminar have been useful to you in other classes?	# of Responses 2016	# of Responses 2017
Using databases to find books and articles	272	292
Citing sources	72	124
Navigating the library (physically and virtually)	57	66
Evaluating sources for appropriateness to the task	56	30
Distinguishing among source types	48	63
Creating an annotated bibliography	N/A	30
Refining a search	43	21
Other	36	50
Has not been useful in other courses	60	51

In the “Other” category, many students mentioned using the writing center and meeting with a librarian for research help.

Students who responded that they did not use IL skills in other classes also provided some notable feedback:

- “Nothing as of yet, but I am sure searching databases will be very useful in the future.”
- “None so far. I have calculus and economics etc., which require almost no library oriented research (at least for me).”



Finally, students were asked, “What challenges did you face while engaging in research for your First Year Seminar?” This was a free response section answered by 538 students. Students listed a number of challenges that broke roughly into the broad categories shown in Table 4.

Table 4

<b>What challenges did you face while engaging in research for your First Year Seminar?</b>	<b># of Responses 2016</b>	<b># of Responses 2017</b>
Finding credible/relevant sources	150	194
Too many or too few sources available on the topic	106	74
No challenges or didn't do research for this class	49	54
Sources were not available locally; reliance on interlibrary loan services necessary	40	30
Integrating sources with writing	38	6
Citing sources	28	48
Sources found were beyond student's level of comprehension of the topic	23	14
Other	120	140

Representative comments from the students regarding their challenges include:

- “Tough to narrow down the search results because there were so many applicable articles.”
- “Citations were hard to nail, as they were a different format then I was use [*sic*] to.”
- “Library assignments were not given far enough in advance and they were not on the syllabus.”
- “I still struggle with compiling my references list and feel that it was never really deeply addressed- online examples can only get you so far!”
- “I didn't think our paper had clear enough guidelines.”
- “I wish we had done the library skills earlier in the semester as it would've been helpful for other classes.”

Some students demonstrated a flawed understanding of the use of research material in the writing process:

- “Finding sources to support my thesis exactly.”
- “Sometimes it was difficult to find the part of a source that proves my thesis as well.”
- “I would settle for the first source I found sometimes, instead of going deeper.”

Other students showed evidence of understanding higher-order IL skills:

- “I first [*sic*] had a hard time using all my sources and making them converse.”
- “Looking for an interesting subject. Connecting the sources with each other.”
- “Clearly articulating my arguments, as well as saying specifically how those sources would help my thesis and arguments.”

Student comments revealed several areas in which the librarians may be able to work with faculty for improvement:

- Students in three seminars said that all of the research materials for the class were provided to them.
- Some students asked for library skills to be taught earlier in the semester because, as one said, “It would've been helpful for other classes.”

- In some seminars, the details of the library work (specifically additional assignments) were not listed on the syllabus.

The results of the 2016 FYS assessment revealed an unusual upswing in interlibrary loan (ILL) requests from FY students, as shown in Table 4. This trend also was reflected in the student comment section in 2016. Liaison librarians therefore renewed efforts to help students select and analyze locally available resources. This year, there were 25% fewer responses indicating dependency on ILL.

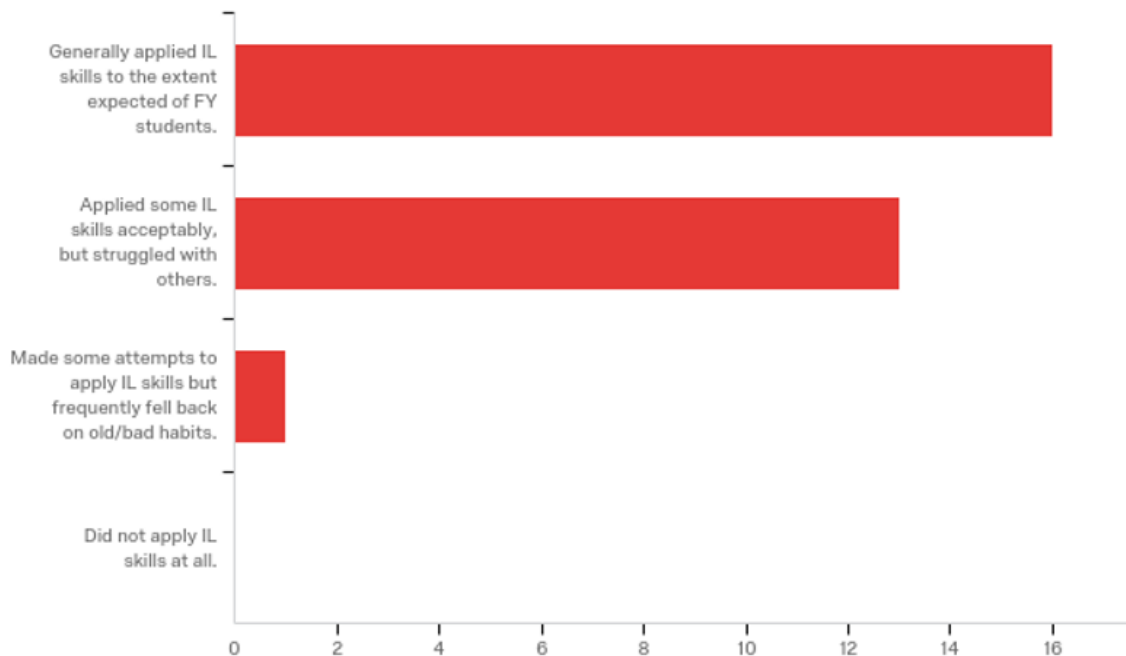
## Faculty Survey

Each year, faculty members who teach first-year seminars are asked to complete a short survey about the effectiveness of library instruction in their classes. In 2017, 32 of 45 (71%) FYS faculty responded, to the survey, with 30 having completed it in its entirety. It asked faculty to report on specific IL activities in their individual seminars, the details of which are noted in previous sections of this report, and asked for their perceptions of the FYS IL program.

One question asked: “How well did your students apply the information literacy (IL) skills (e.g. finding information, evaluating information, citing information) to their research based assignments?” The results are shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11

**How well did your students apply information literacy (IL) skills (e.g. finding information, evaluating information, citing information) to their research-based assignment(s)?**



Faculty who responded that students struggled with some aspects of information literacy were asked to elaborate by responding to an additional question: “With what aspects of information literacy did your students struggle?” Thirteen FYS faculty members responded as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Students struggled with...	# of Responses
Citing	7
Evaluating sources	4
Identifying quality/scholarly material	4
Retaining or transferring skills to other research projects later in the semester	3

One faculty member summed up these issues by saying: “Some students used the lessons on information literacy well, especially with regard to finding quality citations and citing them correctly. Others found good sources, but they didn't show effective independence in using the citation guides and lessons from class to cite correctly.”

Faculty members were then asked: “What is working well about the library's information literacy program for first-year students?” They provided 25 comments, summarized by category below.

- Working with a librarian was helpful to the faculty member:
  - The librarian designed effective research assignments that integrated skills throughout the semester.
  - The librarian worked with the faculty member to achieve common goals.
  - Skills that faculty members are trying to teach are reinforced by another professional.
  - FY students do not have a good understanding of the resources available to them until the librarian introduces the students to that information.
  - Having a librarian as an additional teacher saved the faculty member time.
  - Having a point of contact at the library is important.
- Content of sessions:
  - Finding scholarly sources, using library resources, and citing were important lessons.
  - Meetings with a librarian gave the students an excellent overview of both the library's offerings and practice with IL.
  - Students become more familiar with the types of databases that we have and how to evaluate the quality of a source.
  - The lesson on different types of source and their reliability was particularly well received.
- Assessment of Work:
  - Some faculty members appreciated the librarian’s participation in evaluating student work.
- Frequency of IL sessions and work:
  - Students learned more by practicing skills out of class than they would have otherwise.
  - Students became more comfortable using library resources over the course of the semester.

Faculty were also asked what they thought could be improved about information literacy instruction in First Year Seminars. Many did not respond and eight answered “nothing.” Two themes that emerged

are that IL needs to be a greater component of the course and that it should be incorporated throughout the semester. Some comments that will help the library improve instruction in future semesters include the following:

- Two faculty members commented on the connection between IL sessions and student work. One said, “I have to do a better job of reinforcing the connection between the IL workshops and the research projects” and another said, “Despite the fact that the library sessions were worth 5% of the overall grade, I felt the students were not invested in them. I need to restructure how I incorporate the library sessions into the class to emphasize the importance of them.”
- “Students only seem able (willing?) to hear and remember a certain amount of information ... then they need more help later, because it isn't as easy as they assumed it would be.”
- Two faculty members commented on evaluating sources. One said, “Helping students understand what is a scholarly source, and better information regarding what are bad sources.” Another added, “The session on distinguishing scholarly from popular sources should include some information about how to distinguish from a legitimate, peer reviewed journal and the new online journals that will publish anything they are paid to publish.”
- A few faculty members felt that more time needed to be spent on citing.

## **Academic Integrity**

Fall 2017 was the twelfth year in which all new students – first-years, transfers, and internationals - were required to complete Academic Integrity (AI) instruction. The tutorial consists of an interactive online presentation with a quiz. It takes most students between 10 and 20 minutes to complete the tutorial. Non-compliance results in a hold being placed on the student’s account, thus preventing registration for spring classes during the early November course registration period. Although all students who were required to take the tutorial did so by the end of the semester, this year 73 students did not complete it before the deadline, rendering them unable to choose classes during the mid-semester course selection period.

Library staff had already determined at the end of the 2017 academic year that the Academic Integrity tutorial was ready for a complete overhaul. A project of this magnitude takes up to a year to complete and work commenced on it during the fall of 2017. We expect to have a new version ready for fall 2018.

### *Timing*

Getting all students to complete the tutorial has been somewhat of a problem since its inception. With the cooperation of Admissions and the campus’ orientation committee, this year we included notice of the AI requirement with incoming students’ orientation materials and kept in regular contact with the Global Education and Dean’s offices about student compliance. In addition, the deadline was moved to the end of the second full week of classes rather than the third.

### *Effectiveness*

Assessment results suggest that the tutorial continues to be informative and helpful for many students. When asked near the beginning of the tutorial, “Have you ever committed an act of plagiarism?” 77% responded that they had not. Near the end of the tutorial, when asked the same question a second time, only 48% responded the same way, for a 60% increase in those who, following the instruction, thought they might have engaged in plagiarism. This compares consistently with prior years as noted in Table 6.

Table 6

<b>"Have you ever committed an act of plagiarism?"</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
"No" at beginning of tutorial	73%	73%	78%	77%
"No" at end of tutorial	48%	50%	51%	48%

As part of the built-in assessment component, students are asked to indicate how much of the material is new to them. Their responses have remained consistent over the past few years, as noted in Table 7.

Table 7

<b>"How much of this material was new to you?"</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
All of the information was new to me	1%	1.5%	1%	1%
Most of the information was new to me	5%	4%	7%	9%
Some of the information was new to me	40%	45%	43%	38%
Very little of the information was new to me	42%	36%	36%	40%
None of the information was new to me	12%	12.5%	11%	10%
No response	0%	0%	2%	2%

Additionally, students are asked if they found the tutorial to be effective. Those responses along with prior year comparisons, which again have remained consistent, are noted in Table 8.

Table 8

<b>Did you find this tutorial to be effective?</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Extremely	6%	8%	10%	8%
Very	43%	46%	49%	47%
Somewhat	35%	33%	29%	31%
Only a little	12%	11%	7%	9%
Not at all	4%	2%	3%	3%
No response	0%	0%	2%	2%

### Comments

Students provided few constructive suggestions for improvement, all of which have been accounted for in the draft of the new version.

### General Commentary

- "I think the presentation was pretty clear but really basic so maybe it could include more details."
- "I feel like it should be noted somewhere that 'it's better safe than sorry' especially in the context of academic integrity."
- "I found it helpful that you could have it read aloud to you."
- "I have had many talks about plagiarism from my high school but I believe that this tutorial summed everything up in a more efficient and effective way."
- "After this course, I understand how important citation is. And I know for certain that librarians are crucial resources."
- "It was great that you informed about Dickinson's particular policies on academic integrity but also reminded me again of other guidelines that I was taught in high school."

- “It helps me a lot, because in Chinese high schools, teachers didn't tell us a lot about the citation stuffs [*sic*].”

#### Regarding Citation

- “This presentation was great and very effective! Although, it would be great if it also included instructions on how to create a citation or bibliography.”
- “It might be necessary to include some questions about the specific methods of annotation within this tutorial, such as Chicago and MLA style, as everyone taking this tutorial will have to learn those methods.”

#### Redundancy

- “It was just a little boring, as I went through most of this in high school. I also understand that a lot of people did not have this sort of information so I recognize that it is important that we learn about these things.”
- “I suppose it does instruct students the proper way to cite author's work but it did not tell me anything I did not already know.”

#### Visuals

- “Get rid of the drawings! They were nice, but they were distracting and made the tutorial harder to navigate.”
- “I think the only qualm I have about the tutorial was the font style used in the comics. It was a little difficult to read.”
- “The information was helpful, but I did not find the corresponding stories particularly useful. I would have preferred straight facts.”

### **Conclusion**

First year students who are new to college-level research will naturally struggle with certain elements of the process, particularly source selection and evaluation. This is to be expected at this stage as it takes more than one or two lessons to become an efficient and effective researcher, just as it takes years to become proficient in any discipline. That some first year students expressed some challenges in regard to sifting through large amounts of information and evaluating sources is not surprising or concerning; likely they will improve under the guidance of librarians as they practice IL skills in disciplinary courses, especially Writing in the Discipline (WID) courses.

The comments provided annually by faculty and students about the FYS IL program often complement or reinforce one another, but sometimes can also reveal interesting disconnects in perception. This year there was much commentary about students struggling with citing. To this issue, one faculty member said that some students “didn't show effective independence in using the citation guides and lessons from class to cite correctly” while one student commented: “I still struggle with compiling my references list and feel that it was never really deeply addressed- online examples can only get you so far!” While this may indicate the immediate need for more practice and/or different methods of teaching the citation process, it also exemplifies the need to listen to students about what they consider to be effective classroom teaching.

Student and faculty commentary revealed some additional improvements that library staff can make in future years. The success of the FYS IL program relies largely on collaboration between faculty member

and librarian. As librarians work with FYS faculty beginning with the workshop in May, we will make the following recommendations:

- Faculty and librarians should build more opportunities for research assignments and citing throughout the course.
- Communicate the message - as reported by students - that work in the FYS directly affects student performance in other courses.
- Skill transfer should be addressed through the scaffolding of assignments as recommended in sample syllabi.
- Make IL goals and expectations of outcomes clear. We will address this partially by presenting a FY-only rubric at the May FYS workshop and beginning to use it in the fall.
- Continue to emphasize the importance of source evaluation, including source type and reliability.
- Ensure that all library activity is included on the syllabus and in Moodle if applicable.

## Appendix A – Class Visits and Activity by Instructor

FYS Faculty	Librarian	Title of FYS	IL Sessions	IL Tutorials Required?
Alam	Arndt	Should We Fear Globalization in the Twenty-First Century?	3	No
Arnold	Loneragan	The Science of Competition	2	Yes
Ball	Bombaro	Civil Disobedience in History	3	Yes
Barrett	Doran	Community Studios: Creating Affordable Art for Others	3	No
Bednarz	Doran	Music of the Holocaust and Under Soviet Oppression	2	No
Bilodeau	Bombaro	Ideas That Have Shaped the World	1	Yes
Brindeau	Ge	(Re)presenting Haiti Through Noir Short-Stories	3	No
Commings	Bombaro	Muslim Lives in the First Person	3	Yes
Connor	Loneragan	The Emperor's New Clothes: Textiles from a Historical, Scientific, and Environmental Perspective	2	No
Davenney	Ge	The Creative Process	1	No
Diamant	Bombaro	Arguing about Politics, Society and Culture in China and Japan	0	No
Duzs	Ge	At the Crossroads: Critical Issues for the United States	1	No
Ellison	Loneragan	Belonging and Exclusion, Here and Now	2	No
Farrant	Arndt	The Not So Beautiful Game? Thinking about Football (Soccer) Culture in Britain	3	No
Farrington	Bombaro	Ideas That Have Shaped the World	1	Yes
Ford	Howard	Famous Psyches: Examining the Connection between Unique "Genius" and "Madness"	3	Yes
Frohlich	Kozlowska	What a Privileged Gaze Overlooks: Reframing Social Justice and Hispanic Documentary Film	3	No
Hamilton-Drager	Loneragan	Are We Alone in the Solar System?	2	Yes
Holden	Loneragan	You Mean You Burned ALL the Oil? Energy in the Time of Trump	2	Yes
Johnston	Bombaro	Ideas That Have Shaped the World	1	Yes
Kingston	Howard	Does the Place Make the Person? The Effects of the Physical Environment on Human Psychology	3	No
Koss	Loneragan	Cryptology: The Science and Culture of Secrecy	2	Yes
Kushner	Bombaro	Bioethics and Bioissues	2	Yes
Lanzilotta	Kozlowska	Italians in America: Yesterday and Today	3	No
Lebron	Triller	Learning Injustice: The School-to-Prison Pipeline	1	Yes
Lee	Kozlowska	Home and Belonging as an Immigrant in 21st Century America	4	No
Love	Triller	Technology and Social Interaction	2	Yes
Maher	Ge	The Persistence of Racism	2	No



Marchetti	Kozłowska	Fright Night: Perspectives on Halloween and the Supernatural	3	Yes
McPhail	Arndt	The Ordinary Business of Life—Worldly Philosophy and the Secret History of the ‘Dismal Science’—A Thematic History of Economic Thought	3	No
Nesselrodt	Ge	Social Justice and American Education	2	Yes
Oliviero	Howard	Composing Disability: How Identity and Power Shape Normalcy	3	Yes
Pfister	Loneragan	The Entropy—Renewable Energy—Sustainability Connection	1	No
Pires	Loneragan	Biophilia: Human Connections to Other Life Form	2	Yes
Pound	Doran	Music, Mediated: How Recording Technology Transformed Music	3	No
Reiner	Kozłowska	Good and Evil in the Human Imagination: Ethical Issues in Fiction	3	No
Ren	Ge	The Gateless Gate: Zen Teachings through Riddles and Images	1	Yes
Reyes-Zaga	Kozłowska	Between Two Worlds: The Mexican Americans in The United States	3	Yes
Riccio	Kozłowska	Finding Meaning: An introspective Examination of Life’s Purpose in College and Beyond	3	No
Richeson	Loneragan	Decisions, Decisions! Why We Make Bad Ones and How to Make Better Ones	2	No
Sagatume	Triller	Literature and the Obsession with the Blind Impress	1	Yes
Sarcone	Arndt	The Business of Sports	3	No
Thibodeau	Howard	Into the Wild: Exploring the American Wilderness	3	No
van Leeuwaarde Moonsammy	Triller	Indivisible, With Liberty and Justice for All? Marginalizing Politics and Acts of Resistance	3	No
Yang	Ge	Chinese Fiction: from Ghosts and Demons to Magic Realism, Science Fiction	2	No