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Assessing Critical Thinking Skills in First-Semester Freshmen: A Case Study: A collaboration between St. John Fisher College Freshmen Seminar Faculty and Lavery Library Librarians

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Abstract
First-year programs assist new students in adapting to college life, developing skills for academic success and increasing retention. The Freshmen Seminar course at St. John Fisher College is such a course, taught by college faculty and staff with collaboration from departments across campus. Participants will experience a stand-alone lesson created by the college archivist with the objective of identifying a baseline assessment of critical thinking skills. Presented as a complete package from learning objectives to assessment tools, the class session is purposely designed to be easy to replicated.

Disciplines
Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research | Library and Information Science

Comments
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Students were asked to carefully examine the following types of documents:

**PROBLEM:**
How to get a baseline assessment for incoming freshmen’s critical thinking skills

**SOLUTION:**
- Create a common lesson for all incoming freshmen!
- Use a first year program course - in this case, the Freshmen Seminar class
- Propose a complete lesson package - from SLOs to assessment rubrics
- Easy to replicate and can be taught by faculty, staff, or librarians

**WHY USE THE COLLEGE ARCHIVES?**
- Introduces students to primary sources
- Helps develop skills for college success – critical thinking and communication skills
- Using College History is engaging to new students = Retention

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**Using Primary Documents from the College Archives to Construct a Cohesive Narrative of Events**

**Fall 1967 – Spring 1968**

The story revolves around a student group called The Student Board of Administration, and in particular, a student by the name of Joseph Kaestner.

Students were divided into 6 groups; each group had to read their document(s) very carefully, and report to the rest of the group how their document added to the story!

**Assessment:** Students submitted essays of their perceived narrative of events, including references to documents containing pertinent information

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**Student Reflection Quotes**

- This exercise benefitted my ability to think critically and effectively read texts.
- Overall, I think this has helped my reading skills, improved my ability to work on problem solving, and working with other people.
- It definitely tested my critical thinking skills when I had to figure out how everything connected together into one story. I liked the activity because it was cool to learn about something that actually happened at my own school and I found it really interesting!
- It was also very interesting to use these primary sources of information as they give you a different perspective on history compared to reading a textbook. I feel that they give you a deeper understanding of what really happened.
- I learned that you have to work for the answers to things, and sometimes it will be frustrating, confusing, and vague, but you just have to pay attention to details to get the answers.

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**ADAPTABLE TO YOUR INSTITUTION**

- Find an interesting local event, occurrence, incident, or scandal
- Discover any primary documents that were created (public or private), having to do with the event
- Identify SLOs this exercise may address
- Create a package to be used as a proposal for the department or division. The package should include session SLOs, class activity, lesson plan, and assessment.

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