

The Library Scavenger Hunt Strikes Back: Teaching "Library as Place"

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Introduction

Information literacy instruction sessions focus on teaching research skills and how to use library resources, but generally do not present the library as a place. The role of the physical academic library on college and university campuses is rapidly changing with a growing percentage of electronic information resources. Students can use library resources without ever stepping into the "brick and mortar" library building and some argue this makes academic libraries obsolete. However, advocates of "library as place" suggest that the role of the academic library should change from being a repository for materials to a place on campus that fosters learning, collaboration, and connects users to information resources (Freeman, 2005).

Without experiencing the physical library, students often lack the understanding of the organization of information, may not use library resources, and possess poor research skills. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students that know about the physical library resources, such as quiet study space, group study rooms, and librarian research help, are often academically successful. Research indicates that unfamiliarity with the physical library is a clear contributor to library anxiety (Onwuegbuzie, et. al., 2004). Adding a "library as place" component to library orientations or sessions could alleviate library anxiety and improve student learning.

Scavenger hunts, also recently re-branded as "treasure hunts," have been much criticized, even hated by many instruction librarians as an ineffective ways to teach research skills (Kearns, 2006; Miller, 2009). Many disciplinary faculty design library scavenger hunts that force students to look up trivia or speak to library staff and continue to use them after they become outdated. Traditional library orientation tours bore students, instructors, and the librarians giving them. So how can we teach students the functions and use of the physical library using sound pedagogy? Presenters suggested that reinventing library scavenger hunts may improve student learning.

Description

In "The Library Scavenger Hunt Strikes Back: Teaching "Library as Place" discussion session, presenters (1) utilized the "Broken Method" to discuss issues and opportunities with scavenger hunts, (2) shared a scavenger hunt case study from their institution, California State University San Marcos (CSUSM), (3) brainstormed library scavenger hunt best practices with participants, and (4) had participants develop student learning outcomes for scavenger hunts at their institutions and share ideas. All discussion activities will be generally described in this section and participant contributions will be shared in the "Key Points" section.

Broken Method

Participants engaged in discussion about poor uses of scavenger hunt assignments and devised best practices for scavenger hunts using the "Broken Method" activity that is commonly utilized in Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Immersion Teacher Track Programs. With the Broken Method, an outdated or problematic instructional method is critically examined before participants are challenged to brainstorm ways to improve or "fix" the broken method. In this session participants worked in small groups to discuss why scavenger hunts suck and how to fix them and reported back to the larger group.

Case Study: GEL 101 Library Module

At CSUSM, instruction librarians teach a two-week library research module as part of a semester long freshman experience course, General Education Lifelong Learning 101 (GEL 101). The two presenters designed a group library exploration activity in order to for students to learn the physical layout of the library while simultaneously meeting student learning outcomes (e.g. using the catalog to look up a book and find it in the stacks). After two semesters of implementation, feedback from students, classroom faculty, and other CSUSM librarians has been overwhelmingly positive. In the case study, presenters discussed the impetus for the scavenger hunt activity, development and continuous improvements, and best practices for creating (or recreating) effective scavenger hunts that include assessment of student learning. Support for effective scavenger hunts comes from student centered learning theory, Millennial student characteristics, the concept of library as place, and a literature review of the use of scavenger hunts in library instruction.

Best Practices

After Broken Method discussion and the case study of CSUSM librarians designing and implementing a library scavenger hunt, participants in small groups were asked to develop best practices for this type of instructional method. Participants were encouraged to think about pedagogical theories and information needs of students.

Student Learning Outcomes

Participants were encouraged to directly apply insights and ideas from the earlier part of this session by brainstorm student learning outcomes for their own scavenger hunt in order to teach "library as place" at their institution. Using a think/pair/share activity, participants individually reflected on what physical aspects of their library that students needed to explore and what information related tasks that students could learn. After reflection, participants shared their ideas with a partner for feedback.

Key Points

In the library scavenger hunt discussions, session attendees were guided through the Broken Method analysis, a case study, developing best practices, and designing student learning outcomes in order to design an effective and engaging student activity.

Scavenger Hunt as a Broken Method

Participants discussed in small groups all the issues they could think of for all types of scavenger hunts before reporting to large group. After listing negative aspects of scavenger hunts, groups were tasked to fix this instructional method. Contributions included:

Why do scavenger hunts suck?

- Assigned by faculty and never updated, so the items students are supposed to find are no longer available, do not exist or are just outdated
- When scavenger hunts are assigned by non-library faculty, they are unconnected to research assignments and library instruction session, and thus have no learning outcomes
- Students just want the answer and tend to cheat
- Busy work

How could we fix scavenger hunts?

- Collaborate with classroom faculty
- Explain the purpose of the assignment and create SLOs
- Make them useful and relevant
- Put students in teams and make it semi-competitive
- Connect with searching library resources
- Bring item(s) back to the classroom to share
- Develop web guide for assistance in completing the scavenger hunt

Case study: GEL 101 Library Scavenger Hunt

The impetus for this activity came from anecdotal evidence of students' inability to find a library book on the shelf, after having been taught how to use the catalog in a variety of settings (instruction sessions and reference desk).

The first version of the scavenger hunt was designed with the following learning outcomes: (1) to provide students with physical orientation to the library building, (2) allow students to explore areas they should use in the future, such as the Check Out (Circulation) Desk and Student Technology Help Desk, and (3) have students use the library catalog to find library materials, such as books, magazines, and videos on the shelf. There was positive feedback from instructors and students about this activity. However, this initial version was very time-intensive for librarians, requiring setting up informational handouts at each of the stations on multiple floors, putting colored post-it for students to "prove" they had visited locations on the hunt, organizing folders with multiple handouts that each group of students used, and grading quiz/worksheets students completed after returning from the scavenger hunt. After two rounds of revisions based on librarian observations and student and faculty feedback, the current iteration requires fewer materials and is more effective.

Student groups now use one handout that includes a list of locations and map, and complete a quiz/worksheet during the scavenger hunt. Rather than collecting information or post-its at each of the stations, students use the camera on their cell phone to take a picture of the location or answer a question on the worksheet. This means that no set-up or "break-down" is needed and there are only photocopies of two handouts instead of a folder full of materials. The most current scavenger hunt iteration also asks students to answer specific questions rather than

just finding a location or item (e.g. what is the title of the third chapter in this book?). This change was made after suggestions from a student focus group to make the activity more challenging by "forcing them to pay attention." After hearing about the success of the scavenger hunt, other CSUSM librarians have begun adopting the activity and the presenters created a scavenger hunt instruction sheet for librarians (see <http://public.csusm.edu/acarr/scavenger/index.html> for all teaching materials for the three iterations titled Post-its, Cell phones, and Co-teaching).

Throughout the instructional design process, feedback from students, classroom faculty, and librarians was overwhelmingly positive. Students liked leaving the classroom to explore the library in small groups and stayed on task with assigned roles: leader, recorder, photographer, and navigator. Many of them were excited to learn about different areas and offerings of the library ("you have movies we can check out" and "I love the reading room!"). In some sections, extra credit was offered to the first group that finished the scavenger hunt activity and quiz correctly. However with this incentive, students had to be reminded to not run in the library and to use low voices when going through quiet study areas. Librarians now send an email to all library faculty and staff alerting them of scavenger hunt students. In student evaluations of the two-week library research modules, the majority of students listed the scavenger hunt as their favorite activity and suggested even more interactive components to the class.

Best practices

After the case study, there was a discussion of best practices for scavenger hunt and other instructional design. Participants suggested:

- Don't expect to create the perfect scavenger hunt the first time around, but use your experiences to make it better
- Solicit student feedback and make changes
- Come up with learning outcomes for the activity
- Report back to the larger group on what the students have found
- Ask students to interact with librarians (what degrees do you have?)
- Ask students to reflect on the activity and what they learned
- Communicate with all librarians and library staff about the activity
- Create an out-of-the-box package that can be reused by classroom faculty and librarians

Developing Student Learning Outcomes

Participants worked individually and in pairs to develop possible student learning outcomes for their own scavenger hunt. The group offered everything from specific skills (find a book, find an article, check out a book) to working with other groups on campus to integrate other areas as well. Participants were encouraged to follow-up with presenters for feedback on their scavenger hunt activity and materials.

Conclusion/Main takeaways

The main purpose of this session was to share a creative and iterative instructional design process in order to enhance student understanding of the physical library and information literacy. By revisioning scavenger hunts with student learning outcomes in mind, this activity has been very successful for California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) librarians in first year

courses. A next step for CSUSM librarians is a formal assessment of the SLO's for the scavenger hunt.

Presenters and attendees discussed issues with scavenger hunts as well as best practices for designing successful scavenger hunts, with an emphasis on obtaining student, instructor, and librarian feedback. During the discussion session, participants also had the opportunity to discuss their ideas for SLOs to teach "library as place" to students at their own institution. Many participants wrote in session evaluations that they were excited to develop library scavenger hunt curriculum for their students.

Presentation slideshow and all instruction materials are available at <http://public.csusm.edu/acarr/scavenger/index.html>

References and Further Reading

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