

**San Jose State University's Martin Luther King Jr. Library's resources for developing
undergraduate level writing skills:**

Evaluating the Library's materials and human power that are accessible to students

Vida Yeung

vida.yeung-shumskas@sjsu.edu

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School of Information, San Jose State University

Dr. Renee N. Jefferson

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Introduction

The Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) mandates that all San Jose State University (SJSU) undergraduate students take the online Writing Skills Test-Directed Self-Placement to place themselves in a writing workshop course appropriate to their skill level, which they, then, must pass with a C –not C minus- or better in order to graduate (SJSU, 2022). The University’s main library, the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library offers resources to support this endeavor. Online are the “Citing and Writing Help” Research Guide and the Writing Center’s online tutoring, available on the Library’s website (King Library, 2022; SJSU, 2022). Onsite are the Writing Center’s in-person tutoring and librarians reachable by email and phone (SJSU, 2022).

This partnership between university faculty and their academic libraries have not always existed (Elmborg, 2003), despite decades of research on critical writing issues (Bronstheyn & Balabad, 2006; Peters & Cadieux, 2019). A notable example is students’ difficulties in navigating citation styles (Freimer & Perry, 1986). Since then, the Library has strengthened collaboration between itself and the University by conducting surveys on how much the students feel like they belong in the building and using its resources. Molteni, Goldman & Oulc’hen (2013) surveyed 744 San Jose State University students to evaluate how relevant the Library is to their academic lives. Then, in 2017, the Library moved reference services from the second floor to join circulation on the first, to better handle and invite both simple and complex reference issues. Understanding that the first floor could be busy and noisy populated with both students and San Jose Public Library users, librarians were given a reference consultation room behind the circulation desk. This new model was named the Unified Service Point (USP) (Megwalu & Barron, 2019). The following year, Megwalu and Barron surveyed 357 SJSU students using the

Library to find only 15% of them sought a librarian for help to write papers, with domestic students seeking more often than international students in this category. This is illogical, because either international students are already better writers or it is more important to the domestic ones to graduate. This also points to issues in Library outreach and student awareness of their writing shortcomings. However, most of the students who'd spoken to a librarian were satisfied with services received.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the King Library's resources, in materials and human power, online or onsite, accessible to undergraduate students aiming to successfully satisfy the GVAR. To do this, this researcher will examine writing skills-related programs, services, and library personnel made available from Fall 2012 to Spring 2022.

Annotated Bibliography

Elmborg, J. K. (2003, March 1). Information literacy and writing across the curriculum: Sharing the vision. *References Services Review*, 31(1), 68-88.

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Summary. Elmborg discusses the entwined history of college-level library and writing instruction, and how the development of the concept 'Writing across the Curriculum' (WAC) worked to establish composition as an academic discipline. The author also cites other scholars on the advancement of 'student-centered' teaching methodologies, how language and learning developed together, and that learning to write can improve critical thinking. The article then observes how inexperienced writers are burdened also with fitting into the academic 'discourse communities' of the courses they take. This is why academic libraries took some decades to grow information literacy into a legitimate

discipline, because there were no systems to integrate it with academic departments, and why libraries should take part in WAC workshops.

Analysis. One strength of this article is it explains the history and scholarly findings behind the development of writing as an academic discipline, how WAC can be a model for libraries to teach information literacy at a similar level of collaboration, and what standards have already been set, along with warnings on how not to use them. Another strength of this article is its observations on the similarities and differences between the beginning of library and writing instruction, with the crucial detail that the former started teaching before establishing course theory, while writing had already inherited theory from their English departments. One limitation of this article is it was published in 2003, almost two decades ago; many advances through partnerships, research, and technology have been made since. Another limitation of this article is it does not define what colleges or universities (i.e. parts of the world, student body type, in-person/distance learning, year library was established) the histories, findings, and observations apply.

Application. The information in this article is useful to my Action Research Study because it explains, in detail, how writing as an academic discipline was established, how academic libraries came into participating in the curriculum through teaching information literacy, and identifies a way for library staff to collaborate with academic department faculty to teach together. Another reason is it relates directly to the purpose of my study, to evaluate the services San Jose State University's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr Library offers to students wishing to successfully complete their Graduation Writing Requirement. The third reason this article will be useful is it makes me reconsider the

population I will collect my data from; there is reason to include writing instructors and library staff now, too.

Freimer, G. R., & Perry, M. M. (1986, January 1). Student problems with documentation.

Journal of Academic Librarianship, 11(6), 350-353.

Summary. The purpose of this study was to explore the reasons why college professors had demanded so many different citation formats instead of agreeing on one at least across an academic department. Students who would use the reference desk at the William S. Carlson Library, at the University of Toledo, were invited to complete a brief questionnaire. Interviews were planned for faculty from several university departments. The authors also did a literature review. Results were students were confused on why there are multiple styles and did not feel ready to create a reference list, faculty believed a standardized format would impede academic freedom, and similarities were rare between the most used styles. Conclusion was the 'library profession' is best suited to help students.

Analysis. One strength of this article was it had evaluated a major writing problem at a time before the Internet, which can give readers a baseline understanding to why college students were scared to inaction at confronting reference lists. Another strength of this article is the writing style and tone the authors used, a casual voice that is friendlier than a dryer (more academic) syntax. This makes their research, results, and conclusions more approachable, more in the spirit of solving a difficult-to-approach problem. One limitation of this article is the sample of students surveyed were ones who already needed help. Although a graduate and an undergraduate student, who were moderately experienced in writing research papers, were interviewed, they only reinforced those

needy students' confusion and insecurities. Another limitation was the authors were unable to provide a full history of why it had become of scholarly importance to provide references.

Application. This article is useful for my action research study because it provides background information for one of the more difficult components of undergraduate writing for students to master. Often, a well-written research paper is marred by an inadequate reference list, and not because the student had not tried, but because they were confused on what to deliver. This also relates to the purpose of my study, because the authors explained how the library can readily help with this student writing problem. This article is also useful in how their data collection methods and procedures were applied to a university's faculty and undergraduate students using reference services at an academic library, which are participants that I, from San Jose State University, plan to draw.

Megwalu, A., & Barron, K. (2019, June 5). Incorporating reference into a unified service point at an academic library: A case study. *The Reference Librarian*, 60(4), 262-276.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02763877.2019.1625295>

Summary. The purpose of this paper was to explore how the King Library's 2017 moving of its second floor reference desk to the first floor with the citations desk would help San Jose State University students better navigate the use of these two services. Participants were students who were happening by the first floor elevator. The data collection method was a seven-question survey conducted over five days. Results were most students who had seen a librarian were satisfied, with 34% very satisfied, 36% simply satisfied, and 29% were unsure. Conclusions were services are current only if they

are responding to intended users. Researchers recommended follow-up surveys for library staff with skill gaps and future cross-training in mind.

Analysis. One strength of this article is its clear description of what USPs are and their utilization in academic libraries. It is important to know that USPs are places, physical or online, where more than one library service is offered. Another strength is the 22 items in the reference list, in case this researcher needed more examples of USPs reshaping library services. A limitation is there was no mention of what “other” reasons students had to seek help from a librarian. It could have added depth to this researcher’s study on, perhaps, why students would not go to a librarian for writing help. Another limitation is there was no mention of flipping the USP question around for distance-learning students, amidst COVID-19 and those doing 100% online programs. Can having so many links on the King Library homepage, these students’ USP, make it harder to find the services they need?

Application. This paper is useful for my action research study because it gives me an insider’s background on the King Library’s recent relationship with SJSU students across three types: undergraduates, graduates, and international. Anamika Megwalu, the primary author, is the Library’s Faculty Director of Library Instruction and Assessment. The paper also relates to the purpose of my study by illustrating how likely students are to approach the Library for writing help and other services. This will help in recommending where and how to best offer writing services in a way students are likely to be comfortable. Another reason this paper is useful is the participants are students answering a survey. This gives a practical model for administering my own. It was helpful to

mention only one recruiter of participants was needed to gather such rich results in only five days.

Molteni, V. E., Goldman, C. & Oulc'hen, E. (2013, July 1). Experiences of the student population at an urban university: How do they use a joint library? *Portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 13(3), 233-256. <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2013.0020>

Summary. The purpose of this article was to evaluate SJSU students' relationship with the King Library building, whether they were using it as a space for books or for learning in light of its dual nature of academic and public library. Participants were 744 students, undergraduates and graduates, who had taken library classes with the authors from the 2010-2011 academic year. The voluntary survey was given at the end of class. Results were students liked the library and found its services relevant to their needs. Conclusions were students were more likely to use academic spaces, those areas created for their use, and were welcoming of the roving reference desk program launched in 2013.

Analysis. A strength of this article is the 30-question survey that gave the participants' demographics, frequency of Library use, services sought, and spaces visited. Data collected gave rich insight to students' library needs according to gender, class level, major, commute distance, daily hours on campus, and other factors. Another strength is how including the history behind the merging the San Jose Public Library with SJSU's academic library explained to this researcher what social space the study's participants were dealing with. A limitation is there was no mention of how the Library would handle students' discomfort with homeless users. This is an issue too crucial to deserve merely a declaration. Another limitation is there was no explanation why only 9% of participants

took a formal Library tour. With 62.1% of participants preferring to muddle through, this is another issue too serious to overlook.

Application. This paper is useful for my action research study because the background information and research addresses in significant detail how, why, and in what degrees SJSU students use the Library. This can help me consider how likely students would approach Library services for writing help. This paper's authors –like two previous papers in this annotated bibliography concerning students using academic libraries- also used a survey to gather data. This highlights the practicality of this collection instrument for determining SJSU students' Library use. Also, the authors' method of administering the survey can help me to evaluate ways other than giving print outs in the Library or putting links onto the Library's website; I should also ask library instruction teachers to help direct students taking their classes to my study's survey. Furthermore, their providing their 30 questions in the Appendix could help me write my own.

Peters, M. & Cadieux, A. (2019, November 28). Are Canadian professors teaching the skills and knowledge students need to prevent plagiarism? *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 15(10). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40979-019-0047-z>

Summary. The purpose of this article is to investigate what university students should learn in order to avoid committing plagiarism. Participants were 279 professors and 1,170 students from six universities in Quebec. The former were questioned, and the latter given questionnaires. Results were students wanted to learn more on how to not plagiarize, while professors expect them to already know how. Conclusions were this lack of knowledge is not the students' fault, and thus it is not only the responsibility of

professors to rectify this, but also the administrations' to provide the structure and set graduation requirements that would systematize writing success.

Analysis. A strength of this article is the population and sample size from which the researchers gathered their data. Over a thousand undergraduate students and nearly 300 professors from six universities across an entire Canadian province yielded compelling results. Another strength is how the questionnaires were different for each sample. Students were asked about their writing and what they knew about plagiarism, while professors were put in a position to speculate about the same. This way, the data would give a more relevant answer to the research question. A limitation is some meanings were lost in translation from French to English. This researcher had to guess on average once per paragraph the American equivalent to some terms. Another limitation is the student sample comprised only of undergraduate students, and there was no explanation why graduate students were not included. Other papers in this annotated bibliography had, and their data had given deeper insight for it.

Application. This paper is useful for my action research study because the rationale of its study relates to mine. It concerns plagiarism, a writing problem, and concluded that academic sources other than professors should take part in helping to eradicate. The study has also demonstrated the likely reason why these Quebecois undergraduates were prone to committing plagiarism was because their professors were not meeting their writing help needs through more training. This can give me a deeper perspective on where or in what way students will seek writing help. The purpose of the paper's study also relates to mine by observing student needs in order to make recommendations on how best to meet these needs. This can help with my writing recommendations for my study. This paper's

background information on writing and referencing skills can help define for me how academic librarians could feel about both students and professors overlooking the importance of their writing help services.

Method

Participants

The participants will be a convenience sample of San Jose State University (SJSU) undergraduate students who access the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library's resources for help to successfully complete the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR). These resources include -but are not limited to- the Citing and Writing Help Research Guide on the Library's website, and the Writing Center, either online or onsite. The intended population is SJSU undergraduate students enrolled in the Spring semester of 2023. Surveying students who needed help and have used at least one of the above Library resources will provide an understanding to how well the Library fulfills their writing needs.

Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments will be a survey, web- and paper-based, and audio-visually recorded face-to-face interviews, either online or in-person. The purpose of the survey is to evaluate the participants' perception of the Library's writing resources. Areas of inquiry may include: How many library programs/services had they participated in? Where did they learn of these resources? Was their grade higher/lower than expected after getting this help? Were these services easy to access/delightful to use? Do their new writing skills make them feel more brave/intimidated towards writing? The purpose of the interview is for participants to further explain their experiences with Library writing resources. This would be an open discussion, with

the main question to be: Do you have more stories about learning better writing through the Library?

Procedure

Permission to conduct this study will be obtained from the King Library's Faculty Director of Library Instruction and Assessment and the Academic Liaison Librarian overseeing GVAR. Then, this researcher will submit her CITI certificate and application for approval to the SJSU Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once approved, this researcher will, for three weeks, canvas instructors of classes that satisfy the GVAR during office hours and students studying in the King Library to determine the appropriateness and applicability of the areas of inquiry listed in the Data Collections Instrument section of this Method Draft. The aim is to create at least seven, but no more than 10 survey questions that ask participants to grade on a scale of 1-10 their perceptions on the King Library's writing resources. This researcher also intends to conceive at least two more open-ended inquiries for those further participating in the interview, putting the total to three interview questions.

The survey will be administered on paper by Writing Center staff and the Library's other onsite points of access to writing instruction, and online through links on the Writing Center's and Citing and Writing Help Research Guide's landing pages. Survey data will be collected during the last four weeks of instruction for Spring 2023, while interviews will be conducted for the following two weeks.

A strength to conducting this study is it follows up Megwalu and Barron's 2019 research on the efficacy of the USP in the King Library, where writing help was only one of seven library services on the student survey. Another strength is this can strengthen coordination between the

Writing Center, reference and academic liaison librarians, and instructors of courses that can be used to satisfy the GVAR.

A limitation to conducting this survey could be the data generated might not align readily into metrics that this researcher could draw substantive conclusions from. For example, if some students are hesitant to get tutoring because they are nervous of conversing at length with strangers or to accept in-person appointments after dark in fear of traversing campus at night, this researcher will be unable to determine a course of action the King Library or even the University can take. Another limitation could be if International students express they would use Library writing help services, online and onsite, more if the language used on the website and by tutors and librarians were more similar to how they were taught to speak English. This researcher cannot publish such meticulous recommendations.

A strength of the survey is it is easy to administer and take, which will net this researcher more participants for this convenience sample than if a more complicated and/or time consuming data collection method were used; for example, if only interviews were conducted. The strength of inviting participants to further share their experience in an interview after the survey is it will give this researcher an opportunity to notice non-verbal cues, which can lead to more targeted inquiry for clarification.

A limitation of the survey is more time must be taken to decide on the questions' syntax in order to accommodate different English comprehension levels; the King Library website has a page dedicated to helping International students develop their English writing skills, and thus this study may have participants who will have trouble with English that is too colloquial.

Limitations of the follow-up interview are it requires coordinating availability and appropriate

locations, and for this researcher to obtain permission from participants to record the interview audio-visually.

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