

Review: Collaboration is Key: Librarians and Composition Instructors Analyze Student Research and Writing

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Caroline Cason Barratt, Kristin Nielsen, Christy Desmet, and Ron Balthazor, "Collaboration is Key: Librarians and Composition Instructors Analyze Student Research and Writing." *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 9, no. 1 (2009): 37-56.

This article, a collaboration between University of Georgia (UGA) composition instructors and librarians, presents an analysis of citation patterns from students in their First-year Composition Program (FYC). The data was gathered through an open-source electronic markup and management application, or <emma>, developed at UGA, "that provides a dynamic and information-rich source for the study of undergraduate research behavior by acting as a digital repository for student work."¹ The authors gathered data from student bibliographies housed in the electronic repository in order to identify what resources students cited in their composition essays, as well as how teacher prompts, pedagogical rhetoric, and librarian research instruction may have been reflected in those choices. This analysis further expanded the findings of previous bibliometric studies by offering a larger data set of citations focused on undergraduate research papers. The authors of the UGA study were able to "examine citations within the context of individual writers, teachers, assignments, and library instruction,"² while also using <emma>'s technology to coalesce specific data and maintain the confidentiality of students and teachers.

The 5,246 citations were marked by type, including books, journals, magazines, newspapers, Web sites, interview, media, and other sources, including song lyrics and references to class notes. Web sites were further categorized by type (.gov, .org, .edu, .net, .com, or news Web sites.) Although Web sites "accounted for 51 percent of the total citations, followed by articles (25 percent) and books (20 percent),"³ "the students' preference for online resources...[resulted

in] 3,979 out of 5,246 citations, or 76 percent, [being] retrieved electronically."⁴ The UGA study was not about how to limit students' use of electronic resources, but focused instead on how this predominant choice might adversely affect the quality of the research papers. In addition, the authors explored whether or not library instruction or strict assignment requirements (or a combination of the two) might improve the quality of writing. To that end, a microanalysis was conducted to see "how [a] teacher's written instructions might intersect with citation quality," and "how differing disciplinary perspectives influence judgments in research quality."⁵ What followed was a quantitative analysis of the same assignment in four different classes, two with library instruction, two without, and all four with varying degrees of written resource requirements or guidelines.

Not surprisingly, the UGA project's individual case studies generally confirmed the findings of the broader citation research: "that a combination of library instruction and detailed written guidelines produces the best research in first-year composition essays,"⁶ with a further conclusion that for optimal success, "written exhortations and library instruction must work in tandem."⁷

As a former composition teacher and a current instruction librarian at a small liberal arts college, I found this quantitative analysis validated my less than scientific assessment of how the quality of students' work improves when instructors and librarians collaborate. I am also intrigued by the authors' intention to conduct a follow-up study for 2009-2010 in order "to examine whether the citation behavior of first-year composition students has changed"⁸ during the five-year interval. UGA's development of and further use of <emma> to conduct this research is a valuable addition to bibliographic pedagogy.



¹ Barratt, et al., "Collaboration is Key: Librarians and Composition Instructors Analyze Student Research and Writing," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 9, no.1 (2009): 38

² *Ibid.*: 37

³ *Ibid.*: 42

⁴ *Ibid.*: 44

⁵ *Ibid.*: 49

⁶ *Ibid.*: 53

⁷ *Ibid.*: 54

⁸ *Ibid.*: 55

