Googling in the Classroom:
Integrating the Handheld Library into our Pedagogy

J. Mack Robinson College of Business
Instructional Innovation Grant Proposal
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I have reviewed the proposal, and I support the request for a course release/cost reimbursement for the project.

Head of Academic Unit  

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Problem Statement

"In my day", instructor objectives focused on providing content to students, usually through lectures. Students were expected to memorize theories and facts because either the information was foundational or finding the information was difficult or time-consuming. We still have the reality that some of the content students must master is foundational. We expect our doctors to know the names of all our bones. We expect our business analysts to identify situations in which multiple regression is an apt tool. We expect our human resources managers to be fluent in Title VII. While the need for foundational knowledge has not changed, the need for memorizing information because it was difficult to ascertain or time-consuming to acquire is no longer relevant.

Electronic devices are ubiquitous and with that ubiquity come the ability to access dictionaries, thesauruses, equations, regulations, encyclopedia, news reports, videos, and journal articles, with the click of a button or the flick of a screen. While students have a plethora of resources available to them, it is our experience that many do not know when or how to use these resources. Unfortunately, "[t]he problem is that Googling delivers data and information, not knowledge." (Adams, 2006)

A study in the Journal of Accounting Education (Baker, Baker, & White, 1999) surveyed accounting instructors to determine how they were using the internet. The majority (over 60%) were merely using the resource to acquaint students with internet capability. Times have clearly changed since 1999 and few instructors would suggest that familiarity with the internet is a salient learning objective. In a more recent study, Griffiths and Brophy (2005) found that 45% of students use Google in their first search when locating information.

The American Library Association (ALA) has developed a definition of an information literate person. That individual is "able to recognize when information is needed and has the ability to locate, evaluate, and use the needed information effectively." ("Presidential Committee on Information Literacy. Final Report," 1989).

We must identify that fundamental, core knowledge on which our discipline is based and ensure that students master these fundamentals. Additionally, our instruction should produce students who are able

1) to diagnose what they do not, but need to, know to solve problems [self-diagnose], and,
2) to develop strategies to locate and evaluate information using readily-available resources, like google [search].

As instructors, our learning objectives should reflect this need for information literacy. Our students are conversant with googling and we need to let them use it. However, students, in their web searches, tend to follow the path of least effort (Jansen, Spink, & Saracevic, 2000). We need to help them explore new search strategies and practice so that the "path of least effort" is also the path of likely success.

Let us provide several examples of the need to self-diagnose and search. In MGS 4300 (Managing Human Resources), we teach students about Title VII and the foundational ideas about discrimination. While there is federal law in this area, many states have passed statutes that protect their citizens from discrimination. The size of the business covered and some of the
protections vary by jurisdiction. So, it is important that students are able to determine what the local rules are. Creating an in-class internet exercise that requires students to consider whether they need this information and how to find it can assist the instructor in meeting the learning objectives for self-diagnosis and search.

In discussing turnover, we often ask students what a “good” turnover rate should be. The answer depends on many things including the current unemployment rate, industry turnover, and organizational objectives. Helping students understand the information they need (and find it through googling), is another example of an exercise that can help with self-diagnosis and search.

In MGS 3100, students are introduced to the profit model to see how this basic concept is linked to the health of a company. They need to be able to use Internet resources to find information from acceptable business sources to examine how the concept of a profit is used and reported by businesses.

Also, we want to increase student awareness of available sources of data. A forecasting assignment creates and compares time series forecast methods. Numerous sources of times series data are available on the Internet. Students will be instructed to locate data to use for their forecast.

Proposal Objectives
To develop students who are able to self-diagnose and search, modifications to our examples, exercises, and activities are required. Ultimately, the goal of this proposed work is to develop a template that instructors can use to design class activities that require students to use internet resources to solve problems.

Method and Evaluation
We will develop a template and use it to design at least three activities for each of our classes, MGS 3100 (Business Analysis) and MGS 4300 (Managing Human Resources). Students will be given a pre-test consisting of several business-related, topical scenarios and asked to determine 1) what additional information is needed to solve this problem, and 2) what phrase would they google to find that information. With this pre-test we can determine the common search strategies that the students are using (Navarro-Prieto, Scaife, & Rogers, 1999) and use that to inform our activities. We may also include a question on their confidence in the answers.

The activities will be built into the classes, either as in-class exercises or homework assignments. We will use a post-test after each exercise to determine if learning has occurred and diagnose if our template needs to be modified. For the final exam, questions similar to those used in the pre-test will be used to assess overall student learning relative to self-diagnosis and search.

One of the authors is IRB certified and appropriate IRB approval will be obtained to position the research for publication.

Budget
We request the allocation of $2000 to cover expenses related to the research or its presentation.
Media/Classroom
The proposal requires no special media or equipment.

Resources