



Tying Television Comedies to Information Literacy: A Mixed-Methods Investigation



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ABSTRACT

Many components of Information Literacy (IL) are too massive to be addressed in a single instruction session, yet an introduction to these concepts is essential for students' academic careers and intellectual development. This study evaluates the impact of applying excerpts from television comedies that illustrate ACRL's *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* to library instruction sessions for first-year students. Pre- and posttest results from 193 subjects and interview data from two focus groups indicate that television comedies can be integrated into one-shot instruction sessions to demonstrate IL concepts in an accessible and dialogue-provoking manner.

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INTRODUCTION

Three students gather in their library's group study room to prepare for a Spanish exam. The students are in their first semester at a Colorado community college and are struggling to adapt, but they have taken a proactive approach by creating a study group and selecting the library as a central meeting place. The blackboard in the group study room reads, "SHHHHHH....people are trying to study" in large bold letters. One of the students comments on their location by referencing a classic movie set predominantly in a library. "Hey, this is kind of like *Breakfast Club*, huh?" One of the student's study partners dryly replies, "We *are* in a library." This scene from the first episode of the TV sitcom *Community* depicts student use of the library in an engaging manner, and is one of many films and television programs that have used libraries as vehicles for humor. By implementing excerpts from popular media in the classroom to stimulate dialogue, various challenges to effective undergraduate library use may be brought to light. This study seeks to provide insight into whether televisual media has the capacity to illustrate information literacy (IL) concepts in action.

Beyond introducing opportunities to discuss the importance of effective information seeking and information literacy skills, there are a number of potential benefits to using film to increase student awareness of IL. Visual media, and television comedies specifically, may be capable of fulfilling numerous tasks simultaneously, such as connecting

students through a mutual interest, providing a theme for the instruction session, invoking emotional learning, and acting as scaffolding for challenging concepts. Television, a medium that many students have a shared interest in, is an appealing format for considering the significance of information literacy in settings beyond the library or campus. This type of engagement with what Detmering (2011, p. 265) terms "the cultural contexts of information literacy" can result in the recognition of IL as the ability to use information in everyday life, and not simply a theory associated with a class or assignment. Using students' familiarity and comfort with television comedies as a basis, more complicated or conceptual subjects can be addressed. As Springer and Yelinek (2011, p. 79) has found, "Using the right popular culture reference will evoke strong reactions in students, and these emotions allow deeper learning to occur." Film and television create strong emotional responses in people, and this same effect can be applied when attempting to create a memorable classroom experience. Laughing at a television show, for example, can help to create an emotional connection to what library instructors want students to learn (Peterson, 2010). By relating to characters on an emotional level students are more likely to understand the information environment these characters inhabit, and by extension, their own.

The foundation of many instructors' and institutions' delivery and assessment of information literacy instruction is the Association of College and Research Libraries (2000) *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (IL Standards), currently in the process of revision. The highly influential IL Standards continue to provide important guidelines for instruction and assessment, due in part to detailing the set of abilities an information-literate person must demonstrate. Using ACRL's IL Standards to guide and evaluate information literacy instruction has proved fruitful for a number of researchers (Emmett & Emde, 2007; Magnuson, 2013). The motivation for this study stems

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from the possibility that, as Detmering (2011) and Peterson (2010) hypothesize, specific learning outcomes may be met by using the powerful influence of multimedia and popular culture. It is the author's expectation that by seeing characters from *Parks & Recreation* struggle with ideological bias or by hearing Stephen Colbert's remarks on "Wikilobbying," students can better situate IL concepts that are notoriously difficult to grasp within their own academic worlds. First, the literature provides context for the use of popular culture, television media, and humor in the classroom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While the use of television and film to teach information literacy is infrequently documented, popular culture as a means to facilitate literacy has appeared occasionally in the LIS and educational literature since the early 2000s. Within this subset of the literature a variety of instructional settings and popular culture texts are represented. In libraries, particularly academic institutions, a variety of media have been used to foster students' information literacy skills, most notably music and short stories (Blackburn & Molidor, 2011; Brier & Lebbin, 2004). Brier and Lebbin (2004) argue that narratives are ideal vehicles for giving meaning to and aiding memory of content that is otherwise challenging to comprehend, an observation also applicable to television media. Friese (2008) advocates for the inclusion of popular culture materials in school library collections and instruction to support the development of students' media literacy. Analyzing the content of three popular films, Detmering (2011, p. 265) posits that judiciously selected films are an exceptional medium to "contextualize the access, use, and interpretation of information within a political and social framework" for politically engaged information literacy instruction. Peterson (2010) uses selections from three different films as a means to demonstrate to students the practice of research skills. Adopting the reality TV program *Jersey Shore* as a theme for information literacy classes, Springer and Yelinek (2011, p. 85) found through survey responses that 95% of students felt engaged during class.

Popular culture has also been incorporated into non-library curriculum. Most notable is Alvermann, Moon, and Hagwood's (1999) *Popular Culture in the Classroom*, an overview of teaching media literacy to students using popular culture examples. This guide for instructors provides an array of practical strategies for incorporating popular culture into classes. In particular, the volume addresses the teaching of critical media literacy, a concept closely linked to that of information literacy. In regards to television comedies Gray (2005, p. 225) makes use of *The Simpsons'* frequent parodies of other popular culture touchstones to communicate media literacy and rhetorical devices employed by mass media, and advocates creating a student-centered learning environment by means of "students' own experiences of and responses to media texts as a touchstone for education." Beyond the use of popular media to involve and inform students, the topic of humor to improve library instruction provides further underpinnings for this research. Arnsan (2000) and Trefts and Blakeslee (2000) discuss the importance of humor as a tool to facilitate learning and reduce stress. Trefts and Blakeslee (2000) identify several advantages to incorporating comedy into classes, including fostering camaraderie, drawing attention to the instructor, and making learning more enjoyable. Walker (2006) employs humor in an attempt to mitigate student library anxiety, and furnishes practical techniques for instructors seeking to cultivate humor in the classroom. Vossler and Sheidlower's (2011) *Humor and Information Literacy* provides a basis for the efficacy of humor as an instructional tool and offers pragmatic advice on how librarians can use humor to teach IL. With this review of the literature on the benefits and applicability of popular culture examples and humor in library instruction in mind, the research questions for creating lessons that connect television comedies to components of IL concepts were devised.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to measure student learning in relation to popular media, specifically television comedies, when used in an instructional setting to introduce information literacy concepts. It is hypothesized that student learning in regards to selected IL concepts, as expressed in ACRL's *Information Literacy Competency Standards*, among an experimental group receiving instruction with three excerpts from television programs in conjunction with group discussion will be higher than that of a control group which participates in only group discussion. This research is designed to address the following research questions:

1. Are popular culture examples, such as excerpts from television comedies, an effective means of increasing student learning in one-shot instruction sessions?
2. Does student familiarity with and understanding of IL concepts increase when popular culture examples are tied to these same concepts during one-shot instruction sessions?
3. Do students prefer instruction that utilizes popular culture examples compared to solely group discussion?

More broadly, this study investigates whether popular media can serve as an effective means of information literacy instruction. Before these questions are explored, excerpts from three television comedies pertinent to IL concepts are identified for incorporation into library instruction sessions for first-year students.

INFORMATION LITERACY IN TV COMEDIES: THREE EXAMPLES

Based upon prior knowledge of television comedies and online searches for relevant examples, the author identified excerpts from popular TV programs that contain themes pertinent to at least one standard from ACRL's *Information Literacy Competency Standards*. Additional criteria considered during the process of excerpt selection gave preference to those of short duration and containing widely accessible humor. Brief descriptions of the excerpts and their corresponding IL Standards follow.

Excerpt 1 "Wikilobbying" — *The Colbert Report*, Jan. 29, 2007. *The Colbert Report* is a satirical late-night news program that parodies conservative pundit shows. The series began in 2005 and is currently in its ninth season. Actor and comedian Stephen Colbert plays a fictional anchorman who is unafraid to make poorly informed and hyperbolic statements. *The Colbert Report's* satirizing of current events has resulted in several Wikipedia-related topics, including one entitled "Wikilobbying." This term refers to the act of compensating others to edit Wikipedia entries in order to more positively portray one's company or commercial product. In the selected excerpt Colbert discusses "Wikiality"—reality becoming what the majority agrees upon—and in particular Microsoft's hiring of a computer expert to alter Wikipedia entries referencing Microsoft's products to enhance their public image. Brumm et al. (2007) concludes with an insightful statement that prompts reflection: "When money determines Wikipedia entries, reality has become a commodity." This excerpt corresponds directly to Standard Five: "The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally" (ACRL, 2000, p. 14). Performance Indicator 1 for this Standard states: "The information literate student understands many of the ethical, legal and socio-economic issues surrounding information and information technology," which are the issues *The Colbert Report's* "Wikilobbying" segment speaks to.

Excerpt 2 "Ron and Tammy" — *Parks and Recreation*, Season Two, Episode Eight. *Parks and Recreation* is a comedy series on

NBC that debuted in 2009 and is currently in its sixth season. Set in the fictional location of Pawnee, Indiana, the series is led by Amy Poehler as Leslie Knope, a well-intentioned, perpetually optimistic bureaucrat in the town's Parks Department. In Season Two of *Parks and Recreation* Leslie Knope's cheerful predilection is tested when she learns that the Pawnee Public Library wishes to build on the same land sought after by the Parks Department. One of *Parks & Recreation's* running jokes, made tongue-in-cheek, is that the library is the one municipal department that everyone loves to hate. Leslie declares: "The library is the worst group of people ever assembled in history. They're mean, conniving, rude, and extremely well-read, which makes them dangerous" (Scully & Miller, 2009). Leslie schedules a meeting with Tammy Swanson, a shrewd and forceful Deputy Director of Library Services. In Tammy's office there are books on the "Approved" shelf (*Man Putty, Woman War III*) and the "Rejected" shelf (*Power In Your Pants, The Male Brain – It's Bigger!*) that make it apparent Tammy is decisively failing to maintain a collection representative of all types of viewpoints. During Leslie and Tammy's exchange fines are discussed and forgiven, but Leslie continues to distrust the library. IL Standard Three dovetails with this excerpt from *Parks and Recreation*: "The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system" (ACRL, 2000, p. 11). Information evaluation, including how information is selected for acquisition by libraries, is a salient issue for undergraduates to understand and is illustrated succinctly by this excerpt.

Excerpt 3 "Retreat to Move Forward" — *30 Rock*, Season Three, Episode Nine. *30 Rock* is a satire of the television industry that aired from 2006 to 2013. The actors, writers, and producers for a fictional live sketch comedy series similar to *Saturday Night Live* are the subjects of show's sardonic focus. Jenna Maroney, who in Season Three has an upcoming film role as singer Janis Joplin, is one such character. Jenna decides the optimal way to prepare for her role is to employ method acting, a technique requiring her to heavily research her subject and immerse herself in Joplin's life, and turns to Janis Joplin's Wikipedia entry to do so. Jenna's coworkers take advantage of her naiveté, editing Joplin's Wikipedia page to reflect such factual inaccuracies as, "Janis Joplin speed-walked everywhere and was afraid of toilets" (Sagher & Buscemi, 2009). Jenna takes these claims at face value and, to her personal detriment and her coworkers' amusement, imitates everything she reads on Wikipedia. IL Standard Three features prominently in this episode. Performance Indicator Two notes, "The information literate student articulates and applies initial criteria for evaluating both the information and its sources" (ACRL, 2000, p. 11), something which Jenna entirely fails to do. Two Outcomes for Indicator Two are particularly applicable to this excerpt, including:

- c. Recognizes prejudice, deception, or manipulation.
- d. Recognizes the cultural, physical, or other context within which the information was created and understands the impact of context on interpreting the information.

Each of the above examples illustrates a component of ACRL's IL Standards. Two are on topics related to Wikipedia, a source highly recognizable to many undergraduates, and two are related to IL Standard Three, which pertains to the consistently challenging issue of resource evaluation. Having selected excerpts from television comedies that engage with IL concepts and are appropriate for library instruction, the methodologies to measure student learning before and after instruction were established.

METHODS

Two methods were selected to collect data on student learning of IL concepts using popular culture examples: pre- and posttests conducted during one-shot instruction sessions and focus groups held approximately one month after instruction. A mixed-methods approach was chosen in order to acquire both quantitative and qualitative data and achieve methodological triangulation, thus viewing the subject from more than one perspective and hypothetically increasing the accuracy and validity of the results. Quantitative data were obtained from questionnaires administered before and after instruction. Focus group discussions represent the qualitative method. The study was conducted at Sarah Lawrence College, a small liberal arts institution in Bronxville, NY, and received IRB approval for research using human subjects.

In the 2012–2013 academic year (Fall and Spring semesters) the author conducted a total of 16 instruction sessions for freshman courses. The "First-Year Studies" classes are required for all freshmen at Sarah Lawrence College and last one academic year. Each course addresses a particular discipline while emphasizing critical thinking and communication skills. All First-Year Studies courses visit the library for one instruction session, a majority of which occur in the fall semester. Library instruction for First-Year Studies is comprised of an introduction to services offered, key resources, and information ethics and evaluation, all completed within the period of one and one-half hours.

PRE- AND POSTTESTS

A pre- and posttest of ten multiple choice questions, included as Appendix A, was developed based on select Performance Indicators from ACRL's IL Standards Three and Five and Beile's (2005) Test of Information Literacy for Education (B-TILED). B-TILED, which underwent extensive testing and received developmental support from Project SAILS and the Institute for Information Literacy and Library Education, is a multiple-choice test that consists of 22 content questions and takes approximately 30 min to complete. Because of the limited classroom time for students to complete a questionnaire, an abridged instrument with queries that reflected the original B-TILED questions as closely as possible was adopted. Prior to the fall semester two mock sessions were conducted with library staff to solicit feedback on survey design. The instrument was then revised according to colleague recommendations. The pre- and posttest questionnaires contain the same questions and were randomized in the posttest.

A total of 211 freshmen attended 16 instruction sessions. All students present were asked to complete an online pre- and posttest questionnaire at the beginning and end of class. The same instructor administered the tests for all classes, ensuring that similar instructions and environmental conditions were provided to the fullest degree possible. Eight randomly-chosen sessions comprised of 103 respondents served as an experimental group that viewed television comedy excerpts before engaging in an instructor-led discussion based on pre-selected IL concepts, and eight randomly-chosen sessions comprised of 90 respondents served as a control group that did not view excerpts but engaged in instructor-led discussion of the same concepts. Eighteen students did not complete the pre- and/or posttests, resulting in a total of 193 valid respondents. Responses were exported from Google Forms to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet where data tabulation and manipulation were performed. Quantitative analysis, including t-tests to calculate statistical significance between pre- and post results, was performed using Excel.

FOCUS GROUPS

At the conclusion of each class students were asked to contact the instructor if they wished to participate in a focus group related to the instruction they received, with free pizza offered as an incentive. Using this method a total of 15 students were recruited. In December 2012,

11 student volunteers attended two focus groups facilitated by the author that were 1 h in duration. Students who attended gave their informed consent to participate and to be recorded. Participants were all traditional freshmen undergraduates, with seven women and four men represented. During each session the participants were asked to describe one thing they recalled from the library instruction session, something they learned from the class, perspectives on website evaluation, perspectives on ethical issues related to information, and what they did or did not enjoy about the class. Appendix B contains the six focus group questions. The author later transcribed the audio recordings to conduct analysis of themes present in the conversations, which are described in detail in the following results.

RESULTS

PRE- AND POSTTESTS

This data consists of individual student scores on the pre- and posttest. The 103 students in the experimental group receiving instruction with television comedy excerpts followed by discussion demonstrated a mean score of 4.75 in the pretest ($SD = 2.028$) and 5.81 in the posttest ($SD = 2.177$), with 10 being the highest possible score. The average increase of 1.07 points from pre- to posttest represents approximately one additional item per student being answered correctly. Among the control group of 90 students participating solely in discussion regarding selected IL concepts, mean scores increased by 0.13 from pretest (mean of 4.9, $SD = 2.39$) to posttest (mean of 5.03, $SD = 2.121$). Table 1 indicates the variations in test scores by group, and the analyses that follow test statistical significance between and within both samples.

To calculate whether the experimental and control groups produced posttest results that differed meaningfully, a two-tailed independent samples *t*-test was conducted using the widely accepted 0.05 confidence level. With 191 degrees of freedom the *t* value comes to 4.954 and the *p* value to .013, showing a statistically significant difference. Because the *p* value is considerably less than 0.05, this test lends support to the hypothesis that student learning of selected IL concepts increased when the subjects were presented with excerpts from television comedies that corresponded to the same concepts.

Pre- and posttest scores within the experimental and control groups were measured to discern additional trends in the data. With 102 degrees of freedom, a one-tailed paired samples *t*-test on the experimental group's scores indicated that subjects made statistically significant improvements from pre- to posttest ($p < .000$). In terms of individual questions the greatest improvements were made on Question 3 regarding website evaluation (17.5% difference) and Question 5 addressing plagiarism and information ethics (14.6%). The queries posing the most challenge to respondents were Question 6 concerning characteristics of journal articles (40.8% correct responses posttest) and Question 8 on works eligible for copyright (48.5% correct responses posttest). Table 2 displays the experimental group's correct answers to each question in terms of frequency and percentage.

The improvements made among the control group from pre- to posttest were not found to be significant, as the *p* value of .064 from a one-tailed paired samples *t*-test with 89 degrees of freedom is greater than the 0.05 confidence level. This finding supports the expectation that less learning took place in the control group that participated in discussion of IL concepts only when compared to the experimental group.

Table 1
Pre- and Posttest Score Statistics.

	Experimental group (N = 103)			Control group (N = 90)		
	Mean	Standard deviation	Std. error of mean	Mean	Standard deviation	Std. error of mean
Pretest	4.75	2.028	4.635	4.9	2.39	0.252
Posttest	5.81	2.177	5.677	5.03	2.121	0.223
Difference	1.07	0.149	1.043	0.13	-0.269	-0.028

Table 2
Frequency and Percent of Correct Answers by Question.
(Experimental group, N = 103.)

Question	Pretest	Posttest	Percent difference
Q1	63 (61.2%)	72 (72.8%)	11.7%
Q2	50 (48.5%)	58 (56.3%)	7.8%
Q3	51 (49.5%)	69 (49.5%)	17.5%
Q4	59 (57.3%)	68 (66%)	8.7%
Q5	40 (38.8%)	55 (53.4%)	14.6%
Q6	34 (33%)	42 (40.8%)	7.8%
Q7	45 (43.7%)	54 (52.4%)	8.7%
Q8	39 (37.9%)	50 (48.5%)	10.7%
Q9	46 (44.7%)	52 (50.5%)	5.8%
Q10	57 (55.3%)	70 (68%)	12.6%

As with the experimental group Question 3 showed the greatest positive change in percentage, though of a less significant increase (3.3%). Additionally, Question 6 saw a 3.3% increase in correct responses. Most challenging for control group respondents were Question 7 on sources that must be cited and Question 9 on characteristics of high quality information, neither of which saw an improvement in posttest scores.

The quantitative results suggest that student test results either increased, as in the experimental group, or remained relatively level, as in the control group, due to the type of instruction received. The application of the pre- and posttest questionnaire, intended to measure student learning of limited IL concepts using a small set of multiple-choice questions, provides results that evidence a potential increase in learning among subjects that viewed excerpts illustrating information literacy concepts. However, the test results reveal only one perspective of student familiarity with IL before and after instruction. To understand more nuanced components of the students' classroom experience, two focus groups were conducted approximately 1 month after instruction to gather data on familiarity with IL and satisfaction with the instruction provided.

FOCUS GROUPS

After transcribing audio recordings from the two focus group sessions, the transcripts for the experimental focus group (comprised of five subjects from instruction sessions utilizing the experimental treatment) and the control focus group (six subjects who participated in non-experimental instruction) were compared. Any responses in the transcripts that indicated agreement or disagreement with other responses were noted in the analysis process, as well as themes that were shared by or exclusive to each group. The results below report interesting themes and comments among either group, and the Discussion section that follows will extrapolate upon how the results inform the hypothesis and research questions specifically. Table 3 indicates the most common theme for each question posed.

Q 1: What do you remember most from your class in the library?

The first question, intended to open a dialogue with subjects regarding their instructional experience, elicited a range of responses that included the following themes:

- TV excerpts (4 responses): "It was funny, there's this mean librarian [in one excerpt] but we know librarians aren't like that."
- Library tour (3 responses): "I liked the moving bookshelves, I didn't know they could do that."

Table 3
Most Common Themes by Focus Group Question.
(Control and Experimental Groups, N = 11.)

Question	Theme	Frequency of responses
What do you remember most from your class in the library?	Television excerpts	4
Can you describe one thing you learned from the class?	Library services	5
Do you feel that the class helped you to better evaluate whether or not to use a website for your research?	Class did not help/skills remained the same	4
How do you decide which websites are trustworthy and which are not?	Intuition	5
Did the class cause you to think about any topics regarding the ethical use of information?	Have not considered these topics	6
Did you enjoy the class? If so, what did you enjoy about it? If not, what would you change?	Enjoyed due to content	4

- Databases (2 responses): “Now I see that’s how you get articles if you need them for [meetings with professors].”

In the experimental group focus session this initial question prompted the most mentions of the television comedies used in class. The following is a selection of dialogue between the moderator and two students on the excerpts that were presented and Wikipedia:

Student 2: I liked *30 Rock*.

Moderator: What about *30 Rock* did you like?

Student 2: I just like the show. It was a good part.

Moderator: Did the episode seem to relate to the class?

Student 2: Yeah, it was about how you can’t just blindly use Wikipedia because you can’t tell who’s writing it. We talked about it after the clip.

Student 3: I thought it was a good way to get us to think about what websites we should and shouldn’t use for research. There was a fake news show we saw?

Moderator: Sure, *The Colbert Report*.

Student 3: And I thought, um, that’s something interesting, that you don’t know who’s changing a Wikipedia page, and that there may be an influence from corporations, you don’t know...I know not to use Wikipedia in papers but that was new thing for me.

One additional student appreciated the levity the television comedies brought to the class, mentioning that one excerpt was “a funny view on libraries,” and s/he “wasn’t expecting the class to be very interesting, since, you know, it’s just about the library, but that made it more fun.” Beyond the experimental group’s enthusiasm for the TV excerpts, the control focus group remembered taking a tour of the library at the beginning of the instruction session and receiving an introduction to databases and retrieving articles.

Q 2: Can you describe one thing you learned from the class?

This question regarding self-identified student learning as a result of the class elicited the following responses:

- Library services (5 responses): “I learned about ordering books from other libraries.”
- Databases (2 responses): “I didn’t know there were different databases for different subjects, I only had used JSTOR.”
- Censorship (2 responses): “There’s all kinds of censorship that we take for granted, and not just libraries or books but information in general.”

A majority of subjects indicated that they had learned about library services from the instruction session, including Interlibrary Loan, research consultations with reference librarians, course reserves, and group study rooms. Two students replied that they learned about databases, with one reply focusing on JSTOR: “I didn’t know there were different databases for different subjects, I only knew JSTOR. I know JSTOR isn’t always the best database now, since you may be looking for something on, like, recent news and JSTOR won’t have that.” Among the experimental focus group, two subjects stated that the library

instruction piqued their interest in censorship as it applies to printed materials. As one student noted:

“I think the idea of censorship is really important, it’s coming up in my Japanese Literature class and discussing it together, but about libraries instead of Japan, that’s really interesting and I get more ideas about what I want to do for class projects. There are books that were censored in libraries and they’re classic and really popular, and that’s something we talked about that I want to look at more.”

Q 3: Do you feel that the class helped you to better evaluate whether or not to use a website for your research?

This question was included to determine subject familiarity with and knowledge of online information evaluation in light of the library instruction session. The themes established are as follows:

- Class did not help/skills remained the same (4 responses): “I’m already pretty good at choosing the right sites.”
- Class helped, no concrete example given (3 responses): “The class made it easier for me to tell whether a website is acceptable for me to use, like whether my professor will allow it.”
- Class helped due to television comedies/discussion (3 responses): “The *30 Rock* example...that was an example of websites that need to have evaluation.”

Three students replied that the class helped them to evaluate websites, though it is uncertain how as no specific instances were described. Three subjects from the experimental focus group made the connection between one excerpt that was viewed and website evaluation, with one stating, “The *30 Rock* example, from the clip where she was doing all these ridiculous things because that’s what Wikipedia told her, that was an example of websites that need to have evaluation.” One other expressed their agreement afterwards but it was not made explicit how the class contributed to their self-reported learning. A respondent recalled the CRAP Test due to its memorable acronym, though they explained that they simply remembered that it exists and do not use the criteria to assess websites.

Q 4: How do you decide which websites are trustworthy and which are not?

To ascertain whether any evaluative criteria discussed in class remained with the students, this question asked how the subjects perceive trustworthiness in websites. This question revealed the following themes:

- Intuition (5 responses): “I can tell...just by the way it looks.”
- Point of view/bias (3 responses): “I look for what someone’s agenda is.”

Five students responded with some variation on the theme of personal intuition, effectively stating that they know a trustworthy website when they see it. In these responses the subjects appeared to be comfortable with their personal capabilities for developing and applying evaluative criteria. These methods for determining the truthfulness of an online resource were largely subjective, such as using “the pictures and how it’s laid out and those design-y things” to gauge trustworthiness. Students in the experimental group conveyed a greater understanding of evaluation,

as timeliness, point of view, and context were all referred to by different subjects as methods for website evaluation. One student who was expanding on another's point articulated their understanding of the significance of context when considering resources:

"The context something was made in, like written in a certain time period or when there was a big cultural influence, that will affect how something was written, and you have to consider the influence of the author's surroundings and mindset."

Another subject, responding not just to website evaluation but thinking critically about all types of sources, specifically referenced a selection from a television comedy:

"I look for what someone's agenda is. That was what we talked about after the clip where Amy Poehler [*Parks & Recreation* actress] was in the library office with the books on the shelf that were all pro-women, and there was this agenda even with the library books, and that shows you have to evaluate everything."

Q 5: Did the class cause you to think about any topics regarding the ethical use of information?

Focus group participants were asked to reflect upon whether they had considered any topics related to the ethical use of information subsequent to library instruction. The responses were grouped into the following categories:

- Have not considered these topics (6 responses): "I didn't think about it too much until now."
- Have considered these topics (3 responses): "For me censorship came up since then."

Both focus groups required a brief reminder of what types of topics fit within the rubric of the "ethical use of information," and after understanding the question more fully, several claimed to have not considered such issues post-instruction. Among the experimental group conversation there was slightly more evidence of awareness in regards to IL Standard Five, Performance Indicator 1 ("The information literate student understands many of the ethical, legal and socio-economic issues surrounding information and information technology") (ACRL, 2000). In particular, plagiarism and censorship were mentioned, as with one subject: "For me censorship came up...and how that's a big part of books and whether information is available further in history." Considered as an entire group, it was evident the participants had not considered or were confused by the "ethics of information."

Q 6: Did you enjoy the class? If so, what did you enjoy about it? If not, what would you change?

The final focus group question was posed in order to assess if students enjoyed the class and whether any subjects would mention television excerpts as a reason for satisfaction.

- Enjoyed due to content (4 responses): "I liked that it had interesting topics, not just using the library but the bigger things to do with information."
- Enjoyed due to television comedies (2 responses): "I appreciated it wasn't just a lecture and there were video clips to kind of show the things we were talking about."
- Enjoyed due to group discussion (2 responses): "For me, I like learning by talking and discussion."

The majority of students expressed enjoyment of the class, citing the "interestingness" of the concepts addressed, in particular governmental censorship and freedom of speech. Two respondents affirmed that they enjoyed the media clips viewed in class. One subject noted their dislike of "group work" and preferred a lecture format, a preference contrary to other respondents. Both groups claimed to be "surprised" by the usefulness of the class and its relevancy to their courses, stating, "It was a lot less boring than I thought it would be." One student dissented by suggesting that the instruction was too basic and unhelpful to their needs,

but the general consensus among both experimental and control focus groups underscored an enjoyment of the session.

DISCUSSION

Based on pre- and posttest findings and focus group sessions, student learning of selected IL concepts may have improved overall, and if so, it increased more significantly among students in the experimental group that viewed excerpts from television comedies corresponding to the material being discussed. The results support the author's hypothesis that student learning in regards to selected IL concepts among the experimental group will be higher than that of a control group that participates in only group discussion. More detailed answers to the three research questions can be found by combining the pertinent quantitative and qualitative data, which provide a more complete representation of the elements involved in the larger research picture when taken together.

RQ 1

Are popular culture examples, such as excerpts from television comedies, an effective means of increasing student learning in one-shot instruction sessions?

This study provides evidence supporting the possibility that popular culture examples used in one-shot instruction, in this case excerpts from television comedies, may be an effective means of increasing student learning. The experimental group performed better than the control group on the 10-question posttest, demonstrating a mean increase of 1.07 points from pre- to posttest compared to a .13 mean increase in the control group. Further, t-tests confirmed that the improvements in mean scores made by the experimental group were statistically significant, both when compared pre- to posttest within the group and when matched to the control group's posttest scores. The control group's gains, while worth noting, were not found to be significant. Overall, comparing test performance before and after participating in one instruction session suggests an improvement in the population that viewed excerpts related to the instruction session's material.

Focus group findings may also signify an increase in student learning due to the use of selections from television comedies. When asked what they remember most from their class in the library, four of five students mentioned television excerpts, and two of those students gave specific instances from those excerpts that assisted their learning. Later in the experimental focus group session three students stated that the class had improved their ability to determine whether to use a website for their research and supplied examples related to the television comedies viewed during instruction, suggesting that the excerpts made a strong impression on these students and their conceptions of source evaluation. The TV comedies were one of many themes of the focus group despite there being no questions that asked about the excerpts specifically.

RQ 2

Does student familiarity with and understanding of IL concepts increase when popular culture examples are tied to these same concepts during one-shot instruction sessions?

Research Question Two asks whether using TV comedies that show a component of IL concepts in instruction has an impact on student understanding of these same concepts. A close examination of the quantitative data reveals that the greatest difference in pre- and posttest questions among the experimental group were related to resource evaluation and plagiarism/information ethics, both being concepts selected for this study. These questions showed improvement from pre- to posttest. Question Three, which asks by which criteria one should validate the authority of a website, saw an increase of 17.5% after instruction. Question Five asks when it is ethical to use someone else's ideas in a research paper, on which posttest scores rose by 14.6%. The control group, conversely, increased their scores on these questions by 3.3% and 1.1%.

The observation that the two questions with the greatest difference in pre- and posttest scores may lend credence to the idea that student familiarity with IL concepts rose as a result of the use of television comedies as scaffolding for their learning.

The experimental focus group was generally able to give more specific examples of resource evaluation when compared to the control focus group. Experimental focus group participants referred to timeliness, point of view, and context when they asked how they evaluate websites. Furthermore, plagiarism and censorship were mentioned when students were asked whether the class had caused them to think about the ethical use of information. The predominant response in the control group focus session, in contrast, was that any topics related to information and ethics had not been considered subsequent to library instruction. This potentially signals that the experimental group was more familiar with IL concepts post-instruction, possibly due in part to using easy-to-recall characters and stories from television comedies to demonstrate these concepts.

RQ 3

Do students express a preference to instruction that utilizes popular culture examples compared to solely group discussion?

While student preferences with regards to television excerpts used in class were not solicited in the pre- and posttests, Question 6 asked each focus group: “Did you enjoy the class? If so, what did you enjoy about it? If not, what would you change?” The query was intended to present students with the opportunity to discuss the television comedy examples used in instruction while being cautious not to elicit a specific response by mentioning the subject. Of the five students in the experimental focus group, two noted their enjoyment of the “video clips” used to illustrate class material, indicating some degree of preference to visual media for these students. Taking the focus group population as a whole, however, the overall content of the class took precedence over any methods used during instruction. Such issues as censorship and freedom of speech were given as reasons for class enjoyment. Speculating on student interest in talking about, as one response stated, “not just using the library but the bigger things to do with information,” giving students the opportunity to engage with a significant topic and challenging them intellectually were major factors in student enjoyment of the class. Somewhat surprisingly, students also communicated a strong sense of the session’s utility, including applicability to their current courses. This suggests that the relevancy of a class to student needs does not always necessitate the teaching of highly specific research skills such as performing database searches. One member of each focus group also expressed their enjoyment of the group discussions, citing a dialogue between class members as a preferred way to learn new concepts. This adds further credence to the author’s impression that the specific methods of instruction, such as incorporating popular culture examples, may in fact be less important than the intellectual content of the class.

LIMITATIONS

One limitation of this study includes the nature of the classroom setting in which the research was partially conducted. The test respondents represent a nonrandom convenience sample, and while appropriate for the purpose of this study, the sample is not intended to represent a larger population. As such, the results are not generalizable and practitioners must thoroughly consider their student populace and unique institutional characteristics when considering the study’s implications. Despite limits on generalization, the results may offer ideas relating to modes of effective instruction and developing classes centered upon information literacy concepts. An additional potential limitation is that of sensitization in the posttests. Because the pre- and posttests were conducted within the same class session, it is possible that sensitization to the test questions occurred among subjects and an increase in post-instruction test performance was due in part to respondent familiarity

with the topics and questions at hand. The t-tests for statistical significance that demonstrate an improvement in the experimental group but not the control group suggest that this factor may have been appropriately controlled for. It should be noted that the population size for the pre- and posttests, while found to be statistically significant, is nonetheless relatively small. Regarding focus groups, the risks of groupthink and social desirability bias are important considerations that pose challenges to accurate results, and can be difficult to control for apart from the moderation process. Finally, the researcher who conducted the instruction sessions was also the focus group moderator, which could have influenced focus group participants to answer more positively to questions asked. It is also possible that self-selected focus group participants can result in interviewees who feel more strongly about the topics being discussed than random members of the target population might.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the potential impact that conscientiously selected popular culture examples can have on student learning in relation to IL concepts. Being cognizant of certain limitations necessary for a project of this scope, including the narrow range of IL concepts being tested and the measurement of student learning using a small set of multiple-choice questions, the author found evidence to support the hypothesis that viewing television comedy excerpts had an effect on student familiarity with IL concepts when compared to the control group. Moreover, it is demonstrated that it is possible for these examples to be used successfully within the constraints of one-shot instruction sessions. The benefits from incorporating television comedies into instruction were that students may have gained a greater familiarity with select IL concepts, a potential overall increase in learning from pre- to posttest, and possible knowledge retention from instruction to focus group one month later. It was not determined that students preferred instruction with television excerpts to discussion-only instruction, as focus groups revealed more interest in the content addressed in class than the means of education. Ultimately, it is hoped that an awareness of information literacy concepts among first-year students would result in stronger IL skills as their academic careers progressed, and that these skills would be applied to both their educational coursework and life decisions.

Further research could expand upon this study’s examination of television comedies as applied to one-shot instruction by evaluating different variables. Researchers could consider substituting the visual popular culture materials in this study for those employing a different mode of operation and learning styles (such as comic books or video games), selecting different student characteristics and/or institutional settings (for example, upper-level undergraduates or at a large public university), or altering the learning outcomes (including using different information literacy concepts or another measure of student learning). Doing so would increase the profession’s knowledge of the efficacy of popular culture in instruction. Additionally, longitudinal studies conducted over the course of one or more academic years would provide highly useful information on the long-term impact of IL instruction.

The findings of this research indicate that, when tied to IL concepts, television comedies may have the capacity to increase undergraduate learning in library instruction and prove to be an effective means of familiarizing first-year students with information literacy. The unique properties of television comedies and film in general, such as students’ preexisting comfort with the medium and the creation of emotional connections that help promote engagement, make them well suited for use in lesson plans. At the same time, it is important to note that the fundamental difference that encourages student learning appears to lay not in the specific format but in making information literacy more relevant and accessible to students’ lives. Library instructors must continue to create opportunities for learning that speak to students’ interests and needs to enable them to become educated consumers and creators of information in its many forms.

APPENDIX A. PRE- AND POSTTEST QUESTIONS

1. Which resource is *least* likely to be reviewed by an editor?
 - a. a book
 - b. a scholarly article
 - c. a newspaper article
 - d. a website

2. Select the option that is *most* characteristic of scholarly research articles:
 - a. articles addressing current events
 - b. articles with an abstract and bibliography
 - c. articles with accompanying photographs
 - d. articles intended for a general audience

3. While evaluating a website, you should validate its authority through:
 - a. sponsor or owner of the webpage
 - b. author credentials
 - c. domain name (such as .org or .edu)
 - d. all of the above

4. The peer review process is:
 - a. applicable to only science and mathematics
 - b. used to evaluate the research findings of scholars in order to improve their work
 - c. a foolproof method of ensuring research is free from error
 - d. conducted by students when evaluating a class at the end of a semester

5. When is it ethical to use the ideas of another person in a research paper?
 - a. it is never ethical to use another person's ideas
 - b. only if you do not use their exact words
 - c. only when you give proper credit
 - d. only when you receive their permission

6. Select the following statement that is true. Journal articles:
 - a. are ideal sources for beginning your research
 - b. typically address very specific topics
 - c. should be used exclusively while doing research
 - d. are always less reliable than websites

7. Which of the following sources must be cited?
 - a. widely-accepted factual information
 - b. your personal ideas
 - c. paraphrased information
 - d. notes taken during class

8. What types of works are eligible for copyright?
 - a. scientific inventions
 - b. literary works
 - c. music, pictorial works, and art
 - d. all of the above

9. Information that is high quality:

- a. will always include charts or diagrams
- b. can be found using Google exclusively
- c. will be relevant to your topic and come from a trusted source
- d. will have been written recently

10. Which of the following best indicates that a resource is scholarly research?

- a. available in a library
- b. available on the Internet
- c. reviewed by experts for publication
- d. written by faculty

APPENDIX B. FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What do you remember most from your class in the library?
2. Can you describe one thing you learned from the class?
3. Do you feel that the class helped you to better evaluate whether or not to use a website for your research?
4. How do you decide which websites are trustworthy and which are not?
5. Did the class cause you to think about any topics regarding the ethical use of information?
6. Did you enjoy the class? If so, what did you enjoy about it? If not, what would you change?

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