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Rebooting a Technical Writing Course: Control Instructional Design, Alt Information Literacy, and Delete Non-Collaboration

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West Virginia University



Introduction

West Virginia University

Land Grant Institution

13 colleges and schools

191 bachelor's, master's, doctoral,
and professional degree programs

Fall 2014

Total Enrollment = 32,348

Undergraduate = 22,563

Graduate & Professional = 6,612

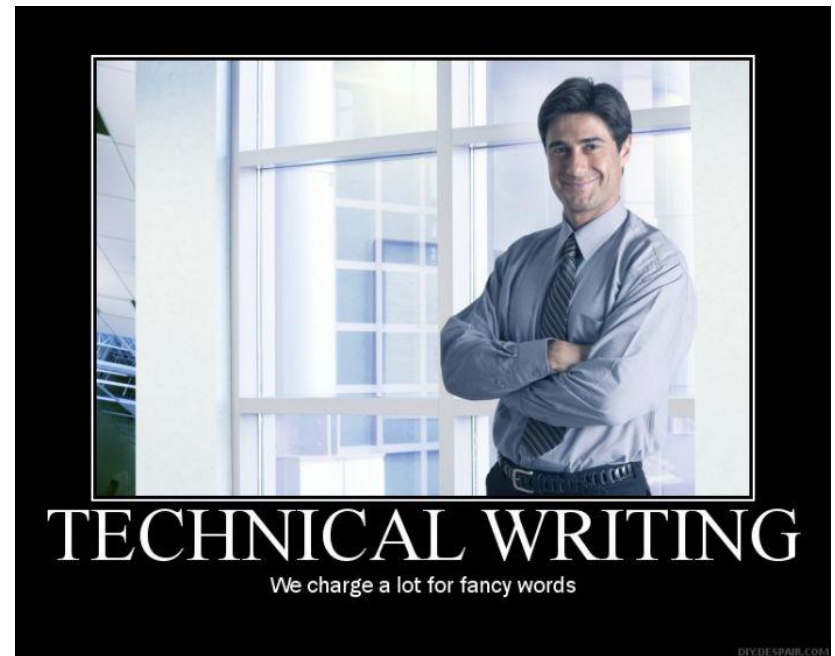
Students come from 113 nations, every
US state (and D.C.), and all 55 West
Virginia counties



English 305: Technical Writing

- Writing in scientific and technical fields.
- Introduces students to typical genres, workplace practices, document design, and conventions of writing for experts and non-experts.

-- WVU Course Catalog



Traditional Class Structure

- Assignments
 - ▣ Unsolicited Recommendation
 - Focus on tone
 - ▣ Information Page
 - Focus on graphics, concision
 - ▣ Mechanism Description
 - ▣ Instructions
 - ▣ Proposal
 - Link back to unsolicited proposal

Challenges with Course

- Aligning assignments with text
 - ▣ Department-assigned text
 - ▣ Assignments too ambitious for limits of text: online class
 - ▣ Proposal
- Little student collaboration
- “Assembly line” feel
- Reluctance to use Library resources
 - ▣ Problem with distance students

Information Literacy Course Enhancement Program (ILCEP)

- Grant from WVU Libraries and Provost's office
- Faculty apply to work with a subject-specialist librarian
 - ▣ Improve information literacy instruction in class

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- ✓ Redesign course structure to engage students in online environment
- ✓ Create new, workplace authentic, assignments
- ✓ Create reusable digital learning objects
- ✓ Incorporate assignment-driven research requirements



Collaboration

- Worked together over summer
 - ▣ Greg: Beta tested ideas
- New assignments and assessments
 - ▣ Greg and Kelly
- Better course design
 - ▣ Kelly
- Winter Break
 - ▣ Course Evaluation and revise
- New version for Spring





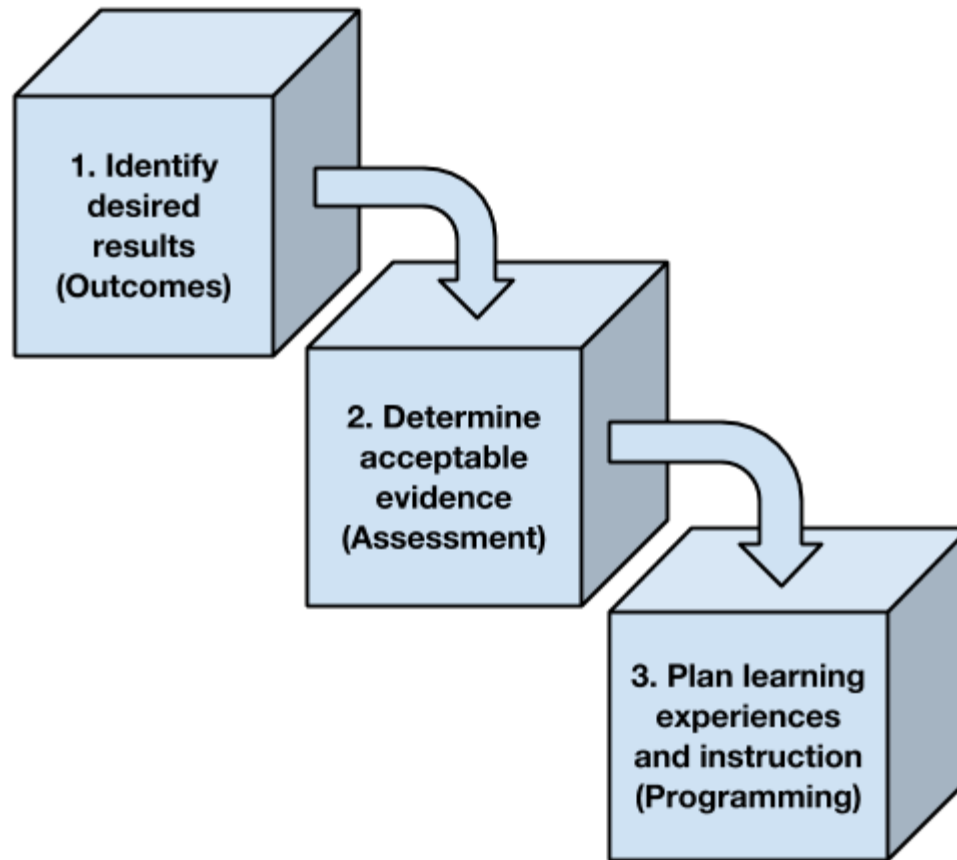
Instructional Design Information Literacy

Backwards Design



<<https://www.flickr.com/photos/pinkmoose/532853944/>>

What is Backwards Design?



Backwards Design:

Goals for the Students and Goals for the Course

STUDENT GOALS

- ❑ Understand how assignments worked together and had practical application
- ❑ Collaborate effectively with classmates
- ❑ Become more information literate
 - ❑ Use the library
 - ❑ Integrate sources into writing projects
 - ❑ Improved sources

COURSE GOALS

- ✓ Create new, workplace authentic, assignments
- ✓ Incorporate assignment-driven research requirements
- ✓ Redesign course structure to engage students in online environment
- ✓ Create reusable digital learning objects

Backwards Design: Assessment



<<http://assessment.uconn.edu/why/>>

Assessments (Grant)

- Knowledge Practices
 - ▣ Pre and Post Test (for grant)

- Use pre and post-test to measure:
 - ▣ Students' recognition of Library resources and their purposes
 - ▣ Ability to choose best search strategies
 - ▣ Ability to choose the most relevant source from a list of sources
 - ▣ Understanding of how peer review works and why it's important
 - ▣ Understanding of what a vendor is
 - ▣ How to pick the best database for a subject

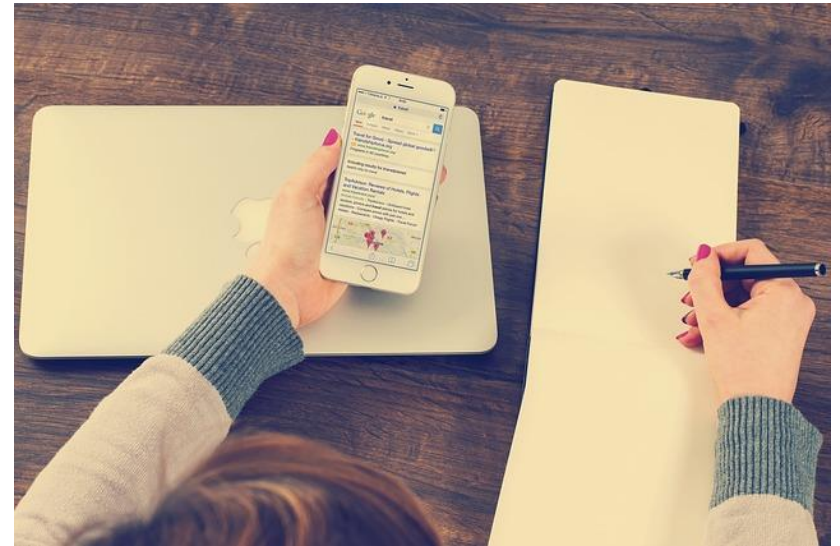
Assessments (Qualitative)

- Dispositions
 - ▣ Citation Analysis

- Students will be able to:
 - ▣ Use databases and other electronic sources to find information (application)
 - ▣ Choose relevant sources (evaluation)
 - ▣ Prepare a written document (synthesis)
 - ▣ Create presentation (synthesis)

Backwards Design: Create new, workplace-oriented, and research-based assignments

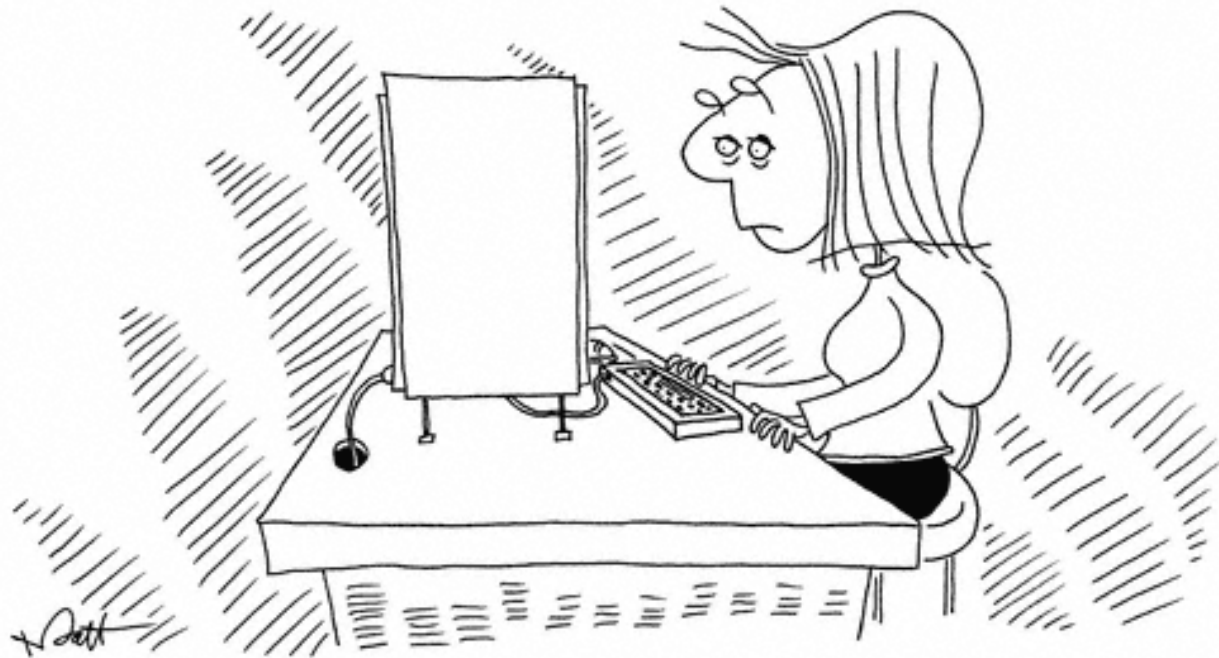
- Assignments
 - ▣ Ethics of Technical Writing* [research]
 - ▣ Instructions
 - ▣ Infographic*
 - ▣ Research Scenario* [research]
 - Final Report
 - Presentation



<https://pixabay.com/en/office-notes-notepad-entrepreneur-614273/>

Improving the Online Environment

Teaching Online



"You have 736 new messages!"

Improve Online Environment

- Course Structure
 - ▣ Weekly modules
 - ▣ Current module at top of page (auto-release)
 - ▣ Consistent structure and organization to each module (to-do list, etc. list them all)
 - ▣ Resource help at end of module

- Resources
 - ▣ Embedded links to databases / websites / course LibGuide
 - ▣ Contact info for instructor and librarian.
 - ▣ Chat widget for librarian

Create reusable digital learning objects

- *Searching ABI/ Inform for Trade Journals*
 - (Captive Video)
- [What's the Deal with Peer-Reviewed Journals?](#)
 - (PowToon Video)
- [What's the Deal with Trade Journals?](#)
 - (PowToon Video)
- [What's the Deal with Annotated Bibliographies?](#)
 - (PowToon Video)
- [English 305: Technical Writing](#) [Online]
 - Research Guide

Results

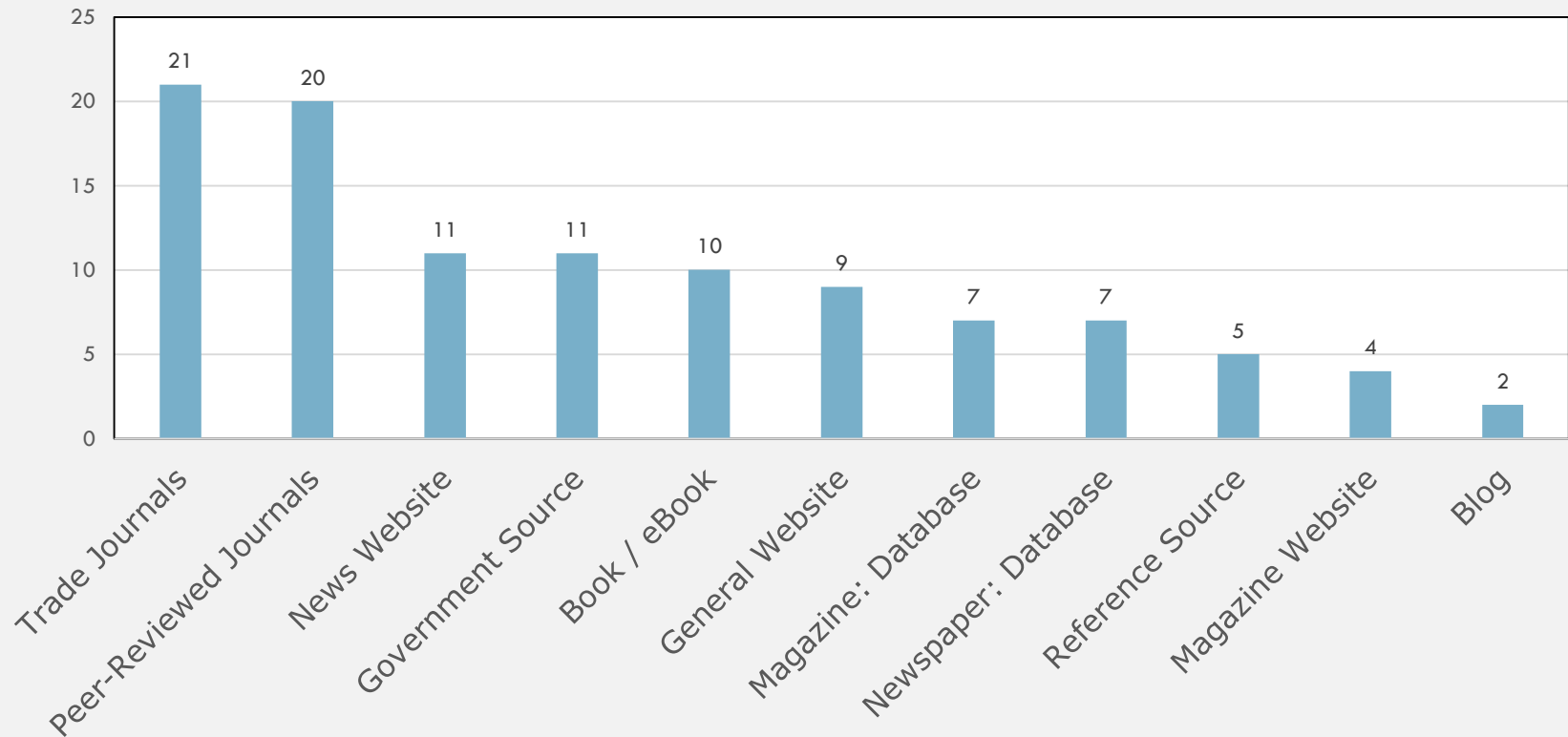
Summative Course Assessment

- Pre / Post tests
 - ▣ Knowledge Practices vs. Dispositions

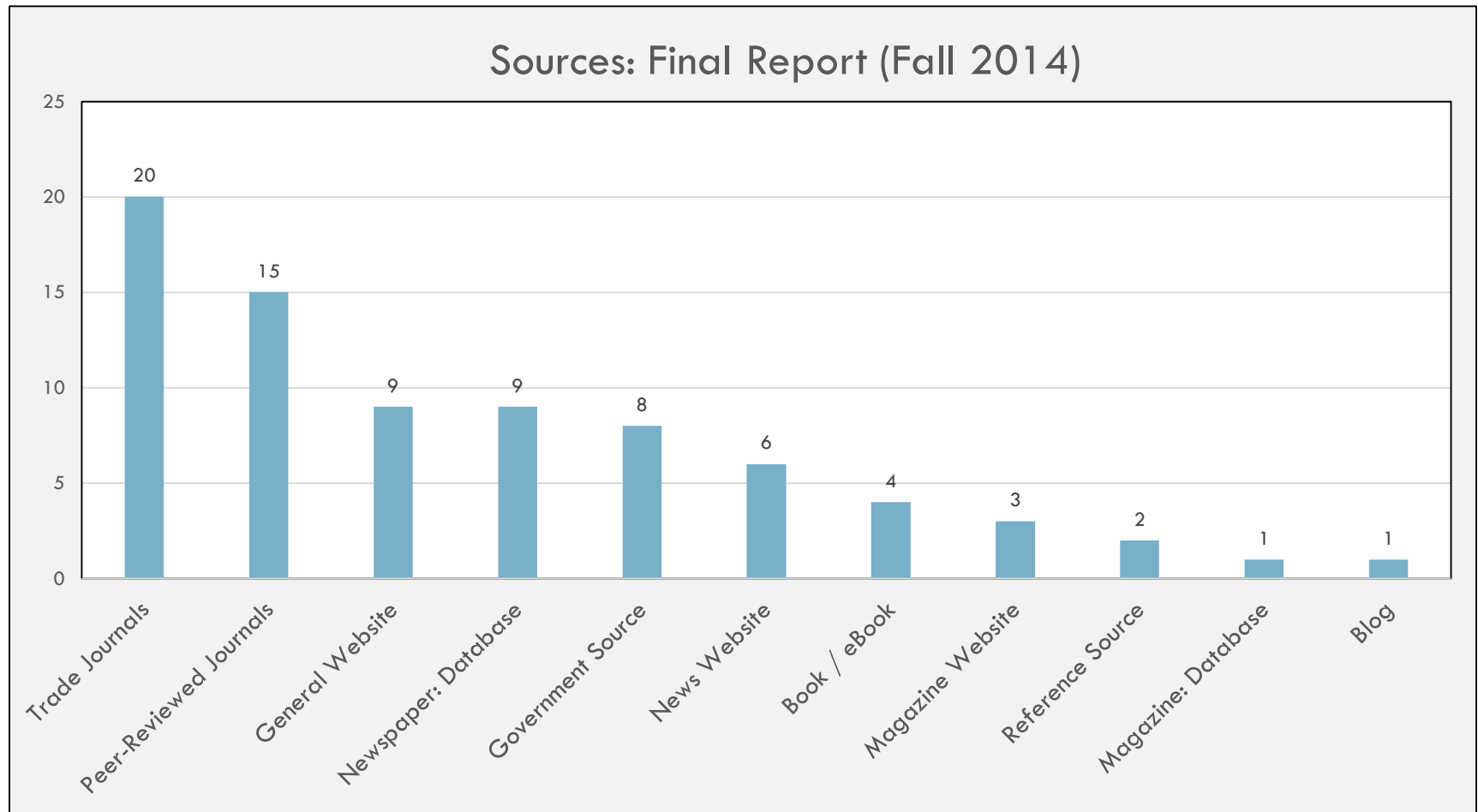
- Citation analysis
 - ▣ Students were not given explicit instructions regarding types of sources to use for their annotated bibliographies or final reports.
 - ▣ The majority of the sources used were from trade journals or peer-reviewed journals, both highlighted by the PowToon Videos.

Fall 2014: Annotated Bibliography

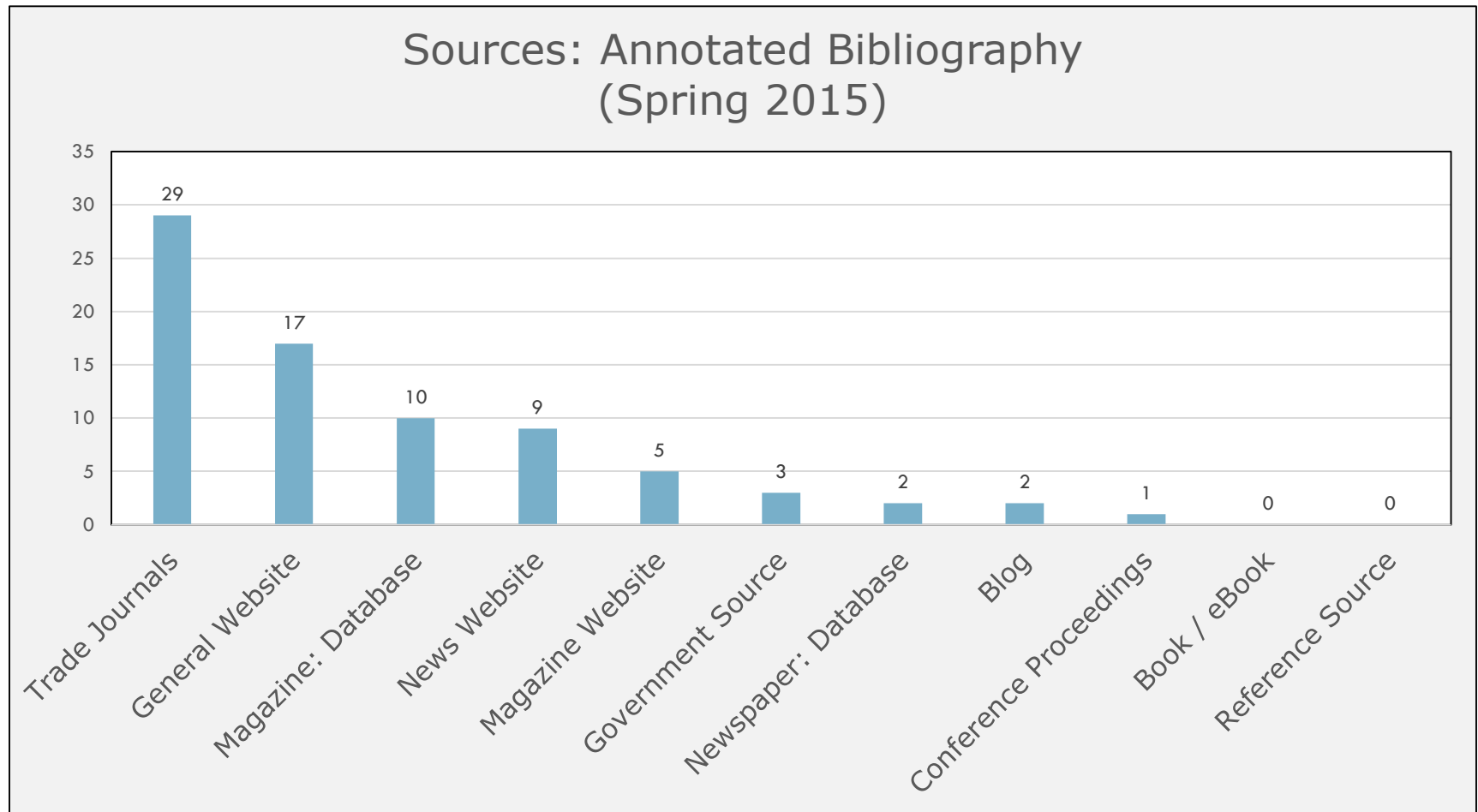
Sources: Annotated Bibliography
(Fall 2014)



Fall 2014: Final Report

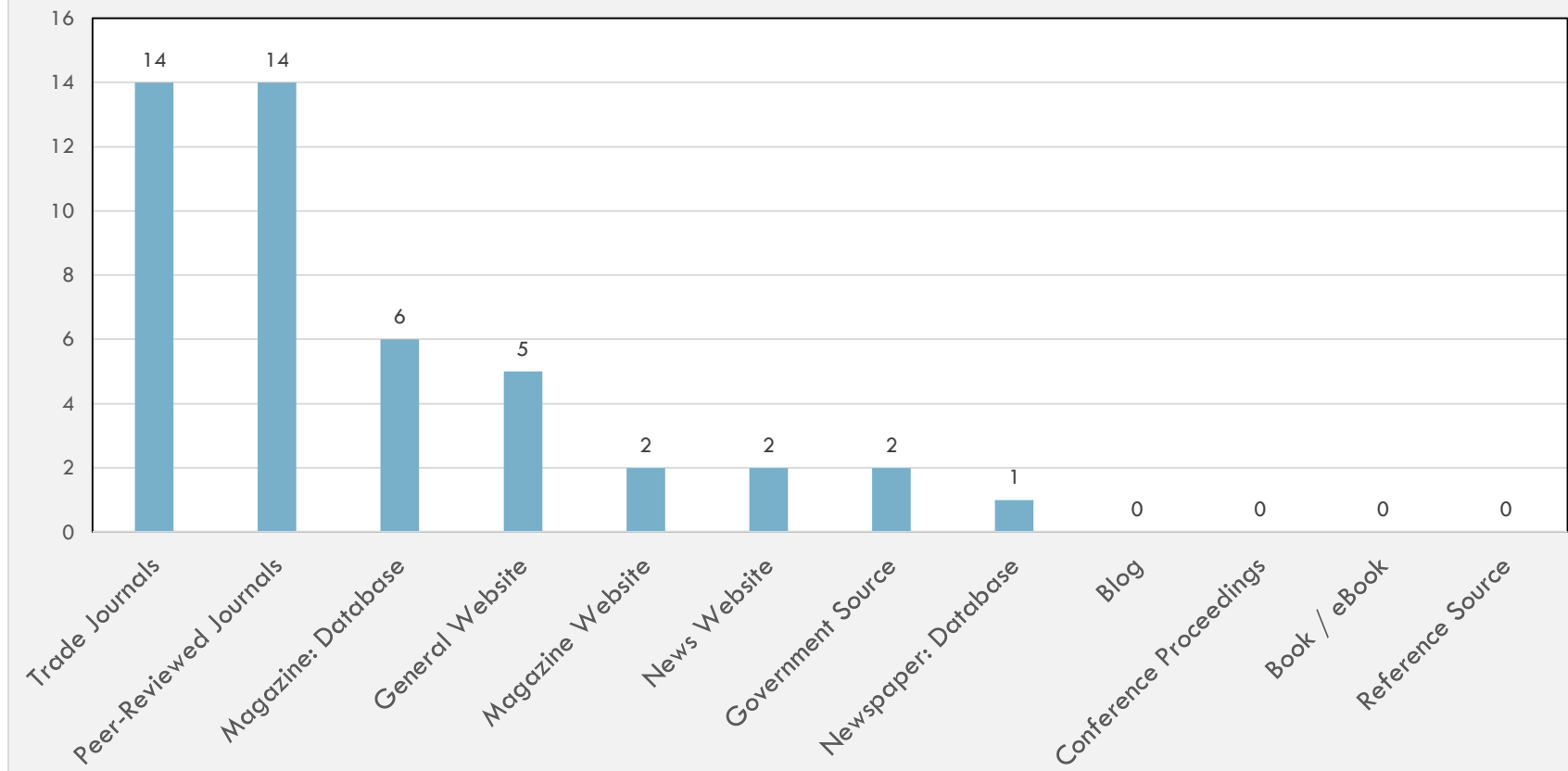


Spring 2015: Annotated Bibliography



Spring 2015: Final Report

Sources: Final Report (Spring 2015)



Student Survey Results

Which instructional videos did you find useful?

- What's the Deal with Trade Journals? 67%
- What's the Deal with Annotated Bibliographies? 55%
- Database Demonstration: How to Search ABI / Inform 45%
- Embedded Links within Weekly Modules (to usa.gov, for example) 36%
- English 305 Technical Writing Research Guide 36%
- What's the Deal with Peer-Reviewed Journals 27%

Student Survey Results

- Which instructional videos did you find least useful?
 - What's the Deal with Peer-Reviewed Journals 45%
 - What's the Deal with Annotated Bibliographies? 18%
 - Embedded Links within Weekly Modules (to usa.gov, for example) 1%
 - What's the Deal with Trade Journals? 1%
 - Database Demonstration: How to Search ABI / Inform 1%
 - English 305 Technical Writing Research Guide 1%

Student Survey Other Comments

- These links simply made the work a bit less tedious and did a good job of supplementing other readings assigned.
- Annotated Bibliographies is the only item that has not been fully covered in any previous classes that I have taken, therefore; the information pertaining Annotated Bibliographies were the most helpful to me.
- I now understand how to search for trade and peer review journals which is why I think this resource was most helpful. Also, the infographic links were tremendously helpful.
- I didn't know what a trade journal was or how to find them, so the database demonstration told me exactly where to find them.
- I thought the websites were helpful because it gave me visual examples that I could keep referring back too.
- Used the link to the APA basics sheet as a reference for my annotated bib, Very helpful for quick structure reference.

Student Survey Comments

- Please comment on the librarian's helpfulness
 - ▣ I never asked for help directly but she seemed ready to help if I ever had a question.
 - ▣ I only emailed her once to ask a question, but she responded in a timely manner and was helpful.
 - ▣ Mrs. Diamond seemed to involved with the class once the research portion came around. She seemed helpful and sent out multiple emails telling students to contact whenever they needed help or if they ever had questions.

Collaboration Tips

- ❑ Allow time for many brainstorming sessions
- ❑ Incorporate trial runs / testing if possible
- ❑ Trust and respect each other's experience, abilities, and talents
- ❑ Establish mutual goals and designing assignments that satisfy both participant's objectives
- ❑ Create pre-test and post-test
- ❑ Create discipline-specific assessment of learning standards

Questions?

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