COLLEGE RESEARCH: COMPETENCIES AND CHALLENGES FOR FIRST-TIME FRESHMAN AT SONOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Kaitlin Springmier, Hilary Smith, and Marjorie Lear – Sonoma State University Library
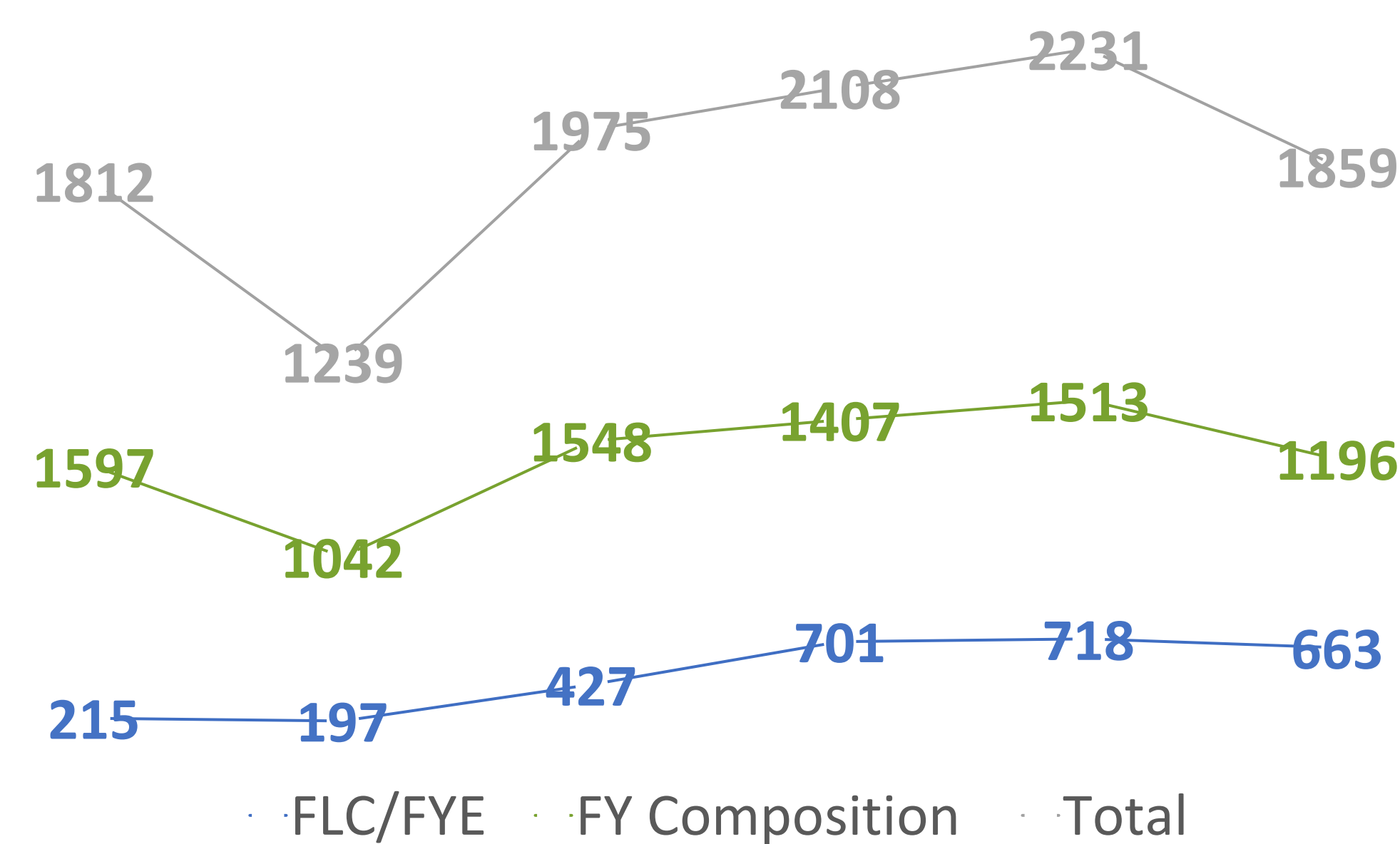
INTRODUCTION

At Sonoma State University, information literacy is embedded throughout the General Education (GE) learning outcomes. However, too often a student's work shows that they struggle to deeply engage with information they find.

The skills gap between finding, analyzing, and incorporating information could be attributed to a number of factors: a crowded information landscape, students' perception of research, lack of preparation, or a neglect to address skills in the classroom. This poster presents preliminary findings on how freshmen conceptualize and conduct research, as well as challenges they encounter in their first year.

OBJECTIVE

On average, SSU Library faculty see 1,800 students in their first year. While library sessions are designed to prepare students for research assignments, creating meaningful lessons is difficult without an understanding of the students' previous experiences with research.

ATTENDEES IN LIBRARY SESSIONS, 2011-2017

Total: 1812, 1239, 1975, 2108, 2231, 1859
FLC/FYE: 1597, 1042, 1548, 1407, 1513, 1196
FY Composition: 215, 197, 427, 701, 718, 663

FLC/FYE   FY Composition   Total

The purpose of this study is to gain insight on skills and experiences Sonoma State University students have with college-level research. Data collected will inform library instruction practice and pedagogy, and hopefully spark new conversations about first-year research experiences.

ONE THING I LEARNED WAS… / ONE THING I'M STILL CONFUSED ABOUT…

BACKGROUND

In Spring of 2011, the Library participated in a holistic assessment of freshman research papers led by the Composition Coordinator, Cathy Kroll. The review showed that students were focusing on writing the paper and not engaging with outside sources. Their work suggested that they were improperly integrating the ideas of others and not evaluating information for credibility. Plagiarism or inadvertent copying from sources was widespread.

In 2017, the Library implemented a "muddiest point" (Angelo & Cross, 2013) classroom assessment. Overwhelmingly, the majority of first-year students reported that after their library session, they had learned how to 'find articles' and were still confused about 'nothing.'

Combined, these data show a discrepancy between faculty's research expectations for students and students' understanding of research.

METHODOLOGY

Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with first-time freshmen at SSU in order to gather more qualitative data explaining students' perspectives on the skills needed and the process of research.

Participants were selected randomly from a list generated by SSU's Office for Reporting and Analytics and recruited via email. They were invited to select an interview time ranging from 8 AM - 8 PM Monday-Friday. After completing the interview, participants were awarded with a $25 Amazon gift card. Money for this research project was funded through the Provost's Innovation Fund.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Due to a low response rate, recruitment of participants and data analysis is ongoing.

### RESPONSE RATE
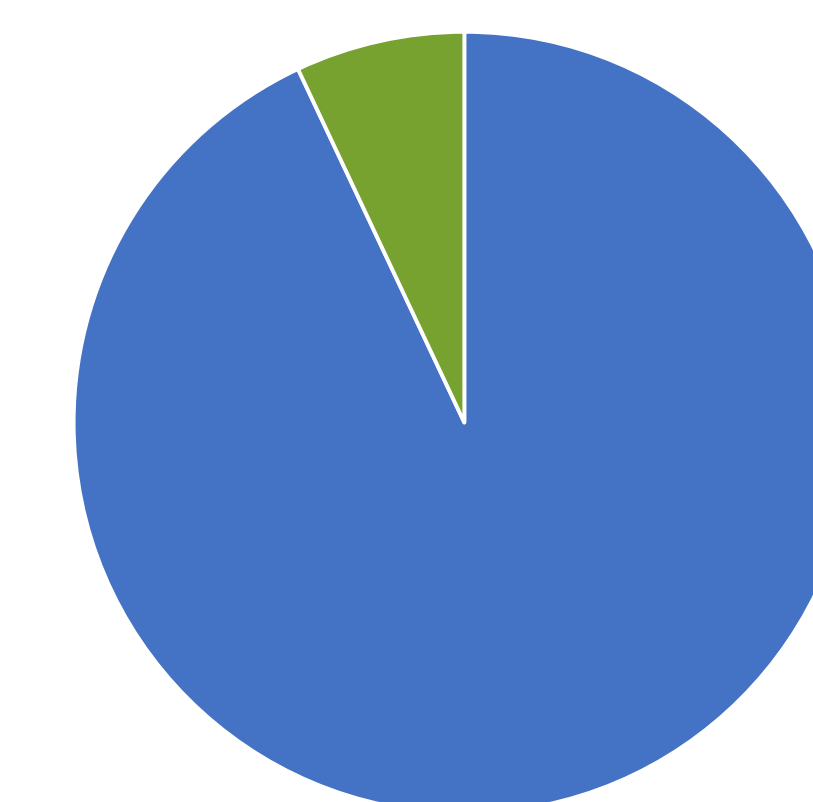
FINDINGS

Even though the research is ongoing, investigators have identified that, currently, Sonoma State University faculty and students do not agree on the nature of a research project. While faculty view research as analytical, interpretive, and argumentative, students tend to view research as fact-gathering and information-reporting.

- WHAT CAN WE DO? -

DEFINE RESEARCH
Set clear goals on what you believe to be a successful research assignment. Talk about goals with your students, and explain why the assignment is important.
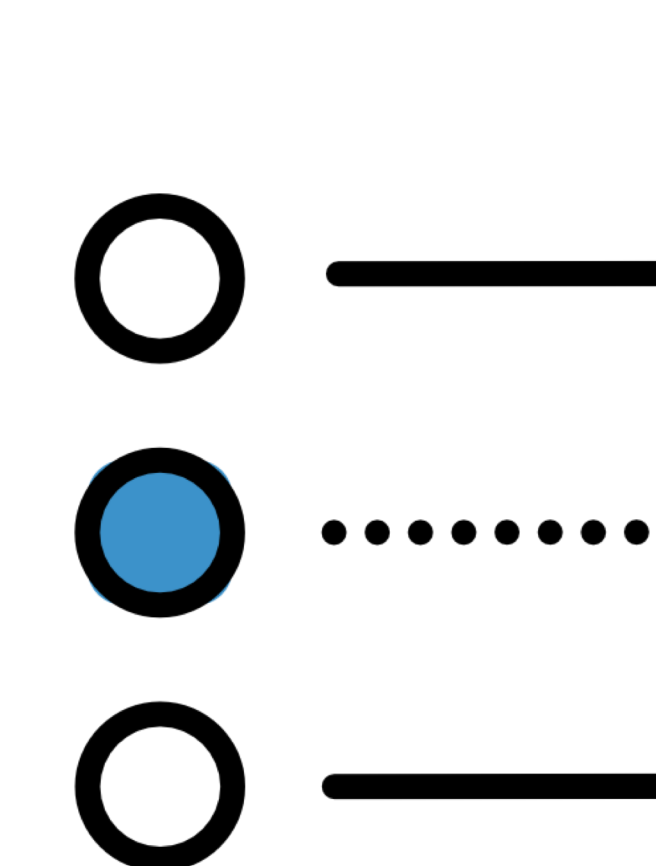
SCAFFOLD YOUR ASSIGNMENT
Break a complex research assignment into smaller, more manageable parts. Demonstrate the process of iterative research in your classroom, and clearly define each step.
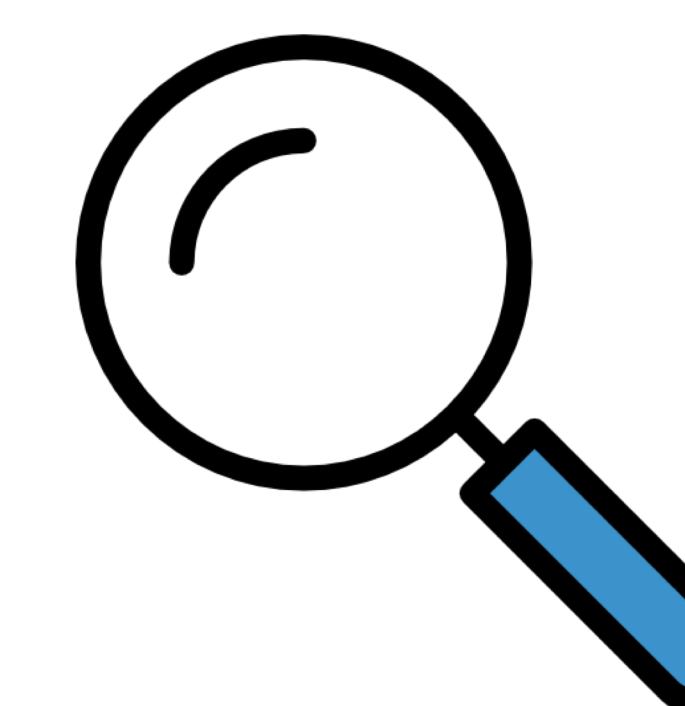
PRACTICE READING AND ANALYZING IN CLASS
This is the first time many students will have encountered peer reviewed material. Spend time teaching your class how to read scholarly literature.
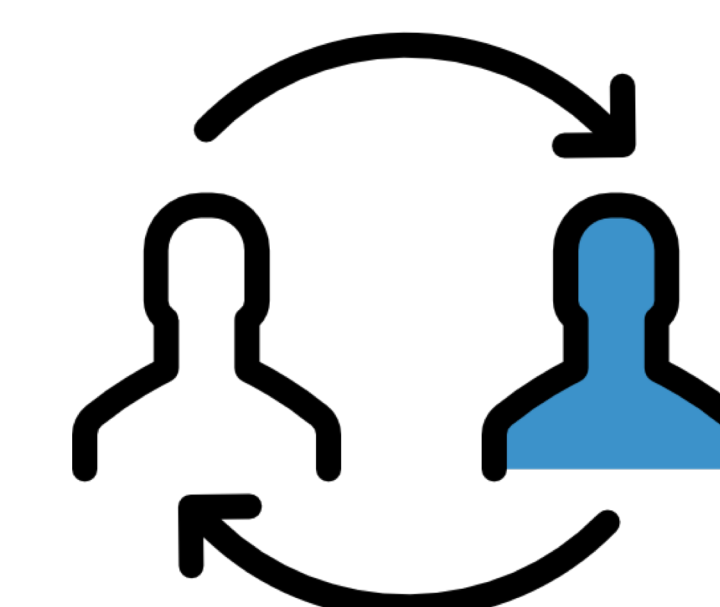
CONSULT WITH A LIBRARIAN
Librarians are experts in teaching research. Talk to your subject specialist to learn about how you can help your students succeed beyond your classroom.