Presentation for Scholarship of Excellence in Teaching

Fall 2020 Faculty Cohort
David Lott, ELAP, TP/SS
1/22/21

Goal:

To sharpen ELAR 980 students' skills in evaluating the acceptability of online sources in order to…

- equip students to carry out future research projects

- prepare students to scrutinize purveyors of online news

Rationale for goal:

Students will need to assess online sources well in future credit classes that require research

Students will become more reliably informed if they learn to evaluate online sites

Students will improve their critical thinking through close examination of such sources

Basis in scholarship:

Richard Paul and Linda Elder in *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools*:

"A well-cultivated critical thinker…is scrupulously careful not to misrepresent or distort information in developing an argument or position, and sees through false information and fake news" (9).
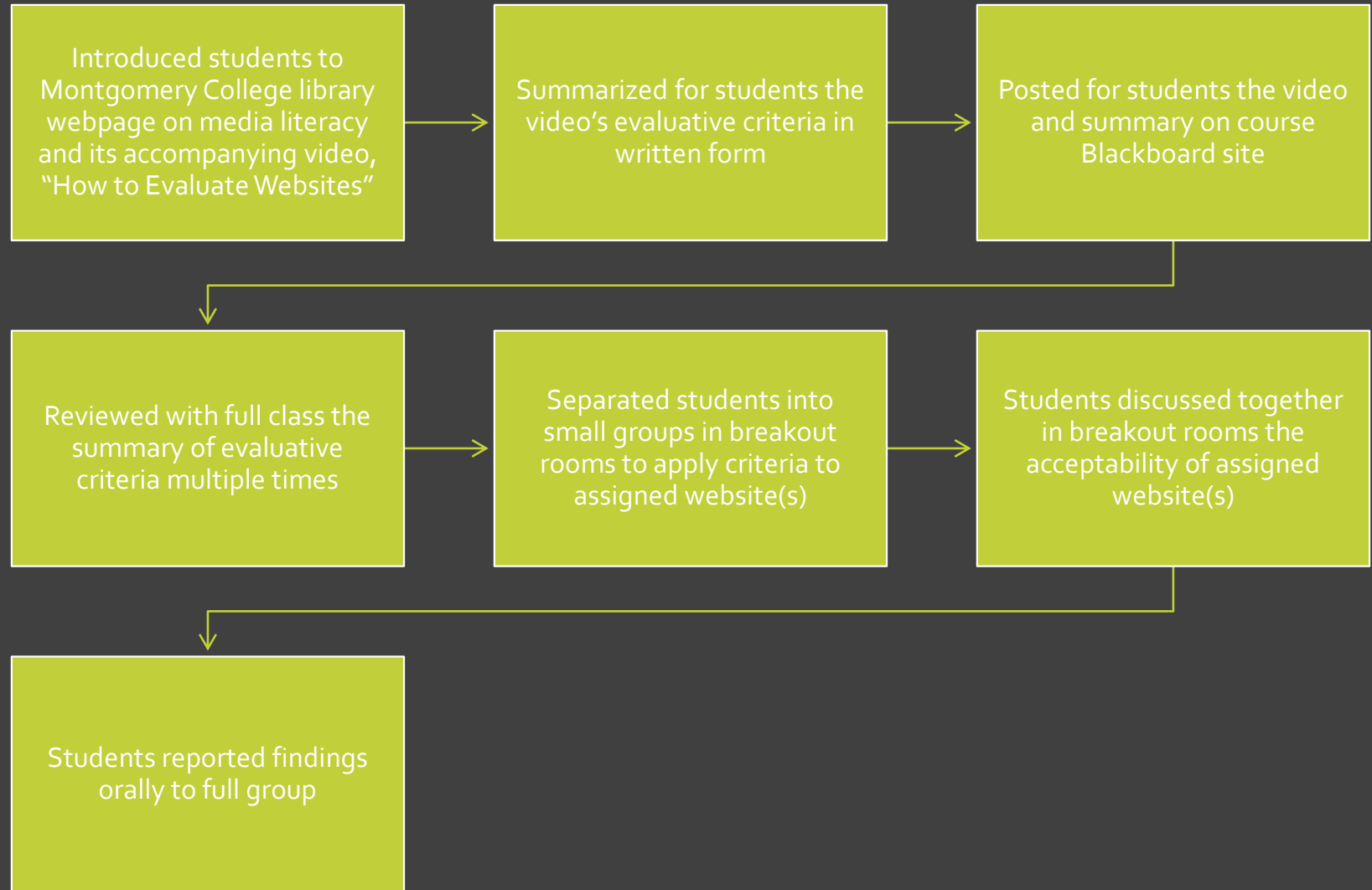
Elizabeth F. Barkley, Claire Howell Major, and K. Patricia Ross in *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*:

"Many quantitative studies point to the fact that interaction and meaningful work among peers is an important component of an effective online learning environment and that it has the potential to influence student learning in online courses" (29).

Ken Bain in *What the Best College Teachers Do*:

"…[a] critical learning environment also engages student in some higher-order intellectual activity: encouraging them to compare, apply, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize, but never only to listen and remember" (102).

Description of strategies:

Introduced students to Montgomery College library webpage on media literacy and its accompanying video, "How to Evaluate Websites" → Summarized for students the video's evaluative criteria in written form → Posted for students the video and summary on course Blackboard site

Reviewed with full class the summary of evaluative criteria multiple times → Separated students into small groups in breakout rooms to apply criteria to assigned website(s) → Students discussed together in breakout rooms the acceptability of assigned website(s)

Students reported findings orally to full group

Example of student work:

ELAR 980 Exercise on Evaluating an Online Source

1. What is the name of the online source that your group is examining?
   Rock City Times

2. Does the source have an "About" page? If so, does the info on the "About" page imply the source is <u>valid</u> for a research paper or <u>not</u>?
   Yes. No, it's not valid for a research paper.

3. What is the domain suffix of this source? Is the suffix <u>ideal</u> for a research paper, like .edu or .gov, or <u>not</u>?
   No, the suffix is not ideal for research. (.com)

4. Does this online source seem to be <u>biased</u> or <u>not</u>? Does this online source appear to be <u>well</u> <u>proofread</u> or <u>not</u>?
   Not applicable. It's a "satire news organization" (About us webpage).

5. Is the home page of this online source <u>current</u> or <u>not</u>?
   No, it's not current. Last updated in 2019.

6. What other evidence on the website itself – or from a separate online search to investigate the website – indicates that it might be a <u>legitimate</u> source for a research paper or <u>not</u>?
   It's not legitimate. Other sources may describe the webpage as "fictional news for an intent of humor"
   -(fakenewscodex.com)

   "These sources exclusively use humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues. Primarily these sources are clear that they are satire" -(mediabiasfactcheck.com)

   "RockCity Times is a satire news organization"
   -about us module in webpage.

7. Considering your answers to 1-6 above, is it a <u>good</u> idea to use this online source for a research paper or <u>not</u>?
   No, it's not a good idea to use this online source for a research paper.

Questionnaire:

a) How much more skilled are you <u>now</u> at <u>evaluating online sources</u> compared to when you started this course? Pick <u>one</u>: *not more skilled at all; a little bit more skilled; somewhat more skilled; a lot more skilled*

b) <u>Which</u> <u>aspect</u> of the class sessions on <u>evaluating online sources</u> did you learn from <u>most</u>? Label the following 1 through 4, with the number 1 going to the aspect you learned from <u>most</u> and the number 4 going to the aspect you learned from <u>least</u>: *library video and webpage; instructor's oral explanations; discussions with other students in small groups; written criteria for in-class exercises*

c) Focusing on the aspects you labeled as number 1 and number 2 in the previous question, write several sentences telling <u>why</u> you learned the <u>most</u> from these two aspects <u>rather than</u> the other two aspects.

d) Write several sentences telling how the instructor can <u>improve</u> the class sessions on <u>evaluating online sources</u> for <u>next</u> semester's students.

e) Write several sentences telling about anything else that you think the instructor would benefit from knowing about the sessions on <u>evaluating online sources</u> this semester.

Responses to questionnaire:

8 of 10 students reported becoming "a lot more skilled"

2 of 10 students reported becoming "somewhat more skilled"

Ways for the instructor to improve these lessons:

"He can maybe let the students choose the website that they want to study by themselves."

"Students might focus and learn more if they do it individually. Even though group work may help students to some extent, working individually may make students to pay more attention while working on their assignments."

"Perhaps he can improve the topic Evaluating Online Sources by giving students one assignment for homework in which they select a webpage of choice, and explain why that webpage is an appropriate online source for academic purposes, or why not."

"I think that a better way to learn about evaluating online sources would be implementing more tasks to each student when they are in small groups since sometimes one person does the most part of the job."

"A way for the instructor to improve the class on evaluating online sources for next semester is to allow a little bit more time during the meeting room."

Next steps and final thoughts:

- give more autonomy to students in selecting which online sources to evaluate

- allocate more time to students in breakout sessions to discuss their findings

- discuss with students ways to generate and assign roles during breakout sessions

- teach students how to distinguish news articles from op ed pieces and blog entries

- work with students on how to recognize bias in sources

- Just one final thought: Thank you to Joan Naake and fellow cohort members for an exceptional opportunity to examine closely and improve upon my teaching practices!