

Bringing Creativity to Information Literacy: Show Students That “Research Is Everywhere”



How Infobase’s Credo Reference can help students build solid factual foundations as they embark on modern research projects

Customer

Florida SouthWestern State College (FSW)

Challenge

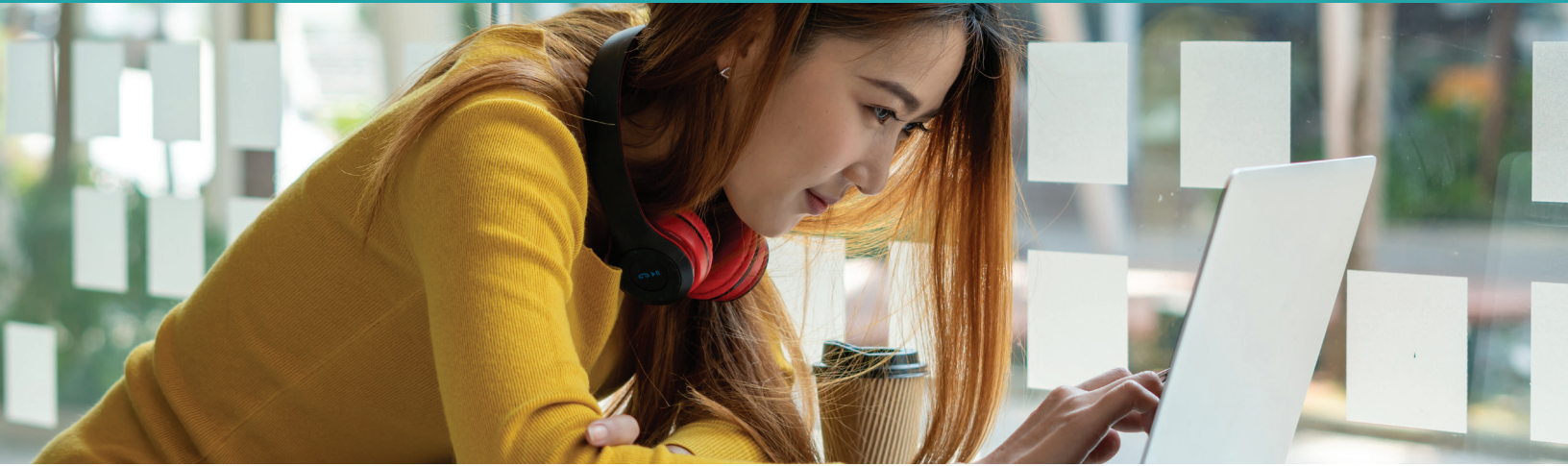
As part of a campus Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), FSW identified an opportunity to energize and improve information literacy instruction.

Resource

Infobase’s Credo Reference

Outcome

Using library resources like Infobase’s Credo Reference, FSW’s librarians and faculty developed a new creative capstone course that encourages students to step away from traditional research papers and use their creativity to build information literacy skills.



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Florida SouthWestern State College Developed a New Course to Bolster Information Literacy

“We realized that we needed to utilize reference sources, and we found [Infobase’s] Credo Reference to be really, really user friendly.”

Arenthia Herren, Lead Librarian for the Creative Capstone Course, Florida SouthWestern State College

What do K-pop, conspiracy theories, and baking all have in common? They are all subjects students explored as part of their Creative Capstone Course research projects at Florida SouthWestern State College (FSW)—with the help of Credo Reference, an essential resource for students in the early research mindset.

As part of the school’s accreditation process, the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) board asked faculty to indicate what areas they believed needed improvement. Information literacy topped the list.

The Creative Capstone Course was developed with direct input from the school’s librarians and faculty to address this need. Now a graduation requirement for all Associate of Arts (AA) Degree students (80% of FSW students are AA students), this general education course is centered on instruction and workshops to reinforce students’ research skills. A professor leads each course, while an embedded class librarian attends a third or more of the classes to offer research support and lead three multipart workshops. The course has evolved a bit since it first launched, but librarian involvement and Infobase’s Credo Reference were always at the center of the course.



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Workshop 1: Develop Your Topic

Students explore topics for their research...any topic that they are deeply passionate about. The catch? They're steered away from writing a traditional research paper.

"Students are encouraged to think outside the box and research something they care about," Richard Hodges, Assistant VP of Library Services at FSW, said. "To facilitate their research, that's where the [embedded] librarian comes in as a constant source—their own personal librarian."

To get students invested in the research process, librarians have students create their own Mind Maps, similar to the ones found in Infobase's Credo Reference, to visualize the scope of their topics and to help them see their topics in a new light. As an example, one librarian created a Mind Map to build topics around the Disney movie *Finding Nemo*. Students were asked to consider the themes surrounding this movie: parental loss, oceanography, fish, animation, memory problems, friendship, and more. The web of ideas from that discussion showed students that even a simple animated film for kids can provide a breadth of topics that span disciplines: history, science, and art. This exercise also proves they can do their project on just about anything and have fun doing so.

"I've had students do projects on cat portraiture, running shoes, horror movies, special effects, makeup...any topic that interests them," Arenthia Herren, Lead Librarian for the Creative Capstone Course, noted. "One student was interested in how baking went viral on TikTok. For her project, she created a TikTok about the women's movement within baking."

Workshop 2: Background Research

One of the biggest challenges students face when researching at the 100 and 200 levels is that they're expected to jump right into scholarly and peer-reviewed journal articles. Without any context, students do not synthesize the information they're researching, resulting in "citation bombing."

"[Students] don't understand what it is that the scholars are really saying," Herren said.

"We realized that we needed to utilize reference sources, and we found Credo Reference to be really, really user friendly."

This workshop has students working with the embedded librarian and Infobase's Credo Reference to help them build context around a topic—their "who, what, where, and when"—before moving on to scholarly articles and expert research.

"Students love Credo Reference because it's so straightforward. It doesn't have the dense language of hard-hitting databases or peer-reviewed journals," Jane Charles, Assessment Librarian at FSW, said. "Credo Reference is such a backbone for them. It's a foundational source."

Infobase's Credo Reference is a popular resource because of its wealth of primary resources. It provides easy-to-grasp reference sources with accessible definitions, background information, and basic history appropriate for students at this level. These references are also linked throughout, so students can click through to another source if something catches their interest. This gives them context and helps them shape and fine-tune their theses.

Workshop 3: Find the Experts

Once students have mined their background information and know more about their topic, they're ready to find the experts from academic, scholarly, and professional sources. In this workshop, students move away from the "who, what, where, and when" of their research and begin focusing on the more complicated "why and how."

"We tell students, to do research, you can't just go to one source," Herren said. "You need to go to multiple places and you need to find different types of information that you can pull together to have a broad overview of what it is that you're looking at."

Students now break down their broad topics into smaller sub-topics or "research buckets," and begin identifying experts within each area.

Building on the ACRL Framework frame "authority is constructed and contextual," students seek experts from multiple sources to provide a broad overview that supports their research. For example, if they're doing a project on the Everglades, they will most likely start with biologists, then perhaps consult the Florida Fish and Wildlife Department, and then speak with people who live in the area and have seen changes over time.

By the end of this workshop, students will have thoroughly explored the possibilities of their topic, gathered appropriate context from reference resources and learned why and how experts have contributed to their fields. The students are now ready to focus on the execution of their presentations.

About Florida SouthWestern State College

Founded in 1962, Florida SouthWestern State College provides students with the opportunity to fulfill their professional goals. This public college offers Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, and Baccalaureate degrees and various certificate programs.

About Credo Reference

Credo Reference is a research starting point for students and faculty that combines premier reference content and research skillbuilding tools on a simple instruction-friendly platform. A hub of topic discovery, Credo Reference maximizes learning opportunities and supports successful student research with 1.5M+ curated reference articles, images, and videos. Credo Source is the K-12 equivalent.

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Research Is Everywhere

The freedom of having the research subject parameters open to areas of interest and presentation allows students to flex their interests and meld them with what they've learned over their two years at FSW. Librarians work closely with students throughout the semester to help them with their projects and show them that research is, in fact, everywhere.

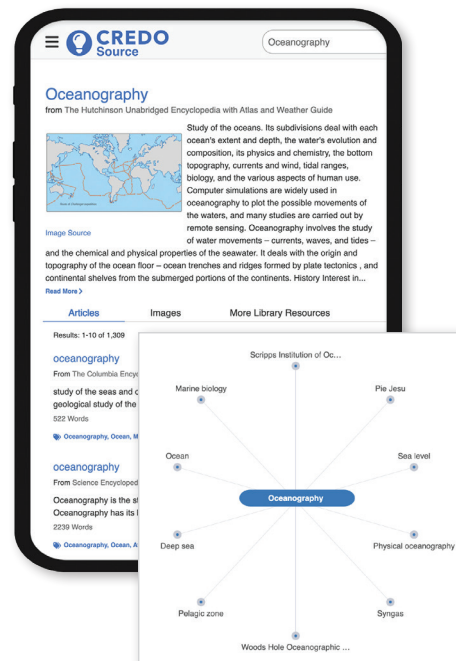
"Once they have gone deep into the research...that's where the 'creative' part of the Creative Capstone comes in," Anthony Valenti, Collections Management Librarian at FSW, said.

Given free rein for their topics and projects, their creativity soars. For their final projects, students have prepared TikTok and YouTube videos, podcasts, documentaries, blog posts, cooking demonstrations, policy papers, websites, infographics, and more.

A Win-Win for Students and Faculty

The Capstone Course has become so popular at FSW that the library hired additional part-time librarians to take over the reference desk so the full-time staff could focus on working within the classroom and directly with students. Each librarian works with approximately one hundred students per semester. Librarians set aside two hours every day to meet with students, virtually or in person. The course has become a favorite amongst students and librarians alike.

"I love teaching and being a part of this class so much because I get maybe more invested in their topics than they do," Herren admits. "I find myself emailing students these random sources as I come across them...And it surprises them that, as faculty, we can take an interest in something they're interested in."



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Jane Charles, Assessment Librarian at FSW

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