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Two Parts Reflection, One Part Selfie: A Visual Alternative to the Minute Paper

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TWO PARTS REFLECTION, ONE PART SELFIE

A visual alternative to the Minute Paper

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For almost 40 years, the Minute Paper has been a quick and easy means of learning assessment, both in the college classroom and in library instruction. More recently, the use of social media, particularly selfies, has gained popularity by connecting with students through the technology with which they are most familiar. This article makes the case for combining the Minute Paper and selfies in order to gain an insight into students' skill development and retention after a library session. Adaptable to a variety of classes and learning outcomes, the activity enables students to actively use the skills they have learned, rather than passively reflecting on them.

Communications in INFORMATION LITERACY

INTRODUCTION

For academic libraries, the so-called "Minute Paper" provides a quick and easy method of gathering library instruction feedback and measuring the effectiveness of a particular session through short, instructor-posed writing prompts. However, it may be noted that beyond student self-reflection of the learning experience, this assessment technique doesn't actively measure retention or the use of the information and skills presented, especially in a one-shot session (Cunningham, 2006). Moreover, the Minute Paper's textual format doesn't account for alternative learning styles and means of reflection. To remedy these weaknesses, and to gain a better understanding of how students transfer what they learned in the library to their research assignments, librarians at the Rodney A. Briggs Library at the University of Minnesota, Morris (UMM) added a visual and creative component to the Minute Paper in the form of a book "selfie" (or "shelfie", as some in the library community call it), a self-taken photo of the student and his or her research material. This essay discusses the use of selfies in information literacy (IL) assessment, as well as their potential applications in other library departments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Minute Paper
As is often the case with pedagogical tools, the Minute Paper has developed organically over the last 40 years. Alternatively called the "One-Minute Paper" or the "Half-Sheet Response," the device is believed to have been conceived by University of California at Berkeley Professor Charles Schwartz in the late 1970s (Holtzman, 2007, p. 97). At the end of each lesson, Schwartz's students would hand in a sheet answering the following questions: "What was the most significant thing I learned today?" and "What question is left uppermost in my mind after this lecture?" (Schwartz, 1991). The answers to these questions would not be graded, however, as Schwartz merely wanted to record who was in class that day. Yet, what began as a practical means of tracking attendance in a large lecture class soon became a source of "marvelous feedback" as well as "an important part of the students' learning process" (Schwartz, 1991). Schwartz states:

> Students who were uncomfortable about speaking up in class could express their questions and their ideas more freely. Students could disagree with the teacher in a non-threatening way. I would occasionally read portions of the students' minute papers back to the class, so that students could appreciate the diversity of views held by their peers, and this sometimes led to further illuminating discussion. (Schwartz, 1991)

Wilson (1986) and Cross & Angelo (1988) —two early promoters of the Minute Paper—highlighted this simple, two-way flow of information as one of the most effective classroom-based assessment techniques. While the first question encourages students to reflect on what is being taught, the second question indicates any gaps in understanding, thereby allowing instructors to adjust their teaching practice regularly as needed. Ultimately, both parties benefit, as the students feel their opinions are valued and the instructor gains

immediate feedback about student learning.

This formative assessment tool gained further scholarly attention in subsequent decades, wherein it was advocated as encouraging active learning (Anderson & Burns, 2013; Cross & Angelo, 1988; Holtzman, 2007; Wilson, 1986); highlighting emotional reactions to and understanding of learning material (Chizmar & Ostrosky, 1998; Drabick, Weisberg, Paul, & Bubier, 2007; Kloss, 1993); and strengthening student-faculty engagement (Lucas, 2010; Wilson, 1986). A major part of its appeal can be attributed to its low-tech nature and its adaptability to different subjects and situations. Subject to preference or need, the Minute Paper can be completed individually or in small groups at the beginning, middle, or end of a lesson. Relying on a mixture of individual notecards and in-class group participation, Kloss (1993) and Holtzman (2007) both emphasize the importance of varying the questions asked in order to elicit a range of feedback. According to Kloss, "the potential for the one-minute paper is limited perhaps only by your ability to phrase precise questions or statements about the information you would like" (p. 63). Likewise, Wolstenholme (2015) used Google Forms to distribute "Polling One Minute Papers" before and "Reflective One Minute Papers" after library instruction
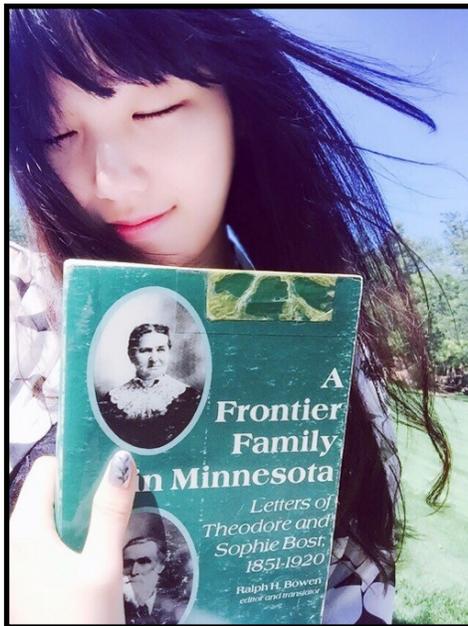
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sessions. This speedier variation of the popular pre/post-test method enabled the librarians to "extend the opportunity for discussion with researchers beyond the defined period of a library research support session" (Wolstenholme, 2015, p. 19).

The Minute Paper is not without its weaknesses, however. Scholars have been quick to note that the activity can rarely be completed in just one minute, thus diverting valuable time from learning activities or eliciting less thought-provoking questions (Cross & Angelo, 1988; Holtzman, 2007; Stead, 2005). The time constraint is especially noted in library science literature: whereas an instructor can adjust lecture time and respond directly, this is not always possible with time-crunched, one-shot library instruction. Choinski & Emanuel (2006) offer the solution of having students complete the Minute Paper after the library session and turn it in to their professor. Although these responses were not reviewed until the end of the semester, thereby preventing the immediate two-way flow of communication, the librarians still found the method beneficial in applying student learning to "ACRL-defined outcomes" (p. 154) quickly and easily. Indeed, these challenges appear to be minor for instructors and librarians alike, and as indicated above, they may be easily overcome through varying timing and/or content.

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Selfies in Learning

Almost since their introduction, aspects of social media have been incorporated into the college classroom as a means of engaging the tech-crazed, millennial learner (Click & Petit, 2010; Younger, Duncan, & Hart, 2013), and selfies are no exception. Defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a photographic self-portrait; esp. one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media" (Selfie, 2016), the selfie serves as a form of experiential learning, wherein students use the image for self-reflection and practical application of learning outcomes. As with the Minute Paper, this Internet trend is limited only by its user's creative or technical abilities, enabling its use across academic disciplines (though most notably in writing and foreign-language courses). From deciding what to photograph to sharing the resulting image with others, the entire process requires students to actively reflect on their material and then conceptualize its relevance to their overall understanding. For example, Al-Ali (2014) and Pek & Mee (2015) found that assigning writing prompts to accompany student-produced images simultaneously appealed to visual learners and contextualized the material in a way students could relate to. Because many students are already well-versed in social media, they were thus more motivated and involved in the learning process, leading to an improvement in learning retention and writing scores for ESL learners (Pek & Mee, 2015, p. 8). Further supporting this research, Johnson, et al. (2014) incorporated selfies into an ice-breaker activity, a language translation exercise, and extracurricular publicity. In all three instances, this quick, flexible activity proved an effective means of facilitating engagement and community-building beyond the classroom. While no known literature has made a direct comparison, the positive outcomes of this pedagogical tool are similar to those of the Minute Paper, especially when combined with writing or oral communication in a meaningful way.

To date, scholarship regarding the use of selfies in library instruction specifically is just beginning to gain momentum. In a study of library orientation sessions, Dennis and Dees (2015) note that some librarians sought "to encourage fun" (p. 7) by requiring students to take "shelfies" with a library book as part of a post-session quiz. The shelfies' impact on quiz scores is not reported, but the study does indicate student enthusiasm for the activity. Responding to the new *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education's* concept of "Scholarship as Conversation", Kraft and Williams (2016) used a combination of hashtags, Twitter, and selfies to enhance a traditional library scavenger hunt. Not only did the selfies make the library session more interactive, but its content and desired outcomes could easily be modified to different classes and research assignments. More formal assessment of the activity's effectiveness is still in the works, but informal observation of student participants shows "a sense of self-efficacy in the weeks following the class" (Kraft and Williams, 2016, p. 13). Indeed, both case studies highlight the low-risk, high-impact potential of selfies in the library. Aside from the required camera/cell phone and, if applicable, a social media account, the opportunities are endless.

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIBRARY INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

Similar to Charles Schwartz's initial intention for the Minute Paper, my notion of a "selfie-esque" version of the Minute Paper was more an informal homework assignment than any formative means of assessment. Every summer, UMM hosts STELLAR and Gateway, two transitional programs for incoming and international students, respectively. The itineraries include a joint week-long crash course in IL and library skills.

After one day's lesson on the library catalog, I gave students the following homework assignment:

1. Search the catalog for a book related to your major (or, if undecided, to Minnesota history and culture).
2. Find the book in the library stacks and check it out.
3. Somewhere outside of the library, take a selfie of yourself with said book.
4. Before 10am the next day, email the selfie to the librarian.

My initial purpose with this activity was to encourage the students to explore the library while gaining experience in using the catalog and Library of Congress call numbers. Since most of the students chose to complete the assignment in their free time directly after the session, I was able to observe their information-seeking processes and address any issues as they arose. While I shared a sample selfie and technical directions for the few students unfamiliar with the concept, a majority had experience

taking and sharing such images on their smartphones, thus allowing them to be as creative as they wanted to be with the final product. All selfies were subsequently collected in a PowerPoint presentation and shared during the next day's lesson. What surprised me most about this assignment, however, was the informal feedback hidden within some of the emails. For example, one student whose photo featured herself with two books commented, "There were so many great titles I couldnt [sic] decide which one! Thanks for showing where they are!" By engaging with the students where they are in the process, this activity not only brought an element of fun to a basic library task, but also opened a student-librarian dialogue regarding the library and students' academic interests.

Before this point, I had often employed the Minute Paper for information literacy assessment, implementing the same two questions as librarians and faculty before me. The activity's efficacy, however, was usually hit or miss. On the one hand, the responses, especially from one-shot instruction sessions, provided a clear snapshot of what worked and what didn't in the sessions, as well as guidelines for planning future lessons. On the other hand, as has been previously noted, there wasn't always enough time to properly devote to the activity, and the time crunch was reflected in the nature of the responses. By having students submit feedback almost immediately after learning the material, I found that their writing was typically more self-reflective (e.g., I now know X) or focused on trivial details (e.g., a funny anecdote) rather than being an actual measure of learning. It is one thing to write that one knows "how to search for books,"

but a whole other ball game for one to actually conduct a search successfully a week later. The Minute Paper needed another element of active learning that would require students to put knowledge into practice.

With the perceived success of the STELLAR/Gateway selfie assignment in mind, I decided to try adapting it for other library instruction sessions during the fall semester. All ENGL 1601: Writing for the Liberal Arts classes are required to schedule a minimum of two library instruction sessions, with the first session typically focused on introducing IL concepts, and the second reinforcing basic and advanced search strategies. Therefore, this group of students seemed the most logical test subjects because, with instructor permission, the activity could be assigned as homework in between the two sessions. I could then respond to the assignment at the second session if necessary. In addition to taking the selfie, students were asked to answer the following questions in their email:

1. Why did you choose this particular book? How does it relate to your topic or benefit your assignment overall?
2. Did you have any challenges in locating and checking out this item? If so, what might you do next time to avoid this happening again?
3. List one "takeaway" or useful piece of information that you learned from this library session in general.
4. What questions do you still have about the library or conducting research?

The email was to be addressed to both myself and the instructor; some instructors chose to grade the assignment for participation, but this was not a necessity. Participation rates were around 80% when ungraded and 95% when graded. In both cases, the selfies were once again compiled into PowerPoint slideshows and used as a starting point for the next session's discussion.

The expansion of the written portion from two questions to four is yet another popular Minute Paper variation meant to further increase student engagement. Dietz-Uhler and Lanter (2009) developed the four-question model to encompass "multiple forms of active learning" by requiring students to "analyze the material, reflect on it, relate it to some aspect of their personal lives, and generate at least one question about it that was unanswered by the activity" (p. 38). The four questions required only a little more time to complete than just two questions, but the additional questions encouraged a deeper comprehension of the learned material that later translated to higher quiz scores. In the same vein, Houtman (2015) adapted the model as a means of "self-regulated learning," wherein students are empowered to regulate and evaluate their own IL skill development and retention. When presented over the course of two or more library sessions, this practice creates a habit of perceiving one's learning, setting goals for improvement, and modifying behavior accordingly.

My own objectives were not as complex. As an assessment tool, the selfie-Minute Paper combination addresses multiple ACRL *Framework* concepts, including

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"Scholarship as Conversation" and "Searching as Strategic Exploration." While the selfie serves as a learning artifact, the writing prompts carry a two-fold purpose of evaluating information-seeking behavior and reflecting on the library session as a whole. If more than one student indicated an issue with, for example, identifying a book's call number, then that knowledge gap would become evident to the instructor and myself. The issue could then be addressed either to the student directly in a reply email or to the entire class in the next library session.

It goes without saying that this activity takes longer to complete than the Minute Paper (about 15 minutes, depending on students' technological abilities). Nevertheless, it can be adapted to fit different materials, collections, and student populations. Briggs Library has found this activity to be particularly helpful with international students, as it both assesses their ability to find materials and alerts the instructor and/or librarian to any language or cultural barriers. Another ENGL 1601 section didn't rely on books for their research assignment, so the selfie parameters were changed to searching a database for a relevant article and then printing out the first page (or detailed record, if full text wasn't available). Students seemed to enjoy viewing their classmates' selfies during the next library session, laughing over ridiculous poses
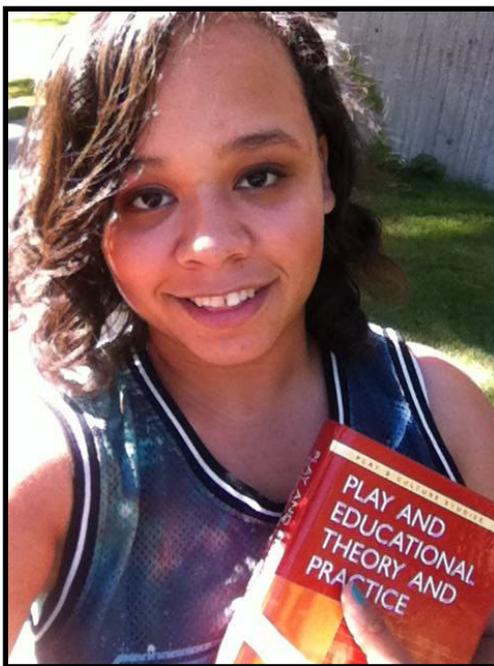
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(e.g., parkouring on a rail while reading). After viewing the slideshow, it was natural for librarians to ask about students' experiences with the assignment and with researching in general, using the answers to reinforce IL concepts or segue into more advanced search strategies.

FUTURE PLANNING

Formal assessment of the selfie-Minute Paper combination's effectiveness is still in the planning stage, but informal observation has nevertheless opened a gateway of possibilities in Briggs Library's IL program. In the future, I plan to offer the activity to instructors for inclusion in one-shot instruction, wherein I will either respond to students' emails individually, send a class-wide email, or schedule a later classroom visit to answer questions. Feedback from more tech-savvy students has also suggested alternative means of sharing the images, such as uploading them to Instagram with a predetermined hashtag, as Kraft and Williams (2016) successfully implemented, or allowing video documentation of the search process.

The selfies can also be used in a variety of assessment situations beyond library instruction (e.g., collection assessment). A quick search of Instagram and Flickr accounts reveals that book selfies are

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already being used in public and school libraries for publicity and community outreach to highlight particular collections or disciplines; this approach would be especially appropriate when a library instruction session is not focused around a research assignment. Selfies and social media in general are already a large part of our patrons' daily lives, so the possibilities are as limitless as the librarian's imagination.

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