This session focused on an introductory course on New Zealand history taught to 80-120 first-year students. The course has a high internal assessment quotient, but during her twenty-five years of teaching Jeanine has moved from focusing on content to empowering her students. This has been possible thanks to the very supportive library staff working in the New Zealand collection.

Librarians produce a 'Green guide' every year with academic staff, which is basically a how-to guide for relevant resources. Sections cover general reference works, research aids, electronic databases and reference guides. Information about each key source given includes the call number, illustrations of the source, maps showing its location in the library, and examples of what you might use it for. Academic staff also write a guide on how to cite references correctly, which is a problem for many students. It has been useful to include incorrect examples from former students.

So, how do you familiarise students with the library? In the past, students were required to know the New Zealand collection really well, each being required to spend ten minutes with their tutor demonstrating they could find items. This made students apprehensive of the library, besides being very repetitive and time-consuming for the tutor. A more effective method was to build library skills into the teaching, and try and change the students' attitude towards libraries. Initially students were taken on a tour of the collection, given a twenty-minute talk on sources and then quizzed on what they'd learnt. However, this became something of a bottleneck, given the numbers to be accommodated.

More effective was a more gradual introduction to library resources. Two weeks before each assignment, library staff now have a twenty-minute slot during the teaching period, where they come to the classroom and demonstrate material relevant for that assignment. As students will immediately use that material, very effective responses are generated by this reinforcement, and library staff can give continuous feedback to queries.

Assessments are designed to increase library use, beginning in the first few weeks of term. Jeanine begins with a very focused exercise, to reduce the library workload, asking for a paragraph on a person/place/event using information from one general encyclopaedia and one database. This replaced the traditional book report and oral presentation, which was much more time-consuming.

Traditionally this course had been taught by three one-hour lectures and a one-hour tutorial. Jeanine moved to a system of two two-hour teaching blocks, involving group work and discussion within the lecture theatre. Since students were then denied the regular feedback of tutorials, she included optional participation exercises focusing on a different source each week (for example, assessing a web site in 100 words) - half an hour a week was then spent in giving feedback on the last exercise and talking about the next one. After a deal with the publishers of an historical atlas, many exercises were based around individual plates. This technique produced a good rapport with the students and increased their familiarity with the library's resources. Also of benefit was the couple of hours each week academics spent in the library, where students could drop-in and ask for advice.

More extensive were research-based assignments, the format of which varied from year to year. An early unsuccessful version required each student to spend ten hours working on newspaper microfilm sources - the demand forced the university to purchase a new machine and prevented any other researchers from using microfilm in the last month before the assignment was due! This highlights the danger of giving assignments dependent on technology - later versions asked students to spend just one hour using this source. Usefully, the assignment details included instructions on how to load the microfilm reader.

In 2000, the main assignment produced a class guide to New Zealand history. Each student was asked to produce a page of A4 appraising the contribution of a one individual, including a brief biography, an image and five key references. As students were able to see each other's work, there was potential for them to teach each other. As Jeanine never teaches the same assignment two years running, this was also useful when the next intake of students was able to critique and edit it.

Another assignment asked students to write an article for inclusion in a New Zealand encyclopaedia. Interestingly, one student's work was used as the prototype by the publisher of a commercial encyclopaedia, thus providing a perfect example of students learning skills that relate to the real world. A highly enjoyable assignment asked students to compile a novelist's background briefing paper - creating a character and researching sources about their lives. These were sent to real novelists, who wrote back requesting that a database be created of the material produced. They also highlighted areas they'd like more information on, such as the sounds, smells and social relationships the characters would have experienced - these are now included in the instructions to students.

Assignments such as these can be very intensive for academics, both in preparing specifications and marking. Some academics also see the fact that no sustained prose (apart from exams) is required as a disadvantage, but as this is a skill students learn in many other courses it is probably not a major problem. Even Jeanine's exams are slightly different - students are told the questions at the beginning of the course.

Audience Feedback

This was a very popular session, although British academics felt they had considerably less freedom as regards assessments, which are mostly not determined by the individual tutor. Also a problem was the stress laid on research, which caused tension with the time available for teaching.

Jeanine also mentioned an assignment where students were asked to provide an annotated bibliography of what they considered to be the eight key items. The results were merged, and made available to all students on the course.