

# Information Literacy Assessment: Partnering with a Living Learning Community to Assess Library Instruction

Sara McCaslin, Ed.D., MLIS  
Department of Library Public Services, Western Kentucky University

## PURPOSE AND GOALS

Assessment of information literacy efforts can impact college students' success and retention. Library outreach and partnerships with teaching faculty, especially those targeted towards first-year students are important. This case study sought to assess the impact of information literacy library instruction on first-year Living Learning Community (LLC) Criminology students and asked the following question: **Are the general information literacy class and the Special Collections information literacy class beneficial to Criminology LLC students?** The authors learned that students' comfort, awareness, and knowledge of library services increased from the pre- to post-surveys.

## BACKGROUND

Higher education faces many challenges including decreases in funding, enrollment, and graduation rates. These challenges are not new, and institutions have weathered these and many other obstacles for decades through creative problem solving, innovative thinking, and critically analyzing enrollment data.

With institutions' economic viability sometimes dependent on retention, it is not surprising that the topic is of paramount importance to researchers. In fact, campus-wide initiatives to increase retention among all students, but specifically first-year students, are a growing trend (Hubbard & Loos, 2013). Oliveira (2018) encouraged library involvement in student retention and outlined activities worth exploring for student success. Among these are research instruction, partnerships with teachers and academic departments, and in-person reference interaction.



## DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A total of 13 students were enrolled in the Fall 2023 Criminology 101 course, Introduction to Criminal Justice, and were the subjects of this case study. These students were also enrolled in the Criminology Living Learning Community and would complete CRIM 101 in the Fall 2023 semester and CRIM 234, Crime and Popular Culture, in the Spring 2024 semester. As a primary research method, surveys were designed to collect data directly from the subjects. The pre- and post-surveys measured students' knowledge before and after the information literacy classes. Questions were designed to reveal students' confidence, comfort, and awareness levels related to services offered through University Libraries.



Photo Caption: Archival materials used during the Special Collections information literacy class.

Two different librarians led the information literacy sessions for the CRIM 101 class. Students received a link to the pre- and post-surveys through their CRIM 101 Blackboard course site before and after their participation in the general library session and the Special Collections library session.

The surveys:

- created via Qualtrics
- eight questions for the general library pre- and post-survey
- six questions for the Special Collection library pre- and post-survey.

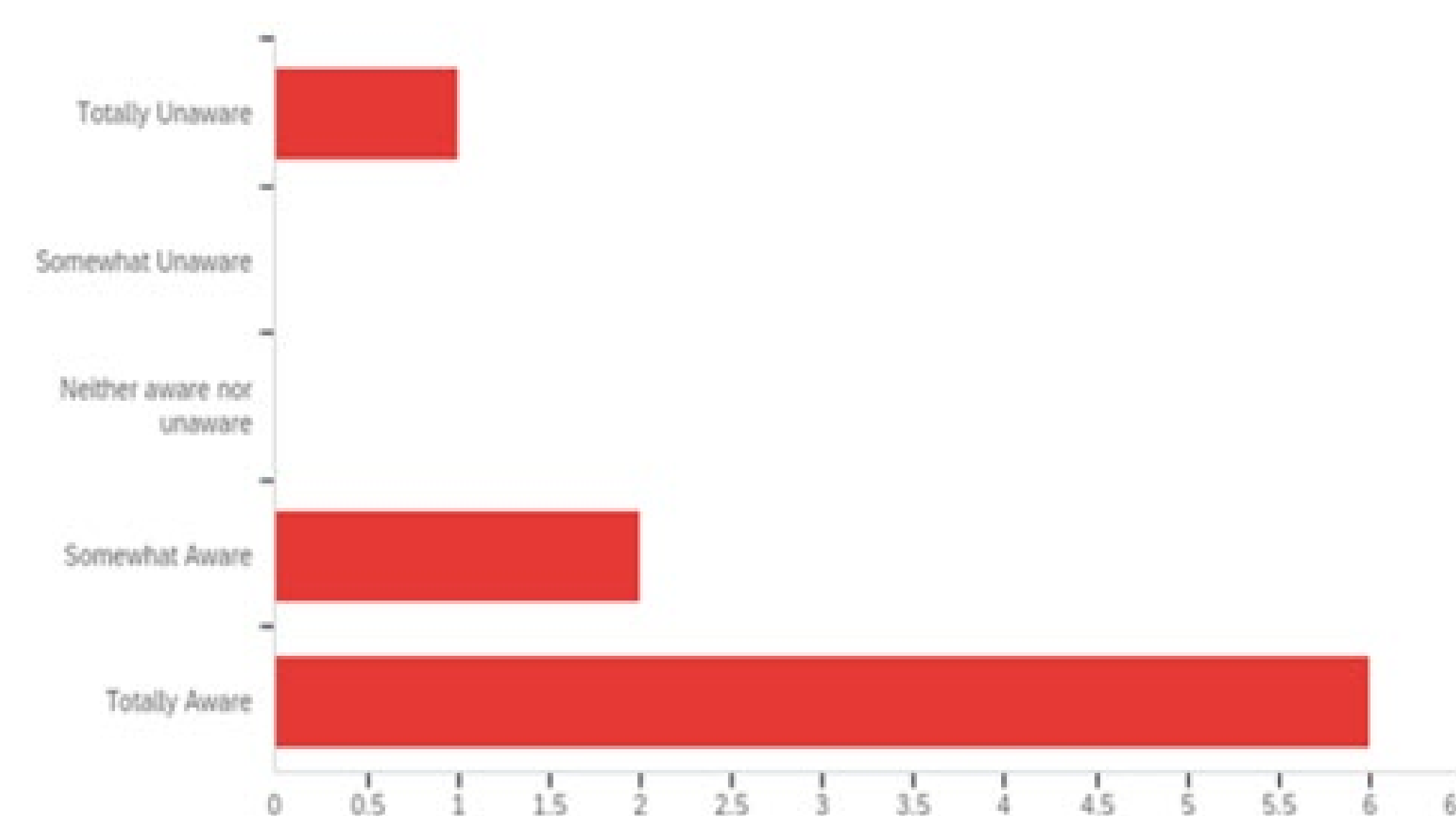
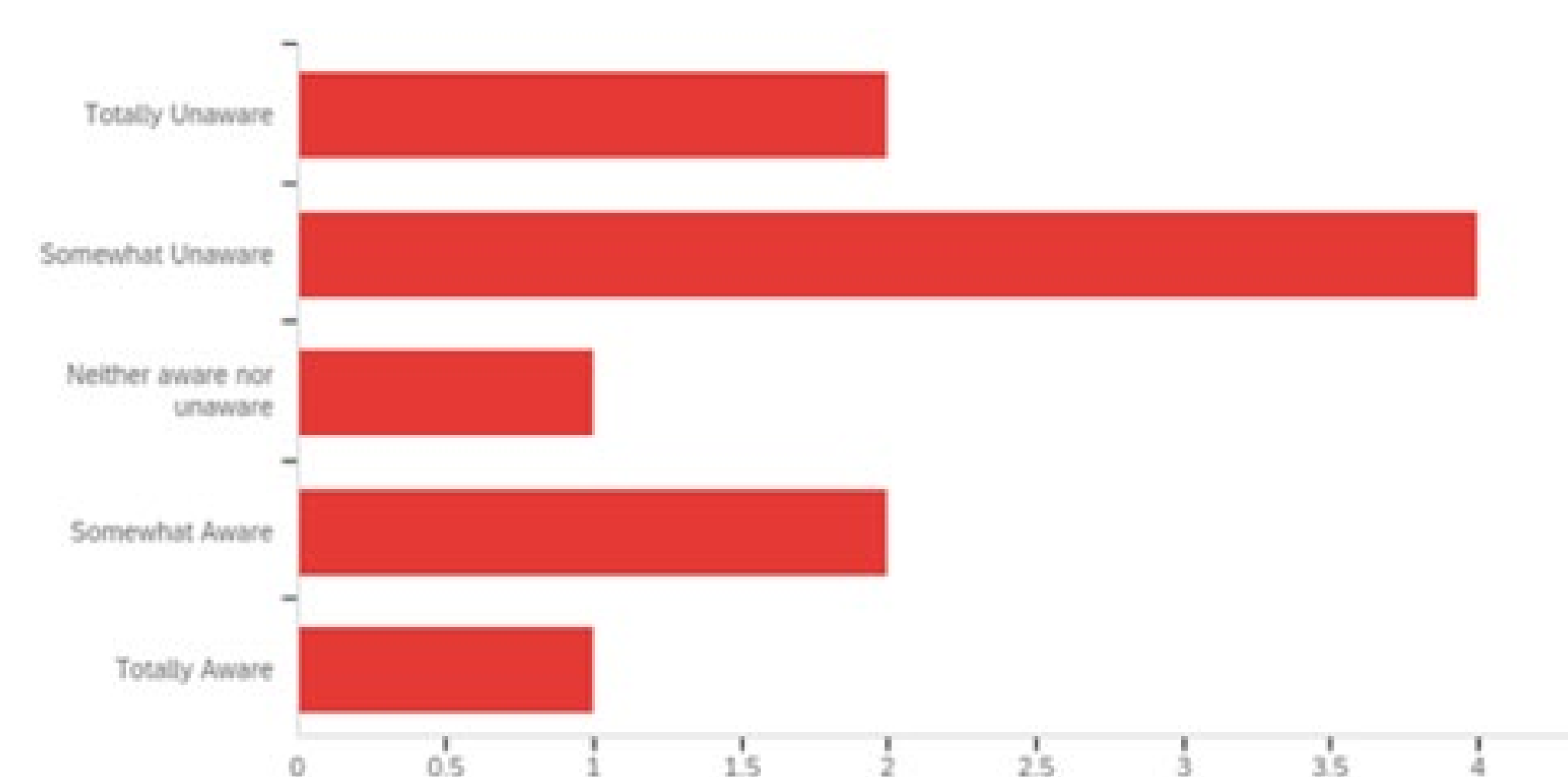
## FINDINGS

Pre-survey data reveal some favorable results that are welcome and gratifying. Even before their information literacy session, students in both groups were overwhelmingly confident that library faculty and staff would be able to help and support them in achieving their academic goals:

- 90% of respondents in the general information literacy class indicating that they were either somewhat confident or extremely confident in their librarians
- 73% of respondents in the Special Collection group expressed similar sentiments.

Most pre and post responses showed an increase in knowledge gained during the general library and Special Collections library information literacy sessions.

**GENERAL INFORMATION LITERACY SESSION QUESTION 1:** *On a scale of 1-5 (1 is totally unaware, 5 is totally aware), how aware are you of the multiple services offered by the WKU Libraries?*



## LIMITATIONS

Case study limitations include:

- Small sample size
- Survey instrument
- Survey administration
- Student participation

## ACTION, IMPACT, AND VALUE

Despite the small sample of students in one class during one semester, there can still be a valuable impact for the institutional academic library. Smith (2019) stated, "It is important for the individual efforts and practices around assessment to be recognized and investigated in order for library-wide culture shifts to take place" (p. 500). Small studies can lead to larger assessment efforts that show how libraries and information literacy contribute to student success and retention in higher education.

LLCs at WKU have proven to positively impact retention rates. According to the WKU Office of Institutional Research, 94.8% of first-time, first-year LLC students returned for the Spring 2023 semester, compared to 90.4% of first-time, first-year students who did not participate in an LLC (WKU News, 2024). WKU administration places value on LLCs and data collected about library involvement with LLCs shows a commitment to students' success and persistence.

The researchers hope this case study data will contribute to the overall scholarly conversation related to library assessment. Specifically, the researchers foresee a positive impact on library involvement in LLCs and outreach.

## REFERENCES and QUESTIONS

Email:

- [sara.mccaslin@wku.edu](mailto:sara.mccaslin@wku.edu)  
[sean.kinder@wku.edu](mailto:sean.kinder@wku.edu)

