The Evolution of Information Literacy and Technology in the KU Academic Accelerator Program

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Introduction

The Kansas University Academic Accelerator Program (KUAAP) began in the fall of 2014. During the first term, all but a handful of students were required to take AAPT 001: Introduction to Technology for Academic Purposes. The focus of this one-credit course was to teach students how to function in a university academic setting using and optimizing technology. This was the first class in a two-course sequence where the second class, AAPT 002 (it was never officially named past its abbreviation because it was never offered), would focus on research skills and plagiarism which built on the foundation from the previous term. After the first term of KUAAP, the two courses were merged into a single course called AAP 111: Information Literacy. In Information Literacy, the students focus less on the technology and more on how to utilize technology to research at the university level. The evolution of this course has had a profound positive effect on the program; however, there are still some elements from the previous two-course sequence that are now not emphasized but are nonetheless invaluable to the students, but given the time constraints of the curriculum, the material now covered prepares students for any academic course.

The AAP curriculum has changed significantly since its conception. Beginning in the fall of 2014, the program was extremely compartmentalized and, although there was much communication among instructors, the English language courses did not share a common thread.[1] With the original implementation of AAPT, the skills that were initially taught would build a solid foundation of technology for KUAAP students but over two terms as research and citation skills would be presented in the second term of AAPT. The skills that were incorporated in the first term were, for example, technology skills such as working with Microsoft Word to create a successfully formatted document for a writing class or composing an etiquette-appropriate email for the university setting. These skills proved to be useful in all academic classes. In the spring of 2015, the core language courses of AAP were drawn together into a more cohesive manner where the language skills were taught in a single course rather than in various courses. This allowed for AAPT to turn into Information Literacy and provide a more direct connection with the material taught in the primary language courses by supporting teaching students the fundamentals of conducting, evaluating, incorporating, and disseminating research.

Examining how AAPT 001 has changed to AAP 111 reflects important changes in the curriculum because information literacy is present in every course at its core as every course requires the use of research and technology in one form or another. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how this course has changed throughout time and how those changes have impacted the current AAP curriculum.

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[1] The language skills were taught independently of one another as there was a grammar course and a separate Reading/Writing course following the model of the Intensive English Program. This proved to be unsuccessful for the AAP curriculum as speaking and listening skills were lacking but necessary. The current course offering, AAP 101, now replaces the separate grammar and Reading/Writing courses with a single 6-hour course that incorporates skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. There is also a grammar course, which is taught in close connection with two core AAP courses, Environmental Studies 170 & 171.

From AAPT 001 to Information Literacy

In the beginning, AAPT 001 had a very language-in-technology focus and the course was extremely technical in nature. Students left the course knowing the vocabulary associated with each skillset. For example, the students learned vocabulary for the Microsoft Word unit including but not limited to: *double space*, *justification*, *margin*, *scroll*, *font*, *format*, and *software*. In addition to the vocabulary associated with each unit, the students learned technical skills within various skillsets such as:

- how to navigate Blackboard, the University of Kansas' online course software;

- how to properly use Microsoft Word and format a document in MLA style;

- how to properly use Microsoft PowerPoint and create a polished, professional presentation;

- how to properly store and save files and online clouds for free and safe file storage;

- how to compose an academically appropriate email;

- how to compare the benefits of digital versus manual notetaking and applications for digital notetaking as well as other applications that are beneficial in an academic environment.

AAPT 001 attempted to help students to better understand the requirements set forth by KU instructors regarding formatting their papers. When creating PowerPoint presentations, students were able to utilize professional backgrounds and aesthetics, use an appropriate amount of words per slide, and engage the audience with proper media. By including an email component in the course, there was less miscommunication because students were able to compose email that was more grammatically correct and academically appropriate. Leaving AAPT 101, students were better prepared to face the University environment having technology in their toolboxes.

AAPT 002: An Intermediary Step

AAPT 002 was to continue the technical focus and build on the foundation from Microsoft Word and Microsoft PowerPoint while adding in a much-needed research component. Had this course been taught, students would have left knowing the vocabulary associated with each skillset and

- more advanced techniques in Microsoft Word including adding citations;

- more advanced techniques in Microsoft PowerPoint including adding professional animation, hyperlinks, media, and citing sources;

- the basics of using Microsoft Excel for inputting data, making charts, and placing charts into Word and PowerPoint;

- how to maintain a high level of security on the Internet including a discussion on passwords and social media; and

- the fundamental research process (essentially, this is where Information Literacy began) including navigating the KU databases, evaluating sources, integrating sources into a short presentation, citing sources, and avoiding plagiarism.

The goal for AAPT 002 was for each student to have a grasp on how to avoid plagiarism and conduct sound academic research. Their papers and presentations would also be better organized as more advanced

technology skills were added into this course. Additionally, students would know how to stay safe online and protect their digital footprints. Having AAPT over the course of a year rather than in a single term would have allowed for more topics to be covered with more depth. However, carving out the topics with the most need created the next iteration of AAPT: Information Literacy.

AAP 111: Information Literacy

Taking over where AAPT 002 was headed, AAP 111: Information Literacy focuses primarily on the research process. First taught in the spring of 2015 in KUAAP, Information Literacy translates to a set of skills students require to effectively conduct and disseminate research in a university setting in the United States. The first term when Information Literacy was implemented, the previous model from the level 4 Intensive English Program Reading/Writing classes was followed where the students wrote a longer, argumentative essay in the class piecewise. The students were guided through the research process and were able to create their own topics and find their own sources on a common argumentative essay topic. By the end of the term, each student had written a paper where a minimum of three sources were cited and integrated properly into their essay. Each week the students would complete a different portion of the research process and the argumentative essay. For example, early in the term, the students learned basic research skills such as navigating the library databases and evaluating sources. Later in the term, they wrote a single paragraph each week and integrated sources accordingly. This model needed more of the focus on the research skills from the beginning of the term and less of the focus on the writing portion as students struggled to understand *how* to do the research. In AAP 111, the teachers of this course worked very closely with AAP 101: English for Academic Purposes which is where the essay prompt originated. The AAP 101 teacher graded the essays on content and language while the AAP 111 teacher graded the essays on the formatting, in-text citations, end-of-text citations, and quality of sources. This model works very well on a smaller scale, but having multiple sections of AAP 111 taught by different AAP 101 teachers who are at various points in the term's syllabus proved to be difficult. Additionally, students did not keep up with the pace of the course. Writing a full-scale paper and learning the research skills associated with the paper was too much for the one-credit course. The model needed to be tweaked to be more successful.

In the fall of 2015, AAP 111, although still working closely with AAP 101, found more flexibility in its curriculum. The long paper was omitted from the curriculum. Replacing this paper allowed more of a focus on the process rather than the product. Class time was not devoted to writing but rather to researching, evaluating, and integrating sources; mastering how to enter information into Microsoft Word's citation component; creating polished PowerPoints to better explain information; and creating Excel charts from relevant data. With this flexibility, elements from AAP 121: Grammar for Academic Purposes were also able to be integrated into the group work project near the end of the term when students are required to create and analyze a visual using Microsoft Excel. As a result of the revised class, when students leave AAP 111, they know

- how to navigate Blackboard;

- how to properly format a paper in Microsoft Word in MLA style;

- how to properly format an outline in MLA style;

- how to create a professionally polished presentation in Microsoft PowerPoint;

- the fundamental research process including navigating the KU databases, evaluating sources, integrating and citing sources into a paper and presentation, and avoiding plagiarism; and

- how to create a chart and use that information in a short presentation while collaborating in a group project.

The Next Step for AAP 111

Although the newest model of Information Literacy is strong, there is still a lack of some fundamental skills such as email etiquette and the technical jargon. Although most of the other skills in the original AAPT 001 were able to be integrated seamlessly into the new curriculum, albeit in a quicker fashion, email etiquette never found its place. While at first glance email etiquette may not seem to have its place in Information Literacy, it is crucial for students to know how to compose an academic email to be able to communicate effectively with their professors and colleagues about projects, assignments, and eventually to even share information and research. Additionally, because of the amount of information incorporated into the course, there is little time to stop and focus explicitly on the technical jargon; instead, students acquire the words in a more incidental or implicit fashion or miss them partially or even entirely. Even though those two skills are somewhat omitted from the current curriculum, the course itself is stronger and students are learning a much more solid skillset and foundation in research skills fundamental to being an effective university student.

AAP 111: Information Literacy is a cornerstone course where the skills that the students learn will be used repeatedly throughout their academic careers – within and outside of KUAAP. The material taught in Information Literacy is fundamental to every academic interaction students will have. Additionally, the course has the unique ability to access information from various other courses and implement those ideas into the class to hone the students' skills. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the information gleaned from Information Literacy, what is learned is crucial to a student's success at the university.