

IMPROVING COLLEGE READINESS SKILLS SPEAKS VOLUMES IN LITERATURE

Biography In Context: Explore how transitioning to digital research tools saves time, boosts test scores, and more.

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Laurie Decker
English Teacher,
San Luis Obispo High School

A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT

San Luis Obispo High School (SLOHS) is one of the top-ranking academic high schools in California. According to the school’s website, beyond their core academic program, they provide elective classes to better prepare students for what’s next.

“We have excellent opportunities for both college and career pathways,” says Jennifer Sawyer, SLOHS library tech. “Our students are bright, engaged, and altogether fun to work with ... and we enjoy a highly supportive parent community. Our dedicated and hard-working staff is constantly seeking to provide our students with a top-notch educational experience. Plus, we are fortunate to be in close proximity to a wonderful community college and a top-notch university with Cuesta College and Cal Poly CSU located in our town.”

As part of that preparedness, the school’s staff and nearly 1,400 students have access to Gale’s databases via the County Office of Education portal. That includes Gale’s *Biography In Context*, an engaging online resource built on a foundation of over 650,000 biographical entries covering more than 400,000 international figures from all time periods and areas of study. Content is aligned to national and state standards, including Common Core.

ABOUT THE CHALLENGE

EQUIPPING STAFF AND STUDENTS TO SUCCEED

It can be difficult to maintain current information when you are relying on printed publications alone. Sawyer said they saw the trend was shifting toward digital research, and realized that they needed to provide their students and staff with quality content. “It became apparent that we needed to add to our academic database offerings to fill the gaps as we weeded our print collection of out-of-date materials,” says Sawyer.

Laurie Decker, a 10th grade Honors English teacher at the school, agrees. She said the days of printed materials alone are outdated. In fact, the efficiency of researching through *Biography In Context* enabled her to squeeze in a Poetry Out Loud project. According to Decker, that type of research can be an arduous task, requiring two credible resources. “Students have a rubric of what qualifies as credible,” said Decker. “This database is a credible source, which enables teachers and students to be more creative without all the front-load work.”

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Jennifer Sawyer
Library Media Technician,
San Luis Obispo High School

■ BRIDGING THE GAP

PROVIDING ACCESS TO TIMELY AND RELIABLE INFORMATION

To see how receptive students would be to using resources from Gale’s *In Context* suite, the school gave three curriculum-aligned resources a try. “All three were given the thumbs up by students and teachers and we successfully added them to our portal offerings,” said Sawyer.

According to Sawyer, adding resources such as *Biography In Context* solved the “one book, one student” issue. “The entire class is able to access the information instead of relying on sharing a copy or purchasing class sets of materials that may quickly become dated,” she said.

To develop a collaborative, project-based learning environment, Decker uses Google Classroom. This is part of G Suite for Education and available with many of Gale’s online resources. “You can assign, share, and create announcements right from the databases,” said Decker. “Because you can create new projects in a fraction of the time, more projects can happen in a year. The transference of skills learned on these databases will be used at the collegiate level.”

■ THE RESULTS

GREATER ENTHUSIASM AND INCREASED USAGE

“We emphasize that one of the most important skills students need when they leave here is the ability to effectively search and find high-quality research resources, and Gale’s databases are an essential component of this skill set,” said Sawyer.

Since they expanded their database offerings, the school has seen a significant increase in usage. Sawyer said they experienced a **120% increase** in database sessions from the 2013-14 school year to 2014-15, followed by **another 26% increase** in the 2015-16 school year.¹

As they continued to add databases, Sawyer said teachers became more excited to see the range and depth of sources available. Likewise, she said once students became aware of how the databases worked, including how to search and access information, they became more engaged.

That assessment rings true for Decker. Engagement continues to translate to high test scores and the success of research projects. She said, “Students really like how user-friendly everything is—the different tools, categories, and the navigation inside the databases.” She added that they appreciated the fact that resources can provide correct MLA citations with a single click.

¹Based on independent 2013-2016 San Luis Obispo High School database tracking studies.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PRODUCT

 gale.com/biographyincontext