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CASE STUDY



## Allen Community College Supports Student Success with Rich Information Resources During the Pandemic and Beyond

*High-quality online products enhance teaching, learning, and research*

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# Case Study: Supporting Student Success with Rich Information Resources During the Pandemic and Beyond

Information literacy—knowing how to use credible, authoritative sources to access high-quality information—is critical for success in college, work, and life. Yet, librarian Virginia Shaffer believes this is becoming a “lost skill.”

As director of the [Allen Community College](#) library in Iola, Kansas, Shaffer sees students from all walks of life: teenagers who just graduated from high school, but also working adults who need new career skills and must balance college with a full-time job and a family. They arrive at college with varying degrees of proficiency in accessing reliable information.

Some have been away from formal schooling for so long that they’ve forgotten how to find authoritative sources. Others have never even learned this skill.

“Many high schools no longer have librarians on their staff,” Shaffer observes. “They might have someone who works in the library. But this person often isn’t a trained librarian who has the skills to teach students how to use databases or do formal research.”

To succeed in college, finish their degree, and become not only productive employees but knowledgeable citizens, students must learn how to identify high-quality information sources. For the students at Allen Community College, this starts with [Films On Demand](#) and [Credo Reference: Academic Core](#), two authoritative online products from [Infobase](#).

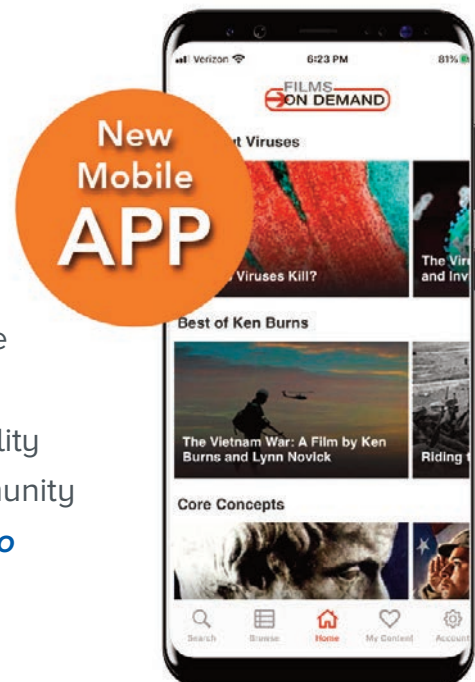
## Aiding Student Research

Shaffer and her colleague, library support specialist Heather VanDyne, are invited into the first-year composition courses that every student at the college must take. During these guest lectures, they show students how to research topics effectively and evaluate the credibility of information they find. In this way, nearly every student at Allen Community College has some exposure to sound information literacy practices.

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Not surprisingly, students' natural inclination is to start by searching Google or Wikipedia for the information they need, Shaffer says, noting, "They're so used to the ease of just searching online. I try to get them to think about the authority of a source they're looking at: How can you be sure this author knows what they're talking about?"

Shaffer and VanDyne also explain to students how they can use carefully vetted library resources to support the research process. These resources include *Films On Demand*, a comprehensive streaming video subscription service that gives colleges and universities unlimited access to thousands of videos in a wide range of subject areas, and *Credo Reference: Academic Core*, which offers access to 2.2 million full-text articles from more than 750 top-tier reference titles covering all major disciplines.

The screenshot displays the Credo Reference website. At the top, it says "Infobase" and "Credo Reference". A search bar indicates "Searching 2,118,723 full text articles in 762 titles from 102 publishers". Below the search bar, there are three columns of "Research Popular Topics":

- Biographies:** Nabokov, Vladimir (1899-1977), Archimedes (287-212 BCE), Keller, Helen (1880-1968), Parks, Rosa (1913-2005), Gandhi, Mohandas (1869-1948), Darwin, Charles (1809-1882), Ramses II (1304-1213 BCE), Smith, Adam (1723-1790), King, Martin Luther Jr. (1929-1968), Dylan, Bob (1941-), Mandela, Nelson (1918-2013).
- Sciences:** Meteorology, Climate change, Biosphere 2, National parks, Grasslands, Carcinogen, The Galapagos Islands, Deciduous forest, Carbon footprint, Pollination, Recycling, Water pollution, Carson, Rachel (1907-1964), Wildfires, Muir, John (1838-1914), Sustainable development, Overfishing, Coral Reefs, Glaciers, Ecosystem.
- Humanities:** Drone aircraft, Violence in the workplace, Racial profiling, Charter schools, Minimum Wage, Corporate responsibility, Gentrification, Censorship, Political Activism, Social inequality, Gun control, The Petroleum Industry, Imprisonment, Genetic counselling, Active learning, Same-sex marriage, Unemployment, Coronaviruses.

At the bottom, there are "Research Quick Tips" with video thumbnails for "Research Questions to Your Conclusion", "How to Find Relevant Sources", "How to Avoid Bias in Your Searches", and "How to Select a Topic".



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*Credo Reference* is an ideal place for students to begin their research, Shaffer says. It brings together citable background information while also pointing students to the library's own next-step databases. Federated search results seamlessly include a library's other licensed resources, leading students to subject-specific resources for a deeper dive into the topic they're researching.

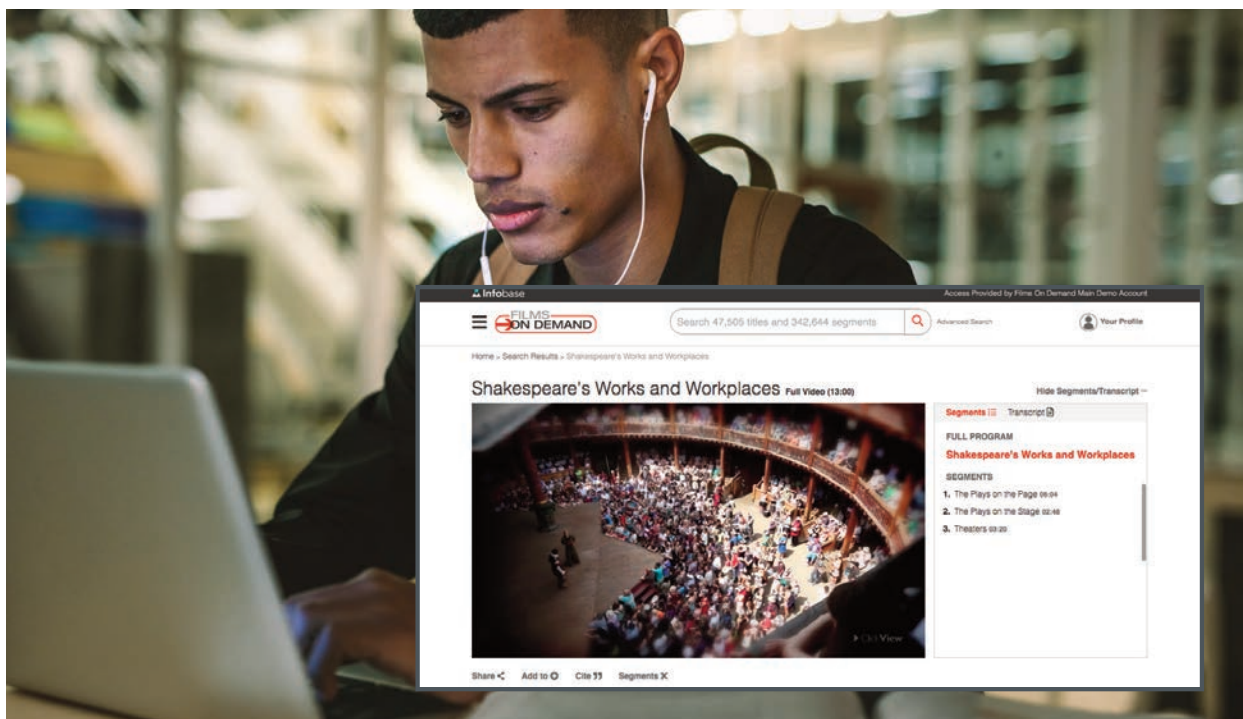
"Students might be used to using Wikipedia as their jumping-off point for research," Shaffer says. "I tell them, 'Why don't you use Credo instead? It's kind of like Wikipedia, only you can trust it.'"

One of the many aspects students like about *Credo Reference* is that its encyclopedia-like search interface is familiar to them from using Wikipedia. "Sometimes students can get so overwhelmed, especially when they're new to college," Shaffer says. "It's nice when there's a little bit of familiarity to make the research process easier." Students also like the database's Mind Map feature, she says—a visualization tool that helps them discover connections across topics.

## Supplementing Instruction

*Credo Reference* and *Films On Demand* aren't just ideal for student research; they're also exceptional teaching resources.

Shaffer and VanDyne create LibGuides for teaching and learning about each academic subject. "We'll search through *Films On Demand* and find clips that help students learn more about various subjects, and we'll embed these into our LibGuides," Shaffer says. Instructors will also embed video clips from *Films On Demand* directly into their course page within the Blackboard learning management system.





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One of the college's instructors who teaches sociology and anthropology uses *Films On Demand* to support her instruction "all the time," Shaffer says. "In her Blackboard modules, she will include at least three snippets of video to support what she's teaching about that week. There's just so much information it covers."

In a society where everyone is used to watching streaming video, "*Films On Demand* fits right in," Shaffer observes. "Students can learn in the same kind of format they're used to watching every day."

The sudden shift to remote learning during the pandemic showed the value of having high-quality online resources to support teaching, learning, and research. "While moving everyone to online instruction was tough, it was so nice to have high-quality resources available to pop into remote classes," Shaffer says. "The transition was pretty seamless, because our databases were already available online—and everyone was accustomed to using them already."

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"The database was ready-made for remote learning; instructors could still find what they needed to convey information when they couldn't lecture in front of the class."

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In fact, use of *Credo Reference* and *Films On Demand* soared during the spring 2020 semester. "In spring 2018, we had 3,656 views of videos within *Films On Demand*," Shaffer indicates. "In 2019, we had 3,949 views. In 2020, it went up to 8,288—more than doubling in usage. The database was ready-made for remote learning; instructors could still find what they needed to convey information when they couldn't lecture in front of the class."

### Helping Students Succeed

*Films On Demand* and *Credo Reference: Academic Core* give Allen Community College instructors high-quality resources to supplement their teaching—and they give students authoritative sources to begin the research process.

Understanding how to find reliable information "is so important," Shaffer says, "especially now that there's so much misinformation online. Anybody can easily post false information and make it look like it comes from a credible source."

Learning how to use trustworthy sources when gathering information is a basic skill that students will use throughout their lives—and it's also a key factor in college success. [Numerous research studies](#) have shown a clear connection between information literacy skills and college retention and completion rates.

"Both resources have great value to our students and our instructors," Shaffer concludes. "They're exactly what we need to teach our students and help them succeed."

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