

Better Citations Please! Aiding Students in Creating Correct Citations

Presented at Virginia Library Association Annual Conference Fall 2016

By

Jeffrey R. Prater, Director of Library Services, Virginia International University

Abstract

RefME is a free software that allows the user to create citations through an application, a searchable database, a Webclipper, or by using a template. The VIU Library conducted a voluntary study on users' perceptions and attitudes in creating citations with RefME. Furthermore, instructors of classes participating in the study were interviewed. The conclusion from both students and instructors was that there was improvement in creating citations. Instructors noted improvement in quality of citations. Students expressed satisfaction with faster construction time, easiness to learn, and multiple methods for creating citations. Three Schools at VIU have approved RefME for introductory courses starting in the Winter 2017 semester.

Introduction

Virginia International University faces many challenges in teaching a global student population how to cite correctly. Language comprehension, differing cultural citation ethics, and attitudes create much anxiety in students learning these skills. Our 1100 students speak multiple languages with English being a second language. Ninety-eight percent of the population comes from outside of North America (VIU, 2016).

RefME is a free software that meets students where they are technologically by allowing the user to create citations for bibliographies and in-text formats from:

1. **The RefME App**-students can scan a book's ISBN number using their smartphones and create a citation;
2. **Searching the RefME database**- students can search the RefME database using author, title, DOI, ISBN, keyword, or URL to look for a citation;
3. **Using the Webclipper**-students can use an extension in the Chrome browser to import data from webpage source data and create a citation;
4. **A template**-students can enter the information manually into the citation format (APA, etc.); select the work to reference (article, blog, etc.) and use the template to enter the metadata. The software will then format the information when the project exports.

RefME organizes the bibliography in the alphabetical order and can export the reference page in Microsoft Word or other formats. In addition, users can preset the citation format (APA, etc.) in the settings and the software formats the entries. RefME hosts its database so there is nothing to download or install (RefME, 2016).

Methods and materials

This voluntary RefMe study measured attitudes and perceptions of VIU students and instructors. Only students who had not used RefME previously were considered. A pre and post survey assessed students' outcomes. The pre-survey was a paper survey taken in the classroom before RefME instruction. The post-survey was an electronic survey emailed at the end of the semester. Instructors were interviewed after spring term final exams. The VIU Academic Affairs Committee, IRB, and Ad Hoc Committee approved the study. Deans identified introductory courses in which to conduct the study. Instructors from other courses were asked to participate via email invite. Sixteen classes and eleven instructors participated. Four instructors from the VIU Library, Writing Center, and Student Affairs taught RefME. Instruction included: pre-Survey, permission for study, registration, style set-up, and demonstration on how to use the software. The instruction took 22 minutes. A RefME assistance webpage was added to the Library webpage <http://library.viu.edu/refme>.

Results

While 66% of the students felt they could create a reference page with confidence, eighty percent of the 229 pre-survey respondents were "willing to learn software to create a reference page more quickly and more efficiently from instruction." Twenty students who had not used RefME prior to the study responded to the emailed survey. Of these respondents, ninety percent believed they had created a reference page to their teachers' satisfaction with 95% believing RefME took less time than Microsoft Word. Students felt RefME was easy to learn with classroom instruction (95%). Students sought assistance with RefME from websites (65%), videos (40%), and online guides (35%). (Please see chart 3 for the RefME features preferred). Seven instructors interviewed with me after reviewing assignments where students used RefME and rated the improvement as a mean of 3.65% out of 5. One instructor noted a noticeable improvement in the midterm and final projects with citations while other instructors noted improvement and felt RefME was more intuitive than Endnote or Zotero. All the instructors who were interviewed believed RefME would benefit students in creating citations. They endorsed the VIU Library teaching and advising how to use RefME. Additionally, all the instructors expressed the need for a formal process of teaching citations in introductory and other classes. The instruction model expressed was for traditional citation instruction from the instructor or Writing Center with support of RefME from the library (Confidential, 2016).

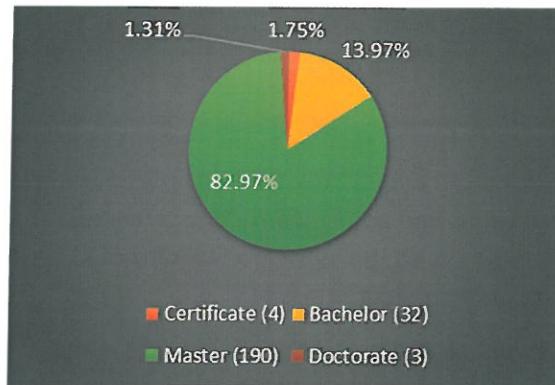


Chart 1. School participants enrolled.

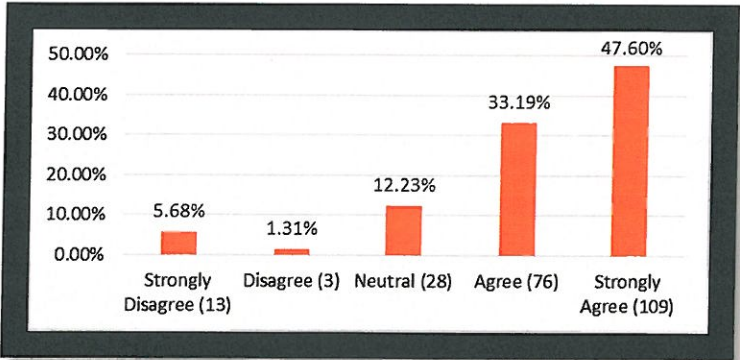


Chart 2. Pretest question: I am willing to learn software to help me create a reference page more quickly and more efficiently from instruction

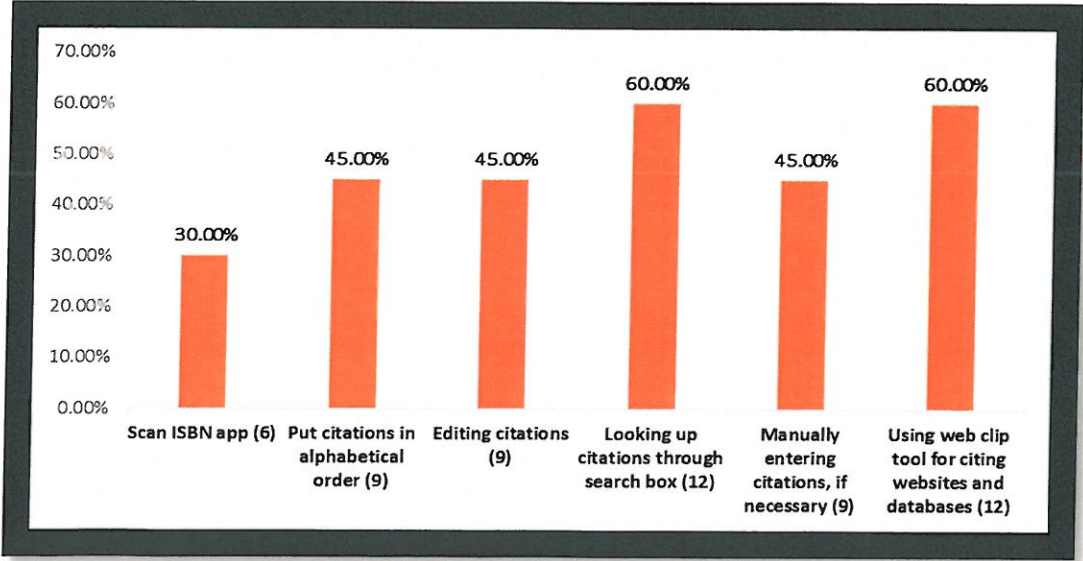


Chart 3. How student preferred to use RefME

Discussion

Implementing RefME should have a plan for further evaluation. One possibility is a random sampling of papers from the introductory classes to assess how students perform in citation management. A committee would review the citations and adjust instruction to correct common errors. In some instances, students may report errors with the software, which would be investigated and communicated with RefME customer support.

The VIU Library should lead all training and customer service with RefME. Teaching new Faculty after hire or during meetings would lead to more consistency. Having the writing center review the current citation style would refresh faculty who may not be familiar with latest updates. In addition, teaching workshops for the students not involved in introductory courses would assist in citation improvement.

Lastly, there needs to be a constant evaluation of student citation management and recommendations on how to improve.

Conclusions

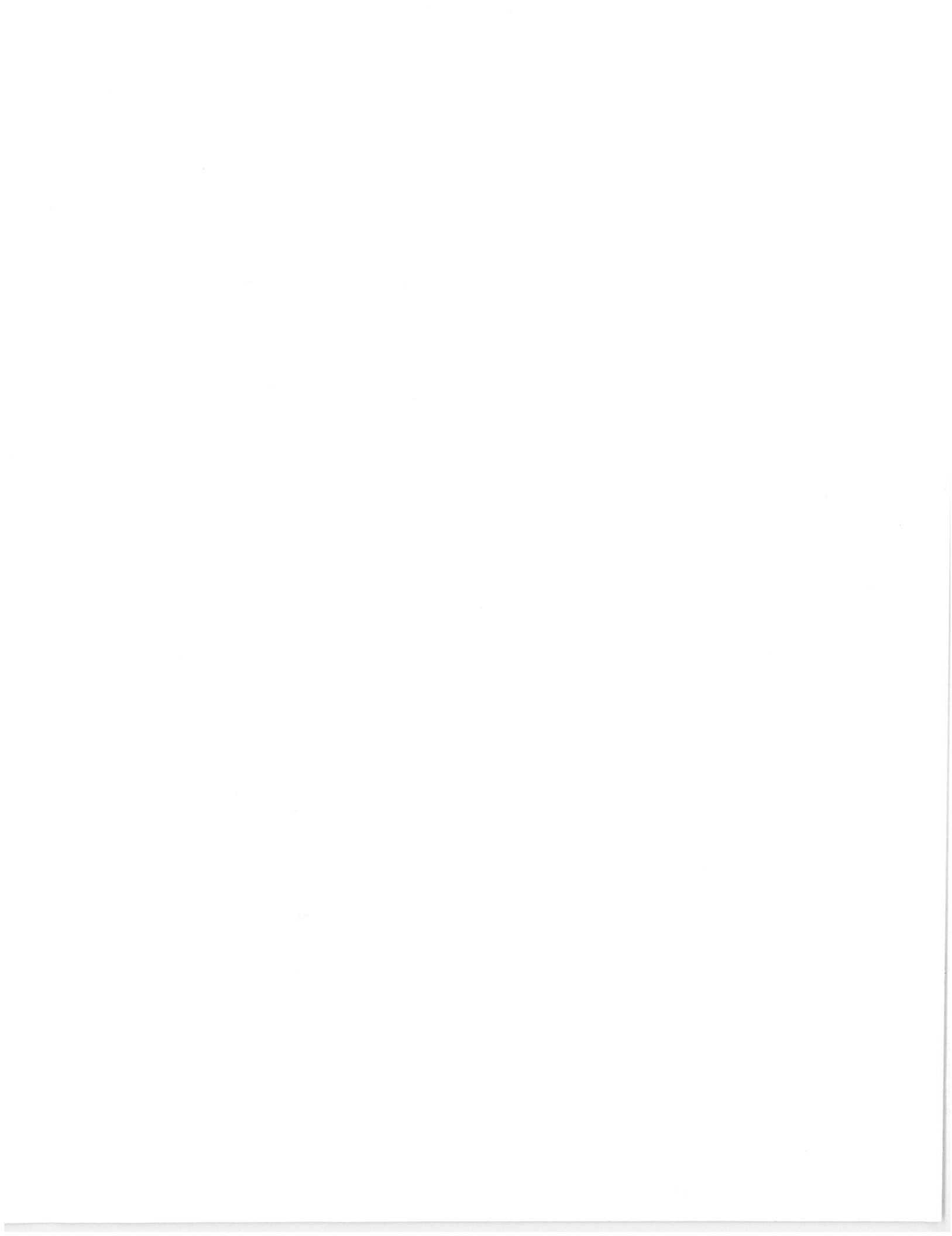
- Students who utilize RefME believe it improves the amount of time and accuracy needed to create proper citations. These students reported RefME as easy to learn with instruction and liked the many different methods available to create a citation.
- Faculty support The VIU Library assisting with citation management instruction during introductory or other courses using RefME as well as performing technical assistance.
- The Library's support role would give the Writing Center more time to focus on grammar and other writing issues. Instructors could save instruction time by sending students to either the writing center or library for assistance.
- Three Schools at VIU have approved RefME for introductory courses starting in the winter 2017 semester.
- Further study and evaluation is necessary to improve citation quality at VIU. A committee should be formed to study and recommend any necessary changes.

References

Confidential. (2016). RefME Instructor Interviews.

VIU. (2016). Facts and figures. Retrieved October 21, 2016, from <http://www.viu.edu/our-university/about-viu/facts-and-figures.html>

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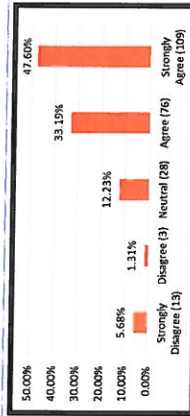


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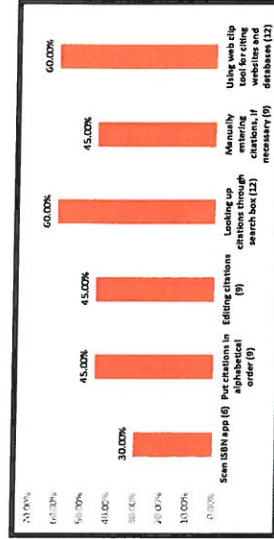


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1. VIU. (2016). Facts and figures. Retrieved October 21, 2016, from <http://www.viu.edu/about/viu/about/viu-facts-and-figures.html>
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