

Information Literacy and Librarian-Faculty Collaboration: A Model for Success

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ABSTRACT: In the age of information explosion and technological advancement, issues of information storage, organization, access, and evaluation have become necessarily important in our societies. Addressing issues of information literacy and designing how they can be best integrated in students' learning process are of critical importance. Library professionals in the United States, particularly in the academia, have realized the importance of information literacy and have attempted in various ways to address these issues. The ultimate goal is to make information literacy an integral part of the academic curriculum, thus helping students to succeed not only during their years in college but also for their lifelong career choices. This article will look at ways of how information literacy can best be incorporated into students' academic experience, and how this process can make students' learning meaningful and successful. Specifically, the author will examine the model of librarian-faculty collaboration in integrating information literacy into the curriculum, as demonstrated in the Ohio Five Colleges' Information Literacy Program.

I. Introduction

Information literacy has been a hot issue in the library world for almost a decade. And it is still very pertinent today. In the age of information explosion and technological advancement, issues of information storage, organization, access, and evaluation have become important issues to be addressed by our societies. Library professionals in the United States, particularly in the academia, realize that information literacy plays a critical role in students' learning process. They have attempted in various ways to address issues related to information literacy and have endeavored to make information literacy an integral part of the college curriculum. The goal is to help students succeed, not only during their years in college but also in their life-long career choices. "The road to information literacy is about creating relationships between ourselves and the world," and librarians are "about facilitating those connections between students and their worlds."^[1] It is thus important to make space

in the traditional curriculum for the role of information literacy in the learning process so that students will be able to build a stronger foundation for their future careers.

The library literature indicates that college students are in critical need for information literacy skills. In the age of information explosion, while information is easily accessible, the abundance of information also makes it confusing to choose the most relevant information so as to reach sound decisions. As much of the information available is of doubtful quality,^[2] the ability to act confidently while seeking information is critical to academic success and college learning. In today's world, only those who are capable of finding, evaluating, analyzing, and conveying information to others effectively and efficiently are ones who will succeed in this information environment.

In addition, with the Internet, websites and web pages growing rapidly and readily accessible, e-learning is another area that deserves discussion. Students tend to google everything without analyzing the value of the information or not being able to analyze. A study done by Holly Gunn, a teacher-librarian in Canada, who was recognized by NIS (Network of Innovative Schools) as an Expert of the Month for integrating technology into the curriculum through the school library in 2002, and as the Canadian Library Association's Teacher-Librarian of the Year in 2000, indicates that most students rely on the Internet while completing homework assignments.^[3] The article cites a research study conducted by the Environics Research Group in 2001, in which 5,682 students aged 9 to 17 years in schools across Canada were surveyed on the issue of Internet use. Findings of the study show that 99% reported that they had used the Internet at some point, 63% used the Internet at least once a month to do homework, and 48% used the Internet from home at least an hour every day.^[4] It is evident from this study that guidance is needed in students' maneuvering on the Internet for resources in today's electronic environment. Abilities of finding, evaluating, and analyzing the information available to us have thus become extremely important in the world of information explosion.

II. Information Literacy

The library profession in the United States has responded well to the critical need for information literacy for library users. Library associations at various levels have attempted to address this need. The American Library Association (ALA) formed a presidential committee on information literacy in 1989, which led the efforts to create information literacy standards for the profession. The Association of Colleges and Research Libraries (ACRL) also created guidelines for how information literacy can be best implemented. Many other library organizations have followed suit, such as the Library Orientation Exchange (LOEX) and Academic Library Association of Ohio (ALAO), which have held conferences specifically addressing issues of information literacy.

The National Forum on Information Literacy (NFIL) was created in 1989 as a response to the recommendations of the American Library Association's Presidential Committee on Information Literacy. In the Presidential Committee on Information Literacy Report, the Committee addressed the issue of the importance of information literacy to individuals, business, and citizenship.[\[5\]](#) The report not only raised the need for information literacy but also outlined the steps to take to successfully incorporate information literacy into cultural literacy programs. In response to that, the NFIL came up with a working definition of information literacy.

The NFIL describes information literacy as: “the ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use that information for the issue or problem at hand.[\[6\]](#) In addition, ACRL provides the context in which information literacy is needed in the environments of higher education:

...Because of the escalating complexity of this environment, individuals are faced with diverse, abundant information choices--in their academic studies, in the workplace, and in their personal lives. Information is available through libraries, community resources, special interest organizations, media, and the Internet--and increasingly, information comes to individuals in unfiltered formats, raising questions about its authenticity, validity, and reliability. In addition, information is available through multiple media, including graphical, aural, and textual, and these pose new challenges for individuals in evaluating and understanding it. The uncertain quality and expanding quantity of information pose large challenges for society. The sheer abundance of information will not in itself create a more informed citizenry without a complementary cluster of abilities necessary to use information effectively.[\[7\]](#)

ACRL further describes information literacy as abilities to:

- Determine the extent of information needed
- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
- Evaluate information and its sources critically
- Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
- Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally.[\[8\]](#)

III. Learning Experience

Many students and researchers use Google to search for the information they need. A study conducted by two researchers at the Manchester Metropolitan University in the United Kingdom found that 75% of the students surveyed used Google as their first port of call when locating information, with the university library catalogue used by only 10%.[\[9\]](#) In China, nearly 80% of Chinese researchers start their searches with Google, or another Internet search engine, according to a survey conducted in 2005 by

the publishing giant, Elsevier.[10] While it is legitimate to use some of the information available on the web, students need to learn how to evaluate that information. Amy Bruckman, professor of Computer Science at Georgia Institute of Technology, maintains that “to help students understand the art of research and the reliability of sources in the age of online information, we should teach them about the nature of ‘truth.’[11] And the “truth” here refers to the quality of information.

In another article, “Information Literacy and Higher Education: Placing the Academic Library in the Center of a Comprehensive Solution,” Edward K. Owusu-Ansah presents a solution as to what role the academic library should play in the academic mission of the higher education. That solution has two fundamental underpinnings: the first is that information literacy is an issue for every college and university; and the second is that librarians should occupy a position in attempts to define and achieve campus-wide information literacy.[12] He goes on to say that “both flow from recognition of the fact that the goal of producing students knowledgeable in their disciplines and capable of adjusting and advancing in college and life after college is universal to all institutions of higher learning.[13] Thus it is our students’ learning experience that determines a legitimate place in the curriculum on college campuses.

IV. Motivation Theory

Scholars believe that when students are motivated, they have more interest and desire to learn.[14] Jacobson and Xu describe the issue of relevance as one important factor in getting students motivated. They state that “in order to maintain student interest in the material and subject matter, they (students) will have to perceive that it is related to their personal goals? Therefore, the material must be personally relevant to students.[15] The goal of students during their years of study is to learn through the academic curriculum at their institutions. It is important and natural to have information literacy as part of the curriculum and their learning experience. Thus information literacy incorporated as a component of the course package to motivate students to learn has become a necessity rather than a choice.

V. Incorporating Information Literacy into the Curriculum

The traditional one-shot bibliographic instruction sessions, even though still being carried out, no longer meet the needs in the process of providing information literacy to students. More and more course-related or integrated instruction sessions have come to play a bigger role in making students more information literate. Practice may vary in dealing with the issue of information literacy at different institutions. One particular model which has proven to be effective is course integrated instruction. With this model, librarians and teaching faculty co-design a course, and make sure that information literacy is incorporated in the course.

VI. Librarian-Faculty Collaboration

The role of librarians in the information literacy efforts is critical in order to engage students in their learning process. George D. Kuh and Robert M. Gonyea in their study “The Role of the Academic Library in Promoting Student Engagement in Learning” argue that “because the emphasis a campus places on information literacy is a strong predictor of students becoming information literate, librarians should redouble their collaborative efforts to promote the value of information literacy and help create opportunities for students to evaluate the quality of the information they obtain.[16] The study was based on a survey conducted to examine the nature and value of undergraduate students' experiences with the academic library. The data was compiled from the responses from more than 300,000 students between 1984 and 2002 to the College Student Experiences Questionnaire.[17] Ann Grafstein, Reference Librarian and Circulation Coordinator at the College of Staten Island of the City University of New York, argues that the responsibility for teaching information literacy should be shared throughout an academic institution, rather than limited to the library.[18] She also presents an outline of the complementary responsibilities of librarians and classroom faculty in teaching information literacy. Obviously, the need for the role of librarians in students' learning process is critical.

Many institutions in the United States have made various attempts in integrating information literacy into the curriculum and students' academic experience as a whole. Several models have been experimented, including the one-shot bibliographic instruction, credit-bearing courses, and course-integrated instruction. The latter has proven to be the most effective and has the most impact on students' learning, which involves close collaboration between librarians and faculty.

While working on issues related to information literacy, it is important to seize opportunities to lobby for the integration of information literacy campus-wide. At the New Mexico State University, librarians sought ways to establish good working relationships with campus-wide programs and individuals who would be supportive of these efforts. They not only sought to build short-term programmatic partnerships but more importantly, formal long-term working relationships with campus units, groups, departments and administrators.[19] At George Mason University, librarians also felt that “..the best way to achieve the integration of information literacy skills into an academic unit is for faculty and librarians to work closely together.[20]

The Ohio Five Colleges' information literacy program set a good example for liberal arts college campuses to follow. The program was funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support five colleges in Ohio: the College of Wooster, Denison University, Kenyon College, Oberlin College, and Ohio Wesleyan University. It started in 1999 in support of a three-year program called “Integrating Information Literacy into the Liberal Arts College Curriculum.” The goal of the program was to increase undergraduate students' information literacy skills and capabilities.[21] Librarians realized from the beginning that in order to reach that goal, they would

need strong collaboration from faculty to design and implement course assignments/projects which would involve information literacy components. As a result, each of the five campuses launched a campaign to recruit faculty as partners in the process, which was successful.

Many colleges also took advantage of the liaison system already in place to work closely with liaison departments to build collaborative relationships.[\[22\]](#) For example, an information literacy tutorial was created and developed to meet the needs of students in psychology by Ellen Stoltzfus, a faculty member in Psychology, and Jasmine Vaughan, a librarian, at Kenyon College. The tutorial was designed to teach students in psychology information literacy skills by guiding them through the process of conducting effective research. It includes assignments and instruction for introductory Psychology students and will eventually include modules for upper-level undergraduates in research methods courses.[\[23\]](#)

Other examples of librarian-faculty collaborative projects include:

- “Relationship between China and the Modern West” at Ohio Wesleyan University, collaborated by Xiaoming Chen, Associate Professor of History, and Xudong Jin, Associate Director of Libraries and Head of Technical Services, and Library Liaison to the East Asian Studies;
- “Labor and Global Development” at Oberlin College, collaborated by Stephen Crowley, Professor of Politics, and Jessica Grim, Reference Librarian/Instruction Coordinator;
- “Art of Medieval Europe” at Kenyon College, collaborated by Sarah Blick, Professor of Art History, and Carmen King, Fine Arts Librarian;
- “Introductory Plant Biology” at Denison University, collaborated by Fardad Firooznia, Professor of Biology, and Debra Andreadis, Science Librarian;
- “Slavery and the Western Hemisphere” at Oberlin College, collaborated by James Millette, Professor of African American Studies, and Haipeng Li, Reference Librarian.[\[24\]](#)

Symposiums were organized for faculty and librarians to focus on assessment and science disciplines. These workshops targeted at specific issues related to information literacy that faculty and students face today. The Five Colleges of Ohio Consortium offered a workshop on “Thinking about Assessment” in 2001, and another on “Information Literacy Workshop for Scientists” in 2003. Individual campuses within Ohio Five also offered workshops for the faculty of their own. For example, Oberlin College Library offered two workshops to faculty on preventing plagiarism (2002), and on finding and using images (2004).[\[25\]](#) Feedback to these workshops was generally positive in that they provided necessary tools to carry out information literacy tasks.

Ohio five colleges also created pathways to help guide faculty in this effort. Librarians at Oberlin College created a faculty guide in 2002 on *Incorporating*

Information Literacy into Oberlin's First Year Seminars,[\[26\]](#) which lists various approaches to learn information literacy competencies, including how to evaluate online resources. In general, faculty members involved in the process were willing to collaborate with librarians who served as consultants, as instructors, and as team players in designing, teaching and implementing course assignments.

VII. Challenges

Through participating in the various initiatives and efforts related to information literacy, librarians, for the first time, have found themselves “thrust into leadership roles in the learning process”[\[27\]](#) on college campuses. These collaborative efforts have enabled librarians to encourage and support faculty in establishing learning priorities which will ensure that students be equipped with the competencies to become effective lifelong learners. Challenges remain in this process to engage faculty on board and ask them to set time aside in addressing and incorporating information literacy into their courses. Only by establishing a successful partnership between librarians and faculty, can the goal of mastery of information literacy by students be accomplished.[\[28\]](#) Such an important strategy cannot be overlooked in the process of achieving the goal of information literacy.

Even though many institutions have made attempts to integrate information literacy into the curriculum, many of these efforts are short-term projects and funded by grants for a limited time period. The challenge remains as how to make information literacy an integral part of the college curriculum. Mary MacDonald and others have explored ways of how to build an incremental, multi-year information literacy program at the University of Rhode Island. They suggest that library instruction program should focus on the “concepts of understanding what information is, in addition to learning how to gather, evaluate, and use information,” and ways to reach the goal of achieving information literacy through the development of credit-bearing courses in information literacy and the creation of information literacy modules for specific disciplines.[\[29\]](#) This is just one of the approaches taken to address the broad ranges of issues related to information literacy.

As discussed in this article, colleges and universities have realized the importance of information literacy and its role in the curriculum. Various models of information literacy have also been developed on college campuses. However, information literacy needs to be recognized not simply as computer literacy or the ability to use technology; it is really “the ability to find, evaluate, analyze, integrate, communicate, and use information to solve problems, create new ideas, make informed decisions, and turn data into meaning.”[\[30\]](#) The goal of librarian-faculty collaboration in integrating information literacy into the curriculum is to enable students to learn the skills and competencies needed for success during their life time.

As societies grow, the scope of information literacy also expands. Ilene F. Rockman, Manager of the Information Competence Initiative for the Office of the Chancellor of

the California State University, states that “Information literacy is no longer just a library issue, an education issue, or an American issue.[31] Information literacy has become a global issue. Countries around the world are recognizing the fact that only an educated, skilled, and information-literate person can contribute more to the economic productivity and societal well-being. To make sure that everyone is able to become an educated, skilled, and information-literate person, librarians and faculty at institutions of higher education throughout the world will need to work together as partners to provide the education needed in the age of information.

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