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Information Literacy Facts

What is Information Literacy?

Information Literacy (a.k.a. Information Competence) is a set of abilities requiring individuals to “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.” Information literacy is a new liberal art which extends beyond technical skills and is conceived as the critical reflection on the nature of information itself, its technical infrastructure and its social, cultural and even philosophical context and impact.

An information literate individual is able 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

Why is it important for students to be information literate?

Provides Proven Methods for Successfully Navigating Proliferating Information Resource

Individuals are faced with diverse, abundant information choices within 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. 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.

Supports National Efforts to Improve the Quality of Education

The Boyer Commission Report, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education*, recommends strategies that require the student to engage actively in “framing of a significant question or set of questions, research or creative exploration to find answers, and the communications skills to convey the results.” Courses structured around these skills create student-centered learning environments where inquiry is the norm, problem solving becomes the focus, and thinking critically is part of the process. Proactive learning environments require information literacy competencies.

Provides Additional Tools for Reinforcing Course Content

The convergence of the prodigious production of the information age and the growing awareness of the student memory loss of course content suggests that a vital part of education must be in the students= ability to locate information for themselves. If students graduate from a CSU campus unable to locate, synthesize, and evaluate information, they will not have the skills necessary for survival in any field. Moreover, even if student retention of course content was almost perfect, the rate of change of knowledge is so high that what students learn today, especially in certain fields, may not be accurate or relevant a few years from now.

Enhances Lifelong Learning

Developing lifelong learners is central to the mission of higher education institutions. By ensuring that individuals have the intellectual abilities of reasoning and critical thinking, and by helping them construct a framework for learning how to learn, colleges and universities provide the foundation for continued growth throughout their careers, as well as in their roles as informed citizens and members of communities. Information literacy is a key component of, and contributor to, lifelong learning. Information literacy competency extends learning beyond formal classroom settings and provides practice with self-directed investigations as individuals move into internships, first professional positions, and increasing responsibilities in all arenas of life. Because information literacy augments students= competence with evaluating, managing, and using information, it is now considered by several regional and discipline-based accreditation associations as a key outcome for college students.

Who should assume responsibility for information literacy teaching and learning?

The research undertaken by the CSU Information Competence Work Group suggests that isolated hit-or-miss, *ad hoc* attempts cannot ensure that students are well equipped for the Information Age. It also indicates that the best programs are integrated into the curriculum and are built on strong alliances between discipline faculty and library faculty. This suggests, therefore, that the education in information literacy is a responsibility to be shared by discipline faculty and library faculty and should be an integral element of the curriculum.

Through lectures and by leading discussion, faculty establishes the context for learning, inspire students to explore the unknown, and monitor students= progress. Academic librarians coordinate the evaluation and selection of intellectual resources for programs and services; organize, and maintain collections and many points of access to information; offer guidance on how best to fulfill information needs, and provide instruction to the campus community of effective methods of accessing, selecting, and evaluating information. Administrators also lay a significant role through active support of information literacy programs and by creating opportunities for collaboration and staff development among faculty, librarians, and other professionals who initiate information literacy programs, lead in planning and budgeting for those programs, and provide ongoing resources to sustain them.

What should faculty and administrators know about information literacy programs?

- Information literacy may be a hot new term in the higher education lexicon as we talk about living in the Information Age. However, it is not a new concept. The idea of resource-based education is an old one and librarians have been involved in teaching the effective use of information resources for over a century under the labels library instruction, bibliographic instruction and library skills.
- Information literacy programs take two archetypical forms B separate courses (for credit or non-credit) or activities integrated into general education courses and/or courses in major fields of study.
- Information literacy programs require the leadership and support of academic administrators. Such leadership is not limited to budgetary support. It also includes helping create a supportive atmosphere and practical opportunities for cooperation among librarians, classroom faculty and information technologists.
- Information literacy includes both a set of generic skills and concepts as well as skills and concepts, which are specific to certain disciplines and subject areas.

What are some options for Information Literacy programs?

Freshman Orientation/Transitions Course

Freshman courses can provide a place to begin a sustained education in information literacy; however, the "orientation" nature of these courses usually dictates that the attention devoted to information competencies is brief.

General Education

Since the ability to use information effectively and wisely is crucial to a student's success in higher education, it seems natural to incorporate information literacy into the general education curriculum. It could be a stand-alone course dealing with the topic, or added as a component in several of all of the courses.

Cornerstone Class in Major Area

Discipline-specific information literacies have been identified in some fields; all graduates should be well versed in this aspect of their discipline.

One option for including discipline-specific information literacy is to integrate it into an "introductory" or "gatekeeper" or "funnel" course, the one that students take first in their disciplinary sequence. This introductory course in a discipline typically familiarizes students with the methodologies, terminologies, and resources of a discipline.

Other models emphasize information competence in part or all of several courses required in the major. These models can be effective if the information literacy component is a required course component, regardless of the professor currently teaching this class.

Information Competence through Competency-Based Mastery

A recent trend has been to award academic credit on the basis of demonstrated mastery of skills rather than through course work. CSU Monterey Bay is an experimental program through which students, in order to graduate, must demonstrate mastery of a host of skills and knowledge B regardless of whether that knowledge was gained through life experience, independent, study, regular university courses, or community service.

Another method, then is to require students to demonstrate mastery. Students can be given ample opportunity to acquire the necessary skills through workshops, workbooks, computer tutorials, classroom instruction, etc., and when they believe they have mastered the competencies identified, they can apply for an assessment and evaluation. Once the students have passed the assessment, their transcript reflects that they have completed this requirement for graduation.

Are there model programs I can examine?

Examples of model programs include:

Arizona: University of Arizona, The Information Literacy Project
URL: <http://dizzy.library.arizona.edu/infolit/>

California: California State University, San Marcos
California California State University San
Marcos URL: <http://ww2.csusm.edu/library/ILP>

California: University of California B Berkeley
California University of California B
Berkeley URL: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/>

Florida: Florida International University
Florida Florida International
University URL: <http://www.fiu.edu/%7Elibrary/ili/iliprop1.html>

Indiana: Earlham College
URL: <http://www.earlham.edu/~libr/about/about.htm>

Kentucky: University of Louisville, Lifelong Learning Through the
Libraries URL: <http://www.louisville.edu/infoliteracy>

Washington: University of Washington, UWired Program
URL: <http://www.washington.edu/uwired>

Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin -- Parkside
URL: <http://www.uwp.edu/library/>

Copied and Paraphrased from:

California State University (2000). *Information literacy fact sheet*.
Author. http://library.csun.edu/susan.curzon/fact_sheet.html

Kirk, T.G. Jr. (2000). *Academics= guide to information literacy*.
Institute for Information Literacy. <http://www.ala.org/acr/.nili/whatis.html>