

California State University
Northridge

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Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling

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Title: Future Step in Counselor Education: Information Competence

Topic Area Addressed: Teaching

Program Abstract:

Information literacy, the hot new term in the lexicon of higher education, is the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information. Through a grant from the CSU system, information competence criteria were developed in the areas of technology, research, and professional skills and infused throughout a counselor education program, beginning with admissions. This session will describe how the criteria were developed, the criteria themselves, the evolution of the infusion process, and outcomes.

Program Description:

"Information competence is the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information to become life-long learners" (Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1996). In its narrowest sense, information literacy includes the practical skills involved in effective use of information technology and information resources, both print and electronic. In a broader sense, 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.

Since 1995, the California State University (CSU) system has been committed to developing a program of information competence. The purpose is to ensure that all students graduate with a mastery of this vital skill. In January 2001, the CSU offered grants to departments committed to including information competence into the educational outcomes.

The Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling at California State University, Northridge was awarded an Information Competence grant in April 2001 to ensure graduate students mastered this skill and could successfully conduct quality research for a master's degree thesis, as well as to provide life-long professional skills in dealing competently with information, plus thinking and reasoning.

At a retreat of department faculty members, criteria for information competence were developed for the areas of technology, research, and professional skills. These criteria were then sorted into basic, intermediate and advanced skill areas. To determine if basic skills could be reached before admission, (1) graduate students in a prerequisite class were assessed to determine their level of basic skills, (2) for those whose skill level was unacceptable, appropriate referral resources were given (3) after the use of resources, learning was evaluated again. Based on this assessment, some basic skills plus intermediate skills were infused into courses on research principles and ethics for counselors and assessed. Advanced criteria were infused into the development of the thesis, as well as in courses for a particular specialization. Through this process, graduate students became information literate and increased their ability to use this skill through their lives.