

# **Information Competence Grant Proposal**

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# Assessing Information Competence Skills

## April 23, 2004

### Abstract

As a result of an information competence grant in 2001, the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling has made significant progress in infusing information competence throughout the curriculum. However, further work needs to be completed in developing reliable and systematic assessments of basic, research, and professional information competence skills. In addition, the list of professional information competence skills needs to be refined to reflect each master's degree option before assessment can be implemented. Moreover, I feel that it is

### Background

In order to provide background for this grant application, I am going to: (1) briefly describe the department and its academic degrees; (2) present what steps have been taken to infuse information competence throughout the curriculum; (3) identify department's future information competence goals; and (4) discuss plans for accomplishing these goals.

### Description of Department

The Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling (EPC), one of six departments in the Michael D. Eisner College of Education, has one of the largest graduate enrollments in the university and is one of the largest academic departments on campus. The nearly 400 graduate students in the department's degree programs, Master of Science in Counseling and Master of Arts in Education, comprise about 9% of the graduate population at CSUN. Within the two master's degrees are seven options: career counseling, college counseling and student services, early childhood education, educational psychology (development, learning, and instruction), marriage and family therapy, school counseling, and school psychology. The department also offers courses towards four post-master's certificates, two State credentials, and two State licenses.

### Information Competence Accomplishments

In 2001, the California State University Information Competency Project awarded a grant to the department:

1. To assess information competence skills and needs of EPC faculty and students, and
2. To incorporate information competence skills in the department's learning outcomes as a prerequisite to receiving a master's degree.

The following narrative presents the steps the department followed to implement objectives of the Information Competence grant.

To oversee grant implementation, a departmental Information Competence Committee (ICC) of four faculty members was formed. The ICC drafted three lists of information competencies: Basic IC Skills, Research Skills, and Professional Skills, and designed a proposed model that infused these IC skills into the curriculum. The model included a plan for:

1. Ensuring that students would enter the master's degree programs with basic skills.
2. Infusing research skills in Educational Research (EPC 602), a course required of all master's degree students, followed by two additional courses within each of the seven master's options. (Students would then use these skills in preparation of their culminating thesis/project or comprehensive examinations.)
3. Developing professional skills in courses within each of the department's seven master's degree options

At a faculty retreat in the fall of 2001, faculty members unanimously "bought into" and supported the goal that students would become information competent learners by the time they received their

master's degrees. The faculty refined the criteria lists of basic, research, and professional competencies, and the ICC model was tentatively adopted with identified modifications to be discussed at the first faculty meeting. Ideas were discussed regarding types of IC assignments, and faculty identified their own desired areas of growth using a survey developed by the ICC. In addition, faculty decided to survey students in the prerequisite class (EPC 451) to determine to what extent potential master's degree applicants had already mastered basic skills. It was agreed that mastery of basic skills would not be a criterion for admission to masters' programs at this time; however, applicants accepted to programs would be given a copy of the list of the basic skills and learning resources, and be asked to master these skills before classes began the following fall. It was expected that we would assess these students to determine their level of skill.

During fall 2001, small modifications were made to the ICC plan, and information competence was included as a performance outcome in the department learning outcomes. Fifty-three students in the prerequisite course, EPC 451 were surveyed. It was found that:

1. Fifty-two students had a computer at home; one did not; three did not respond.
2. Forty-nine students had a printer at home; two did not; two did not respond.
3. Forty-nine students used e-mail often or very often; 3 rarely; 1 did not respond.
4. Overall students reported better technology skills than library information skills: The mean of 32 skills in five technology categories ( $M = 2.6$ ) was higher than the mean of 19 skills in six library information categories ( $M = 2.130$ ), with the mean of 19 skills in information resource awareness placing mid-way between the previous two categories ( $M = 2.46$ ).

By the end of the fall 2001 semester, we realized that, although faculty teaching EPC 602 had helped students to improve their research competencies, no formal assessment measure had been developed. Therefore, with a referral from Dean Susan Curzon, I contacted Lynn Lampert, Senior Assistant Librarian, to discuss the assessment problem. Lynn suggested that the CSUN librarians develop two to three modules for EPC 602 courses. These modules would: (1) help students acquire both basic and research competencies, and (2) provide a post-test assessment to determine if students had attained the required basic and research skills.

During spring semester, 2002, the grant proposal, activities, and deliverables were included on department web pages, [www.csun.edu/edpsy/resoures.html](http://www.csun.edu/edpsy/resoures.html). Also, a SPSS workshop was given for faculty members, because a number of faculty members had indicated on the ICC survey at the faculty retreat that they wanted to be able to use the SPSS program. In addition, the ICC members submitted a proposal to present a workshop on information competence at a national conference of counselor educators; the proposal was accepted for fall 2002.

In fall 2002, EPC 602 students participated in the library-designed modules. At the conclusion, an administered survey indicated that students stated that their research skills had increased substantially.

In spring 2003, a certificate of completion was designed for students who evidenced mastery of information competence skills (i.e., basic, research, and professional). If desired, the student could cite this accomplishment on his/her professional resume. In addition, ICC members presented their work at a CSU-sponsored workshop for other educational psychologists and counselor educators in the system. Also, a full-time faculty member with a specialty in educational research and experience in information competence, Dr. Reagan Curtis, was hired to begin teaching in fall 2003.

During the fall of 2003, Reagan Curtis fine-tuned the EPC 602 course and developed a common syllabus. Course meetings for faculty teaching 602 were held on a regular basis. Also, faculty in all master's options identified courses where students would be required to complete research-based assignments to order to follow-up on the competencies learned in EPC 602 and to ready students for their culminating experience, i.e., thesis, project, or comprehensive examinations.

### Future Goals

I am hopeful that our department will become a model for other large and complex departments in how to institutionalize information competence skills throughout all department programs. Although we have come a long way down the path, issues still remain that need to be resolved.

These are:

1. When and how can student's mastery of basic skills best be assessed?

We have tried a number of methods and have come to the conclusion that basic skills are best assessed in the first semester of graduate work through a common assignment that requires knowledge of basic skills in order to complete it successfully. Our newest faculty member has had experience in developing such assignments. For students who are unable to complete the assignment successfully, we are planning to develop a tutorial module.

2. In a large department, some courses have multiple sections taught by both full and part time instructors with varying degrees of interest and knowledge about information competence. How can we be sure that students are mastering the information competence skills associated with that class?

For EPC 602 (Educational Research), we have partially solved that problem by requiring a common syllabus (with common goals and assignments) and using research modules developed for our students and taught by library faculty. Two other key ingredients that maximize mastery of information competence skills are: (1) the regular use of course meetings led by a faculty member committed to information competence, and (2) the maintenance of good communication between department and library faculty. Another key ingredient in ensuring student learning of research skills is to develop a valid and reliable measure of student learning that feeds back assessment results to the instructor. Within the department, a common assessment method needs to be identified with an agreed upon rubric.

Identifying follow-up courses to EPC 602 strengthens research skills. However, these follow-up courses need to develop common information competence goals, assignments, and assessment methods/rubrics. In the EPC department, this involves approximately ten courses.

3. Does the list of Professional Skills fit for all options? How will students in each option fulfill professional skills competencies?

The faculty needs to reexamine the list of professional skills in light of the needs of each option. Then the faculty should identify course(s) in each option that teach, or will teach, that skill, and determine how specific professional skill options can be evaluated.

## **Project Activities**

Appropriate members of department and library faculty will develop plans during half day or full day working retreats with later follow-up taking place at department meetings. Goals and activities will be as follows:

1. Design an initial assignment for first semester graduate students in order to assess their basic information competence skills.
2. Design a hands-on tutorial module for students who are unable to complete successfully the initial information competence assignment.
3. For the EPC 602 course, identify a method for assessing knowledge of research skills at the beginning and end of the course with a rubric to guide scoring and increase reliability.
4. Develop common information competence goals, assignments, and assessment methods/rubrics for each of follow-up (to EPC 602) courses.
5. Reexamine professional skills list in light of the needs of each option.
6. Identify courses in each option that teach particular professional skill(s), and determine how the mastery of each professional skill can be assessed.

Library faculty will be involved in each step of project activities as consultants and participants.

## **Timeline**

May/June 2004: Develop plans for retreat and follow-up on retreat outcomes.

May/June 2004: Identify library faculty members to work with department faculty

June/July 2004: Design an initial assignment for first semester graduate students to assess basic information competence skills.

June/July 2004: Design a hands-on tutorial module for students who are unable to complete the initial information competence assignment successfully.

August 2004 – October 2004: Begin to hold half-day and full-day retreats that:

- a. Identify a method for assessing knowledge of research skills at the beginning and end of the course with a rubric for systematic scoring . (Normally EPC 602 is a spring semester course.)
- b. Develop common information competence goals, assignments, and assessment methods/rubrics for each of follow-up (to EPC 602) courses.
- c. Reexamine professional skills list in light of the needs of each option.
- d. Identify courses in each option that teach a particular professional skill(s), and determine how the mastery of each professional skill can be assessed.

**Population:** See “Description of Department” above.

### **Budget**

\$2000 Half- and full-day retreats for 20 faculty involved in Project Activities #3, 4, and 5 (above).

1500 Faculty Member to design initial assignment in order to assess basic information competence skills and develop a hands-on tutorial for students unable to complete initial information competence assignment.

1500 Partial compensation for planning committee effort, plus project administration, including preparation and copying of materials for final report.

Total: \$5000

### **Qualifications**

Rie Rogers Mitchell, department chair and project director, has had extensive experience in research and various aspects of information competence. During a 35-year career as a researcher and university professor, she has written numerous articles, chapters, and books. All of these have required extensive research.

All EPC faculty members are skilled researchers with good to outstanding computer and information competence skills. Five faculty members have given workshops on basic computer skills and information competency. These are Drs. Reagan Curtis, Greg Jackson, Rie Rogers Mitchell, Bernard Nisenholz and Merrill Simon. Dr. Nisenholz, who teaches EPC 451, has already infused some aspects of the ACRL standards into this class, but without the detailed assessment of skills that we plan ultimately to include as part of this project. Drs. Michael Auer, Reagan Curtis, and Beverly Cabello, who teach EPC 602, include information competence (basic and research) skills in this class.

Library faculty members have outstanding expertise in information competence. Sue Curzon, Dean of the Library, has been at the forefront in leading information competence initiatives. Lynn Lampert, Librarian, specializes in information competence and has published articles on this subject in refereed journals.