

Definition

According to the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), information literacy is a set of abilities enabling individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information." The information competent student:

- determines the nature and extent of the information needed.
- accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.
- evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.
- uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.
- understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.

Association of College & Research Libraries. *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*. American Library Association, 2000.

Rationale

Information literacy is necessary for life-long learning, problem-solving, decision-making, and academic success.

Because different disciplines use different information in different ways, students benefit from being exposed to information literacy training in a variety of 100-level courses, not just in one. Furthermore, because advanced levels of information literacy are discipline-specific, students should be taught information literacy skills in their majors, and not just in the general education program.

Criteria for Approving Proposals

In order for a course to be designated as an information literacy course, a clear plan needs to be in place for how the instructor in collaboration with librarians will:

1. teach information literacy (as described in the learning outcomes) as part of the class.
2. require students to utilize information literacy in completing at least one assignment.
3. assess the extent to which students can meet the learning outcomes identified below.

Learning outcomes for a 100-level course

- Consult a librarian for assistance/guidance.
- Differentiate between the library catalog, a subscription research database, and the "free" web, and start to understand reasons to use each, evaluating resources using established set of criteria.
- Understand what a periodical is and learn the difference between a newspaper, a popular magazine, a trade publication, and a scholarly journal.
- Be able to construct a simple search, understand the difference between keyword and subject searching, and broaden or narrow searches as necessary.
- Understand the idea of academic integrity and how it relates to plagiarism.

Learning outcomes for a 200- or 300-level course

- Understand how knowledge is organized in their major discipline.
- Know and recognize classic ideas, journals, and thinkers in their field.
- Plan a strategy to accomplish needed research.
- Use the important databases in their major field, utilizing more advanced database searching strategies, such as field searching, nested searching, and limiters as appropriate.
- Begin using other kinds of resources (newspaper indexes, special collections, other libraries, organization web pages, primary sources, grey literature, experts, statistics) as needed.
- Evaluate information in their field with the logic of their field, applying more advanced evaluation criteria.
- Understand academic integrity guidelines within their discipline.

Source Information on Similar Requirements at other Good Schools

The following schools have information literacy programs as part of their general education requirements and in which information literacy is taught in courses.

- Wartburg College: <http://public.wartburg.edu/library/infolit/index.html>
<http://public.wartburg.edu/library/infolit/Handouts/ProgramDescription.doc>
- King's College: http://www.aacu.org/aacu_news/AACUNews05/February05/feature.cfm

Characteristics of Programs of Information Literacy that Illustrate Best Practices: A Guideline
<http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/characteristics.cfm>

Teaching Resources

Open-source tutorials exist to help teach first-year students basic information literacy. These tutorials can be adapted so they are geared to Simpson students and to Dunn Library. One of the most commonly adapted tutorials is TILT, the Texas Information Literacy Tutorial (<http://tilt.lib.utsystem.edu/>).

Another option is Searchpath (<http://www.wmich.edu/library/searchpath/docs/opl/index.html>) which incorporates aspects of TILT but is easier to customize. Mary Peterson has used it for our plagiarism tutorial.

The University of Maryland University College has a nice set of materials available online for faculty who are interested in incorporating information literacy assignments into their courses. This site includes advice for incorporating information literacy statements into syllabi, examples of writing assignments, and examples of how to assess those assignments.

Information Literacy and Writing Assessment Project: Tutorial for Developing and Evaluating Assignments:
http://www.umuc.edu/library/tutorials/information_literacy/toc.html

Assessment Resources

Information literacy can be assessed by thorough testing, preferably by both pretesting and post-testing. Wartburg uses a pretest-posttest system to assess information literacy. Their assessment report can be read at <http://www.wartburg.edu/library/download/studentevaluation.doc>.

A variety of universities require students to pass a series of information literacy quizzes in order to pass the information literacy requirement.

1. Utah State University. Students must pass (with 70% or better) 6 tests to complete the Computer and Information Literacy requirement (<http://cil.usu.edu/>)
2. University of Wisconsin-Parkside. Complete the 5 modules within the tutorial and earn grades of 80% or better on each quiz. (<http://www.uwp.edu/departments/library/infolit/intro/>)

Examples of Classes

English 102 and LAS both currently have some information literacy training as part of them. Many 100-level courses could be modified to include information literacy.

The most logical courses in the majors in which to teach information literacy are those that teach writing in the disciplines. For example, Psyc 299 Experimental Methodology is the course in which psychology majors learn to conduct empirical research and write research reports. That would be an excellent place to teach information literacy within psychology.

Staffing and Costs

No additional library or faculty staff would be needed to implement an information literacy requirement.

Implementation Challenges

Other institutions have discovered faculty resistance to an information literacy requirement based on the mistaken belief that teaching information literacy is remediation for unprepared students.