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### Discipline-based Information Literacy: Experience, Themes and Recommendations

Carolyn Sanford  
*Carleton College*

Mary Savina  
*Carleton College*

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# Discipline-based Information Literacy:

Experience, Themes and  
Recommendations

Minnesota Library Association October 7, 2004

Carolyn Sanford and Mary Savina, Carleton College

# Basic Features

- Funded by Mellon Foundation
- Focus on academic disciplines (majors)
- Five departments: Classical Languages, Economics, English, Geology and History
- Report Summary:  
<http://www.carleton.edu/campus/library/reference/InfoLit/MellonTOC.htm>

# Institutional context

- Successful Writing-Across-Curriculum program (funded by Bush Foundation)
- Successful Learning and Teaching Center
- Other cross-disciplinary conversations about literacies and skills
- Recent study of senior year (and senior integrative experience)
- Accrediting agency

# Components of Program

- Basis in faculty development
- Department retreats
- Grants to departments and individual faculty members
- Departmental assessment and evaluation
- Public reporting of results

# ACRL Definition of Information Literacy

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 Competency Standards for Higher Education, ACRL, 2000*

# Liberal Arts Definition

“In liberal arts colleges, librarians and faculty assist students in developing a sophisticated relationship with information by fostering appropriate expectations for information sources, and respect for the intellectual work of others.”

*FYILLAA / First Year Information Literacy in the Liberal Arts  
Assessment Project*

(current project funded by the MITC / Midwest Information Technology  
Center)

# Discipline Definitions of Information Literacy

- “What it means to be a ....”
- Definitions or skills list
- Institutional Research: “What are you measuring?”



# Classics:

- Knowing what sorts of questions and problems Classicists study;
- Understanding how and when to use any reference or search tools appropriate to answer these questions and problems;
- Understanding how to evaluate the information these tools uncover.

# Economics

## Data Literacy / Information Literacy Skills

- Use of EconLit, JSTOR, SSCI/WOS
- Identifying publicly available data sets
- Organizing a literature review
- Locating summary articles
- Identifying seminal works
- Identifying research questions
- Determining whether data exist to answer a research question
- Critical reading of articles in leading journals

# English

- Grounded in literary texts
- Knowledge of methods to access and evaluate primary texts (including rare and special editions)
- Knowledge of technologies involved in accessing on-line resources and evaluating those resources

# Geology

Information-literate geologists should be:

- Proficient in using the full range of information sources in the discipline (incl. maps, data, field guides, etc.);
- Able to search and locate documents, manage search results, evaluate sources;
- Able to frame a research question, determine if it is answerable and where to get the information
- Able to use established procedures to cite and acknowledge sources of information

# History

- Able to formulate and answer historical questions on the basis of primary sources
- Able to use secondary sources to enlarge dossier of sources, perspectives and questions
- Understand concepts of intellectual honesty and proper crediting of others' work
- Familiar with library resources
- Develop a research project
- Situate oneself in a pre-existing field or body of literature

# Common Themes?

- Yes, there are some – but. . .
  - Definitions have a unique flavor – both disciplinary and institutional
  - Students come with different levels of skills and expertise
  - Faculty are already doing many activities but need to make them explicit and predictable
  - Focus on comps

# Economics Department Experience

- Preparing students for comps - Data!
- Departmental Review - as long as we're doing this, why not add in info lit!
- Junior and Senior surveys
- Librarian's involvement
- Evaluations

# Highlights from Other Departments

- History – rubric for evaluating senior thesis bibliographies
- Classics – Analecta Technica portfolio requirement for juniors
- Geology – requiring senior theses to have EndNote bibliographies and using these to assess information literacy
- English – focus on the book as an object; use of rare book collection



# Liaison Librarians

- Developed a publicity program
- Focused more on staff development
- Increased visibility, more connected
- First Year Student Library Survey
- Increased one-on-one consultations

# Assessment tools developed

- Department surveys
- Skills lists for the discipline
- Portfolios
- Annual departmental discussions or evaluations about information literacy

# Successes

- Sharing of assignments within departments
- Focused on the whole student experience in the discipline
- Steering Committee
- Librarians more connected to departments
- Appointments with liaison librarians

# More Successes

- Information literacy embedded in Carleton consciousness
  - New faculty orientation
  - Discussions of cross-cutting skills and literacies
  - Other departments moving forward
  - Reviewed by major governance
  - Curricular grants from the Dean
- Related initiatives
  - ACM Interdisciplinary Discussion
  - WAC & ILAC
  - FYILLAA survey

# Problems

- Terminology problematic
- Turnover in department faculty and library staff
- Departments started at different places
- Absence of follow-through in individual courses
- Disciplines vary in class prerequisites or having no sequential requirements
- Assessment difficult
- Departments lacked vision of how to incorporate librarian

# Lessons

- One size does not fit all.
- Consciousness of information literacy was raised across campus.
- Grant activities facilitated discussions about all aspects of student learning and curriculum, not just information literacy.
- Involvement of librarians was a more natural fit in some disciplines.

# Recommendations

- Engage in information literacy initiatives in a broad curricular context, with other opportunities, such as department reviews, writing workshops, etc.
- Let faculty interest and direction drive the program
- Assist liaison librarians in gaining subject expertise
- Allow opportunities for cross-discipline discussions, but structure the initiative on a department level

# Stepping into the Future

- Faculty & departmental grants
- Small, targeted workshops
- Use expertise within the college
- Campus literacies initiative
- Faculty leadership



# Librarian Colleen McFarland:

- “In preparing to reflect upon my experiences with the History Department..., I was struck by the fact that, by traditional measures, there appeared to be little impact...yet...significant, though sometimes subtle, change occurred in the relationships...a strong sense of trust and respect developed, which, when publicly manifested over time, transformed the nature of the librarian-student interaction.”