

CUNY COUNCIL OF CHIEF LIBRARIANS INFORMATION LITERACY WHITE PAPER

Information literacy (IL) is defined as a process by which students come to

- Recognize when they have a need for information
- Identify the kinds of information needed to address a given problem or issue
- Develop a search strategy and find and evaluate the needed information
- Organize the information and use it effectively to address the problem at hand
- Use the information legally and ethically.

The Council of Chief Librarians recommends that Information Literacy be fully implemented across the City University of New York, including

- The formation of a task force--appointed by the provosts--on each campus to determine ways that IL can be incorporated into the general education requirement for all programs. These groups might include interested librarians; professionals with expertise on learning theory, instructional design, and testing; as well as teaching faculty who effectively incorporate library research or IL into their courses.
- Extensive training of librarians and faculty--utilizing our videoconferencing infrastructure -- on information literacy principles and best practices.
- Library partnerships with CUNY departments and programs to make explicit how appropriate information and research competencies are imparted to all graduates.
- Ongoing study of the information-gathering behaviors of faculty and students, including those engaged in online and distance learning.
- Careful assessment of IL outcomes.

EXPLANATION: THE CHALLENGE

Today's college students and graduates will spend their work life in an era of ubiquitous computing, networked and interactive communication, and information overload. To succeed in this era of knowledge work requires competencies in creating, sharing, searching out, using, and evaluating information to make judgements and solve problems. A "fourth R," (Information) Retrieval must be added as a basic competency for the educated worker and professional.

THE RESPONSE: INFORMATION LITERACY

Over the past decade, the concept, and program, of information literacy has developed within the context of "active learning" and "learning how to learn." A broad coalition of educators, led by librarians, has promoted IL as an important theme in higher education and institutional accreditation. Specifically, the historical call from the Middle States Association that *each institution should foster optimal use of its learning resources through strategies designed to help students develop information literacy*,¹ was expanded recently to make clear that: *the knowledge, skills, and tools to obtain information in many formats and media in order to identify, retrieve, and apply relevant and valid knowledge and information resources ... is vital to all disciplines*.²

Traditionally, IL training focused on print materials and the production of a research paper. Today additional emphases include the interpretation of visual materials (such as charts and graphs), using the Internet with discernment, exchanging information collaboratively, and using media in the presentation of findings.³ The new CUNY Proficiency Exam requirements of analytic reading and writing and interpreting material from charts and tables express current expectations of the

University in this regard. Another emphasis is on understanding the requirements of effective assessment of IL "outcomes" as developed in the ACRL Information Literacy Standards (for a summary statement of desirable outcomes, see Appendix), recently expanded into guidelines for librarian-instructors in a report on the "Objectives for Information Literacy Outcomes."⁴

ACTIONS: CUNY COUNCIL OF CHIEF LIBRARIANS

In step with these developments, the Council of Chief Librarians has proactively supported the intensive training of CUNY librarians in Association of College and Research Libraries Institutes for Information Literacy, reviewed existing programs on the various campuses, encouraged the hiring of IL specialists by CUNY libraries, initiated development of an interactive IL tutorial, and adopted this White Paper for purposes of promoting its recommendations.

¹ Commission on Higher Education/Middle States Association. *Characteristics for Excellence in Higher Education*. 1994, pp. 15-16.

² Middle States Commission on Higher Education, *Characteristics of Excellence*, Draft, (Nov. 1, 2000), p. 29.

³ Iannuzzi, P., et al. *Teaching Information Literacy Skills*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999.

⁴ ACRL IL Standards for Higher Education. <http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilcomstan.html>; for "Objectives" see *College and Research Libraries News* 62:4 (April 2001): 416-428.

APPENDIX: Information Literacy Outcomes (Summary)

Outcome 1: The information literate student defines and articulates information needs by

- Consulting faculty, librarians, peers, and a variety of resources
- Utilizing print, media, and Web resources as appropriate considering cost, time, and availability
- Reviewing and adapting the information needed.

Outcome 2: The information literate student accesses information effectively by

- Selecting the best method of investigation (research, lab, fieldwork)
- Designing appropriate search strategies (beyond "keyword" and Web browser)
- Utilizing available resources (print, human, database)
- Refining the strategy as the search progresses
- Capturing, managing, formatting and recording information for effective use.

Outcome 3: The information literate student evaluates and incorporates information into their knowledge base and value system (context) by:

- Restating concepts in his/her own terms
- Synthesizing and integrating information into knowledge
- Articulating, expressing, and adapting knowledge in dialogue and communication
- Reviewing and assessing his/her understanding of the issue at hand.

Outcome 4: The information literate student uses knowledge (individually or as a group member) to accomplish their purpose by

- Planning, revising, and presenting his/her new knowledge effectively
- Utilizing appropriate media and formats.

Outcome 5: The information literate student attributes sources without

- Plagiarism
- Invasion of privacy, or
- Violation of intellectual property rights.