Information literacy competencies

By Dennis Isbell and Carol Hammond

A curricular building block and marketing tool for libraries

The librarians at Arizona State University West, a new campus in the metropolitan Phoenix area established in 1984, have had the uncommon opportunity to work with faculty in developing curriculum and supporting library programs from the ground up. The library was the first building constructed and occupied on the campus, making development of the library and its services high on the list of institutional priorities. The campus continues to experience rapid growth both in the size of the faculty and the student population. A strong partnership between the library and the faculty has been fostered, which facilitated the growth of an active library instruction program. Bibliographic instruction efforts in this environment concentrated on building a course-integrated program that would promote effective use of a highly electronic library.

Even though both student and faculty opinion surveys indicated high levels of satisfaction with the library, librarians in the course of program review identified areas in library instruction that could be improved. Some of the program weaknesses identified were the number of students reached, which was not as great as it might be; a continuing reliance on the individual faculty member for including (or not including) library instruction in their courses; a growing inability to cover everything in one-hour classes; a desire to teach not just sources, but strategies—including database design and structure, and critical evaluation of information and sources; and the need to make library instruction more relevant to the needs of modern information users. In other words, what we wanted to accomplish was more successful marketing and a program that focused on the elements of Information Literacy.

Student library competencies and information literacy

To reach these two goals, our objectives were to revise and improve library instruction to make it more relevant, market the program to growing numbers of new faculty, and promote inclusion of an information literacy component in the curriculum development plans of each academic unit. As a strategy to get started, a task force developed a list of student information literacy competencies. Using the list, a one-page handout was designed featuring the library logo and the title *Information Literacy Competencies for Students.*

This document is used as a focus for the program as well as a major marketing tool. The list of competencies has served to give all the librarians, each of whom is responsible for instruction in different assigned disciplines, an outline for structuring their classes and lectures. It has also been used as an effective tool for marketing information literacy to the faculty at ASU West. Librarians who speak with faculty use the sheet as the vehicle for marketing the concept and promoting the instruction goals we identified. It serves as a fact sheet, goal statement, outcome measurement tool, and reminder that can be left with groups or individuals at the end of a discussion.

The competencies developed are purposely broad. Keeping them broad initially more easily captures the interest of faculty who are intrigued with the concepts, but less so with the details. They are flexible enough to cover all disciplines, and yet, when used within a par-

Dennis Isbell is research support services librarian, bitnet: icdbi@asuacad, and Carol Hammond is head of research and information access services at Arizona State University West, Phoenix.

ticular department or unit, can be adapted to include specific skill- and knowledge-based competencies developed from the broader competency goals. They are easily understood and translated into program goals. They capture all the important aspects of information literacy that can be used in the further development of a library instruction program.

The library competencies document as a marketing tool

Some of the ways that *Information Literacy Competencies for Students* has been used to market and promote instruction are:

- Presenting the list to the campus Library Committee, an advisory group composed of faculty. The committee endorsed the competencies and distributed a recommendation to all department heads that a librarian be included on each curriculum committee. This encouraged library participation in academic planning at the campus level and was a first step towards building the program into the curricular plans being developed by each unit.
- Distributing the document to new faculty during orientation to describe the goals of the program and how it can benefit and enhance the student's experience in a course. This emphasizes to new faculty the importance that is placed in information literacy as a component of the education that students receive, and its link to their own teaching. Handing out one single important page has an impact, especially since orientation is a time of information overload for most new faculty. A handbook with detailed information, the *Library Guide to Programs and Services for Faculty*, is distributed later.
- Using the list as part of the documentation for the development of new courses and the revision of others. Librarians have participated in team-teaching courses that have incorporated the competencies, and helped design courses to include these goals. A new credit course, Using the Library for Teaching, has been approved and will be taught by a librarian and offered through the Education Department. Another credit course on using electronic resources is in development. Both were marketed using *Information Literacy Competencies*.
- Incorporating the concept as part of the goals for the development of the whole curriculum in some academic units. Librarians who serve on curriculum committees have the opportunity to present information literacy to faculty in an especially effective and receptive environment and to contribute to plans being made. In one unit, an entire information literacy proposal is under consideration that will build the concepts into courses. Faculty have indicated they would not have thought of it on their own, but strongly support the objectives when they have been presented in this format. By building information literacy into the curriculum, instruction becomes less reliant on the inclinations of individual faculty and more an expected part of course development.
- Identifying targets and goals for strategic planning and other kinds of long-range planning both within the library and on campus. The competencies have been submitted in response to environmental scanning underway in academic units.
- Encouraging faculty to provide more class time for library instruction by showing them a larger picture of what is being provided for students. The competencies have been a useful tool for presenting this concept with successful results.

The list has also been used to establish common goals with faculty derived from shared experience in the classroom and joint responsibility for student outcomes.

- Including the list along with the course syllabus distributed to students. Faculty have voluntarily distributed the list to classes, which has served to underscore library instruction as an integral and expected part of the course, and to identify for the students the short- and long-range objectives.

An additional and important outcome within the library is that the task force initially established to develop *Information Literacy Competencies for Students* has continued to meet and has taken responsibility for finding additional new directions for the instruction program. Using information literacy as a starting point for discussion within the library itself, the staff has taken a new look at how instruction is provided and what can be done to meet more of the identified goals and outcomes. The task force is now planning workshops on electronic sources for students and faculty, creating a team-

taught credit course on using electronic resources, devising ways to incorporate more active-learning and critical-thinking techniques into course-based instruction, and preparing a pilot program for measuring student outcomes based on the competencies.

The task force and individual librarians continue to find additional uses and strategies for using the document. The positive responses and results achieved so far, in a relatively short period of time, is convincing evidence that *Information Literacy Competencies for Students* is an effective marketing tool that can produce significant results.

References

For additional information on information literacy in the curriculum, see:

American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy. *Final Report*. Chicago: LA, 1989.

Susan N. Bjoner, "The Information Literacy Curriculum—A Working Model," *Iatul Quarterly* 5 (1991): 150–160.

Patricia Senn Breivik, "Information Literacy: An Agenda for Lifelong Learning," *AAHE Bulletin* (March 1992): 6–9.

Lawrence J. McCrank, "Academic Programs for Information Literacy: Theory and Structure," *RQ* 31 (Summer 1992): 485–497.

Marilyn Naito, "An Information Literacy Curriculum: A Proposal," *College & Research Libraries News* 52 (May 1991): 293–296.

Hannelore B. Rader, "Information Literacy: A Revolution in the Library," *RQ* 31 (Fall 1991): 25–30. ■

INFORMATION LITERACY COMPETENCIES FOR STUDENTS

Information or library literacy centers on three broad abilities:
- the ability to access information
- the ability to evaluate information
- the ability to synthesize information

Once these are mastered, the potential for lifelong learning is in place.

Conceptual Competencies:
- Understand:

  the difference between information and knowledge (knowledge as a synthesis of information).

  that the framework of knowledge is constantly shifting; that information and knowledge in a discipline is a social construction, an ongoing dialogue among scholars.

  the basic organization of a library and the different types of access tools to a library's collections.

  the links among information centers and the access points available through technology and reference sources.

  the differing information structures in the disciplines and the stages of growth of the literature and information within a discipline.

  the criteria used to evaluate information for its content, source, quality, and relevance.

  that there are a number of different research strategies and models that can be employed to structure a research project in each discipline, and that one needs to remain flexible while doing research.

  the basic structure of electronic databases and the strategies used to access information from them.

  the conventions of scholarly research, such as proper citation and intellectual property rights.

- Recognize the different levels, types, and formats of information and their appropriate uses.
- Develop an awareness of the relevant issues affecting information access policy, such as copyright, privacy, privatization of government information, electronic access to information, and the exponential growth of information.