Report on the National Information Literacy Survey

Documenting progress throughout the United States

by Gabriela Sonntag

W hat do we know about campus information literacy programs? Librarians are caught up in a whirlwind of activity. Faculty are aware of the numerous and varied information sources that are available. There are more requests for instruction, and librarians are reaching a larger number of students than ever before. Disciplinary faculty and librarians are more attentive to the need to teach students the methods for accessing and critically evaluating information. Students are required to use a greater variety of sources when writing papers. At the campus level, academic senates have adopted information literacy resolutions, committees have established information literacy requirements in the curriculum, and varied examples of the reform of general education show inclusion of information literacy.

More than five years have passed since the first survey of information literacy programs at higher education institutions was conducted by the National Forum on Information Literacy, (ACRL), Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, and Western Accreditation Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities.[1]

These years have seen tremendous national activity in information literacy. Fore-

most within ACRL was the creation in 1997 of the Institute for Information Literacy[2] with its Immersion Program for librarian professional development, and institutional best practice and community partners' initiatives.

More recently, two efforts stand out—the ALA Special Presidential Committee on Information Literacy Community Partnerships[3] and the development, endorsement, publication, and distribution of the "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education."[4] Not only have these efforts been widely applauded, but their impact can be seen in the explosion of activity within the institutions of higher education as evidenced by presentations at professional conferences.
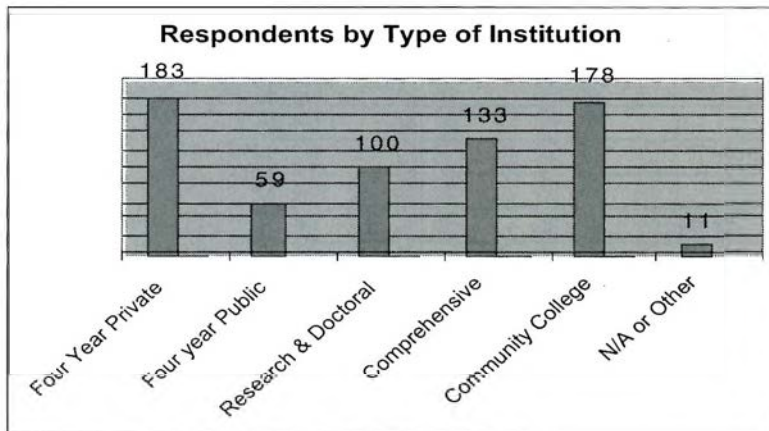
The National Information Literacy Survey provides an updated snapshot of information literacy programming in higher education institutions. Developed by ACRL and supported by the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE), this survey was e-mailed to the vice presidents of academic units at approximately 2,700 institutions in May 2001; a reminder notice was sent two weeks later.

Responses were submitted electronically using a Web-based survey form. Of the possible respondents, 710 institutions or 26 percent responded to the survey. Compilation of data used 664 valid submissions. These

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figures are comparable to the 1994 survey in which 834 or 20 percent of the 3,236 institutions responded. Institutions were classified according to the Carnegie Classification system.

Respondents by Type of Institution

Main goals of the survey

What information did we want to gather with the National Information Literacy Survey? The main goals of the survey are to gather reliable data to support information literacy program development; compare information literacy experiences across various types of institutions; and document success in establishing information literacy within the curriculum.

Specifically, the survey asks respondents to define information literacy. What aspects of the definition are particularly important? What groups on campus are discussing information literacy? Are some disciplines more focused on information literacy than others? Are non-faculty groups also discussing information literacy? Is there a match between those groups that discuss information literacy and those that adopt standards or develop a formal charge for teaching information literacy? Gathering this information can assist those institutions that are developing a program to know which campus groups might be approached.

A second focus was on the different models being used to integrate information literacy. Do most institutions distinguish between information literacy and computer literacy or technology use? Are institutions adopting the standards? Which groups of students within a university are targeted for information literacy instruction? How many institutions have a formal information literacy requirement and/ or information literacy charge? How long has

the requirement or information literacy program been in existence?

The higher education accreditation associations, both general and disciplinary-specific, are aware of and embracing information literacy, and are either considering or have adopted information literacy standards. Therefore, another set of questions looked for a match between the accrediting body and those institutions that have an information literacy requirement or charge. Are the accrediting bodies that have embraced information literacy facilitating the discussion on campus?

Lastly, the survey asked three open-ended questions: How do we know that information literacy instruction is beneficial to students? What has been the impact of the instruction on campus? What are the common barriers to developing information literacy program?

Many institutions that have not adopted the term "information literacy" use a different name for the same concept. To obtain a clearer picture of an institution's definition of information literacy, the following question was asked: "When defining information literacy at your institution, what are the three most important elements that you include in the definition?"

It was evident that most respondents were familiar with the "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education," as they referred to them in their definition. Focusing on finding or accessing information was important in the definitions of 18 percent of the respondents. Fully 28 percent either quoted Standard Three ("The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically") or mentioned critical thinking and evaluation. Another 9 percent mentioned computer literacy or use of technology, and 9 percent again mentioned defining the need for information (determines nature and extent of information needed). Other definitions include wording such as "course integrated or related," "integrated into the learning process," or "student-centered with focus on active learning."

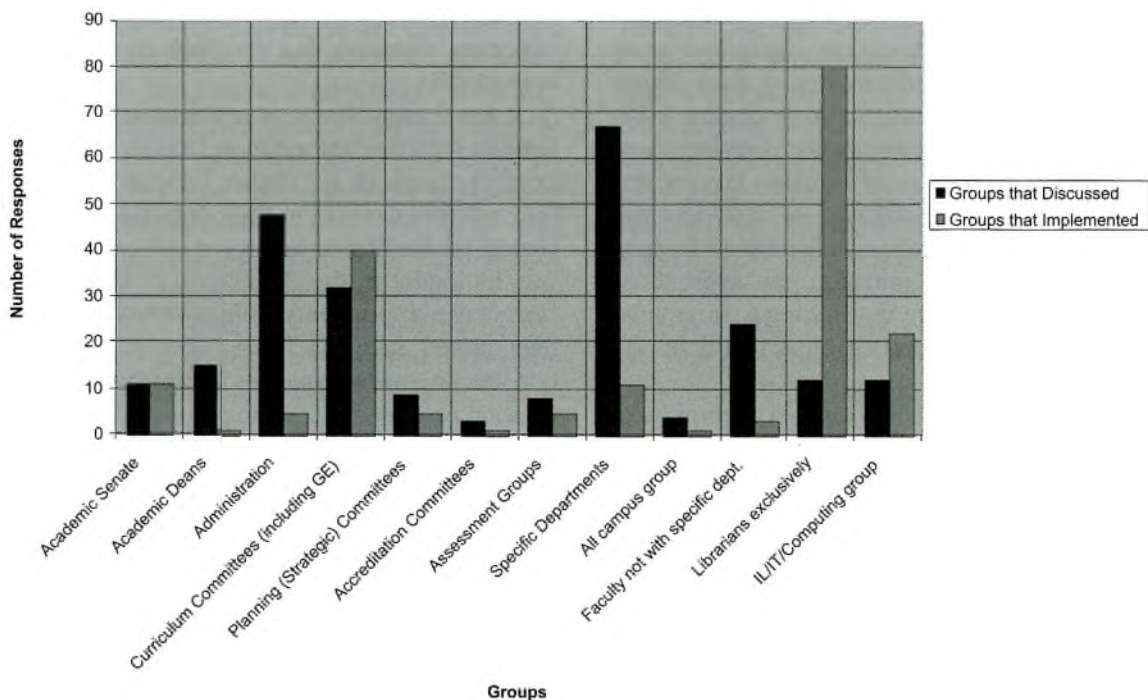| Groups responsible for standards implementation	Number
Librarians and library committees exclusively	80
General Education Committee	28
Information Literacy or Information Technology/Computing group	22
Curriculum Committees	12
Specific Departments	11
Academic Senate	11
Planning (Strategic) Committees	5
Administration	5
Assessment Groups	5
System-wide or State-wide	4
Campus Accreditation Committees	1
Faculty not identified with a specific department	3
Academic Deans	1
All campus group	1

are using the standards within the library or that individuals are using the standards, but that the *institution* has not implemented them.

Many of the responses were followed with comments about the librarian efforts to disseminate information throughout the campus. In fact, this can be seen in the wide response to the question regarding group discussion of information literacy on campus.

The survey results clearly show that a fairly uniform set of standards for information literacy are widely accepted by higher education institutions of all types. There is a desire to make sure that students gain skills that meet these standards. When asked if the institution had used the "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education," the responses that although adopted by ACRL in January 2001, they are already being widely distributed. Most respondents state that they

In the chart below, we list the various groups that respondents identified when asked: "If your institution has implemented information literacy standards, what committee, group, or council was responsible?" Results clearly show that library-based groups are much more involved in the discussion of standards than any other group on campus.
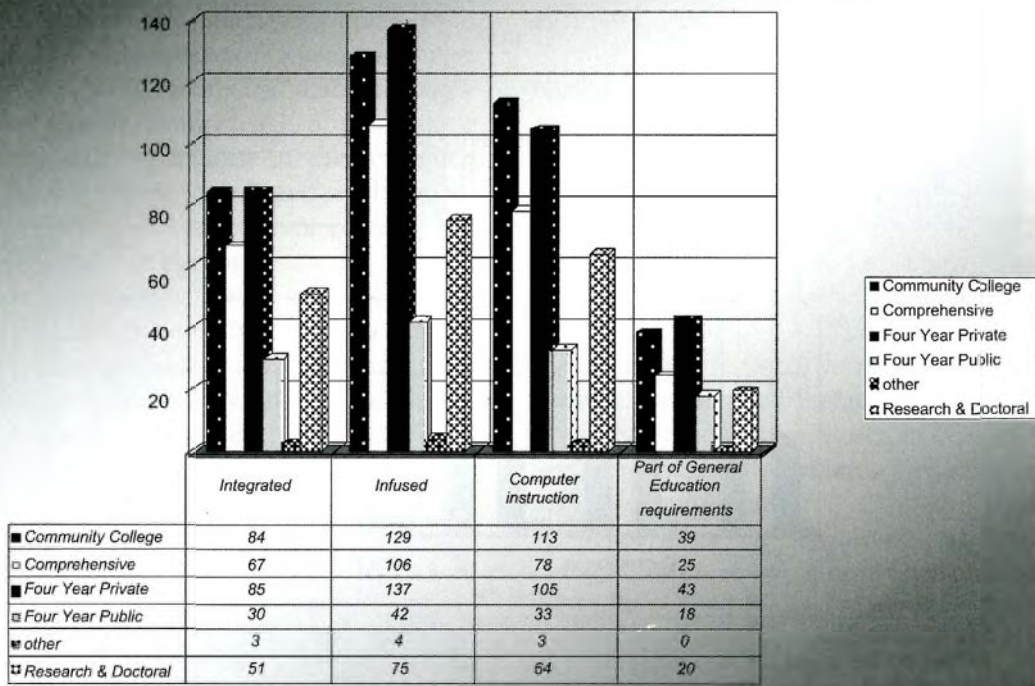
Comparison of Groups that Discussed and Groups that Implemented

	Integrated	Infused	Computer instruction	Part of General Education requirements
■ Community College	84	129	113	39
□ Comprehensive	67	106	78	25
■ Four Year Private	85	137	105	43
▣ Four Year Public	30	42	33	18
▧ other	3	4	3	0
▨ Research & Doctoral	51	75	64	20

It is very difficult to develop a program if you face a situation as noted by one survey participant, "Information literacy is viewed as 'remedial skills' by faculty. Institution is unwilling to 'mandate' this kind of curricular change." Or another "Faculty (and administration) acknowledge the need for it, but say they cannot add another requirement because they do not have time to teach what they should now." The following chart notes however that there is a variety of groups discussing information literacy while implementation is stronger within the library and in curriculum committees.

One respondent sums it up for many saying, "Information literacy initiatives will be developed in the future. We are currently re-evaluating our mission and all policies." There are varied methods for including information literacy as seen in these responses categorized by the Carnegie Classification or institution type.

Many campuses are including information literacy in a variety of ways. Of the respondents, 26 percent noted using at least 2 of these methods and 29 percent included 3 of the 4 methods. We can see that some institutions are experiencing success. Some respondents sum it up for us this way, "Information & Technology Competency" (as it is called here) is one of five campus-wide student learning outcomes." Another states: "Information skills are part of the college's culture. Students and faculty skill levels have increased significantly since the program began. These responses demonstrate the range of success of librarians developing information literacy programs.
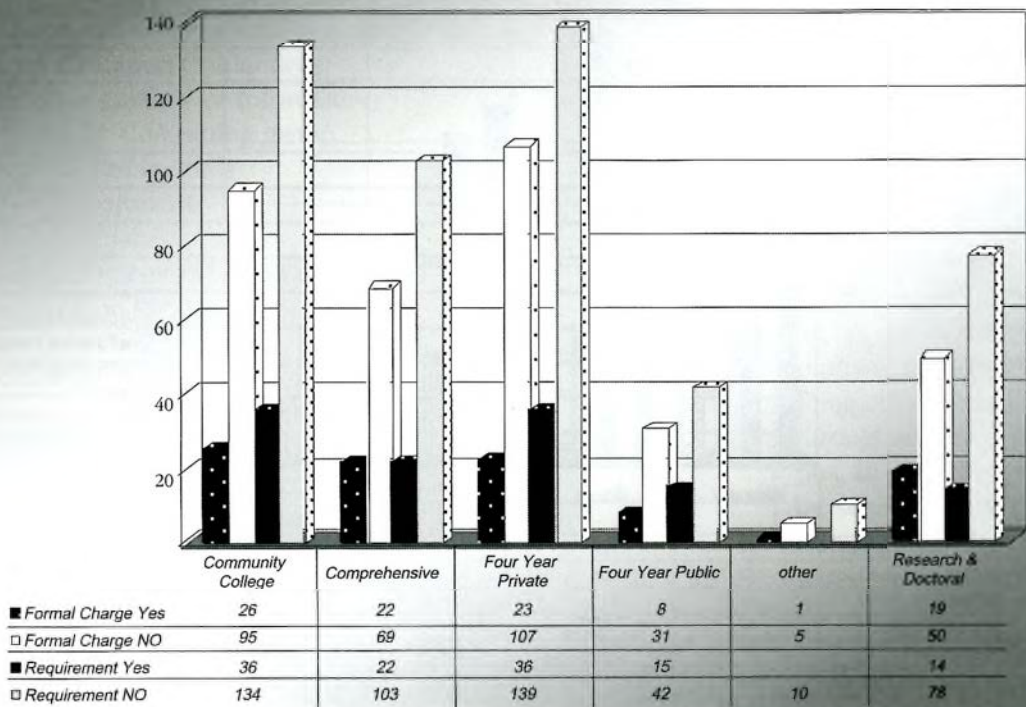
The survey asked questions about information literacy requirements. One asked respondents if their institutions had a formal charge that mandated the teaching of information literacy. Only 99 institutions had a formal charge. When asked, "Does your institution have a specific information literacy requirement?" only 123 institutions stated that they had a specific requirement. The following chart shows the answers to these two questions with a breakdown by institutional type.

The survey clearly shows that there is general dissatisfaction with the way in which programs have been implemented up to this point.

A third question asked, "How long has this requirement been in existence?" Of the respondents to this question, 48 percent (64 institutions) had programs that had been in existence 3 years or less. Another 29 percent had programs dating between 4 and 7 years.

Only about 80 of the 664 respondents have a formal program in place with a method for

Q.5 and 6 by Institution Type

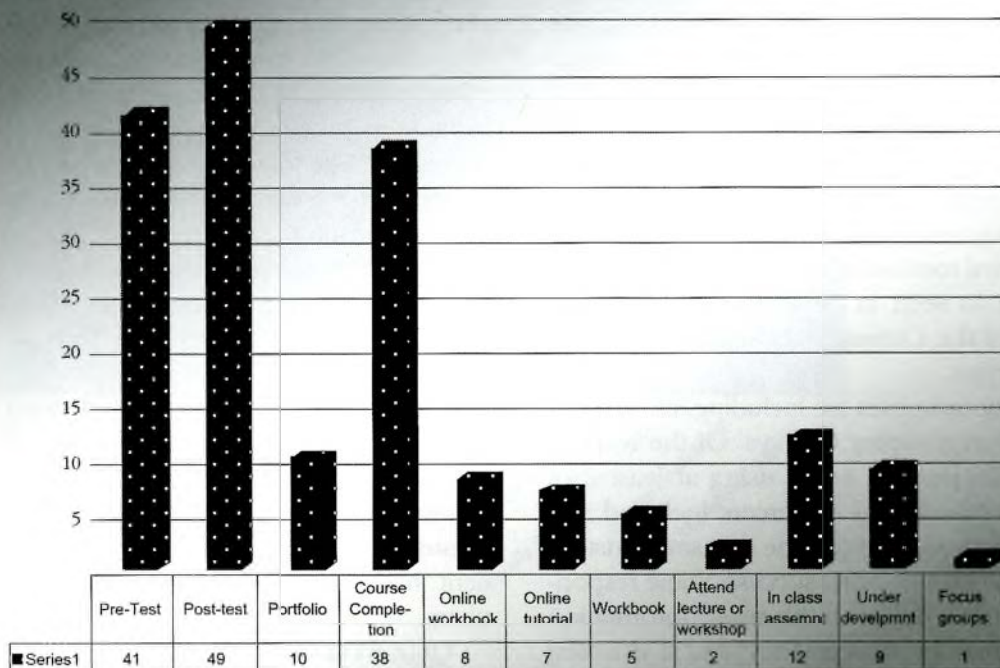|	Community College	Comprehensive	Four Year Private	Four Year Public	other	Research & Doctoral
■ Formal Charge Yes	26	22	23	8	1	19
□ Formal Charge NO	95	69	107	31	5	50
■ Requirement Yes	36	22	36	15		14
□ Requirement NO	134	103	139	42	10	78

assessing student performance. Among the institutions who accept some information literacy standards, most have no program implemented, or only a minimal program. Yet numerous respondents stated that a program was being developed or was at the very least, in discussion at the library level.

Conclusion

As a result, this study makes a fairly strong case that institutions need, and want, guidance on implementing successful information literacy programs.

Those who have programs are looking to assess student learning and evaluate the im-

Q.11 Types of Assessment

	Pre-Test	Post-test	Portfolio	Course Completion	Online workbook	Online tutorial	Workbook	Attend lecture or workshop	In class assemnt	Under develpmnt	Focus groups
■ Series1	41	49	10	38	8	7	5	2	12	9	1

pact of their efforts. When asked to share with us "What has been the impact of your campus information literacy program?" one respondent was very clear: "Faculty are more aware of what librarians can teach and how it relates to what faculty teach. Students have more complex questions at the reference desk." Many others contributed similar anecdotal evidence and stated their plans to being assessment in the future.

One respondent shares with us: "Apart from my own teaching, information literacy is just being introduced on this campus. So far I am getting a positive response, but we have a long way to go before I would consider that information literacy is even being implemented."

The National Information Literacy Survey will provide librarians with reliable data to support their programs. It gives them ex-amples of practice at various types of institutions, and it demonstrates success in establishing information literacy within the curriculum.[5]

Notes

1. The survey report can be found as an appendix to Patricia Senn Breivik's book *Student Learning in the Information Age* (American Council on Education/Oryx Press, 1998).

2. For more information see the Institute's Web page at http://www.ala.org/acrl/nili/nilihp.html.

3. For more information see http://www.ala.org/kranich/literacy.html.

4. The Standards are available from ACRL. See more information at http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilcomstan.html.

5. For more on the survey, see http://www.ala.org/acrl/infolit.html (available Nov. 2001). ∎

Letter to the editor

I had just finished service on a search committee when I read Philip C. Howze's excellent article "New librarians and job hunting" (June 2001). I wanted to add a few suggestions to those persons looking for a job:

1. Do not assume that someone will contact you and ask for information you have not yet supplied. . . . It is incumbent upon the applicant to verify that the necessary materials have arrived.

2. Failure to address each and every one of the job requirements may, in fact, remove you from consideration in some circumstances. Make sure your letter of application addresses every stated required and desired or preferred qualification . . .

3. Do not address letters of application to "Dear Sirs." For all you know, the search committee may be made up entirely of women . . .

4. Do not forward a résumé that lists your "career goals." . . . We know you have career goals, and if you make it to the interview stage, someone is likely to ask you about them.

5. Spell checkers don't check everything. Have someone—a friend, a colleague, a professor, your mentor—read everything before you send it . . .

6. Regarding references—do not list the "most important" people you know. List people who know you, know your work, and can (and will) comment positively (and enthusiastically) on your skills and attributes . . .

7. If you haven't heard anything from the search committee and you would like more information about the status of the search, contact the institution and inquire. However, do not make a pest of yourself. Call once. Do not call before the closing date . . .

8. Be kind to the search committees, even if they aren't always kind to you. If you accept a position with Library B before you've heard from Library A, send Library A an e-mail or a letter withdrawing your application. It is courteous and professional . . .

And finally, if you believe that you've been treated shabbily by an organization during this process (e.g., you sent everything on time and no one ever got back to you, and you had to telephone to find out that they had already hired someone), don't take it to heart. . . . This kind of behavior on the part of an organization may tell you that perhaps this isn't the place you want to begin your career.—*Sara B. Sluss, California State University, Long Beach, e-mail: sbsluss@csulb.edu* ∎