Immersion '99

Reports from the Institute for Information Literacy program

by Chris Grugel and Madeline A. Copp

ACRL's Institute for Information Literacy held its first immersion program, July 23–28, 1999, at Plattsburgh State University of New York. This intensive four-and-a-half-day conference exploring the many dimensions of information literacy, attracted wide interest and the number of applicants (256) soon exceeded the number of openings (90) available.

Participants came from all types of academic libraries, representing 34 states, Canada, Sweden, and Puerto Rico.

Conference participants were divided into two separate tracks: Track I was designed for new librarians and librarians new to teaching, while Track II was designed for experienced instruction librarians who wanted to further develop and integrate information literacy programs within their institutions. This article shares reports from both Track 1 and a Track II participants.

Immersion '99 participants take a break from their studies at a picnic with "Honey the Waitress": (top row from left to right) Michele Mach, Janeanne Rockwell-Kincanon, "Honey," (bottom row from left to right) Jennifer Carmody, Priscilla McIntosh, Kristen Miller, and Chris Yurgelonis.

Track I: Defining information literacy

I am a reference librarian at Carthage College, a small liberal arts college in Kenosha, Wisconsin. I wanted to understand the concepts of developing an information literacy program so I could introduce them to my colleagues at Carthage, and together we could create an information literacy program.

We soon learned that defining information literacy and determining the methods to reach the goals of information literacy is not an easy process. Trying to actually find and agree on a definition for information literacy was a hot topic for debate. If it was hard to agree on definitions during an intensive conference, then what would it be like to try and convince colleagues back at home of the relevance of having an information literacy program?

About the authors

Chris Grugel is reference/media services librarian at Carthage College, e-mail: c-grugel@carthage.edu; Madeline A. Copp is instructional services coordinator at the Nimitz Library at the U.S. Naval Academy, e-mail: copp@nadn.navy.mil

Track I was divided into two distinct arenas to help us apply what we were learning. The first arena introduced the concepts, history, and methods of information literacy. This provided the necessary grounding to visualize an information literacy program. The second arena involved smaller group discussions that focused on the concepts from the formal sessions, and allowed transference into ideas that could shape a literacy program at our schools.

The sessions

Nationally recognized leaders conducted the following sessions: "Learning Theory" by Joan Kaplowitz, "Teaching" by Randy Hensley, "Assessment" by Debra Gilchrist, "Management" by Eugene Engeldinger, "Information Literacy" by Mary Jane Petrowski, and "Leadership" by Karen Williams.

Several key points were reiterated. The first concept was that students must be able to locate, evaluate, and synthesize information while understanding the information-seeking process to become lifelong learners.

Students must be taught concepts, not just which buttons to push. This may be best summed up by using a quote by Patricia Knapp from Mary Jane Petrowski's "Information Literacy" session that states, "Competence in the use of the library is one of the liberal arts."

The second concept was that a successful information literacy program must have faculty involvement. Faculty must be able see the benefits and results from an information literacy program. Working closely with faculty to develop and assess programs will help to promote the common goal of helping students succeed.

What we learned

This was an effective "hands-on" working conference. One of the goals for the conference was that participants would create a personal portfolio of projects and ideas that could be used to enhance their own programs. This portfolio of related projects helped show the many different pieces of information literacy. This included writing goals and objectives for a teaching segment and then designing an assessment instrument to measure that particular program.

Developing criteria, understanding the difference between terminal and affective objectives, writing outcomes, and understanding the importance of assessment involved late nights in the computer lab for many of us.

Instructor feedback played an important part in our learning process. Verbal and written comments on our assignments, our classroom sessions, and our small groups provided material that would help us shape what we wanted to accomplish at our own schools.

As each session progressed, I felt that I had a better understanding of how to develop an encompassing information literacy program. Definitions were actually starting to make sense.

The closing session asked us to assess the Immersion '99 program while reflecting on what we had written down in the opening session. What had we learned? This program gave me an opportunity to share ideas with others, helped me to understand the different segments of an information literacy program, and taught me practical approaches to introduce information literacy concepts to my co-workers.

Birds of a feather

One of the best parts of the conference was the open exchange of ideas and the networking that happened through roundtable discussion groups, affectionately called "Birds of a Feather," which took place at the end of the conference. These groups of six-to-eight members from both Tracks I and II were arranged by size and type of institution, for example community colleges worked together as did large research universities.

Discussions were at a practical level—how an information literacy program can be created, developed, and improved for specific cases and schools. Finding out about other schools' library instruction programs and which programs did or did not work effectively, generated helpful suggestions and support. It was clear that the dynamics of each campus would play an integral part in developing an information literacy program.

Track I and Track II participants shared action plans and goals with their Birds of a Feather groups for what they intended to accomplish over the next year.

After the conference

Even though it has only been a short time since the conference, participants are using what they have learned to make changes in their own settings. I have received several e-mails from participants relating how the Immersion program has influenced their workplace.

Michelle Mach, the Web librarian at Colorado State University at Ft. Collins, wrote, "Within a week of my return, we revised our standard comment form given at the end of instruction sessions so that it asks more open-ended, student-focused questions.

"This was a great idea that came from several participants during the assessment session—some called it the two-minute essay. We're also working on articulating some instructional goals for the library."

Other conference participants came away with a better understanding of the components of information literacy. Mary Lou Baker Jones, who works at Wright State University, com-

mented, "One area from the experience stands out quite clearly for me: the value and the utility of assessment within our process.

"It seems to me that the success and the viability of any information literacy program attempt is going to hinge on appropriate assessment."

At Carthage, we are in the beginning stages of defining how an information literacy program would benefit our students, staff, and faculty. Presently, staff from the library, media services, and the computer center are working together to develop our program. Our core members are very excited about how we can further integrate information literacy into the liberal arts.

Finally, this conference has given the participants a learning community to bounce and trade ideas with over the next year. A very active discussion list continues to ask questions and explore ideas in shaping information literacy programs.—*Chris Grugel*

Track II

"Intense." "Worthwhile." "Unique." "Incredibly energizing." "Valuable." These are only a few of the terms mentioned by Track II participants who attended the ACRL Institute for Information Literacy Immersion Program.[1]

The program and participants

We Track II participants began our work months before we arrived in Plattsburgh by completing the application process and then by creating case studies, which included descriptions of our institutions, analysis of our user populations, descriptions of our library environment, special connections to other offices on campus, and a plan describing what goals we wanted to achieve by attending the Immersion Program. This preparation helped us make the most of what turned out to be a very short time at the institute.

We experienced four-and-a-half days of structured sessions, small group discussions, informal discussions, thinking, analyzing, writing, communicating, and developing action plans to take back to our institutions.

The structured sessions by the faculty included discussions about problem definition and analysis, historical background of information literacy, distance education, assessment, teaching, and campus leadership.

The faculty did a wonderful job in leading the discussions and explaining the content so that we were able to apply the theory presented in these sessions to our action plans. Plus, the collective experience, wisdom, and common sense demonstrated by the participants during the structured sessions were invaluable additions to the discussions.

Faculty in the lead

In the session on problem definition and analysis, Eugene Engeldinger gave a very good overview of how to analyze issues of information literacy at our campuses. The content provided a useful review of items included in our case studies; it also offered us a chance to analyze our own problem-solving styles and to think about those styles as they relate to the workings of our institutions and how we communicate on a daily basis with colleagues.

Mary Jane Petrowski gave a wonderful historical overview of information literacy, noting that even a standard definition of information literacy is problematic. "I know it when I see it!" and "Information literacy is just the newest marketing [gimmick]" are comments participants noted hearing from faculty and librarians when confronted with the task of defining information literacy. The ACRL

draft standards is a good start in gaining a mutual understanding of the concept, but they need to be adaptable to many types of academic institutions to be truly useful.

Joan Kaplowitz led an energetic discussion on distance learning. Definition, once again, pro-

Participants share ideas during Immersion '99 .

on identifying your arena (creating partnerships with other campus units), determining content and approach (especially when we teach faculty), and assessment at the institutional level.

One especially thought-provoking question from

vided a topic for reflection, and our conclusions helped us realize that even campuses with a 100% residential population (like mine) can utilize ideas for distance leaning (for example, distance learning techniques can be applied to those students and faculty who research from their dorm rooms or offices).

Why do we do what we do and is it working? Debra Gilchrist delved into this topic during her presentation on assessment. A starting point on the road to assessing information literacy could be to ask ourselves the following questions: 1) What do we want the students to be able to do?, 2) What do the students need to learn?, 3) How will we know they've done it well?, 4) What activity will bring about the learning?, and 5) How will the learning be demonstrated? Linda Fritz, one of the participants, commented. "When we started to deal with outcomes, I began to see a light at the end of the tunnel."

Since "teaching" is a large part of what we do, Randy Hensley lead a dynamic discussion on librarians teaching in an academic setting. This session included tips and techniques

this session was the idea that if we teach faculty, are we prepared to let go and allow them to teach information literacy?

Our last structured session was led by Karen Williams, who gave an excellent presentation on campus leadership. We discussed leadership characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, expectations, and what we can do to make a difference at our institutions.

Small groups
Our small groups met twice daily to enable us to flesh out our action plans and to receive comments, suggestions, sympathy, commiseration, and ideas from each other.

Our action plans included the following components: 1) summary of our problem/concern, 2) explanation about why we chose this problem, 3) summary of proposed solution, 4) description of stakeholders, 5) resources, 6) description of an implementation plan, and 7) analysis and justification for our proposed solutions.

Many participants will agree with Martin Raish when he commented that "For me, the most valuable aspect was that I came away with an action plan document in my hands. We actually wrote up something that we could do when we got home."

Let's get together
During our last two days, we had the opportunity to meet with colleagues from similar institutions who were enrolled in Track I. These "Birds of a Feather" groups were generally formed by type and size of library. I found these sessions to be especially beneficial and gave members from the two tracks a chance to participate in uninterrupted interactions.

Immersion '00

ACRL's Institute for Information Literacy plans to hold Immersion '00 at the University of Washington August 4-9, 2000. It is intended for new librarians or instruction librarians wanting to develop their individual instruction skills (Track I) as well as those who want to develop/advance an information literacy program for their institution (Track II). Attendees are selected through a competitive application process. Application instructions will be posted on the Web in October at http://www.ala.org/acrl/nili/initiatives.html.

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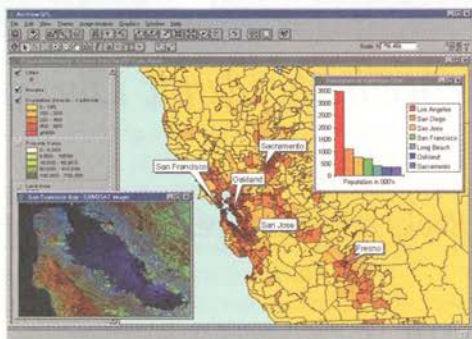
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ship between computer literacy and information literacy and the roles of various stakeholders (librarians, faculty, students, teaching centers, and computer centers) in the teaching of information literacy. Much discussion focused on the partnerships needed to make information literacy a part of the curriculum. Participants also discussed the need for librarians to continue marketing the issue of information literacy outside of librarianship through attendance at higher education conferences.

When asked to identify key conclusions at the end of the day, participants mentioned that:

• librarians and educators need to develop tools of collaboration in order to transform higher education;

• the Think Tank process should be replicated within universities as a way to continue the conversation about information literacy and collaboration and bring it before a wider audience;

• librarians are still struggling for validation in our roles as educators, both within and outside of our profession; and

• technologies are secondary to the education process; people drive transformation not technology.

Librarians and educational technologists need to move far beyond their own jobs and think about what it is to educate and to be an educated person. Information literacy needs to be a pervasive part of the learning environment. The evolution of higher education demands the reconsideration of all of their roles.

Notes

1. American Library Association, Association of College and Research Libraries, Bibliographic Instruction Section, "Think Tank Recommendations for Bibliographic Instruction," *College & Research Libraries News* 42 (1981): 394–98.

2. The working papers for Think Tank II were subsequently revised and published as *The Evolving Educational Mission of the Library* (Chicago: ACRL, 1992).

3. Task force members were Charlotte Crockett, Keith Gresham (chair), Rebecca Jackson, Allison Level, Cindy Pierard, Laverne Simoneaux, and Beth Woodard. ∎

A break from our work

In addition to our strenuous academics, several terrific social activities were held. We had a lovely reception on Friday evening to kick off the program and meet our Immersion colleagues in an informal setting, and we all enjoyed a wonderful "indoor" picnic at the Valcour Educational Conference Center on the shore of breathtaking Lake Champlain. To celebrate our last evening, many of us treated ourselves to a fabulous dinner cruise with delicious food, live music, dancing, and a splendid sunset and brilliant full moon.

In conclusion

I hope that this was the first of many similar Information Literacy Immersion Programs. Being the first Immersion Program, there were of course some suggested changes. Beth Evans from CUNY, Brooklyn College, noted that she and her colleagues felt that a Track 1.5 would be quite useful, and that more sessions mixing the two tracks could be very beneficial. Several Track II participants mentioned that because of the amount of information given, discussed, and debated, another day would have been valuable to give us more time for absorption and reflection.

Immersion '99 was grueling, intense, and reminded me that I'm grateful not to be a full-time student again living in the dorms and eating dorm food; it was also an absolutely wonderful experience.

I agree with Martha Perry when she commented, "I would heartily encourage all instruction librarians to apply for admission to future IILs—you won't regret it!"—*Madeline Copp* (Note: Many thanks to the following people for their comments: Linda Fritz (University of Saskatchewan), Jerilyn Veldof (University of Minnesota), Martin Raish (Brigham Young University), Martha R. Perry (Bellarmine College), Beth Evans (CUNY, Brooklyn College), and all the other Track II participants I met at Immersion 99.

Note

1. Many thanks to the following people for their comments: Linda Fritz (University of Saskatchewan), Jerilyn Veldof (University of Minnesota), Martin Raish (Brigham Young University), Martha R. Perry (Bellarmine College), Beth Evans (CUNY, Brooklyn College), and all the other Track II participants I met at Immersion '99.∎