

What is Information Literacy/Information Competency? Perspectives for Instructional Faculty

Librarians support departments and programs with information literacy instruction at the reference desk, in one-hour class sessions, and in for-credit information literacy courses. As faculty and administrators learn more about this key 21st century academic skill, they can collaborate with librarians on further integration of information literacy into their classes and programs.

Librarians have always provided instruction for research. Traditional offerings focused on print collections. The development of digital and networked information has expanded opportunities for instruction about this more complex and evolving information environment. New terms for this instruction have arisen. “Information competence,” “information and communication technologies (ICT) skills,” and “information literacy (IL)” take the place of traditional “library skills” or “bibliographic instruction.”

While there is some divergence in the specific meaning or provenance of these new terms, they all encompass digital technologies, critical thinking about resources, and integration of these research skills into the course curriculum.

Because these are foundational skills for any discipline, institutions are including information literacy as a graduation requirement, and accrediting bodies such as Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) are including it among accreditation criteria. As the work that students do to train for their career involves more networked digital information sources, degree programs and universities are updating traditional learning goals to include information literacy as a 21st Century work and life skill.

What is information Literacy?

According to the American Library Association (ALA) Committee on Information Literacy report, an information literate person is one who is “able to recognize when information is needed,” knows what information is needed to address a given problem or issue, and, beyond that, has “the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information” (Presidential Committee, 1989).

According to the [Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education](#) (2000) from Academic, College, and Research Libraries (ACRL), an information literate individual is able to:

- Determine the extent of information needed
- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
- Evaluate information and its sources critically
- Incorporate selected information into one’s knowledge base
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose

- Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally

In other words, information literacy includes knowledge of the research process, skill in using resources, critical thinking about them, and an appreciation of proper documentation of sources. It also expands to include knowledge of how information is created and produced, disciplinary standards about the use of information, and computer literacy in the communication of that knowledge. It is interdisciplinary in general, though disciplinary at the upper division level. Although librarians are well placed to teach information literacy, faculty are also experts at citation and discipline-specific sources that upper division and graduate students must learn. Best practices suggest that librarians and faculty collaborate in order to integrate information literacy instruction into the disciplinary writing process.

Information Literacy in the CSU

Because of pioneering efforts of CSU system personalities such as Ilene Rockman, Several CSU's have an information literacy (competency) requirement for all undergraduates. San Francisco State has an online self-paced set of tutorials with quizzes that meets its undergraduate [information competence requirement](#). At SAC State, the Faculty Senate in 2004 adopted an [Information Competence Graduation Requirement](#) that requires programs to explain how they implement information competency skills. CSU Monterey Bay combines the research and computer technologies skills into a [graduation requirement](#) that can be fulfilled by one of several courses. The Academic Senate of the California Community Colleges have adopted a [resolution](#) to include information literacy in Associates Degrees (Fall, 2006, p. 14).

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) also mentions information literacy in its criteria for accreditation for universities. [Standard 2](#) includes the following language:

Baccalaureate programs engage students in an integrated course of study of sufficient depth and breadth to prepare them for work, citizenship, and a fulfilling life. These programs also ensure the development of core learning abilities and competencies including, but not limited to college-level written and oral communication; college level quantitative skills; information literacy; and the habit of critical analysis of data and argument. (Handbook, 2008, p. 14)

In addition, the state statute guiding General Education courses, Executive Order 1033, includes information literacy as one of the skill areas or needs to which general education courses should be responsive and suggests they “demonstrate information competency” as a more specific outcome ([Executive Order](#), 2008).

Accrediting bodies such as the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) include information literacy in Program Standard 16 for Professional Teacher Induction Programs:

Each participating teacher designs, adapts, and uses lessons which address students' needs to develop information literacy and problem solving skills as tools for lifelong learning. (Standards, 2001, p. 21).

Information Literacy at CSU Stanislaus

Information literacy is integrated into several programs at Cal State Stanislaus such as First Year Experience, General Education, Social Science, History, and Teacher Education. It takes several forms.

- The library home page includes online tutorials, or Digital Learning Objects (DLOs) for faculty to integrate into their instruction and for students to access 24/7.
- Students make use of the reference desk for one-on-one instruction either by dropping in, emailing, chatting, or phoning the reference desk.
- Students and faculty also make appointments to consult with librarians for more in-depth research projects.
- Faculty commonly request sessions in the library instruction lab where their students are given guidance for specific research projects.
- Librarians teach a 2-credit course in information literacy (SSCI/MDIS 3005) for History and Social Science majors.
- Librarians team teach Honors 3500, a preparatory course for the Honors Senior Capstone Thesis, with Honors faculty.
- Librarians collaborate with academic units such as the Center for Excellence in Graduate Education (CEGE) Title V Grant. Librarians and staff teach several workshops on research, citing sources, and formatting the thesis.

Opportunities for Collaboration

Librarians are working on initiatives to move more instruction to the online environment where it is always available and scalable. Librarians are also collaborating more with faculty who are moving courses online with tutorials imbedded into these courses, as well as improving their presence in Blackboard courses, so students can benefit from research assistance and instruction regardless of whether they are on campus.

According to the 1989 ALA Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, in order to create an information literate citizenry, with the critical thinking skills that prepare them for lifelong learning, schools and instructional programs need to integrate information literacy into their learning programs (Presidential Committee, 1989). Whether more programs incorporate information literacy into their explicit learning goals, or the University adopts an information literacy learning goal for all graduating students, is a matter for faculty, department chairs, deans, the Provost, and the President to discuss. Librarians stand ready to support those goals, though programmatic expansion of librarian responsibilities would require more resources.

Future initiatives on which librarians, faculty, and administrators can collaborate could include:

- Further integration of information literacy into upper division courses, possibly the WPT course
- Further integration of information literacy into graduate courses
- Assessment of graduating seniors' information literacy skills
- An information literacy graduation requirement
- An information literacy requirement in Gen Ed
- Graduate program information literacy requirement

Recent Statewide and National Initiatives

Recognizing the importance of digital communication technology to the citizens and economy of California, Governor Schwarzenegger signed an Executive Order in May of 2009 that made “information and communications technologies digital literacy” a goal of educators. His definition, paralleling information literacy, includes “using digital technology, communications tools and/or networks to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, create and communicate information in order to function in a knowledge-based economy and society (Swartzenegger, 2009). He tasked educators with training California’s workforce. Pointing out that there are persistent economic and ethnic underclass when it comes to this important skills set, he asserted that

all residents must have the opportunity for full participation in the educational, civic, cultural, and economic sectors of California society and must have accessibility to and appropriate skills for fully utilizing government, education, workforce, health care, business, and other services. (Swartzenegger, 2009).

He made it a goal to set up educational policy and benchmarks for citizens to have these digital communication skills and access. To implement this Executive Order, he established a California ICT Digital Literacy Leadership Council with an advisory committee that includes a representative of the CSU. Together, these bodies will develop policy and an action plan for making California citizens information and communication technologies digital literate, including “strategies and actions for incorporating digital literacy into K-12 and higher education.” Although this Order focuses on workforce development, it includes implications for the CSU mission, and although it focuses on the technology aspects information literacy, by definition they cannot be separated from the critical thinking and research aspects.

Also, President Obama signed a proclaimed October, 2010 to be “National Information Literacy Awareness Month.” The Proclamation states in part that all Americans need to be “adept at the skills necessary to effectively navigate the Information Age” and that “[o]ur Nation’s educators and institutions of learning must be aware of—and adjust to—these new realities.” Also, “the ability to seek, find, and decipher information can be applied to countless life decisions, whether financial, medical, educational, or technical. . . . An informed and educated citizenry is essential to the functioning of our modern democratic society” (Obama, 2009).

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Prepared by Tim Held, Instruction Coordinator, University Library. (9/15/2011)