

First Year Initiative: Integrating Information Literacy Skills in to the Curriculum

Background:

Information literacy is the ability to access, evaluate, and use information from a variety of sources. According to the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), the information literate student is able to:

- determine the nature and extent of information needed
- access information effectively and efficiently
- evaluate information critically and incorporate selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system
- use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
- understand many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and therefore access and use information ethically and legally¹

Information literacy skills are essential for successful life-long learning. These skills can be taught in a variety of ways, but are learned most effectively if fully integrated into courses and taught collaboratively with library faculty/subject liaisons.²

Implementation:

Information literacy skills can be seamlessly integrated into the content of a course and/or across the curriculum in a variety of ways; however, the most effective method is through the development of creative and original assignments. Assignments must interest and engage the student and the faculty, and be developed in conjunction with course goals and objectives, and the ACRL information literacy standards. In designing assignments it is beneficial to connect with library faculty on subject topics to insure the availability of appropriate resources, to structure assignments so that all students are not doing the exact same thing, inadvertently placing a strain on and consequently preventing access to limited available resources, and to collaborate on the instruction of students in appropriate databases, other resources, and library research methodology—including search strategies, resource selection, and evaluation.

Examples of Possible Assignments:

- Research papers—a paper that presents information to support a point of view on a particular topic
- Annotated bibliography—a summary/critical evaluation of books, articles and other materials on a particular topic
- Evaluating Web sites—determine if a website contains reliable information on a topic
- Biographical research—identifying individuals' accomplishments, contributions, and influence in a field of study, discipline, or role in history
- Compare and contrast popular vs. scholarly articles—distinguishing the differences in how information is covered in these two types of sources and if the information can be judged to be reliable
- Treasure hunts—designed to teach students about resources as well as the acquisition of additional information on primary course subject matter
- Presentations and peer evaluation—brief reports on topics to a class illustrating presentation and facilitation skills, as well as knowledge acquired during research. Graded peer evaluation is an ideal method to insure that students are engaged throughout the process and the assignment
- Intellectual property, plagiarism, censorship, free speech
- Taking popular science and connecting it with scientific research—designed to assist students in tracking items from the popular news back to the scholarly/research beginnings

Other methods for integration include team teaching (courses/labs) with librarians, inviting a librarian to your class, the use of online, interactive, self paced modules and tutorials with built in quizzes, one shot bibliographic instruction sessions, and students enrolling in the library's for credit course, Honors 201.

¹ Association for College and Research Libraries, "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education: Standards, Performance Indicators, and Outcomes" (on-line) <http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilstandardlo.html>.

² Library faculty at the UMBC Library are liaisons to subject departments. A complete list can be found at <http://aok.lib.umbc.edu/reference/libliaisons.php3>.