Information Literacy @ Ursinus College
4/14/14

Information literacy at Ursinus College is based on our belief that to remain viable in the modern world the traditional notion of a liberally educated person must be linked to changing information technology and contemporary information sources. Unlike other colleges, we do not define information literacy simply in terms of acquiring updated research skills for finding and utilizing facts. After all, the questions sparking inquiry can change as information is gathered and assessed. Accordingly, we think of information literacy more as a "state of mind" or "way of being" centered on a set of intellectual dispositions like healthy skepticism and creative curiosity that lead to disciplined and analytical inquiry and culminate in good judgment about thoughtfully marshaled information. Hence, information literacy at Ursinus is not seen as the varyingly defined product of multiple academic disciplines. For us, information literacy transcends academic borders entirely in reflecting our conviction that neither the multidimensionality nor the ubiquity of information guarantees the generation of knowledge.

Given our rich conception of information literacy, we do not commit its inculcation to our library alone, as do many other colleges. Instead, information literacy here is the shared responsibility of students, faculty, and academic programs working in conjunction with the College's librarians. Indeed, information literacy infuses our entire curriculum, beginning with the Common Intellectual Experience (CIE). If students are to "cultivate the self-knowledge necessary to live a considered, independent, and responsible life," as articulated by one of the main goals of CIE, they must be information literate – that is, thoughtful, curious, and aware individuals who can navigate through the world exercising informed judgment and participate in civic life based on well-considered opinions. Students take the first step toward that end in CIE, learning to read texts and images closely and to consider them critically. The effort to instill information literacy continues beyond CIE, progressing from our departmentally based introductory courses, to our intermediate courses, and ending in our "capstone" courses. Yet the acquisition of information literacy does not cease when our students graduate; if we do our jobs right, it will continue for the rest of our students' lives.

Each academic program (including departments, certificate programs, and interdisciplinary majors) determines how it incorporates information literacy. Though the underlying principles are the same, different programs determine the most effective course of action. For example, some departments will introduce their students to subject-specific databases in their disciplines in lower-level courses and require increasingly sophisticated research projects from them as they progress in upper-level courses. Other departments will take a more theoretical approach to information literacy by offering courses that interrogate the concept itself. Ongoing critical communication should take place within each program and across programs about the place of information literacy in the curriculum. Approaches will change over time, and all academic programs have an important role to play in the ongoing evolution of the concept of information literacy.

The goal of the Myrin Library's information literacy program is for librarians to participate fully in the development of Ursinus students by encouraging and teaching them to be information literate. Librarians seek to foster a sense of intellectual excitement as students approach

increasingly complex questions and problems as they progress at Ursinus, thereby instilling in students a quality of mind that stays with them long after they graduate.

The librarians seek to attain the goals of the information literacy program through the following means:

1. A library liaison program that facilitates collaboration with faculty in various ways, such as:
   a. Each librarian has responsibility for information literacy in several programs
   b. Librarians work with faculty and staff to integrate information literacy into academic programs in an appropriate way
   c. Embedded librarians participate in all or part of a course for the purpose of working with students on research projects at the appropriate time during the semester
   d. Librarians work with faculty to design appropriate assignments that effectively use library resources
   e. Librarians help programs develop ways of assessing information literacy outcomes among their students
   f. Librarians make presentations about information literacy in order to keep the campus community informed about national trends and new approaches
   g. Over the long term, librarians will work with every academic program to help incorporate information literacy across campus
2. Active participation in CIE
   a. Librarians will be well acquainted with the CIE syllabus, and they will meet with the CIE coordinators at least once per academic year to learn of program changes and to discuss ways the library can support the CIE program
   b. Librarians will develop LibGuides and/or other resources to supplement and support specific CIE texts
   c. Some librarians will teach a section of CIE, when determined to be appropriate
   d. Librarians will participate in special CIE initiatives, such as the Teagle project
3. Library workshops
   a. Single-class demonstration and discussion sessions
   b. Multiple-class demonstration and discussion sessions
   c. Guided research sessions in which students start their research projects while a librarian is present
   d. Brief (15 minutes), focused topic sessions
   e. Over the long term, librarians will develop a partnership with the Teaching & Learning Initiative (TLI)
4. Research consultations
   a. At a desk or specialized place in the library – walk-up, moment-of-need
   b. By appointment
   c. Required meetings with librarians for particular projects
5. Web presence
   a. The Library website is treated as part of its information literacy program; design decisions are made to support information literacy
   b. Librarians create subject and/or course specific guides

      c. Librarian liaisons will explore the potential to articulate the information literacy program on the web pages of all academic programs

      d. Over the long term, librarians will seek ways to enhance the visibility of information literacy on the College's website

6. Development of librarians as effective teachers

      a. Monthly librarian meetings during the academic year to discuss issues related to the integration of teaching and information literacy and the development of the program

      b. Participation in Teaching & Learning Initiative (TLI) programs

      c. Special workshops with outside presenters for librarians

      d. Over the long term, develop an inter-disciplinary course to be taught by librarians

7. Work in close partnership with the Center for Writing and Speaking

      a. Librarians meet with Writing Fellows at least once during the Fellows' training

      b. Librarians and Writing Fellows mutually refer each other to one another's services.

      c. Over the long term, work with the Director of the Center to co-sponsor workshops and lecture series about common issues

8. Opportunities for student workers to promote information literacy

      a. Work with the Circulation Supervisor to integrate information literacy awareness into the general student-worker training.

      b. Internships for students interested in pursuing a career in librarianship or archival studies will give selected students a chance to develop their own understanding of information literacy at a more sophisticated level, and ultimately help them to become teachers and guides for their fellow students

      c. Over the long term, establish a formal training program for interns that deepens their understanding of information literacy.

For the College's librarians looking toward the future at this critical moment in the evolution of Myrin Library, this document articulates the most fundamental ways that they – and the Library itself – will remain connected to the core academic mission of the College to encourage "students to think for themselves, so that they may become mature, responsible independent adults in an interdependent world." Much work remains to be done within the library to strengthen the means we have listed (many of which are already in practice but need to be further developed) to reach the student-centered goals, and this document provides clear direction for the Reference & Instruction Librarian to lead the library's information literacy program. The library can begin its work this summer without adding new positions, but developing this program will necessarily entail a serious consideration of the orientation of the current staff and future staffing needs to ensure the success of this program. As the Middle States evaluation team noted in its report of April 2009, "We are also concerned about library staffing levels. The College will need to pay close attention to whether staffing is adequate to enable students to acquire competency in information literacy according to the standards established by Middle States (p. 18)." Other considerations must be addressed too, such as the role of technology in information literacy, as the library begins to work more closely with IT under the leadership of a new CIO.

The Working Group recommends that the Library of the Future committee consider ways to keep information literacy at the forefront of campus-wide discussions. This could be done in a

number of ways, including adding librarians to the Committee, designating a faculty member on the Committee to be responsible for working closely with the Reference & Instruction Librarian in an advisory role, or forming an official sub-committee with a similar make up to this Working Group to continue this work into future. We recommend that something be established by the beginning of the Fall 2014 semester.

The library's role in inculcating information literacy is, of course, only a part of the whole endeavor, which ultimately involves the entire College: library, faculty, staff, and the students themselves. This document defines the concept of information literacy and articulates a vision for implementing it at Ursinus College. We hope faculty and staff involved in academic programs will endorse this vision and commit to working with the librarians to incorporate information literacy throughout the campus, for we see it as fundamental for students' intellectual development today.

Respectfully Submitted,
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