

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY NORTHRIDGE
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California State University

INFORMATION LITERACY FACT SHEET

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INFORMATION LITERACY DEFINED:

Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information." 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

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR STUDENTS TO BE INFORMATION LITERATE?

Provides Proven Methods for Successfully Navigating Proliferating Information Resources

Individuals are faced with diverse, abundant information choices--in their academic studies, in the workplace, and in their personal lives. Information is available through libraries, community resources, special interest organizations, media, and the Internet--and increasingly, information comes to individuals in unfiltered formats, raising questions about its authenticity, validity, and reliability. The sheer abundance of information will not in itself create a more informed citizenry without a complementary cluster of abilities necessary to use information effectively.

Supports National Efforts to Improve the Quality of Education

The Boyer Commission Report, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education*, recommends strategies that require the student to engage actively in "framing of a significant question or set of questions, research or creative exploration to find answers, and the communications skills to convey the results..." Courses structured around these skills create student-centered learning environments where inquiry is the norm, problem solving becomes the focus, and thinking critically is part of the process. Proactive learning environments require information literacy competencies.

Provide Additional Tools for Reinforcing Course Content

The convergence of the prodigious production of the information age and the growing awareness of the student memory loss of course content suggests that a vital part of education must be in the students' ability to locate information for themselves. If students graduate from a CSU campus unable to locate, synthesize, and evaluate information, they will not have the skills necessary for survival in any field. Moreover, even if student retention of course content was almost perfect, the rate of change of knowledge is so high that what students learn today, especially in certain fields, may not be accurate or relevant a few years from now.

Enhances Lifelong Learning

Developing lifelong learners is central to the mission of higher education institutions. By ensuring that individuals have the intellectual abilities of reasoning and critical thinking, and by helping them construct a

framework for learning how to learn, colleges and universities provide the foundation for continued growth throughout their careers, as well as in their roles as informed citizens and members of communities. Information literacy is a key component of, and contributor to, lifelong learning. Information literacy competency extends learning beyond formal classroom settings and provides practice with self-directed investigations as individuals move into internships, first professional positions, and increasing responsibilities in all arenas of life. Because information literacy augments students' competency with evaluating, managing, and using information, it is now considered by several regional and discipline-based accreditation associations as a key outcome for college students.

WHO SHOULD ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR INFORMATION LITERACY TEACHING AND LEARNING?

The research undertaken by the CSU Information Competence Work Group suggests that isolated, hit-or-miss, ad hoc attempts cannot ensure that students are well equipped for the Information Age. It also indicates that the best programs are integrated into the curriculum and are built on strong alliances between discipline faculty and library faculty. This suggests, therefore, that the education in information literacy is a responsibility to be shared by discipline faculty and library faculty and should be an integral element of the curriculum.

Through lectures and by leading discussions, faculty establish the context for learning, inspire students to explore the unknown, and monitor students' progress. Academic librarians coordinate the evaluation and selection of intellectual resources for programs and services; organize, and maintain collections and many points of access to information; offer guidance on how best to fulfill information needs, and provide instruction to the campus community on effective methods of accessing, selecting, and evaluating information. Administrators also play a significant role through active support of information literacy programs and by creating opportunities for collaboration and staff development among faculty, librarians, and other professionals who initiate information literacy programs, lead in planning and budgeting for those programs, and provide ongoing resources to sustain them.

OPTIONS FOR INFORMATION LITERACY PROGRAMS

Freshman Orientation/Transitions Course

Freshman Seminar/Transitions courses are now widespread, and they provide a place to begin a sustained education in information literacy. The "orientation" nature of these courses, however, usually dictates that the component devoted to information competencies is brief.

General Education

Since the ability to use information effectively and wisely is crucial to a student's success in higher education, it seems natural to incorporate information literacy into the general education curriculum required of all students. It could be added as a stand-alone course dealing with the topic, or it could be added as a component in several or all of the courses included in the General Education curriculum.

Cornerstone Class in Major Area

Each discipline has information resources that document and preserve the scholarship of the discipline. In addition, research on information transfer documents that disciplines differ in the emphasis placed on currency, use of primary documents, use of electronic publishing, etc. Discipline-specific information literacies have been identified and all graduates should be well versed in this aspect of their discipline.

- One option for including discipline-specific information literacy in the major area is to integrate it into an "introductory" or "gatekeeper" or "funnel" course, the one that students take first in their disciplinary

sequence. The introductory course in a discipline typically familiarizes students with the methodologies, terminologies, and resources of a discipline.

- Other models emphasize information competence in part or all of several courses required in the major. These models can be effective if the information literacy component is a required course component, regardless of the professor currently teaching the class.

Information Competence through Competency-Based Mastery

- A recent trend has been the willingness to award academic credit on the basis of demonstrated mastery of skills rather than through course work. For example, many nurses who return to college to pursue a baccalaureate degree are permitted to receive credit for demonstrated mastery of the skills they have acquired through experience, and are then placed in the appropriate course in the baccalaureate sequence. CSU Monterey Bay is an experimental program through which students, in order to graduate, must demonstrate mastery of a host of skills and knowledge--regardless of whether that knowledge was gained through life experience, independent study, regular university courses, or community service.
- Another method, then, for a campus to institute a program of information literacy is to require students to demonstrate mastery. Students can be given ample opportunity to acquire the necessary skills through workshops, workbooks, computer tutorials, classroom instruction, etc., and when they believe they have mastered the competencies identified, they can apply for an assessment and evaluation. Once the students have passed the assessment, their transcript reflects that they have completed this requirement for graduation.

Source Consulted

- Association of College and Research Libraries. Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. ACRL: Chicago, 2000
See: <http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilcomstan.html>
- California State University, Commission on Learning Resources and Instructional Technology, Work Group on Information Competence. Information Competence in the CSU: A Report. CSUN, 1995.

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