Information Literacy Planning Task Force Report  
May 2010

What is the purpose of this report?

The Rutgers University Libraries Planning and Coordinating Information Literacy Planning Task Force was charged in December 2009 to gather information about information literacy, the role of library liaisons, assessment of information literacy, and how information literacy can be implemented into the Rutgers University teaching environment in order to fulfill Middle States requirements on information literacy. This report attempts to present information that can be used as background for beginning a discussion of information literacy with university teaching faculty and administrators and for an eventual collaborative development of a Rutgers University information literacy plan. Please note that the information gathered and presented in this report reflects the perspectives of library faculty.

Why is information literacy an important issue for the teaching faculty?

- What is information literacy?

  Middle States Commission on Higher Education in its *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Requirements of Affiliation and Standards for Accreditation*, [Online Version updated March 2009](http://www.msche.org/publications/CHX06_Aug08REVMarch09.pdf) (p. 42) defines information literacy in the following terms: “Several skills collectively referred to as “information literacy,” apply to all disciplines in an institution’s curricula. These skills relate to a student’s competency in acquiring and processing information in the search for understanding, whether that information is sought in or through the facilities of a library, through practica, as a result of field experiments, by communications with experts in professional communities, or by other means. Therefore, information literacy is an essential component of any educational program at the graduate or undergraduate levels. These skills include the ability to:

  - determine the nature and extent of needed information;
  - access information effectively and efficiently;
  - evaluate critically the sources and content of information;
  - incorporate selected information in the learner’s knowledge base and value system;
use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose;

- understand the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information and information technology; and

- observe laws, regulations, and institutional policies related to the access and use of information.”

Why is this important to teaching faculty at the university level?

The mission of higher education is to prepare students to become life-long learners and informed participants in a global community. Communication and critical thinking skills – at the core of the information literacy initiative – are the basis for scholarship within the academy. The intent of this initiative is to effectively prepare the next generation of leaders, scholars, and practitioners.

Intellectual honesty is also an important part of information literacy programming. Concerns about plagiarism not only in academia, but also in the publishing industry and government, serve to highlight the importance of teaching students how to use information in an intellectually honest manner.

How can this work in the classroom curriculum?

Information literacy instruction is part of the methodology of scholarly research and writing. Highly effective information literacy programs are implemented through partnerships among the teaching faculty, academic librarians, and student support centers (such as writing labs and tutoring centers) and include initiatives such as:

- Classroom instruction in information literacy skills by librarians

- Collaboratively produced online teaching resources (librarians and faculty)

- “Embedded” library resources in print and online syllabi

- Increased contact with librarians and students by presence on online class management tools (via chat, discussion groups, etc.)

How would an information literacy initiative benefit the teaching faculty?

By working together teaching faculty and librarians can raise the quality of scholarship in the products and papers that the students produce.

What are some of the outcomes of an information literacy initiative?

- Better researched student papers.
Increased student awareness of plagiarism and the consequences for intellectual dishonesty.

Increased awareness of how to do college-level scholarly research (life beyond Google and Wikipedia).

What are Rutgers University Libraries currently doing with information literacy?

The Rutgers University Libraries are active advocates in the teaching of information literacy. Some of the reports and documents from task forces and committees involved in information literacy and related activities are listed in appendix A: Chronology of RUL Instruction and Information Literacy Efforts. All these efforts indicate that the libraries understand the importance of incorporating information literacy into library research sessions; however the current grassroots liaison effort is piecemeal and inefficient.

The following is a summary of the current state of information literacy instruction for the Rutgers University Libraries:

- Library instruction covers only some of the information literacy standards and competencies as needed for a particular class or as possible given the time available for the library session.

- Multimodal library instruction - (in-person and online efforts including courses, classes, sessions, etc being taught). See Appendix B: Range of instruction coverage as an example of subjects, departments and courses covered by the libraries for 2008-09.

- Based on 2008-2009 library instruction statistics, RUL reached only about 33% of 38,902 undergraduates and 20% of 13,569 graduates (Fall 2008). [Appendix C: 2008-09: Library instruction and student enrollment]. It is assumed that library instruction sessions cover some aspects of information literacy; however, it is clear that more than 65% of the students may not have had access to developing information literacy or library research skills.

Uneven implementation of information literacy objectives for students should be of grave concern given the colossal rate at which information is produced and is available via the Internet today; learner-centered rather than teacher-centered learners, especially those who can find information and learn on their own; and an inevitable constant need for access, evaluation, and ethical use of information by today’s students.
How are other colleges and universities partnering with the libraries to implement information literacy initiatives?

This is a brief summary of common processes used by universities or colleges and libraries in the establishment of an institution-wide information literacy program. For this survey, universities were chosen based on a literature and Web search. Those that made their college or university wide Information literacy plans and process details readily available either in the form of an article or on their website were analyzed: University of Rhode Island; University of Central Florida; University of South Carolina; NJIT; Trinity University (San Antonio, Texas); Weber State University and University of California Los Angeles.

Some of the strategies that these colleges and universities employed include:

- The establishment of an institution-wide program, or a program that targets specific campus constituencies and explains why those constituencies were chosen.

- Defining what information literacy means at the particular institution (not only the library’s perspective). At some institutions this included computer or technological or media literacy.

- Development of a program with clearly stated, measurable objectives tied to national or regional standards.

- A differentiation in the plan, and in campus conversations, between “library instruction” and “information literacy.”

- A plan to communicate and receive input from the teaching faculty on the information literacy plan/program before, during, and after its implementation.

- Collaboration with other campus stakeholders, such as teaching excellence or teaching support centers.

- Documentation about the program that is aimed as different audiences, including teaching faculty and students.

- Leadership and buy-in from university administration that leads to wide-spread institutional commitment including commitment in terms of making available financial resources and setting up incentives or rewards for faculty and/or teaching teams.

- The tenets and practices of the information literacy program were approved and supported by the faculty and university administration.
• A review of pre-program library instructional efforts.
• A core of teacher-librarians committed to teaching in the information literacy program.
• A support infrastructure that includes adequately equipped spaces in which information literacy instruction can take place.
• Multi-pronged, standardized assessment of student performance and the sharing of assessment data.
• Multi-pronged assessment of program performance and the sharing of assessment data.
• Continual refinement of the program based on assessment data.
• Phased implementation of the information literacy program.
• Tiered information literacy instruction, both general and subject-based.
• Multiple ways for students to meet the information literacy requirement.

Who are the partners and stakeholders at Rutgers University for an information literacy initiative?

Objectives or goals for information literacy requirements need to be created collaboratively and implemented by bringing together campus and university wide-partners. These partners maybe interested faculty, department, program or curriculum committee chairs, graduate and undergraduate directors or chairs, including, but not limited to:

• The Rutgers, Office of Undergraduate Education: Dr. Carla Yanni, Assistant Vice President for Undergraduate Academic Affairs and Professor, Art History

• New Brunswick
  o Center for Teaching Advancement and Assessment Research (CTAAR)
  o SAS Office of Undergraduate Education: Dr. Michael Beals, Vice Dean for Undergraduate Education, beals@sas.rutgers.edu
  o SAS Office of Undergraduate Education: Dr. Susan E. Lawrence, Dean for Educational Initiatives and the Core Curriculum and Associate Professor Political Science, slawrence@sas.rutgers.edu.
What are some next steps for beginning discussions and collaborating for an integrated information literacy program?

At Rutgers, students must have adequate opportunities to work with a variety of sources of information – they must be able to access, evaluate and use information accurately and ethically and be able to communicate their findings at various levels of their education and in different disciplines. At present, Rutgers does not offer a well-coordinated approach for ensuring that all students are information literate when they graduate from Rutgers. What then should be done? To create a successful, collaborative and integrated information literacy program at Rutgers, we find that the following issues would be important to consider:

- Build a common definition of information literacy understood and accepted by campus or university-wide curriculum committees, administration, faculty and libraries. Middle States Commission's definition (included on page 1 of this report) is well-established and recommended for use. Because computer and media literacy differ significantly from
information literacy, it is recommended that these skills be learned as a separate process rather than be included as part of the process of acquiring information literacy competencies.

- Survey how information literacy is currently implemented by RU faculty across the university or in syllabi courses.

- Raise awareness for incorporating information literacy within Rutgers curricula through a variety of faculty focus groups or workshops hosted along with university wide partners. Publicize to our university partners the availability of subject specialist librarians to partner and participate as regards information literacy in the Departmental Curriculum and Assessment committee or in the School-wide Assessment Advisory Committee. [http://ctaar.rutgers.edu/assessment/infrastructure.html](http://ctaar.rutgers.edu/assessment/infrastructure.html).

- Survey and identify departmental teaching faculty that design curriculum and create syllabi and who may be willing to incorporate information literacy as a learning objective within certain courses. Faculty from different departments and schools that usually request library research classes would be good potential partners.

- Use assessments of current efforts of libraries as solid proof to show how libraries can be useful partners in this effort.

- Encourage and assess trials of new initiatives by librarians such as credit courses offered as co-requisite or part of a course or as a separate course e.g. a library co-credit course for an SAS honors program. It is recommended that programmatic graduate/undergraduate segmentation of information literacy instruction might result in more focused outreach to students at various levels of study at Rutgers.

- Use results of discussion from the May 7 RUL Liaison Forum regarding educational role of librarians to communicate across the university as well as amongst the library faculty.

- Survey and study the feasibility, time commitments, and funding requirements necessary to implement an information literacy plan with the participation of teaching faculty, university administration and libraries.

- Determine a list of mutually workable options for achieving information literacy across the curriculum at Rutgers.
This report represents a beginning in the process of establishing an information literacy plan and program. The conversation must continue, both within Rutgers Libraries and with the wider university community.

Respectfully submitted,

Vibiana Cvetkovic
Sara Harrington
Theo Haynes
Triveni Kuchi (Chair)
Eileen Stec
Roberta Tipton