



Basic Proficiencies in Information Literacy

AS REVISED December, 2005

As approved by Faculty Senate February 1, 2006

This recommendation is submitted in response to the guidelines of the Undergraduate Education Initiative, a campus-wide review of FSU's undergraduate curriculum, as approved by the Faculty Senate in February, 2005.

Membership

The following FSU faculty served on the planning group for the establishment of criteria for basic proficiencies in information literacy:

Dr. Marcia Cushall, Educational Professions;

Ms. Judith Gaydos, Lewis J. Ort Library;

Mr. Randy Lowe, Lewis J. Ort Library;

Ms. Pam Williams, Lewis J. Ort Library.

Dr. Jim Limbaugh, Assistant to the Provost, served as convener and facilitator.

The Case for Information Literacy

Our General Education Goals specifically cite a focus on students' attainment of core skills—to "comprehend and use various fundamental research methods to evaluate information critically" and "use technological resources as appropriate to access and communicate relevant information"—because we understand fully that students entering careers in a technology-driven society must develop the ability to review, analyze, and evaluate the phenomenal amount of information available to them at any time.

Information literacy is often considered in tandem with technology literacy—the ability to perform basic functions on computers and, eventually, the ability to effectively search for information on the Internet. While this component of information literacy is important, it is only a small part of the skill sets needed to be information-literate. Information literacy extends to the essential tasks of analyzing the content of the material, creating new knowledge, and using that knowledge to create a product, performance, or other activity. For these reasons, information literacy applies to anyone learning anything, anywhere, and at any time. . . It encourages critical thinking and reflection in the

context of the increasingly extensive amounts of information now available through a wide range of technologies. (p. 2)

In fact, the Association of College and Research Libraries (2000) maintains that “Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning [because] it is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education” (p. 4).

As a result of the changing landscape of information and its value to today’s world, and in tandem with external mandates to identify students’ basic skill levels (as detailed below), the University will use the definition of information literacy, as outlined in a subsequent section, to drive its general education assessments.

External Mandates

The Maryland Higher Education Commission has mandated that all Maryland institutions of higher education establish specific definitions and benchmarks regarding college-level skills in seven basic skills. In addition to information literacy, these skills include written communication, critical thinking, scientific reasoning, quantitative reasoning, technological literacy, and oral communication. Said benchmarks are to be assessed on a regular basis and reported to MHEC every three years, beginning in 2007.

The University’s accrediting agency, in its revised standards, also specifically mentions the need to assess students’ skills in information literacy. The accreditation standards of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education state that an institution’s program of general education must be designed “so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills” including those cited above (*Characteristics of Excellence*, 2002, -p. 37).

Definition

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. It initiates, sustains, and extends lifelong learning through abilities which may use but are not ultimately independent of them (Association of College and Research Libraries). Information literacy is more than technological competence or library/online research. Rather, it promotes critical thinking, leading to efficient and effective use of information in all disciplines throughout the academic program.

At Frostburg State University, a student is considered information literate when he/she is knowledgeable about and competent with the following skills:

- Recognizing the need to find information to support ideas and opinions,
- Understanding that there are differences among information resources,

- Searching several kinds of sources to retrieve information,
- Evaluating the reliability of information sources,
- Evaluating the probability of the accuracy and reliability of information content,
- Using information to complete assignments,
- Understanding issues of plagiarism,
- Citing sources using appropriate documentation style. (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2003).

Please note that this definition is subject to continual review and refinement as assessment results are analyzed in light of institutional learning goals.

Connection to Undergraduate Institutional Learning Goals

Frostburg State University’s definition of information literacy supports the following Undergraduate Institutional Learning Goals:

- Liberal Knowledge and Skills of Inquiry, Critical Thinking, and Synthesis...specifically, “comprehend and apply various research methods to evaluate information critically”;
- Core Skills...specifically, “comprehend and critically interpret information in written and oral forms” and “use technological resources to access and communicate relevant information.”

Assessment Strategies

Information literacy assessment initiatives fall primarily within the purview of the professional faculty of the Lewis J. Ort Library in their efforts to assess student learning regarding the attainment of basic skills. The Library also is partnering with the Department of English, who has included basic skills in the required syllabus for all Freshman Composition courses (English 101...please see Appendix A for an overview of the information literacy requirements cited for Freshman Composition).

Therefore, the focus of the assessment efforts of Library faculty will be through their library instruction sessions and through collaboration with the Department of English. To this end, the following strategies will be applied and evaluated on a regular basis:

- I. In “Introduction to Higher Education” library seminars, a seven-question survey will be conducted with all students. The focus of the survey is to ascertain students’ level of skill regarding preparation received in high school. The results of this survey will be evaluated on a semester-by-semester basis, with findings serving as the foundation for adjustments to the Library’s introduction to information literacy through its orientation sessions.

2. In library instruction sessions, a one-page, three question library exercise will be distributed, with the topic provided. Students will complete this exercise while in the instruction session. A rubric will be developed to assess students' level of attainment of basic skills after their completion of the library session.
3. Collaborating with the Department of English, a sixteen-question end-of-semester assessment instrument will be distributed to all English 101 students to assess their level of attainment of basic information skills after they have completed a full semester of work in information literacy through the library instruction session and through course requirements.

Internal Benchmark

Frostburg State University will report that its students are attaining basic skills in information literacy if 70% or more of the students in ENGL101 completing the aforementioned sixteen-question assessment score at a level of “meets standards” or above.

Reports on student performance in the aggregate (not by individual class) will be shared with appropriate University constituencies.

Participation in Project SAILS

Project SAILS is a standardized test of information literacy skills, based on ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries) Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. This Web-based tool allows libraries to document information literacy skills for groups of students and to pinpoint areas for improvement. The project is currently completing a three-year research and development phase. The first iteration of the test will be available fall 2006 and will allow participants to compare their students' skills against those of students at other institutions. FSU's participation in Project SAILS will be further explored as an additional opportunity to assess basic skills in information literacy.

Timeline for Implementation

1. February 2006: Faculty Senate reviews criteria for information literacy.
2. Spring 2006: Library staff complete development of rubrics (as outlined elsewhere in this document) and collaborate with the Department of English on information literacy assessments. Pilot assessments completed and assessed for sufficiency.
3. Fall 2006 and beyond: (Tentative) Participate in Project SAILS. Full assessments are reviewed on a regular basis in order to complete the “assessment cycle”.

*Submitted by Jim Limbaugh, Assistant to the Provost
on behalf of the Faculty Planning Group for Information Literacy
November, 2005*

References

Association of College and Research Libraries (2000). Information literacy competency standards for higher education. Retrieved February 5, 2005, from <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/standards.pdf>.

Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2000). *Developing research and communications skills: Guidelines for information literacy in the curriculum (executive summary)*. Philadelphia: Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

APPENDIX A
Information Literacy Requirements
As cited in
Freshman Composition Syllabus

As part of its standard department syllabus for Freshman Composition (English 101), the Department of English states specific requirements regarding students' work in developing basic skills in information literacy. The pertinent portion of the syllabus is reproduced below.

Information Literacy: Although English 101 is not a course in writing major research papers, the following information literacy skills will be introduced in anticipation of their later development in advanced composition.

Framing the Argument: Students should recognize the need to find information to fill in gaps in their knowledge and support ideas.

Accessing Sources: Students should be able to search a variety of legitimate sources to retrieve information, understanding that there are differences among information sources.

Evaluating Sources: Students should know how to assess the reliability of information sources and determine whether the information available is sufficient to address the issue.

Evaluating Content: Students should be able to analyze and evaluate appropriate source material.

Using Information for a Specific Purpose: Students should be able to synthesize appropriate source material with their own ideas in order to support a thesis.

Understanding Issues Affecting the Use of Information: Students should understand what plagiarism is and how to avoid it; students should use appropriate documentation style for citing sources.

Each section of English 101 will schedule at least one session in the library.