



# Information Literacy Assessment

## Background

In 1993 national standards for information literacy were revised and accepted by the Association of Colleges and Research Libraries (ACRL). Most of the relevant literature on information literacy focuses on why, when, and how to develop information literacy in your institution. Very little is written on how undergraduate students meet the ACRL standards. A search in September 2004 found one article, written by Patricia Davitt Maughan, "Assessing Information Literacy among Undergraduates: a discussion of the literature and the University of California-Berkeley Assessment Experience," which described the extent to which undergraduates met the ACRL standards or earlier sets of standards. This article reports subjective student self-assessment and not objective data (Maughan, 2001).

## Relevance of Information Literacy Training

Information Literacy is defined in the 2002 edition of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education's (MSCHE) *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation*. As well as being defined, Standards 11 and 12 indicate that one of the overarching goals of an institution "should be to produce information literate graduates." Standard 12 also states that: "The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college level proficiency in general education and essentials skills, including oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency, and information literacy" (pg.38).

The MSCHE 2003 publication entitled *Developing Research & Communication Skills: Guidelines for Information Literacy in the Curriculum*, discusses the importance of information literacy training,

a result of a factor analysis performed by the Library faculty at

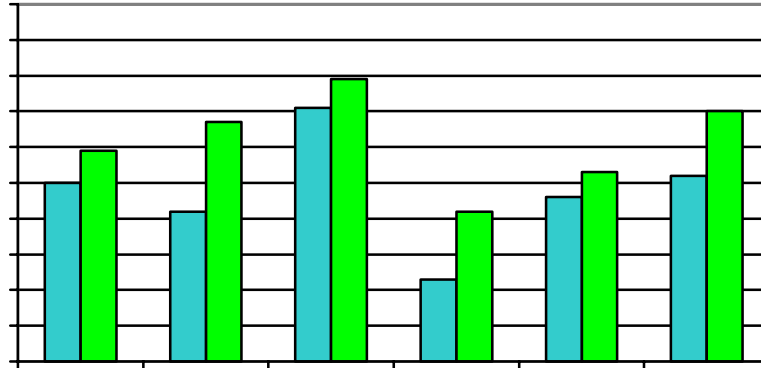




## Library Specific Questions

When considering the individual items on the assessment, questions 2, 3, 5, 8, 15, and 24 were identified as information that is the primary responsibility of library instruction. The percentage of students who answered each question correct is listed in Chart 1.

Chart 1  
Information Literacy Assessment Primary Library  
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**Table 3**  
**Differences for Freshmen and Seniors for Percent of Questions Answered Correctly for Library Specific Questions (arranged by ACRL standards)**

Question	Topic	Standard	Senior Score*	Freshman Score*	Difference	Potential Explanation
3	Secondary source identification	1	67	42	<b>25</b>	Higher increase due to practice and instruction on determining the extent of information needed.
2	Search Strategy	2	59	50	9	Due to previous experience with commercial search engines- there may already be a familiarity with search strategies using key words. Easy for students to succumb to inefficient searching.
8	Boolean Logic	2	42	23	<b>19</b>	Higher increase due to the unfamiliarity of Boolean logic prior to entering college. Boolean Logic is emphasized in Information Literacy Classes. Search engines use natural language styles as opposed to developing search strategies
5	Main Concepts	3	79	71	8	Students may be entering college using keyword searches and not higher level searches by subjects headings. Students may not see the reason for using subject heading searches because they find enough information through keyword searches.
15	Best support for claim	3	53	46	7	Both groups are failing to recognize the difference between primary, secondary, and tertiary materials and the appropriate application of those materials
24	Database usages from other schools	5	70	52	<b>18</b>	Students, after instruction, have a better understanding of our subscriptions and how to obtain items beyond those owned/accessible by the university.

\*Percent of questions answered correctly

**Bolded** numbers represent the largest differences between freshmen and seniors





own knowledge base in order to apply the information to a variety of practical or applied situations or assignments, and then use the information to its full advantage for a specific purpose.

One possibility for improving the scores for the seniors in *ACRL's* Standards 3 and 4 may be integrating discussions, assignments, and tests regarding information literacy skills into the general education and major courses throughout the four-year curriculum. This would allow the students to increase their capacity to use the knowledge gained and therefore increase their ability to apply the skills to various situations and practical implementations. The statement from the MSCHE 2003 publication entitled *Developing Research & Communication Skills: Guidelines for Information Literacy in the Curriculum* cannot be overstated.

“Information literacy training can deepen and improve basic general education skills...weaving information literacy instruction explicitly into specific disciplines enables students to place essential skills in the context of their majors, because each discipline has its unique approach to information, critical thinking, and evaluation. This may be done seamlessly throughout a course or as an explicit and minor component of a course (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools et al, 2003)”

Information Literacy instruction is a University-wide initiative to produce information literate graduates.

### **Limitations of the study**

Limitation in the study included the following:

- The three participating institutions used varying methodologies to administer the *Information Literacy Assessment*. This limitation deterred The University of Scranton Weinberg Memorial Faculty from comparing their data with that of the other institutions.
- The *Information Literacy Assessment* instrument continues to be developed. The wording of several questions has been refined after another item analysis.
- Using two different cohorts of students. The 2004 freshman were compared with the 2004 seniors. The purpose of participation this year was to begin to gather some baseline data. A comparison could not be made within a single cohort. The plan in the future is to pre-test a sample of incoming freshman students and then post-test the same sample in their senior year to assess information literacy skills.
- Minimal demographic data was collected. The plan for the next administration is to add more demographic questions such as an identifier, major, school, etc.

## **Future Steps for Incorporating Information Literacy into the Curriculum**

- Prepare a Power Point presentation to use to explain the results of the Information Literacy Assessment. **Completed.**
- Present to the Library Advisory Board an overview of the Information Literacy Assessment. The Library Advisory Board is made up of representatives from each academic department. **Completed.**
- Schedule meetings with Deans Conferences to present the results of the Information Literacy Assessment. **Pending.**
- Schedule a Brown-Bag lunch to show the results to the faculty who volunteered their classes for the Information Literacy Assessment. **Pending.**
- Schedule a Brown-Bag lunch to show the results to any faculty member who is interested in the results of the Information Literacy Assessment. **Pending.**
- Prepare an article for the Library's Spring Newsletter regarding the assessment results. **Completed.**
- Fall 2004 the Weinberg Memorial Library awarded six stipends to faculty who will be collaborating with selected library faculty in embedding information literacy into certain courses. At the end of each project, there will be a written report explaining the process and insights encountered. **Ongoing.**
- Spring 2006 a panel discussion of those who participated in the projects. This will be a school-wide presentation. **Pending.**
- Meet with Terry Mech and a representative from Marywood University to discuss wording of questions and develop a standardized administration process. **Completed.**
- Participate in the University of Scranton Pilot Assessment Plan. **Ongoing.**
- Develop an action plan for the Weinberg Memorial Library Information Literacy Program. **Ongoing.**
- Partner with Faculty in developing student learning outcomes on information for their courses. **Ongoing.**
- Repeat the Information Literacy Assessment in Fall 2005. **Pending.**

## References

Associated Colleges of the South. Information Fluency Definition. Retrieved February 10, 2005 from [http://www.colleges.org/~if/if\\_definition.html](http://www.colleges.org/~if/if_definition.html)

Maughan, P.D. (2001). Assessing information literacy among undergraduates: A discussion of the literature and the University of California-Berkeley Assessment Experience. *College & Research Libraries* 62(1), 71-85.

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