**Integrating Information Literacy in a First-Year University Course:
A Case Study from Canada**

Ganga Dakshinamurti, Ph.D.,
Librarian
Albert D. Cohen Library,
I.H. Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba, Canada

Lena Horne, Ph.D.,
Associate Professor
Department of Textile Sciences, University of Manitoba, Canada

Abstract

An information literate person is one who uses information effectively in all its forms. When presented with questions or problems, an information literate person would know what information to look for, how to search efficiently and be able to access relevant sources. In addition, an information literate person would have the ability to evaluate and select appropriate information sources and to use the information effectively and ethically to answer questions or solve problems.

Information literacy has become an important element in higher education. The information literacy movement has internationally recognized standards and learning outcomes. The step-by-step process of achieving information literacy is particularly crucial in an era where knowledge could be disseminated through a variety of media. Academic librarians could become even more effective if they are linked to curriculum development where faculty and librarians work together to achieve learning outcomes. This case study describes the steps taken by the authors to integrate information literacy skills in a new curriculum.

Case Study: The Textile Sciences Curriculum

In the summer of 2004, the new interdisciplinary Textile Sciences curriculum at the University of Manitoba was designated as a test case for integrating information literacy instruction. The Textile Sciences program comprises two streams, a product development stream and a textile development stream. The librarians are working with all the professors in the Textile Sciences department to create information literacy development activities for all Textile Sciences courses from the first to the fourth year of the program.

The product development stream is structured to follow the major steps involved in turning abstract ideas into tangible textile products for all ages and abilities. The knowledge base for these steps originates from various disciplines including business, economics, textile science, statistics, social psychology, and design. The multidisciplinary nature of the program demands students to use and evaluate information from a variety of sources. This attribute provides a challenging platform for information literacy development.

Integrating Information Literacy in the Textile Sciences Curriculum

The process of integrating information literacy in the Textile Sciences curriculum fits the four criteria of "course-integrated instruction" by Allegri (1985):

- Faculty and librarian involvement in planning, delivery, and evaluation of program.
- Curriculum based information literacy instruction.
- Mandatory student participation
- Credit received for participation.

<u>Faculty and Librarian Involvement in Planning, Delivery, and Evaluation of Program</u>

At the final stages of the Textile Sciences curriculum development process, a two-day teaching workshop was organized for the Textile Sciences faculty and the librarians who would be working with Textile Sciences to develop information literacy content. In this workshop, the structure of the Textile Sciences program and the relationship among all Textile Sciences courses were emphasized. In addition, the librarians and professors participated in several sessions on teaching techniques. In these sessions, the professors purposefully applied teaching techniques to some of the new courses, giving the librarians an opportunity to see how their expertise would fit. Subsequently, the librarians and the professors of four courses which were launched in September 2005 began to work on the specific objectives of those courses and the manner in which information literacy would be introduced.

For the remainder of the paper, the authors will describe the activities related to introducing information literacy in *Textiles, Products, and Consumers*, a three-credit course open to all first year university students.

<u>Curriculum-Based Information Literacy Instruction</u>

Textiles, Products and Consumers applies the elements of supply chain management to textiles and textile products. The course material is drawn from business, marketing, economics and textiles technology. Presently available textbooks could not capture the inherently *multidisciplinary* nature of the course nor do they adequately address current scientific and technological developments. Consequently, a variety of literature was used to form the course's knowledge base. The range of literature includes books, monographs, trade statistics, trade organization websites, and trade magazines. Hence, the traditional practice of a librarian appearing once or twice during the term as a "guest lecturer" to give instructions for using the library would have been futile. For the librarian, this means that the planning and delivery of information literacy instruction must be driven by the sequence and level of course material presented.

The absence of a textbook for this course created an opportunity for the authors to introduce multiple resources to students, to encourage them to apply the criteria for evaluating information and to determine the type of additional resources that would be needed to solve problems**.**   Three information literacy instructional sessions were delivered.

a. Session One

In this session, the following were covered by the librarian:

- The role of textbooks in an academic environment.
- How to use the University of Manitoba on-line catalogue system to search book titles that are relevant for the course.
- The role of print publications as sources of information.
- The role of websites as information sources in an academic environment.

The librarian took advantage of the absence of a textbook to discuss the purpose and features of a monograph, as well as the skills in using one effectively. She also used the University's electronic catalogue system to show how to find books and other print material that would be suitable for the course. Finally, the importance of keeping abreast of current developments in textile supply chain led to a discussion of websites as sources of *current* and *credible* information.

To reinforce the librarian's instructions, the professor designed an assignment in which students were asked to use two websites to answer a number of questions. Afterwards, students had to comment on which of the two websites provided the information they needed to answer the questions. Finally, they were asked to evaluate the websites according to authority, relevance, currency, and accuracy.

b. Session Two

This session was designed to fit the segment of the course on structure of the apparel industry in Canada. The librarian covered the following:

- The role of print and electronic media as sources of information on an industry.

- Websites that contain credible information on the global textile and apparel industries.
- Evaluate websites as sources of information using a set of criteria.

For this session, the professor designed an assignment which asked the students to use two websites to answer a number of questions on the apparel industry in Canada. Furthermore, students had to evaluate each website according to currency and credibility in order to conclude which website is more effective in answering the questions posed in the assignment.

c. Session Three

This session was designed to fit the segment of the course on apparel companies in Canada. The librarian showed *a range of* sources for looking up information about industries and companies. This range included newspapers, directories, company bibliographies, annual reports and websites.

The professor designed an assignment in which students were asked to compare information on three Canadian companies from various sources. They were also asked to comment on the advantages of using multiple sources of information to learn about companies.

To encourage students to form the habit of documenting sources of information, students learned to use the APA style of referencing.

Mandatory Student Participation

Since the assignments were deliberately and directly tied to information literacy instructional sessions, students knew that satisfactory performance on the assignments depended on their attendance at those sessions.

Credit for Student Participation

The three assignments constituted 15% of the student's final grade. For each assignment, students were evaluated according to knowledge-based material, the quality of which depended on their information literacy skills. In other words, the students' performance on each assignment was truly an indication of whether they were able to use relevant sources to answer questions posed in the assignment.

Benefits

For the **professor**, the integration of information literacy would be reflected in the course material, specifically, where information literacy is inserted at "teachable moments." Another area where evidence of integration of information literacy would be explicit is the manner in which assignments are developed. Hence, the professor's teaching dossier would be an important mechanism in recording and tracking the evolution of teaching style and materials.

For the **librarian**, a curriculum-based and integrated information literacy program would result in blending analysis of individual information sources with the subject matter so resources are introduced at appropriate moments, rather than as a one-shot deal. As the librarian is involved throughout the duration of the class, the process also allows the librarian to match the level and depth of information accessed and the analysis of the information is tailored to the students' level of cognitive development.

Activities for the Near Future

Based on the experience of the authors, they will consider the following for the 2006 academic year:

1. Continue to be involved in the curriculum development efforts of professors in Textile Sciences as new courses are launched in the next two years.

2. Review information literacy development activities established in 2005 with a view to implementing enhancements including software that would enable students to manage the information gathering and organization process.

3. Since this collaborative effort is a new experience to the authors, the next step is to develop a formal mechanism to elicit, organize and evaluate students' responses to specific information literacy development instructional activities.

Reference

Allegri, F. (1985). Course integrated instruction: Metamorphosis for the twenty-first century. *Medical Reference Services Quarterly, 4*, 47-66.