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Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education: An International Perspective

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An information literate person is:

“...one who is able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and effectively use the needed information.”

This simple definition was created in 1989 by the American Library Association’s Presidential Commission on Information Literacy.¹

While the term and definition have been debated extensively, the true challenge has not been what or whether, but rather how to create an information literate society. To meet this challenge, an international agenda has emerged through the partnering efforts of many organizations. In the United States, these partners have included the National Forum on Information Literacy, a coalition of more than sixty educational organizations; the American Association for Higher Education, whose 1998 conference theme was “developing students’ information literacy”; the Institute for Information Literacy; Regional and Discipline based accreditation groups; Teaching and Learning with Technology group; the American Library Association and many others.

One initiative that has begun to coordinate efforts to create the information literate society has been to develop Information Literacy Standards. Standards have now been established for school and college level students. The American Association of School Libraries and the Association of Educational

Communications and Technology have collaborated on *Information Power: Building Partnerships for learning*, which includes *Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning* for K-12. It focuses on developing, implementing and articulating a vision for the profession through standards and guidelines. For college level students, the Association of College and Research Libraries' Task Force on Information Literacy Competency Standards worked with many groups and individuals to develop the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education.

The Task force developed the standards with several considerations in mind. Foremost was that information literacy isn't just a library issue, but is an issue for all of higher education and society as well. Therefore the standards had to be developed through a cooperative and collaborative process that included representatives from all stakeholders. From the beginning, librarians on the task force were joined by representatives from the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE), the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSACHE) and the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE). This group, in consultation with many others, crafted the language that resulted in a final document. The process was one of drafting, discussion and wordsmithing, and redrafting many times to accommodate the ideas and concepts of the various participants. It was a process of collaboration to integrate the various cultures into a single written standard, incorporating the resources that all parties brought to the table. The result, of course, was not as any one group might have written it independently, but was stronger because it was a product all parties could agree to. No one "wins", but everyone is a winner. The final document represents a **shared vision**.

This document, which is now available at <http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilcomstan.html> and contains five standards and twenty-two performance indicators. The standards apply to the needs of students in higher education at all levels. They also assist in assessing student progress toward information literacy. They serve as guidelines for faculty, librarians, and others in developing local methods for measuring student learning in the context of an institution's unique mission. In addition to assessing all students' basic information literacy skills, faculty and librarians should also work together to develop assessment instruments and strategies in the context of particular disciplines, as information literacy manifests itself in the specific understanding of the knowledge creation, scholarly activity, and publication processes found in those disciplines.

Librarians in the international community can encourage support of information literacy and the information literacy standards within their professional library associations and within their educational and accreditation associations. To do this, they may wish to partner with faculty colleagues to present papers, panels or poster sessions, conduct workshops, and host discussion forums. They may wish to encourage adoption or endorsement by these associations.

The process of translating the standards into other languages has begun. In the efforts toward creating accurate translations, careful attention is being paid to nuances of language and meaning that were so carefully worked out as the document developed. If anyone in the audience is interested in participating in this initiative, they are welcome to leave their card, or name, address and language with me after the session and I will forward it to Barton Lessin, the Chair of the current Task Force for his consideration.

Some of you may find that an exact translation is a good first step, but not the final one. The best way to advance information literacy in your own country, organization and/or institution may be to recreate the process to arrive at another set of standards that are adapted to and appropriate for your situation. Patricia Iannuzzi, chair of the original task force, states, "We developed the standards with the expectation that they would be customized for the specific environment."² The process could mirror the process used by the task force by identifying the stakeholders and bringing them to the table to begin a dialog on information

literacy. The “Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education” may be a good place to begin the conversation, but the parties involved may find that the culture, circumstances and purpose require adjustments. This same model process could be the best way to achieve support at the level of a country, an association or an educational institution

Examples of how information literacy initiatives and standards have been applied in the United States at various level include the following: At the state level, Colorado, Wisconsin, and Oregon have adopted standards. In addition, several initiatives have been developed by statewide systems of higher education, including SUNY Information Literacy Initiative (<http://www.sunyconnect.suny.edu/ili/final.htm>), the California State University System Information Competence Project, Wisconsin (<http://facstaff.uww.edu/WAAL/infolit/ilcc.html>), and University of Massachusetts (<http://www.lib.umassd.edu/INFOLIT/InfoLitComp.html>). Individual Colleges and Universities have also implemented standards. Some of these are Earlham College, Kings College, University of Louisville (<http://www.louisville.edu/infoliteracy/aboutus.htm>), University of Washington (http://depts.washington.edu/itlit/mike_n.html), and Florida International University (<http://www.fiu.edu/~library/ili/iliprop1.html>).

At the level of the educational institution, librarians and administrators can encourage the inclusion of information literacy concepts and standards into their institution’s strategic vision and planning process. This could include the institution’s mission or vision statement, the strategic plan, institutional goals and other documents that set the overall tone and direction of the institution. The library’s own documents should also include these concepts. Other important policies and documents that relate to undergraduate education, such as general education definitions and requirements, teaching and learning guidelines, etc. are appropriate places for information literacy concepts to appear. “In many cases existing institutional documents contain language that incorporates principles of information literacy without it being labeled as such. It is important for librarians to help expose those connections and build upon them.” My favorite example of this Penn State University is that one of the goals for the strategic vision is to “develop world-class teachers and learners”³ I believe that world-class learners can only be achieved through information literacy, and am pleased to have such language to use when discussing the importance of information literacy with students and faculty on campus.

Once standards have been adopted, Iannuzzi suggests the following roles for librarians in building “the information literate student”:

- Work with faculty to develop curriculum, syllabi, and assignments that focus on the research process and the development of information literacy
- Join with faculty to explore and implement performance-based assessment methods
- Identify campus partners on faculty development and help transform teaching and learning through information literacy
- Collaborate with faculty to help them define information literacy for their discipline
- Identify and focus on library responsibilities toward information literacy and develop library instruction programs accordingly.

- Ensure that librarians teach the research process and its concepts, and do more than introduce electronic tools and technology to their patrons.
- Provide continuing education for librarians about teaching techniques, outcomes based learning, and assessment.⁴

To assist librarians in their efforts to prepare themselves for these roles, the Institute for Information Literacy has developed an Immersion program to help new librarians learn to teach, and to assist experienced teachers to understand the issues surrounding the collaborative processes needed in the implementation of standards and programs within the institution. The American Library Association, and the Association of College and Research Libraries have also been conducting workshops on advocacy for information literacy at their conferences.

¹ American Library Association. Presidential Committee on Information Literacy. Final Report.(Chicago: American Library Association, 1989.) <http://www.ala.org/acrl/nili/ilit1st.html>

² Patricia Iannuzzi, "Focus: Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education" *Community & Junior College Libraries*, Vol. 9 (4) 2000 p. 63-67.

³ Penn State University, Strategic Plan "Academic Excellence: Planning for the Twenty-first Century", p2. September 1997 <http://www.psu.edu/ur/state/stratplan.pdf>.

⁴ same, page 65