Information Literacy Efforts to Date


*In-fo-ria·tion Lit·er·a·cy n. 1. 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." 2. longer definition... from Association of College & Research Libraries:

The Middlebury Library (formerly part of Library and Information Services, i.e. LIS, and now its own separate organization) has an Information Literacy website (go/infolit) to provide the relevant information and resources to support the College’s information literacy efforts, which are an integral part of meeting the NEASC reaccreditation standards. More detailed explanations of how information literacy is defined, our vision for the program, and links to standards, articles, and resources for faculty can be found on this website.

Information Literacy Skills

In 2010, a group of Middlebury librarians and technologists (formerly part of LIS) developed a set of research and technology skills that were adapted and simplified from a much longer set of information literacy competency standards developed by the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) that are in wide use at colleges and universities. The full ACRL version includes introductory to advanced skills, but faculty on the LIS Advisory Committee, i.e. FLAC (now the Faculty Library Advisory Committee) felt that the intermediate and advanced skills varied too much by discipline and should therefore be developed within the majors, thus our focus shifted to developing introductory skills. These were developed with input from FLAC, the Student LIS Advisory Committee (now defunct), and the Liaisons (librarians, technologists). Our introductory skills and the complete ACRL standards can be found on the Information Literacy website (go/infolitskills).

Information Literacy Intermediate and Advanced Skills

It is our long-term goal to develop discipline-specific intermediate and advanced information literacy skills tied to department/program learning goals. We should be thinking in 5-year increments and beyond, along the lines of the reaccreditation review with its 5-year check-in. We piloted projects with two departments (History of Art & Architecture, i.e. HARC, and Chemistry) to develop a list of learning goals, classes to target, and method of assessment to serve as models. The two pilots have been completed and approved by the department and are available online from the skills section of the Infolit website. The question remains how we should approach getting more departments to participate in the pilots and how to communicate our information literacy efforts to faculty. A small working group within LIS / the Library has been meeting to discuss this. The College Academic Affairs Committee endorsed expanding the pilots. Our next focus is to bring the issue to the Department Heads and Educational Affairs Committee meetings. The topic is on the agenda for Department Heads for 2014/15. Ultimately our goal is to develop sufficient pilots to serve as examples to help develop such learning goals for all departments and programs.

Information Literacy in FYSE’s

There has been a long history of collaboration between faculty, librarians, technologists, and the Center for Teaching, Learning, & Research (CTLR) to include assignments and/or instruction in First Year Seminars (FYSE’s) to help our students begin to learn information
literacy skills. Our introductory skills document will help us to better focus on the skills that our students need to learn. However, assignments and instruction vary with each First Year Seminar and not all faculty/classes participate. From 2013 - 2014 the first year seminar program was revamped and the goal of including research & technology instruction is still encouraged but not mandated. In any case we will have to supplement class instruction with the Midd Libraries Quick Guide, course-specific FYSE research guides, tutorials, and also focus on other introductory level courses.

Tutorials

Recent efforts to provide online video tutorials have increased the options we make available to faculty, librarians, and technologists to support the teaching of introductory information literacy skills. The librarians, academic technologists, and student digital media tutors (DMT's) have developed a number of short library web tutorials and have more in the works. See our tutorials page at go/tutorials. To support technology learning, Information Technology Services (ITS) provides access to Lynda.com technology video tutorials. See go/lynda. In addition, the Library and ITS have developed, and will continue to develop, detailed documentation for Middlebury-specific technologies via the Library & ITS wiki or other tools as appropriate.

Assessment of the Information Literacy Skills of Students

It is not enough to simply define skills we want our students to have and attempt to teach them. We also need to assess skill levels students arrive with and achieve over their academic career. In fall 2010 we sent a 7 question "quiz" adapted from the Research Practices Survey (RPS) to the first year students to get a baseline assessment of incoming students' skills. "The Research Practices Survey is a fifteen-minute questionnaire, developed by and for liberal arts institutions, that assesses undergraduate students' experiences, dispositions, and proficiencies in conducting college-level academic research." It is based on the ACRL information literacy standards. For more information, see the description and options here. The response rate (8.85%) in 2010 was too low to draw representative conclusions, so results were not shared. In fall 2011 with the help of the Office of Planning and Assessment, we used the full Research Practices Survey (RPS). It was administered by HEDS (Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium). A one page summary of the 2011 results was shared with faculty. In fall 2012 another scaled down and modified version of the RPS survey was administered by the college and distributed to all students as part of a longer required survey, thus greatly improving participation. In fall 2013 the required survey wasn't administered, so we targeted a small number of FYSE's from across the disciplines and administered a simplified version of the RPS survey before and after library instruction. A one page summary of the 2012-2013 results was shared with faculty. In the future we intend to assess student skills at other times between their first year seminar and graduation. Next year, we hope to repeat the survey to the juniors who took the survey their first year to determine whether they have improved their skills, and we are investigating options for obtaining data on baseline skills of new incoming students on an annual basis. We will also be interested in the results of other pre-existing surveys (for example, the alumni survey and the senior survey) on how well Middlebury has prepared students for their futures.

Last updated 12-2-2014