



**THE UNIVERSITY
OF VERMONT**

University Libraries

Information Literacy White Paper

March 2006

Information Literacy: the basis for lifelong learning

Within an environment of rapid technological change and proliferating information resources, information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning and is an essential element in the creation of an informed citizenry in a burgeoning information society. Information literacy enables individuals to think critically, master content, extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning experiences.

Information Literacy: a definition for the UVM campus

Information literacy is both the understanding of concepts and the acquisition of skills that support independence in identifying, accessing, evaluating, organizing and communicating information. Information literacy permits individuals to learn, work and participate in the global information society and is relevant to all academic disciplines and all levels of education.

In practice, the information literate individual is one who:

- recognizes and articulates an information need
- defines appropriate avenues of investigation for meeting the need
- identifies and accesses relevant sources of information in a variety of formats
- evaluates information and synthesizes content into an integrated whole
- communicates or disseminates information to a variety of audiences

Information Literacy: assessing student learning through educational outcomes

Under the current standards for accreditation of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), universities and colleges are held accountable for ensuring that students receive instruction and support for information literacy appropriate to the degree level and field of study. Thus information literacy joins written and oral communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, and critical analysis/logical thinking as a demonstrable core outcome for all graduates of undergraduate programs.

Seven core information literacy outcomes have been identified for UVM undergraduates:

1. Recognizes the need for information and understands that accurate and complete information is the basis for intelligent decision-making.
2. Formulates questions based on information needs.
3. Identifies potential sources of information and develops successful search strategies.
4. Accesses sources of information.
5. Evaluates information and its source.
6. Organizes information for practical applications, integrates information into an existing body of knowledge, and disseminates or communicates that knowledge in the most appropriate format.
7. Uses information in critical thinking and problem solving.

Information Literacy: a natural complement to computer technology literacy

All information literate individuals necessarily develop some computer technology skills, but information literacy is not the same as computer technology literacy. Computer technology literacy refers to teaching individuals to use computers, software applications, databases, and other information and communication technologies. By contrast, information literacy encompasses a much more expansive set of higher order critical-thinking skills:

- articulation of research questions
- conceptualization of scholarly dissemination of information
- construction of information-seeking strategies
- analysis, critical discernment, and evaluation of information content
- understanding of ethical and legal issues surrounding information and information use

Information Literacy: embrace best practices within higher education

Information literacy programs in colleges and universities across the country vary in scope and structure, but the best programs all:

- require the leadership and support of academic administrators
- integrate information literacy instruction widely throughout the curriculum
- involve collaboration among classroom faculty, program administrators, librarians and other information professionals on campus
- interpret information literacy as an integral component to the learning process
- employ learner-centered, experiential and reflective pedagogical approaches
- include measures of assessment for both program and student performance

Information Literacy: an invitation to dialogue

Librarians are deeply involved in addressing the issues associated with developing information literacy programs and with national and regional efforts to improve program quality. The faculty and staff of the University Libraries are committed to working with departments on campus to ensure that information literacy becomes an integral part of the educational experience for all UVM students. We invite you to discuss the issue of information literacy with your colleagues across campus and bring us your ideas for collaboration.

To continue this conversation, please contact **Mara Saule, Dean of University Libraries**, at <marasaule@uvm.edu>.

Information Literacy: key readings

Association of College and Research Libraries. "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education," 2000. Available at: <<http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm>>.

Bruce, Christine. "Information Literacy as a Catalyst for Educational Change: A Background Paper," July 2002. White Paper prepared for UNESCO, the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, and the National Forum on Information Literacy, for use at the Information Literacy Meeting of Experts, Prague, The Czech Republic. Available at: <<http://www.nclis.gov/libinter/infolitconf&meet/papers/bruce-fullpaper.pdf>>.

U.S. National Commission on Library and Information Science and the National Forum on Information Literacy. "The Prague Declaration: Towards An Information Literate Society". Document prepared for the Information Literacy Meeting of Experts, Prague, The Czech Republic, September 20-23, 2003. Available at: <<http://www.nclis.gov/libinter/infolitconf&meet/postinfolitconf&meet/PragueDeclaration.pdf>>.