

# ***Transforming BI Activities Into an IL Program: Challenges and Opportunities***

*Pamela Snelson and Lisa Stillwell*

## **Introduction**

A core goal of an academic library's mission is to teach students the skills and knowledge they need to be life-long learners, or "information literate." To achieve this goal, academic librarians engage in a wide array of instruction activities traditionally known as "Bibliographic Instruction" (or "BI"). These activities quite often are invisible to, or misunderstood by, the library's greater campus community...until now.

The recently approved ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education<sup>1</sup> (hereafter referred to as "the Standards") present a fantastic opportunity for academic librarians to demystify and enhance BI. The Standards' Performance Indicators and Outcomes can serve as a framework for the review and transformation of BI activities into an "Information Literacy" (or "IL") program that is better understood, valued and embraced by the campus community. This paper documents the processes through which the authors reviewed and developed strategies for transforming the BI activities at their institution, Franklin & Marshall College.

## **Context**

Franklin & Marshall College (F&M) is a 4-year, undergraduate liberal arts college in south central Pennsylvania, with an average enrollment of 1900 students. The library holds approximately 450,000 volumes and 1700 periodical titles. Seven of the nine librarians on campus teach regularly in the library's Instruction Program. The program is comprised primarily of course-related instruction sessions developed upon the request of faculty members. F&M has no single course required of all students through which librarians could programmatically provide BI. Nor do the authors foresee opportunities for curricular change that would formally incorporate a separate Information Literacy course.

Instruction occurs most often in the Library Classroom located in the Shadék-Fackenthal Library. The classroom features 16 Macintosh computers, including one for the instruction librarian. The classroom opened in Spring 1999.

## **Methodology**

To review and transform instruction activities, a careful

---

*Pamela Snelson is college librarian and Lisa Stillwell is reference librarian at Franklin & Marshall College*

analysis of these activities is required. To gain this understanding, 2 years of BI—academic years 1998–99 and 1999–2000—were studied. Data collection involved 2 methods—a review of artifacts, and interviews with librarians who conducted instruction sessions (hereafter referred to as “instruction librarians.”)

### ***Review of Artifacts***

For each academic year, the Coordinator of Instruction recorded data into a spreadsheet for every course that had BI. These data were: Course Name and Number, Faculty Member, Department, Date and Time of Session(s), Number of Sessions, and Number of Students in the course. Instruction librarians occasionally provided supplemental information on BI Data Sheets. This content varied widely, from commentary on the session, to how many students were in attendance. Instruction librarians also created print and/or online documentation for the students. This documentation provided a record of the information sources covered in the session. Using the spreadsheet as a guide, the authors solicited all available artifacts—BI Data Sheets, course syllabi, session documentation—from instruction librarians for courses that had BI during the period studied.

### ***Matrix of Elements***

The authors analyzed each other’s artifacts and converted the resulting data into elements of a matrix to be used in analyzing the remaining instruction librarians’ artifacts. The authors reviewed this first matrix and determined additional elements were necessary to perform as complete an analysis as possible of BI activities at F&M. The final matrix featured the following elements:

1. Primary sources
2. The Library Catalog
3. Print indexes and abstracts & online indexes and abstracts
4. Specific/specialized journals
5. Government documents
6. Web search engines & specific web sites
7. Full text journals as a complete title (e.g. JSTOR) & full text journals as part of an aggregated collection (e.g. Lexis-Nexis)
8. Print reference sources & online reference sources
9. Week of term session occurred
10. The degree of/Good fit between date of the instruction session(s) and due date of assignment
11. Student hands-on work
12. In-class exercise

### **13. Discussion of evaluation**

### **14. Type of class assignment.**

The authors then analyzed all relevant artifacts from all instruction librarians and input the data into the matrix. In all but 10 cases, the data collection was sufficient to complete the first 8 elements of the matrix.

### ***Interviews with Instruction Librarians***

The interviews qualitatively enhanced the matrix data. The interview questions concentrated solely on the Standards, and were derived from those Outcomes not explicitly represented in the matrix. Several Outcomes require knowledge beyond that to which librarians are privy; these Outcomes were not discussed in the interviews. The language of the Outcomes was altered in the questions to better reflect the language commonly used in the library’s instruction program. The authors interviewed librarians who had conducted library instruction sessions during the 2 academic years studied.

## **Results**

### ***The Students***

The total enrollment for the courses that had BI was 2436 students. If multiple sessions were included, the total was 3133 students. The classes were represented as follows: First Year 39.24%; Sophomore 25.49%; Junior 19.79%; and Senior 15.48%.

### ***Courses***

Librarians met with 110 courses for a total of 174 sessions. 70% of the courses had one session, while the remaining 30% of courses met at least twice. Instruction was concentrated in the lowest level courses (course numbers in the 100s) at 48% or 53 courses total. Less than 25% of instruction was delivered to upper level courses (course numbers in the 300s and 400s). The majority of instruction occurred in the fall semester. Over half of all instruction took place in weeks 1–4 of the semester. Close to 90 percent of instruction was completed by week 8 of 15-week semesters

### ***Departments***

BI sessions were conducted for at least one course in every academic department, with 40% of all faculty members requesting BI. Rates of participation by faculty members per department ranged from 11% to 100%. Close to 1/2 of departments had instruction for upper level courses.

### **Instruction Content**

Three elements were covered in nearly every instruction session—online indexes and abstracts, print reference sources, and the library catalog. Instruction librarians discussed specific web sites, full text articles, and web search engines in half or more classes. Less likely to be mentioned were print abstracts and indexes, primary sources, and complete full text journals. Rarely included were specialized journals, government documents and online reference sources.

### **Discussion**

The data compiled in the matrix provide a thorough analysis of current instruction activities. The information gathered through the interviews relates current activities to the Standards. This discussion synthesizes the two.

*STANDARD I The information literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed.*

For Standard I, the matrix and interview data indicate room for improvement with current instruction activities.

A wide variety of information formats were consistently featured in instruction, as were the purposes and intended audiences of the information sources. What lacked was discussion of primary sources, as they were taught in only 43% of sessions. It bears noting there were sessions that focused exclusively on primary sources, particularly those located in the library's Special Collections. Since all disciplines have primary literature, it would not be difficult to incorporate this discussion into session content.

Print reference sources were discussed in nearly every instruction session, but rarely were online reference sources covered. This could be problematic if/when the F&M library moves to greater online provision of reference sources. It is reasonable to assume, however, that changes in instruction session content would occur along with any significant changes in format.

Librarians infrequently encouraged students to seek information beyond that which is available at F&M. There are several colleges and universities in the area, and the library belongs to various library consortia, one featuring a union catalog of all participants. Incorporating this content into the sessions should occur upon reminding librarians of these options.

Two of the more conceptual Outcomes of Standard I were absent from library sessions. Instruction librarians rarely explained the organization of knowledge in disciplines, nor did they convey that research is a process requiring time and planning. A review of these and other concep-

tual components of information literacy should spark their inclusion in future sessions.

*STANDARD II The information literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.*

Library instruction at F&M excelled at addressing the Outcomes of Standard II. The Library Classroom greatly enhanced the ability to teach online searching and retrieval, and introduced "hands-on" experience for students to exercise their research skills. Having both the instruction librarian and the faculty member available for assistance contributed to effective and efficient work by students.

Extensive instruction in using various search systems to retrieve information in a variety of formats was provided. All librarians explained the distinguishing characteristics and appropriate use of information sources, particularly the Library Catalog, online indexes, abstracts, and full-text article sources. Search statement development, execution of searches, and the use of controlled vocabulary were all addressed regularly. Assessing and reformulating searches to improve results most often occurred when hands-on time was provided. Many interview responses indicated the most meaningful (and obedient) student participation in hands-on experiences occurred when students had topics with which to work.

Librarians usually addressed the skills required to locate materials by reviewing the call numbers of the print reference materials presented. The F&M library's journal collection (print and online) has a search facility distinct from the Library Catalog, and it was frequently covered in instruction sessions.

Instruction librarians seemed to favor Interlibrary Loan as the means by which to obtain materials not available locally. Local libraries and library consortia to which F&M belongs were rarely mentioned in instruction sessions.

Print indexes and abstracts were conspicuously absent from instruction sessions. This may just reflect research needs for the most current information and/or that the majority of major indexes and abstracts in the F&M collection are now available online, with the print format being kept only to supplement the online content.

Students were regularly encouraged to capture citation data, particularly when citing Internet sources. This practice will most likely continue, if not expand, in light of growing problems with plagiarism on college and university campuses.

Most librarians addressed the "transferability" of research skills through either direct explanation or inference

through the demonstration of a variety of database products. This important concept needs to be conveyed as directly as possible.

The matrix data revealed instruction in the use of the Internet was inconsistent, most likely because not all faculty members with whom the library works allow such sources to be used in their students' research.

**STANDARD III** *The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.*

The Performance Indicators of Standard III address the evaluation of information and the ability of students to synthesize information. Librarians routinely discussed how to evaluate information sources, but the discussion occurred almost exclusively in regard to Internet sources. The library has readily available documentation on evaluating all information formats, so extending the discussion should be an easy modification.

The synthesizing component of Standard III can only be evaluated with the cooperation of faculty, as they have consistent contact with students and can follow their progress.

**STANDARD IV** *The information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose*

Neither the matrix data nor the interviews could provide data related to this Standard. Partnering with faculty to assess student performance would provide information impossible to obtain from current instruction activities.

[At the end of the Fall 2000 semester the authors distributed a survey to faculty who had BI for their courses. The results will be available at the conference.]

**STANDARD V** *The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.*

The content of Standard V reached beyond the scope of current activities. Library instruction sessions at F&M were primarily assignment-driven, which did not often allow adequate time to address the issues of Standard V. It seems a more programmatic approach to IL, which allowed for continuing discussion, could best achieve the Outcomes of this Standard.

Librarians would occasionally convey the difference between free and fee-based information, usually in terms of which would best serve the students. A variety of citation styles were also discussed inconsistently, as their inclusion often came only at faculty request.

## **Conclusion**

When the authors first examined the Standards, they could not easily map the Outcomes onto their institution's existing BI activities. It seemed the Performance Indicators presupposed an existing Information Literacy course or at least significant faculty involvement with BI. The authors nevertheless conclude the Library Instruction program at their institution currently performs to enable students to achieve several Outcomes of the Standards, and is well positioned to incorporate the remaining Outcomes, provided several changes occur. Below are the strategies necessary to effect these changes.

### **Goal I Involve the faculty in Information Literacy efforts.**

The authors determined a significant portion of the Outcomes would be most appropriately and effectively produced through librarian partnership with faculty. Information Literacy encompasses the conceptual *and* the practical, whereas Bibliographic Instruction at F&M tends to focuses primarily on the latter. The conceptual content might prove attractive to faculty and inspire their interest and involvement, which is crucial to generating campus support for a new IL program.

#### *Strategies:*

- Gauge faculty awareness of Information Literacy. Find out what they want their students to know, and what their concerns are regarding student research abilities.
- Assess faculty satisfaction with current instruction activities.
- Host faculty forums to explain and discuss IL Outcomes to determine what is important at F&M and what is critical to individual departments and disciplines.
- Collaborate with faculty to develop assessment instruments to ascertain student performance of Outcomes.
- Reach out to *all* faculty to increase participation in a variety of courses within each department. Although IL will not be a component in all courses, all faculty should be aware of it.

### **Goal II Transform current BI activities.**

The authors' research indicates significant transformation of BI activities at F&M is necessary to produce information literate students. Although the Standards make no structural or procedural recommendations for change, they can serve to guide the process and legitimize the need for an IL program to the campus community. With seven instruction librarians, three of whom comprise the Reference Department which already teaches just over 50% of all sessions, it

should not be too challenging to agree on uniform content and approaches to information literacy.

**Strategies:**

- Share results of this research with all instruction librarians, and encourage frank discussion and analysis of current BI activities.
- Develop uniform IL content which broadens that of current BI activities to more specifically address the Standards and Outcomes.
- Convert enhanced content into a cohesive IL program with clearly stated goals and methods of evaluation.

- Work with all librarians to increase awareness of IL in all academic departments

The above goals and strategies represent what the authors are confident they can achieve, based on their findings, through the initial phase of transforming BI activities into an IL program. Further design and development will occur as the transformation progresses.

**Notes**

1. For the complete text of the Standards: <http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilintro.html>.