1999

Information Literacy at the University of Rhode Island Libraries

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The University of Rhode Island Libraries have placed building an effective information literacy program as one of the Libraries’ primary goals. In their position paper on information literacy, the American Library Association states, “to be prepared for a future characterized by change, students must learn to think rationally and creatively, solve problems, manage and retrieve information, and communicate effectively. By mastering information problem-solving, students will be ready for an information based society and a technological workplace.” The URI Libraries are committed to developing a multi-tiered approach to fostering information literacy among both students and faculty in support of the University’s stated mission of promoting students’ capabilities as “critical and independent thinkers.”

BACKGROUND

Beginning in March 1998, a working group of librarians met with the Vice-Provost for Information Services to address information literacy goals and to investigate how they could best be integrated into the curriculum. While the Libraries have for many years offered an extensive and successful bibliographic instruction program, the group felt that this approach needed to be expanded. Over the summer, the group researched various information literacy models and met with supportive faculty members for their input. The group concluded that to be successful, any model would require support and commitment from both administration and faculty.

The group determined that the most promising way of successfully integrating information literacy into the curriculum would be to develop partnerships with faculty teaching core courses in major disciplines. The discipline on which the group decided to focus first was business. Specific faculty in the College of Business were approached and responded enthusiastically to an invitation to work with the group. After some discussion, the group decided to create an open-ended, one-credit Special Topics course that could also be made to run concurrently with a core course, in which case students in the core course would be required to register for the Special Topics course as well.

THE COURSE

The spring 1999 semester, two sections of LIB 140 Special Topics in Information Literacy with a focus on business information were team-taught by Andrée Rathemacher and Mary MacDonald. Students who enrolled in Professor Clay Sink’s two sections of Management 110: Introduction to Business were also required to enroll in LIB 140. Despite the fact that a few students from MGT 110 slipped through the cracks and did not enroll in the course and eight students dropped the course mid-semester, both sections of LIB 140 were full with 25 students each.

Taught in a workshop style, the course covered general concepts as well as business information. Each class began with a short introduction to the day’s topic. Students then gathered into groups to work on an in-class worksheet. There was no final exam for the course. Instead, each student wrote a “Memo-to-Your-Manager” on one of a number of current issues in business. The Memo was a tool for students to demonstrate that they could find, evaluate, and communicate information effectively. There was no textbook for the course, and readings were minimal. All worksheets and lecture slides were developed by the instructors. (The syllabus is available online at http://www.library.uri.edu/LIB140/.)

At the time of this writing, feedback from the course evaluation forms had not been received. However, from comments that students have made, it appears that reaction to the class is mixed. Some students clearly resented having been “forced” to enroll in a course they had not planned on taking. Other students were quite positive about the course, with comments such as: “Every student should have to take this class.” “Now I finally understand the library.” “This class is much more useful than URI 101 or WRT 101 [required freshmen-level courses with library components].” “The worksheets are fun; I like them.” “At first I thought these worksheets were stupid, but now that I have to do research for MGT 110, I realize how useful they are.”

FUTURE PLANS

More information literacy courses are planned for the future. In the fall, the University Libraries will again offer two sections of LIB 140 with a business focus. As before, one section is required of students in Professor Sink’s MGT 110 section. The other section is open to students enrolled in any undergraduate business course. This second section will be a test case to see whether LIB 140 generates adequate interest as a freestanding course or if it works best to continue “piggy-backing” on MGT 110 and other courses in the College of Business.

Also in Fall 1999, Mary MacDonald and Joanna Burkhardt continued on page 4
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CRIARL CONTINUING EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
JUNE 1998 - MAY 1999  

By Barbara Donnelly, Naval War College

1998/1999 Program
June 1998

Exploring Legal Education: Rhode Island and Beyond was presented on June 16, 1998 at Roger Williams University School of Law in Bristol, RI. The purpose of the workshop was to inform participants of the legal resources available in Rhode Island and on the Internet and to provide suggestions for collecting Rhode Island legal materials. Gail Winson, Director of the RWU Law Library and Professor of Law, and Kendall Svengalis, Rhode Island State Law Librarian and the author of The Legal Information Buyer’s Guide and Reference Manual, presented the day-long workshop. Nan Kelley Balliot coordinated the workshop. Joan Bartram handled registration, and Ruth Souto designed the flyer.

Professor Winson conducted a “virtual tour” of selected Internet websites. Sites for locating federal materials as well as state and municipal materials were mentioned. A handout describing the various websites, and a diskette with embedded links to websites were given to the participants. Afterward, The RWU Law Library’s computer lab was available for hands-on use.

Mr. Svengalis spoke about the collection and services available at the Rhode Island State Law Library. He also spoke about the collection development of legal materials. Changes have occurred in legal publishing since 1978 which have influenced pricing. He described print and CD-ROM materials for building Rhode Island and core legal collections.

The workshop had 30 participants and was rated highly on the evaluation forms. Comments such as “Very informative,” “Both excellent presenters,” and “Very professional and informative workshop” were noted on the evaluations.

January 1999

On January 12, 1999 Michael Jackson, Reference/Collection Development-Social Sciences Librarian and Professor of Political Science at Brown University, presented a lively and informative workshop entitled Critical Evaluation of Internet Websites. Lori Jargo coordinated the workshop, Joan Bartram handled registrations, and Ruth Souto designed the flyer.

The first part of the half-day workshop was held in Room 241 of the CIT Building at Brown, and the second part was a hands-on session in the Mac classroom in CIT. Professor Jackson covered such questions as how to determine if a website is legitimate and authoritative or filled with false information, how one can tell if the information is biased or scholarly, and how to avoid false hits.

The workshop had 32 participants and had a waiting list. Everyone who attended expressed very positive comments about the workshop content and about Professor Jackson’s style of presentation. Evaluations rated the workshop very highly.

Upcoming Programs
June 1999

The Committee is currently planning a workshop for June 16, 1999, entitled Tools for Coping: Stress, Change and Technology, which is to be held in Galanti Lounge at URI. This day-long workshop will be presented by Mr. Eugene Knott of URI’s Professional Development, Leadership and Organization Training program (PDLOT). Mr. Knott will personalize the notion of change, stressors, and technological advances. Discussion will focus on approaches to accommodating change. He will also address how library staff can deal with patron expectations of technology, some of which are unrealistic. Eileen Tierney is coordinating the workshop. Ruth Souto designed and distributed the flyer, and Joan Bartram is handling registrations.

Committee Membership

Barbara Donnelly from the Naval War College served as Chair, and Nan Kelley Balliot from Roger Williams University Law School served as Secretary. Other members of the committee are: Joan Bartram, Salve Regina University; Lori Jargo, Brown University; Veronica Maher, Roger Williams University; Betty-Ann Nelson, Johnson & Wales University who replace Rosita Hopper of the same institution; Ruth Souto, Community College of Rhode Island; Susan Waddington, Providence Public Library; and Eileen Tierney, University of Rhode Island.

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will team-teach the first section of LIB 120: Introduction to Information Literacy (3 credits) at the Feinstein College of Continuing Education in Providence. This course was developed as a general exploration of gathering, analyzing, and evaluating information and will not have a subject-specific focus. After the initial teaching of LIB 120, the course may be expanded to the Kingston campus if there is enough interest.

Hopefully LIB 120 and LIB 140 are the beginnings of what will become a thriving information literacy program at the University of Rhode Island.