Information Literacy—Time for a Comprehensive Plan

Short Session Description
Participants will be guided through the process of creating a comprehensive plan for Information Literacy, using a workbook which the presenters will supply. Participants will gain knowledge of how to get started, knowledge of what to put in the plan, and leave the session with an outline plan for their home institution.

Full Description
Many libraries take an ad hoc approach to Information Literacy, omitting the creation of a long-term plan entirely, or delaying it until an Information Literacy program has already taken shape. This may be due to time, staff, and funding constraints, or any number of other reasons.

Wonderful Information Literacy courses, workshops and tutorials have been developed over time, and their librarian creators have been very gracious in sharing their ideas with others. For this reason, it is fairly common practice to massage, emulate and borrow what already exists, when possible, in order to meet an urgent need for Information Literacy programming. Meeting those urgent needs frequently takes precedence over the time consuming and sometimes arduous planning process. Once involved in the delivery of Information Literacy classes, workshops and tutorials, it is often difficult to find the time to create a comprehensive plan that reflects the goals of the institution, the needs of the students served, and the programmatic outcomes desired and measured. Although many institutions have some scheme for providing instruction in Information Literacy, not very many have created a comprehensive plan for providing Information Literacy to their users.

Why is having a comprehensive plan important? The planning process helps to identify what is most important in Information Literacy at a specific institution. It will determine who will be served and how. It will explain where librarians fit into the curricular scheme for delivery of Information Literacy instruction. It will define what resources are needed to accomplish the stated goals and objectives. A comprehensive Information Literacy plan can serve as a starting point for future planning as well.

Institutions having an approved plan for Information Literacy have a sign from their supporting institution that it is willing to make a serious commitment to Information Literacy. The plan indicates that the needs of the academic community have been considered, and that the solution is specifically designed to address those needs. It is a tangible document in which a vision of the future can be projected. An Information Literacy plan can be presented to any interested party, from the President of the University to future employers to prospective students. A comprehensive plan serves as a road map or a blueprint for Information Literacy in the near and distant future.

At the University of Rhode Island librarians created a multi-year comprehensive plan for Information Literacy. In doing so we made progress, made mistakes and made new friends. We learned about the structure of the University, the processes by which programs and courses come to be, the committees that approve various proposals, and
the faculty, staff and administrators who are involved in long range planning for the University. We arrived at an acceptable version of an Information Literacy plan approximately 18 months after we began. The plan is serving to guide our progress in a logical step-by-step manner and will do so for many years to come.

We felt that it would be a time-saving service to others to share our experiences and the process we used to create our plan, and to help others begin to create their own plans which reflect the needs of their own institutions. A major step toward the completion of any large task is simply to overcome inertia and get started. To this end, we propose to the workshop described below at ACRL 2003—“Information Literacy—Time for a Comprehensive Plan”.

Presenters will work with both large and small group during the session. This workshop will guide participants through all the stages of development of an Information Literacy plan, supplying insights from the presenters’ experience at the University of Rhode Island. We will briefly outline the University of Rhode Island Plan for Information Literacy. In addition, other Information Literacy plans from other institutions will be discussed and examined for similarities and differences.

Then, workshop participants will engage in the preparation of a long-range plan for Information Literacy, using the workbook the presenters will supply. Presenters will provide step by step guidance in the creation of these plans. Methods used in creating these plans will include concept mapping, discussion, and question and answer. Participants will identify appropriate data at their home institutions and apply that specific information to the outline in the workbook.

Participants will leave the workshop with a blueprint/roadmap for how to create an Information Literacy plan and with an outline plan for their own institution.