New Learners, New Models:
Cultivating an Information Literacy Program

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New Learners, New Models:
Cultivating an Information Literacy Program

- Beginnings of our program
- Current library instruction practices
- Why change?
- Draft Plan for Information Literacy at the University of Rhode Island
- The courses — LIB 140 & LIB 120
- The Information Literacy Modules
- The future?
The Beginnings

- **March 1998**
  - Interested reference librarians met with the Vice Provost for Information Services / Dean of Libraries to discuss
    - information literacy goals
    - how to fit them into curriculum
  - Provided the support needed to bring our informal discussions and thoughts together into a plan
Current Library Instruction Program

• Very active program, but
• No overall plan or strategy
• 1998/99
  – 8 reference librarians
  – 3 library science graduate students
  – 325 library instruction sessions
  – 7,323 students reached
Current Library Instruction Program

- Growing steadily since 1995/96
  - number of classes taught increased 15%
Current Library Instruction Program

• “Blitzes”
  – URI 101
    • online catalog
  – Writing 101
    • periodical database

• “One-Shot” BIs
  – subject-specific
  – requested by faculty members
  – geared to specific assignments
Current Library Instruction Program

- Shortcomings - “Blitzes”
  - each class receives only 1 hour of instruction
  - students do not appear to retain material
  - total of approximately 150 sessions/semester is a strain at current staffing levels
Current Library Instruction Program

- **Shortcomings - “One-shots”**
  - depends solely on initiative of individual faculty members
  - conceptual understanding de-emphasized
  - many students missed; others receive same instruction multiple times
  - customized preparations are time and resource intensive
Why change?

What do we want to accomplish?

• ALA President’s report on information literacy recommends a learning process that would actively involve students in the process of knowing when they have a need for information, identifying information needed to address a given problem, finding needed information, evaluating the information, organizing the information, and using the information effectively to address the issue at hand.
Why change?

What do we want to accomplish?

- Research on transforming higher education in the information age stresses developing higher-order skills and focusing less on facts.
- Research-based learning, inquiry learning, problem based learning, etc. are all involved in producing learning from within that will remain with the student throughout her life.
Why change?

What do we want to accomplish?

- Our goals:
  - Information literacy instruction should stress information concepts, not just skills.
  - The method of instruction should instill in students a sense of discovery and empowerment in their research.
Draft Plan

• Objectives
  – Develop a definition of information literacy at the University of Rhode Island.
  – Develop and introduce an incremental, four-year-plus program for student mastery of information literacy skills and concepts.
• Objectives, continued...
  – Implement the program by working with teaching faculty outside the library.
  – Provide more teaching labs, locations, and facilities.
  – Develop a core group of library faculty specifically for teaching.
Draft Plan

- Objectives, continued...
  - Form an Information Literacy Council which would be charged with producing information literacy competencies, creating objectives and action plans, and evaluating the progress of the university community toward these objectives.
The Courses

• The heart of our proposed program
  – the best way to emphasize concepts and skills together
  – provides the level of interaction that we feel will lead to discovery and empowerment

• The source of our experience and accomplishments thus far
Library 140: 
Special Topics in Information Literacy

- First course taught under fledgling information literacy program
- One-credit
- Covers information resources in a particular subject area
- Designed to run concurrently with a course in that discipline
Library 140:  
*Special Topics in Information Literacy*

- Team-taught by two librarians in spring 1999
- Partnership with management professor
- Students who enrolled in MGT 110: *Introduction to Business* had to also take Library 140
- Two sections had 25 students each, mostly freshmen
Library 140: *Special Topics in Information Literacy*

- Covered general information concepts as well as business information
- Hands-on: short introduction to topic then in-class worksheet
- Final assessment tool was “Memo to Your Manager” on current issue in business
Library 140:
Special Topics in Information Literacy

• Student likes:
  – 94% thought they learned “a great deal” or “a fair amount” in the course
  – 73% rated course “excellent” or “good”
  – hands-on nature of class
  – “I found it very helpful for my business classes and many other classes. Many students don’t know how to do research. This class teaches that!”
Library 140: Special Topics in Information Literacy

- Student dislikes:
  - having been “forced” to enroll
  - “too much work for one credit”
  - if the instructors lectured too much
  - if they couldn’t see immediate relevance of LIB 140 material to MGT 110
  - attempts to provide them with a more conceptual framework
Library 140:  
*Special Topics in Information Literacy*

- **Reflections**
  - Are freshmen ready to engage with information at a conceptual level?
  - Would student engagement have been higher if LIB 140 content had been more closely integrated with MGT 110?
Library 140: Special Topics in Information Literacy

• The future?
  – University administration decided that concurrent registration cannot be required
  – Fall 1999 sections were canceled because of low enrollments
  – LIB 140 will be revisited again later
  – Our energies are now focused on LIB 120
Library 120: *Introduction to Information Literacy*

- Second course taught in our information literacy program
- 3 credits instead of 1
  - taken more seriously by students
  - larger potential audience for course
Library 120: *Introduction to Information Literacy*

- Developed by library faculty in consultation with instructional faculty who recognized the need for such a course.
- Goal is to provide students with a broader and deeper understanding of information, information retrieval, and the evaluation and analysis of information.
Library 120:
*Introduction to Information Literacy*

- Team-taught by two librarians this fall at URI’s College of Continuing Education
  - 9 students in the class
  - older, non-traditional
  - focused, motivated, and enthusiastic
Library 120: Introduction to Information Literacy

- Course focuses on the basic conceptual understandings of
  - what information is
  - where it comes from
  - how it is organized
  - how it is used
Library 120:  
*Introduction to Information Literacy*

- In-class and take-home exercises and worksheets
- Emphasis on:
  - Hands-on learning opportunities
  - Resource evaluation techniques
  - Critical thinking skills
  - Information skills and concepts
• Final project is “paper trail” for research leading to a research paper
  – what research tools were used?
  – what information was found in each?
  – what information sources were used?
  – which provided material pertinent to the topic?
  – outline of paper or paper itself & complete bibliography
Library 120:  
*Introduction to Information Literacy*

- Student reactions
  - eager and appreciative participants in the class
  - take the class and the work seriously
  - wonder why course wasn’t offered before
  - have volunteered to write letters to Deans and Directors in support of the course
Library 120:  
*Introduction to Information Literacy*

- The future
  - 2 sections will be offered this spring, one in Providence and one on the main campus
  - marketing by word of mouth, posters, student advisors, and written recommendations from current class
  - hope to fill both sections with 20 students each to demonstrate need and demand for course
Library 120: 
*Introduction to Information Literacy*

- The future, continued
  - have started the process of petitioning for LIB 120 to fill General Education requirement in the University
    - would provide steady enrollment and a solid place in the curriculum
    - hopefully would create demand which would require expansion of program
Information Literacy Modules

• Web-based tutorials covering general and subject-specific topics, for example:
  – the library catalog
  – company information
  – drug information, etc.

• Supplement to LIB 120 & LIB 140 courses

• Standardized content, but can be customized
Information Literacy Modules

- Advantages
  - more students could be reached than possible through courses and traditional instruction alone
  - readily adaptable to distance learning environment
  - would eliminate redundancies in instruction, saving time and resources
  - focused on concepts in addition to skills
Information Literacy Modules

• Vision
  – link specific modules to particular general education courses and to core courses in each discipline
  – evaluation of students’ mastery of material incorporated into course grade
  – would replace “blitzes” and many, if not all, of “one-shot” instruction
Conclusion

- We’re still in the early stages of a work in progress.
  - our plan is still in draft form
  - we have taught each course only once
- Success will require a great deal of effort, collaboration, flexibility, and patience.
- Hope to create a program that can provide students with what they need to master information in all its forms