

What exactly is “information literacy”?

The new *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* defines information literacy as “the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning.” (Association of College & Research Libraries. 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>)

At Bloomsburg University, information literacy is taught within the disciplines and is also one of the ten BU General Education goals: **Goal 2. Information Literacy - Find, evaluate, and ethically use information using appropriate technology.**

Information literacy in practice requires:

- competence in using information technology
- understanding how information is created, published, organized, and accessed
- being able to frame questions using subject-appropriate terms
- applying appropriate criteria to evaluate and select relevant and authoritative sources
- using information to create new knowledge, crediting others' intellectual property in discipline-appropriate reference styles

So how “information literate” are BU students?

The short answer is -- about as information literate as students at many other institutions are. Data from the NSSE Topical Module for Information Literacy for 2 years (2015 & 2016) shows BU freshmen and seniors are average in their information literacy competencies.

Project Information Literacy, <http://projectinfolit.org/>, a large-scale nationwide research study of undergraduate information-seeking strategies and research practices, found that most students experienced difficulty with research when defining a topic, narrowing it, and filtering irrelevant results.

Not surprisingly, PIL also found in their follow-up studies that “students lacked the research acumen for framing an inquiry in the digital age where information abounds and intellectual discovery was paradoxically overwhelming for them.” (*Truth Be Told: How College Students Evaluate and Use Information in the Digital Age*. 2010. Project Information Literacy Progress Report).

What can faculty do to help students develop better information literacy skills?

- Assess students' current level of information literacy prior to an assignment.** Although students may be heavy consumers of technology and use the Internet for personal research, most likely they are not proficient at academic research. Ask students to demonstrate their ability rather than self-report it. For example, can they recognize and locate ‘scholarly articles’? Can they explain how books treat a topic differently than articles and when a book might be preferred?
- Consider alternative assignments** to the traditional term paper to develop students' familiarity with disciplinary discourse. The Library's Information Literacy site lists some, and many others may be found in discipline-specific journals. When searching for assignments, use alternative keywords such as ‘critical thinking’, ‘research skills’, ‘digital literacy’, or ‘information seeking.’
- Collaborate with a librarian.** Librarians can work with you to develop and/or adapt assignments to include appropriate information literacy outcomes. They also can provide information literacy instruction to your students either in class or outside of class and can develop instructional materials, such as online tutorials and subject guides, for your classes. Contact your department's library faculty liaison.
- Encourage your students to contact a librarian** for help with their research. Add your liaison librarian's contact info to your syllabus, and ask them if you may add them to your BOLT course as a ‘content builder’ so they can work with you to add tutorials, subject guides, and so on for students.
- Track information literacy student learning outcomes** in your courses and your department's curriculum. Ideally, students should be able to demonstrate information literacy competency in a senior year capstone project.
- Provide students with multiple opportunities** to practice information research strategies in order to develop deep learning pathways and proficiency. Rome wasn't built in a day and neither is students' information literacy.
- Learn more about information literacy.** Explore the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education Sandbox, <http://sandbox.acrl.org>, for ideas on how to use the Framework in your classes and to share your ideas with other educators. The Instruction Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) maintains a wiki titled [Information Literacy in the Disciplines](#), with links to curricula developed by accrediting agencies, professional associations, and institutions of higher education for information literacy.

What are the challenges to teaching (and learning) information literacy?

Many faculty believe that students have already mastered information research skills in high school or that they will develop these abilities on their own in college (McGuinness, 2006). However, due to the increased emphasis in K-12 schools on high-stakes testing, which has reduced the amount of time students spend working with school librarians to develop information-use skills, this is not true. Further compounding the problem, many schools have no library or librarian at all (*PA School Library Research Project*, <http://paschoollibraryproject.org/home/schlibresearch>).

As a result, many high school students come to college lacking even rudimentary information research skills. Furthermore, most students do not develop information competency in college unless their courses require it. Students frequently 'satisfice' their information needs using Google, Wikipedia, and one or two library databases they used in high school.

Faculty may feel the pressure of too much course content to cover and too little time to incorporate information literacy outcomes into their courses (McGuinness, 2006). However, rather than viewing information literacy as 'one more thing to cover,' faculty can include information literacy processes in assignments designed to teach students about the conventions and norms of disciplinary discourse, especially writing. Although revising courses to include information literacy outcomes takes time, it usually results in improved student learning and writing.

Information literacy is not learned through a single instruction session, library orientation, or tour; but over time through repeated practice in a variety of contexts. Information literacy is part of lifelong learning, enabling individuals not only to find answers to daily life questions but also to continue to develop professionally in their fields after graduation and be able to use evidence for decision-making.

The Six Frames

- Authority Is Constructed and Contextual
- Information Creation as a Process
- Information Has Value
- Research as Inquiry
- Scholarship as Conversation
- Searching as Strategic Exploration

from the ACRL's *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*,
<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>

Another definition of information literacy from the *Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report*:

Ultimately, information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how knowledge is organized, how to find information, and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them. They are people prepared for lifelong learning, because they can always find the information needed for any task or decision at hand.

Further Reading

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