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# Integrating student information competencies into library services

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Many in the library field would argue that we have begun to perceive ourselves differently – especially in academic libraries. ALA's Association of College and Research Libraries has been instrumental in creating or promoting a sea-change and much has gone into projecting an image of the librarian as an integral part of the educational enterprise. The message is that librarians are/ are becoming teachers.

How many of you see yourselves as teachers? Do you ever describe yourself to others as such?

ACRL has developed concrete definitions and supplemental materials for information literacy. http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlissues/acrlinfolit/informationliteracy.htm [SLIDE 2] They have five areas of information competencies: defining need, finding, evaluating, applying/using, and understanding legal and social issues around information. [I usually boil this down in my mind as finding, evaluating, and using.] A lot of time and thought has gone into this development.

For those who may not be intimately familiar with the ACRL Standards, here are the first three outcomes under the category of being able to employ effective search strategies: [SLIDE 2]

a. Develops a research plan appropriate to the investigative method
b. Identifies keywords, synonyms and related terms for the information needed
c. Selects controlled vocabulary specific to the discipline or information retrieval source

Librarians in design fields – art and architecture librarians for instance – are in unique positions. They have the potential for either riding the wave of info lit and being recognized for their unique disciplinary contribution or missing that wave and being swamped by the generalist librarian's vision! The core competencies project is a tool for riding that wave.

In 2005 I solicited help from ARLIS colleagues to develop disciplinary competencies. Gradually a group formed and produced drafts. [SLIDE 3]

The group: Jeanne Brown, University of Nevada Las Vegas, chair, architecture competencies; Jane Carlin, University of Cincinnati, planning competencies, fashion competencies; Edith Crowe, San Jose State University, art history competencies; Maya Gervits, New Jersey Institute of Technology, architecture history competencies; Susan Lewis, Boston Architectural Center, interior design competencies; Alan Michelson, University of Washington, landscape architecture competencies; Barbara Opar, Syracuse University, architectural technology competencies; and Jennifer Parker, University of Colorado, studio art competencies.

The drafts we produced were then shared with ARLIS/NA and AASL members. Unlike the ACRL competencies, the drafts we produced were organized year by year to aid in

integration into the curriculum, and they were discipline specific. Input indicated that the year by year approach was too dependent on specific institutional context, so we revised it to "basic," "intermediate," and "advanced." [SLIDE 4] We also as a result of input cut down on duplication by pulling out competencies that ALL design students should have, following these general competencies with disciplinary ones. [SLIDE 5]

We have posted the competencies to the web at http://www.scsv.nevada.edu/~asl/index.html [SLIDE 4] for additional feedback, and most importantly for librarians to begin using them. We are also starting to approach disciplinary groups, such as the ACSA, to get feedback.

My presentation today is about using the competencies. But before we pursue that, I'd like to take a minute to ask you to participate vicariously in the process we undertook. Please take the index card attached to your handout and indicate three competencies relating to images, labeling one basic, one intermediate, and one advanced. [give 5 minutes and collect]. Thanks! Any comments?

Back to the presentation: My contention is that the competencies can be used in the classroom, but also in other contexts. Working out ways to integrate them into instructional and other services of the library, in a systematic way is the challenge. Not only will student and faculty buy-in be required but it will perhaps require thinking in some different ways.

## *Application and Integration of Competencies into Instruction*

### *Application of Competencies for a Classroom Instruction Session*

Instruction is, in some ways, the easiest target, and in some ways it is the most difficult. Ensuring a venue is one rather sizeable challenge. Today I want to give you a specific example: Introduction to Architecture/Landscape/Interiors.

The Intro class has a team of teachers, and the standard mode of instruction is the guest instructor. With this pattern, it is a natural for a librarian presenter. It is a first year course, although it is not just freshmen who find themselves in this required course [sometimes seniors leave it to their final semester!]. In the past I have addressed this class of 150 just briefly, with the simple goal of letting them know who I was and that the library was there for their use, the staff there to help them. This year, armed with a laptop, newly wireless connections, and the core competencies, I tried something more ambitious.

I selected outcomes for the class presentation listed as competencies in the disciplinary section of the comps document that I thought were logical given the curriculum and that I thought would appeal to the *instructors.* These outcomes are: 1. to identify major associations, 2. to identify major journals, and 3. to find sources of information on the profession as a career – for each of the three professions. I shared these outcomes in

advance with the instructors, who did not question them. They are just some of the basic competencies for architecture students you see in SLIDE 6.

Here are a few samples from the basic competencies for architecture students, in the design-oriented competencies.

Architecture students should be aware of:

- the major journals in architecture and related fields, such as *Architecture*, *Landscape Architecture*, *Interior Design, Architectural Record, Architectural Review,*
- the major associations in architecture and related fields: the American Institute of Architects, the American Society of Landscape Architects, the American Society of Interior Designers,
- the value for architecture students in browsing new books and periodicals on a regular basis,
- basic reference tools in architecture and related fields [e.g. architecture encyclopedias, dictionaries, time-saver standards],
- sources of guidance on the library web site, e.g. online tutorials, bibliographies on specific topics, selected architecture web resources, etc.

I then, for my own use, selected <u>additional</u> competencies from the general [non-architecture specific set] that the students would need in order to be able to achieve the outcomes I had selected [please note that I am using outcomes and competencies interchangeably]. I was quite pleased with the usefulness of the comps document in allowing me to approach it this way, and in having the outcomes laid out for what I wanted to get to.

So for instance, for the outcome of identifying major associations, a student would have to be able to do some basic keyword searching, then evaluate the results to determine which was THE association. The may sound straightforward, but in fact is a fairly complex process. They have to be able to select reasonable sources that fit that need. They have to be able to articulate the elements that might lead them to conclude that a given association was the predominate one in the profession. They have to have the persistence to continue their search even though they may have something that sort of looks like the right thing. And so on. You will perhaps not be surprised to learn that the best source turned out to be a guide on the ASL page, which was the only place that actually came out and said, this is THE ONE!

AND this was just the associations part of the presentation! My enthusiasm for the core comps approach may have contributed to my natural tendency to try and cover too much in any given session. Nonetheless the core competencies document was quite valuable in its assistance in organizing what kinds of skills I wanted to at least model for the students.

*Integrating Competencies into Existing Online Instruction Modules*

I am currently working on identifying which competencies are covered in the Architecture Studies Library's 14 online instruction modules and where those modules fit in the curriculum. To determine whether these modules support the range of information skills needed by architecture students, I and my graduate assistant have been working on

a crosswalk [so to speak] between the competencies and the modules. It is working out pretty well, although we have identified some competencies that are not addressed, such as identifying campus sources for civil engineering information. This has set the stage for two follow-up activities: 1) allocate specific modules to specific courses and get approval from the curriculum committee to add them to the syllabi for those courses, and 2) generate additional modules for the competencies not yet addressed. The most developed area of this process is the architecture history area, which has already incorporated modules into class instruction, but not yet consciously identified competencies. [SLIDE 7]

*Levels of Skills and Target Applications*

Thus far I addressed only the basic level competencies. There is good reason for that.

How many of you teach class sessions? To what level students?

A survey I did last year on the AASL list generated about 20 results, almost all or whom concentrated their instruction efforts at the basic level. Even those teaching grad student courses got them in their first year. Students just starting – whether grad or undergraduate – are more willing to recognize they have something to learn. Perhaps too, librarians are more confident that we have something to teach them. Faculty too seem more inclined to grant that this level of instruction is needed, and less likely to begrudge the time.

How do we address that? One approach I am working on is to try and identify which skills faculty themselves are teaching the students. For instance, the architecture competencies at the intermediate level suggest that students should be able to use several technical titles. Here are three: [SLIDE 8]

- use handbooks on materials and systems as well as reference manuals produced by professional organizations (e.g., the American Institute of Timber Construction, the American Concrete Institute and the American Institute of Steel Construction) to gather general design data and recommended engineering practices for building materials,
- consult appropriate reference works in the *Time Saver Standards* series as necessary to better understand site planning, building types, urban design and landscape architecture,
- locate product information using *Thomas Register* and *Sweet's Catalogs*, along with specific manufacturer's print and online publications,

If faculty are already incorporating these into their classes, then my goal is simply to institutionalize it, to guarantee that e.g. AAD380 always includes *Time Saver Standards*, and not just when instructor x is teaching it. The more competencies I can address this way, the more likely the overall enterprise will be successful.

*Other Library Services and Their Relationship to Information Skills*
[SLIDE 9]

*Blogs*
How can blogs be part of the comps agenda? I see blogs as modeling a form of current information awareness. I have started a blog, and market it to SOA students in an effort to

incorporate it into their everyday information behavior. A technological survey of our students this fall showed few currently reading blogs [38 of 170]. We are looking for an appropriate RSS feed for the ASL homepage that would also contribute to current awareness.

*Reference*

Many reference transactions are in fact one-on-one instruction. As such they should be seen as part of the information literacy initiative. However they take more management, since "reference" is done by a variety of staff, including student assistants. After a discussion with my staff on how we might reengineer this function as an instruction function tied to core competencies, we agreed to identify 5-10 common questions [e.g. how do I find scholarly articles in the Avery Index] and the competencies we would like to address as we answer those questions. Of course the proportion of reference versus instruction would still depend on the context – and level of desperation of the student!

*Collection Development*

There are several possibilities that occur to me in relating CD with instruction. One is the materials themselves: e.g. there are journals that serve to bring issues to the students, such as *Design Intelligence*. Highlighting materials and titles is another link, leading to collection guides such as the ASL Professional Basics guide. And of course the whole process of finding materials is integral to information literacy, so investigating additional access points would also be a component [metadata, table of contents, even tagging and patron contributed reviews].

*New Environments: MySpace, Facebook, and Second Life*

Use of various means of reaching students – such as MySpace and Facebook -- raises their tech IQ. We are currently experimenting with MySpace in this context. A recent posting on the *Chronicle of Higher Education* blog [*Wired Campus*, 10/06/06] has this to say about Facebook, a similar site: "Like many emerging Internet applications, Facebook also emphasizes the importance of creating content over simply consuming it…. Any technology that is able to captivate so many students for so much time not only carries implications for how those students view the world but also offers an opportunity for educators to understand the elements of social networking that students find to so compelling and to incorporate those elements into teaching and learning."

Creating content – applying information found – is in fact a major area of information competency/literacy. In addition, social networking sites add the component of tagging to find topics – an interesting jumping off point for a keyword versus subject discussion, which address yet another competency. Putting "things" in different environment such as 2nd life might provide yet another kind of development opportunity!

*Conclusion*

So in conclusion the core competencies document offers a lens and a tool. A lens through which to view many of our services in a new light; and a tool to morph some of those services in a systematic and productive way.

Lessons learned

Lesson 1:
I am sure you can already see that I tried to cover too much. The script I drafted was fine, it just needed to be covered in 3 class sessions.

In addition, my goal of demonstrating the complexity of the information world, which would hopefully lead to an awareness of the need for information skills like the ability to evaluate is at odds with the student's goal to get to information quickly and conveniently.

Both of these missteps can be laid at the door of trying to convey information competencies, and trying to do so in one class session!

Lesson 2:
Students know more than we often think they do. And less. I was surprised by the number who had not heard of wikipedia. I was also surprised that of those that did more had a healthy awareness that they could not use the information in it without verifying elsewhere. The lesson? It's about getting all up to a common point.

Lesson 3:
The law of unintended consequences will always kick in at some point. In this class, my effort to show the students that the library has the major association journals demonstrated to me instead that we have some key gaps. Horrors.

Lesson 4:
Students get the point in spite of misguided instructors. In the "what stood out to you" feedback sheets, by far the most common response was "The architecture library as a resource".

Bottom line: students will pick up what they think they'll need. I can't necessarily predict what that is. I need to find ways to get inside their heads. The key to a successful session – though not necessarily a successful program – is to promote what they need, not what I want to teach them.

OR

Maybe I need to be more of a missionary about why they need to learn what I think they need to learn?

OR

Maybe I just need to ask and let them lead the session? Like when I was pushing the web and they wanted to know how to find a book.

http://www.ala.org/ala/acrlbucket/is/projectsacrl/infolitdisciplines/index.htm