LIS Curricula Introducing Information Literacy Courses Alongside Instructional Classes

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Library and information studies (LIS) programs have commonly used the terms bibliographic instruction, information literacy, and user education interchangeably for courses on instruction. Some of the shared topics in these courses have been teaching and learning theory, instructional design and techniques, and program management. This study reviews LIS curricula available publicly on the Web for programs accredited by the American Library Association (ALA) and finds that, for the first time, three programs are offering information literacy as distinctive separate courses alongside other instructional courses. Moreover, course descriptions for these courses indicated that instructional theories still featured prominently in them. The article discusses the implications of these developments and reiterates that user instruction alone provides learners only with the lower-level aspects of information literacy. Higher-level competencies are obtained in the process of learning. It concludes that LIS courses on information literacy ought to present it within the larger context of student learning.

Keywords: *LIS curricula, information literacy, Library user instruction, general education curriculum, higher-order skills*

The growth of user-education courses in LIS programs was well reviewed by Westbrook (1999). She noted that LIS programs were resiliently responding to the increasing demand on librarians to provide user training in a variety of ways. The demand has seen remarkably high growth in the last three decades. Reference librarian job-postings whose duties included instruction in the *College and Research Libraries News,* for example, rose from 0% in 1973 to 100% in 1990 (Lynch & Smith, 2001). Westbrook observed an enduring rise in the number of user-education courses offered in LIS programs during this period. The rise was in the areas of bibliographic instruction, information literacy, and user education. These courses have traditionally offered training on learning theory, instructional design, teaching techniques, and program management among other topics.

A 2007 content analysis of textbooks used for information literacy instruction in LIS programs showed that most of the texts were dedicated to instructional subjects such as: instructional models, techniques, design, and methods; learning theory and curriculum; motivation; testing; measurement; grant writing; and student assessment (Mbabu, 2007). The study found that out of the considerably high number of textbooks used by the thirteen programs that offered information literacy courses, only two textbooks addressed at least one of the learning procedures recommended for developing competency in information literacy: determining the information needed, retrieving the information, critically evaluating and synthesizing retrieved information, integrating and applying knowledge, and understanding the economic, legal, and social implica-

tions of the information needed (ALA, 1989).

Those findings demonstrated that, for the most part, information literacy courses addressed the same issues and topics as traditional user-education courses. This study sought to find out which LIS programs, if any, offered information literacy alongside one or more user-education courses, thus recognizing it as a distinctive subject area. A review of course listings of all LIS programs accredited by the ALA was conducted from March to July 2008. The course selection criteria and methodology were adapted from Westbrook (1999). Course descriptions were retrieved from the Web to identify fulltime recurrent credit courses dedicated to user-education, information literacy, bibliographic instruction, or instructional roles.

Fundamental Research Milestones of Information Literacy

Presidential Committee of Information Literacy (1989)

Zurkowski (1974) presented information literacy as the ability to use a variety of information sources in everyday problem solving. The term has since been used interchangeably in a variety of library instruction settings such as user education and library skills instruction (Grassian & Kaplowitz, 2001). The ALA first defined and presented it as an academic concept in the final report of the Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (1989). The report addressed the importance of information literacy to individuals, businesses, and the public. According to the report, the educational role in promoting information literacy was to introduce critical thinking into the curriculum. It suggested that such a learning process would consistently involve students in the process of recognizing information needs, and locating, evaluating and applying the necessary information as needed.

Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education

Information literacy competency standards were established by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, 2000). The standards were developed as a next step towards operationalizing the ALA Presidential Committee's report on information literacy (1989). ACRL outlined proficiency standards, performance indicators, and expected outcomes of information literacy instruction in the education setting. The standards were subsequently endorsed by the American Association for Higher Education and the Council of Independent Colleges.

The underlying definition of information literacy adopted in the standards significantly differed from the prevailing concept that was presented by the Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (1989). Whereas the Presidential Committee proposed the processes of identifying, retrieving, and integrating information as learning processes that promote information literacy, the procedures were adopted in the standards as the definition of information literacy. This distinction is important because as a consequence, while the Presidential Committee explicitly recommended that the learning process be restructured to include procedures that actively involved students in research and problem solving, ACRL's standards sought to provide instruction towards attaining proficiency in these procedures. As such, the content on ACRL's (2008) Information Literacy Web site is based on the notion that proficiency in information literacy can be attained through instruction on these procedures. It defines information literacy as "the set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze, and use information." This premise triggered a lingering controversy over the choice of terms between bibliographic instruction, information literacy, and other user-education

courses (Arp, 1990). Nevertheless, ACRL's application of the concept has been widely applied in library instruction programs nationwide. Indeed, all but one LIS (University of Washington) course description of information literacy presented it as a course on instruction.

Guidelines for Information Literacy in the Curriculum

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2003) adopted the Presidential Committee on Information Literacy's (1989) concept of information literacy. The Commission defined information literacy as an intellectual framework for identifying, finding, understanding, and using information. The commission observed that many aspects of this framework were already essential components of general education and reiterated that many institutions incorporate some information literacy skills in their requirements for general education. Consequently, they did not require that information literacy be defined and assessed separately from other student learning goals. The commission's landmark contribution to the pedagogy of information literacy was in suggesting specific guidelines for integrating information literacy throughout the curriculum. This development positioned information literacy as a shared responsibility between faculty and librarians. In this paradigm, library-user education became a part of the integrated student learning process in which: faculty members mentor the students and guide them in their exploration; librarians lead them through information searching, retrieval and evaluation; and administrators create opportunities for collaboration and staff development.

It is proposed in the guidelines that instruction should occur in an integrated and coherent manner such that students experience increasingly sophisticated concepts as they progress through their lower, upper, and graduate levels. They underscored that where general education programs are provided only in the first two years at a university, information literacy training does not offer sufficient opportunities for acquiring higher-order information literacy skills. Rather, embedding information literacy explicitly within the specific disciplines provides opportunities for students to develop their skills within their particular context. As they deepen their understanding of their disciplines, they experience deeper appreciation of information and attain their institution's higher-order information literacy goals.

LIS Course Offerings on Instruction

The first LIS courses specializing in user instruction were recorded in 1976 with four out of 57 accredited programs offering fulltime recurrent credit courses (Westbrook, 1999). Before that, library schools offered instructional courses by embedding them in other courses or as short separate courses (Westbrook, 1999). This trend continued into the 1980s. In 1984, for example, up to 91% of the courses offered were still integrated in existing courses (Larson & Meltzer, 1987). Westbrook examined the development of courses in instruction and found that by 1999, for the first time, more than 50% of accredited programs were offering fulltime credit courses on library-user education.

Information literacy emphasizes a learning process that promotes the ability to determine information needs, locate, evaluate, assimilate, and communicate new knowledge. However, Mbabu (2007) found that out of a wide variety of texts used for instruction of information literacy in LIS programs, only two textbooks and two book chapters addressed at least one of those concepts. Both textbooks mainly addressed instruction and learn-

ing theories such as: instruction models, techniques, materials, design, and methods; learning theory; curriculum; motivation; testing; measurement; grant writing; and student assessment. These findings support Meulemans and Brown's (2001) suggestion that the syllabi for information literacy courses in LIS programs were comparable to that of other user-education courses. This study examines the development of information literacy courses as distinct curricula offered alongside at least one other user-education course.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to a review of LIS information literacy courses as publicly posted on the Web at the time of the survey. LIS programs accredited by the ALA (2008) were examined with the aim of ascertaining whether any of them were offering courses in information literacy alongside at least one other user-education course. The description of user-education courses was adapted from Westbrook (1999). The study does not evaluate the efficacy of the courses.

Results and Discussion

Course descriptions showed that 49 out of 57 (86%) LIS programs accredited by the ALA offered at least one continuing credit course dedicated to instruction. Among those, 15 of them had the term "information literacy" in the course title. Moreover, three programs—University of Arizona, University of California–Los Angeles, and University of Washington—offered an information literacy course alongside at least one other user-education course. A list of the programs and their offerings is found in Appendix A. Topical issues unique to information literacy were exemplified by the University of Washington's (2008) course description:

LIS 568 Information Literacy for Teaching and Learning

Explores theories, process, and practical applications of information literacy. Examines the development of information literacy programs for libraries, community agencies, business, education or other information settings. Explores integral relationship between technology and information literacy, and continual evaluation.

Even before the Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (1989) presented its report illustrating the concept of information literacy, LIS programs were struggling to come to an agreement on suitable curricula for courses on bibliographic instruction. According to Larson and Meltzer (1987), differences of opinion included:

- Hesitancy to venture into what was then considered the specialized discipline of education. (Brundin (1985) presented this as the major apprehension for LIS programs.)
- The broadness of the subject matter.
- Lack of consensus on the scope of theory and practice to be covered.
- Availability of faculty familiar with the subject.

With 86% of LIS programs now offering instructional courses, hesitancy to offer user-education courses is apparently a thing of the past. Nevertheless, introduction of information literacy added to the broadness of the subject matter as evidenced by the following course descriptions:

University of Arizona (2009): IRLS585 Information Literacy Instruction

Course Objectives:

By the end of the semester, students will

- be able to discuss effectively various aspects of information literacy, learning theories and styles, and modes of instruction;

- be acquainted with the range of organizations and resources supporting information literacy instruction; and
- demonstrate the ability to plan and implement instruction.

University of California—Los Angeles (2009): *INF STD 448 LEC 1—Information Literacy Instruction: Theory and Technique*

Class Description: Lecture, four hours. History, theory, methods, and materials of user education/bibliographic instruction in libraries and other information retrieval environments. Examination of variety of user education/bibliographic instruction theories and methodologies, including overview of planning and administration. Identification of problems in user education/bibliographic instruction. Applications of methods of teaching use of libraries and information resources.

These examples indicate that although information literacy in these programs is taught alongside at least one other user-education course, instructional theory and practice are still featured in the courses. In the concept exemplified by the Presidential Committee of Information Literacy (1989) and The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2003), information literacy is presented as an intellectual construct for identifying, finding, understanding, and using information. Both the Presidential Committee and The Middle States Commission suggested that implementing this concept in education would involve integrating information management in the learning process so students are systematically engaged in inquiry and problem solving. Following this line of thought, an important component of an LIS course on information literacy would include an understanding of the librarian's role in integrating information literacy in the institutional, programmatic, and disciplinary curricula. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education developed an outline of these responsibilities.

Integrated and Coherent Instruction

In the best possible scenario, information literacy can be planned as part of the institution's student learning goals. In New York, for example, the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (SUNY) ruled that all SUNY colleges include information management in the core general education program (Jacobson & Germain, 2004). However, some institutions in the United States are eliminating general education requirements altogether (Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1972). The Carnegie Commission argued that in such settings, where students are allowed to pick courses solely of their own choosing, the degree of coherence in the programs was highly diminished. In addition, the fragmentation within research universities that was reported by the Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University (2006) results in students being overly specialized and oblivious of interconnections between diverse fields of knowledge. The Middle State Commission on Higher Education (1989) demonstrated that information literacy can serve as a framework for interlinking student objectives at the institution, program, and classroom levels.

In the absence of program goals such as those outlined by general education or consistent curricula in various fields of study, it is difficult to integrate coherent information literacy goals at all levels of college education. But this obstacle is not limited to information literacy. A report by the Commission Appointed by the Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings (2006) concluded that the quality of student learning in the U.S. was inadequate and in some cases declining. The report affirmed that new graduates were particularly lacking in critical thinking, writing, and problem-solving skills. As

part of their recommendations for addressing these problems, the Spellings Commission suggested that students' educational objectives be defined and meaningful measurement tools be developed. LIS programs can prepare librarians for their role in locating information literacy in the curriculum and its objectives, and developing reliable assessment tools.

Conclusion

Library-user instruction plays an important role in introducing readers to library research. Even so, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2003) underscored that such instruction only provided learners with the lower-level aspects of information literacy. To incrementally develop proficiency in information literacy, scholars need to have continual exposure to increasingly sophisticated methods of information gathering and management throughout their learning process. In such a process, information literacy would be embedded in the curricula. This calls for a collaborative approach to teaching and learning: faculty guide student learning; librarians provide information management expertise; and administrators promote faculty/librarian collaboration and staff development. LIS courses in information literacy need to clearly position library-user instruction within the larger context of student learning.

Appendix A

Programs accredited by the ALA whose course descriptions available on the Web indicated that they offered recurrent fulltime credit courses dedicated to user education, information literacy, bibliographic instruction, or instructional roles as of July 2008.

1. Alabama, University of
2. Albany, State University of New York
3. Alberta, University of
4. British Columbia, University of
5. Buffalo, State University of New York
6. Catholic University of America
7. Dalhousie University
8. Denver, University of
9. Dominican University
10. Drexel University
11. Emporia State University
12. Florida State University
13. Hawaii, University of
14. Illinois, University of
15. Indiana University
16. Iowa, University of
17. Kentucky, University of
18. Long Island University
19. Louisiana State University
20. McGill University
21. Maryland, University of
22. Michigan, University of
23. Missouri-Columbia, University of
24. Montreal, University of
25. North Carolina—Chapel Hill, University of
26. North Carolina—Greensboro, University of
27. Oklahoma, University of
28. Pittsburgh, University of
29. Pratt Institute
30. Puerto Rico, University of
31. Queens College, City University of New York
32. Rutgers University
33. San Jose State University
34. Simmons College
35. South Carolina, University of
36. South Florida, University of
37. Southern Connecticut State University
38. Southern Mississippi, University of
39. Syracuse University
40. Tennessee, University of
41. Texas—Austin, University of

42. Texas Woman's University
43. Toronto, University of
44. Wayne State University
45. Western Ontario, University of
46. Wisconsin—Madison, University of

Programs that offered recurrent fulltime credit courses entitled information literacy and at least one other course dedicated to user-education, bibliographic instruction, or instructional roles.

1. Arizona, University of
2. California—Los Angeles, University of
3. Washington, University of

Programs whose course list did not include any dedicated fulltime credit courses dedicated to user-education, information literacy, bibliographic instruction, or instructional roles.

1. Clarion University of Pennsylvania
2. Kent State University
3. North Carolina Central University
4. North Texas, University of
5. Rhode Island, University of
6. St. John's University
7. Valdosta State University
8. Wisconsin—Milwaukee, University of

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