

Literacies Information and beyond

The Learning Commons and the embedding of academic literacy instruction in disciplinary courses

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Agenda

Learning Commons

Integrated approach to support of student learning
New opportunity for faculty development and innovating curriculum

Definition/Scope of academic literacy

Literature review – education, information literacy, educational development & educational psychology

Faculty conceptions' of academic literacy instruction at York

Study (focus groups)

Selected findings and reflections on implications

Collaborative programming models

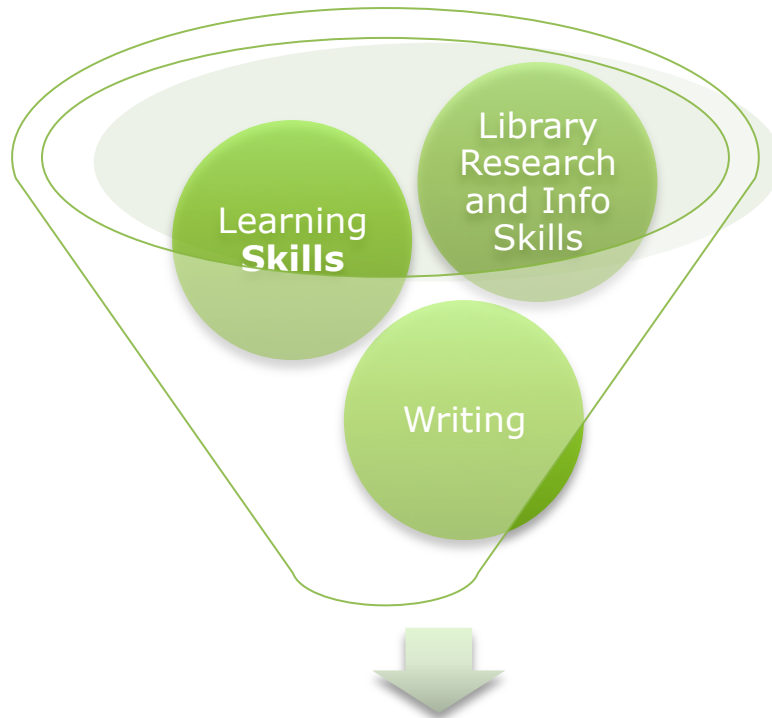
Workshops/brownbags

Course Design @ York

End goal: Institute on Teaching Academic Literacy

Learning Commons

Background and context



LC Partners: Libraries, Career Centre,
Learning Skills, and Writing Department





Learning
Commons
Steering
Committee

Workshops
Subcommittee

Virtual Learning
Commons

**Faculty
Subcommittee**

Academic Innovation Fund

SUPPORTING ACADEMIC LITERACY INSTRUCTION WITHIN COURSES

The purpose of this project is to support the planning of a Summer Institute for York instructors on the teaching of academic literacies. Our long-term goal is to enhance the curriculum in support of students' development of academic reading, writing, and information literacy skills. Special emphasis will be placed on first-year courses, including general education. The project will support preparation of an Institute that will offer instructors tools and strategies to implement such curriculum innovations in their own courses.

Academic Innovation Fund

SUPPORTING ACADEMIC LITERACY INSTRUCTION WITHIN COURSES

Steps in Preparing for an Institute

- Hired graduate student with expertise in literacy education, aka Rebecca! (Spring 2012)
- Focus groups with faculty at York University (Summer 2012)
- Literature review on supporting faculty teaching of academic literacy within university courses (Fall 2012)
- Pilot-programming with York Teaching Commons

Defining academic literacy within Learning Commons framework

Used in focus groups' introductory script with York faculty (Summer 2012)

“Academic literacy refers to the writing strategies, library research strategies and general learning strategies needed for completion of university or college coursework, including how to read sophisticated academic material.”

Literature Review

Definition & Scope of Academic Literacy

Literacy Studies - highlights

Developing a questioning disposition

- affinity with liberal education goals

Academic world as discourse community

- “ways of being in the world,” Gee
- language shaped by social context, Bakhtin

Vygotsky’s notion of internalization of observed/
enacted social practice

Apprenticeship model

- observing, doing, simulating *actual work* of academics

Content area literacy & disciplinary literacy

Higher Education literature

Haggis (2007)

Problems in current practice:

Academic literacy usually fostered through “supports” by academic services

Supplementary (extra-curricular) not embedded

Cause of “problem” located within individual students

Deficit Model (remedial)

Higher Education literature

Haggis (2007)

Suggested basis for innovation:

Sociocultural ideas of learning (apprenticeship, intent participation)

Developmental and systemic

Academic literacy *embedded* within curriculum

Academic literacy taught within *disciplinary contexts*
- Discourse communities

Process-oriented
- Metacognition, Reflection

Information Literacy Literature

Faculty conceptions/culture

Expert vs. Novice Researcher

Faculty members often operate in “expert researcher” mode when designing assignments, giving instructions, and setting expectations etc.

Leckie (1996)

Information Literacy Literature

Current Conceptions of IL

Indivisible from the processes that constitute research

Fluid, holistic, nonlinear

Lifelong learning, developmental, scaffolding

Critical information literacy at core

Digital information landscape → changing scope

Importance of context (disciplinary framing)

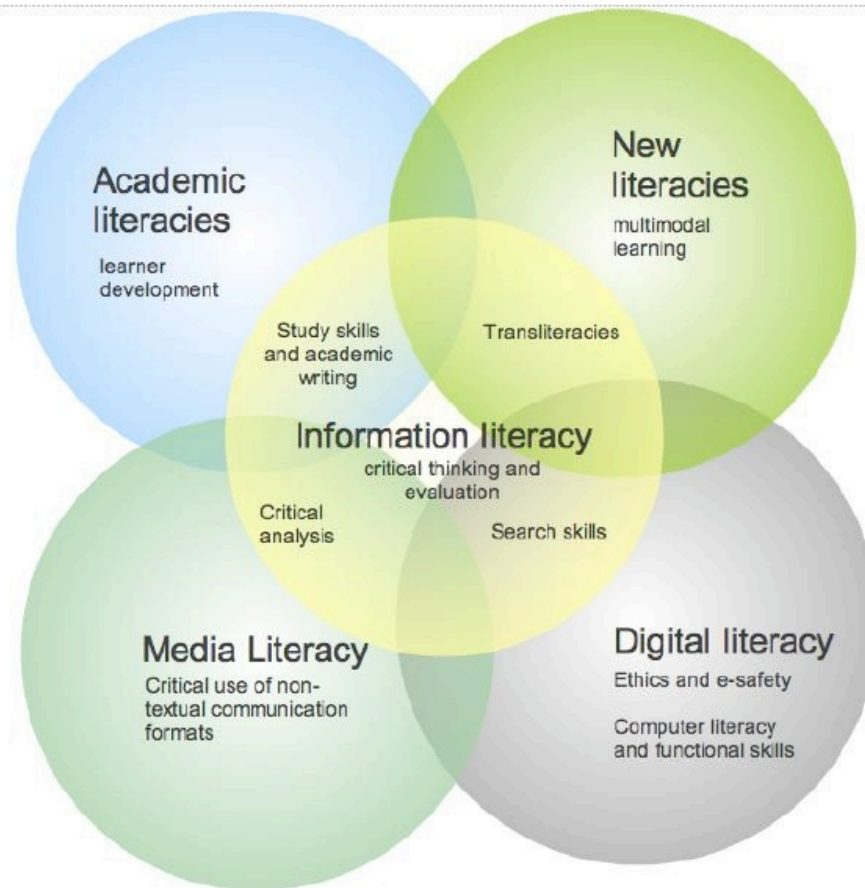
Not about “transferable skills” but “intellectual agility”

Coonan & Secker (2011)

Information Literacy in Context

Coonan & Secker (2011)

Information Literacy Landscape



York faculty's
conceptions of
academic literacy
instruction
Focus group study

Focus group study

Faculty focus groups at York University

- Four groups with a total of 18 participants
- Summer 2012

Included Faculty of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences,
Faculty of Health, Faculty of Science & Engineering

Department Chairs nominated participants from
General Education courses or core first/second year
courses

Facilitated by Rebecca Katz

- Outside literacy studies scholar

Conceptions of academic literacy instruction

Participants agree that academic literacy skills of students require development

"...once they have the information in front of them, they have a hard time reading it and understanding it and summarizing it and evaluating it. All those skills I think need to be shown or taught."

Literature and Language Professor

Conceptions of academic literacy instruction

Participants see critical reflection and engagement with research and coursework as fundamental for student learning and growth. Critical reading gets special emphasis

"...they've been told to read the primary literature but they haven't actually been given any guidance. I mean even in first year, we're telling them to go find the literature. But there isn't true guidance about how to read literature and dissect it. And as we know, a lot of it is very, very obtuse writing."

Biology Professor

Conceptions of academic literacy instruction

Plagiarism often identified as being connected to students' lack of academic literacy skills, and a great deal of concern expressed about this issue

"The fire that we had to put out was plagiarism...What was discovered was... they think writing a paper is copying stuff and editing it. So we spend the 12 weeks [dealing with questions like] Why are we at university? What is writing a paper all about?...What is academia?"

Health Studies Professor

Conceptions of academic literacy instruction

Participants readily offer diagnoses of the problem they see with student abilities. Often refer to motivation, high school, part-time work or need for remedial attention

“But I do find that students...come in with a lack of understanding and the difference between their opinion and evidence, what we’d like to call evidence-based conclusions, or something of the sort...they seem to come from high school with the view that any opinion is equally good, or my opinion is as good as the experts.”

Psychology Professor

Conceptions of academic literacy instruction

But, participants speak about research as a recursive, iterative process and see role for selves in scaffolding the process

“And I used to think my job was to deliver content. It’s not about content... [It’s about] process, process and psychological support. I teach them to learn how to learn.”

English Professor

Conceptions of academic literacy instruction

Participants feel that TAs must play a fundamental role in academic literacy instruction and associated challenges

"I'm thinking more of the TAs I've worked with and my suggestions to them...we go over how to critically read in the tutorial and how to, you know, make notes from what they're reading, identify key points and arguments, have students do reading – like pose a question that they have to then delve into and extrapolate more..."

Social Sciences Professor

Conceptions of academic literacy instruction

Define very specific narrow role for librarians around search and retrieval

“The seminar with the librarian. That’s the one I’ve used the most....So then we go to the library...she gears her little thing to the topics of the course and then really helps them...It becomes a three hour thing...They come out working on their own topic... She goes through all the steps with explaining the databases and the different types of databases and how to access them.”

Literature and Language Professor

Conceptions of academic literacy instruction

Participants see Learning Commons possibly providing a forum for dialogue about academic literacy issues and instructional techniques

"And I think what would be really good for this summer institute would be to help faculty find ways of integrating different writing assignments, different levels of writing, different skills...so it's not just like one big research paper, for example, like I do. But it should be --- this is dreaming, but anyway, it should be a sort of collective effort."

Languages and Literature Professor

Implications for our practice

Continue our programming with a Learning Commons academic literacy approach

Treat critical reading as the entry point for embedding literacy instruction

Represent ourselves as process experts

- Encourage modelling of expert process
- Encourage explicit, guided practice

Focus on assignment design support

Collaborative programming models at York University

Current planning and next
steps

Types of programming

End goal: Academic Literacies Institute
Summer or Fall 2014

Workshop (April, 2013)
Developing students' critical skills

Course Design @ York (May, 2013)
- Designing for academic literacy

Program elements

Provide theoretical background and debate

- deficit *vs.* socio-cultural model
- concept of tacit knowledge
- concepts of scaffolding and staging

Present evidence regarding gaps between faculty and student conceptions of reading, writing, and research

- make the invisible, visible
- be explicit about process

Program elements continued

Provide multiple templates, worksheets, and activities for addressing gaps

Model constructive collaboration, drawing heavily on experience and practice of participants

Assignment design templates/ examples

Grassian, E. *Teach Information Literacy & Critical Thinking*.
Retrieved from: <https://sites.google.com/site/teachinfolit/>

University of Huddersfield. Embedding Skills: Integrating Learning Development in to the Student Experience. Retrieved from: <http://embeddingskills.hud.ac.uk/>

University of Arizona Libraries. *Downloadable assignments*.
Retrieved from:
[http://www.library.arizona.edu/services/for-faculty-instructors/
model-assignments](http://www.library.arizona.edu/services/for-faculty-instructors/model-assignments)

Programming materials - examples

April 18th brownbag – *Developing Your Students' Critical Skills*

Slides:

http://www.yorku.ca/rsheese2/sheese_bury.pdf

Questions & Discussion