Faculty Voices on Information Literacy

Information Literacy

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Interview-based Research Exploring Information Literacy Practices, Attitudes and Perceptions among University Faculty

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+ Goals of author research

To gather quantitative and qualitative data on the following:

- Faculty conceptions of the definition of information literacy

- Faculty perceptions of York students' information literacy habits and competency levels

- Faculty perceptions of the importance of IL competencies & IL instruction among students

- Existing IL practices among faculty

- Faculty beliefs about ideal future frameworks for planning and delivery of IL instruction

+ Earlier study: methodology

- **Web-based Survey**
  - Primarily closed-ended questions
  - Some open-ended questions

- Spring 2007

- All full-time faculty at York
  - 221 usable responses (response rate of 15.2%)

- Data analyzed using SPSS 16.0
  - Cross-tabulations, chi-square testing

- Results and comprehensive literature review will appear *in Journal of Information Literacy*, Vol.4(3) 2011. http://ojs.lboro.ac.uk/ojs/index.php/JIL
Title: Faculty Attitudes, Perceptions and Experiences of Information Literacy: A Study Across Multiple Disciplines at York University

Current study: methodology
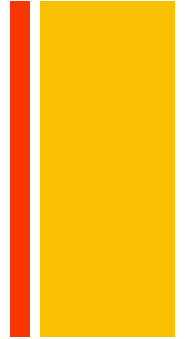
24 semi-structured interviews with York University
faculty during 2010-2011

- 22 interviews completed, coded and analyzed at this point
  - 10 female, 12 male.
- Focus on undergraduate students
- One third (8 faculty members) in each of these broad areas:
  - Business
  - Science
  - Social sciences and humanities
- All interviewees have expectations that students demonstrate library and information research skills to meet assignment and/or course learning objectives
- 50% of faculty arrange for IL instruction with the library
- 50% of faculty do not

How do faculty define information literacy?

+ Faculty Definitions of IL

- **Most common elements** in faculty definitions of information literacy
  - **Accessing** needed information effectively and efficiently (ACRL IL Competency Standard Two) – 18 interviewees
  - **Evaluating** information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information in to his or her knowledge base or value system (ACRL IL Competency Standard Three) – 18 interviewees
    - Predominantly comments fit with standard 3.2 – ability to evaluate information by criteria such as bias, authority, reliability etc.
    - Three faculty refer to the ability to read accurately and effectively (standard 3.1)

"It's that you know how to find stuff…And also the whole concept of, um, you know, search terms…if I'm going to interface with this index or this thing…you have to be reflective about what you are asking it."
Social sciences faculty member

Access

"Students ability to access and analyze research material mainly from different sources. It could be the internet. It could be databases that are in the library or not."
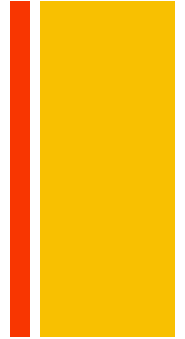Business faculty member

"Information literacy for me means being able to not merely find the information you need, but being able to assess the information that you need…where it's coming from, [to] be able to think critically about it in making your decision about whether that's information you want to use."

Business faculty member

+ Faculty Definitions of IL

- Elements receiving **moderate emphasis**

  - Determining the **nature and extent of information needed** (ACRL IL Competency Standard One) – 8 interviewees

"I think for undergraduates I don't even need them to know the full range of what's out there but they need to get the concept there is a range."

Social sciences faculty member

Nature and extent of information

"[information literacy is about] fluency in knowing the difference between different types of sources…"

Social sciences faculty member

+ Faculty Definitions of IL

- Elements receiving **little emphasis**

  - **Using information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose** (ACRL IL Competency Standard Four) – One interviewee

  - **Understands economic legal and social issues surrounding information and uses information ethically and legally** (ACRL IL Competency Five) – Two interviewees – speak about using information ethically when they define IL

Faculty's perceptions and experiences of students' IL abilities

+ Student IL Abilities

- Skills need development – room for improvement

- Need attention and are important – practically unanimous agreement across disciplines
  - When shown ACRL IL competencies defined at broadest level widespread agreement that all listed items important

- Consistent with library literature: Cannon (1994); Leckie & Fullerton (1999); Morrison (2007); Webber, Boon & Johnston (2005), Weetman Da Costa (2010)

- Consistent with studies outside the library literature: Arum and Roksa (2011), Carr (2010)

+ Student IL Abilities – Which areas get most attention?

- Defines and articulates the need for information (Standard 1)
- Ability to access information effectively and efficiently (Standard 2)
- Evaluate information and its sources critically and and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system (Standard Three)
  - By far the most lengthy and extensive comments
- Citing and academic integrity (Standard 5.1d and 5.2f and 5.3)

"They don't know where to get started or they start in the wrong places."

Science faculty member

Defines and articulates the need for information

"The hard part of doing an essay is figuring what to write an essay about and how to frame it and how to determine what is relevant to learn about to do it. And that is very hard…they are not good at that but I am sympathetic because I think it is extremely difficult…They are much happier if you say to them pick one of the following topics."

Humanities faculty member

Includes defining a topic

"…getting the information and accessing it – those I think are sort of the basic skills."

Business faculty member

Accessing information

"...in the lectures or in class we were talking about somebody and the kids all have their laptops...I drop a name and the next thing you know they have pulled them up. The lectures are a different phenomenon."

Social Sciences faculty member

"…what's really disappointing is that you'd think those skills would translate. So they used to be so familiar with the book shelves but they don't seem to be as familiar with the electronic resources and how to navigate them because there are tricks"

Business faculty member

Accessing information

"Searching for things requires you to know jargon and to appreciate that there is jargon you don't know and to find the jargon so you can search…Do they have awareness that jargon exists? I don't know. My feeling is probably not"

Science faculty member

**Critical Information Literacy –
What faculty in this study cared
about most**

"I think the gross problem, if I were going to pick the big problem, is largely knowing what is acceptable and what is not."
    Science faculty member

"Often these kids in one sense think of themselves as information literate because they are fairly good at finding stuff using Google but they are often not very sophisticated about evaluating information. And that's really where the hard work is…They think that what they are looking for are facts…they think you can find a clear definite answer…that this is it and that there aren't all these other factors, grey areas, and we really don't know…part of growing up too is learning to live with uncertainty. But I think it's also a school system thing…it's all rubrics and so laid out. It's kind of formulaic."

Humanities faculty member

Evaluating authority and content of sources

"..I mean the idea that we no longer need to know things because you can look them up bothers me."

Business faculty member

Internet age, technology and critical IL skills

"…organized text of argument or a single piece of organized text is really harder for them…They are used to bits; lumps…in the way that web pages do… you kind of click here, you kind of skim…"

Humanities faculty member

"I just call it thinking to the bottom. They are not skilled at doing that. They are skilled at staying on top. I think they know a lot of things, a little about a lot of things.

Business faculty member

"… I think hammering home this notion of values, about the value of secondary information and the obligations that are associated with using it correctly would be a real significant contribution. People need to hear that every single day. "

Business faculty member

Citing and plagiairism

"I guess with respect to information literacy when they write their reports they don't always include citations when they should, so maybe that's just not realizing, um, that they need to do so or it's lazy… "

Science faculty member

Citing and plagiarism

"One of the things that I find is that skill with citation is diagnostic for me…It's cut and dried…The people that have the best information literacy skills; they know exactly how to cite. They have the most sources. "

Business faculty member

Faculty's IL instruction practices

+ Faculty who arrange IL instruction with librarians

Five of twelve faculty

 IL formally integrated within the curriculum of the program

where they teach

3 faculty members

- English, Professional Writing, Psychology
- Teach IL extensively themselves
- Assignments designed to focus on IL skills

2 faculty members

- BBA and Physics
- Librarian does most of the IL instruction
- Physics has assignments designed by librarian to focus on IL skills

+ Faculty who arrange IL instruction with librarians

One faculty member

- Political Science

- Teaches IL skills frequently herself

- Designs assignments to develop IL skills.

Six faculty members

- Librarian does most of the IL instruction

- Do a little IL instruction self

- Business (3), Kinesiology (1), Natural Sciences (1), Social Sciences (1)

- With the exception of one faculty member (foundations course), none have assignments specifically designed to focus on the research process and IL skills.

+ Faculty who arrange no IL instruction with the library

10 faculty in total

- Four faculty members
  - History (2), Business & Society (1), Business (1).
  - Teach one or more IL skill frequently themselves
  - In case of history both profs recognize academic skills development as a defined priority at program level
  - Three out of four have assignments/in-class exercises crafted specifically with the development of one or more IL skill in mind.

  - Three faculty members
    - Chemistry, Business, Biology
    - Teach IL skills to a moderate degree - mainly through guidance on the research process geared to help students with research papers

  - Three faculty members
    - Chemistry, Business (2)
    - Do not teach IL skills.
    - Two believe they should know this already and one sees no issue with existing skills as developed earlier in program.

"…we also look at this course as these are the things you need to know and it is our responsibility to show you, this is part of an introduction to literary studies…"

Humanities faculty member

Disciplinary differences – stage where assignments apply

"…we get a lot of students through to third and fourth year who can't write and that's a huge problem because all of a sudden now they have to write a thesis. And they've never written anything really up until they get there because the class size is too big to do written assignments. So they've written short answers on tests but that's nothing. You know they haven't written an essay since high school."

Science faculty member

"No. I haven't done that at all. So I just consider that is something they should have done before they get to my point in the program…I know that some of them won't be able to do it so I just assume they are going to have extra work figuring it out."

Business faculty member

Faculty who do not organize or engage in IL instruction

"This should be easy but it's actually surprising… it should be easy anyway because we have a lot of well organized databases and there is a specific place that you go…Anyway they should know how to use these things…in Science it is very structured. You really only have two places to go if you want primary literature."

Science faculty member

Lack of Time

High school is not fostering IL skills development sufficiently

IL instructional challenges as articulated by study participants

Students IL abilities vary

IL planning not happening at the program level – limits what an individual faculty member can achieve

Faculty's pedagogical practice typically emphasizes covering the content

Perception among some faculty that teaching information literacy skills is not their job

Faculty beliefs: Desired future frameworks for planning and delivering IL instruction

"Mohammed is not going to come to the mountain so the mountain has got to go to Mohammed which means the students are not going to go on their own somewhere to get these skills. It's going to have to built in to the program for them."

Business faculty member

19 faculty think IL deserves attention in context of curriculum planning

"We should as a program be clear about if you are a Political Science major…what you should be able to do by the end of first year, second year. It should get progressively more challenging and difficult. We should give them lots of practice and we should be assessing them as they go. "

Social Sciences faculty member

Tiered, mandated and sophisticated up through the levels within programs

"...one idea might be to incorporate it as part of the dissertation course they take…That would be nice… I think a course on information literacy sounds kind of nice but people don't remember things or learn things unless they have a darn good reason to apply it…if they learned specific skills related to their research project it would enable them to do a better job…I think you'd probably have a better learning outcome."

Science faculty member

Course-intensive within program context – dissertation course, research-methods course etc.

"…we have the foundations courses so we kind of do it through specialized critical skills courses and that's where the linkages should happen … through the foundations or critical skills or general education courses. I really think that the Gen Ed program would be the hub, sort of, for linkages."

Social Sciences faculty member

Stand-alone critical skills course framed within broad disciplinary context e.g. Science, Social Sciences
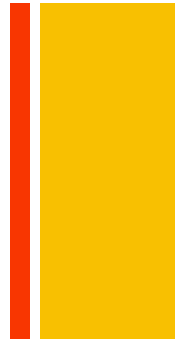
+ Implications for Practice

Information literacy education is important to faculty and
needs to be a priority in higher education

- Opportunities for dynamic and constructive collaboration
- Need to be sensitive to faculty conceptions and priorities and practices

+ Implications for Practice

Need for academic librarians to be more proactive in advocating for how librarian/faculty collaboration can contribute to information literacy skills building. Librarians need to clearly articulate the value that they can add/bring.

+ Implications for Practice

IL programming in academic libraries must be fine tuned with faculty perceptions in mind.

- Critical information literacy lense and approach needs to be adopted on a wider scale and expertise in this area needs to grow

+ Implications for Practice

Flexible approach desirable as faculty preferences for IL education delivery models vary.

Two pronged approach recommended to accommodate faculty who wish to teach IL themselves versus faculty who prefer to invite librarians to teach in their classes

1. Library-based IL programming
   - IL sessions delivered by librarians in collaboration with faculty
2. Working with educational developers and academic support units to build faculty development opportunities
   - Consultation model

Implications for Research
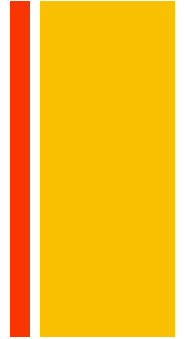
More research needed to gain a deeper understanding of why faculty choose not to adopt IL instruction at all.

More research to obtain greater understandings of faculty views on collaborative roles for information literacy skills development.

More research on faculty perceptions of delivery models for IL instruction.

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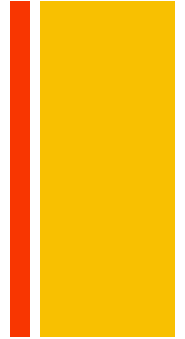
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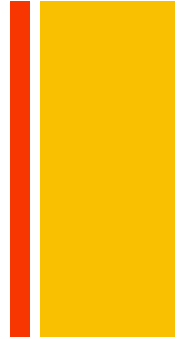
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