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## Preparing Our Students to Succeed

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# Preparing Our Students to Succeed

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Tracy Pulford-Russell

**W**e represent two steps on the ladder of K–20 education: Tracy is the teacher-librarian at Lincoln High School in the Portland Public Schools district and Anna is a librarian and instructor at Mt. Hood Community College (MHCC) in East Multnomah County. Tracy is especially interested in developing her student’s research and writing skills, and has established a research/writing center in the library that is modeled after college writing centers. Anna guest lectures in more than 100 courses each year, teaching students across the MHCC curriculum how to find and evaluate information in their subject areas. While we specialize in different educational environments, we feel strongly that Oregon’s librarians at high schools, colleges, and universities can and should work together to articulate information literacy (IL) standards, especially as our populations of students become more fluid.

In a city as rich in educational institutions as Portland students will always “swirl” between high schools, community colleges, and universities. Today we are seeing more overlap than ever before, as high school students take college classes earlier, and as university students shift to community colleges and back again to save money.

Knowing that our students are swirling between learning environments, teachers at every educational level must develop ways to assess that students are mastering the crucial skills at each grade level. Teacher librarians know that IL skills are essential for all students. But to what extent do library and information skills instruction at levels K–12 impact college performance? Research shows that students that attended high schools with library instructional programs bring a higher level of understanding about information research to their college experiences (Smiley and Goodin). This makes collaborative work and discussions between academic librarians across the educational system so important.

For all librarians who teach information literacy, it’s important to define what we want our students to learn in our own classrooms, but we must also have a reasonable understanding of the information literacy skills students have already mastered before they come to us. Articulation agreements between colleges and universities such as the Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer degree (AAOT) have been in place for years, and are frequently revised by the State Board of Education to ensure that all players are at the same table. It is our



opinion that similar articulation agreements can and should exist between public high schools and public colleges and universities, and that IL must be an explicit component of these agreements.

Since 2006, librarians and writing instructors at colleges and universities across Oregon have been collaborating to develop a set of shared information literacy proficiencies for students ready to begin upper-division coursework. From its inception, one of the major goals of this group has been to stress the importance of explicitly stated IL outcomes in the AAOT. Happily, the State Board of Education has been receptive to this effort; information literacy outcomes will be included in the AAOT, for the first time, in Fall 2010. Colleges are now facing the challenge of selecting which courses will fulfill these outcomes. The statewide collaboration between librarians and writing instructors has recently formalized its structure as ILAGO: the Information Literacy Advisory Group of Oregon. ILAGO maintains an electronic mailing list; to join the conversation, send an e-mail to [ilago-subscribe@cctrls.org](mailto:ilago-subscribe@cctrls.org) (no subject line is needed).

ILAGO's work has been the topic of discussion at several meetings of PAIL: the Portland Area Information Literacy group, a quarterly forum held at Portland State University (PSU) and attended by public, school, college, and university librarians. In the Portland area, four ILAGO members have adapted this collaboration at the local level, for students transferring to PSU from its neighbor community colleges, by defining specific skills for each of the eight IL proficiencies. (This work is illustrated on a poster, available at <http://ilago.wordpress.com/resources/> and may be adapted under a Creative Commons license.)

After several years of discussing information literacy proficiencies for rising juniors, the Portland-area conversation

has now expanded to include high school teacher-librarians, with a goal of defining skills for each of the existing eight proficiencies for students ready to begin college-level coursework. (We were careful not to refer to this group of students as "high school graduates" nor "entering freshmen" since students, especially at community colleges, begin taking college courses at many different ages and life stages). Our collaboration seeks to answer the question: which information literacy skills does a student need to have mastered in high school if he/ she is to succeed in college?

We have drafted an adaptation of the Portland-area proficiencies to the skills that could and should be expected of a student entering first-year college coursework. In these proficiencies students are expected to confer with teacher librarians and other experts, whereas students ready to begin upper-level college coursework are expected to demonstrate mastery of basic information literacy skills on their own.

This effort forms the beginning of a conversation with other area high schools in the hope of articulating shared information literacy proficiencies; it's critical that we do this work by and for ourselves, since Oregon has not adopted IL standards for K–12 students. In fact, according to the Oregon Coalition for School Libraries & Information Technology, less than one third of K–12 students in Oregon attend a school that has a teacher-librarian. We have hope that this inequity will soon be addressed: recently the Oregon Legislature passed House Bill 2586 which "Requires local districts' continuous improvement plans to include (the) goal of implementing a strong school library program." The Oregon Department of Education will need to identify what a "strong" library program looks like.

With HB 2586 and the revised AAOT degree, Oregon's board of education has taken major steps toward recognizing the



importance of clearly articulated information literacy standards. As librarians we need to join together to continue to advocate for the establishment of state adopted information literacy standards K–20 so that all of our students are prepared to succeed. Individually, at our home institutions, we need to get seats at the table when standards and degree requirements are being discussed. We highly recommend that all academic librarians identify and participate in campus committees that deal with articulation agreements and/ or educational assessment. It’s much better to co-host the party than to get an invitation after the party’s already been planned! 🌿

### References

Goodin, Elspeth. “The Transferability of Library Research Skills from High School to College.” *School Library Media Quarterly* 20.1 (1991): 33–41. Print.

Smalley, Topsy. ”College Success: High School Librarians Make the Difference.” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 30.3 (2004): 193. Print.

### Information literacy proficiencies for students ready to move into upper-division coursework

*Students who are ready to begin upper-division coursework can ...*

1. Identify gaps in their knowledge and recognize when they need information.
2. Find information efficiently and effectively, using appropriate research tools and search strategies.
3. Evaluate and select information using appropriate criteria.
4. Treat research as a multi-stage, recursive learning process.
5. Ethically and legally use information and information technologies.
6. Recognize safety issues involved with information sharing and information technologies.
7. Manipulate and manage information, using appropriate tools and technologies.
8. Create, produce, and communicate understanding of a subject through synthesis of relevant information.

(From <http://blogs.library.oregonstate.edu/ilsummit/2007-summit/proposed-proficiencies/>)

