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The Times They Are A-Changin': The Information Literacy Initiative at Lewis and Clark College

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The Aubrey R. Watzek Library at Lewis and Clark College traditionally has taken an informal approach to library instruction. Since the previous library leadership advocated instruction at the “point of need”—a philosophy that the best time to instruct patrons on library research and service is at the reference desk when the need arises—librarians have not been encouraged to actively solicit instructional opportunities. Without a formal instruction program, classes are provided at the behest of faculty and those requesting them are primarily in the Social Sciences or involved in the required first-year common-syllabus course, *Inventing America*. Typically during an academic year, librarians conduct a total of 25–30 instruction sessions reaching approximately 250 students. In the spring of 1999, reference staff tried a

more systematic approach to teaching all the incoming freshmen and transfer students by giving a 50-minute, one-shot introduction to the library to each *Inventing America* class. The mixed results did not convince the librarians and faculty that the experience was useful for students.

The current library instruction program at Lewis and Clark College falls somewhat short of fulfilling the general education requirement of information literacy as described in the College Catalog. The challenges faced by this program are not unique among higher education institutions. Indeed, the weaknesses of many library instruction programs are symptoms of a greater problem. Even those campuses like Lewis and Clark College, which recognize the importance of information literacy to academic success and lifelong learning, have not developed a mechanism to incorporate it across the curriculum. Librarians have stepped forward to fill this gap when

LEWIS AND CLARK COLLEGE is a private, liberal arts institution in Portland, Oregon, which includes a small graduate school and a law school. The Aubrey R. Watzek Library serves approximately 1,800 undergraduate students, 120 faculty members, and numerous staff of the college, as well as the graduate school. Currently four reference librarians, the Associate Director, and the Library Director each serve as liaisons to several academic departments and programs. These responsibilities include collection development, assisting with information and research needs, and providing library instruction to classes upon request by faculty.

academic departments declined to take responsibility. As their skills and knowledge in this arena develop, librarians realize that the instruction they provided in the past is no longer sufficient. In response, librarians at many institutions have worked to expand their instruction programs to encompass more aspects of information literacy and to work more collaboratively with faculty to integrate it into the curriculum.

Fortunately, the Lewis and Clark faculty realized that traditional library instruction or computer skills instruction may not be enough to prepare students for the demands of the “information age.” In 1999, the Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences unanimously passed a resolution calling for the design of a comprehensive information literacy program. The administration established a task force to address specific issues related to developing and implementing an information literacy program integrated into departmental and program curricula. The task force identified a number of objectives and issues related to the implementation of an information literacy initiative.

While this activity was underway, the College sought support from the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust to help launch an information literacy program in collaboration with five other institutions: Willamette University, Pacific University, University of Portland, George Fox University, and Linfield College. The Murdock Trust awarded this group with funding for three years. The funding allowed Lewis and Clark College to hire an Information Literacy Coordinator (ILC) to work with faculty, staff, and administrators at the schools to develop programs that broadly incorporate information literacy within the curricula of the institutions. The ILC will assess the needs of the students, outline an action plan for the schools, develop workshops and other training opportunities for faculty who want to participate, and serve as a resource for anyone interested in information literacy objectives.

The Information Literacy Initiative, as conceived by the task force and outlined in the Murdock grant proposal, focuses on faculty development. For Lewis and Clark College, this means helping faculty incorporate information literacy concepts into their courses rather than building a traditional library instruction program. Using the framework of the Information Literacy Competency Standards developed by the Association of College and Research Libraries, the ILC will work with the faculty to determine which competencies should be required by students at each level of their education and which are most appropriate for integration into the content of courses.

The ILC will work with IT staff, and library and faculty information literacy committees to identify opportunities for faculty development. One of the first opportunities provided to faculty members is the chance to participate in the inaugural Information Literacy Team, a group of 12 to 14 faculty members who will attend a series of five

workshops. These spring workshops will explore information resources, incorporation of information technology in the classroom, information literacy concepts, using problem-based learning techniques to teach information literacy, and information issues such as copyright and plagiarism. During the summer, the workshop participants will work with the ILC and liaison librarians to incorporate information literacy concepts into one or more of their Fall 2001 courses. The ILC will also work with the faculty and an Information Literacy Initiative committee to develop assessment tools for these classes. This first group of participants will also participate in an evaluation of the program and will serve as mentors for the second group of participants who will be identified in the spring of 2002.

By the end of the three years, approximately 40 percent of the faculty will have participated in the information literacy teams. Additional faculty will be reached through presentations, departmental programs, additional workshops, and one-on-one coaching. By reaching as many faculty members as possible, awareness of the initiative will be raised to the point where the program can sustain itself without the help of the ILC.

Currently, there is still the problem of identifying how required competencies could be worked into appropriate courses. This needs to be done in a systematic way so that every student, regardless of his or her major, receives the same information. Although the faculty proposed the Information Literacy Initiative, it is still entirely voluntary. There is no administrative mandate requiring faculty members to participate in this initiative. Even if the ILC identifies classes in each major that are prime candidates for incorporating information literacy concepts, the instructors of those classes may not be interested in participating. The ILC will try to overcome the resistance to change that is always exhibited by some portion of any organization by experimenting with a variety of approaches, and by doing a significant amount of public relations work.

The ILC and the librarians realize that this type of a program is a radical departure from the traditional library instruction program. Everyone must accept the fact that faculty may provide less consistency in their instruction than librarians are able to when meeting with students. On the other hand, the advantage of a faculty-driven Information Literacy Initiative is the benefit of providing students with the information they need in a way that seems relevant to them. By weaving information literacy concepts into the content and structure of the courses, students will see the usefulness in a way they do not when they attend traditional instruction sessions outside of their classroom. Even during course-related instruction, a perceived lack of relevance has always been a barrier to student learning when the librarian takes over the class.

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The faculty development approach seems to be a good fit for Lewis and Clark College, where the instruction program is relatively undeveloped and the faculty has taken steps to make information literacy an integral part of the curriculum. Given the differences between the various institutions involved in the grant, the model developed at Lewis and Clark College may not suit others. In site visits to the institutions, the ILC has perceived a wide range of instructional programs, administrative models, and cooperation with faculty. Rather than suggest a single model, the ILC will work with each institution to develop their existing instructional programs into more comprehensive information literacy efforts.

The Information Literacy Initiative's impact on the current configuration of the Lewis and Clark College's library instruction program is, of course, unknown. It is likely that traditional instruction sessions will still occur, but it is uncertain whether the number of classes conducted will change drastically. Many of the concepts librarians teach in typical instruction sessions should be incorporated into the curriculum. However, classes of this style may still be a good means to introduce freshmen to librarians and library resources. As the campus's collective knowledge of library and information literacy increases, requests for library instruction may grow as well.

Transactions at the reference desk have been declining steadily over the past several years, so the Initiative comes at a point when the librarians have time to more fully develop their roles as department liaisons. Librarians will become an increasingly important resource for faculty as they begin integrating information literacy into the curriculum. Opportunities for librarians and faculty to team-teach may occur, which will also increase the librarians' visibility on campus and draw more attention to the pivotal role the library has in higher education.

The Information Literacy Initiative is still in its fledgling state at Lewis and Clark College and the plans outlined in this article may undergo radical revision after its assessment by the first Information Literacy Team. Regardless of what form and path the Information Literacy Initiative takes, however, any efforts the faculty make to incorporate information literacy concepts into their classes will be of great benefit to the students. 