Information Literacy Assessment

In support of PK-16 state initiatives and aligning information literacy for direct-from high school freshmen with the information literacy competencies identified in the Ohio Department of Education’s K-12 Technology Academic Content standards, for fall 2005, the direct from high school enrolled at UT in freshmen orientation sections are being pre-tested on vocabulary and concept recognition and post-tested after information literacy instruction against identified core competencies for academic success during the first semester of their post-secondary education. Recognizing the traditional course load direct-from-high school students take during their first semester, successive pre and post assessments are being given in PSYC 1010 and ENG 1100/1110. Two additional pilot projects using the above linked FYI section to General Education sections are being conducted with the direct from high school students in the College of Business Administration, FYI QUEST and the Career and Academic Planning (CAP) Living Learning Community. This work forms the basis for the design and delivery of information literacy instruction for the freshmen students in both their FYI sections and general education sections.

The initial review of the survey results contradicts the popularly held notion that direct from high school arrive on campus with solid technology, information and computer skills. While direct from high school students own computers and are comfortable with technology, ownership does not translate into competencies. Direct from high school students are comfortable with accessing a search engine and sending/receiving email but they are not prepared for the web-based learning environment they are confronted with on a university campus. From logons and usernames to creation of an effective search strategy using Boolean operations and/or truncation, direct from high school students during their first semester on campus either do not have the skills or can not transfer their technology, computer and information skills to their new environment. For library instruction, this translates into designing and developing instruction not based on library of congress call numbers and introduction to discipline specific research databases but to a very basic introduction to an academic research library, the evaluation of web resources, hands-on instruction to distinguish between a magazine and a scholarly publication and the use of course reserves. Direct from high school students must also be introduced to the basic differences between an academic library and their high school or public library.

The pre-test of the direct from high school students’ recognition of standard vocabulary terms and basic search and access concepts supported the thesis that students needed a more basic approach to academic libraries. This movement to “start at the beginning” provided the opportunity to design and develop a graduated course of library instruction that aligns the first year information orientation with composition and ripples out to align with the most popular general education courses, e.g. Introduction to Psychology, History of Jazz, etc. In addition, the introduction of a post-test after the class meeting affords the librarian to examine what the student has learned during the actual library instruction session. The post test provides a series of true-false, short answer, fill in the blank,
multiple choice and open-ended questions that are completed by the student. A separate evaluation of the librarians’ teaching and presentation skills is completed by the course instructor.

This focus on student learning has changed the content of what is provided during a library instruction session. It has created a greater focus on identifying the competencies students must possess as they learn the research process in an academic library. It has also created more consistent classroom content being taught across the library by different librarians. Finally, it has provided an opportunity to create a series of successive modules of library instruction where students learn information literacy competencies as they move through the university’s lower division curriculum.

Core competencies:

- Recognition of the difference between free Internet and fee-based Internet access
- Evaluation of web retrieved information against the criteria of authority, accuracy, objectivity, currency, and coverage.
- Identification of role of academic library in relationship to public and school libraries.
  - Large, complex research environment.
  - Focus on discipline literature.
  - Use of scholarly publications versus magazines or trade publications.
  - Primary sources
  - Nonfiction materials versus fiction.
- The role of academic honesty and the ethical use of information.
- Demonstration of web-based information retrieval using university’s technology.
- Identification of library’s home page.
- Distinguish between keyword and subject searching.
- Recognition of information need.
- Creation of effective search strategy aligned with efficient information retrieval.
- Recognition of Library of Congress classification as basis for the organization and retrieval of academic information.
- Academic support services provided by an academic library:
  - Assistance
  - Individual or group study
  - Laptop lending
  - University academic support services, e.g. tutoring, Writing Center, computer labs