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Future Through the Past — A Quality Enhancement Plan for Belmont Abbey College, 2010-2015

Information Literacy + the Learning Commons

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In 2009, the **Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)** approved the **Belmont Abbey College** quality enhancement plan (QEP) titled: “PILOT: Promoting Information Literacy Over Time” as a ten-year plan. PILOT has been our initiative to enhance undergraduate students’ information literacy knowledge and skill-sets and thereby better prepare them to enter an information-driven and knowledge-based economy. Structured around the six core competencies identified by the **Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)**, titled “Information Literacy Competency Standards of 2000,” the plan was designed to help lower-division students understand these core competencies in first-year general education courses, and then enable upper-division students to deepen their understanding of them, sharpen the skill-sets associated with them, and apply that understanding and those skills in research-intensive and capstone courses in their disciplinary majors. We set forth three initial goals for our first five year milestone:

INITIAL QEP GOAL 1: Information literacy will be introduced to traditional freshmen students in First Year Symposium, and to Adult Degree Program students through the Adult Transitions Classes, with focus on **ACRL IL Competency Standards 1, 2, and 3**. These will be supported by three video tutorials, produced by the library’s Reference Department, with accompanying quizzes developed with the help of Institutional Research. **Initial Intended Outcome:** To expose first-year students to the **ACRL IL Competency Standards**, with emphasis on 1, 2, & 3, as well as selected IT skills pertinent to the iSkills exam from ETS.

INITIAL QEP GOAL 2: Research-intensive and capstone courses in five PILOT disciplinary majors will be reviewed by a Faculty QEP Committee to confirm that their assessment rubrics align with **ACRL standards**, or to bring their rubrics into alignment accordingly. Library instructional staff will assist with the initiative to bring rubrics into alignment with **ACRL competencies** as needed, and will also be available to provide research skills sessions to the students of these classes. **Initial Intended Outcome:** To assist students in the five PILOT majors to build on their initial exposure from First Year Symposium and to extend these competencies into effective research skill-sets within their disciplinary majors.

INITIAL QEP GOAL 3: The College agreed to apply for a \$100,000 LSTA Major Technology Grant to convert the Reference Room (with 10 workstations) into a more fully equipped Learning Commons with 50 workstations. The southwest corner would be partitioned off for an Information Literacy Instructional Area, and the Library would be budgeted to acquire an enhanced set of research databases identified by the Faculty Library Committee (FLC). **Initial Intended Outcome:** To eliminate longstanding student wait lines for use of library workstations, to provide access to disciplinary research databases, and to provide individual library consultation and class instruction in use of those databases.

Changes Made to the QEP and the Reasons for Making Those Changes

Assessment Testing: Our plan originally called for the ETS iSkills test to be our primary assessment instrument, to be used to score incoming freshmen and then again to score graduating seniors four years later. Because iSkills initially meshed information literacy (IL) and information technology (IT) elements in one instrument, our initial planning for related QEP activities and secondary assessments involved a parallel meshing of IL and IT elements. But after we had administered

iSkills to freshmen in Fall 2009, ETS temporarily discontinued iSkills for extended revision. We therefore needed a substitute instrument, and reviewed two options: a) Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (SAILS); and b) Research Readiness Self-Assessment (RRSA). Our review of RRSA raised concerns over its reported conflation of objective and subjective elements, in that it measured both students’ actual competence but also their perceived competence, as confirmed by a later research study.¹ This approach deviated from the objective premise of both iSkills and SAILS, neither of which attempts to explore student self-confidence. We therefore switched from iSkills to SAILS. We reset initial freshman SAILS testing “for the Project Record” to Fall 2010. Correspondingly, four years later, the first seniors in the PILOT courses were tested on SAILS “for the record” in Spring 2014. Freshman testing with SAILS has continued each Fall since 2010, and continued for seniors through Spring 2015.

First Year Symposium: Our plan originally called for first exposing freshmen to the **ACRL IL Competency Standards** in First Year Symposium (FYS), and this was the case through academic year 2012-13, but we found that the content agenda for FYS was increasingly burdensome.

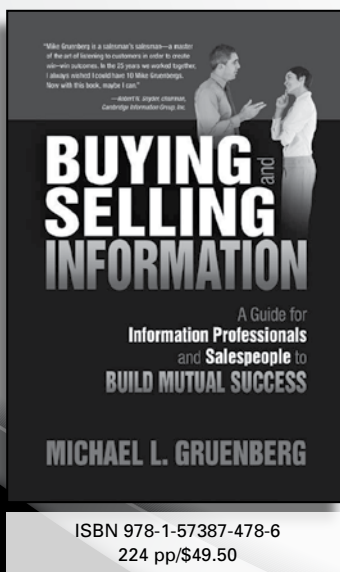
A core curriculum revision that replaced the EN 101-102 sequence with Rhetoric I & II offered what our QEP Committee felt was a more suitable context for freshman exposure to the **ACRL IL competency standards**. This was supported by our sampled assessment of IL tutorial quiz results in Spring 2013, which indicated that Rhetoric II students were viewing the tutorials to a greater degree than anticipated (discussed further below). So in academic year 2013-14, FYS was replaced by the Rhetoric I & II sequence as the standard introduction to information literacy for freshman students.

Five PILOT Disciplines: Our plan originally called for the five PILOT disciplines to be Psychology, Elementary Education, History, Biology, and Business Management. The intense involvement of English faculty in the conversion from English 101 to Rhetoric I brought that entire department more directly into our campus conversation about IL. Consequently, English faculty requested a 2-day overview of the **ACRL Standards** and database research methods by our (then) Research Specialist, **William Spivey** (conducted on June 3-4, 2010). Meanwhile, the retirement of the former Chair of Business was followed by a period of internal reassessment of that department’s curricular goals. These factors led the QEP Committee (in its meeting of Spring 2014), with approval of the Director of Institutional Research, to replace Business Management with English/Rhetoric as the fifth PILOT discipline.

Longitudinal Database Usage: Our initial QEP assessment regime included two fully longitudinal measures: a) iSkills/SAILS; and b) annual cumulative tracking of “full-text pageview downloads” from a selected set of research databases through our state library consortial portal, NCLIVE. We chose to focus on usage of the **EBSCO** family of databases because these had been (as of 2010) the most stable long-term licenses across multiple disciplines since the birth of NCLIVE in the late-1990s. And these longitudinal tracking measures of **EBSCO** full-text pageview downloads did in fact show very favorable impact from the QEP, as will be shown in a subsequent column. But in Summer 2014, the NCLIVE governing board announced a competitive bidding process that resulted in a broad-based replacement of **EBSCO** products by **ProQuest** products as of January 1, 2015. So going forward, we intend to reset this measurement regime, and restart the longitudinal tracking of full-text pageview downloads from **ProQuest** databases for the expected duration of our QEP.

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Library Staffing Pattern: Our QEP began with the primary involvement of Library staff a) Director of Library Services **Donald Beagle** (ft); b) Reference Librarian **Sandra Williams** (ft); c) Research Specialist **William Spivey** (ht); and d) Evening Librarian **Christine Pasour** (ht). For a number of organizational reasons, the Reference Librarian’s role in QEP-related instruction was steadily reduced, especially in 2013-14, and replaced by a) more focused commitment by the Research Specialist; and b) the expansion of duties by our MLS-degreed Acquisitions Specialist **Heather Pierce Smith**, whose prior experience on other campuses had included IL instruction, and who voluntarily requested greater involvement in our QEP. With the retirement of former Reference Librarian **Sandra Williams** in late Fall 2014, we saw the opportunity to redefine that position to more closely align its duties and responsibilities with the goals of the QEP. This led to a rewrite of the position description, and the new title of “Learning Technology & Information Fluency Librarian.” This position was filled by promoting **Heather Pierce Smith** on January 5, 2015. The Acquisition Specialist position vacated by **Smith** was then also retitled as “Instructional / Administrative Librarian,” and filled by **Sharon Bolger** — a **Belmont Abbey College** alum who had recently completed her MSLS.

Impact of ACRL Exploration of IL Framework Revision from February 2014 through August 2014

Early in 2014, ACRL released early drafts of its proposed major revision to its approach to IL, including a possible migration from the IL Competency Standards of 2000 to a “Framework for IL” based on the new set of “threshold concepts.” An announcement of the first draft of the proposed Framework was released for comment and feedback on February 20, 2014. Library Director **Donald Beagle** monitored the feedback and discussion within ACRL from Draft 1 in February through Draft 2 in June, which included the recommendation (#2): “*The Task Force recommends that the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*

be sunsetted one year after the approval of the new Framework.” Because the proposed revisions were far-reaching, and because the “sunsetting” of the 2000 standards would have fallen at the midpoint of our QEP, **Mr. Beagle** recommended that there be a temporary one year hiatus from freshman SAILS testing to see whether or not the new Framework would be formally adopted before the end of 2014. By March 2015, however, it was clear that the IL Competency Standards would not be subjected to “sunsetting” before our Interim Report to SACS would be due in September 2015. Our QEP plan, therefore, temporarily retained its focus on the IL Competency Standards of 2000 through that report’s submission, with longitudinal assessment based on the SAILS exam still structured around those same competency standards. In a follow-up column, I will summarize the interesting assessment results that flowed from our PILOT project, and its dual-focus structure organized around both Information Literacy and the development of our Learning Commons. 🌱

Endnotes

1. **Jackson, C.** (2013). “Confidence as an indicator of research students’ abilities in information literacy: A mismatch.” *Journal of Information Literacy*, 7(2). pp. 149-152.

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into the pie, cooked and then eaten cold. These tiny pies have been a favorite food in Britain since the Middle Ages — and have changed the English language with idioms, nursery rhyme verses, even a mention by **Shakespeare**. You know what? Now I am even hungrier! Wonder where I can get a **Melton Mowbray pork pie**? <http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20170322-how-a-pocket-sized-snack-changed-the-english-language>

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