

# TAKING IMMERSION HOME: DEVELOPING OWNERSHIP OF INFORMATION LITERACY AMONG FACULTY

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“I just can’t get faculty interested in information literacy” -- sound familiar? We used to say this too. At a regional ACRL Immersion program, the Seattle Community College District librarians asked ourselves how we could get faculty more involved with information literacy on their campuses. One way to do it: Take Immersion Home.

Engaging faculty in developing information literacy (IL) programs is a common concern among librarians. Our three-day summer retreat for faculty was the result of a year of planning, development, and implementation that is now bearing fruit. Faculty across the district are taking notice of IL and revising their curricula to give students opportunities to seek and use information in a variety of contexts. We believe that other college and university IL programs will find our process and program adaptable to their own faculty.

The goals for the program were to promote faculty driven initiatives to incorporate IL outcomes in curriculum design and to encourage teaching that integrates IL outcomes with course content. The program took place during the last days of summer 2006 and offered faculty a three-day immersion experience to develop curriculum projects they proposed when they registered. Faculty who completed their IL curriculum projects received a small stipend. Our program has helped build critical mass for continuing to integrate information literacy outcomes in our colleges.

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## BACKGROUND

The Seattle Community Colleges serve a diverse population of more than 27,000 students at three urban commuter campuses. Our libraries are committed to providing students with as many IL learning opportunities as possible. The three campuses employ 12 librarians responsible for collections, library operations and services, and our highest priority, instruction. With a limited number of librarians, we must engage other faculty in order to reach our students.

In spring 2005, a regional ACRL Information Literacy Immersion Program gave us a vision and a process. At the same time, one of our librarians was on sabbatical examining how academic libraries are engaging faculty outside of the library in the work of promoting information competencies. The results of her study dovetailed with the conclusions reached by the ACRL Immersion participants: shifting the focus of information literacy programs from the library to faculty would reach more students and students would have more opportunities to develop IL in multiple contexts and at different levels.

The regional Immersion Program was funded by a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant for Washington State community college libraries. The grant focused on helping librarians to collaborate with faculty, to develop and implement programs that employ IL as a lifelong skill, to use IL as an instructional strategy, and to strengthen IL pedagogies. The ultimate goal of this grant was to improve student information literacy in the two-year colleges of Washington State.

Eight librarians from the three Seattle Community Colleges attended the regional IL Immersion Program at Sleeping Lady Retreat and Conference Center in Leavenworth, Washington, in June 2005. Most of us attended the Program Track and we decided to collaborate at the district level to promote our IL goals. Meeting spaces at the Immersion facility were limited,

so in the evenings we met for after-dinner drinks at the Conference Center's bar, The Grotto, to develop a project. Through these informal work sessions, we realized that our combined passion, energy, expertise and creativity would allow us to do more than would be possible at the individual campus level.

The idea for our faculty program came out of an analytical process, taking into account the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) relating to IL instruction on our campuses. We identified weaknesses that included a lack of administrative support at higher levels, the reality that instruction does not reach all students, and serious understaffing. On the other hand, we found our strengths in a long tradition of library collaboration across the Seattle Community Colleges that has included resource sharing and quarterly planning. The Immersion experience gave us new energy and motivation to achieve our goals. Together we brainstormed how we could market IL to faculty.

We concluded that the highest impact could be achieved through a summer institute for faculty. Our strategy was to present the importance of IL to different constituencies at multiple levels across the District. Our primary objective was to offer an Information Literacy Institute that we envisioned as a mini IL Immersion for faculty from all three campuses. We wanted to create for our own faculty the same kind of experience that we enjoyed at the ACRL Immersion. We recognized the need to market our plan not only to faculty, but to top administrators including the chancellor, vice chancellor, campus presidents and vice presidents. We began to plan how to raise the money and recruit participants for a successful summer program. In our minds this included good food, stipends for curriculum projects, and interesting speakers. Obtaining financial backing and mounting a successful marketing campaign were essential; the two go together more than we initially realized.

## HOW WE DID IT

### Creating a Vision

When we returned from the ACRL Immersion experience, we formed a district-wide Information Literacy Committee and refined our shared district IL vision and goals:

Seattle Community Colleges provide a learning environment in which students use critical thinking skills to find and apply information in order to achieve personal, academic and career goals as citizens in a democratic society and the global community.

*Students will be able to:*

- Articulate an information need
- Develop an awareness of the kinds of information sources available because information needs change over time
- Recognize the value of libraries in providing meaningful connections to the diversity of human knowledge, both virtually and tangibly
- Understand the economics of information and the

critical role libraries play in making information freely available

- Practice selecting and evaluating appropriate sources for their needs

*Faculty will:*

- Collaborate in the library and the classrooms to achieve the vision

*Librarians will:*

- Work closely with other faculty from the Teaching and Learning Centers, Faculty Development and Curriculum committees, Information Technology, professional programs, counseling, and academic subjects
- Seek support from administrators

Bold as they were, the vision statement and goals gave us the inspiration to think big. The Grotto tradition begun at the ACRL Immersion program continued in Seattle through an entire year of planning, fund raising and marketing to put on a local faculty IL Immersion program.

### How We Got the Money

Money in Washington State community colleges is tight, as it is for most educational institutions, but we found that asking for money is an excellent way to market IL and the value of libraries to the college administration. At our first joint meeting in September 2005, a group brainstorm led to a list of possible funding sources. We divided these sources among ourselves and made appointments with the appropriate contacts. Working as a group gave us courage and impetus to go to the top administrators.

As we planned to meet with administrators to present our proposal, we realized that it was important to educate them about what IL is and why it is important. As a result, we created a proposal explaining our project, a preliminary budget and justification for their support to fund it. We were pleased with how enthusiastically our proposal was received and soon realized that the proposal itself was an important marketing tool. It showed clearly that we had done our homework. How often does a librarian get to meet with the chancellor to explain the importance of IL? Now the chancellor, the vice chancellor for instruction, the college presidents, the chair of the faculty development advisory committee, the director of planning and research, and the three college foundation directors all know something about the importance of IL. Each 'yes' gave us more encouragement and a growing certainty that what we had to say was worthwhile and received with interest. We also used our successes to leverage more money and in the end we raised over \$13,000. This funding allowed us to serve lunches and snacks, hire speakers, purchase supplies, and pay faculty participants and ourselves for summer work when we are off contract.

### If We Build It, Will They Come?

Marketing is about communicating a vision that will fulfill a perceived need to a targeted audience. The importance

of better IL is not lost on faculty, although they sometimes need reminders and help articulating its value. They are aware that students have trouble defining an information need, thinking and using a full range of resources, and critically evaluating both the process and results. Our task was to get faculty thinking about how they can address these needs within their own teaching and make better use of our library resources and services. To find out whether there was interest and let instructors know about the program we:

- Surveyed faculty to determine whether there was interest in a summer immersion experience (over 80 responses)
- Leveraged library liaison relationships to include IL development
- Offered IL faculty workshops
- Promoted IL as a college-wide learning outcome
- Created flyers and placed them in faculty mailboxes and copy rooms
- Made announcements in meetings
- Targeted emails to faculty groups
- Visited faculty offices
- Offered \$200 stipends for IL curriculum plans and assignments (see appendix)

## Program

Even as we raised money and promoted the program, we began to develop the program plan itself. We employed a curriculum planning tool inspired by Debra Gilchrist's presentation at the June, 2005 ACRL Immersion to ask:

- What do we want faculty to do?
- What would faculty need to know in order to do it?
- What logical sequence of activities would lead to this end?
- What would we ask faculty to do to practice?
- How would we know when they were doing it?

This process led to the program we finally offered in September 2006, just a week before the beginning of fall quarter. The goals for our program were to promote faculty driven initiatives to incorporate information literacy outcomes in curriculum design as well as to create a bank of faculty-designed instructional models for information literacy. The resulting three-day program offered engaging and playful activities designed to support the curriculum projects that faculty proposed. Faculty who completed projects within three weeks of the program--and 29 of the 30 participants did--received a \$200 stipend.

The program provided faculty with a solid foundation for understanding how to teach and assess information literacy, and each day focused on activities that led faculty through the process of completing their projects. A summary of our Immersion program schedule appears below.

*Day One: Defining Information Literacy.* The librarians kicked off the event with a humorous short skit to get faculty thinking about information literacy. Yvonne Sanchez, a district trustee, delivered an inspiring keynote speech about the value of information literacy in the real world, and faculty

had opportunities to consider the role of information literacy in their personal and work lives. We then focused on defining IL and brainstormed about its meaning in different contexts. To finish the day, a one-hour library boot camp provided faculty with a refresher on library resources.

*Day Two: Outcomes and Assessment.* Building on the IL discussion from day one, Debra Gilchrist, Dean of Libraries and Media Services at Pierce College, Washington, and a national leader in IL, presented an assessment model and worked with participants to develop outcomes and assessments for their IL curriculum projects.

*Day Three: Putting It All Together.* Faculty spent the morning working with librarians to refine their projects. Later they discussed IL issues raised in articles that were assigned on day one. Finally, faculty demonstrated their learning by creating and performing short skits. To close the event and inspire faculty to carry the work forward, Mike Eisenberg, Dean Emeritus and faculty of the University of Washington Information School and co-creator of the Big6 information literacy model, offered the framework of his model through his unique and energetic approach.

## CONCLUSION

There is substantial evidence that by engaging faculty in IL instruction, their instruction is more effective. Our experience is supported by other research. One such study examines the level and extent of community college faculty participation in IL instruction and how faculty participation (or nonparticipation) affects student motivation (Small et al., 2004). The researchers conclude that faculty participation in designing library instruction, their preparation of students, and their presence during instruction is essential to student motivation.

The degree of integration is also significant. A San Jose State University project develops relationships across the campus to integrate IL at the program level (Breivik & McDermond, 2004). In this program, faculty and librarian teams apply for grants for curriculum development projects that integrate IL. The program promotes freshman level research courses specific to disciplines and follow-up is delivered through program-specific junior and senior writing courses and capstone projects. At the Seattle Community Colleges, we also are finding that grant money is a motivator for faculty to rethink and rewrite their curriculum. We used LSTA grant money obtained through our state library to develop our program and included a request for stipends payable to faculty who developed a curriculum plan and assignment integrating IL. We also raised money from sources in our district: faculty development grants, assessment and distance learning funds, and campus foundations. Another source, which we have not yet tapped, is curriculum development monies. An important side benefit to our fundraising efforts has been the fact that grantors have become stakeholders in our efforts to develop IL programs.

Furthermore, we recognize that new strategies are needed to increase faculty participation. In an ongoing UK study,

researchers are conducting interviews with university faculty about their own IL practices, how they use IL in their teaching, and the relationship of these practices to their academic disciplines (Webber & Johnston, 2005). The preliminary results of the study have important implications for promoting IL teaching and learning. Across our campuses we are now engaging faculty in conversations about what IL means to them, why it is important for their students, and how it has a place in their own teaching.

Hannelore Rader describes a variety of strategies for promoting information literacy through institutional partnerships (Rader, 2001). She advocates extending these partnerships from librarian and faculty to other relationships within and beyond the institution through outreach to distance education programs, faculty development, writing centers, faculty research support, and by partnering with information technology, student organizations, businesses, and other school and public libraries. She views librarians as primarily responsible for proactive outreach to develop these relationships.

The connection between IL and other general learning outcomes for students (such as critical thinking, problem solving, technology fluency, and written and oral communication) has been an important selling point for the Seattle Community Colleges' program. In the past, librarians participated in writing the learning outcomes for the Associate of Arts degree. Additionally, the draft Associate of Science degree outcomes developed by science and math faculty clearly articulate IL expectations. However, it was sometimes difficult to help faculty understand how information literacy relates to their curriculum. The connections we have now made--through supporting curriculum development and creating IL programs for faculty--have created a buzz about IL on our campuses.

Through our faculty development and curriculum projects we are discovering that faculty are indeed interested in developing their students' understanding of how ideas and information are critical to the mastery of their disciplines. Many of these faculty are discovering that IL plays an important role in the effectiveness of their teaching. In continuing to work with our program participants, we are developing them as IL leaders to help us reach other faculty. In addition to developing relationships with faculty, we are developing partnerships

with curriculum and assessment committees to build a wider institutional understanding of how IL relates to critical thinking and problem solving. In the process of collaborating directly with Seattle Community Colleges faculty, and with other college-wide stakeholders, we are reaching more students. We believe that as a result of our project, students benefit from many more opportunities to practice IL competencies in a variety of disciplines and at a variety of levels.

*We are grateful to the colleagues who worked with us to implement this program.*

*- North Campus: Jennifer Wu and Sharon Simes*

*- Central Campus: Lynn Kanne, Jane Shoop and Sharon Spence-Wilcox*

## REFERENCES

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# APPENDIX

## Seattle Community College IL Curriculum Plan

(Application for faculty stipends)

### Instructions:

Use the template below to develop a plan for the outcomes you've identified. In a separate document, provide a new or revised assignment, unit, or syllabus that demonstrates how you will integrate IL into your course.

Instructor's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Course Name & Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Next scheduled to be offered in: \_\_\_\_\_

### **LEARNING OUTCOMES: *Students need to be able to:***

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- List what you want your student to be able to do
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### **KNOWLEDGE BASE: *What do Students need to know?***

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- List what students need to know in order to do it
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### **TEACHING: *What will students do to learn this?***

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- List a logical sequence of activities that will help students to learn this
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### **ASSIGNMENT: *How will students practice what you want them to learn?***

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- Create an assignment with tasks to help students practice
- Have a students show you what they've learned

### **EVIDENCE OF LEARNING: *How will you know the students have done this well?***

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- What is your assessment strategy?
- What are your criteria?

Adapted from: Debra Gilchrist, Pierce College, Lakewood, Washington. "Five Questions for Assessment Design." ACRL Institute for Information Literacy Immersion Program, 2005.