Our Transition Mission: Reaching Out to the High School Community

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"The need to increase retention and completion rates for students in higher education is a compelling reason for academic librarians to collaborate with their K-12 colleagues in developing information literacy activities across K-20 education."
(Carr & Rockman, 2003, p. 52)

For the past three years, librarians at Kent State University have been working with high school library media specialists, educators and students to aid information literacy instruction. This work has been supported, in part, by The Institute for Library and Information Literacy Education (ILILE). The Institute is federally funded through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the U.S. Department of Education, and was established at Kent State University to provide leadership:

- In fostering collaboration among K-12 teachers and library media specialists
- In advancing information literacy in the K-12 curriculum.

Three partners comprise ILILE: the College of Education, the School of Library & Information Science, and University Libraries. Each directs projects intended to foster information literacy in K-12 in Ohio and nationally. This work has already produced useful tools and model programs, and just as importantly, it has revealed many insights into the K-12 information literacy culture and how teachers and librarians prepare students for college.

Background

In the past few years, a number of concerns have arisen in higher education regarding the preparedness of students and performance of universities. Certainly, the reader would recognize these problems, as they are not unique to Ohio. They involve the buzzwords: retention, remediation, alignment and funding. Higher education's response to these concerns has been to create first-year experience programs that focus on the preparation and support of incoming students. At Kent State, we began to see our work with high schools as a component of the first-year experience that worked on several fronts to connect K-12 education with higher education. We realized that by supporting library media specialists, teachers and students at the high school level, we could impact student preparation for college. The following summarizes some of the most important insights and lessons we have learned through our collaborative work with high schools in Ohio.

Insights Gained / Lessons Learned

1. **Budgetary considerations directly influence collaborative opportunities.**

   At the high school level, fluctuations in federal, state and local funding can have an effect on information literacy instruction. In Ohio, many library media specialists worry about their security within the educational system, since the state's Operating Standards for Schools do not mandate a librarian for every school. Limited resources sometimes present administrators with the challenge of choosing between a nurse and library media specialist.

   Funding levels also impact whether schools can afford field trips. We have had schools visit Kent State one year and then not be able to afford to return the next. We have also seen the size of groups increase on visits, since schools that can afford a bus for a field trip want to fill them with as many students as possible.

2. **Information literacy appears in state standards and begins with K-2.**

   In Ohio, standards drive K-12 education. Benchmarks for information literacy appear within the Technology

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standards, beginning at the K-2 level and continuing through grades 9-12. Information literacy is also integrated into the academic content standards, such as Science, Language Arts and Social Studies. These standards offer opportunities for collaboration with library media specialists, providing common ground for discussion, programming and assessment projects.

3. **Like academic librarians, library media specialists often must collaborate to access students.**

Just as we need to collaborate with faculty members to integrate information literacy into courses, library media specialists must do the same. More than once we have been contacted directly by teachers, who had left their school librarians out of the loop on planning a visit. We have made it our policy to try to bring the library media specialist back into these conversations and help build healthy teacher – librarian collaborations.

4. **Library media specialists have their own professional associations, regional groups and consortia.**

Like academic librarians, library media specialists have a strong national association within ALA, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), as well as an active state AASL affiliate. INFOhio, the information network for Ohio schools, coordinates the acquisition of online library resources at the state level.

We were also surprised to learn of other regional organizations and state agencies that play a strong role in the education and support of librarians and library media centers. For example the Ohio Education Computer Network has 24 regional sites providing data and technical support to school districts. Many of these also provide a forum for discussions and offer programming for library media specialists. Each of these associations and organizations can provide opportunities to connect with and share information with groups of school librarians.

5. **Professional associations provide a framework for information literacy.**

The professional associations for both academic librarians and library media specialists (ACRL and AASL) provide a framework of standards around which we can design and deliver instruction. A comparison of the standards (see Figure 1) shows modest differences. Overall, the ACRL standards align well with those of the AASL, demonstrating further that academic and school librarians have very similar instructional objectives.

Figure 1: Comparison of Standards	
AASL	**ACRL**
1. Accesses information effectively and efficiently.	1. Defines information need.
2. Evaluates information critically.	2. Accesses information effectively and efficiently.
3. Uses information accurately and creatively.	3. Evaluates information critically and incorporates information into knowledge base.
4. Pursues information for personal interests.	4. Uses information to accomplish a specific purpose.
5. Appreciates literature and creative works.	5. Uses information ethically.
6. Strives for excellence in information seeking.	
7. Recognizes importance of information to democracy.	
8. Uses information ethically.	
9. Participates effectively with groups to use information.	

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6. **Exposure to academic libraries can reduce anxiety and may help with recruitment.**
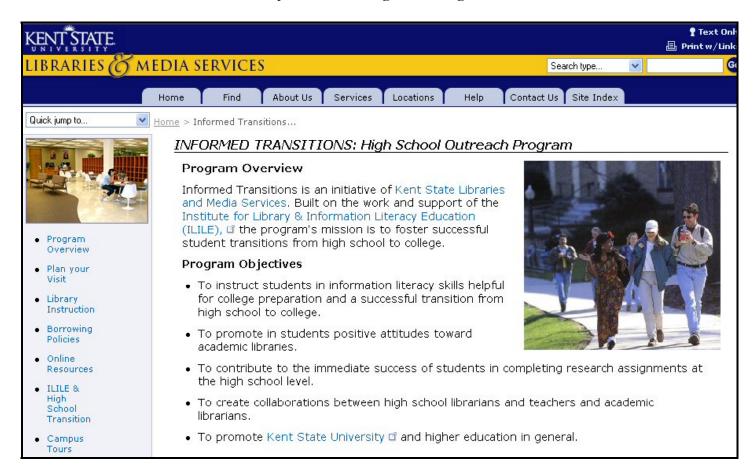
   Throughout our outreach work with high schools, one objective has been to give visiting students a positive experience using the academic library. If students feel too intimidated or confused to even venture into their college library or ask a question, there will be less opportunity to reach them. Visits can also serve as a powerful recruitment tool when the library visit is combined with campus tours and admission office visits.

7. **Library media specialists are eager and willing to collaborate.**

   We saved this point for last because it represents perhaps our most rewarding discovery. Library media specialists, despite their limited resources and tight schedules, are open and willing to work with academic librarians. Preparing students for college success is very important to them. We found that the way we talk about our freshmen is very similar to how library media specialists talk about their seniors. In fact, when meeting with library media specialists they are eager to ask us specific questions about college preparation: What's the best style manual to teach? Which databases will students be asked to use in their first year? Library media specialists have also proven quick to make connections, putting other colleagues in touch with us and inviting us to speak at regional and state meetings. Consider contacting library media specialists local to your college or university and introducing yourself. Even if an outreach-collaboration doesn't evolve, you'll gain helpful insights into how your colleagues in K-12 education are preparing your future students.

The Results of Our Collaborations: Programs and Projects

Informed Transitions: Kent State University's Library Outreach Program to High Schools

At the local level, we took the momentum and knowledge we gained through our ILILE grant work and formalized our library's outreach program to local high schools. We had been informally working with local high schools for a number of years, but with the help of the grant, we were able to create an instructional classroom devoted to visits by high school students. We named our outreach program Informed Transitions (www.kent.library.edu/highschool). Its overall mission is to ease student transitions to college, with special emphasis on library experiences. The program has the following specific objectives:

- Build on, reinforce and introduce important information literacy skills
- Lower student anxiety related to large libraries and college-level resources
- Help students succeed in the near-term on their high school assignments
- Create a collaborative framework between academic and school librarians
- Promote higher education in general, KSU specifically.

How the Program Works

Library media specialists and teachers contact us with visit requests and then we collaborate with them to design a lesson plan and objectives. Whenever possible, we attempt to involve both teacher and librarian in the process. Here are some key questions to consider when planning a high school visit:

1. **Do the students have an assignment?** An assignment tied to the students' high school curriculum that requires college level resources is a great mandate around which to build a lesson.
2. **Does the school have other specific objectives?** Sometimes in addition to an assignment or in place of one, schools wish to introduce students to specific aspects of academic libraries, like how the Library of Congress classification system works or an overview of library services.
3. **What is the size of the group?** We have tried to keep group sizes to 25 or lower, but recently we've seen group sizes increase due to budgetary concerns.
4. **Will students need borrowing privileges?** We will provide borrowing privileges to high schools with administrative approval.

Early Results

During the first two years of *Informed Transitions*, over 700 high school students have visited the Kent State Library. While we have yet to formally assess the program, we have received feedback and indications that we are making a difference. One graduate of Aurora High School returned to thank her school librarian for taking her class on a visit to the KSU library. The student reported feeling a step ahead when she needed to begin research for a term paper. Stories of these visits can carry strong influence with administrators in both high school and college. We have also noticed high school students returning independently to use the library during evenings and weekends, and we have met first-year students at Kent State who have told us they visited with a high school class previously.

We can list several reasons to consider collaborating with local high schools as we have with *Informed Transitions*, but one important observation does a good job of summing up their value. Last year, a colleague approached us after a visit and asked, "What class were you working with today? I looked in and they were hanging on your every word."

"They weren't from Kent State," we said. "They were a group of high school students."

My colleague was amazed. She shook her head. "I wish our own students would engage at that level," she told us. "What do you think the difference is?"

We thought about her question, and it was true. During high school visits, the students are engaged and enthused. They follow directions and work hard. On the other hand, our own students sometimes seem distracted and to lack focus. We have come to believe that high school students are open and receptive to academic library experiences in ways they may not be when they return as first-year students. In the three months that separate high school from college, they have gained their independence and their priorities have shifted. But as high school students, they are enjoying a field trip and have gotten out of their normal classes to explore a university. A high school class visit is a great opportunity to connect with students, regardless of what college or university they end up attending.

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Transitioning to College

As mentioned earlier, high schools often work under strict budget considerations that may prohibit them from scheduling student visits to a university library. Also, some high schools (particularly in rural areas) may not be located near a college or university campus. To address these barriers, discussions were held between a small group of academic and high school librarians to explore alternative modes of delivery.

We began by examining a project, Pathways to Academic Libraries (P.A.L.) http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/library/infosrv/lue/pal/, developed by Colleen Boff, the first-year experience librarian at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. P.A.L. uses online instructional videos to help students understand more about academic libraries and college-level research. Since this seemed like an effective way to share information without bringing students to campus, the decision was made to update the videos and to make them less specific to Bowling Green and more generic to any academic library – in or out of Ohio. During these discussions, other tools were also identified as being potentially useful to both high school seniors and first year students.

Additional funding was received through a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) mini-grant program in Spring 2006. The grant allowed for the creation of new videos and provided support for the development of a Web site, *Transitioning to College: Helping Students Succeed* (www.transitioning2college.org). The overall objectives for the project were to help students understand the unique features of academic libraries and to provide resources that would help reduce the anxiety of being a new student on campus. Several academic librarians, with input from high school library media specialists, collaborated to develop scripts for five videos:

- Welcome to Academic Libraries
- Talking to Databases
- Tips for Research Success
- Getting Help When You Need It
- College: What to Expect

The videos present information from a student's rather than a librarian's perspective. They feature two first-year students, Emily and Jason, who are being mentored by Brian, a college junior. The videos, which are mounted on the *Transitioning to College Web* site and streamed from a Quicktime server, each last from three to five minutes. They are set up as modules with supplementary material (sample course assignments, syllabi, Web site links, etc.) tied to the video theme. For example, the *Talking to Databases* module includes tips for creating a search strategy, links to worksheets that help students identify key concepts, diagrams explaining Boolean connectors, and an explanation of the difference between subject and general databases. The *Transitioning to College Web* site also includes a glossary of academic terms and a list of additional web resources that students can explore. Several lesson plans provide suggestions for how instructors can use the site with students in the classroom.

The Web site and videos can be used in several ways: by high school librarians and teachers to prepare students for college, by academic librarians working with first year students, or by the students themselves. In spring 2006, this site was still in development and had not yet been used extensively by students. It is hoped that feedback from librarians and students will lead to additional enhancements so that this Web site becomes a viable alternative for those who cannot visit an academic library firsthand.

As one of its ILILE initiatives, the Libraries at Kent State embarked on creating an assessment tool to measure information literacy competencies in high school students. This project was undertaken with the belief that such an instrument could help school library media specialists and high school teachers diagnose information literacy strengths and weaknesses within a given classroom.

TRAILS Objectives

To be useful and used, *TRAILS* had to meet the following objectives:

1. **Be standards-based**: Given the climate of assessment within K-12 education, we realized that *TRAILS* would have credibility only if it related to existing standards. This would give library media specialists confidence that *TRAILS* addressed core competencies, as well as opportunities to connect with teachers who were addressing related standards.

2. **Available on the Web at no cost**: We wanted to insure

that use of *TRAILS* was not hindered by cost. Making it freely available would encourage use based on local needs.

3. **Easy to administer**: As a self-service tool, the library media specialist could initiate a session on their own schedule. For Kent State, self-service eliminated significant administration costs.

4. **Privacy insured**: No personal student information would be collected.

5. **Accessibility of reports**: After administering a session, a report of outcomes should be immediately available.

Item Development

Two school library media specialists served as consultants to develop *TRAILS* assessment items. To insure that *TRAILS* addressed core information literacy competencies, they reviewed all 9th grade Ohio Academic Content Standards for areas related

to information literacy as well as the standards and indicators laid out in *Information Power* for the 9th – 12th grade student group. Further analysis resulted in classifying these into twelve information literacy categories. Priority competencies were then identified within each category. For each of these, assessment objectives were developed and items written to address the objectives. These draft items were field tested by volunteer library media specialists and 9th grade students to determine if the items were understandable and measuring what was intended.

How *TRAILS* Works

The library media specialist registers for an account at the *TRAILS* Web site (http://www.trails-9.org). After signing in and going to the "My Account" page, it is possible to create a session for a specific class. Two assessments are available for pre-viewing prior to selection. Also offered is the choice of getting a report on individual students in addition to the class report. After creating a session, it will show as being open and ready to administer to the class. The Web URL is provided and, if the individual student report option was selected, a list of unique student codes is generated. The library media specialist then assigns a code to each student to track performance. When all students have completed the session, the library media specialist again signs in to her account, goes to the "My Account" page, and closes the open session. A link to a report on outcomes appears for both the class as a whole and by student code if used.

TRAILS: The Next Step

TRAILS went live with full functionality in January 2006. In five months the number of registered users grew to over 300. More important than numbers has been the initial response. Here is an example of its use in one high school:

> I tested the student workers in my Media Center and found it simple to use -- both for the students and me…. I now have 2 of the 5 freshmen teachers scheduled for their

students to take test 1, after which they will go through an instructional unit on research, information, and media literacy skills before the students begin a research project. At the conclusion of the project the students will take test 2. The statistical information will be a wonderful tool when I present the *TRAILS* assessment to my principal and English department chairperson.

We have also received a number of enhancement suggestions on how to provide more flexibility in the use of *TRAILS*. Development will continue on identified priority areas in this last year of ILILE support.

Action Points for High School to College Transitions Collaborations

As evidenced by the projects described in this paper, reaching out to the high school community can result in positive outcomes at many levels. Appendix 1 offers suggestions, based on our experiences at Kent State, for initiating your own outreach efforts.

References

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APPENDIX 1:

Action Points for High School to College Transition Collaborations

☐ Identify programs on your campus in which high schools are involved and make a connection with them (e.g., postsecondary work, bridge programs like Upward Bound).

☐ Reach out to local library media specialists to introduce yourself and show your willingness to consult and collaborate regarding college preparation and expectations.

☐ Think about developing a one page handout about your information literacy expectations for new students. This will help solidify your thinking and be a great tool for communicating with library media specialists and teachers.

☐ Identify the top five to ten feeder high schools for your institution. Where are your new students coming from?

☐ Investigate the K-12 educational terrain in your state. What role do standards play? Is information literacy included?

☐ Learn about the professional organizations, statewide and regionally, that support library media specialists. They have meetings, conferences, committees, and publications, which all present opportunities to connect.

☐ Along these same lines, find out if local school districts offer regular professional development sessions to their teachers and librarians. If so, consider offering to speak.

☐ Consider developing a program whereby local high school classes can visit your library.

☐ Consider offering borrowing privileges to local high school students.

☐ Finally, consider your first-year students in light of what you've learned about high school to college transitions.