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An Unconventional Union: Promoting Information Literacy through Assessment

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"An Unconventional Union": Promoting Information Literacy through Assessment

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Across the Curriculum

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Typical ways IL is included in the curriculum

1. Discrete courses in IL.

+: IL is a graduation requirement and librarians have control.

--: IL is taught acontextually in a “one shot” approach. Students simply check it off as another requirement.

Typical ways IL is included in the curriculum

2. “Flagged” courses.

- + : IL is a graduation requirement and taught in the context of specific courses across disciplines.
- : IL is more in faculty control. Collaboration with librarians may or may not happen. Students simply check it off as another requirement.

Then there's our *atypical*/way to include IL:
via Assessment

The Context:

December 2018:

After a great deal of controversy and strife, the most comprehensive core curriculum revision ever undertaken at the University of St. Thomas passed via faculty vote.

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One new and relatively uncontroversial part of this new curriculum is an Information Literacy component (*aka* “Appendix F”) scaffolded at three levels...

Phase 1: First-Year Experience, co-curricular course (1 credit)

“Introduce students to dispositions and ways of thinking about information.”

- Academic Integrity part of Module on Academic Success.
- Other IL goals embedded in other Modules: Financial Literacy, Career and Vocation, Sustainability.

Phase 2: Application in Core Area Courses

Learning objective: “Thinking critically and creatively”

- logically evaluating information, arguments and evidence
- interpreting data by explaining its meaning and significance
- being aware of one’s own inferences and biases in order to confirm, correct, or develop ideas

Learning objective: “Communicating effectively with diverse audiences”

- accessing, evaluating, and using information appropriately

Phase 3: Discipline-specific Information & Research Literacy

- Each program that offers a major will develop a plan for teaching and assessing information/research literacy in the major curriculum.
- Disciplines develop their own IRL goals for majors.

IL via Assessment: *The compromise*

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- The Task Force developing the new core curriculum had already added two flagged interdisciplinary requirements to the already-existing four flagged WAC courses (for a total of six flagged core requirements).
- The Task Force did not want to add more flags.
- However, they were persuaded to include Information Literacy.

(Year-long Faculty Learning Community on IL, interest from key player in administration, our input)

IL via Assessment: *The compromise*

- So the Task Force agreed to add it as “Appendix F”: A component that must be part of the new core, but without designated courses where it is *taught*.
- Instead, there are designated courses where it is *assessed*.
- Because, to meet HLC accreditation requirements, *all* parts of the curriculum—in the body of the new curriculum or in an appendix-- must be assessed, IL must be assessed (and therefore, taught).

Assessment of Phase 1

- No official assessment yet, since the current focus is on points later in the curriculum.
- Yesterday, the FYE directors reported to our IRL Advisory Committee that the Academic Integrity portion (created by library staff) went well; the elements of IL embedded in other topics ended up sidelined.
- Revised plan: Next year, all Phase 1 IL goals will be delivered directly in one dedicated module.

Assessment of Phase 1

CHALLENGES: Lots of diverse FYE instructors over 75 sections—all will need support in teaching IL.

OPPORTUNITIES: Library staff continue to have the most control over the content of this phase.

Assessment of Phase 2

- Bottom up/Top down process of creating a core curriculum assessment map.
- Departments present assessment plans for IRL learning objectives on a five-year schedule (we are in Year 1)
- They present the plans to the Information and Research Literacy Advisory Committee (IRLAC) and the Core Curriculum Assessment Committee (CCAC), both of which have library and faculty representation.

Assessment of Phase 2

1. Think critically: logically evaluating information, arguments, and evidence **HISTORY**
2. Think critically: interpreting data by explaining its meaning and significance **NATURAL SCIENCES**
3. Think critically: being aware of one's own inferences and biases in order to confirm, correct, or develop ideas **DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**
4. Access, evaluate, and use information appropriately **WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINE**

Assessment of Phase 2

CHALLENGES:

- Matching of core courses with core learning objectives not always a good fit.
- Reduction of many possible IL learning outcomes to these four.
- Focus on assessment, not on teaching.
- “Requirement” for departments/faculty (not students)
- Collaboration with librarians is always “suggested,” but faculty-librarian collaboration is not the norm.

OPPORTUNITIES:

- By the time we get to Goal 4 (WID), all academic units are assessed for this phase.
- All students will be exposed to courses in the core that cover all four IL goals
- Improvements in instruction--and increased collaboration with librarians--may result when departments come to the “closing the loop” phase: acting on the assessment outcomes.

Assessment of Phase 3

- Departments submit assessment plan to IRLAC for collaboration/support, then to their College/School Curriculum Committee for approval.

Assessment of Phase 3

CHALLENGES:

- Again, departments are “encouraged” to work with their librarians in developing the plans.
- No librarians sit on college/school curriculum committees assessing the plans.

OPPORTUNITIES:

- IRL must be scaffolded through the major curriculum (introduced, reinforced, mastered), not just dumped into one course (as with WID)
- They choose their own IL learning objectives: more ownership.

From the library perspective...

What we hoped for...

- Increased faculty-librarian collaboration
- Increased visibility for librarians
- Opportunities to reach all (or most) students earlier on
- Scaffolded IRL throughout the Core
- Formal IRL Assessment



Challenges for Librarian's Role

- Assessment has become the only way to reach students with IRL.
- Squeezing IRL through the side (or back) door of assessment is problematic (disservice for librarians).
- Defining and promoting Information & Research Literacy through assessment is challenging.
- Fewer references to librarians in current documents and a focus on faculty/departments collaborating with IRLAC is a problem.