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Measure by Measure: Composing and Rehearsing a Campus-Wide IL Rubric

Jim Kinnie
University of Rhode Island, jkinnie@uri.edu

Mary C. MacDonald
University of Rhode Island, marymac@uri.edu

See next page for additional authors

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MEASURE BY MEASURE: COMPOSING AND REHEARSING A CAMPUS-WIDE IL RUBRIC

JIM KINNIE, MARY C. MACDONALD, ELAINE FINAN

INTRODUCTION

The University of Rhode Island (URI) Libraries provides information literacy (IL) instruction to approximately nine thousand students annually. Through a variety of scaffolded, incremental programs, credit-bearing courses, and stand-alone "one shots," students receive support and guidance from librarians in both face-to-face and online modes. Assessment of student achievement in IL is documented by librarians through classroom assessment techniques, formal grades, and anecdotal feedback from both students and instructors.

However, outside of the library IL programs, students are receiving dozens of assignments each academic year, and many of these assignments include an IL component. Instructors design assignments that focus on a particular topic and goal, and within these myriad assignments very often there also exists a sentence or a paragraph that instructs the student to find, evaluate, and apply information in support of the assignment.

URI librarians have long known there is a considerable amount of information literacy across campus within courses and academic programs that are outside of the library's purview. Additionally, the development of IL competency is supported in the current URI General Education program which includes student learning outcomes and a set of integrated skills, one of which is information literacy:

> Use of Information Literacy: Course requires assignments which involve the use of information literacy such as web-based research (access to and evaluation of information), participation in class-related internet conferencing, or introduction to and use of computer programs. (University of Rhode Island, 2013)

Information Literacy is also reflected in the university-wide learning outcomes:

> URI expects that every academic program, as a consequence of the interaction between general education and a major, will lead the student to:
>
> - think critically in order to solve problems and question the nature and sources of authority
> - use the methods and materials characteristic of each of the knowledge areas while understanding their interconnectedness
> - commit to intellectual curiosity and lifelong learning
> - maintain an openness to new ideas while utilizing the social skills necessary for both teamwork and leadership and
> - think independently, be self-directed, and take initiative based on informed choices. (University of Rhode Island, 2012)

This knowledge is the framework for the IL rubric project. Our goal is multi-pronged: raise awareness about information literacy competency that exists within courses across the curriculum; create a shared understanding of what information literacy means on our campus; and create a common measurement tool (the IL rubric) to highlight and assess IL competency across the four-year student experience. This paper describes the process of creating and piloting a campus-wide IL rubric and offers a model that can be adapted by other institutions to both measure IL outcomes to improve teaching and learning, and to satisfy IL requirements from accrediting agencies and academic administrations.

OVERVIEW

The project began with one overriding question: "Are URI students achieving information literacy competencies over the span of their undergraduate program?" An important goal for students at URI is to become informed citizens, and professors expect their students to be information literate. Information literacy and critical thinking skills are essential for students to learn and practice in order for them to find, evaluate, and use information effectively and ethically. While URI Libraries provide a robust IL instruction program, it is not possible for us to oversee and evaluate the information literacy competency that occurs as a result of each course offered elsewhere at URI. These considerations lend themselves to cross-campus collaboration in a very big way; involving faculty to help define what it means to be information literate can create a meaningful but neutral common language across disciplines.

Composing

A major goal in creating the rubric was to first create a shared understanding of information literacy at URI before measuring student learning. We turned to the Association of College & Research Libraries' (ACRL) Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2000) for developing the elements of the rubric to parallel the IL Standards. We also consulted the American Association of Colleges & Universities' (AAC&U) VALUE Rubric for Information Literacy for language we could use to evaluate the standards (AAC&U, 2013).

The VALUE IL rubric was used as a starting point to measure the standards and help us create a common language. Developed by a diverse group of academic professionals, the VALUE rubrics define essential learning outcomes in undergraduate education. They are designed to use data to measure achievement of programmatic learning outcomes in both discipline-specific majors and in general education, and provide faculty with a roadmap for the areas in which students need more help by correlating high impact practices (sharing rubric with students, providing clearer feedback, creating better assignments) with improved student learning. The five ACRL IL standards are clearly defined in language readily understood by librarians, but subject faculty can think of these terms differently.

We discovered that words did have different meanings across disciplines at URI and sometimes even among academic majors. For instance, the term "research" is interpreted to be mean laboratory or clinical work in the sciences, and it can be mean a literature review or a search for criticism in the humanities. During one of our working sessions, there was a lengthy discussion about the differences between "analyze" and "synthesize" (we decided to use both terms in the final language, allowing users to choose).

The URI rubric project began in 2008 when we decided to seriously address our question about URI students' IL development. A campus workshop on rubric creation gave a small group of librarians the impetus to develop an IL rubric for use campus wide. With support from the library and the Office of Student Learning, Outcomes Assessment, and Accreditation (SLOAA), initial workshops involved library and subject faculty, a national consultant, and

assessment personnel to test two elements of the nascent rubric. A smaller group of librarians and staff from the Instructional Development Program and SLOAA then took up the cause to finalize a beta version. It was designed on a developmental scale, measuring students from Beginning IL Competency to Approaching IL Competency to IL Competent. The IL VALUE Rubric was used as a solid starting point, but the language was found to be somewhat dense so it was deconstructed and customized to fit our needs. After several sessions, the resulting rubric was a URI IL librarian-approved version that emerged in final draft form, ready for pilot-testing.

Rehearsing

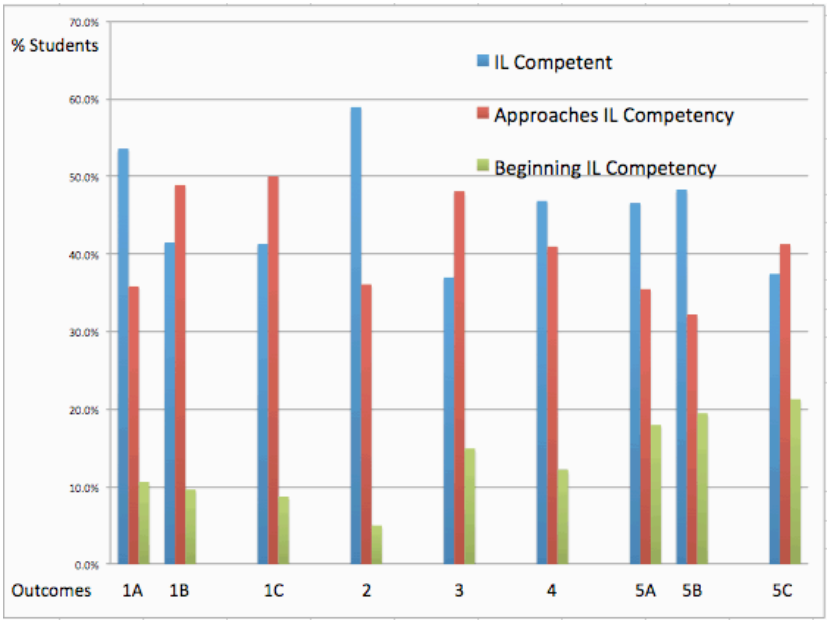
In two phases, during the spring of 2011 and fall of 2012, URI Libraries and SLOAA coordinated a pilot program, grant-funded by the Davis Educational Foundation, to test the finalized rubric's efficacy across different disciplines. Instructors were invited to use the rubric to evaluate information literacy competency in their own students' work. Faculty who volunteered to join the pilot taught courses in history, sociology, public relations, writing & rhetoric, business, pharmacy, library (undergraduate), and natural resource science. The pilot prompted faculty to consider changes to their assignments to better address information literacy concepts as well. Faculty were invited to use the elements from the rubric that mapped to elements of their assignments, and scored their students' work accordingly.

Measuring

Results of the two phases were graphed to give an overview of the students' IL competency. Over the two phases, 12 faculty from 11 majors took part and used a total of 11 assignments to measure their students' IL competency in one or more standards. Six of seven URI colleges were represented; up to 442 samples of student work were evaluated using the various elements of the rubric criteria.

The aggregated scores from both phases of the pilot are represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Combined Results Phase 1 & 2

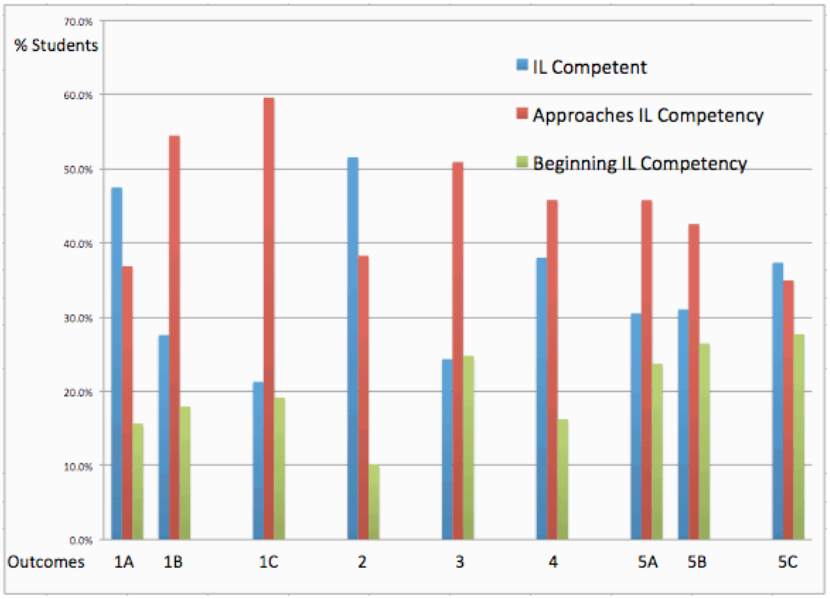


The elements of the rubric are represented along the bottom with numbers 1-5 correlating to the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. Standards 1 and 5 have more than one measurable element and correspond to the rows of the URI IL Rubric (Appendix A). Note that between the two phases, subject instructors indicated suggestions for improvements to the rubric including the elimination of one element (1C) because of redundancy, and some of the language was changed for further clarity. The percentages of students achieving levels of competency in each element are compared.

The results reveal that overall, students in this sample were more information literate than we expected, especially in Standard 5 where many faculty typically indicate challenges for students. We expected more students to be approaching or beginning IL competency, but realized the data were skewed because three of the courses in the pilot were IL-intensive: two sections of LIB 120 (Introduction to Information Literacy) and a large pharmacy course. Both courses include all five IL Standards as course learning outcomes and accounted for nearly half of the students in both phases.

The results of the pilot scores with the IL-intensive courses removed are shown in Figure 2, and depict a more realistic view of our expectations across campus with more students approaching or beginning IL competency overall. The change in Standard 5 scores also reflects broad discussions on campus about the ethical use of information. Issues of plagiarism and citations are passionately discussed by programs across all disciplines.

Figure 2: Combined Results Phase 1 & 2 - No IL Courses



The conclusion of the pilot study and aggregation of results both point to areas that need attention. Results can be used in many ways to impact student learning: An instructor with three courses can alter assignment requirements to improve students' evaluation skills; a department chair with ten or more sections of one course could add library instruction to the syllabus to improve learning about information access; academic programs can analyze aggregated scores to inform program plans for improvement.

CHALLENGES

Early workshops included library staff and faculty librarian contacts. Branching out to be inclusive and "tap into" the language and needs of a variety of disciplines across colleges was important in making the rubric useful. However, there can be challenges with a cross-discipline collaborative relationship. Since it can be problematic to ask faculty to add an additional evaluation to their grading process, thus increasing workload, “library-friendly” faculty were asked to join the pilot first. These were faculty with whom we had already established an academic relationship. Now, we have the experience of our pilot faculty to mitigate concerns among faculty about the challenges or "extra" demands of using the rubric.

It can be difficult to get agreement on a skill like information literacy that is peripheral to a faculty’s discipline-specific content area. Detailing expectations for finding, evaluating and citing sources is often secondary to course subject content, and the language in an assignment is often too vague which makes it a challenge for students to know what is being asked and makes assessment difficult. Faculty can now be encouraged by other faculty to evaluate their assignments to find better ways to express their expectations to students which should improve their IL competence. Informing faculty of the value of IL competency to a student’s entire learning experience is imperative.

REWARDS

Based on our successful collaboration in developing a university-wide IL rubric, we look forward to continuing our collaboration with subject faculty in support of developing information literate students in order to strengthen the libraries’ mission in “being responsive to students and their instructional needs” (University of Rhode Island Libraries, 2006)**.** Supporting faculty in the assessment of information literacy in their students’ work advances the integration of the library’s role in the academic life of the university and in the overall assessment of campus programs. As assessment continues to grow as a natural and regular process of the teaching and learning cycle, and as accrediting bodies support formal guidelines and expectations for assessment of student competencies, the adaptation, development and testing of university-wide tools, such as rubrics, are helpful to evaluate university-wide learning outcomes, and support faculty in assessment efforts and planning interventions for improvement.

The process developed in the creation of the IL rubric can be adapted and expanded to other academic programs, especially within General Education since there are a variety of competencies included in courses spread across URI’s curricula in different academic majors and programs. The IL integrated skill embedded in many General Education courses is now able to be evaluated by a tool that is useful for programmatic assessment.

NEXT STEPS

As of Spring 2013, SLOAA and University Libraries have both endorsed the IL Rubric as an assessment tool. Establishing the IL Rubric as such is leading to multiple other plans. The University College General Education Subcommittee on Assessment of General Education (UCGE-SAGE) is using the IL Rubric development model as a means to continue general assessment of other university-wide student learning outcomes. Plans are in place to hold informational meetings and rubric development workshops for faculty who teach courses with a focus on writing. The committee plans to repeat the process for all general education student learning outcomes.

To further support use of the IL Rubric, librarians will develop a complete package of supporting IL instructional resources and rubric application and interpretation resources. The pilot has created the opportunity to

expand the availability of online information literacy resources for faculty and student use, enhancing student learning by creating a toolbox for faculty to link to in their assignments to support students in real-time. The toolbox will include the University Libraries' InfoRhode Tutorials and quiz (a series of thirteen introductory-level IL tutorials), information about how to plan an information literacy session with a librarian, the IL Rubric, suggested assignment elements for each of the IL learning outcomes, and a student version of the rubric which can be distributed to students along with class assignments.

CONCLUSION

The end goal of this project is to support URI faculty in the process of teaching and assessing information literacy, and to support students in their learning to become information literate competent students and citizens. Information literacy is a competency that reaches across and through all disciplines, though each discipline may need a different level and type of support. As we move forward, our original question, "Are URI students achieving information literacy competencies over the span of their undergraduate program?" will continue to both guide and inform our work. The library will continue to provide direct support for IL by developing and sharing our resources in as many modes as possible for the faculty and students of our learning community.

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APPENDIX A

URI Information Literacy (IL) Rubric			
IL Outcomes	**IL Competent**	**Approaches IL Competency**	**Beginning IL Competency**
Determines the extent of information needed	Defines the scope of the research question, or hypothesis, or thesis effectively.	Defines the scope of the research question, or hypothesis, or thesis partially.	Defines the scope of the research question, or hypothesis, or thesis too broadly or too narrowly.
	Identifies all relevant key concepts or main ideas that determine the extent of the information needed.	Identifies some relevant key concepts or main ideas that determine the extent of the information needed.	Identifies irrelevant key concepts or main ideas or does not identify any that determine the extent of the information needed.
Accesses the Needed Information	Accesses information using effective, well-designed search strategies and most relevant information sources.	Accesses information using simple search strategies and some relevant information sources.	Accesses information randomly, retrieves information that lacks relevance and quality.
Critically Evaluates Information and its Sources *Criteria: Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, Purpose	Selects and applies all relevant evaluation criteria of information sources. o Currency o Relevance o Authority o Accuracy o Purpose	Selects and applies some but not all of the relevant evaluation criteria of information sources. o Currency o Relevance o Authority o Accuracy o Purpose	Selects some evaluation criteria of information sources but selection lacks relevancy or specific application to information need. o Currency o Relevance o Authority o Accuracy o Purpose
Uses Information Effectively to Accomplish a Specific Purpose	Organizes, communicates, and integrates/synthesizes information from sources to fully achieve a specific purpose, with clarity and depth.	Organizes and communicates information from sources; information is not yet integrated/synthesized. The intended purpose is not fully achieved.	Communicates information from sources; information is unorganized and not integrated/synthesized. Intended purpose is not achieved.
Uses Information Ethically and Legally (Understand the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential, and/or proprietary information.)	Demonstrates understanding of the difference between common knowledge and information requiring attribution most of the time.	Demonstrates an understanding of the difference between common knowledge and information requiring attribution with minor lapses.	Demonstrates a lack of understanding the difference between common knowledge and information requiring attribution.
	Always includes paraphrases, summaries, and quotes in the text appropriately and accurately without distorting original intent.	Usually includes paraphrases, summaries, and quotes in the text appropriately and accurately without distorting original intent.	Does not include paraphrases, summaries, and quotes in the text appropriately and accurately without distorting original intent.
	Uses and formats citations and references correctly.	Uses and formats citations and references correctly with minor lapses.	Uses and formats citations and references incorrectly or they are missing.

*From *Evaluating Information – Applying the CRAAP Test*, Meriam Library, California State University, Chico - www.csuchico.edu/lins/handouts/evalsites.html

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