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E-Content: Student Content Creators: Convergence of Literacies[1]

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There is ample evidence that students are creating all types of digital content and disseminating it via the Internet.[2] When they graduate from universities and colleges and enter such fields as business, education, government, medicine, research, or the arts, they will continue to produce digital content. Employers often select new graduates for positions in the expectation that they will take on technology-intensive assignments related to the Web presence of the organization. While in school, many students create digital materials without guidance from faculty, information technologists, or librarians, but such products are typically recreational and do not have the hallmarks of academic work. This is not to say that producing academic-quality work in the Internet environment is impossible or beyond our current understandings. Some faculty use digital media in creative and compelling ways to publish and disseminate research in their disciplines.[3] However, few academic programs have identified the preparation of students to be digital authors as a desired outcome of their studies.

Higher education needs a new framework for promoting the value of information and technology skills for undergraduate and graduate students. This new focus should speak in a language that resonates with academic administrators, faculty, and students and deemphasizes the jargon of information professionals. Many librarians and information technologists believe that acquiring information and technology literacy skills is an important part of a college student's education. However, despite reports and standards from groups such as the National Academies and the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), few institutions have implemented information or technology literacy educational components throughout the curriculum.[4]

So, what perspective might resonate with academic administrators, faculty, and students? I suggest using a framework that focuses on higher education's need to prepare students to be content creators within their disciplinary or professional specialties. Delineating the skills that students need in order to create content within the disciplinary context could be a more meaningful way of encouraging the integration of a wide variety of skills into the curriculum. A student who creates an advertising spot for a business communications class may need a variety of skills: getting background information about a company, product, industry, and target audience; developing a script using compelling language; locating visuals and being aware of the intellectual property restrictions that are involved; using a video-camera and editing software; and understanding how to make an impact on an audience using video as the medium. Ideally, a convergence of literacies—written, information, technology, new media/visual—in the digital, multimedia products will result from such work.

Many faculty would acknowledge the need for students to acquire information and technology skills, even if they do not explicitly build these skills into their own courses. However, another aspect of literacy, media literacy, is generally less understood or accepted by faculty. Elizabeth Daley and her colleagues at the Institute for Multimedia Literacy at the Annenberg Center at the University of Southern California believe that "those who are truly literate in the twenty-first century will be those who learn to both read and write the multimedia language of the screen."[5] They offer coursework that helps students attain, for work in digital media, analytic skills that are similar in scope and depth to those developed by literature students. As part of a major initiative of the MacArthur Foundation, Henry Jenkins and his colleagues have described a range of skills needed by pre-college students. They state that new media literacies, research skills, and technical skills must now accompany the development of written skills.[6] Jenkins and his coauthors emphasize that new media literacies should be thought of in addition to, not as replacements for, written literacy.

If it is already difficult to implement information and technology literacy programs on campus, how can we develop a coordinated, discipline-oriented literacies program? I don't think information

professionals can "solve" this problem. However, they can serve as catalysts in initiating discussions about these issues in faculty groups such as the faculty senate, the general education committee, or departmental curriculum committees. They can demonstrate the value that information professionals can add by helping to identify relevant skills, assisting with the design of assignments to incorporate those skills, suggesting rubrics for the assessment of multimedia assignments, developing learning objects, and/or participating directly in instruction. Whereas information professionals can do this with faculty on an individual basis, ideally they would work with programs, departments, and colleges.

In the way that we produce content today, it is difficult to separate out where media literacy ends and where technology literacy begins—or where information literacy begins and where technology literacy ends. There is a convergence of literacies, and they can all inform academic work in separate but integrated ways. It is time to frame the discussion of literacies in the context of academic work products rather than in the context of organizational structures (e.g., library, computing, English department, media department). Faculty and professionals from a variety of areas could collaborate to develop experiences that can be embedded in the curriculum to assist graduates in becoming sophisticated digital-content producers in their professional lives. This is most certainly a twenty-first-century challenge for higher education.

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[1] This article was adapted from Lippincott, Joan K. "Student Content Creators: Convergence of Literacies." EDUCAUSE Review, 42(6), 2007, pp. 16-17.

[2] Amanda Lenhart, John Horrigan, and Deborah Fallows, *Content Creation Online* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2004), <http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Content_Creation_Report.pdf>. See also Amanda Lenhart and Mary Madden, *Teen Content Creators and Consumers* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2005), <http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Teens_Content_Creation.pdf>.

[3] A well-known example is the Valley of the Shadow Project, highlighting Civil War primary source material and developed at the University of Virginia by Edward L. Ayers: <http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu/>. Many examples of digital creativity in scholarship are evident in *Vectors: Journal of Culture and Technology in a Dynamic Vernacular,* produced at the University of Southern California School of Cinema & Television: <http://www.vectorsjournal.org/>.

[4] Association of College & Research Libraries, *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (Chicago: ACRL, 2000), <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm>; Computer Science and Telecommunications Board, Commission on Physical Sciences, Mathematics, and Applications, and the National Research Council, *Being Fluent with Information Technology* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1999).

[5] Elizabeth Daley, "Expanding the Concept of Literacy," *EDUCAUSE Review,* vol. 38, no. 2 (March/April 2003): 34, <http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/erm0322.pdf>.

[6] Henry Jenkins, with Ravi Purushotma, Katherine Clinton, Margaret Weigel, and Alice J. Robison, "Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century," John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Occasional Paper on Digital Media and Learning, 2006, <http://www.projectnml.org/files/working/NMLWhitePaper.pdf>.

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