

# **SEEING THE FOREST AND THE TREES: INTEGRATING CURRICULUM-INTEGRATED LEARNING OUTCOME DEVELOPMENT AND ASSESSMENT WITH AN ACADEMIC REVIEW PROCESS**

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## **PROJECT OVERVIEW**

Illinois State University's Milner Library, a comprehensive state university in Normal, Illinois submitted and received a campus assessment grant to encourage the co-development of curriculum-integrated, information fluency outcomes by subject librarians paired with classroom faculty members in a series of summer workshops. The co-developers and organizers, the Head of Instruction and Student Engagement and the Data Services Librarian, will teach the third series of workshops this summer.

Milner Library's instructional program is focused on developing skills in information fluency: "A holistic approach to how students learn to interact with information related to their studies and personal lives. Our programming creates a foundation to build teaching and learning opportunities that encourage engagement and higher order thinking."

Milner Library further defines Information fluency as:

The ability to critically think while engaging with, creating, and utilizing information and technology regardless of format or platform.

1. Recognize the need for information;
2. Formulate a plan to obtain the information including appropriate technologies to be used;
3. Discover, identify, and retrieve information from multiple venues and in multiple formats;
4. Evaluate and select relevant and credible information;
5. Synthesize obtained information or create new information using various technologies; and
6. Present or publish an information product to an audience using an appropriate platform (Milner Library, n.d.).

Milner Library had three primary goals with its curriculum-integrated information fluency outcomes development program. First, the library wanted a stronger connection between its information fluency program and the curricula of the instructional departments/ programs/ schools (hereafter, department). Second, Milner wanted to tie the development of information fluency skills with the university's program review cycle. Third, the library is attempting to better demonstrate the information fluency program's impact on student success.

The development of tiered information fluency outcomes provides a connection to the curriculum across beginning, intermediate, and advanced courses that library instructional programs often struggle with. This is an attempt to move beyond potentially disjointed one-shot instructional sessions that often rely on personal relationships between a librarian and a classroom faculty member. While personal and professional relationships provide the backbone for the liaison work of many successful subject librarians, without a structure in place, a library runs the risk of losing that instructional contact if library or classroom faculty members leave their roles.

The tiered component also ensures progressive, iterative development of information fluency skills that build upon lessons that were already learned. Students will experience new instructional lessons rather than similar content across multiple one-shot sessions.

Milner Library also is building on its strategic development of a meaningful role in the program review process. Illinois State University's eight-year program review cycle relies on the submission of self-studies. The self-study is an overview of the academic unit that includes a description of how it interacts with the library. In librarians' experiences, the library's contribution to the self-study submissions were often not integrated in a meaningful way by the academic programs. It has been challenging to demonstrate how the collaboration between the program and the subject librarian intentionally impacts student learning and success and classroom faculty research. Frequently, the library section of the report is partially or wholly based on text provided by a subject librarian and is not meaningfully integrated into the self-study.

Tenure-track/Tenured librarians serve on the campus' Academic Planning Committee (APC) that reviews fifteen to twenty program self-studies each academic year. Milner Library's APC representatives have successfully advocated for clearer and more meaningful language that demonstrates the collaboration between the library and the program in the self-study guidelines. Recent guidelines have included greater awareness of library resources beyond collections and research services (Office of the Provost, n.d.). One of those areas of growth has been greater attention to the role of information fluency instruction and its impact on student learning and success. Rather than rely on indirect measures, such as number of books checked out in a department's LC classification area or number of library instructional sessions, the library is moving to assessment of learning outcomes tied to curricular goals as a direct measure of student learning.

Given that fifteen to twenty programs submit self-studies each fall, initial prioritization has been given to subject librarians with the greatest likelihood of success in co-developing curriculum-integrated learning outcomes. Workshop organizers prioritize programs that received feedback during the program review process to explicitly define the development of information fluency skills more clearly in their curriculum, demonstrated good working relationships with their subject librarians, and may have met a variety of other criteria, such as having external accreditation, curriculum mapping, and/or well-developed academic assessment plans. Efforts have also been made to identify potential programs from each of the six academic colleges. To-date, two summer cohorts have participated, comprised of the following: Criminal Justice Sciences, Communication Sciences & Disorders, Creative Technologies, and Marketing.

Prior to the summer workshops, the subject librarian works with the department chair to identify a classroom faculty member who is familiar with their curriculum and is a strong advocate to present the initial learning outcomes to their fellow faculty members. The department chair and subject librarian also identify an undergraduate program to be the focus of the development of the learning outcomes. The department receives a \$500 departmental transfer on behalf of their classroom faculty member(s).

The first round of workshops was funded by a 2019-2020 Assessment Initiative Award grant from (Illinois State) University Assessment Services. Due to COVID, the first workshops occurred in the summer of 2021-2022. The university grant paid for participation from three departments, books on learning outcomes that were added to the collection, and refreshments. After the first summer, Milner Library Administration provided funds for the departmental transfers.

Through their involvement in the summer workshops, the library and classroom faculty members spend twelve hours over eight 90-minute sessions. The workshops utilize a combination of lecture, practice activities, peer conversations, and work time.

#### Week 1: Introduction / Learning Outcomes

These sessions provide an overview of why tiered learning outcomes are being developed as part of program review process, what is information fluency and its competencies; and how to write quality information fluency learning outcomes.

Prior to Week Two, draft learning outcomes are supposed to be fleshed out and ready to share with the group for peer feedback.

#### Week 2: Categorizing Learning Outcomes

The focus of these sessions is to finalize the learning outcomes and start determining specific objectives and skills students needed to learn to achieve the outcome, when the objectives and skills should be taught within the program, and the level of importance of the skill (e.g., Must Know, Helpful to Know, Interesting to Know).

Prior to Week Three, a draft structure of the objectives and skills and their designation of when to be taught and level of importance should be completed.

#### Week 3: Mapping Learning Outcomes

This week is primarily working sessions focused on mapping learning outcomes, objectives, and skills to the program's curriculum.

Prior to the Week Four, the curriculum map should be finalized.

#### Week 4: Assessment Planning

Workshop participants use the curriculum map and other work done up to this point to identify and draft types of assessments used to determine acquisition of the learning outcomes and skills. Time is provided to modify outcomes, objectives, and skills as needed.

After the workshops are completed and draft information fluency outcomes are developed, the classroom faculty member is expected to use the fall semester to present them for feedback from their colleagues. Based on that discussion, if the learning outcomes are revised, they are submitted to the workshop organizers for an additional round of feedback that allows the classroom faculty member to present them in the spring semester to discuss implementation and assessment.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

### Before

Differences between library and classroom faculty schedules were an issue that arose well before the workshops took place. Many classroom faculty use summer months to work on individual research projects, moving their focus away from curricular and institutional responsibilities and often taking them physically away from campus. This limited the available classroom faculty partners for this project. There was also varying interest on the part of available faculty, so there was some work to be done in finding available *and* interested partners to recruit.

### During

Participants found these workshops to be a positive experience overall, allowing for creativity and community-building. Some aspects of the program were more successful than others. However, even the aspects of the workshop that required revision presented a learning experience for facilitators and participants.

Participants encountered several challenges that needed to be addressed throughout the workshops. Each academic discipline has its own common practices, frameworks, and assumptions regarding curricular planning and developing learning outcomes specific to the discipline. At times, these specific understandings were at odds with library partners' assumptions and understandings. Workshop time was spent coming to a shared understanding of the development of these outcomes, and the common curricular responsibilities of librarians and classroom faculty.

Although classroom faculty partners were often quite aware of much of the work done by librarians, there were still misunderstandings of the true scope of that work. Some classroom faculty partners had too limited a view of the potential for information fluency outcomes. They were familiar with the more obvious library instruction themes –

database searching, creating citations, locating library materials – but had a harder time making connections to more creative opportunities. This was evident in one example of an iteratively developed learning outcome:

- first version: Students will evaluate the information presented within the main points of a source in order to determine if the information presented is relevant and credible to their arguments.
- second version: Students will synthesize information, applying “source awareness” in order to create accurate and original oral and written arguments.
- third version: Students will develop an understanding of how to read and comprehend different types of sources in order to incorporate evidence into their work.

Others were too optimistic about what could be achieved through information fluency competencies. For example, one librarian-classroom faculty pairing discussed methods of expanding student professional networks by recognizing expertise and initiating communication, such as the subject librarian or clinical offices. Some goals were lofty and connected directly to the department’s learning goals, but the assessment of those goals fell outside the boundaries for information fluency outcomes. However, these clarifying conversations led to more information sharing and, ultimately, more creative, relevant, and achievable outcomes.

It's worth noting that both classroom and library faculty generally have varying levels of experience or training in curricular development, such as how to write effective learning outcomes. Within librarianship, MLIS courses in instructional practice and well-established professional programs such as ACRL Immersion support such skill development, but many librarians do not have the opportunity to access these, and the availability of comparable programs for classroom faculty varies widely. This provided an opportunity for collaborative learning in a ‘beginner-friendly’ environment. The workshop series was structured to help address this very gap, providing time for trial, error, and revision.

After

As noted previously, learning outcome development continued after the summer workshops were completed.

The workshop organizers identified future improvements, including the need for greater flexibility, more rapid turnaround of feedback, improvements to the workshop curriculum, and more. The feedback from the classroom faculty member participants was positive and helpful, especially about the pacing and length of the workshops.

One group consisted of two classroom faculty and one librarian due to scheduling conflicts. However, this turned out to be a strength because it allowed for more perspectives during the workshops and creation period. It helped afterward to have two classroom faculty members talking to their department and working with different groups. For example, one classroom faculty worked directly with the department’s curriculum committee, coordinating discussions and work with faculty updating and revising their syllabi, connecting assignments, and assessments to blocks of courses. The other classroom faculty coordinated with campus to set up assessment capabilities and digital learning objects within the LMS.

Programmatic assessment of learning is often a challenge at the campus level and the authors’ experience was no different. The scope of assessment for many classroom and library faculty does not exceed their classroom, so drafting departmental level learning outcomes, assessing them, and presenting them to remaining classroom faculty can be challenging. There’s also no guarantee that a classroom faculty member who has a strong curricular role and understanding will influence these practices within the department’s assessment process.

Campus-level assessment occurs through the eight-year programmatic cycle with annual updates to University Assessment Services, and the library will need to work diligently to ensure the learning outcomes are integrated with departmental curriculum and their systemic assessment. Since the first cycle of workshops occurred in 2022, not enough time has yet passed to fully assess the results of these partnerships on the Program Review cycle. For example, the work by one faculty pairing from the summer 2022 cohort was briefly noted in a program self-study report that was drafted starting in academic year 2023 and submitted in fall 2023.

The experience of one workshop pairing resulted in applying for and obtaining an additional university assessment grant to develop pre/post knowledge checks for information fluency through online modules.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Milner Library faces three challenges as it continues to expand this effort.

First is resources. Milner Library has had one to three classroom and librarian faculty pairings each summer. Yet, several dozen programs have received an APC recommendation to work with the library to jointly develop curriculum-integrated learning outcomes and more are added during each yearly review cycle. To this end, the library needs to at least triple the number of classroom and librarian pairings each year. That will involve administrative, personnel, and financial considerations. Can the library budget support additional administrative stipends? What happens when a subject librarian is working with several departments that need to simultaneously develop curriculum-integrated learning outcomes for their different academic programs?

Second is sustainability. How does Milner Library ensure support extends beyond the year-long collaboration between the library and classroom faculty members? If the pairing successfully develops curriculum-integrated learning outcomes that are met with support of the department, how does Milner ensure that these learning outcomes continue to be part of the curriculum as it changes? This is especially important to consider as more faculty become involved beyond the initial classroom and library faculty pairing.

Third is campus integration. The Provost's Office ensures there are resources to support the program review cycle—tied to state-level and accreditor requirements—and to continued academic assessment through the University Assessment Services office's. Although the two processes are now integrated, considerable administrative support and resources were required to try new approaches and ensure they worked well together. Will there be support to introduce a new variable to this now-established process that endured years of trial and error before successful implementation?

Ultimately, the success of this initiative depends on continued support and alignment with leadership, assessment efforts, and collaboration with academic programs.

## **REFERENCES**

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