2005

Information Competencies Checklist: A Resource for Intersegmental Collaboration

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Recommended Citation

Susan Klingberg. "Information Competencies Checklist: A Resource for Intersegmental Collaboration"
Faculty and Staff Publications (2005).

Information Competencies Checklist: A Resource for Intersegmental Collaboration

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Purpose - The paper provides a model checklist of information competencies for two- and four-year colleges and universities.

Approach - The Checklist was a collaborative project developed by a team of two- and four-year librarians from the California State University and California Community Colleges.

Findings - The Checklist demonstrates that it is possible for two- and four-year librarians to develop a common understanding of student information competencies and use the process to facilitate intersegmental cooperation.

Practical Implications - The Checklist is useful for planning information competency programs, designing effective library assignments in courses, and developing student learning outcomes throughout the curriculum.

Originality/Value - The originality of the project is its collaborative nature and its success in advancing intersegmental cooperation in California public higher education, the largest system in the nation.

Paper type - Case Study

Keywords -   Information literacy; Information skills; Higher education; Academic libraries; Intersegmental collaboration; College students

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Background

The idea to develop the Checklist originated at a conference at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) Library in the spring of 2004. MLK Library, which opened in August 2003 in a beautiful new facility, is a unique joint city-university library which receives about 8,500 visitors daily. It serves the San José State University (SJSU) community, including 27,000 students, and also functions as the downtown main library for the San José Public Library system. The conference included librarians from three California State Universities (SJSU, CSU Monterey Bay, and CSU East Bay) and from six local community colleges. The conference was hosted by SJSU with the intention of promoting collaboration on information competency (IC) activities among university and community college librarians. California State University actively supports joint initiatives with the state's community colleges; these initiatives involving the two educational systems are referred to as intersegmental collaboration. At the conference, the CSU was represented by Dr. Ilene Rockman, Director of the CSU Information Competence Initiative. She also served as consultant to the Checklist project until her untimely death in November 2005.

During the conference, community college librarians received a tour of the new eight-story library, a description of King Library resources of interest to their students, and information about referring their students for reference help. The King Library reference desk serves both SJSU students and public users. Conference participants saw the value of increased intersegmental cooperation in planning IC programs, and the group discussed possible future activities. Developing a checklist of student information competencies emerged as a top priority. It could be used to reach a common understanding of essential competencies among two- and four-year librarians.

The new library draws a considerable number of students from local community colleges. When the MLK Library opened, community college students gained greater access than they had in the former university library. They became eligible for library cards and are now able to borrow both public and university owned materials in the new library. They can now use a large university collection with many resources appropriate for their community college courses. This enhanced community college access was a principal reason behind the Library's interest in IC collaboration. Another important factor was the substantial number of transfer students enrolling at SJSU from California community colleges - 3,213 students in 2004/05.

Because its library provides full privileges to community college students, SJSU has a special interest in collaborating with the colleges where they are enrolled. The other CSU campuses also accept transfer students, and the entire system actively supports intersegmental cooperation. California public higher education is a tiered system, made up of the University of California (10 campuses), the California State University (23 campuses), and the California Community Colleges (109 campuses). The CSU enrolls more than 400,000 students and is the largest university system in the country. It has an admissions mandate to accommodate transfer students from the state's community

colleges, which enroll over two million students. Each year over 50,000 students enter the 23 CSU campuses from these two-year colleges.

Literature Review

Both the California Community Colleges and the CSU have long histories of promoting information competency for students; the term *competency* is more widely used than *literacy* in the two systems. Background documents are available on the CSU's library web site [1] and for community colleges on the web site of one of the Checklist's authors [2]. In gathering background material for this project, the authors relied more on their informal network of professional contacts than on a formal literature review. However in the course of writing the Checklist, a number of helpful resources were identified. The Checklist is consistent with the ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (ACRL, 2000), and its competencies are similar to the outcomes in the *Standards*. Useful information on developing and teaching core information competencies in individual universities is available in *Information Literacy: Essential Skills for the Information Age*. Lists of competencies are included in full from the State University of New York and the University of Massachusetts, as well as an early 1997 list for the CSU (Eisenberg, 2004). A report from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education emphasizes integrating IC into the curriculum and contains two useful lists: "Profile of an Information Literate Student" and "Learning Goals across Academic Levels." The latter is of special interest because it provides different levels of proficiency for freshmen, seniors, and graduate students for each competency (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2003).

A number of college and university libraries have developed or adapted competency lists for their own IC programs. In *First Year Student Library Instruction Programs*, there is a chapter called "Competencies" that includes four comprehensive lists from different libraries with graduated skills for multiple college years (Malone, 2003). A number of libraries have posted student competency or skill lists on their web sites. They can be easily found by googling the names of libraries with well-regarded IC programs and locating the part of the web site devoted to instruction. Colorado State University Libraries' web site highlights librarian-faculty cooperation in teaching research skills and includes graduated "literacy goals" for a first-year seminar, a required lower-division composition course, and the upper-division years [3]. The library web sites of the University of Connecticut [4] and New Mexico State University include competencies that are closely based on the ACRL standards. The latter web site links the ACRL standards and performance indicators to relevant local handouts and learning activities [5].

When the Checklist is compared to these other lists, there is substantial agreement on the core competencies. For example, many of the lists include the ability to construct Boolean searches and to use discipline-specific strategies such as chemical structure searching. Most of the competency lists identified during the project did not represent intersegmental cooperation, with the exception of one developed by the Rochester Regional Library Council which focuses on the transition from high school to college.

"Library and Information Literacy Core Library Skills Grades 9 – 14+" covers from high school through the first two years of college. For each skill listed, separate grade levels are indicated for first introducing and later mastering the skill [6].

Developing the Checklist

Although the idea originated in a meeting of Bay area librarians, from the beginning the Checklist of Information Competencies was envisioned as a state-wide project. Our goal was to develop a succinct list of core competencies or skills for each college year that would be applicable to both two- and four-year institutions. The project team consisted of two CSU librarians and two community college librarians, all with extensive reference and instruction experience. The author of this paper served as project coordinator and editor. The other contributors were: Pam Baker, California State University Monterey Bay Library; Topsy Smalley, Cabrillo College Library; and Bonnie Gratch-Lindauer, City College of San Francisco Library.

To select the competencies, the team looked for those that were essential for students' academic success and when mastered could be applied in new situations and contexts. In the first draft the skills were arranged by college year. Later the organization of the Checklist was changed from four sections (one for each year) to two sections (lower and upper division). Because so many skills are required of first-year students using sophisticated academic libraries, it proved difficult to distinguish among those appropriate for the first versus the second year. In the writing process, a substantial number of drafts were written and revised. Because all four team members lived in different cities, we communicated primarily by email and telephone. Although time-consuming, the process of working together was rewarding and important for building intersegmental cooperation.

The nearly completed draft was shared for comment with designated IC experts, including several other librarians and an SJSU faculty member from the social sciences. The team also worked hard to get the Checklist presented at two conference programs in 2004 – the California Library Association Conference and the CARL Northern California Conference. Comments were actively solicited on the Checklist's content, especially on the addition of any core skills overlooked. Both conferences were good opportunities to gather feedback and to promote the Checklist.

Using the Checklist

The Checklist was designed to be practical and useful in a variety of ways; it is brief, written in straightforward language, and simply organized by lower and upper division skill levels. It is currently being used to promote IC cooperation between community colleges and the CSU for the benefit of transfer students. The Checklist also has a number of practical applications at the campus level. It can be been used as a resource to:

- develop effective library assignments for academic courses
- determine IC skills taught in targeted courses (100W-*Writing in the Major*)

- develop four-year IC programs with graduated mastery of skills
- develop assessments of students' information skills
- focus discussion at librarian professional development workshops
- include IC in student learning outcomes for academic departments
- educate newly hired librarians and faculty

The Checklist's lower-division skills have been used to create library assignments for several courses – English 1A (College Composition) at Cabrillo College and the First Year Seminar at CSU Monterey Bay. Both courses involved close collaboration between the instructor and the librarian. For the latter course, a contemporary non-fiction book is chosen as the course text. Students complete four assignments which are based on specific Checklist skills.

Conclusion and Future Plans

The Checklist has already been reviewed by all twenty-three CSU libraries, endorsed by the CSU information competence program, and added to its web site. Since the CSU has no system-wide information competence requirement for its students, the Checklist is an important resource, representing a common understanding of essential skills for students. Because it is brief and easy to read, it is also being used by librarians to promote IC to course instructors planning research assignments and to program administrators developing learning outcomes for majors.

The Checklist's authors also plan to seek endorsement from the California Community Colleges; this will be a challenge given the size of the system (109 campuses). However, the Checklist is already serving as a useful intersegmental resource. References to the Checklist are appearing on listservs, and conference programs introducing it are drawing both two- and four-year librarians. There is strong support among California community colleges for a state-wide information competency requirement for students, but enabling legislation has not yet been passed because of funding issues. Individual colleges would likely have the flexibility to design their own plan for the requirement. All of the CSU campuses would be accepting transfer students who have satisfied the requirement, and their IC programs would need to be aligned with those of their feeder community colleges. Since the Checklist provides a common understanding of essential competencies, it would be a very useful tool for cooperation in this situation.

Librarians and faculty in California higher education and beyond are encouraged to adapt the Checklist to meet local needs, such as planning or revising an information competency program, assessing student skills, and developing student learning outcomes in academic majors and programs. The Checklist has also been introduced to the California School Library Association as a suggested resource to help prepare high school students for college. Future plans include promoting it to a wider audience through professional conferences and web sites, as well as revising it when needed to maintain currency.

Notes

1   The California State University's Information Competence Initiative is available at: http://www.calstate.edu/LS/infocomp.shtml
2   Background and current information on information competency in the California Community Colleges is available at a web site by Cabrillo College librarian Topsy Smalley available at: http://www.topsy.org/infocomp.html
3   Colorado State University Libraries' information literacy web site is available at: http://lib.colostate.edu/irs/infolit/
4   The University of Connecticut Libraries' information literacy web site is available at: http://www.lib.uconn.edu/using/tutorials/instruction/infolitmain.htm
5   New Mexico State University Library's information literacy web site is available at: http://lib.nmsu.edu/instruction/toolkit/toolkit.htm
6   "Library and Information Literacy Core Library Skills Grade 9-14+" is available on the Rochester Regional Library Council web site at: http://rrlc.entrexp.com/documentview.asp?docID=312

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Malone, D. and Videon, C., (2003), *First Year Student Library Instruction Programs,* CLIP Notes #33, Association of College and Research Libraries, Chicago, IL, pp. 31-51.

Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2003), *Developing Research and Communication Skills: Guidelines for Information Literacy in the Curriculum*, Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Philadelphia, PA, pp. 8-12.

Appendix. A Checklist of Information Competencies for College Students

This Checklist is a collaborative work by a team of California State University and California community college librarians. It is intended to be a succinct list of essential competencies that will encourage collaboration among libraries serving two- and four-year institutions. It can also be used as a resource for planning and assessing information literacy programs.

Lower Division Students - Basic Information Resources and Search Strategies

Ability to:

✓ use signage, maps, and user guides to locate library collections and services

✓ use the library's classification system to browse by subject and locate an item by call number

✓ develop a focused topic and strategies for obtaining needed information

✓ gather background information in books and encyclopedic works

✓ search by author, title, and keyword in library online catalog and locate relevant items

✓ identify relevant keywords and controlled vocabulary terms for searching a topic

✓ conduct a search in an interdisciplinary database, e.g., *Expanded Academic ASAP* using Boolean operators, limit function, etc.

✓ identify relevant subject databases, e.g., *PsycInfo* and execute a basic search

✓ use database features to mark/save/print/email citations and link to fulltext

✓ interpret catalog and database search results; link from subject headings to find additional resources

✓ determine local availability of cited items and use interlibrary loan services as needed

✓ match search tool to information need: academic library databases, search engines, e.g., *Google*, etc.

✓ evaluate information gathered by such criteria as: relevance, authority, currency, peer review process

✓ revise topic and/or strategy if search results are unsatisfactory

✓ understand and differentiate between primary vs. secondary, popular vs. scholarly resources

✓ summarize, organize, and synthesize information found

✓ cite sources properly according to appropriate style guide

✓ observe copyright guidelines; legally obtain, store, and use text and data

✓ recognize the need for information for any purpose (academic, work, personal)

Upper Division Students - Disciplinary Resources and Critical Evaluation

Ability to:

- ✓ identify and use specialized reference sources in the major field, e.g., subject dictionaries
- ✓ use special features of subject databases, e.g., chemical structure searching in *SciFinder Scholar*
- ✓ select controlled vocabulary specific to the discipline
- ✓ use appropriate subject-based style manuals and/or citation style formatting software
- ✓ describe how research literature is generated and disseminated in the major subject
- ✓ identify investigative methods in the major subject, e.g., fieldwork in anthropology
- ✓ identify and use unique resources in the major subject, e.g., case studies (business) and datasets (geography)
- ✓ observe guidelines and standards endorsed by the discipline/profession, e.g., human subjects research
- ✓ use appropriate criteria to evaluate and select resources suitable for upper-division work, such as relevance, scope, authority, objectivity, and currency
- ✓ perform cited reference searches in order to follow a research topic forward and backward in time
- ✓ conduct a comprehensive literature review for papers/projects, including books, journal articles, dissertations, technical reports, non-print media, etc.
- ✓ analyze a body of research literature, drawing conclusions and developing new insights
- ✓ use research collections beyond the local library when needed, e.g., special libraries and archives
- ✓ apply ethical and legal principles to the use of information in all formats and contexts
- ✓ apply acquired information and research skills in new situations and contexts

The Checklist is available at: http://www.calstate.edu/LS/SystemwideResources.shtml