ACRL Best Practices in Information Literacy Invitational Conference Application, 2002

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Program and Institution:

Information Literacy Program of the A.C. Buehler Library at Elmhurst College, Elmhurst, Illinois

Application contact:

Susan Swords Steffen, Director of the Library

Program Description:

As a teaching library, the A. C. Buehler Library is committed to an active role in the preparation of students for a lifetime of purposeful learning for professional excellence in an information technology based society. Information literacy instruction serves as an organizing philosophy for all the library’s services and programs, and all staff view either formal or informal instruction of users as part of their responsibilities. The library’s mission statement and action plan both articulate the centrality of information literacy instruction in the teaching library, and the campus administration and faculty affirm and promote the library’s commitment to information literacy and its integration into the college curriculum. Our instruction program includes a required module in all courses in the Writing and Reasoning category of our general education program and course-integrated information literacy across the curriculum at basic and advanced levels. Librarians teach over 200 formal instruction sessions each year and provide informal instruction from the reference desk.

Uniqueness and Success

The most unique aspects of the information literacy program of Elmhurst College are its strong administrative support, its successful delivery of course-integrated instruction to a mixed population of resident, commuter, and non-traditional students, its innovative use of web pages as support for information literacy skills instruction and practice, its strong element of faculty collaboration, and its planning and implementation of its model 21st century library organized around information literacy. We have achieved success by adopting information literacy as an organizing principle that informs all of our work, by emphasizing collaboration with faculty and integration into the curriculum as delivery methods, and by gaining strong support from the college’s administration to create a model library for the 21st century.
**PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

**Program name**

The instructional program of the A.C. Buehler Library of Elmhurst College is referred to as the information literacy instruction program.

The team members applying to attend the Best Practices Conference include:

Susan Swords Steffen, Director of the Library
As Director of the Library since 1997, Susan has led the library in expanding its instructional programs. She has over 25 years of experience in libraries with instruction of users as a major area of expertise.

Michael Bell, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the College
With an academic background in folklore and American Studies, Dr. Bell has a passion for libraries and for articulating the role of the college library in the 21st century. He views the instructional role of the library and of librarians as central to the mission of the college.

Anne Jordan-Baker, Reference/Instruction Librarian
Anne provides leadership for information literacy, teaches many classes, and manages the library’s web site. She attended the Information Literacy Immersion Institute in 2000.

Mary Kay Mulvaney, Assistant Professor, Department of English
Mary Kay’s expertise is in the area of rhetoric and composition at all levels. She is interested in the connections between information literacy and writing across the curriculum.

Judy Fiene, Department of Education
Judy has recently joined the Department of Education after over 20 years in elementary school classrooms. She is responsible for coordinating technology in the Education Department, serves on many campus-wide technology groups, and teaches courses in the teaching of reading.

**History of the Program**

As a teaching library, the A. C. Buehler Library is committed to an active role in the preparation of students for a lifetime of purposeful learning for professional excellence in an information technology based society. Information literacy instruction serves as an organizing philosophy for all the library’s services and programs, and all staff view either formal or informal instruction of users as part of their responsibilities. The library’s mission statement and action plan both articulate the centrality of information literacy instruction in the teaching library, and the campus administration and faculty affirm and promote the library’s commitment to information literacy and its integration into the college curriculum.

Elmhurst College is a four-year private college located 16 miles west of downtown Chicago. Approximately 2,700 full-time and part-time students are enrolled in the college’s 22 undergraduate academic departments and six graduate degree programs. These students represent
dichotomies of diverse ages, residential status, and ethnicity and pursue their studies in a variety of traditional and nontraditional formats both on and off campus.

The instructional programs of the library have a long and evolving history. Librarians have taught formal instruction sessions since the 1970’s, primarily in the English department’s required writing course and in some courses in other disciplines. Librarians at Elmhurst have had full faculty status with eligibility for tenure and promotion since the 1960’s, and classroom faculty and librarians work collegially on many projects. The library’s instructional programs have evolved over the years from library orientation to bibliographic instruction and more recently to information literacy instruction.

Since the fall of 1997 under the leadership of a new library director, the instruction program has been refined and expanded. Many of our students experience information literacy instruction after entering the college. The Writing and Reasoning Category of the General Education program has a required library and research component, and many other faculty bring individual classes in for instruction. During 2000-2001, the five librarians taught over 200 classes in all 22 departments. For each instructional session, a librarian creates a web page that gathers relevant library resources to guide students in their research and to reinforce instruction after students leave the classroom. These course pages are extremely popular both with students, who will often ask for their course’s web page at the reference desk, and with faculty who appreciate the coaching provided by these pages. Information literacy instruction is provided to all areas of the college’s academic programs: traditional day and evening classes, accelerated nontraditional majors in business, human services administration, and information technology, accelerated general education program for adult students, and off-campus programs.

Best Practices

The information literacy program of the A.C. Buehler Library is exemplary in five of the categories outlined by the ACRL Best Practices Initiative: Administrative and Institutional Support; Articulation With the Curriculum; Collaboration With Classroom Faculty, Pedagogy; and Staff.

The program receives a high level of administrative and institutional support both within the library and at the highest administrative levels of the college. All librarians teach and work collaboratively with faculty and are evaluated and rewarded for this work annually and through tenure and promotion procedures. Tenure and promotion policies and procedures are available at http://www.elmhurst.edu/~susanss/guidelines.html. These instructional responsibilities are included in job descriptions and in the Faculty Manual, which outlines criteria for promotion and tenure for librarians. Every year a portion of the library’s travel budget funds participation in instruction-related continuing education, and most years additional funding has been provided by the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The college’s administration, including the President, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and the Board of Trustees, has strongly articulated its support for information literacy by including it in the most recent version of the college’s strategic plan (Action Plan II), by endorsing our Vision for the Library, and by committing to the implementation of our plan for creating a 21st century model college library. The Library of the Future renovation plan currently being developed employs the teaching role of the library and
librarians as its organizing principle and will include a new information literacy laboratory classroom and newly designed collaborative work areas for students, faculty, and librarians. We expect the project will be completed by the fall of 2002; more complete descriptions are available at http://www.elmhurst.edu/~susanss/newlibrary.html.

As a course-integrated program, it is essential that the library’s information literacy programs articulate well with the college’s curriculum. The college’s General Education curriculum includes library and research skills as a required part of all courses meeting the Writing and Reasoning requirement (English and Philosophy). We believe that information literacy skills are best learned within the context of disciplines. So, within the last year, liaison librarians and the Library Director have met with each academic department to introduce the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. Currently, departments are looking at their curricula to determine the most appropriate courses for incorporating specific information literacy skills instruction for their majors. To keep up with changes in the curriculum, the Library Director serves on the Academic Council and reviews all proposals for new courses, majors, and program revisions. Librarians are also involved in the development of curricula for our nontraditional programs both on and off campus to insure that information literacy instruction is included in these programs.

Collaboration with faculty is a key element in our program. Each librarian has liaison responsibility with several academic departments to provide assistance with instruction, web page development, and collection building. Librarians work collegially with individual faculty to design effective research assignments that introduce information literacy while also meeting the faculty member’s instructional goals. We make a special effort to work with our adjunct faculty by contacting them individually and including them in outreach and workshop activities. In addition, librarians annually offer information literacy across the curriculum workshops for faculty as well as presentations for academic departments and for adjunct faculty to introduce information literacy concepts and theories.

Our approach to the pedagogy of information literacy is discipline based; that is, all instruction is delivered with the context of courses rather than as “general” introductions to information literacy. Librarians work collaboratively with faculty to develop assignments that stress critical thinking and reflection as well as skill development. The library’s commitment to develop a web page for each course that participates in the instruction program supports student-centered learning by encouraging students to work independently and to carry their learning beyond the classroom. We believe that these web pages are very effective because they provide guidance and structure to novice researchers as they navigate disciplines that are new to them by helping them to understand how knowledge is created and valued by a discipline. We are also currently experimenting with online instruction using Blackboard to deliver instruction to our accelerated degree completion programs both on and off campus. Because all five librarians teach in the program, students and faculty are exposed to a variety of teaching styles. In addition, all librarians strive to use a range of active and collaborative learning activities that address students’ multiple learning styles.

The staff of our information literacy program is also a particular strength. All librarians at Elmhurst College are expected to teach. Candidates for all librarian positions are asked to
demonstrate their teaching skills as part of the interview process and are expected to express a strong interest in teaching. There are currently five full-time librarians on the staff with plans for the addition of a sixth librarian in the fall semester of 2002. Librarians collaborate with classroom faculty in designing and delivering instruction and also in the academic life of the campus through membership on committees such as the General Education Committee, the Honors Committee, and the Academic Council. All librarians also work with campus groups and events such as the Holocaust Guestship, the Center for Professional Excellence, Straights and Gays for Equality, HABLAMOS, and Staff and Faculty for Equality. Librarians are also encouraged to participate in a vigorous program of professional development including attendance at the Information Literacy Immersion Institute (both national and regional), the TLTR program of the American Association of Higher Education, the ACRL national conference (including presentations and poster sessions at the last two conferences), ALA programs such as the “Information Literacy Competency Standards Training Session” held in 2000, and the Ameritech/SBC Faculty Development Technology Program.

Thus far, achieving excellence in the best practices category of assessment has proved the most challenging for us for a number of reasons. The campus as a whole is struggling with determining the methods for assessing student learning outcomes in the General Education program and across the curriculum. Since our instruction program is integrated into courses across the curriculum, the assessment of its learning outcomes will also need to be integrated into the assessment of these courses and programs. Ideally, information literacy learning outcomes will be assessed as part of the assessment methodology used by the program. That methodology is currently being developed, and for the last several years a librarian has been involved in that effort as a member of the General Education Committee. We are also currently working with the Associate Dean of the Faculty who is responsible for the College’s assessment program to insure the information literacy learning outcomes are part of the college’s assessment efforts. Within the library, we monitor our programs and services, but we need to collect and analyze assessment data about student learning and program outcomes more formally. We will also be planning more formal assessment of the results of our 21st century library project that is currently in the planning stages.

Evidence of Success To Date

Thus far, the instructional programs of the A.C. Buehler Library have experienced a great deal of success. Librarians provided over 200 instruction sessions during 2000-2001 and experienced a 20% increase in instruction during the fall of 2001. Many faculty members regularly schedule instruction sessions without prompting as part of their course planning, and increasing numbers of faculty collaborate with librarians when developing research assignments. The course web pages created by librarians are some of the most frequently used pages on the library’s web site, and many students and faculty rely on them to find the resources they need to complete their course work. The tenure and promotion process for librarians requires librarians to document the impact and effectiveness of their teaching and librarianship by collecting letters of evidence from faculty. The letters collected by the two librarians who were tenure candidates during the last two years testify to the positive impact of the library’s instruction program on faculty and their students. The following comment from a political science professor is typical of the faculty responses we received:
“Each semester, I have most of my classes attend information literacy instruction sessions at the library. I have appreciated how the librarians make these sessions pertinent and creative. These sessions have always been designed with specific research questions, databases, and learning objectives in mind. Rather than being overwhelmed, my students have found the type and amount of information presented to be helpful and manageable. I firmly believe that these encounters with the library have contributed to a higher quality of student research projects and more importantly, to my students’ confidence in using the library.”

Finally, the college’s recently approved strategic plan (Action Plan II) includes a separate item which reads, “Develop a model small-college library for the information age, positioning it at the center of efforts to use technology in support of learning and to help students develop wide ranging information literacy.” This strategic plan will drive much of the activity of the college during the next five years, and it is quite a significant recognition for the library to occupy such a prominent position in the plan.

**Uniqueness and Potential Contribution**

The most unique aspects of the information literacy program of Elmhurst College are its strong administrative support, its successful delivery of course-integrated instruction to a mixed population of resident, commuter, and non-traditional students, its innovative use of web pages as support for information literacy skills instruction and practice, its strong element of faculty collaboration, and its planning and implementation of its model 21st century library organized around information literacy. While many college administrations support the missions of their libraries, it is rare to find a chief academic office that provides as articulate and passionate support for rethinking the roles and best practices of libraries as Dr. Michael Bell does. He is eager to work with librarians and committed to share our story with other chief academic officers. At Elmhurst College, we have been successful in delivering a course-integrated, across-the-curriculum model of instruction developed in residential liberal arts colleges to a diverse population of students that includes traditional and nontraditional students, resident and commuter students, traditional and accelerated degree completion curricula, and on- and off-campus programs. We employ diverse methods of pedagogy to meet the needs of this student body and have experience using various methods and technologies to deliver instruction. We also bring a long and strong tradition of collaborating closely with faculty to design, develop, and deliver information literacy instruction. The two classroom faculty members on our team bring expertise in Writing Across the Curriculum, educational assessment, and innovation in the classroom. Finally, we are currently in the process of planning a library renovation that is designed to bring information literacy and the teaching role of librarians to the center of library operations, and we will bring our experiences in developing this project to the process.

**Questions To Be Considered**

How can we articulate Best Practices in Information Literacy in ways that are both convincing and useful to chief academic officers as well as to librarians?
How can we use Best Practices in Information Literacy to articulate and publicize our information literacy programs to prospective students as well as to current students and faculty?