

From BI to IL: The Paths of Two Liberal Arts Colleges

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Abstract

Two liberal arts colleges in Minnesota are transforming strong, longstanding bibliographic instruction programs into dynamic information literacy programs involving extensive cross-campus collaboration. This paper outlines their strategies and the lessons learned thus far.

Liberal arts colleges were early adopters of bibliographic instruction as an effective means of integrating research strategies into the curriculum; in fact, the famous “Earlham Model,” was developed in a liberal arts context.¹ Given that many colleges using this model for three decades have strong programs already in place that rely on collaboration with faculty and are tied to curricular goals, the arguments made for information literacy seem oddly familiar. Innovations being introduced on campuses under the banner of information literacy sound like what we’ve been doing for years. Are they finally catching on? Is information literacy a new name for a philosophy and practice long established at liberal arts colleges?

Yes—and no. St. Olaf College and Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota are two institutions that have practiced the Earlham model for years with notable success.² Yet we have found that the concepts embraced by information literacy do offer opportunities to rethink our approach to developing even more effective cross-campus collaboration.

Colleges committed to the Earlham model locate bibliographic instruction at the intersection of the classroom and the library, where library research methods and materials are developed for particular discipline-based tasks. This approach to bibliographic instruction involves collaboration between the library and other academic departments. In practice, the results of this collaboration may range from one-shot sessions in which librarians plug resources and skills into a course without knowing how well-integrated they are, to sessions in which individual departmental faculty and librarians are equal partners in the development, presentation and evaluation of student research projects. Wherever bibliographic instruction lies on this spectrum, the ownership of the program has resided in the library, with outreach to other constituencies.

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Information literacy, like the Earlham model, situates research skills in the broader context of articulating questions, finding information, and putting it to use in generating some new understanding but does so with some key differences. Development of an information literacy program relies on transforming a library-based program into a cross-campus enterprise with wider ownership, seeking not just buy-in but leadership and engagement beyond the walls of the library. Further, information literacy depends on collaborative pedagogy, building research competencies throughout individual courses and throughout a departmental or college-wide curriculum, embedding skills developmentally into the entire learning process with the aim of creating informed and critical lifelong learners.

The following case studies map the paths taken by two liberal arts colleges as they transform their programs and explore the conditions necessary to make the trip.

The Paths We've Traveled

We have learned a lot from the road already traveled. As a case in point, the St. Olaf Libraries' mission statement reflects the centrality of teaching and learning with a firm commitment to "systematic instruction in the retrieval and evaluation of information from its many sources" and to having "library instruction complement classroom teaching."³

This commitment has been long-standing. St. Olaf received a grant in 1977 to develop a course-integrated bibliographic instruction program under the mentorship of Evan Farber and sent many of its librarians to the Earlham workshops during the early '80s. The initial program was grounded in a college-wide agreement to having both the required first-year English and Religion courses include student research and bibliographic instruction. Then, as early as 1983, the College's Bibliographic Instruction Advisory Committee, composed of both library and disciplinary faculty, encouraged departments to develop multi-tiered programs in order to embed critical thinking and independent library use throughout their curriculum in a sequential, developmental way. This approach had particular success with the departments of Music and History; in other departments where courses were not taken sequentially (for example, Psychology, Social Work, Biology), strong faculty connections still enabled quality, course-related and course-integrated bibliographic instruction. The Libraries participated in the development of a new curriculum in the late 1980s and chose, rather than isolate library literacy as a competency to be "checked off," to continue a tradition of integration and collaboration. Once the new curriculum was

in place, the Libraries received a Pew grant in 1992 to assess and revise the sequential course-integrated approach to research skills. Since then, the program has continued to develop—demonstrated by a shift to hands-on labs with active student-centered learning, an NSF grant with the Psychology Department developing a new introductory course with a three-hour information literacy lab⁴, and the organization and sponsorship of an Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM) - funded conference, "Bibliographic Instruction: An Opportunity for Collaborative Pedagogy" in 1998. The next logical step has been to transform the bibliographic instruction program into a campus-wide information literacy initiative with an expanded focus on developmental research skills and pedagogy.

Gustavus followed a similar path. The Earlham model embodied important and valuable assumptions about learning research skills that Gustavus librarians embraced from the 1970s. But, as at St. Olaf, changes in faculty, programs and the administration required continual reintroduction of those principles. Gustavus librarians tried many ways to work more closely with the faculty but still felt dissatisfied with the results. Students were still having trouble integrating what they learned in the library with the whole process of thinking through a research task. Librarians had difficulty working within what was usually a fifty-minute window of opportunity. Faculty were growing increasingly frustrated with students' difficulty in making critical judgments about their sources. And all of this was exacerbated by the increasing complexity of the hybrid world of print and electronic resources. In spite of all of our efforts, something wasn't working.

The Gustavus library developed a strategic plan in 1998 that reiterated the importance of teaching and learning as the basis of the entire library program. With that in mind, the library held focus groups with faculty across the curriculum who said that electronic information formats and inadequate computer hardware weren't the problem. The issue wasn't *technology*, it was *pedagogy*. One of the faculty members said bluntly "we have to change the way we teach." They felt the most valuable thing the library could do would be to provide faculty a chance to work with librarians and other colleagues to retool courses so that their students would learn how to articulate good questions, seek information in both print and online formats, make intelligent choices, and use what they learned to create new knowledge—in short, they wanted help making students information literate, though none of them used that phrase to describe what they meant.

What they wanted to do—and what we hoped to do all these years—hadn't really changed. This form of learning is practically the definition of a liberal arts education, after all. But they were saying they wanted to understand student needs and develop better ways to embed support for their learning of research skills into the curriculum. It wasn't up to us to point out the need and gain their approval—it was work they recognized *they* had to do.

Packing for the Trip—and Leaving old Baggage Behind

What would we need to strike out on another path?

Much of the literature on information literacy suggests that transforming library-based bibliographic instruction to a cross-campus program of information literacy entails a major paradigm shift.⁵ The Boyer Commission report, "Re-inventing Undergraduate Education," suggests research universities should change "the prevailing undergraduate culture of receivers into a culture of inquirers, a culture in which faculty (and students) share an adventure of discovery."⁶ Many liberal arts colleges are fortunate in having already established such a culture. Gustavus, for example, sends 30 to 40 students annually to the National Undergraduate Research Conference to present their research. Many more students present their work at regional and national conferences and several have co-authored articles with faculty appearing in major scholarly journals. St. Olaf has a similar track record. However, there is still a need to do a better job of what Evan Farber has recently called "the problem of cooperation with teaching faculty."⁷

Some suggest the problem arises out of having two cultures—a faculty culture concerned with disciplinary integrity, content expertise, research, and autonomy, and a librarians' culture, more committed to an interdisciplinary perspective and student-centered learning, and perhaps reluctant to share control over mastery of research skills.⁸ In fact, on our campuses the relations between faculty in the disciplines and librarians are not adversarial but rather a shared enterprise, with the focus on student learning and with inquiry as a major vehicle for it.

Then, what's holding us back? Is it because librarians are second-class citizens? That's not the case. At both campuses, librarians carry faculty status and are viewed by their academic colleagues as peers and fellow educators. This mutual respect contributes directly to collaboration and, in turn, to students becoming more engaged in their research. In these partnerships, the classroom faculty and librarians' objectives are mutually supportive and well-defined along the lines Evan Farber has described: classroom faculty "be-

ing those that help students attain a better understanding of the course's subject matter" and librarians "being those that enhance the students' ability to find and evaluate information."⁹ Moreover, librarians and classroom faculty share the goal of preparing students to participate in scholarly conversations, to evaluate resources critically through a particular disciplinary lens, and to be capable of contributing to the discipline's scholarly discourses. In Joan Bechtel's words, "the focus is on the process of scholarly dialogue, not on the organization of the library or the production of term papers."¹⁰

Could it be we don't share the same agenda? In many higher education institutions there is, perhaps out of necessity, a somewhat utilitarian view of information literacy that claims it will prepare students for jobs in the workplace and help them become "information-savvy consumers."¹¹ On a liberal arts campus, librarians and faculty both agree those claims are suspect; it is more important to create socially-engaged critical thinkers who are equipped not to be better workers (though they certainly may be, assuming critical thinking is of value in the workplace) but to engage in that ongoing curiosity and conversation that helps us understand the world.

Or is it that the integration of information literacy into the curriculum is in competition with other worthwhile college programs and resources?¹² The number of worthy causes on our campuses—where all the faculty are committed, the students are above average, and curriculum debates can be eternal—makes it difficult for the best intentions to get the attention they deserve. This creates the need to build new coalitions and reaffirm old ones in order to get a broad base of support. The library must use a variety of strategies to bring together a number of college constituencies—and then intentionally step back and share ownership. Gustavus and St. Olaf are taking different paths toward information literacy—but in both cases, we're asking the faculty to play a major role in charting the course.

The St. Olaf Experience

The challenge facing St. Olaf has been to expand a successful library-centered program into a cross-campus fully-integrated information literacy program woven throughout the curriculum. In response, the Libraries have created an action plan with the goal:

To design and implement an innovative Information Literacy/ Developmental Research Skills Program firmly grounded in an historically strong

bibliographic instruction program, incorporating active cross-campus collaboration, and embedded within the framework of St. Olaf College's curriculum and overall mission.¹³

The Action Plan's priorities are:

- To support a campus-wide focus on the research process in the midst of rapidly expanding information resources and technologies.
- To develop and articulate a definition of information literacy and/or a developmental research skills sequence appropriate for St. Olaf College and its students.
- To design and implement an information literacy/developmental research skills program that is sensitive to disciplinary distinctions and builds on the earlier 3-tiered model of bibliographic instruction.
- To offer to faculty professional development opportunities to become familiar with a variety of information resources, explore different research strategies, and redesign courses with information literacy/developmental research skills integrated into the course objectives.
- To collaborate with institutional offices to develop evaluation tools which allow for regular assessment of student learning, outcomes, and the effectiveness of the program.
- To develop a sense of shared ownership by participating constituencies.

As noted above, St. Olaf has had the components of an information literacy program only waiting to be named, affirmed, and pulled together into a coherent whole. Building consensus among a variety of constituencies has been considered key to this process.

The Libraries began with several internal steps. A series of retreats was held for the library faculty and support was provided for one of the librarians to participate in the ACRL's Institute for Information Literacy's first Immersion Program. Information literacy was subsequently identified as a major focus of the Libraries' Self-Study and External Review. Librarians also crafted and adopted a draft definition of information literacy that matches the mission of St. Olaf College.

The Libraries recognize that a firm commitment to student-centered learning necessarily places the primary locus of an information literacy program within the disciplinary and interdisciplinary curricula. It has been critical, therefore, to establish a wide-ranging, grassroots coalition among faculty. To achieve this coalition, it has been important that librarians continue to be "visible and viable" in

cross-campus programs and as members of major faculty committees.¹⁴ The strong library liaison program has also continued to be at the heart of the Libraries' instructional mission. In addition, feedback and recommendations concerning information literacy have been solicited from the Faculty Library Committee, as well as campus centers and programs involved with the curriculum.¹⁵ Faculty and departments already integrating information literacy into their courses and departmental curriculum are being identified and showcased, with a series of panel discussions where faculty can model the ways in which curriculum design and assignment construction promote information literacy among students. To enable the faculty to upgrade their own information literacy and stay current with ever-expanding resources in their area of expertise, library liaisons have increased hands-on workshops to departments. In addition, the liaisons are scheduling meetings with the departments and programs that have completed or are currently involved in self-studies to discuss the developmental research skills with which they expect their graduates to be proficient and the ways in which the Libraries should be involved in meeting these goals. In summary, a cross-campus curriculum-centered initiative is aimed at affirming the ways in which information literacy is already embedded in the college's program, expanding faculty ownership, and identifying how the faculty will enable students to graduate fully information literate.

Collaboration with the administration is also considered integral to a successful information literacy program. Past administrations have offered significant support for bibliographic instruction. To bring the current administration's understanding of information literacy together with library-generated initiatives, librarians have engaged administrators in one-on-one discussions about the current initiatives and the ways in which they match and enhance those of the College. In addition, librarians have submitted several proposals for information literacy grants and met with Academic Computing Center personnel to discuss technological innovations and information literacy. Providing ongoing communication concerning all information literacy initiatives is considered key to the Libraries' effort to collaborate with the administration.

The path taken has had its twists and turns. For example, this initiative has coincided with a cross-campus FTE cut that has affected all departments, including the Libraries. The Libraries have been careful, therefore, to present information literacy as a program that supports and enhances faculty efforts rather than being an add-on. They have also

recognized that the implementation of information literacy will vary from discipline to discipline as it is integrated more fully into the curriculum. In summary, even with significant constraints, an information literacy program can be successfully launched with collaboration among faculty, librarians, and other campus constituencies.

The Gustavus Experience

Strategic planning and faculty focus groups helped shape a proposal for a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.¹⁶ The two-year grant, received in the fall of 1999, has two goals: first, to provide support for course design and instruction and second, study the results to understand the problems students encounter in a complex, hybrid print/electronic information environment. The project rests on five basic assumptions:

- Research is a valuable learning experience for undergraduates.
- Research practices are situated in disciplinary frameworks.
- Research is a complex and recursive process of discovery.
- Learning research skills is a developmental process.
- Research skills are not dependent on information formats. The critical thinking skills required are the same whether using print or electronic resources.

The program has three components. First, the Gustavus Library is hosting two Summer Institutes for librarians from six liberal arts colleges in the region, the first focused on pedagogy and the second to focus on assessing student learning. During the first of these institutes, librarians heard faculty perspectives from various disciplines, in small groups tackled common problems that had been gathered beforehand through e-mail communication, worked through case studies of difficult instructional situations, and brainstormed lists of active learning techniques. Each participant was given a packet of readings in advance and librarians from each institution prepared a demonstration of something they'd done in their program that worked. The focus was on learning from each other and collaborative discovery. The second Summer Institute is in the planning stages, but will again be designed to engage participants in sharing, conversation, and the development of practical solutions for information literacy programs.

Second, the Library is sponsoring two intensive summer programs for a core group of Gustavus faculty from across the disciplines who will design or redesign courses with the intention of embedding in them a developmental process

for learning research skills. During the first workshop week, faculty discussed the problems students face and shared solutions, worked with librarians on developing resources and assignments for their courses, presented to each other ways they have sequenced activities to develop research skills, and worked with writing program and assessment experts. One of the most popular activities in the first of these workshops was learning to see from a student's perspective: faculty jotted down a paper topic one of their students might be expected to tackle, then exchanged them and were asked to find five good articles on the topic. This led to a lively discussion of evaluating information when the subject matter is unfamiliar—a common problem for their students. In addition to meeting all day for a week in the summer, the faculty members will share their transformed courses and the materials they develop and will meet occasionally to continue the conversation. Each cohort of fifteen faculty becomes a community that works together to define problems and solve them. In turn, they will share what they've learned with colleagues in their departments and across campus.

Third, the Library will conduct research and assessment that will use the program as a laboratory for exploring how students negotiate their way through an increasingly complex information environment—and how teaching and learning can address the challenges they face. One of the projects is to use papers collected by the faculty in the program to develop a heuristic for assessing the quality of students' use of information in researched writing. Another is to analyze the process used by students who are successful at conducting research in a hybrid print and electronic information environment, using the protocol of a similar study conducted at Gustavus in 1990.¹⁷ The object is to understand students' problems and to address them through faculty and librarian collaboration; a second benefit will be developing methods for understanding the library's impact on student learning, a challenging new focus for library assessment.¹⁸

Distinct Landscapes with Parallel Paths

Each college has its own cultural landscape, and Gustavus's is one that is based on collegiality tempered with individualism. As at St. Olaf, it seemed wiser to work within the curriculum rather than make information literacy a graduation requirement. Not only would a requirement proposal fail at Gustavus, it counters the notion that research skills are embedded in disciplinary traditions and are developmental: they must be built up throughout a course and

throughout an undergraduate's career. Another feature of the cultures at both campuses is that working from the top down is often unsuccessful. It has been important that motivated faculty be the ones that take the lead and that the process be at the grass roots for it to be accepted. The main goal is to hand over ownership of information literacy to the faculty because for the most part its success is in their hands. The librarians will help—as they have for decades—but the faculty are the ones who will work most closely with students on the whole process of learning to ask good questions, learning to assess arguments, and learning how to turn what they've found into new knowledge.

Years ago Joan Bechtel proposed that conversation could be a new paradigm for librarianship.¹⁹ Promoting the conversation among librarians and faculty is a place to start. The ultimate aim of this process is to create conditions so that students perceive themselves as active players in the production of knowledge and to understand how, in fact, knowledge is produced so that they can continue active participation in it beyond their college years.

While the information literacy goals of both schools have concentrated on students' developmental research skills, their approaches have differed. St. Olaf's action plan maps out a comprehensive, campus-wide program aimed at engaging students actively in disciplinary discourse. The Gustavus project has a smaller focus: bringing all of the librarians and a select group of faculty across the disciplines into intense dialogue with the anticipation that we'll learn together and we will be able to use the experience to infuse what we've learned into other courses and programs—and, in turn, share what we've learned about student learning with other institutions as they take their own paths toward information literacy.

Lessons from the trip

Though we've taken different paths as we make the transition from bibliographic instruction to information literacy, there are some common features that any institution contemplating the trip might consider.

First, we both started by reaffirming the centrality of teaching and learning in our libraries. Information literacy, as with bibliographic instruction, continues to be central to the entire mission of the library. It affects all library programs, from collection development to day-to-day operations, and it must continue to be a commonly shared vision.

We built from strength. Our programs have evolved over the years—there is much to be learned from them. At times,

looking over the past we rediscovered things that would help us move forward.

We planned our trip with knowledge of our institutional landscapes. We knew where the pitfalls were before we started out and mapped our paths accordingly.

We listened. If the effort depends on cross-campus collaboration, librarians can't be the only ones doing the talking. In fact, faculty are deeply committed to student-centered learning and are often willing to go to great lengths to support it. We gave faculty an opportunity to talk to each other and to us about what their students need. These conversations build the community feeling necessary for collaboration to flourish.

We invited the faculty to join us in modeling collaborative leadership. In the collegial environment of a college campus, leadership doesn't mean taking the lead. It is a matter of starting conversations, nudging them along, and creating conditions for peers to share their expertise, their doubts, their concerns. Librarians have a key role in these processes—but if we truly want our students to be information literate, we need to share ownership with the faculty.

It is too soon to know exactly where these paths are leading, or whether the road we chose to take is the best route. But it has taken the road we've been on for thirty years into some interesting new terrain.

Notes

1. Evan Farber and Tom Kirk, building on Patricia Knapp's Monteith College program, developed a strong model at Earlham College in the late 1960s. The model spread as many other librarians and faculty were trained at Earlham workshops. See Anne F. Roberts and Susan G. Blandy, *Library Instruction for Librarians*, (Englewood: Libraries Unlimited, 1989), 2–3, and Larry Hardesty et al., *Bibliographic Instruction in Practice: A Tribute to the Legacy of Evan Ira Farber*, (Ann Arbor: Perian, 1993).

2. See appendix A for a list of publications and conference papers on bibliographic instruction and information literacy written and presented by St. Olaf and Gustavus faculty.

3. St. Olaf College Libraries, *Mission Statement*, 1994.

4. For a description of this course and lab, see Elizabeth O. Hutchins and Bonnie S. Sherman, "Information Literacy and Psychological Science: A Case Study of Collaboration." In *Library User Education: Powerful Learning, Powerful Partnerships*. (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 2001): 183–92.

5. See, for example, Loanne Snavely and Natasha Cooper. "Competing Agendas in Higher Education: Finding a Place for Information Literacy," *References & User Services Quarterly*, 37:1 (1997): 53–62, and Patricia Iannuzzi, "Faculty Development and

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6. Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities*, 2000, <<http://notes.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/>> (9 December, 2000), 11.

7. Evan Farber, "Faculty-Librarian Cooperation: A Personal Retrospective," *Reference Services Review*, 27:3 (1999): 229–34.

8. See Snavely and Cooper; Larry Hardesty, "Faculty Culture and Bibliographic Instruction: an Exploratory Analysis," *Library Trends*, 44:2 (1995): 339–67; Gloria J. Leckie and Anne Fullerton, "The Role of Academic Librarians in Fostering a Pedagogy for Information Literacy," *Racing Toward Tomorrow, ACRL 1999 National Conference Papers*. <<http://www.ala.org/acrl/leckie.pdf>> (20 December 2000); Evelyn B. Haynes, "Library-Faculty Partnerships in Instruction," *Advances in Librarianship*, 20 (1996): 191–222; Rosemary M. Young and Stephen Harmony, *Working with Faculty to Design Undergraduate Information Literacy Programs*. (New York: Neal-Schuman, 1999); and Patricia Senn Breivik, "Politics for Closing the Gap," *Reference Librarian*, 24 (1989): 5–16.

9. Farber, 233.

10. Joan M. Bechtel, "Conversation, a New Paradigm for Librarianship?" *College & Research Libraries* 47:3 (1986): 223.

11. Patricia Senn Breivik, "Information Literacy and the Engaged Campus," *AAHE Bulletin* (November 2000): 3.

12. Abigail Loomis, "Building Coalitions for Information Literacy." In *Information for a New Age: Redefining the Librarian* (Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1995): 128.

13. St. Olaf College Libraries, *Information Literacy: An Action Plan for Re-Visioning*. (March 2000), 1.

14. Katherine Beaty Chiste, Andrea Glover, and Glenna Westwood, "Infiltration and Entrenchment: Capturing and Securing Information Literacy Territory in Academe," *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 26:3 (2000): 207.

15. Such centers and programs include the Center for Innovation in the Liberal Arts (focused on faculty development and technology), Center for Integrative Studies (focused on individualized student majors and interdisciplinary seminars), the Writing Across the Curriculum Program, and the Academic Computing Center.

16. The text of the grant and more information about the project and its results can be found at <<http://www.gustavus.edu/Library/IMLS>>.

17. Barbara Fister, "The Research Processes of Undergraduate Students," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 18 (July 1992): 163–69.

18. For example, see Association of College and Research Libraries, *Standards for College Libraries 2000 Edition*, January

2000. <<http://www.ala.org/acrl/guides/college.html>> (2 January, 2001).

19. Bechtel.

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Appendix A

Bibliographic Instruction and Information Literacy Publications and Presentations from St. Olaf College and Gustavus Adolphus College

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