

Characteristics of Programs of Information Literacy that Illustrate Best Practices: A Guideline

Best Practices Initiative Institute for Information Literacy

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Note: Links within the text will take you to an annotation of the highlighted terms.

Overview

The Characteristics of Programs of Information Literacy that Illustrate Best Practices: A Guideline attempts to articulate elements of exemplary information literacy programs for undergraduate students at four-year and two-year institutions.

The characteristics identify and describe features notable in information literacy programs of [excellence](#). The characteristics are not, however, descriptive of any one program, but rather represent a metaset of elements identified through examination of many programs and philosophies of undergraduate information literacy.

In addition, though guided by the definitions found in the “[Final Report of the ALA Presidential Committee on Information Literacy](#)” (1989) and the “[Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education](#)” (2000), the characteristics themselves do not attempt to define [information literacy](#) per se. Instead, the focus is on defining the elements of best practices in information literacy programming.

Although an attempt was made to categorize and organize the characteristics for ease of use and logical presentation, the order does not reflect any judgment of priority.

Purpose and Use

The characteristics are primarily intended to help those who are interested in developing, assessing, and improving information literacy programs. This audience includes faculty, librarians, administrators, and technology professionals, as well as others involved in information literacy programming at a particular institution.

Individuals involved with information literacy programming are encouraged to use the characteristics in a variety of ways. These characteristics present a set of ideas that can be used when establishing, developing, advancing, revitalizing, or assessing an information literacy program. The characteristics also provide a framework within which to categorize the details of a

given program and to analyze how different program elements contribute to attaining excellence in information literacy programming. Because the characteristics are descriptive in nature and the result of a meta-analysis of many programs, they may also be useful for benchmarking program status, improvement, and long-term development.

It is important to note, however, that no program is expected to be exemplary with respect to all characteristics; the list is not prescriptive. Rather, individuals are encouraged to consider the Characteristics as well as library and institutional contexts in establishing information literacy program goals and strategies.

Librarians are also encouraged to make use of the “Guidelines for Instruction Programs in Academic Libraries” for specific guidance on library involvement with information literacy programs.

History

The characteristics were developed through a multiphase process which involved professionals from multiple sectors of higher education, including librarians, faculty, administrators, and professional organizations. Beginning in April 2000, suggestions for an original draft of the Characteristics were gathered through a Web-based Delphi polling technique. Members of the Best Practices Project Team and Best Practices Advisory Panel then wrote a document based upon these suggestions and revised it several times. A working draft was distributed widely for comment and went through a further revision. A penultimate draft was completed in March 2001 and was used as the basis for selecting ten institutions for a national invitational conference on best practices in information literacy programming, which was held in Atlanta in June 2002. As part of that meeting the characteristics were further refined. The revisions culminated in this final edition.

In 2008 members of the ACRL Information Literacy Best Practices committee (ILBP) undertook a revision of this document. Committee members agreed that certain language needed to be changed in order to better represent the current state of information literacy at academic institutions. Members of ILBP began the process by offering suggestions for revisions; these suggestions were then collected, keyed to the original text, and then disseminated for comments from the ACRL membership. After collecting the comments provided by ACRL members the document was re-examined, and a new draft was created using the Track Changed feature that allowed readers to look at proposed changes and the rationale behind them. The changes were then integrated into the original document and submitted to ACRL Executive Committee for approval.

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Characteristics of Programs of Information Literacy that Illustrate Best Practices

All categories should be reviewed and/or evaluated periodically and revised as needed.

Category 1: Mission

A [mission statement](#) for an information literacy program:

- Includes a definition of information literacy;
- Is consistent with the “Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education” [<http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilcomstan.html>];
- Aligns with the library’s mission statement to correspond with the larger mission statement of the institution;
- Adheres to the format of campus strategic documents;
- Incorporates the institutional stakeholders, clearly reflecting their contributions and the expected benefits;
- Appears in appropriate institutional documents;
- Promotes relevant lifelong learning and professional development.

Category 2: Goals and Objectives

[Goals and objectives](#) for an information literacy program:

- Are consistent with the mission, goals, and objectives of the library and the institution;
- Establish measurable outcomes for evaluation of the program;
- Reflect sound pedagogical practice;
- Accommodate input from institutional stakeholders;
- Clearly present the integration of information literacy across the curriculum for students’ academic pursuits and effective lifelong learning, see [Category 5: Articulation](#);
- Accommodate sequential growth of students’ skills and understanding throughout their education, see [Category 5: Articulation](#);
- Take into account all learners, regardless of delivery systems or location.

Category 3: Planning

Planning for an information literacy program:

- Articulates and develops mechanisms to implement and/or adapt components of the best practices listed in this document (as needed):
 - Mission
 - Goals & Objectives
 - Articulation with the Curriculum (program sequence)
 - Administration and Institutional Support
 - Collaboration
 - Pedagogy
 - Staffing
 - Outreach
 - Assessment
- Addresses current and anticipates future opportunities and challenges;
- Is tied to library and institutional information technology planning and budgeting cycles;

- Incorporates findings from [environmental scans](#);
- Accommodates the level of the [program](#), department, and institution;
- Addresses and prioritizes human, technological and financial resources (both current and projected), taking into account administrative and institutional support;
- Includes a program for training and development, see [Category 8: Staffing](#).

Category 4: Administrative and Institutional Support

Administration within an institution:

- Assigns information literacy [leadership](#) and responsibilities;
- Incorporates information literacy in the institution's mission, strategic plan, policies, and procedures;
- Provides funding to establish and ensure ongoing support for
 - Teaching facilities and resources
 - Appropriate staffing levels
 - Professional development opportunities
- Recognizes and encourages collaboration, see [Category 6: Collaboration](#);
- Communicates support for the program;
- [Rewards](#) achievement and participation in the information literacy program.

Category 5: Articulation (program sequence) with the Curriculum

Articulation with the curriculum for an information literacy program:

- Identifies the scope (i.e., depth and complexity) of competencies to be acquired on a disciplinary level as well as at the course level;
- Sequences and integrates competencies throughout a student's academic career, progressing in sophistication;
- Emphasizes student-centered learning, see [Category 7: Pedagogy](#);
- Is formalized and widely disseminated;
- Uses local [governance structures](#) to ensure institution-wide integration into academic or vocational programs;
- Specifies programs and courses charged with implementation.

Category 6: Collaboration

Collaboration among disciplinary faculty, librarians, and other program staff in an information literacy program:

- Fosters communication among disciplinary faculty, librarians, and other program staff;
- Focuses on enhancing student learning and skill development for lifelong learning;
- Communicates effectively with faculty to gain support for the program within the academic community;

- Aligns information literacy with disciplinary content;
- Works within the context of the course content, and other learning experiences, to achieve information literacy outcomes;
- Takes place at the different stages: planning, delivery, assessment of student learning, and evaluation and refinement of the program.

Category 7: Pedagogy

Pedagogy for an information literacy program:

- Supports diverse approaches to teaching;
- Is suitable to the type of instruction (e.g. one-shot, dedicated course);
- Takes into account diverse learning styles;
- Incorporates relevant information technology and other [media resources](#);
- Advances learning through collaborative and experiential-learning activities;
- Promotes critical thinking, reflection, and recursive learning;
- Builds on students' existing knowledge and course assignments;
- Contextualizes information literacy within ongoing coursework appropriate to the academic program and course level.

Category 8: Staffing

Staff for an information literacy program:

- Includes librarians, library staff, administrators, program coordinators, as well as disciplinary faculty, graphic designers, teaching/learning specialists, and other program staff as needed;
- Endeavors to work collaboratively with others;
- Are knowledgeable in instruction/teaching, curriculum development and assessment of student learning and garner expertise in developing, coordinating, implementing, and evaluating information literacy programs;
- Exemplify and advocate for information literacy and lifelong learning;
- Engage in professional development and training;
- Are adequate in number to support the program's mission and workload;
- Receive regular evaluations about the quality of their contributions to the program.

Category 9: Outreach

Outreach activities for an information literacy program:

- Clearly defines and describes the program and its value to targeted audiences;
- Creates marketing and publicity materials for distribution;
- Identifies relevant groups amount stakeholders and support groups;
- Utilizes a variety of communication methods including [formal and informal](#) networks and media channels;

- Provides, in collaboration with campus professional development, workshops and programs that relate to information literacy;
- Contributes to information literacy's advancement by sharing information, methods, and plans with peers at other institutions and through information literacy professional organizations and conferences;
- Is the responsibility of all members of the institution, not simply the librarians'.

Category 10: Assessment/Evaluation

[Assessment/evaluation](#) of information literacy includes program performance and [student outcomes](#).

Program evaluation:

- Develops a process for program planning and evaluation;
- Measures the progress of meeting the program's goals and objectives, see [Category 2: Goals and Objectives](#);
- Integrates with course and curriculum assessment, institutional evaluations and regional/professional accreditation initiatives;
- Utilizes appropriate assessment/evaluation method for relevant purposes, for example: [formative and summative](#) and/or short-term and longitudinal;

Student outcomes:

- Acknowledge differences in learning and teaching styles in the outcome measures;
- Employ a variety of outcome measures, for example: portfolio assessment, oral defense, quizzes, essays, direct observation, anecdotal, peer and self review, and experience;
- Focus on student performance, knowledge acquisition, and attitude appraisal;
- Assess the students' [process and product](#);
- Include student-, peer-, and self-evaluation;