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Lifelong Information Literacy In Southern California

By Amy Wallace

Guest columnist Amy Wallace highlights collaborative information literacy initiatives of four higher education institutions in Southern California. Librarians from these institutions serve on an advisory board called LLI (Lifelong Information Literacy) along with representatives from other California libraries including academic, school, public, and special libraries. LLI members investigate information literacy instruction efforts across educational levels in California in an effort to create models of "lifelong sequential information literacy instruction" (Grassian, 2007). A future College Connection column will discuss LLI in more detail. – Abby Kasowitz–Scheer

Introduction

Southern California libraries and librarians have long been committed to information literacy and library instruction. Some librarians are members of the Southern California Instruction Librarians (SCIL), an interest group of California Academic and Research Libraries (CARL), an ACRL state chapter. SCIL has served as the local host for both ACRL's 2007 Institute for Information Literacy and the 2007 LOEX Conference. SCIL is open to all librarians, but tends to attract academic librarians and offer academic-oriented programs. Other librarians are members of the California Library Association (CLA), which hosts multiple sessions at their annual conference on issues related to information literacy and library instruction. Like SCIL, CLA is open to all, but tends to attract more public and school librarians. Still more librarians are not part of any group, yet diligently work to improve information literacy in their communities, at their schools, and on their campuses.

In 2004, Esther Grassian (Interim Head of College Library at UCLA) pulled together an advisory board of California librarians from state, public university, private college, community college, school, special, and public libraries who were interested in discussing and investigating information literacy instruction across all levels in the state. The advisory board named the group LLI (Lifelong Information Literacy) and developed the group's mission: "to investigate information literacy definitions, standards and instruction in California" (Grassian, 2007). In 2006, Grassian received a grant to examine information literacy efforts across institutions and organizations. The group has since conducted a survey

of information literacy in California libraries, which yielded 247 usable responses from university, college, community college, public, school, and special libraries. The LILi advisory board plans to apply for additional grant funding to conduct another survey that will attract more respondents. The group has presented the results of its survey in a number of venues, including its website (<http://www.library.ucla.edu/college/lili/liliprojects.htm>), the 2007 LOEX Conference, and articles. A reprise of the 2007 LOEX presentation was offered in Second Life in September.

LILi is committed to “using the results of the investigation to craft effective models of lifelong, sequential information literacy instruction that consider previous knowledge, abilities, specific tasks and needs, evolving technology, future opportunities, and on-going collaborations among all those committed to information literacy in California” (Grassian, 2007). As a result, many board members are involved in interesting information literacy collaborations. This article describes collaborative initiatives coordinated by members at California State University–Channel Islands, California State University–Los Angeles, University of California–Irvine, and University of California–Los Angeles.

California State University, Channel Islands

In 2004, California State University, Channel Islands (CSUCI) hosted an Information Literacy Summit for Ventura County in order to gauge information literacy expectations, goals, and activities of various educational institutions in the region, including K–12 schools and higher education institutions. Over fifty teachers, librarians, and administrators from eleven educational institutions attended the event. The summit addressed four goals:

- Examine the state of information literacy
- Identify information literacy gaps within and across educational institutions
- Identify potential information literacy collaborations within and across educational institutions
- Identify needed educational opportunities in the area of information literacy for educational institutions in Ventura County

The summit began with two speakers: one provided an overview of information literacy, and the other stressed the importance of schools, community colleges, and universities working together to enhance information literacy in the county. A panel of four speakers addressed the state of information literacy at panel members’ institutions, assumptions and research about incoming students’ skills and experiences, and

expectations of graduates of their educational institutions. The agenda concluded with three group activities: the first asked cross-institutional groups to discuss and share any gaps between the information literacy skills high school graduates possess and those expected of first year college students; the second asked the same groups to discuss and share current information literacy efforts, activities, and programs; and the third asked all participants to suggest solutions for closing the gaps, collaborations, and educational opportunities.

By the end of the day, the summit provided a very clear picture of the state of information literacy in Ventura County. The discussion showed that similar information literacy expectations and goals existed at every educational level, and that everyone thought it was someone else's responsibility to produce information literate students. As a result, all agreed that advancing information literacy in the county would need to be a shared responsibility. The tricky part came when discussing which level (elementary school, middle school, high school, community college, or university) should take on which skills and trying to determine what level of information literacy skills should be mastered by when. The group was unable to resolve these larger questions during the summit, but participants identified a number of potential collaborations and educational opportunities to facilitate positive change.

The CSUCI library has been fortunate to be involved in several of the partnerships generated by the summit. CSUCI librarians have hosted fieldtrips and co-instructed information literacy sessions for local high school students. They have visited a number of local schools and libraries to explore services and collections. They have co-presented with high school librarians at the Ventura County School Library Conference, which annually brings together over 80 school librarians from Ventura and surrounding counties. They have worked with high school librarians to develop mini-summits and in-services. These events have varied in size, scope, and impact. One event looked at ways for selected high school teachers to better incorporate information literacy into their research assignments, while another provided an entire high school teaching faculty with an information literacy overview and activity ideas. In addition, the relationships established at the summit have helped to place library school interns and future teachers interested in learning more about information literacy. One program pairs undergraduate students in the Liberal Studies Capstone: Information Literacy class with elementary, middle, and high school mentors. For their final project, these students are required to develop an information literacy portfolio, including a philosophy statement, exploratory essay, concept maps, reflections, school librarian interview, annotated bibliography, and five lesson plans. Each term, the students have commented on how valuable it

is to be able to compare theories from the classroom with the real practice in the field.

California State University, Los Angeles

California State University, Los Angeles, is a Hispanic Serving Institution boasting a substantial first-generation student body. Latino college students tend to be underserved and understudied. Latinos are also under-enrolled relative to their emerging status as the nation's dominant minority. There are serious implications for Latino students when considering their habits of research and information literacy, since the development of research skills is increasingly mediated by technology, while many Latino youth make up a community already described as information poor.

Two CSULA studies articulating the role of the Library in the lives of Latino students hope to shed some light on these students' perceptions of and use of the academic library as it affects their academic performance. Catherine Haras (Information Literacy Coordinator) and Dr. Edward Lopez (Department of Child and Family Studies) conducted a one-year pilot in 2005 in preparation for a larger investigation assessing the mathematics, science, and information literacy development on retention levels of 105 freshman Latino students attending CSULA. In 2007, Haras and Lopez received a prestigious Spencer Foundation grant repeating the study, this time with Latino/a students at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles. Garfield High School was chosen since it is a major feeder school for the University, and because it features a dynamic Hispanic population (as reflected in the movie *Stand and Deliver*). These two studies hypothesize that information behaviors and knowledge may affect the overall performance and school retention of these students. Three key questions include:

- * Are Latino students comfortable using libraries?
- * If so, what kind of library do they use?
- * What do they do when they visit a library?

The studies also hope to discover how Latinos' cultural experiences and home lives serve as antecedents to these students' information literacy skills and habits of information seeking.

University of California, Irvine

The community outreach programs of the University of California, Irvine (UCI) Libraries' Department of Education and Outreach (E & O) focus on students' sequential learning at appropriate levels of information literacy.

They provide a variety of avenues and activities for varying styles and positive career outcomes. The E&O department is led by Cathy Palmer, and the Community Outreach Librarian is Melanie Sellar.

According to Sellar, the SPIRIT (School Partnerships in Research and Information Technology) program strives to teach information literacy skills and shares these three main goals:

- Teaching information literacy and lifelong learning skills to students and teachers, increasing their understanding and confidence in their ability to locate and use information appropriately
- Facilitating access to and use of scholarly electronic resources
- Assisting students to become eligible and competitive to enroll at the University of California, to thrive academically while there, and to graduate

These goals are addressed through the two main programs, Teacher Information Literacy Institutes (TILI) and the “Day at College” Program. The TILI program delivers information literacy institutes to Compton Unified School District and other local area K–12 teachers. In 2006–07, more than 70 elementary, middle and high school teachers participated in this program, totaling more than 800 hours of professional development. Students participate in library research sessions at UCI that support subjects taught in the curriculum and that emphasize information literacy skills. These sessions introduce students to research methods in a university environment and are followed by an experiential learning activity complementing the morning library instruction.



Pauline Manaka, Public Services Liaison to Model United Nations (MUN), will begin a smaller-scale information literacy initiative in Fall 2007 on behalf of the UCI Libraries. The initiative is supported by the office of the Dean of Social Sciences. Manaka plans to adopt some of the IL techniques described above. The most important goal of this initiative is to empower UCI college student organizers and high school teachers to incorporate information literacy concepts in conducting research for their essay writing competitions. More information on this project can be found on their website at <http://www.ucimun.net>.

University of California, Los Angeles

The UCLA College Library offers free library cards to Advanced Placement High School (APHS) students and to community college students who have signed up for the Transfer Alliance Program (TAP). These programs have been in place for about 30 years and each has a number of rules and regulations. For many pre-Web years, a librarian held an annual mandatory session in the College Library to tell librarians and school administrators about these rules and regulations.

Several years ago, Esther Grassian turned these sessions into free interactive workshops, designed to help high school and community college librarians help their instructors and students. She has offered a number of different workshops over the years, including:

- Strengthening Research Skills (Fall 2004)
<http://www.slideshare.net/estherg/strengthening-research-skills/>

This session introduced databases that were new at the time, as well as Basic Research Databases (<http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/research/databases.htm>), a web page developed by a library school intern. This page is a table with brief descriptions and links to similar licensed databases available for Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) schools, public libraries, and the UCLA Library. The session also introduced two freely available information literacy tutorials created by UCLA, Road to Research (<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/library/>), a general information literacy tutorial which includes some Flash movies (created using Camtasia Studio), and Bruin Success With Less Stress (<http://www.library.ucla.edu/bruinsuccess/>), on plagiarism and documentation. The session drew 19 attendees.

- Why Use Anything But Google? Information Literacy for Teachers/Faculty (Fall 2005)

<http://www.slideshare.net/estherg/why-use-anything-but-google-information-literacy-for-teachersfaculty/>

This session was adapted from an ACRL pre-conference that Grassian had offered on reviewing and enhancing college-level syllabi with information literacy suggestions and ideas. She worked with a high school librarian to do the same for a high school geography course. The session attracted 32 attendees, who completed exercises designed to incorporate information literacy concepts and activities into their syllabi.

- Super Googling, Plagiarism and More...Getting Parent/Teacher Support (Fall 2006)

<http://www.slideshare.net/estherg/super-googling-plagiarism-more-getting-parentteacher-support/>

This session was modeled on a Super-Googling workshop that Grassian provided to parents of UCLA students. The session attracted 40 attendees, and focused on plagiarism avoidance exercises. In addition, the session introduced UCLA's online help materials, including a new Assignment Calculator (<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/library/modules/freecalc/index.php>), adapted from the University of Minnesota's open source interactive help guide (<http://www.lib.umn.edu/help/calculator/>).

Each of these annual sessions lasts two hours, including a half hour for refreshments before the workshop, provided by the UCLA College Library. The workshop is publicized in May or June each year via email to high school and community college librarians in the Los Angeles area, and participants may register up to a week in advance of the program. The only cost to individuals is an \$8 parking fee.

The workshops have been extremely well received, and have generated additional information literacy opportunities with Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). One attendee, a Library Media Teacher (LMT) from LAUSD, liked the workshop so much that he convinced his district to invite Grassian to speak at one of their day-long LMT Institutes. As a result, Grassian presented two back-to-back sessions titled, "The 'P' Word Can Hurt You! Plagiarism Tips and Tricks," at their June 1, 2007 Institute. The sessions drew about 85 LMTs and focused on practical exercises that could be used with K-12 students (<http://www.slideshare.net/estherg/the-p-word-can-hurt-you->

plagiarism-tips-tricks/). The LMT Institute organizers have also expressed interest in having Grassian return to talk with them about LILi. Grassian hopes these efforts will foster additional collaborations between UCLA and LAUSD on information literacy. She had no idea that LAUSD even offered these sorts of Institutes to their LMTs, which illustrates how you can plant seeds and have small impacts that can grow into larger ones.

References

Grassian, E. (2007). LILi (Lifelong Information Literacy): About. Retrieved October 11, 2007, from <http://www.library.ucla.edu/college/lili/liliabout.htm>

For More Information

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Do you have ideas for future College Connection columns? Want to know more about the higher education component of S.O.S.? We are currently requesting contributions in the way of teaching ideas, lesson plans, and materials for the college level database. Contact Abby Kasowitz-Scheer at askasowi@syr.edu or 315-443-1943.