

The Institute for Information Literacy

Formal training is a critical need

by Cerise Oberman

The Institute for Information Literacy (IIL),¹ formerly known as the National Information Literacy Institute, is dedicated to playing a leadership role in assisting individuals and institutions in integrating information literacy throughout the full spectrum of the education process. The impetus for this initiative comes at a time when information literacy is being broadly recognized outside of librarianship as a critical skill for students of all ages.

In recent years there is evidence that higher education in particular has begun to understand the role of information in our society and the need to prepare students to be information literate. For instance, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools requires that institutions seeking accreditation "... describe and document the strategies and activities used to provide an effective program of bibliographic instruction and information literacy."²

A building block

An array of state university systems is incorporating information literacy competencies into curriculum requirements.³ The Teaching, Learning, and Technology Roundtable Project, previously a project of the American Association of Higher Education and now a separate non-profit organization, identifies information literacy as a building block for constructing a meaningful institutional vision for improving teaching and learning through technology.⁴ The time is right for the establishment of the Institute for Information Literacy.

Within librarianship, the demand for information literacy programs and instruction librarians has grown exponentially over the last 25 years. However, despite the incorporation of instruction programs as a mainstream activity in academic libraries, there are still few signs that information literacy is recognized as a core component of librarianship. Rather, the concepts of information literacy and its pedagogy have largely been self-taught, nurtured by colleagues, or learned through attendance at a wide variety of professional conferences and programs.

The relative absence of formal opportunities for training and education in information literacy is particularly ironic at a time when the "teaching-library" seems to be finally emerging as a model that makes sense in our changing environment.⁵ Now, more than ever, with the interest of higher education focused on information literacy, there is a need for educational opportunities for librarians, but also for educational administrators and faculty.

Librarians and educators from primary schools to universities need to establish a regular and on-going dialogue about information literacy. The recent publication of the American Association of School Librarians standards for information literacy⁶ and the ACRL Instruction Section's *Model Statement of Objectives*, which are currently under revision,⁷ form a common ground. Add to this the public library sector, with its new attention to providing Internet instruction, and we

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have a broad coalition of interest committed to information literacy.

IIL's beginnings

IIL was first proposed at the annual LOEX Conference in May 1997.⁸ The response was overwhelming. A month later, ACRL embraced the idea and established an advisory group⁹ to assist moving the institute from theory to reality. From the earliest discussions of the institute there was a commitment to reach out and serve all types of librarianship. The Advisory Group sponsored an Invitational Planning Day at ALA's Midwinter Meeting in 1998.

Twenty-five individuals, including librarians from academic, school and public venues, provosts and school system administrators, library school faculty, practicing instruction librarians, and library directors gathered on January 9, 1998, in New Orleans to discuss and respond to five discussion issues:

- 1) the problems and challenges identified by the IIL Advisory Group;
- 2) the concepts of information literacy;
- 3) the ideas for an intensive immersion program;
- 4) the characteristics of an IIL "graduate"; and
- 5) ideas for other types of programs that IIL could offer.

The feedback from this day was used to shape the programmatic initiatives that IIL would undertake.

Over the past year, the institute has taken shape. The most distinctive aspect is its commitment to be inclusive of all of librarianship; that is why the mission includes "the full spectrum of the education process." Its goals are broad-based, as well:

- prepare librarians to become effective teachers of information literacy programs;

- support librarians and other educators and administrators in playing leadership roles in the development and implementation of information literacy programs;

- forge new relationships throughout the educational community to work toward information literacy curriculum development; and

- offer opportunities for growth and development in the changing field of information literacy.

Looking ahead

IIL has identified four programmatic initiatives for the years 1998-2000:

- **Immersion Program '99.** This is IIL's core program. The Immersion Program will provide four-and-a-half days of intensive training and education for instruction librarians. It will offer two tracks: one for new librarians and librarians new to teaching and the other for mid-career instruction librarians who will assume a leadership role in information literacy in their institutes.

This first Immersion Program will target academic librarians, but is open to anyone. Participation will be limited to 80; ten ACRL scholarships will be available. A faculty of nationally recognized librarians and scholars is developing the curriculum and will be teaching the program.¹⁰ It is scheduled for July 23-28, 1999, at Plattsburgh State University of New York. (Application information is available via the IIL Web site: <http://www.ala.org/acrl/nili/nilihp.html>.)

Long term, the IIL Immersion Program will be offered at different locations minimally once a year. Once the IIL Immersion Program National Faculty is expanded, it is expected that the Immersion Program will be available upon request from local or state professional organizations, consortia of libraries, etc. The intention is that the Immersion Program will be responsive, mobile, and cost effective for all librarians interested in participating.

- **Institutional Strategies: Best Practices and Assessment.** This program is directed at assisting individual institutions in developing strategies for creating and implementing effective information literacy programs. IIL is seeking grant funds to: 1) identify criteria for assessing information literacy programs, 2) identify model programs that illustrate these criteria, and 3) disseminate information about

the criteria and models to the profession and higher education broadly.

• **Community Partnerships.** Broadening the dialogue on information literacy across the entire educational spectrum is critical. This initiative will bring together librarians from K-12, higher education, and public special libraries to discuss community-based information literacy programs. This initiative will begin to take shape with a discussion session planned for ALA Midwinter 1999.

• **Web Site.** IIL has a Web site. It presently provides basic information on the institute, a brief history, and its mission and goals. The Web site will grow and develop over time to provide electronic links to a wide variety of information literacy issues including best practices, assessment, and links to other information literacy resources. It will also serve as the main vehicle for announcing IIL programs: <http://www.ala.org/acrl/nili/nilih.html>.

IIL is in its infancy. The general direction has been set, but as the institute develops it will require substantive input and advice from the very individuals it hopes to serve: instruction librarians from all sectors of the educational experience, administrators from higher education, school, and public libraries, and faculty. The time is right for the establishment of the Institute for Information Literacy.

Notes

1. The National Information Literacy Institute has been renamed the Institute for Information Literacy to distinguish the Institute from the National Forum on Information Literacy. The National Forum has a different but equally important mission: it is a coalition of education associations outside of librarianship that focuses national attention on the importance of information literacy to individuals, the economy, and an informed citizenry. Patricia Breivik, dean of Wayne State University Libraries, has been the moving force behind the National Forum.

2. Middle States Association of College and Schools, *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Standards for Accreditation*. Philadelphia: Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 1994.

3. Cerise Oberman, Bonnie Gratch Lindauer, and Betsy Wilson, "Integrating Information Literacy into the Curriculum," *C&RL News* 59(May 1998): 347-352.

4. For information on the Teaching, Learning and Technology Roundtable Project see Steven W. Gilbert, "Teaching, Learning, and Technology—The Need for Campuswide Planning and Faculty Support Services," *Change* (March/April 1995): 47-52 and Steven W. Gilbert and Anita L. Antico, *Lever for Change Workbook*, version 1.0. American Association for Higher Education, 1966.

5. For discussion of the "teaching-library" see A. E. Guskin, Carla J. Stoffle, and Joseph A. Boisse, "The Academic Library as a Teaching Library: A Role for the 1980's." *Library Trends* 28 (1979): 281-296 and Richard H. Werking, "The Library and the College: Some Programs of Library Instruction." *ERIC Document ED127 917*, 1976.

6. See the American Association of School Librarians, "Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning," 1998.

7. See ACRL/Instruction Section Web Site *Model Statement of Objectives*; Debbie Tenofsky, chair, www.lib.utexas.edu/is/committee/minutes/mso1.1988.html.

8. Cerise Oberman, "Why We Need a National Information Literacy Institute," *Proceedings of the 25th Annual National LOEX Library Instruction Conference, May 8-10, 1997*, ed. Linda Shirato (forthcoming).

9. The ACRL Institute for Information Literacy Advisory Group's members are Cerise Oberman, chair (Plattsburgh State University of New York), Lou Albert, vice-chancellor of Education Services (San-Jose Evergreen Community College District), Lori Arp (University of Boulder), Esther Grassian (University of California at Los Angeles), Thomas Kirk (Earlham College), Loanne Snavely, Instruction Section representative (Pennsylvania State University), Julie Todaro (Austin Community College/Rio Grande), Mitch Stepanovich, Library Instruction Round Table representative (University of Texas at Austin), Betsy Wilson (University of Washington), Mary Ellen Davis (ACRL staff), and Shelley Phipps and Karen Williams, facilitators (University of Arizona).

10. The IIL Faculty are Mary Jane Petrowski, lead faculty member (Colgate University), Eugene Engeldinger (Carthage College), Randy Hensley (University of Hawaii), Debra Gilchrist (Pierce College), Joan Kaplowitz (University of California at Los Angeles), and Sharon Mader (Christian Brothers University). ■

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