

The full presentation titled “**Where Have You Been? Where Are You Going? Assessing Student Information Skills**” is available at <http://library.stmarytx.edu/acadlib/infocomp/TLAWhereHaveYouBeen.pdf>

Results of the Information Competency Task Force
Research Practices Survey of St. Mary’s University Students

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Executive Summary

Information competency (also called “information literacy” or “information fluency”) lies at the heart of lifelong learning. It enables students to take control of their information needs by becoming more independent, assuming personal control of their learning, and becoming aware of effective processes for finding, analyzing, and using information. The Louis J. Blume Library shares the responsibility for developing information competent students with the university’s schools, departments, and programs by integrating information competency throughout the curriculum with the active participation of the community.

During the first several weeks of the Fall 2007 Semester, the Research Practices Survey was administered to 544 incoming freshmen and 111 undergraduate students enrolled in Advanced Composition courses by faculty from the Louis J. Blume Library.

Findings of the study include:

- There was no statistically significant difference between our Advanced Composition students and new incoming students on evaluation ability measures.
- On other measures of information literacy—source identification and documentation ability, and searching ability—as well as overall information literacy ability measures, there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Both groups averaged the lowest scores in their searching ability.
- Both upperclass students and incoming students averaged below 50% on a combined index of information literacy variables.
- 3% of new students and 4% of upperclass students indicated they enjoy research “very much,” while 28% of new students and 36% of upperclass students indicated they enjoy research “very little.”
- During the previous academic year, 44% of ND0101 students indicated that five or more of their school projects required at least three documented outside sources, while only 36% of the Advanced Composition students indicated that they had such a requirement in five or more of their school projects during the same time period.
- Of the ND0101 students, 48% indicated they had never talked with a librarian about their research project during the past academic year, compared with 60% of the Advanced Composition students.
- Fewer Advanced Composition students (38%) than ND0101 students (42%) indicated they had used subscription databases for their research in the past academic year, even though it is nearly impossible to gain access to articles from library periodicals, especially if the only access to these subscription sources is online, without using these tools.
- When asked which search statement among several would retrieve the most results, 51% of ND0101 students and 60% of EN3300 students incorrectly indicated “movies AND films”

would retrieve the most results. 19% of the ND0101 students and 14% of the Advanced Composition students admitted they did not know which option would retrieve the most results.

- The survey listed several citations and students were asked to identify the type of source it was, whether an entire book, a journal article, or a portion of a book. 59% of the ND0101 students and 57% of the Advanced Composition students incorrectly identified the journal article citation as a portion of a book. Given the citation for an entire book, both groups did somewhat better, but 41% of ND0101 students and 27% of Advanced Composition students mis-identified this citation. In the case of a book chapter, 45% of the ND0101 students, and 41% of the Advanced Composition students identified it incorrectly, saying it was a journal article.
- When asked which among several options were likely to yield the most comprehensive list of relevant scholarly articles for a research project, 33% of ND0101 students correctly indicated “searching an electronic index or database in a specific academic field (History, Biology, Music, etc.)” 31% of the ND0101 students indicated that “all of the above are equally effective” methods, including “using a general Internet search like Google or Yahoo,” and “searching the library catalog.” Among the Advanced Composition students, 50% selected the most desired response, while 23% selected the “all of the above” response and 14% selected “searching the library catalog.” Of the ND0101 students, 12% selected the “don’t know” response, while 6% of the Advanced Composition students did so.
- 32% of ND0101 students correctly identified a peer-reviewed journal as publishing “articles that have been approved by other scholars” but a plurality (34%) selected “don’t know” for their response. 19% of the ND0101 students selected “a journal that includes only articles written collaboratively by peers” in response to this question. As might be expected, the Advanced Composition students fared better on this item. 40% selected the most desired response, but 29% selected “don’t know” while 18% selected “a journal that publishes reviews of other articles.”
- When asked for the definition of a “citation” in a scholarly article or research paper, the Advanced Composition students responded better than the ND0101 students: 54% correct for the former, 38% correct for the latter. A related question asked when a citation is not required, and, again, the more advanced students scored better: 72% correct versus 55%. It should be noted, however, that the percentages of students in both groups which answered these questions incorrectly was still significant, given the importance of this concept.

A few tangible steps that can be taken:

1. Include classroom faculty from each of the three schools where our undergraduate students are located on the Information Competency Task Force. Given the distribution of our students, this might include one faculty from the BGSB, one from SET, and two from HSS. Administrative support for faculty involvement in the ICTF is needed.
2. Classroom faculty and librarians need to collaborate prior to the semester’s beginning, when learning outcomes and course activities are being established. Librarians and teaching faculty need to cooperate in developing assignments that challenge students to gain skills in acquiring information, but also requires students to critically analyze and synthesize information.
3. Librarians, classroom faculty, department chairs, and deans need to work together to develop a vertically-integrated plan that maps desired information literacy learning outcomes to appropriate course levels within each major. Currently, students’ exposure to research methods instruction is “hit and miss” so that some students in a major are exposed to similar research topics more than once while other students never receive any formal instruction.