Information Literacy Instruction Plan for Gonzaga University

**Gonzaga’s Mission Statement**

Information literacy is one of those rare skills so foundational that it can be found in every area of human experience and, within the academy, finds itself central to every discipline. Like reading, handling information is a basic building block of successful life at the university and beyond. Far from being a discrete set of skills that can be sidelined, information literacy is fully integrated into our moment by moment experience. By recognizing the centrality of IL and preparing ourselves and our students to use best practices and thoughtful ways of proceeding, we embody and enable Gonzaga University’s Jesuit mission of bringing forward men and women for (with) others.

**Definitions**

IL = information literacy

ACRL = Association of College and Research Libraries a sub division of the American Library Association, librarian’s main professional organization.

**Goals and Objectives**

Since 2005, Foley Center Library’s assessment group has written learning outcome goals for instruction and the assessment projects we have developed to examine our success in achieving these goals have then contributed to the university’s assessment projects. Below are goals from 2005:

Students will learn how to use the library's resources effectively:
- a) use background materials effectively to define and refine their topics
- b) use databases specific to the discipline area studied
- c) search library catalogs effectively
- d) cite sources using RefWorks
- e) use InterLibrary Loan and ILLiad as needed to obtain resources from other libraries

And learning outcome goals for Pathways in 2007:

Students in Pathways classes successfully completed the following learning objectives which were emphasized during the library instruction session with their class:
- a) work collaboratively in one of 3 groups on a class project
- b) produce a video which shows evidence of understanding about a library service
- c) develop a wiki entry on some aspect of library services
- d) research and summarize an article on a social justice issue which concerns libraries

Pathways learning outcome goals for 2011-2012:

Students will demonstrate the ability to:
- a) make conceptual connections between information problems and social justice issues
- b) search a library database to find a full text article that addresses an information problem and its connection to a social justice issue
- c) accurately and effectively re-interpret the full text article into both a summative paragraph and a story in comic strip/cartoon format with both faithfully characterizing the connection between the information problem and the social justice issue

Learning outcome goals for Religion:

Students in Religion classes are able to successfully address the following student learning objectives which are emphasized in their library instruction session:
- a) find current and relevant sources for their topics
- b) use databases effectively to locate different types of sources: books, magazines, newspapers and journal articles
- c) use suggested library resources effectively
- d) select appropriate sources from the Internet and use them effectively
- e) use an appropriate citation format to cite their sources

Below is the central principle that guides our work and informs our instruction practices:
After participation in information literacy instruction students will be better prepared to find, evaluate, use and produce information in a variety of formats with a view to the practical, scholarly and ethical handling of information so that they develop as strong members of the academy and informed thinkers for life as citizens of the world.

All this is not to say that as instructors we do not incorporate many goals in our teaching experiences. While this is the overarching goal of our program, instructors create goals class by class and instruction opportunity to opportunity.

Information literacy instruction is based on the five standards of ACR’s Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. In these standards, Gonzaga’s librarian instructors find professional connection to the special knowledge of our field and the work of our peers. Here is the foundation and framework that informs our daily tasks of collaboration, mentoring, creating curricula, teaching, assessing.

Information literacy instruction at Gonzaga can be seen through a number of useful paradigms and some are below, the information in them arranged to give the interested reader a few ways of viewing our work.

Year in school/Level in Scaffolded Learning

One way we structure our instruction program is by level of researcher experience. We have a loosely agreed upon set of curricula for each of the following: beginning university researcher/entry to the major researcher/senior level researcher/post-grad and doctoral researcher. While these points of instruction support our central IL learning outcome goal, the potential for variety in what is taught and when and how, remains immense. Because of the partner relationships we maintain with content professors across the university and the provision of our instruction in the integrated context of subject learning and real life contexts, there will always be flexibility in the structure of each learning encounter.

**Year one - Research skills:** These are the types of topics we cover in first year classes. (The IL standard from which it draws its foundation is indicated to the right.)

- Types of information (1)
- Construct of information (1)
- Impacts of format (1)
- Issues of access to information (1)
- Purpose, audience and cost of information creation and retrieval (1 and 5)
- Exploration of general resources (1)
- Finding the words of research (usually keywords) and build a search (2)
- Embrace the efficacy and alacrity of vetted resources and a preference for them over the web when tasked with scholarly research (2)
- Introduction to information ethics and scholarly (and otherwise) protocols of information use including citation construction (2 and 5)
- Pause for reflection allowing for the possibility that information encountered may change your mind as well as the course of further research (3)
- Use agreed upon criteria, such as reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, point of view, to evaluate a source for appropriateness (3)
- Use research artifacts to identify and explain various points of view (3)
- Creation of new product (4)
Consider the social justice connection to information access (5)

Introduce the mechanisms for using Gonzaga specific resources – username/passwords, etc. (5)

**Years two and three** – Entry to the major level researcher: (Repetition of previously taught concepts is not uncommon.)

How do I focus my research questions? Am I examining something too small or too big? Does my thesis need revision? (This is actually a cycle of thinking that runs the course of the investigation and writing process.) (1)

Discipline specific ways of organizing information (1)

Enumerate skills and strategies, demonstrate methods and styles and “run alongside” during the use of content research resources (1)

Primary and secondary resources (1)

Access materials – Interlibrary Loan, etc. (1)

Controlled vocabulary, subject headings and descriptors, using a thesaurus in a database, proper words protocols within the discipline (2)

Deepen skills in format evaluation and usage (2)

Skills expand in the use and creation of bibliographic information and citation management tools (2)

Increase sophistication in understanding information in context (3)

Evaluation of sources and information (3)

Able to incorporate more complex ways of telling their story – media literacy (4)

More understanding of legality and ethical constraints in information use – now also in the context of profession (5)

Familiarizing students with the department specific protocols used in research and information (5)

**Year four** – Senior level researcher: Depending on the department, students may have missed the interim instruction from their second or third year. Therefore, capstone or senior thesis seminar students would benefit from “entry to the major” instruction as well as the more senior points of instruction stated below. Ideally students are strong researchers by this time in their university career, and the IL instructor is present to support, re-teach forgotten or unused skills and present new insights that refine the senior researcher’s processes.

Show excellence in developing research questions, strategizing a research plan and selecting appropriate potential sources/locations of information and the type of investigative method best suited for the query (1, 2)

Easily moves between types and sources of information (media and internet sources as well as the materials of the profession and those of the university) identifying and evaluating them for appropriateness (1, 2)

Is undeterred by the seeming unavailability of information and can collaborate with information and content specialists to locate and retrieve needed resources (1)

Constantly in a state of evaluating thesis and research so that its evolution is continual (1, 2)

High level of expertise in using discipline specific resources, e.g. the use of Boolean operators, truncation and proximity searches (2)

Uses information to enrich their path into the profession (3)

Can see information in the light of their professional standards and ethics (3)
Does not fall subject to manipulation, deception or false arguments (1, 3)

Efficiently mines information for data with which to construct new knowledge (3)

Incorporates new and prior knowledge to create a product or performance (4)

Can communicate their ideas effectively to others using a variety of methods, mediums, formats, technologies (4)

Can think about at a professional level and incorporate into work, the issues of:

Privacy
Censorship
Freedom of speech
Intellectual property
Copyright
Fair use
Understanding information in context
Plagiarism
Human subject ethics (5)

Post-grad and doctoral researcher. It is the work of the information literacy instructor to create learning environments that facilitate post-grad and doctoral researchers meeting the highest level of competency as quickly as possible. Many of our students have been out of a classroom environment for a number of years and things have significantly changed in the availability and methods of accessing and creating information. As previously stated, our goal is not to teach students where to “click” online or in a database but to challenge and guide their development as ponderers, seekers, those who weigh, calculate, handle and finally create information. Depending on the ‘personality’ of the class and what they are getting from their content prof, we may be invited to engage students at any level previously enumerated. Because these students often have such a catch-up game going on when it comes to research skills, it has been a significant help to them to have our online course, Research Primer available through the School of Professional Studies.

Our primary instruction plan for CTED: 1002 Research Primer is:
Within Research Primer we present the substance of information literacy so that students begin to think, write and research like persons in their profession. We desire that our students identify research needs and assess the best place to fill those information needs. We want them to seek information in a variety of places and access it with skill. After evaluation of the information we hope they will choose those things that best fill their needs and use that information to accomplish their task at hand.

Module level goals are:

- Students will be able to effectively evaluate resources in order to determine quality.
- Students will understand the value of using quality resources for coursework and as a component of life-long learning.
- It is highly desired that students will value the importance of libraries as an information gateway.
- Students will approach research feeling competent in the necessary skills and thought processes.
- Student can identify appropriate library resources in their field.
- Students will learn to construct effectively-designed search strategies and use research tools such as thesauri/subject headings, limiters and Boolean operators.
- Student is able to retrieve information using a variety of methods (online, interlibrary loan, document delivery).
- Students are able to effectively manage references using RefWorks.

Disciplines / Program
While it may seem redundant to say so, almost all of our instruction is guided by the content teachers with whom we partner. Their learning outcomes are facilitated and enhanced by our work and our curriculum developed and the learning outcome goals we write for their instruction session are necessarily informed by their goals. Because of this, an information literacy librarian might teach a freshman level critical thinking class in the morning with the learning outcome goal of, “Working with a set of information reliability standards, students will evaluate different websites in order to select authoritative information.” Later that same day the IL prof might meet with a graduate seminar for
whom the learning outcome goal is, “Using self-generated word clouds, database thesauri and MeSH, students will “find the words” in order to construct an appropriate search in two different types of locations.”

**Type of Instruction**
Because of the variety of needs we meet within our instruction program, we find that all our work does not fall into one “way” of proceeding. Sometimes we are one-on-one with a student be that in our office, at the reference desk, online through chat reference, meeting with them after class or whatever. We do a great deal of classroom instruction and sometimes that is a virtual classroom. We create tutorials that students access without any direct interaction with us at all. In short, we have attempted to place students in harm’s way as much as possible when it comes to running into quality IL instruction.

**Location of Instruction**
It is our goal to operate our instruction program without borders, to be librarians on the loose. Professors often want to bring students into our building for class since it places them in proximity to many of the materials with which they are to become acquainted. Though most resources have slipped the surly bonds of the library through digitization and online access, it is still a pleasure for us to host student learning in our building. It is often an introduction to our facilities and services that students will access later. We teach in labs and classrooms across campus as well as online. Our distance instruction program takes IL to our student’s sometimes remote Canadian hometowns, too.

**Oversight of the plan/program**
An instruction coordinator librarian currently runs point for IL, managing incoming requests and keeping the calendar up to date. This is the person who is responsible for thinking about and facilitating discussions that range from instruction assessment, curriculum design, professional best practices in instruction, technologies related to instruction and how we most advantageously place ourselves in the wider community. It would be a misrepresentation to say that we are anything but a team as we move through our work. There are a number of experienced instructors and some newbies, but together we rally to the occasion and find strength in our diversity.

**Assessment**
We have been busy in the area of assessment for the last several years, and because of this we have many kinds of artifacts chronicling the journey. A number of these can be found on this page. A concise a statement about why we do assessment is captured in this sentence penned by Debra Gilchrist and Anne Zald in their article Instruction and Program Design through Assessment, which says, “The main purpose of academic assessment is to provide us with a collection of evidence on which we can base decisions that are designed to improve student learning.”


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