

# Characteristics of programs of information literacy that illustrate best practices: A guideline

by the ACRL Information Literacy Best Practices Committee

Approved by the ACRL Board of Directors, June 2003, revised January 2012

**T**he “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- and two-year institutions.<sup>1</sup>

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), “A Progress Report on Information Literacy: An Update on the American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report” (1998), 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 both present and represent 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. 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; this list is not

prescriptive. Rather, individuals are encouraged to consider their library and institutional contexts in establishing information literacy program goals and strategies while incorporating these characteristics.

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

## **Characteristics of programs of information literacy that illustrate best practices**

### *Category 1: Mission*

A mission statement for an information literacy program:

- includes a definition of information literacy;
- is consistent with the “ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education”;
- 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; and
- 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;
- 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; and
- take into account all learners served by or connected to the institution, 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 and objectives
  - administration and institutional support
  - articulation (program sequence) with the curriculum
  - collaboration
  - pedagogy
  - staffing
  - outreach
  - assessment/evaluation
- addresses current opportunities and challenges;
- is tied to library, institutional, and 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;
- encourages librarian, faculty, and administrator collaboration at the outset;
- enables librarians to take on leadership roles that will extend beyond the planning stages;
- includes a program for training and development, see Category 8: Staffing; and

- provides a timeline for systematic revision.

#### *Category 4: Administrative and institutional support*

Administration within an institution:

- assigns information literacy leadership and responsibilities to appropriate librarians, faculty, and staff;
- incorporates information literacy in the institution's mission, strategic plan, policies, and procedures;
- provides funding to establish and ensure ongoing support for:
  - teaching facilities
  - current and appropriate technologies
  - appropriate staffing levels
  - professional development opportunities
- recognizes and encourages collaboration, see Category 6: Collaboration;
- communicates support for the program; and
- rewards individual and institutional achievement and participation in the information literacy program.

#### *Category 5: Articulation (program sequence) within 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 learner-centered learning, see Category 7: Pedagogy;
- is formalized and widely disseminated;
- uses local governance structures to advocate for and ensure institution-wide integration into academic or vocational programs; and
- specifies programs and courses charged with implementing competencies.

#### *Category 6: Collaboration*

Collaboration in an information literacy program among disciplinary faculty, librarians, other instructors (e.g., teaching assistants), administrators, and other program staff:

- fosters communication among disciplinary faculty, librarians, other instructors (e.g., teaching assistants), administrators, and other staff within the institution;
- focuses on enhancing student learning and skill development for lifelong learning;
- communicates effectively with faculty, librarians, other instructors, administrators, and additional staff members 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; and
- takes place at 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 and learning;
- is suitable to the type of instruction (e.g., one-shot, dedicated course);
- takes into account diverse teaching and learning styles;
- incorporates and uses relevant and appropriate information technology and other media resources to support pedagogy;
- advances learning through collaborative and experiential-learning activities;
- promotes critical thinking, reflection, and recursive learning;
- builds on learners' existing knowledge, course assignments, and career goals;
- contextualizes information literacy within ongoing coursework appropriate to the academic program and course level; and
- prepares students for independent lifelong learning.

### *Category 8: Staffing*

Staff for an information literacy program:

- includes librarians, library staff, administrators, program coordinators, instructional technologists, as well as disciplinary faculty, graphic designers, teaching/learning specialists, and other program staff as needed;
- endeavors to work collaboratively with others and support each other's learning development;
- are knowledgeable in instruction/teaching, curriculum development, and assessment of student learning;
- garner expertise in developing, coordinating, implementing, evaluating, and revising 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; and
- receive regular evaluations about the quality of their contributions to the program and areas for improvement.

### *Category 9: Outreach*

Outreach activities for an information literacy program:

- clearly define and describe the program and its value to targeted audiences, including those within and beyond the specific institution;
- market the program through the creation and distribution of publicity materials;
- identify and reach out to relevant stakeholders and support groups both within and outside of the institution;
- use a variety of communication methods, including formal and informal networks and media channels;
- provide, in collaboration with other campus professional development staff, workshops and programs that relate to information literacy; and
- contribute to information literacy's advancement by sharing information, meth-

ods, and plans with peers and stakeholders both within and outside of the institution.

### *Category 10: Assessment/evaluation*

Assessment/evaluation of information literacy includes program performance and student outcomes.

#### **Program evaluation:**

- develops a process for program planning, evaluation, and revision;
- 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; and
- uses 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 pre- and post-instruction outcome measures; for example: needs assessment, pre-tests, post-tests, portfolio assessment, oral defense, quizzes, essays, direct observation, anecdotal, peer and self review, and experience;
- focus on learner performance, knowledge acquisition, and attitude appraisal;
- assess the learners' process and product; and
- include learner-, peer-, and self-evaluation.

#### **Document and revision 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 a final edition.

In 2008 members of the ACRL Information Literacy Best Practices Committee (ILBP) undertook a revision of the characteristics. 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 by sending the links to the original document and the proposed revisions to the ILL-L, COLLIB, and CJC electronic lists. After collecting the comments provided by ACRL members, the document was re-examined, and a new draft was created using the track changes feature, which allowed readers to look at proposed changes and the differences in meaning that would result from making those changes. The changes were then integrated into the original document and submitted to ACRL Executive Committee for approval.

#### Note

1. View the guideline online at [www.ala.org/acrl/standards/characteristics](http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/characteristics) for interactive annotations. *zz*

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