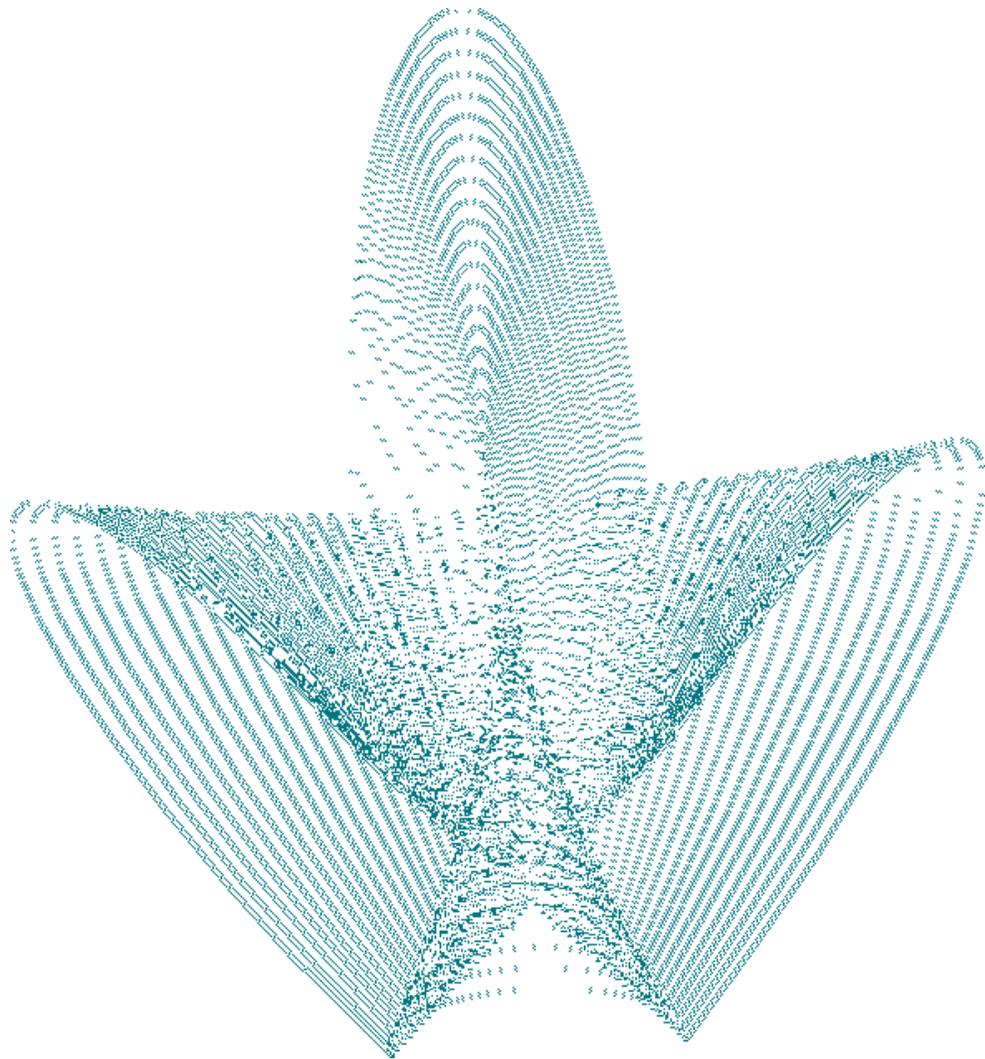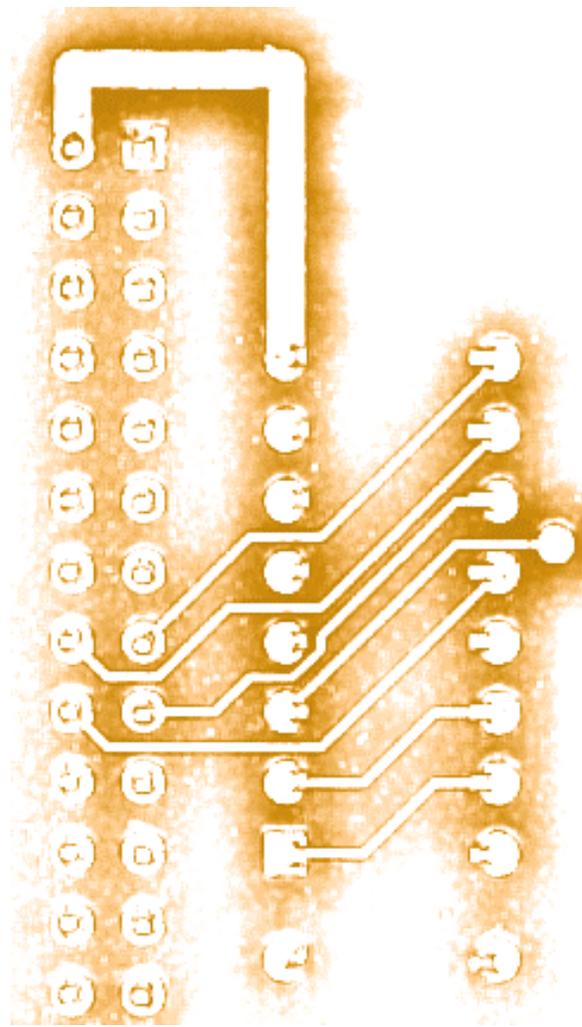# Information Literacy: Challenges for the Future

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Information Literacy…

"…an absolute necessity for anything in life, whether I continue with college or not." *student enrolled in URI's Information Literacy Course (LIB 120).*

Learning today should emphasize the thought and effort required to outwit the forces that create barriers to finding the right information. Effective learning is as much about developing good research and information skills as it is about using technology and information systems. Therefore, information is the fundamental key to developing students into successful, life-long learners. Information Literacy is the ability to define an information need, select and use appropriate tools to find relevant information, evaluate information for accuracy, reliability and relevance, and apply the information retrieved to the information needed.

The Key to Learning how to Learn!

The Information Literacy program at the University of Rhode Island was established in 1998 by the University Library to prepare URI students for research at the University level. The program also prepares students for their future in the workforce. By teaching both the skills and the concepts behind those skills, and by providing hands-on experience to apply the concepts and skills as they are introduced, we have created a learning laboratory. It is the heart of the teaching library. This environment encourages critical and independent thinking. It teaches students how to ask the questions they need answered, and how to find the appropriate information that will answer those questions.

The need for an information literate workforce

"In today's organization you have to take responsibility for information because it is your main tool. But you must know how to use it. Few are information literate." (Peter Drucker, Harvard Business Review. May-June 1993)
http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/Other/system.html

"In the private sector, to cope with big challenges in the information age, organizations are rushing to reform business processes … This also means drastic change of working style of people, i.e., more information-centric, and more information literate. " *(President of Toshiba Corporation, Nishimuro,Taizo. 1999. "Information Literacy:How does it differ from Traditional or Computer Literacy?" TechKnowLogia (September/October) [online] Available :* http://www.techknowlogia.org)

"We are no longer teaching about technology, but about information literacy…Students need the thinking, reasoning, and civic abilities that enable them to succeed in a contemporary democratic economy, workforce and society." *Terry Crane, Vice President for Educational Products, AOL, Sept Issue of* <u>*Converge*</u>*.*

"…the bottom line is that to be successful, you need to acquire a high level of information literacy. What we need in the knowledge industries are people who know how to absorb and analyze and integrate and create and effectively convey information—and who know how to use information to bring value to everything they undertake." *Anthony Comper, President of the Bank of Montreal, 1999 commencement address at University of Toronto.*

URI's Information Literacy Program

T he Plan for Information Literacy at the University of Rhode Island provides the blueprint for Information Literacy now and in the future. URI's Information Literacy Program is recognized as one of the premier programs in the country. We see our teaching Library as the largest "classroom" on campus. We aspire to meet the growing demand for Information Literacy, for all members of the campus community. Our goal is to be the bridge to information empowerment.

Connecting People and Information

Since its inception in 1999, the Plan for Information Literacy at the University of Rhode Island (http://www.uri.edu/library/instruction_services/infolitplan.html) has guided us to accomplish the following:

- Taught: 28 sections of LIB 120: Introduction to Information Literacy, reaching 541 students, and generating 1,623 credit hours; 2 sections of LIB 140, reaching 50 students, and generating 50 credit hours; 2 sections of BIO 508, reaching 15 students and generating 15 credit hours

- Created Learning Laboratory classrooms with state of the art technology and hands-on experience for students in Kingston and Providence

- Created specialized modules for individual departments

- Implemented WebCT delivery of LIB 120 to accommodate distance learners

The Role of the URI's Information Literacy Program

Information Literacy opportunities have been created in several different formats at URI. Some are new and some are of longstanding. All seek to educate URI's students for success in college and beyond.

Credit Courses in Information Literacy

LIB 120: Introduction to Information Literacy is a 3-credit course, which fulfills a General Education requirement in Communications. This course teaches students the concepts and skills they will need both in their future at the University and in the workforce. Students learn critical thinking skills through the use of problem-based assignments and hands-on experimentation. They learn to take an active role in acquiring and evaluating information. The research process, from selecting a topic to designing its final presentation, is the heart of the course. The concepts and skills acquired in LIB 120 are applicable in every other class students take. Their applicability continues into the workplace and beyond.

LIB 140: Special Topics in Information Literacy is a one-credit course specially designed to partner with a discipline-specific course. It was taught with Business 110, for example. The materials covered are specific to the discipline in question. LIB 140 is particularly useful for students who need to learn the tools that apply to their major.

BIO 508: Seminar in Biological Literature is a one credit graduate course that covers the information sources most useful in research in biology at the graduate level.

Modules

Modules are standardized "toolkits" that present information geared toward particular fields, instructional areas and topics. The modules are created individually to complement coursework in a given discipline, major or department. Most modules are taught by Library faculty, providing a concrete way for librarians and other teaching faculty to work together. Much of the content of the modules will be available on the Web via interactive tutorials, allowing practice sessions and reading to occur where and when it fits into the coursework. Modules for URI 101 and WRT 101 have reached thousands of students since 1999.

Classroom technology

Generous grants from the Champlin Foundations allowed the creation of three learning laboratories--two in Kingston and one in Providence--for exploring Information Literacy. Mobile carts with wireless laptops allow small group collaboration, unhindered arrangement of the classroom and mobility within the range of the radio hub. A second grant from the Smarter Kids Foundation provided Smart boards and classroom control software for the Learning Laboratory and the electronic classroom in Kingston.

WebCT has been used to deliver LIB 120 and to supplement face-to-face sections of LIB 120.

Library Faculty who teach LIB 120 have found the hands-on environment to be essential in allowing students to put classroom theory to instant and practical use. Pedagogically, integrating theory and practice helps students to internalize information presented in class. Active learning and problem-based inquiry are ideally suited for instruction in Information Literacy. This approach goes to the heart of the University's mission to create independent and critical thinkers.

Blazing the Trail

Local and national leadership

Presentations on the development of URI Library Plan for Information Literacy and LIB 120 have been given both locally and nationally. URI Library faculty have been invited to share our plan and the specifics of our class with the Rhode Island Library Association, the Association for College and Research Libraries, the New England Library Association and the New England Bibliographic Instruction Committee, and at other local, regional and national meetings. We are currently working on a collaborative program for Fall 2002, which will compare and contrast Information Literacy Programs from K-16 in Rhode Island. Several institutions of higher education have inquired about using our plan as a model for their institutions. Our class and our plan have been cited in numerous bibliographies, newsletters and newslists. The Plan is a "showcase" example of the Best Practices in the Institute for Information Literacy of the Association of College and Research Libraries. URI is a possible site for the nationally recognized "Immersion" program of the Association of College and Research Libraries in 2003. This program prepares librarians to plan and teach Information Literacy at their home institutions.

International recognition

Joanna Burkhardt, Mary MacDonald and Andree Rathemacher received the 2001 Awards For Excellence, Outstanding Paper, Reference Services Review (MCB University Press) for their paper "Challenges in building an incremental, multi-year information literacy plan." The Big Blue Information Literacy project in Great Britain http://www.leeds.ac.uk/bigblue/index.htm)cited our program and our plan both in their literature review and their bibliography. The goal of that British project is to "establish a blueprint for…ensuring a coherent approach to the development of an information literate student population in the UK."

Projects under construction

More Web based tools are being developed for use inside and outside of the classroom. URI librarians are currently creating a Web-based tutorial for URI 101. URI leads the statewide effort to construct a shared Information Literacy Web tutorial. While brief workshops are now available for non-library faculty, we hope to offer intensive summer workshops in the near future. These sessions will allow faculty to understand our Plan and envision how Information Literacy could be built into discipline-specific courses. We will continue to partner with interested departments to create and establish modules .

Measuring Our Success

Increased Demand

Each semester since Fall 1999 we have added an additional section of LIB 120. In the Spring semester 2002 we continue to have a waiting list of students who want to take the class, but for whom there are no seats. We are currently working with several departments to develop program-specific Information Literacy modules. We lead a collaborative HELIN Consortium Committee on Information Literacy to create a shared web-based tutorial. We are exploring a partnership with the K-12 community in Rhode Island.

Students' reactions to courses in Information Literacy

"I think LIB 120 should be mandatory—it helped me with all of my other classes and will definitely always come in handy" *(Student of LIB 120 Spring, 2001)*

"I could just kick myself for taking this (course) my last semester of my senior year. I gained more out of this class than any other. Without a doubt in my mind, I feel that LIB 120 should be a requirement for all freshmen. *(Student of LIB 120 Spring ,2001)*

"The information was great and an absolute necessity for anything in life, whether I continue with college or not *(Student of LIB 120 Spring, 2001)*

"Regardless of the stress that I have felt in taking this course, I know that this one class will benefit my whole life." *(Student of LIB 120 Fall, 2000)*

"I learned a lot in this course, and I know what I learned will help me a lot in my University and my future life." *(Student of LIB 140 Spring, 1999)*

"Info literacy is a great class where you learn everything about the library, databases, and the internet. I discovered how to distinguish internet sites, how to use search terms, how to look up books using the Library of Congress system, and much more. Doing research papers is not the hassle it was before and I feel well-versed in the Library system. I enjoyed the class so much that I think I'm going to go into information sciences and skills myself." *(Student of LIB 120 Fall, 2001)*

Future Challenges

We have had an overwhelming response to and support for our Plan for Information Literacy. Requests from students, faculty, departments and colleges for more sections and more modules come to us on a regular basis. Programmatic partnerships with Learning Communities and BGS are also creating demand for more sections, more options and more availability.

Goals for Information Literacy

We have established a nationally and internationally recognized program in Information Literacy at the University of Rhode Island. However, we have accomplished only a part of our goals.

Creating an Information Literate community at URI

Greater University-wide awareness will be necessary. Educating faculty and administration at the University of Rhode Island about Information Literacy and about our Plan for Information Literacy will need to take a more prominent place in our plans. Collaboration with individuals and departments to plan and implement Information Literacy modules should become commonplace. URI must continue to be a leader in statewide and nationwide initiatives in the field.

Information Literacy across the curriculum

Workshops for non-library faculty must be established and offered to as many faculty members as possible. These workshops will result in increased collaboration between the Library and other Departments. Information Literacy across the curriculum is a goal that can be reached. The mature Plan for Information Literacy would make Information Literacy an incremental and integral part of a student's entire University experience.

Reaching more students

As indicated on the accompanying chart, we have realized phenomenal growth in our 3-credit course. Student demand for seats outstrips the available sections. Colleges and individual programs ask for additional sections every semester. While we are searching for creative ways to staff and house additional sections of LIB 120, we are also working on new ways of meeting this growing demand. Our goal is to reach all URI students with Information Literacy courses during their college careers.

Information Literacy is essential to achieve the University's goal to graduate well-rounded adults capable of critical and independent thinking. It will help URI graduates to be among the most successful and will give them the skills they need to maintain a permanent love of learning. We will move forward, to bring our developing plan to a mature stage. Students will gain a life-long benefit by becoming "information literate." In the process, the University and the State will gain a workforce better prepared for today's and tomorrow's work environment.

Information Literacy at the University of Rhode Island--LIB 120

Bar chart with y-axis labeled "Percent growth" (0 to 800) and x-axis labeled "Library 120 Student Enrollment" with categories: Fall 1999, Spr 2000, Fall 2000, Spr 2001, Fall 2001, Spr 2002. Legend: Series1.