Characteristics of programs of information literacy that illustrate best practice

A draft

ACRL's Institute for Information Literacy

Overview

The "Characteristics of programs of information literacy that illustrate best practices" attempt to articulate elements of exemplary information literacy programs for undergraduate students at four-year and two-year institutions.

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) 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 present 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 programming. 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; the list is not prescriptive. Rather, individuals are encouraged to consider the characteristics as well as library and institutional contexts in establishing information literacy program goals and strategies.

Librarians are also encouraged to make use of the "Guidelines for instruction programs in

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 this final edition.

Background information on the project is available on the Web at http://www.ala.org/acrl/nili/bestprac.html.

Questions and comments about the document can be directed to Tom Kirk at e-mail: kirkto@earlham.edu.

academic libraries" for specific guidance on library involvement with information literacy programs.

Category 1: Mission

A mission statement for an information literacy program:

- includes a definition of information literacy;
- is consistent with the "Information literacy competency standards for higher education" (http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilcomstan.html);
- corresponds with the mission statements of the institution;
- corresponds with the format of related institutional documents;
- clearly reflects the contributions of and expected benefits to all institutional constituencies;
- appears in appropriate institutional documents;
- assumes the availability of and participation in relevant lifelong learning options for all—faculty, staff, and administration; and
- is reviewed periodically and, if necessary, revised.

Category 2: Goals and objectives

Goals and objectives for an information literacy program:

- are consistent with the mission, goals, and objectives of programs, departments, and the institution;
- establish measurable outcomes for evaluation for the program;
- reflect sound pedagogical practice;
- accommodate input from various constituencies;
- articulate the integration of information literacy across the curriculum;
- accommodate student growth in skills and understanding throughout the college years;
- apply to all learners, regardless of delivery system or location;
- reflect the desired outcomes of preparing students for their academic pursuits and for effective lifelong learning; and
- are evaluated and reviewed periodically.

Category 3: Planning

Planning for an information literacy program:

- articulates its mission, goals, objectives, and pedagogical foundation;
- anticipates and addresses current and future opportunities and challenges;
- is tied to library and institutional information technology planning and budgeting cycles;
- incorporates findings from environmental scans;
- accommodates program, department, and institutional levels;
- involves students, faculty, librarians, administrators, and other constituencies as appropriate to the institution;
- establishes formal and informal mechanisms for communication and ongoing dialogue across the academic community;
- establishes the means for implementation and adaptation;

• addresses, with clear priorities, human, technological and financial resources, current and projected, including administrative and institutional support;

• includes mechanisms for articulation with the curriculum;

• includes a program for professional, faculty, and staff development; and

• establishes a process for assessment at the outset, including periodic review of the plan to ensure flexibility.

Category 4: Administrative and institutional support

Administration within an institution:

• identifies or assigns information literacy leadership and responsibilities;

• plants information literacy in the institution's mission, strategic plan, policies, and procedures;

• provides funding to establish and ensure ongoing support for

— formal and informal teaching facilities and resources

— appropriate staffing levels

— professional development opportunities for librarians, faculty, staff, and administrators; and

• recognizes and encourages collaboration among disciplinary faculty, librarians, and other program staff and among institutional units;

• communicates support for the program; and

• rewards achievement and participation in the information literacy program within the institution's system.

Category 5: Articulation with the curriculum

Articulation with the curriculum for an information literacy program:

• is formalized and widely disseminated;

• emphasizes student-centered learning;

• uses local governance structures to ensure institution-wide integration into academic or vocational programs;

• 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; and

• specifies programs and courses charged with implementation.

Category 6: Collaboration

Collaboration among disciplinary faculty, librarians, and other program staff in an information literacy program:

• centers around enhanced student learning and the development of lifelong learning skills;

• engenders communication within the academic community to garner support for the program;

• results in a fusion of information literacy concepts and disciplinary content;

• identifies opportunities for achieving information literacy outcomes through course content and other learning experiences; and

• takes place at the planning stages, 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;

• incorporates appropriate information technology and other media resources;

• includes active and collaborative activities;

• encompasses critical thinking and reflection;

• responds to multiple learning styles;

• supports student-centered learning;

• builds on students' existing knowledge; and

• links information literacy to ongoing coursework and real-life experiences appropriate to program and course level.

Category 8: Staffing

Staff for an information literacy program:

• include librarians, disciplinary faculty, administrators, program coordinators, graphic designers, teaching/learning specialists, and others as needed;

• serve as role models, exemplifying and advocating information literacy and lifelong learning;

• are adequate in number and skills to support the program's mission;

• develop experience in instruction/teaching and assessment of student learning;

• develop experience in curriculum development and expertise to develop, coordinate, implement, maintain, and evaluate information literacy programs;

• employ a collaborative approach to working with others;

• receive and actively engage in systematic and continual professional development and training;

• receive regular evaluations about the quality of their contribution to the program.

Category 9: Outreach

Outreach activities for an information literacy program:

• communicate a clear message defining and describing the program and its value to targeted audiences;

• provide targeted marketing and publicity to stakeholders, support groups and media channels;

• target a wide variety of groups;

• use a variety of outreach channels and media, both formal and informal;

• include participation in campus professional development training by offering or cosponsoring workshops and programs that relate to information literacy for faculty and staff;

• advance information literacy by sharing information, methods and plans with peers from other institutions; and

• are the responsibility of all members of the institution, not simply the librarians.

Category 10: Assessment/evaluation

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

for program evaluation:

• establishes the process of ongoing planning/improvement of the program;

• measures directly progress toward meeting the goals and objectives of the program;

• integrates with course and curriculum assessment as well as institutional evaluations and regional/professional accreditation initiatives; and

• assumes multiple methods and purposes for assessment/evaluation

— formative and summative

— short term and longitudinal; and

for student outcomes:

• acknowledges differences in learning and teaching styles by using a variety of appropriate outcome measures, such as portfolio assessment, oral defense, quizzes, essays, direct observation, anecdotal, peer and self review, and experience;

• focuses on student performance, knowledge acquisition, and attitude appraisal;

• assesses both process and product;

• includes student-, peer-, and self-evaluation; and

for all:

• includes periodic review of assessment/evaluation methods. ■