



INFORMATION COMPETENCY

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Mission of Information Competency

In this global Information Age, *information literacy/competency* is essential for success, both in college and throughout life.

What is the Definition of Information Literacy/Competency?

The definition of information literacy/competency that guides academic librarianship is provided by the American Library Association (ALA)--Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL). They define information literacy/competency as a set of abilities to “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.” This definition is further specified by a set of competency standards that emphasize five key skills. A person who is information literate:

1. Determines the nature and extent of the information needed.
2. Accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.
3. Evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.
4. Individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.
5. Understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.

The ACRL standards and more details on information competency can be viewed at: <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency.cfm>. These standards are also endorsed by the American Association for Higher Education and by the Council of Independent Colleges.

The following is the definition of information competency adopted by the California Community Colleges Academic Senate:

“Information competency is the ability to find, evaluate, use, and communicate information in all its various formats. It combines aspects of library literacy, research methods, and technological literacy. Information competency includes consideration of the ethical and legal implications of information and requires the application of both critical thinking and communication skills.”

This same document lists the skills that students must be able to demonstrate in an integrated process in order to be considered information competent:

- State a research question, problem, or issue.
- Determine information requirements in various disciplines for the research questions, problems, or issues.

- Use information technology tools to locate and retrieve relevant information.
- Organize information.
- Analyze and evaluate information.
- Communicate using a variety of information technologies.
- Understand the ethical and legal issues surrounding information and information technology.
- Apply the skills gained in information competency to enable lifelong learning.

This document is available at: http://www.asccc.org/Publications/Papers/Info_competency.html.

What is the History of Information Literacy/Competency?

According to ALA/ACRL (see site listed above), “information literacy is a hot new term in the higher education lexicon,” but is not a new concept. “The idea of resource-based education is an old one and librarians have been involved in teaching the effective use of information resources for over a century under the labels library instruction, bibliographic instruction and library skills.”

The related term “information skills” was first introduced in 1974 by Paul Zurkowski to refer to people who are able to solve their information problems by using relevant information sources and applying relevant technology. But the concept of “information literacy” was introduced with the establishment in 1989 of the American Library Association’s Presidential Committee on Information Literacy. They determined that information literacy is a critical skill for student success in this Information Age.

It differs from the traditional library instruction in that it involves a collaborative effort between librarians, computer science, and other classroom faculty. It also focuses on the learner, rather than on the teacher, and on teaching lifelong skills rather than on teaching specific function of various library resources.

What is the Status of Information Competency in California Higher Education?



A good web site on information competency in California universities and community colleges is provided by Topsy Smalley, Instruction Librarian at Cabrillo College, at: <http://www.topsy.org/infocomp.html>.

This web site includes a checklist of information competencies for college students that was developed by a team of California State University and California community college librarians and adopted by the California Community College Council of Chief Librarians.

Where do I find information on Information Competency at Orange Coast College?

- The Orange Coast College Library web page on Information Competency is at: <http://www.orangecoastcollege.edu/academics/library/Instruction+and+Help.htm>
- Library 100, *Library and Information Competency*, is a one-unit, transferable, online class that supports information competency and fosters independent, lifelong learning.
- Contact Vinta Oviatt, Instructional Services Librarian/Professor, at telephone: (714) 432-5885, ext. 21057 or at e-mail: voviatt@occ.cccd.edu.