

FORMIST

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Information Literacy (IL) is gradually acquiring an important position in the panorama of French universities and French university libraries. Within the framework of general education, the use and understanding of information and technology are central to the intellectual development of all undergraduate students and contribute to a successful academic life. The objective of these courses, in France as in other countries, is to teach students information-seeking skills, but also how to define, evaluate, use and quote information.

During the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s the role of academic libraries in delivering information literacy courses was not well developed. A few interested people trained students, mainly in PhD programs. Undergraduates were rarely considered in this matter. At the end of the 1990s, things started to change for a number of reasons, one of them being the sudden awareness by the Ministry of Education of the importance of these kinds of skills in assisting students with course success. The high rate of failure during the first two years at the University represented a challenge to fight.

The second important event favoring the expansion of IL courses was that, from the mid-90s and on, the State (more specifically the office in charge of university libraries at the Ministry of Education) gave financial support to libraries involved in user training. At the same time, many universities and university libraries started to offer information literacy courses to undergraduate students. There were many different projects during this time, and the individuals in charge of these projects definitely needed some help in building coherent courses. A working group of information literacy experts suggested the creation of a national website that would make educational tools, recommendations and information about IL available to all instructors. Thus, FORMIST was created.

FORMIST : its aims and missions

FORMIST (Reseau Francophone de FORMation a l'Information Scientifique et Technique) was created in 1997 for the purpose of document sharing within the community of instructors, both librarians and academics, and to make educational documents and tutorials available to students. The FORMIST website went live at the end of 1999. The service was implemented at ENSSIB, the French Na-

tional LIS School, training future librarians and head librarians. FORMIST assumes the following missions:

- Collecting and organizing educational tools for speakers of French on its website
- Providing these resources for instructors and students

Developing programs for the training of future library instructors in association with the curriculum of ENSSIB

Over the years, FORMIST has added new missions to these initial ones:

- Coordinating a national network for IL in France, and through the website, seminars and colloquiums contributing to the evolution of IL and research on the subject in France

Participating in international think tanks and networks on the theme of IL, presenting the main French positions and projects, and making French instructors aware of the importance of IL at an international level

FORMIST Website:

<http://formist.enssib.fr>

The website is intended for two types of people

- Students who can use help during IL courses or in self-training

Instructors - academics, librarians and PhD students- who use the website to find resources to help build their courses, during classes, and to update their knowledge by checking articles and publications about IL and education

One finds different types of documents on the website, including entire courses, tutorials, educational handouts on databases or CD-ROMs, articles, information concerning new educational technologies, colloquiums, announcements, and proceedings. All these documents are freely accessible and most of them are websites, but some are Word or PowerPoint documents.

The documents are produced by individual authors or within the framework of educational projects (tutorials,

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for example). The authors agree that the documents may be used during courses. These educational documents are selected by the two librarians responsible for FORMIST and are then submitted to a Publishing Committee of experts (CES). This process works as a review system for the publications. The fourteen members of the CES, either librarians or academics, analyze the documents and decide whether they should be included on FORMIST, with or without revision. This process only applies to the educational documents and not other materials.

FORMIST: The Nucleus of a French-Speaking Network on Information Literacy

The most visible part of FORMIST is the website, but more generally it provides services to the community of French speaking instructors. Many people in France, as elsewhere, are doing the same type of project on their own. Librarians try to build up interesting courses and try to convince other academics to collaborate on IL projects. Most of them ask themselves questions about education, e-learning, relationships with other staff among the university, financial matters and training of the trainers. FORMIST offers a place to share ideas and information, and to collaborate on common projects.

FORMIST attempts to add vitality to its monitoring and publishing role, and also to coordinate a real teaching network. Its role is essential in the sharing of tools and experience. From the beginning, FORMIST has been participating in working groups, round tables, workshops and conferences in France and in other countries. It also organizes colloquiums and seminars.

Rencontres FORMIST

Beginning in 2001, FORMIST has organized a free entrance conference once a year for all those interested in IL. The audience reaches more than 100 people. It is like a "mini" LOEX conference! "Rencontres" means "meeting" in French. The aim of this one-day conference is to present a wide range of projects, but also one or two papers at the research level. Many instructors are quite isolated in their university and it is important to give them tools as well as ways of reflecting on important matters. Instructors also meet each other and share questions and projects.

In 2001, the theme of the conference was "Building Educational Multimedia Projects in Information Literacy." The next year, the conference focused on Information Literacy, five years after the establishment of new courses within the framework of a university methodology. In 2003, *Rencontres FORMIST* was about IL in Europe. This was followed by a day of discussion with colleagues from Italy, Belgium, Switzerland and Quebec. *Rencontres 2004* took place in June and was very successful. The attendees spent the day reflecting on distance learning and IL, while some colleagues from different libraries shared projects at different stages.

Proceedings of the 2004 *Rencontres FORMIST* are available online on the FORMIST website, in French. If somebody wants to translate them, they are welcome to do so! The proceedings of the 2003 *Rencontres FORMIST* were edited into a book in March of this year.

Training Future Librarians

FORMIST is a service of the French National Library and Information Science School, and the two librarians in charge of the service are also teachers. Each student attends at least a one-day conference on the subject of IL. Many of them choose to participate in an optional 24-hour course on training. Considering the growing importance of IL at the University, we expect this course to be fully included in the curriculum within the next few years.

Participating in International Debates

The goal of FORMIST is to coordinate a French IL network. After the first few years of setting up the service and website, participating in international activities and reviewing them for the French audience seemed like important objectives for the service. I am the individual on the FORMIST team who gets involved in this matter. This implies that I am the person responsible for attending conferences and reporting on them on the FORMIST website ("Creating Knowledge3," Scandinavian IL Conference 2003). I also am responsible for presenting papers at librarian congresses, either specific to the subject of IL (WILU 2002, Canada and DHI 2004 in Mexico) or on other related subjects (LIBER 2003, Roma). This international involvement is an important way to make people from other countries aware of the projects and research on IL in France today, and also of sharing information with the French audience about IL elsewhere. Additionally, FORMIST is very interested in the European Network on Information Literacy (EnIL) but has not yet joined the pro-

ject.

To conclude, I would like to emphasize the main projects and challenges of FORMIST in 2004-2005:

The new website

The FORMIST team is working very hard on the new website. It will keep some of the same characteristics of the current website and will add new features. It will be aimed at the same audience but with two different accesses, and will offer new contents, such as news reviews and translations of the major published works on IL. It will be organized around a knowledge base, and will offer the possibility of using parts of courses.

Additionally, we are looking at the possibility of creating an electronic publication similar to *LOEX Quarterly*!

Seminars and conferences

The theme for the 5th *Rencontres FORMIST* will be defined this autumn by the two FORMIST librarians and the members of the Publishing Committee. Before this annual event, we will be pleased to host Cristina Tovote (University of Stockholm), Chair of Nordinfolit and secretary of the IL section of IFLA on October 11th, for a paper presentation on IL for French instructors. A one day seminar is also planned for November on indexing educational documents. The objective of this seminar is to increase librarian awareness of the importance of indexing educational tools with the standard LOM or others.

International matters

I was granted a three-month Fulbright Scholarship to study "Information Literacy in American University Libraries." One of the objectives of this research is to compare French and American systems and programs on IL, and to establish partnerships on specific projects.

Research matters.

Both librarians in FORMIST are involved in research projects and groups.

I hope those of you who can read French will take a look at the FORMIST website. I want to thank LOEX and its former director Deb Biggs Thomas for the opportunity to let American colleagues know that, *Yes, we too are doing things about IL in France!*

Tech Matters: Exploring the Googleverse

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Google is one of the most well-known and successful Web search engines. Librarians and students alike use it on a daily basis to answer questions and conduct research. Not content to simply rest on its high status as a top-notch search tool with an excellent search algorithm and page ranking system, Google aspires to continually develop and offer more sophisticated search options to its users. In this article, we will begin to dip our toes into the Googleverse and investigate some of the search engine's lesser known options and features.

Google is a Calculator

Need a calculator to help tabulate student grades, or maybe to help a student with their math homework, but don't have one close at hand? Google is the answer. Simply type any mathematical expression directly into the search box, hit enter, and *voilà*, the answer appears! The Google calculator can be used to solve questions ranging from the basic [e.g., $(2+2)*10$] to the advanced [e.g., $\sin(\pi/3)$]. One of my favorite uses for this feature is as a unit conversion tool. Type "6 miles in kilometers", and Google will perform the conversion for you. And just for fun, try typing "the answer to life, the universe, and everything" into the search box. The calculator will provide an answer!

Google is a Dictionary

To access a definition culled from the Web, type the word "define" followed immediately by the word you wish to have defined (e.g., define Dublin Core) into the main search box. The entry on the results list includes the definition and a link to the web page from which it was taken. In addition, Google provides a link to further "web definitions" for the word. Although not necessarily as authoritative as a definition from a standard dictionary, this feature is ideal for quick lookups and retrieving comparative definitions for a term.