

# **REVITALIZING INFORMATION LITERACY CURRICULA: LEADING TO CREATE CHANGE AFTER A COLLEGE-WIDE ASSESSMENT**

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## **ASSESSING INFORMATION LITERACY AS A COLLEGE-WIDE CORE COMPETENCY**

Like many institutions of higher education, Anne Arundel Community College (AACC) has identified information literacy as a college-wide core competency, one of ten “fundamental learning outcomes” considered “vital to success in work and in life” (AACC, *Core Competencies*). All degree-bearing programs at the college have indicated when in their curricula students’ competencies in these ten core areas are developed and assessed, resulting in a robust curriculum map. In order to determine the extent to which graduating students can demonstrate that they have achieved these learning outcomes and in order to inform changes to program curricula that would support successful development of these proficiencies, AACC established in its Learning Outcomes Assessment (LOA) Plan a schedule for assessing graduating students’ core competencies beginning in the fall of 2012.

In the fall of 2013, in keeping with AACC’s LOA Plan, and as a participant in the Association of College & Research Libraries’ Assessment in Action (AiA) program, AACC embarked on a college-wide assessment of the information literacy skills of its students graduating with associate degrees. Faculty librarians in AACC’s Andrew G. Truxal Library scored artifacts from a random sample of graduating students’ coursework generated from fall semester of 2013 through spring semester of 2015 in courses that had been mapped to information literacy. Librarians scored artifacts for evidence of four criteria of information literacy competence: choice of sources, evaluation of sources, incorporation of sources, and ethical use of sources. Librarians collaborated with the AACC Committee for Teaching and Learning’s Subcommittee on Learning Outcomes Assessment, on which

stakeholders from across the college are seated, to develop and approve a scoring rubric. In addition to completing an authentic assessment of student work, librarians used a checklist to determine whether the written directions instructors provided to students for completing their research assignments contained information about the kinds and quantities of sources instructors expected students to use and whether those directions contained information about how instructors expected students to incorporate and cite sources in their work. The AiA team also designed and deployed a faculty survey to gain more insight into how instructors value, develop, and assess information literacy.

A full description of the assessment project’s context and design, as well as the data it produced, can be found in the March 2016 *College & Research Libraries* special issue that focused on assessment as action research (Whitlock & Ebrahimi). In short, the majority of submitted graduating students’ work did not reach competency levels for the criteria assessed. Though librarians could score very few student artifacts for evaluation of sources, average scores were below proficient in each semester that data were gathered for the other three assessment criteria: choice of sources, incorporation, and ethical use. Data gathered from the assignment checklist and from surveying faculty members made it evident that surveyed instructors value information literacy as a core competency at the college and in their courses, but the data also revealed that those same faculty members have not been regularly articulating in their written directions for research assignments expectations for students’ use of sources, nor are these faculty members regularly collaborating or consulting with librarians to teach information literacy concepts to their students or to assess student learning.

Though data from this assessment project demonstrate a clear need for curricular changes at AACC, there are no institutional mandates or processes in place that establish how these curricular changes should be determined, enacted, documented, or evaluated, nor is it clear who should be responsible for this work. The LOA Plan provides a schedule for assessing AACC's core competencies but does not suggest how the assessment data will be used to affect curricular change. In the absence of any clear direction for how to move the assessment process forward for this core competency, Truxal Library has emerged to lead the college's efforts in improving students' information literacy learning outcomes. Truxal's faculty librarians have been integral to this college-wide assessment project from the beginning, and librarians are now leading efforts to revitalize the college's curricula with refined information literacy learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessments.

## **STRATEGIES FOR AFFECTING CURRICULAR CHANGE**

### **Guiding Faculty**

To affect how faculty embed information literacy instruction into coursework, librarians can lead faculty in the development of effective information literacy pedagogies specific to their disciplines and courses (Oakleaf, 2010). Truxal's librarians have helped organize and lead a number of professional development opportunities for fellow faculty members to support the teaching and assessment of students' information literacy skills. Even before the first year's data were disseminated from the college-wide assessment, librarians were collaborating with the organizers of the college's Summer Institute, a day-long faculty professional development summit offered each May, to focus on information literacy. Librarians led the afternoon breakout sessions, one showcasing the use of library resources and services that can help faculty teach and assess information literacy skills, and another discussing best practices for designing and assessing meaningful research projects. AACC's Instruction Librarian, often in collaboration with the college's Director of Learning Outcomes Assessment, led breakout sessions at a number of full-time faculty and adjunct faculty orientations, professional development days offered at the beginning of each fall and spring semester, to provide faculty with the most current assessment data and to promote strategies for developing and assessing students' information literacy skills. In a session with all of the college's new full-time faculty members, "Information Literacy Assessment: From Core Competency to Coursework," AACC's Instruction Librarian led new faculty in an extraordinarily productive conversation about how information literacy functions as a college-wide core competency—affecting the designs of their programs, courses, and research assignments—and why information literacy is not only vital to academic and professional success but also critical for effective civic engagement and lifelong learning. As a result, a number of new faculty members have consulted with librarians to design and deploy new or re-imagined research assignments in their

courses and are utilizing the library's instruction and embedded librarianship programs to help meet the learning outcomes of their assignments and courses.

### **Shaping Curriculum Maps**

Assessing a college-wide core competency should facilitate engagement or re-engagement with a curriculum map and should suggest where the map requires correction and refinement. The college-wide assessment of information literacy at AACC relied on a curriculum map designed to document when in each degree-bearing program's curriculum a student's information literacy skills are developed and assessed. Student artifacts were culled for scoring from those courses that programs mapped to information literacy, so, if similar assessment tools are deployed in the future, a more accurate and robust curriculum map will aid in the validity of those assessment tools and the usefulness of those assessment results. When programs were tasked with documenting when in their programs students' information literacy skills were developed and assessed, they had only the core competency definition to guide them, wherein information literacy is described as a student's competence in "recognizing when information is needed and locating, evaluating and using information appropriately" (AACC, *Core Competencies ~ Information Literacy*). The scoring rubric used for the assessment process was not yet devised when programs first mapped information literacy in their curricula, but this kind of assessment tool provides crucial information about how the college conceptualizes information literacy as a competency and how the college means to measure student learning. The rubric was designed by librarians with feedback and approval by the Subcommittee for Learning Outcomes Assessment and will be a valuable resource when revising course and program curricula and, as a result, the college's curriculum map. Because revisions to the curriculum map are likely to arise from program and course reviews, participating in college-wide curriculum-mapping efforts and reviews of programs and courses lets librarians advocate for embedding more frequent and more meaningful opportunities in program and course curricula for students to develop sophisticated information literacy skills and for those skills to be assessed in the most meaningful ways.

### **Designing Instructional Materials and Experiences**

The results of information literacy assessment efforts can shape revisions and extensions of the library's instructional materials and offerings, helping students learn crucial information literacy skills more successfully across the institution. The roll out of a new online information literacy tutorial at AACC was postponed and is being revised to be more flexible and modular and to speak explicitly to the criteria articulated in the information literacy scoring rubric that was developed and approved for the college-wide assessment. The revised structure and content of the tutorial should both foster the extension of classroom learning experiences and allow for more self-directed student learning. The Instruction Librarian has also designed and will instruct a new three-credit course, "Critical and Creative Thinking in the Information Age," cross-

listed as a philosophy course, that focuses on critical engagement with information and effective use of information in thinking critically and creatively. Results of the college-wide assessment of information literacy helped to justify a need for developing and offering the course and to inform the course's content.

### **Spearheading Continuous Assessment**

For any institutional assessment of information literacy competence to result in meaningful change to college-wide curricula, librarians must work to ensure that the assessment process isn't stymied after data is gathered and analyzed. To be effectual, the process of learning outcomes assessment must be continuous and documented, where the data the assessment process generates spur curricular changes that improve student learning (Oakleaf, 2009a). To this end, Truxal's librarians are crafting an institutional information literacy assessment plan to identify mechanisms for documenting information literacy development and assessment efforts across campus and to secure college-wide support for continued engagement in the information literacy assessment process. While the entire college community will be asked to contribute to the information literacy assessment plan, to approve its enactment, and to work toward its success, the library will spearhead its construction and partner with stakeholders across the college to ensure its continued implementation and functionality.

### **CONCLUSION**

An assessment of a college-wide core competency investigates the extent to which program curricula are successful in producing a particular, shared learning outcome, but the function of the core competency assessment process is to inform decisions that maximize the effectiveness of the college's curricula in achieving those learning outcomes. Using strategies that drive beneficial curricular changes, academic librarians can lead their learning communities in using the assessment process to amplify the effectiveness of information literacy instruction (Oakleaf, 2009b). From the earliest data gathered from AACC's college-wide assessment of student artifacts, which from the beginning suggested that graduating students' work did not regularly provide evidence of information literacy competence, AACC librarians have been leading for curricular changes that provide students with more frequent and more meaningful opportunities to develop information literacy skills and for more documentation of assessment strategies and results. No one thought to wait until all the data were gathered and completely analyzed to begin the complicated work of revising information literacy curricula and learning outcomes assessment across the college. Librarians can even use preliminary assessment data to demonstrate the need for librarian-led professional development opportunities for faculty that focus on information literacy instruction, for improvements to the library's instructional materials and offerings, for the creation or revision of a college-wide information literacy curriculum map, and for institutional support for continuing assessment efforts.

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