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Easing the High School to College Transition: Creating an Information Literacy Continuum

By Abby Kasowitz-Scheer

Regional library consortia and other groups throughout the U.S. are forming collaborative networks of librarians at all levels in order to prepare students to develop the necessary information literacy skills to be successful in college and beyond. We plan to highlight several of these initiatives in the College Connection column in this and future issues of ESD. This article focuses on an initiative of the Rochester (NY) Regional Library Council (RRLC).

Spotlight: Information Literacy Continuum Committee, Rochester Regional Library Council

Background

The Information Literacy Continuum Committee is a collaborative group of academic and school librarians in the Rochester, NY area committed to ensuring that students in K-12 and higher education institutions learn information seeking skills. The group has developed a continuum of information literacy skills for students in high school and higher education.

The committee was first formed in 2004 as a result of a New York State Library Division of Library Development grant focused on the New York Online Virtual Electronic Library (NOVEL) databases. The group's original charge was to promote lifelong learning through the use of NOVEL databases. The group eventually broadened its scope to students' information literacy skills, a concern that had been expressed by council members for a few years.

"Area academic librarians were saying that students came to their institutions lacking basic information literacy skills, yet school librarians knew they were teaching these skills," says Debby Emerson, Assistant Director of the Rochester Regional Library Council. "There was obviously a disconnect somewhere, and all the librarians were interested in working collaboratively to find where that disconnect was and what could be done about it."



Pictured to the left is the Information Literacy Continuum Committee. Sitting are (left to right) Alice Harrington, Kathy Jaccarino, Alice Palokoff, Gwynne Mosch. Standing are Jennifer Little, Joan Brown, Debby Emerson, Barbara Ciambor. Missing are: Barbara Alvarez, Linda Cruttenden, Sue Cardinal, Sandy Johnson, Kathi Sigler.

Development of a Skills Document

According to Barbara Ciambor, Outreach Librarian, Rochester Regional Library Council, "The committee posed the question, 'What if we could develop a document that would assist students with the high school to college transition, introducing specific skills with reinforcement as part of the process?'"

In response to this question, committee members consulted existing documents, but they felt that they needed to create something new to reflect changes in the way students do research today. They developed "Core Library & Research Skills Grade 9-14+" (<http://rrlc.entrexp.com/orgmain.asp?orgID=1&storyID=10251>), in order to guide librarians through the process of teaching research skills. This document, still a work in progress, identifies seven steps of the research process:

1. **Question/Define:** Develop a preliminary topic or thesis; understand project requirements.
2. **Plan/Pre-search:** Brainstorm; review relevant sources and search strategies; plan and pre-search.
3. **Collect/Gather:** Gather relevant information from a variety of sources.
4. **Read/Listen/View:** Skim for major ideas and keywords; take notes from relevant sources; paraphrase information with proposer citations.
5. **Analyze/Sort:** Classify, group, label the information. Differentiate among fact, opinion, propaganda, point of view and bias. Determine authority, currency, and reliability of information.
6. **Produce & Present:** Create an original product; provide appropriate documentation; confirm that the product meets requirement of the project.
7. **Evaluate/Assess:** Grade and reflections.

The document outlines grade levels at which specific skills in each step are expected to be introduced and mastered. For instance, it recommends that "Understands the differences between keyword vs. subject heading searches" under step 3: Collect/Gather, be introduced in ninth grade and mastered in "14th" grade, or second year of college.

Teaching the Continuum

Alice Palakoff, librarian at Wilson Commencement Academy/Wilson Magnet High School, shares the document with teachers and parents to highlight the types of skills their students will be expected to perform early on in college. She also incorporates the skills into her own library skills lessons. In a recent session, she taught senior English students to find scholarly analyses of the Zora Neale Hurston novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. "Students were asked to do a survey of how many resources could be found by going to Yahoo!, Google, Google Scholar, and then NOVEL Databases," Palakoff describes. "The numbers spoke for themselves. By going from three million hits on Yahoo! to about 27 full-text scholarly articles on a NOVEL database, students were able to commence with their assignment in only a few minutes [using] academic sources."

Opening Doors to Collaboration

Information Literacy Continuum Committee members have organized and participated in a variety of programs to help educate school and academic librarians about information literacy instruction at the different levels. School librarians attend academic library orientations, which include tours of library buildings as well as discussions about library instruction at the host institution. Academic librarians share their expectations for incoming students, and high school librarians discuss their experiences teaching students information literacy skills.

Subsequent collaborative activities have included an invitation for University of Rochester librarians to attend a Brockport High School English Department Curriculum meeting and an "Information Literacy Discussion Forum" attended by 18 school and academic librarians.

Sharing Experiences Within and Beyond the Region

The "Core Library & Research Skills" document has been shared throughout the Rochester area as well as nationally and internationally by committee members.

- Alice Palakoff presented the skills document at the International Baccalaureate (IB) International Workshop for Librarians from North America and Korea in February 2006 in Los Angeles. As a result, librarians from Singapore and Belgium requested to incorporate ideas from "Core Library & Research Skills" into their own "scope and sequence" documents.
- Kathleen Sigler, St. John Fisher College, presented the "Core Library & Research Skills" document at a Rochester Area School Librarians (RASL) workshop in February 2007. In addition to sharing the document and reviewing differences between K-12 and academic libraries, Sigler stresses the importance of acknowledging differences in student populations: "While trends can be valuable for stimulating discussion, one must ultimately become familiar with the information literacy needs of the population one is serving, whether it is in the K-12 environment or in an academic library setting. There is no one-size-fits-all answer."

Lessons Learned and Experiences Gained

Committee members are proud not only of the "Core Library & Research Skills" document, but also of the collaboration itself. Due to the relationships formed, school library media specialists and academic librarians have a better understanding of each others' experiences.

"It would be easy for college librarians to blame their high school colleagues for [the] lack of preparedness amongst our students," says Alice Harrington, Monroe Community College Library, "but the truth is that extraordinary teachers exist at all stages of the information literacy continuum...The work of this committee will undoubtedly help create a unified, standardized and encompassing approach to information literacy training so that all students can make the most of life in the Information Age."

Kathy Jaccarino of Brockport High School feels that the experience has added a level of credibility to her interactions with students and teachers, because she can share realistic expectations of librarians and faculty at the college level.

Next Steps

The committee plans to explore the skills document from several angles in 2007:

- How is the document being used, and what impact has it had on teaching information literacy skills?
- How can the document be promoted, so that it is used by more librarians and teachers?
- What role does technology play in the teaching of the skills?

The committee will continue to promote collaboration between K-12 and academic librarians. Additionally, the committee is looking to involve high school students in their discussions and to encourage partnerships between librarians and teachers/faculty.

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- Kathy Jaccarino, Brockport High School
- Alice Palakoff, Wilson Commencement Academy/Wilson Magnet High School
- Kathleen Sigler, St. John Fisher College

Additional committee members include:

- Barbara Alvarez, University of Rochester
- Linda Cruttenden, Rochester City School Library System
- Sue Cardinal, University of Rochester
- Gwynne Mosch, Rochester City School Library System, East High School
- Sandy Johnson, Bryant & Stratton College
- Jennifer Little, SUNY Brockport

About the Author



Abby Kasowitz-Scheer is Head of Instructional Services at the [Syracuse University Library](#). She also leads the effort to expand the *S.O.S. for Information Literacy* project to higher education and has authored or co-authored several professional books and numerous publications.