

Building Community through Research: An Inquiry into Information Literacy

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Professionals in any field need a reason to collaborate. Our team proposes that collaborative research is an effective way to gain valuable experience, while building faculty community and generating meaningful results. Our summary details how our project was conceived, planned, and carried out, as well as share our survey tools and responses.

Information Literacy is defined as a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (American Library Association, 1989). Part-time and full-time faculty, staff, and community stakeholders were called together to collaborate on this undertaking, which reaffirmed existing professional ties and opened new professional connections for future opportunities.

Inquiry Leads to Community-Building

At a program meeting a few years ago, one of the members of the team raised a question about textbook use: were students actually using them? This question led to a few colleagues getting together to discuss our thoughts and experiences with student Information Literacy (IL) practices. We theorized that IL practices and resourcefulness would be correlated but wondered how our college students' skills would compare to university students' skills.

We discussed the many benefits to forming a research community, notably:

1. Collaborating with internal and external stakeholders, while requiring an investment of time, can produce improved research results
2. Team members learn the research process (i.e. REB application, research ethics, designing effective measures, proposal writing, publishing process, trouble-shooting, etc.)
3. Team research supports the completion of time-sensitive goals
4. PT faculty can lead new research opportunities and mentor others
5. The research process can strengthen existing partnerships with college teams, and build new partnerships with community groups that can lead to more opportunities
6. PT and FT faculty collaboration provides meaningful mentorship and networking

Our Community

To create our measure of IL, the YILP, we brought together part-time and full-time faculty, college staff (student academic support, library), as well as community organizations such as the Literacy Network of Durham Region (LiNDR).

In a number of discussions, we explored the issues with an existing Information Literacy Test (ILT; Reed, Kinder, & Farnum, 2007) developed by a research team at Ryerson University, such as having seemingly low face validity for measuring IL as a global construct. In 2007, Reed and colleagues investigated student outcomes in IL when a librarian and an instructor co-taught a university preparation course which focused on the development of IL skills. To measure their students' IL development, they created the Information Literacy Test (ILT) which they used as a pre-test and post-test across the semester. Since the course focused on teaching students library skills, it is not surprising that they observed significant increases in students' IL skills (as measured by the ILT) over the course of the semester.

From our consultations with internal and external stakeholders, and keeping in mind the perceived shortcomings of the ILT which were identified, we created a behavioural self-report measure that aligns with the newly developed *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (2016) by the Association of College and Research Libraries, or simply the *Framework*. Specifically, the YILP includes questions related to all six of the *Framework's* concept categories:

1. Authority Is Constructed and Contextual
2. Information Creation as a Process
3. Information Has Value
4. Research as Inquiry
5. Scholarship as Conversation
6. Searching as Strategic Exploration

Our Research Project

Information Literacy is an important skill for everyone to have, both during formal schooling and in the workplace. IL is difficult to measure, however, especially since its new conceptualization as a *Framework* in 2016 (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016).

College students were recruited through their general education courses and were invited to complete the three measures (discussed in more detail below) online after class. They received a \$5 e-card as compensation. Those who elected to complete the study first provided some demographics, then completed the YILP, ILT, and ARI, all of which are further described below.

- *Demographic* questions asked students to indicate in which School (department) their program was offered, the name of their program, their current semester of study, and whether then began college directly from high school (or if not, what they were doing before attending college).

- *Your Information Literacy Practices (YILP)* is the 16-question self-report measure we developed in consultation with our community. It asks students about their IL habits and can be accessed in full here: <https://tinyurl.com/y6jnuk7x>
- *Information Literacy Test (ILT; Reed et al, 2007)* is an objective measure of abilities and is comprised of 23 questions that are mostly focused on specific skills taught content from the course, such as library search skills.
- *Academic Resourcefulness Inventory (ARI; Kennett, 1994)* includes 22 questions of polar statements which students rate on Likert-like scale (e.g., (1) *Disorganized with my work* - (4) *Neutral* - (7) *Organized with my work*).

In all, 42 students participated. Most students (88%) were in their first semester and came to college directly from high school (67%). Of those who did not come directly from high school, more than three-quarters worked full time prior to attending.

Results and Discussion

By comparing the results obtained in the Reed et al (2007) university student sample to those of our college student sample, our project quantified and compared the IL skills of students using the ILT. This allowed us to compare college and university students' baseline (pre-test) performance. And, because our sample also completed the YILP, we were able to examine relationships among these variables.

Compared to the previously published university samples (Reed et al, 2007) our sample scored slightly lower on the ILT ($M = 30.67\%$ vs 46%), and we found fewer students earning a passing grade (25.71% vs 35%). For resourcefulness, we found a similar mean in our sample compared to Kennett (1994), differing only by approximately 1 point, however, our college sample showed more variability ($SD = 21.02$ vs. 17). Our YILP measure of IL showed a .39 correlation with both the ARI and the ILT and, in our sample, ILT scores were highly correlated ($r = .70$) with the ARI.

Interestingly, differences between university and college students' scores may stem in part from differences in metacognitive abilities (see Lang, 2012 for a discussion), which may affect their ability to reliably self-report. However, given the moderate correlation between the self-report YILP and the more objective ILT, this possible explanation does not appear to be problematic.

It also appears that life experience has a positive effect on outcomes, as participants who did not enter directly from high school scored slightly better on all three measures. Since most non-direct entry respondents reported that they were working full time prior to attending college, it is possible that working before attending college has allowed respondents the opportunity to develop their resourcefulness skills, which they then transferred to an academic setting once they began their post-secondary program

Conclusions and Future Directions

The ILT seemed far too focused on concrete library skills to accurately measure IL skills more globally. The YILP seems to effectively measure IL without being overly-correlated with resourcefulness (ARI), and being relatively strongly correlated with students' concrete library-related skills (ILT), which form an important part of IL skills. Given the ease of administering the YILP, it could be used to measure how students' IL practices progress through their program or course over time (e.g., pre-post in a Communications/English class). Future research should investigate whether the YILP can capture changes in students' IL skills over time.

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