Evidence of National and UAS Deficits in Information and Computer Literacy Skills

National evidence

In 2006, the National ICT Policy Council, formed by the Educational Testing Service and the National Forum on Information Literacy, conducted a study which indicates students’ information and computer literacy skills are inadequate for evaluating, managing and communicating information at a level that supports success at the post-secondary level. There is a focused summary of these findings in *College and Research Libraries News* and an *Inside Higher Ed* article by a professor of design technology at Ohio State University along with her institution’s response. The blog comments following the article include diverse perspectives on the relative importance of information literacy.

A 2007 article in *Library & Information Science Research* (Gross) suggests that students with low-level information literacy skills are likely to over-estimate their skill levels and not recognize limitations in their information search strategies. Unless they receive feedback on the adequacy of their research skills, they risk self-confirmation of their competency and are unlikely to seek remediation. Assessment of entering students would give them and their advisors a more accurate picture of their abilities, provided that we adopt credible assessment tools. (copyright restrictions, paper copy of Gross article to co-chairs for distribution).

An expert in web usability, Jakob Nielsen describes the results of his company’s national study of web skills. Users across professions and income levels appear to have difficulties coping with variable information architectures and even those in higher-paying positions were challenged by unfamiliar web sites, locating the desired information, modifying search strategies, and making comparisons. Nielsen’s findings confirm the need for those moving into the workplace to possess a firm foundation in information literacy skills for an ever-changing information environment.

UAS evidence

Anecdotal evidence from librarians’ encounters with students at the library’s reference desk indicates that students, whether enrolled in lower- or upper-division courses, often initiate searches for scholarly information on the Web or in a single, favorite licensed database, without first considering disciplinary resources or efficient search strategies. Many appear to lack skills for recognizing scholarly versus popular literature, indexing and appropriate search terminology, differences among various types of literature within a discipline, or even the nature of their information need.

Although it is difficult to get comprehensive data on students’ skills and abilities from Library Science courses at UAS since enrollments have been low, we are gradually gathering preliminary data which indicate that more attention to information literacy competencies is needed. The ILT mentioned above was given to upper-division and beginning graduate students (MAT, Natural Sciences) with scores lower than expected
and only a single score above 90%. In addition we have indirect evidence from student course rating data for library-related questions that information literacy skill development is a barrier to student success.

References


View report:  http://www.useit.com/alertbox/user-skills.html