



Preparing Students for Lifelong Success



*How School
Librarians Meet
the Challenges
of Teaching
Information Literacy*



An Infobase Company

Advisor: Joyce Kasman Valenza, PhD.
Associate Professor, Rutgers University, SC&I

Issues of authority and trustworthiness are the biggest challenges students face when sourcing material for research. But according to Susan Matter, staff librarian at Flathead Valley Community College in Montana, about 2/3 of incoming college freshmen lack basic information literacy skills. “They don’t know what a database is,” said Matter.

To get an idea of what lies behind these shortcomings, Credo, and Infobase Company, with support from School Library Journal, sent hundreds of middle and high school librarians an Information Literacy/College Readiness survey. The survey yielded some interesting insights—and possible solutions.

For starters, the prevailing belief is that information literacy instruction is “extremely important” in preparing students for college—90% of respondents agreed.

“Students have every piece of information you could possibly imagine in their pocket, and if we don't teach them how to weed out that information and analyze it, I just don't know how as a society we'll function,” said Colleen Simpson, library media specialist at Scituate High School in Massachusetts. “It’s essential for just being a good citizen.”

Information literacy instruction lays a solid foundation in preparing students for their college experience and enables a lifelong learning growth mindset. This is what motivates so many librarians to teach information literacy to their students—46% said they do so on either a daily or weekly basis. It’s likely that number would be higher if not for the challenges almost all librarians face: lack of time, support, and resources.

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TOP CHALLENGES

to Libraries offering
Information Literacy Instruction

LACK OF
TIME **69%**

LACK OF BUDGET &
ADMINISTRATOR
SUPPORT **63%**

LACK OF
FACULTY
SUPPORT **59%**

% OF RESPONDENTS



31%

**of librarians said that
their administrators do
not place a high priority
on information literacy.**

Lack of Time and Support

The biggest hurdle constraining librarians' efforts in offering information literacy instruction is a lack of time—69% indicated this is their primary challenge. With school budgets constantly shrinking, many librarians find themselves burdened with additional non-core tasks such as lunch duty and study hall. One librarian described how teachers send all of their students from study hall to the library, which adds as many as 65 kids in her room every single period. Some librarians even have technical tasks to manage—they're in charge of assigning Chromebooks, managing their maintenance, and collecting them at the end of the year.

And then there's the lack of administrative support for offering intentional information literacy instruction. 31% of librarians said that their administrators do not place a high priority on information literacy, while a much more prominent 59% report a lack of support from teachers. Several librarians believe it to be a function, again, of a lack of time—with teachers preoccupied by meeting the standards of state tests, they don't have as much time for planning projects or papers.

And then there are teachers who, for one reason or another, prefer to go it alone. "I think teachers assume their students already possess certain skills," said Dana Carmichael, librarian at Whitefish Middle School in Montana. "Because so many students have had access to technology since they were born, teachers tend to assume the kids have a lot of skills. I think teachers forget that learning how to do research is not an innate skill and is not the same as being technically savvy."



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29% of librarians said that a lack of resources impedes IL instruction. This typically manifests itself through budgets too limited to provide computers or anything other than free databases, as well as a lack of teacher-librarians in middle and elementary schools. Yet even an abundance of resources can present its own challenges. In one high school where every student receives her/his own laptop, fewer teachers are bringing their classes to the library for instruction, believing that all research can be done in the classroom.

Collaboration with Teachers: the Key

Still, despite these challenges, 20% of librarians collaborate either daily or weekly with teachers in information literacy instruction (33% collaborate monthly and 30% once a semester). These collaborative efforts take on many forms.

"One of the things that we learned works best in this building is collaboration beforehand," said Simpson. "I'm happy to create lesson plans using video or Google Slides, and typically the teachers are really excited to be able to play them and not have to reinvent the wheel every time."

Susan Pennington, who spent nine years as a high school librarian in Springfield Southeast High School in Springfield, Illinois (she's currently in the middle school), started an "essential library vocabulary" program with the faculty, aligning all departments to make sure they were using the same terminology. For example, a "thesis statement" was the same in sci-

FREQUENCY OF COLLABORATION

in information literacy instruction between librarians and teachers

DAILY/
WEEKLY **20%**

MONTHLY **33%**

1X/SEMESTER **30%**

% OF RESPONDENTS

ence, math, and English classes. “The students can't learn deep research and critical thinking if they don't know how to use a library in the first place,” she said. She put freshmen through a “scavenger hunt” where they had to find and identify specific source material in book form or online. “So that when they graduate high school and go to college, they can go into a college library and know how a circulation desk works,” she said. “Or if they're going straight into the workforce, I want them to be able to research a job and figure out what opportunities are out there for training.”

Kristin Chavonelle, library media specialist at Windham High School near Portland, Maine, said that annual professional development days have helped create a more fluid understanding between teachers and librarians. Once a year the entire staff attends a “Books, Bites and Bagels” event, where a projector or TV is set up, and teachers and librarians make presentations about projects they’ve collaborated on. “The teachers can go around and ask questions and see how, say, Miss Smith consulted me in a lesson, what that looked like and what the results were,” said Chavonelle. “It's always been very successful.”

Some schools have mandated “collaborative times,” sessions that can often kick-start ideas for librarians to create presentations to get administration members behind their efforts. Recently, Chavonelle spoke in front of the school board to advocate for the library’s role. “I talked about how we work with teachers in the classroom, how we help with technology and collection development, that we don't just sit around and check



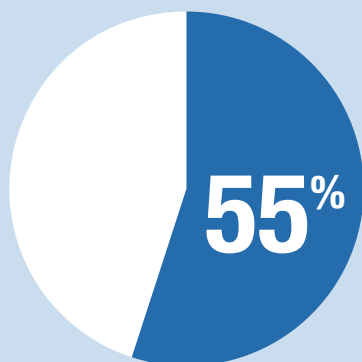
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– Susan Pennington,
Lincoln Magnet School,
Springfield, Illinois

OFF-CAMPUS COLLABORATION

55% of librarians do collaborate with peers at nearby schools and public libraries



% OF RESPONDENTS



out books,” she said, adding that the board responded most to a demonstration of the differences between authentic news websites and fake ones. Librarians need to continue to emphasize the value of library instruction, particularly around information literacy, because these skills will improve overall performance and that will reflect positively on both administrators and teachers. Aligning library outreach and instruction to these goals may get more buy-in and collaboration.

Expanding Collaboration Efforts Off-Campus

Collaboration off-campus is another potential opportunity identified in the survey. When asked if they partner with any other public schools or local libraries to cultivate students’ information literacy skills, 45% of librarians said no. This lack of outreach also isn’t surprising. Several librarians describe how difficult it is to visit with other libraries in the district.

But 55% of librarians do collaborate with peers at nearby schools and public libraries through face-to-face meetings and class visits where students can explore other tools and databases.

Interestingly, collaboration with post-secondary libraries reveals a large gap. With nearly 70% of their students college-bound, only 25% of respondents said their schools have set goals for preparing students for college-level research. It’s understandable, then, that 76% of librarians do not partner with libraries in any local college institutions to better prepare their students—a lack of collaboration that’s acutely felt among college librarians.

PREPAREDNESS GAP

between college-bound students and schools with set goals for preparing students for college-level research.

COLLEGE-BOUND STUDENTS **70%**

SCHOOLS WITH PREPAREDNESS GOALS **25%**

“ They don’t know what peer reviewed articles are, or boolean operators, and they’re not really familiar with academic ebooks. I think overall that’s where it falls short for us: that they just haven’t had the practice.”

– Susan Matter, Flathead Community College

“They don’t know what peer reviewed articles are, or boolean operators, and they’re not really familiar with academic ebooks—and we have about 165,000 of them,” said Susan Matter at Flathead Valley Community College. “I think overall that’s where it falls short for us: that they just haven’t had the practice.”

Dana Carmichael and her colleagues in the valley-wide district hold an annual meeting to make sure that high school students receive college-level information literacy teaching. A community college librarian makes a presentation and the attendees talk about resource sharing so that high school students who are graduating at the valley schools feel comfortable using the resources that she provides.

A similar initiative in Montana called TRAILS, a co-operative program for college libraries, is exploring a model where they could help school libraries form a consortium and purchase access to databases. “This way, our high schoolers are getting the same academic online experience as the college,” said Carmichael.

Meeting the Digital Needs of Students

Carmichael provides perhaps the most common illustration of the evolution of information literacy. Nine years ago when she started her job, she bought a World Book Encyclopedia set. “I’ve not bought one since,” she said. “The kids never think to go there to look for anything.”

Rather than gathering background information from physical reference books, students are drawn to the convenience of the open web. It’s been an uphill struggle to convince administrators of the role librarians can





play in effectively teaching students how to discern fact from fiction in this new and rapidly evolving landscape. Budgets continue to shrink and librarian positions are eliminated. “It’s a huge mistake,” said Matter, a former high school librarian herself. “We have this whole information world to navigate, and it’s complicated, and with all the online resources, it’s getting more complicated.”

Shrinking Time and lopsided student ratios can’t be addressed using the old model of school librarianship. Instead, libraries are investing in more digital resources in order to enable 24/7 access for students—over 30% of respondents said they work in libraries that spend at least \$5,000 per year on digital resources. Survey data suggest college students prefer e-reference when conducting research, and if not familiarized with online databases, students are more likely to visit far-less reliable open web platforms like Google and Wikipedia.

Instruction is also transitioning away from being solely reliant on in-class lectures, towards more on-demand videos and tutorials. For libraries flooded during study hall hours, these types of point-of-need resources can help ensure everyone is exposed to proper research strategies. All interactions with students are teaching opportunities, and technology is helping support librarians who can’t be in 65 places at once.

Flipped classroom models take this one step further, allowing instructors to assign videos covering baseline topics, so that seat time can be dedicated to more hands on, interactive learning. Even for teachers who prefer to “go it alone,” librarians can provide them with LMS-embeddable videos and tutorials in order to offer consistent instruction around information literacy and critical thinking.



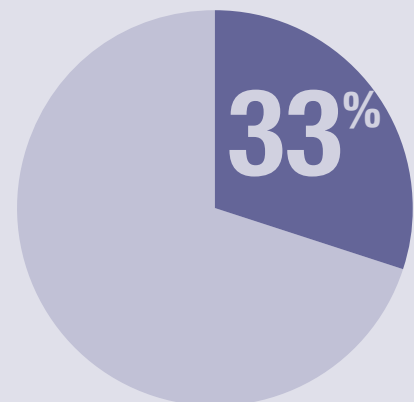
It’s a huge mistake [to limit librarians’ roles in teaching information literacy]. We have this whole information world to navigate, and with all the online resources, it’s getting more complicated.

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INVESTING IN DIGITAL

33% of respondents said they work in libraries that spend at least \$5,000 per year on digital resources.



% OF RESPONDENTS



Bringing IL into the Classroom

In a 2014 study of education graduate students conducted by Barbara Blummer and Jeffrey M. Kenton, *Improving Student Information Search*, the authors stated that all students described themselves as information literate, yet “just over half” of the participants couldn’t define information literacy—they confused it with “issues of technology.”

The insights gained from the Information Literacy/College Readiness survey point to the need for on-demand videos and tutorials, and one-stop instructional platforms that expand the librarian’s footprint, enabling collaboration with teachers, either face-to-face or virtually. This easy, time-saving integration of information literacy into the classroom—and the curriculum—allows students to build their confidence with the types of resources they will see in college, while also cultivating skills for the 21st century.

And it falls on middle and high school librarians to call attention to the resulting student successes, which helps advocate for their positions and new resources—for their students and for the future. Said Carmichael: “We as librarians need to shift our thinking, improve our abilities and communication skills and lead the way.”

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