

Title:

21st Century Skills: Integrating Information Literacy into North Carolina Wesleyan College campuses

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Abstract:

Our students and adult learners need to learn skills that allow them to find, critically evaluate, and effectively use information. These skills are known nationally as 21st Century Information Literacy Skills¹. The QEP authors considered the question: “Are our graduates ready to survive in the 21st century?” Given the realities of globalization, knowledge work, accelerating societal change and technology, it’s obvious that *what* students and adult learners learn—as well as *how* and *when* they learn are changing. Over the last decade, there were tremendous advances in the science of learning, made possible by the convergence of research in the cognitive sciences, neuroscience, human development, and technology. As a result, we know more today about how people think and learn. For starters, research clearly shows that students and adult learners learn more when they are engaged in meaningful, relevant, and intellectually stimulating work. While all learning is deeply personal, the frequency and relevance of such moments increase when they visualize and analyze data; link to real-world contexts; and take advantage of opportunities for feedback, reflection, and analysis.

The College acknowledges the importance of 21st Century Skills in the Statement of Purpose and the General Education Curriculum. However, a formal program that fosters Information Literacy skills does not yet exist, nor are the skills part of Institutional Assessment. By creating a dialogue between faculty, librarians, and administrators to strategically integrate national standards and learning outcomes into the curriculum, a formal assessable program can ensure that all NCWC graduates possess skills that will allow them to be informed citizens and scholars. NCWC’s Statement of Purpose reads, “Instruction emphasizes critical thinking, analytical reasoning, reading, writing, speaking, making informed ethical decisions, and using the new information technologies.” However, the College provides no formal program that strategically fosters effective student and adult learner use of information technology, nor do we assess whether or not graduating students and adult learners are information literate. Without information literacy, students and adult learners attempt to Google their way through college. With no structure in the curriculum, students and adult learners haphazardly encounter assignments requiring research skills, and without prior training, our students and adult learners use the extent of research skills that are self-taught: search Google and scan the first page of “fourteen million results”. The obstacles described above are exacerbated by Pearsall Library’s growing collection of information that is *entirely* in electronic format (research databases). Ironically, these electronic resources are ideal tools for students and adult learners who otherwise complete much of their work from home computers, wireless access, or Adult Degree Program campus computer labs. But again, nothing in our curriculum ensures student and adult learner familiarity with these sophisticated research tools. It is not surprising that these students and adult learners find and use information inappropriately.

Inappropriate student and adult learner use of information has become a topic of discussion among our faculty, staff, and administrators. Recent attention to plagiarism and the actions of the Academic Policy Committee to bring about a revised plagiarism policy have produced debates. The Writing Program Committee is now diligently helping to take up the issue of what to do when students and adult learners use information irresponsibly. Information Literacy addresses this issue. One of the five national ACRL Standards states: “The information literate student understands many of the economic, *legal*, and *social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.*” Through strategic programming, such learning outcomes can help our College to positively change student and adult learner behaviors by educating

¹ **Information literacy** is 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. *Association of College and Research Libraries*:
<<http://www.acrl.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.cfm>>

them about appropriate and ethical uses of information. A college-wide Information Literacy program can focus on freshman and sophomore level research skills in General Education courses that involve research, while junior and senior level skills are fostered through the majors in Writing Intensive courses. The impact of the program occurs when Faculty collaborate with Reference Librarians to develop or adapt activities and assignments that embed information skills into course content.

Learning Outcomes Based on the Standards:

In January 1999, The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) published five Standards that define information literate students and adult learners:

1. The information literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed.
2. The information literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.
3. The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.
4. The information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.
5. The information literate student understands many of the ethical, legal and socio-economic issues surrounding information and information technology.

These Standards were recognized, adapted, and adopted by North Carolina Wesleyan College in 2000 and outcomes were created for the campus population:

- ❖ Recognize and articulate information needs.
- ❖ Access needed information effectively and efficiently.
- ❖ Formulate and execute search strategies appropriate to the information resource.
- ❖ Locate and retrieve relevant sources in a variety of formats.
- ❖ Critically evaluate the information retrieved.
- ❖ Organize, synthesize, integrate, and apply the information.

Freshmen Outcomes:

- Be able to read and understand a library catalog record so as to extract location and status information.
- Be firmly grounded in the use of print materials, especially reference books.
- Have an introduction to the library's website and electronic resources.

Sophomores Outcomes:

- Familiarity with Subject Headings in the library catalog.
- Ability to select appropriate article database(s) for topics.
- Possess a basic library/research vocabulary: Journal, Article, Abstract, Citation, Database, Subject Heading.
- Familiarity with citing sources.

Juniors Outcomes:

- Be able to name a few of the major reference books, journals and databases in their chosen field of study.
- Be able to present a verbal or written strategy for solving an information problem.
- Have learned multidisciplinary ways of thinking.

Seniors Outcomes:

- Understand the concept of scholarly communication.
- Know the major professional journals in one's field.
- Know the major professional associations in one's field.
- Be able to synthesize information from multiple sources regardless of format.

Assessment:

A variety of quantitative approaches can be used to assess Information Literacy learning outcomes, from home-grown embedded assessment in selected courses, to the use of ETS' Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy Assessment. (<http://www.ets.org>, and search for "ICT"). *NCWC already uses ETS for Institutional Assessment. We would only need to add this component.*