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Subversive Infusions: Integrating Information Literacy Across the Curriculum

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Abstract

Beginning in 2004, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) requires

institutions seeking accreditation to develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to improve

student learning. QEP topics may be focused on a single educational initiative or may combine

several efforts in order to enhance and assess student learning. While some plans have focused

on information literacy specifically, a fair number of the QEP proposals submitted to SACS

between 2007-2011 have integrated information literacy learning outcomes as part of another

topic. An analysis of the topics and outcomes proposed at 58 institutions offers librarians and

information professionals an alternative perspective on the integration of information literacy

across the curriculum.

Introduction

    In 2002, the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and

Schools (SACS) revised their accreditation standards to require colleges and university to

develop a plan that would enhance student learning across the institution's curriculum. The

Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is a locally developed proposal that "(1) includes a process

identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes

and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the

institution, (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and

completion of the QEP, (4) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in

the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to

assess their achievement."[1] Institutions would be expected to select a topic and develop a

proposal during the year prior to its review and acceptance by external SACS reviewers.

    At the same time, librarians at colleges and universities across the country were ramping

up the assessment of their library instruction and information literacy programs, thanks in no

small part to the publication of the ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for

Higher Education* in 2000.[2] While library and information literacy instruction was not new to

many campuses, an organized program of planning, teaching, and assessment was less common.

The ACRL *Standards* encouraged local institutions to expand instruction programs and to collect

information about students' pre-instruction abilities and post-instruction information literacy

development.

    As a consequence of timing, librarians at numerous institutions were able to provide their

universities with adequate grounds---both statistically in assessment data and intellectually via a

growing body of literature on information literacy development---to consider information

literacy for local QEP topics. From 2004 to 2011, eighteen universities developed QEP

proposals for enhancing student learning at their institutions by focusing specifically on this

topic. Beyond plans that featured information literacy as a focus, more than 100 universities and

colleges included information literacy learning outcomes as part of more broad learning

objectives. In some cases, the development of information literacy was a direct component of

the plan, while others included information literacy in a very limited manner.

While librarians and others have reported on the process involved in proposing, selecting,

and implementing QEP proposals focused on information literacy development across an

institution's curriculum, the impact of information literacy in plans that blend information

literacy with other curricular goals has received little attention. In the course of completing

research on the presence of information literacy as a topic in Quality Enhancement Plans

developed for SACS accreditation, the researcher analyzed proposals published at the SACS

QEP website between 2003 and 2010 and organized these documents based on the concentration

given to information literacy objectives, learning outcomes, and assessment measures. Rather

than analyzing QEP proposals that focus solely on information literacy, this analysis focused on

plans that integrate information literacy outcomes with other learning goals in a substantive

manner. The results of this work will suggest directions for those librarians and institutions

involved in integrating information literacy goals within similar curricular development

situations.

Literature Review

The use of accreditation reaffirmation criteria and planning to facilitate information

literacy integration across higher education curricula has been a popular option for institutions

seeking to expand or develop local information literacy programming. Ilene F. Rockman introduces *Integrating Information Literacy into the Higher Education Curriculum* with a chapter detailing the need to integrate information literacy development and learning outcomes across disciplines and cites the influence of requirements set by accrediting bodies as one of the motivating factors behind this trend.[3] Aside from SACS, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), and the North West Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) have all included accreditation suggestions or requirements related to the value and necessity of information literacy development in higher education settings.[4] (For a comprehensive review of the relationship between libraries, information literacy instruction, and accreditation standards before 2002, see Thompson's "Information Literacy Accreditation Mandates: What They Mean for Faculty and Librarians."[5])

The inclusion of information literacy and library instruction in requirements for accreditation reaffirmation does not mean that all organizations have treated the subject in a similar fashion. In 2007, Saunders offered a cogent analysis of the different ways that information literacy has been appropriated in these standards. In her comparative analysis, Saunders found that information literacy and related teaching and learning outcomes were distributed across accreditation reaffirmation guidelines and were not isolated to sections related to library instruction.[6] This distribution suggests both a challenge and an opportunity for librarians to become more involved in curriculum development and assessment at their local institutions.[7] Less common is the application of accreditation standards to information literacy goals for specific academic disciplines. Ruediger and Jung analyzed the relationship between accreditation and information literacy standards and suggested a process for weaving these

expectations and outcomes within subject-specific situations (in this case, the curriculum for an advertising program).[8]

With information literacy as the focus of a variety of campus QEP proposals, a number of articles describing the library's role during QEP development and implementation have been published. Millet, Donald, and Wilson write about the experience of successfully proposing a QEP for Trinity University that focuses specifically on information literacy learning outcomes.[9] In "Information Literacy Across the Curriculum: Expanding Horizons," the authors detail the QEP approval process, strategies for infusing information literacy across the curriculum, and the five-year plan to achieve QEP objectives. The authors contend that one of the most valuable results of this process was the involvement of librarians in the development of new courses and the revision of many standing courses, an involvement that has an across-the-board impact on the curriculum. In a subsequent article, Millet argues that the key to the acceptance and success of a QEP proposal with an information literacy focus is to (a) develop strong communication between librarians and faculty members, (b) offer professional development opportunities designed to improve the teaching abilities of librarians, and (c) never underestimate the power of assessment data to provide evidence that students need and will benefit from increased information literacy development.[10]

Penny M. Beile's "Assessing an Institution-Wide Information Fluency Program: Commitment, Plan, and Purpose" describes the University of Central Florida Libraries efforts to partner with faculty and administration to implement and assess information fluency development across the curriculum. Beile highlights the challenges involved in proposing and implementing a curricular initiative of the size and scope of a campus QEP program, and cites the difficulties related to differing conceptualizations of information fluency between librarians,

faculty, and administrators.[11] In addition, the organization of campus partners and the

assignment of responsibilities, as well the need for librarians to maintain a visible role in a

campus QEP with an information fluency focus is considered.

In "The Impact of Accreditation and Distance Education on Information Literacy,"

Johanna Tunon describes the efforts of Nova Southeastern University to meet SACS

accreditation standards related to the provision of library-related learning outcomes. Tunon

contends that it is the very presence of such accreditation standards that have spurred libraries to

focus efforts to assess library and information literacy instruction effectiveness.[12] Along with a

variety of other library-faculty collaborations, Alexandra Simons describes the University of

Houston's involvement with the campus *Learning by Discovery* QEP. Simons believes that the

library's involvement in the QEP process helped librarians to "align library resources more

closely to the needs of the university."[13]

Loughman, Hickson, Sheeks, and Hortman detail Columbus State University's QEP

development process and its focus on the enhancement of students' writing abilities.[14] The

authors explain the ways that information literacy instruction was integrated into the proposal

and the assessment methods that were selected to gauge success and suggest improvement of the

library's involvement with the QEP. David Salinero and Cynthia Beardsley have written on the

library's role in the development and application of Delta State University's QEP focusing on

student and faculty engagement.[15] The authors give focus to the library's efforts to revise

activities and programs that were in place prior to the development of the QEP along with the

creation of new resources and services to facilitate DSU's proposal.

While these examples describe various levels of library involvement in the development

of QEP programs to meet the accreditation standards set by SACS, the relationship between

accreditation standards and information literacy goals requires further exploration in practice and in the scholarly and professional communications of information literacy advocates.   In "Perspectives on Accreditation and Information Literacy as Reflected in the Literature of Library and Information Science," Laura Saunders contends that published and informal discussions on the potential benefits of associating the requirements of accrediting bodies with the goals of information literacy programs continues to receive slim treatment.[16] As institutions and libraries come to the end of five- and ten-year assessment programs related to QEP accreditation requirements, it is expected that more reporting will be offering on the process related to the proposing, implementing, and completing these campus-wide assessment programs.

Methodology

The SACS Quality Enhancement Plan website includes listings of QEP proposals submitted and accepted between 2004 and 2011.[17] Due to considerations related to the launch of the QEP program by SACS and limited information for many proposals published during the first year of the process, study samples were limited to reports submitted during the five-year period between 2007 and 2011. During the sample period, 391 institutions submitted QEP proposals for review. Undergraduate (192) and graduate institutions (199) were represented in an equal manner in this sample. Executive summaries and information available at institutional websites for each QEP proposal were analyzed to locate topics, specific language, or learning outcomes focused on information literacy development. In addition, executive summaries were considered that did not specifically mention information literacy but that included program goals or learning outcomes that are often associated with IL, such as the evaluation of information or

the ethical use of sources.   From the total of 391 proposals, 127 proposals were identified for use

in the study.

Table 1: Total Number of QEP proposals submitted to SACS, 2007-2011

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Number of Proposals	*73*	*73*	*80*	*87*	*78*	*391*
Number of Undergrad Inst.	*36*	*38*	*42*	*43*	*33*	*192*
Number of Grad Inst.	*37*	*35*	*38*	*44*	*45*	*199*

In most cases, the complete QEP proposals created by each institution (commonly

published in PDF form and between 50 and 80 pages in length) were located and analyzed. In

situations where proposals were considered confidential to institutional personnel or were

otherwise unavailable, information from the institution's website was used to collect additional

information. Then, plans were organized into three categories designed for this project.

Categories were based on the level of focus given to information literacy goals, outcomes, and

assessment:

1. IL-Focused Proposals: Information literacy development is the stated goal of the proposal.

While the document may use terminology other than "information literacy," the objectives of the

proposal, the literature review, learning outcomes, program development process, and

assessment measures focus on information literacy development.

2. IL-Integrated Proposals: Information literacy is one of several primary goals of the objectives

and/or outcomes identified in the proposal. Faculty and student are slated to receive information

literacy instruction to aid in the completion of the plan and assessment measures related to

information literacy learning are included in the plan. The term "information literacy" may or

may not be used, but learning outcomes associated with information literacy are included in the

plan.

3. IL-Optional Proposals: Information literacy is not listed as a stated goal of the plan, although outcomes or IL instruction and program development are included as optional or incidental components of the QEP.

After the QEP proposals were organized, each plan received a second analysis based on the category in which it had been initially organized. As a result, some reports were moved from one category to another, until the plans in each category aligned with the definitions provided above. A total of 21 proposals were removed from the collected data due to a lack of substantive information literacy content, resulting in a final sample of 106 QEP proposals.

Descriptive data about each plan was recorded in a Microsoft Excel document and statistical data was collected for each of the three proposal categories. Based on these results, plans in the IL integrated category received a second review to collect the specific language used to describe learning outcomes. Learning outcomes were then associated into five categories based on the *ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*. Additional information was collected about the assessment measures that would be used to gauge the enhancement of student learning due to QEP-related activities.

Table 2: Total Number of Proposals Organized by Category, 2007-2011

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
IL-Focused Proposals	3	3	5	6	1	18
IL-Integrated Proposals	7	8	11	12	20	58
IL-Optional Proposals	1	6	6	6	11	30

Findings

Of the 106 proposals selected for categorization and analysis, 18 focused on information literacy as an institution's QEP topic, 58 QEP proposals integrated information literacy in an equal manner with other learning objectives, and an additional 30 plans incorporated information

literacy learning outcomes as an optional component of the plan's goals or objectives. While IL-Focused Proposals are clearly of interest to librarians and other information literacy advocates, the IL-Integrated category requires greater scrutiny. Clearly, the number of Integrated proposals that included information literacy outcomes saw an increase during each year of the sample period. Further, as evidenced in Table 3, both undergraduate and graduate institutions show increased interest in including IL learning outcomes in their proposals over time. Of these, the majority (37.9%) focused on critical thinking as the primary topic. Improving student writing (17.2%) was also popular, as was the creation of undergraduate research experiences for students that allowed them to be mentored by faculty (12.1%). Other proposal topics included programs to prepare students for college-level work and participation (12.1%).

Table 3: "Integrated" Proposal Topics by Year and Type of Institution (A=Undergraduate Institutions, B=Graduate Institutions)

	2007A	2007B	2008A	2008B	2009A	2009B	2010A	2010B	2011A	2011B	Totals
Critical Thinking	2	2	3	1	1	2		5	3	3	**22**
Writing	1			1	1	1			1	5	**10**
Undergrad Research				2	1			1	1	2	**7**
College Prep Skills/FYS		1	1		1	1	1			2	**7**
Career Education							1	1			**2**
Global Competence						1			1		**2**
Problem-Solving							1	1			**2**
Student Engagement										2	**2**
Academic Creativity		1									**1**
Active Learning						1					**1**
Literacy (general)								1			**1**
Quantitative Literacy						1					**1**
Totals	3	4	4	4	4	7	3	9	6	14	**58**

A number of terms were used in these proposals to identify information literacy learning outcomes, with "information literacy" being the most common (29.3%). A number of schools (24.1%) used the term "critical thinking" to describe outcomes that librarians and information

professionals would commonly associate with information literacy skills. Other examples include "research skills" or "research methods" (13.8%) and "inquiry" (10.3%). A considerable number of proposals (22.4%) did not use a single specific term to describe instruction, assignments, or learning outcomes related to the location, evaluation, selection, or use of information sources.

Table 4: Terms Used in Integrated Proposal to Describe Information Literacy-Related Learning Outcomes, Activities, Etc. Organized by Year and Type of Institution (A=Undergraduate Institutions, B=Graduate Institutions)

	2007A	2007B	2008A	2008B	2009A	2009B	2010A	2010B	2011A	2011B	Totals
information literacy	2	1	1	1		5	2	4	1		**17**
critical thinking	1	1	2	1	1	1		1	3	3	**14**
none		2	1			1	1	2	2	4	**13**
research (skills, methods)				1	3			1		3	**8**
inquiry (skills)				1				1		4	**6**
Totals	**3**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**7**	**3**	**9**	**6**	**14**	**58**

After categorizing each learning outcome associated with information literacy development by their association with one of the five *ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, most plans (37) included one or more learning outcomes related to activities involved in the evaluation of sources. All QEP proposals focused on critical thinking instruction and learning included an outcome that almost replicates the language in the *Standards.* Standard 4 related to the use of information to accomplish a purpose is also a popular outcome (28) and were most prevalent in QEP proposals designed to enhance students' writing abilities. A total of 21 outcomes focused on the effective and efficient location and gathering of sources. Of the five categories, those that have received little attention across these proposals relate to students developing an understanding about the nature and extent of information needed (6) and the ethical use of sources (3). Finally, nine of the proposals included outcomes that were

more aligned with the broad definition of information literacy without focusing on one or more of the five standards.

Discussion

After reviewing and analyzing the 58 IL-integrated QEP proposals, it was evident that the topics of these proposals exhibited a number of trends. The QEP proposal topic that seems most conducive to the integration of information literacy in a conscientious manner focused on enhancing student learning in the area of critical thinking. The connection between critical thinking and information literacy should be no surprise to information literacy advocates. Information literacy requires critical thinking abilities that may have been learned prior to information literacy instruction and that may reinforce continued learning in future situations. The ability to locate and navigate online interfaces and make selections regarding keywords and phrases, the ability to evaluate sources for authority, reliability, timeliness, accuracy, and relevance, and the ability to use sources in an effective and ethical manner are all signs of a critical thinker's behavior. The fact that these activities and behaviors can be graded or quantified makes them well-suited to an assessment-based proposal to enhance student learning.

In addition, a number of QEP proposals that focused on critical thinking included identical information literacy learning outcomes that could not be associated with those published in the ACRL *Standards*. While one could assume that this conformity was achieved by institutions borrowing the outcomes of another, it is more likely that both the inclusion of information literacy and identical phrasing in the learning outcomes for the proposal are tied to the selection of assessment methods designed to determine the effectiveness of selected proposals. While many institutions intended to utilize assignment-specific rubrics and electronic

portfolios to assess QEP learning outcomes, many schools selected the same assessment instruments designed to evaluate students' critical thinking abilities.

The most popular tool for the assessment of critical thinking abilities (35%) in students was Tennessee Technical University's Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CAT). This test interprets students' responses to gauge their ability to evaluate information, think creatively, learn and solve problems, and communicate effectively.[18] Each of these skills categories includes information literacy related outcomes, such as separating factual information from inferred information, the identification of new information that might have an impact on an issue or problem, and separating relevant information from superficial data. The ACT's Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) test was another popular option (25%). The CAAP test includes five possible assessment modules, out of which three modules include the assessment of the student's ability to evaluate and make decisions related to information.[19] The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)[20] and the California Critical Thinking Skills Test (CCTST)[21] were also considered or adopted for assessment purposes by 25% of those schools with a critical thinking QEP focus, and both include measures to gauge critical thinking and problem-solving abilities related to the evaluation and use of information.

Ultimately, the use of these sources and the development of campus-wide learning outcomes based on these assessment tools should be of interest to individuals seeking to integrate information literacy across the curriculum. If librarians and campus partners are aware of the assessment measures that are used to guide the development of QEP-style proposals, strategic planning guidelines, etc., they will be better able to find an opportunity to focus on components of those measures that relate to information literacy development and assessment.

Aside from proposals that focused on critical thinking, improving student writing by improving instruction and programming was a popular QEP topic. This was even more evident in proposals classified in the IL-Optional category. The connection between improving students' ability to write and present reasoned, informed arguments and information literacy development should be clear. Of interest in these cases is the fact that the term "information literacy" was less common in favor of such identifiers as "research skills," "research methods," or "inquiry." One of the reasons for this may be the very specific manner in which English Departments and writing programs view the use of the term "literacy" and its application in this particular situation. Institutions implementing QEP programs focused on student writing tended to depend upon examples of students' written assignments and electronic portfolios and standardized rubrics were provided or proposed to help quantify assessment data that is more commonly presented in a qualitative manner.

Other topics selected by institutions that seemed to have a strong connection with information literacy learning outcomes were focused on creating opportunities for undergraduates to participate in research projects with faculty mentors, the development of students' global competence and sensitivity and understanding related to different countries and cultures, and the preparation of students to either prepare them for their introduction to university education or for their entry into the job market. All of these proposals offer opportunities for librarians and others to integrate information literacy learning outcomes into across-the-curriculum programs. Again, while it is ideal to develop information literacy programs that become integrated throughout the curriculum and within the disciplines in a very direct and conscious manner, the ability and opportunity to integrate information literacy in any way possible is one that should not be overlooked.

Further Research

  While this article focuses on the selection of learning outcomes for a campus-wide effort to enhance student learning, further research is possible involving the assessment methods included in the development of the proposal. In many cases, assessment measures were utilized to help justify the decision to focus on a particular topic or set of topics. Some institutions proposed global assessment tools or practices that were designed to determine the impact of the QEP on student learning. Others planned to use a variety of assessment tools, none of which were configured for a direct or authentic assessment of information literacy development. Of the assessment methods proposed, rubrics (27 %), surveys (27%), and writing portfolios (18%) were the most popular forms. Ultimately, the selection of assessment measures may have some impact on the ways that learning outcomes and curriculum planning are developed. And while librarians have been concerned that there are has been little in the way of widely accepted assessment tools and instruments to determine the students' information literacy development, in some ways this may have helped libraries and institutions to avoid defining a curriculum based on assessment measures. While the *ACRL Standards* have been used effectively as a tool to develop information literacy programs, it has not been so stipulative that local programs were not able to freely and independently chart learning outcomes that speak to the cultures and needs of specific institutions and libraries.

  The rhetorical character of the SACS QEP process is also worth further investigation. These documents are curricular and social designs intended to improve student learning, and still, the fact that these proposals are required by an accrediting body that will then determine the worth and value of the plan as part of an approval-granting process makes for striking and often

sophisticated use of persuasive strategies. While curriculum designs—and redesigns, in particular—must consider the morale and "buy-in" of the local community, the QEP proposal must also convince a group of objective reviewers that the plan is feasible and still substantive in its impact. Librarians, information professionals, and others would be well served by continuing to develop our understanding of the ways that local cultures, professional trends and concerns, and assessment-as-persuasion can impact targeted curricular (re)design.

On a more semantic level, the differences—whether they are obvious or only nuanced variations—in the language used to describe information literacy learning will offer avenues to understanding the way that language is used and can be used to communicate library and information literacy program goals. For example, what is the difference between a learning outcome that says "students will be able to evaluate sources for relevance" and one that says "students will be able to identify relevant versus irrelevant information?" What is the difference between saying that "students will learn to use sources ethically" and "students will learn about problems associated with plagiarism?" Looking to the specific example of the Tennessee State University QEP focused on improving student writing, what is the purpose in developing outcomes related to students' abilities as they "manage and coordinate information from multiple sources"?[22] Librarians and others involved in curricular or learning assessment (re)design projects will attest to the perceived importance and possible contentiousness of questions such as these. By improving our understanding of the ways that the use of specific language can help or hinder our efforts can only benefit us as we have and will continue to become more involved in campus-wide projects that intend to chart our institutions' educational objectives.

Curricular plans and designs that create connections between quantitative literacy and information literacy continue to be rare, and we are only recently taking advantage of the

obvious connections between information literacy and visual literacy as we make efforts to show that instruction on the location, evaluation, selection, and use of information—activities that are often involved in the creation of new informational products---is necessary across *all* disciplines. In addition, QEP proposals or similar curricular planning developed at religious or seminary institutions may provide a conscious and conscientious example of the interplay between information literacy and personal or spiritual values. While not specific to institutions that are religious in derivation or by design, these locations seem to make a more conscious effort to include this interplay into learning outcomes, broadly, and as they relate to information literacy specifically. Our professional understanding about values and learning as part of information literacy instruction continues to be a fertile area for continued work.

Conclusion

The requirements established by organizations involved in the reaffirmation of accreditation for universities and colleges should continue to be investigated as sites for information literacy program development that extend across the curriculum and beyond one-on-one collaborations between librarians and teachers. Taking opportunities when available and creating them where none exist will continue to be a necessary strategies for librarians as they integrate information literacy into their local curricula, culture, and institution. Librarians and others should consider encouraging the use of assessment measures that integrate IL assessment with other university/college assessment initiatives. Not only does this subversive tactic insure that IL competencies are being evaluated at local institutions, but such strategies reinforce the fact that information literacy development is crucial---in and of itself, and within the realm of other learning objectives.

Looking forward, the vitality of information literacy instruction and programming will depend in large part on its adaptability. Indeed, the principles and theories that support information literacy offer a wide expanse of opportunity for distribution across disciplines, subject matters, and professions. As we consider ways to maintain momentum for information literacy programs and instructions, one of our tasks will continue to be the location of connections with disciplinary concerns and institutional initiatives. Understanding the ways that information literacy has been and continues to be integrated (and in a sense, transliterated) for different audiences in different locations benefits both established and developing programs.

Author's Note

An annotated list of the QEP proposals selected for this study is available at http://libguides. trinity.edu/qep. Links to full proposals are included when available or have been replaced by institutional websites or QEP Executive Summaries when necessary.

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