LIBRARY LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

Campus-wide Information Literacy Assessment: An Opportunity for Library Leadership Through Understanding Faculty Perspectives

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Abstract

This article reports on an exploratory study of the process for the shared rubric creation in information literacy assessment at the university-level for accreditation purposes. This process can be used as an avenue for librarians to provide leadership and engage faculty in critical campus-wide assessment initiatives. Findings support previous research that showed faculty members perceive room for growth in students' information literacy competency. Furthermore, findings show faculty members see a connection between information literacy and critical thinking, another core competency. This link can be leveraged for more effective integration of information literacy into curriculum (and instruction) and for more efficient assessment of both competencies through overlaps in assessment rubrics. Librarians can be visible leaders in assessment on campus by addressing faculty concerns and providing resources and services to assist faculty, as well as campus administration, in teaching and assessing information literacy.

Introduction

As information literacy learning and assessment become more important to many universities' missions and accreditation processes, librarians are presented with significant leadership and collaboration opportunities. While the call for librarian collaboration with other faculty in the realm of information literacy is nothing new,¹ there has been less emphasis on the role that librarians can play in shaping changes to include information literacy in the heart of the curriculum.² When librarians are recognized as leaders and experts in information literacy learning for students and provide support for faculty in the disciplines outside of library and information science (LIS). This can, in turn, provide better data for administrators for accreditation and curriculum development purposes. While increasing the library's leadership role in campus-wide initiatives is acknowledged to be a difficult goal, it can have significant positive impacts for the wider campus community. However, to fully accomplish these goals, it is necessary to understand faculty perspectives of information literacy.

Information literacy is well-regarded as an essential competency for undergraduate students and is often incorporated into general education coursework⁴ as a way to address accreditation requirements. While there are many ways of defining information literacy,⁵ the definition from the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) is most relevant for the purposes of this study. ACRL defines information literacy as the "ability to locate, access, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."⁶ The ACRL definition is also used by the Association of

American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) in its *Information Literacy VALUE Rubric* almost verbatim⁷ and the *VALUE Rubric* is used by many universities.

With accreditation bodies such as Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) including information literacy as one of the core competencies that university curricula must address,⁸ information literacy is gaining a surge of interest outside of the LIS field where it has been studied most extensively.⁹ The accreditation requirement is an opportunity for libraries to lead due to the expertise librarians have in information literacy. This can take the form of leading assessment initiatives, providing train-the-trainer models for faculty on how to incorporate information literacy into their classes, and assuming advocacy and educational roles as necessitated by local campus needs.¹⁰

In contrast with the more recent emphasis on information literacy as a core competency, critical thinking has long been considered by most faculty and accrediting bodies as an essential competency for students to become lifelong learners.¹¹ However, the literature contains a variety of definitions for critical thinking that represent some consensus and some distinctions.¹² For example, critical thinking can be defined as a "habit of mind" in which an individual explores all available information before coming to a conclusion or as the ability to reflect and reason based on evidence before concluding a course of action or belief.¹³ Regardless of the variations, critical thinking and information literacy can be seen as supporting competencies with substantial overlap,¹⁴ providing another leadership avenue for librarian collaboration with faculty in teaching and assessment activities.

It is exciting that there has been a growing interest in information literacy learning and assessment, and an acknowledgement of information literacy's links to critical thinking. However, there is still a need for a deeper understanding of faculty perspectives—as opposed to librarian perspectives—on information literacy teaching, learning, and assessment. A better understanding of faculty perspectives and practices may provide new insights on how librarians can lead the integration of information literacy and critical thinking into the curriculum and instruction across university disciplines.

Local Context

At the authors' institution, a combination of general education requirements ensures that students encounter information literacy instruction at different points in their college education. All freshmen take a required, 2-unit quarter-length course that is focused solely on information literacy. The freshmen-level course is taught by librarians, who have faculty rank, in a mix of hybrid and online formats. Students must also complete upper-division courses that satisfy the University's advanced information literacy learning requirements. These upper division courses are taught by faculty from a variety of disciplines. This combination of required courses provides a strong starting point for information literacy teaching and assessment, but these activities are not yet embedded throughout university curriculum.

The Office of Faculty Development at the authors' university runs a Faculty Learning Communities program that brings together faculty from across campus to tackle a variety of scholarly and pedagogical issues.¹⁵ The membership of each faculty learning community (FLC) is designed to represent a variety of disciplines in order to incorporate diverse perspectives. During the 2014-2015 academic year, a librarian-led faculty learning community investigated faculty perceptions of information literacy learning and assessment on campus. The FLC was charged with creating an information literacy assessment rubric (hereafter referred to as "the

rubric"). The members felt that soliciting faculty perspectives, input, and feedback on information literacy teaching and assessment was an essential part of the rubric development process.

This article describes research on faculty perspectives and their information literacy practices in the areas of teaching and assessment. Findings from this study guided the development and refinement of an information literacy assessment rubric that will be used campus-wide. Furthermore, the study's process can be adapted and used by librarians on other campuses who want to take leadership roles in the area of information literacy implementation and assessment.

Methodology

This exploratory study used mixed methods for data collection to understand faculty practices and perspectives on information literacy teaching and assessment. The authors solicited faculty input through participation in a survey, an information-literacy focused discussion at a campus-sponsored learning outcomes assessment symposium, and a focus group session. This research received Institutional Review Board approval from the authors' university.

Survey

As the first step in the study, the authors designed a survey to capture faculty members' perceptions of information literacy and their approaches to teaching and assessing information literacy (please see Appendix for survey questions and design). The ACRL definition of information literacy was provided as a starting point for examining information literacy with faculty. The survey questions were modeled on questions used in previous studies examining faculty perceptions of information literacy.¹⁶ The survey collected quantitative and qualitative data via questions on faculty perspectives of:

- definitions of information literacy
- students' information literacy skills
- Information literacy skills and knowledge that are most important for students to master by graduation
- faculty practices of information literacy integration
- resources/support structures that would be most useful for increasing the integration of information literacy instruction and assessment into courses across the curriculum

Symposium Discussion

Following the survey data collection, the authors facilitated a discussion at a campus symposium on student learning outcomes assessment. During the symposium discussion session, the authors gathered an initial round of feedback on the draft rubric criteria.

Focus Group

As part of the survey, faculty members were asked if they were interested in participating in a focus group session. Those interested were invited to a one-hour discussion session. During this session, faculty members responded to the following prompts:

- What do you think are the minimum requirements for our students to be considered information literate at the time they graduate?
- What do you see as the most effective ways to help students improve their information literacy?
- What would you find most useful for supporting your learning more about information literacy and incorporating it into your classes?

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed in an iterative process. This iterative process of analyzing and incorporating feedback between different data collection steps allowed the authors to use faculty suggestions to inform later data collection. Based on the analysis of the responses to the survey questions, the authors drafted a rubric for information literacy assessment, which included a revised definition of information literacy to elaborate more on local needs. The authors solicited feedback on drafts of the rubric at the assessment symposium and the focus group session. Data from qualitative sections of the survey, plus transcription/notes from the focus group and symposium session were reviewed and common themes from the data were uncovered.¹⁷ Data from the quantitative sections of the survey were analyzed to create descriptive statistics.

Results

Data collected from participating faculty members revealed their perspectives on information literacy competencies, their information literacy teaching and assessment practices, and their desired support structures. The following sections provide the summation of results from all three data collection methods: survey, assessment symposium discussion, and focus group session.

Study Participants

Forty faculty members completed the survey with representation from three of the four campus colleges. The response rate was approximately 5%, the limitations of which are discussed in the following section. Faculty from the College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences, College of Science, College of Education and Allied Studies, and University Libraries completed the survey. There were no respondents from the College of Business or the University Wide Faculty. University Wide refers to those faculty who teach in the General Studies Program and are not affiliated with another College at the University. The response rate was highest from the faculty of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences (10.5%), followed by University Libraries (4.8%), Science (2.6%), and Education and Allied Studies (0.6%). The response rate is based on faculty headcount that includes tenured/tenure-track and lecturers, both full and part-time, from Fall 2014.¹⁸

Participants in the assessment symposium discussion were comprised of the attendees to the third annual Spring Symposium on Assessment of Core Competencies.¹⁹ The campus-sponsored symposium focused on the work of several faculty learning communities devoted to the assessment of four core competencies: diversity and social justice, ethics, information

literacy, and written communication. Approximately thirty faculty members, the majority from the authors' university, attended the symposium and participated in the discussion on information literacy assessment.

Participants in the focus group session represented various departments across campus. Five faculty members from the Departments of Sociology, Philosophy, Theater and Dance, Social Work, and Biological Sciences spent an hour responding to the focus group prompts prepared for this study.

Faculty Perspectives on Desired Student Information Literacy Competencies

Faculty study participants noted many skills, habits, and knowledge that they believe students should demonstrate by the time they graduate from the University. For undergraduate students, the most commonly identified desired competences were the ability to:

- find quality sources
- critically evaluate information
- know when and how to properly cite sources
- interpret/analyze information

Other categories of desired competencies that emerged from analyzing all data collected include the ability to: synthesize information, understand peer review, know where to find needed information, differentiate between information source types, and pose good research questions.

At the graduate level, faculty members expect students to demonstrate that they are "experts in information literacy" and command more sophisticated understanding and skills beyond the expectations of undergraduate students.

Faculty Perspectives on Student Information Literacy Competencies

In the survey, respondents were asked to rate their students' abilities as related to each of the five ACRL information literacy standards. These standards were worded in slightly different language to reflect language familiar to faculty members and remove LIS jargon (ability to: recognize appropriate information sources for assignment, search for and find appropriate information sources, interpret and synthesize information, critically evaluate information, and use sources appropriately). Faculty were also asked to rate their students' ability to create research questions. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the ratings (strong, somewhat strong, somewhat poor, poor) for each competency. Students were rarely considered strong in any of the information literacy competencies, although all six competencies had at least ten faculty members who saw their students as somewhat strong. However, few faculty rated students' interpreting and evaluating information competencies as a somewhat strong. In particular, interpreting information was identified most frequently as a somewhat poor skill among students. Combining the poor and somewhat poor ratings, students' ability to evaluate information was also perceived by faculty as a less developed student competency.

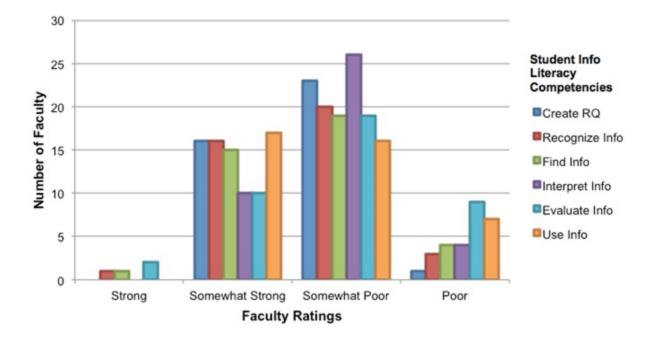


FIGURE 1 Faculty rating of students' information literacy abilities.

Information from the assessment symposium and focus group discussion sessions echoed and provided deeper understanding of the results from the survey. Again, students' ability to critically evaluate information was identified as a problem area with faculty members expressing that students have difficulty recognizing the validity or trustworthiness of the information sources they select. Students also struggle to differentiate between different source types (for example, discerning the difference between a scholarly article and a news article or a blog post) as well as understanding when a source is appropriate to use in an assignment. Faculty members expressed concern about students knowing how and when to cite sources and being able to understand and avoid plagiarism.

Status of Information Literacy Instruction

In addition to the courses designed to satisfy the information literacy requirements, there are faculty members who choose to incorporate information literacy instruction and assessment into their other courses. Seven percent of survey respondents indicated that they include a course-level information literacy learning outcome even when such an outcome is not required by the university. Some of these faculty members collaborate with librarians to incorporate course-integrated instruction on information literacy. Faculty reported covering the topics of: information ethics, including plagiarism and citation formats, and requiring students to use research tools that will lead them to peer-reviewed scholarship in their field. The most common forms of information literacy assignments used by faculty members were research projects, annotated bibliographies, and literature reviews. Assignments and instructional practice were discussed in depth at the assessment symposium and in the focus group. Faculty emphasized the need to incorporate information literacy into their courses to make up for lack of student

competency. One faculty member detailed the issue in the focus group, "They have a hard time with it, looking at the differences in the newspaper and peer reviewed article." In response, this faculty member has created information literacy-focused assignments in her class to bridge this gap in student competency. Other faculty members similarly noted that they have to spend class time discussing, finding, and analyzing information sources with their students because the students do not have the level of information literacy skills that the faculty members expect.

Links between Information Literacy and Critical Thinking

Faculty study participants in all three data collection methods noted explicitly or implicitly the links between information literacy and critical thinking. Several survey respondents included language specific to critical thinking when asked for their definition of information literacy. Faculty noted that information literacy is, "The ability to access, understand, filter, think critically about and communicate information from the vast array of resources...," in addition to, "...the ability for an individual to identify appropriate resources for the activity/assignment in which they are engaging, critically read and evaluate the resource, and use the information in the resource..."

In response to a survey question on how their course student learning outcomes relate to information literacy, one faculty member indicated that a learning outcome for their course was not focused on information literacy alone, but instead connected information literacy skills with critical thinking skills stating:

The ability to access and apply evidence-based practice information using information literacy skills; At the end of this course, students will be able to use critical thinking to understand and analyze basic [discipline] practice, with a commitment to provision of best, evidence-based practice.

Another respondent discussed how one of their program-level learning outcomes did not explicitly mention information literacy, but rather used the language of critical thinking to describe information literacy skills acquisition: "Use critical thinking skills in the analysis and synthesis of information, including in the application of evidence-based practice and theoretical material."

In the assessment symposium and focus group sessions, faculty expressed great interest in the linkages between information literacy and critical thinking. They articulated a number of overlaps and these overlaps made the idea of assessing both of these core competencies more manageable.

Faculty Feedback on Information Literacy Assessment Rubric

One of the key steps to this study's process was the feedback on and the iterative development of the rubric criteria. While overall faculty feedback on the rubric was positive, there were conceptual areas that faculty felt should be more heavily emphasized. During the discussion at the assessment symposium, faculty members stressed the importance of students not just knowing how to find information, but finding information that is appropriate for their need or their assignment. Additionally, faculty members at the symposium discussion and the focus group emphasized that students need to be able to differentiate between information types and

also consider validity, bias, and other issues of authority when selecting sources. This critical feedback informed the development of the final version of the rubric.

Final Information Literacy Assessment Rubric

The final iteration of the rubric was created after incorporation of the last round of faculty feedback at the focus group session. The rubric and its criteria will be used to assess information literacy learning across the curriculum at the authors' university. The final definition of information literacy used in the rubric is: "Information literacy is the knowledge and skills developed to find, evaluate, synthesize, and use information to communicate ideas clearly." The rubric criteria flow from this definition.

The final six rubric criteria are:

- 1. know where to find appropriate information
- 2. able to find appropriate information
- 3. critically evaluate information
- 4. interpret and synthesize information
- 5. communicate information with proper attribution
- 6. recognize social construction of information sources

Faculty Suggestions for Information Literacy Teaching and Assessment Support

In addition to creating the rubric, the authors also sought to understand what support opportunities faculty members would value for learning more about the teaching and assessment of information literacy concepts. The survey asked respondents to rate how useful they would find the following support options: workshops, online resources (links to standards, research articles, etc.), Back to the Bay sessions (an annual campus-wide professional development conference), and online discussion boards. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the ratings (useful, somewhat useful, somewhat unuseful, unuseful) for each support option. Respondents rated the online resources as the most helpful support option, closely followed by workshops and sessions at Back to the Bay. The lowest rated option was providing online discussion boards.

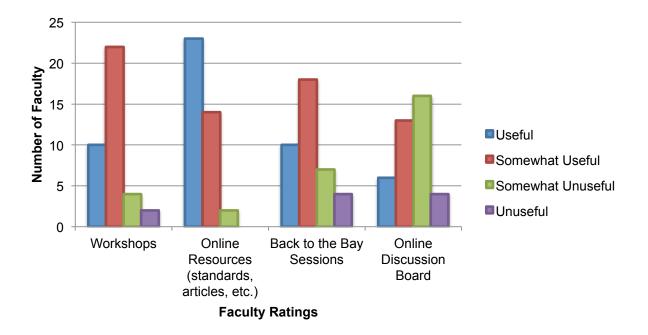


FIGURE 2 Faculty preferences for information literacy teaching and assessment support

More detailed suggestions were received through additional comments on the survey, as well as during the assessment symposium and the focus group sessions. These suggestions included: librarian presentations in courses, videos teaching information literacy skills, "drop-in" modules that faculty could rework to fit their own courses, updates on information literacy in the library newsletter, opportunities to talk with other faculty teaching information literacy, sample information literacy assignments, conference attendance, and assigned time to incorporate information literacy instruction and assessment into courses.

Discussion

This study provides information that may be of use to librarians considering a leadership role in university-wide information literacy instruction and assessment initiatives. The process can be modified for local needs, and the results suggest ways of successfully soliciting faculty feedback. While the response rate to the survey was low, the overall faculty response to the developed rubric was positive. Furthermore, emphasizing the linkage between information literacy and critical thinking for faculty, in terms of teaching and assessing, may serve as an important wedge in opening the door to enhanced faculty awareness and buy-in for information literacy instruction and assessment.

Suggestions for Increasing Faculty Engagement in Information Literacy Instruction and Assessment

One of the challenges noted in the literature is increasing faculty buy-in for information literacy teaching and assessment,²⁰ which has been supported by this study. Levels of faculty engagement in information literacy teaching and assessment can be inferred in multiple ways, and one way is through survey response rate. Previous survey-based studies on information literacy have also suffered from low response rates,²¹ which could be interpreted as a lack of faculty interest in information literacy. As faculty members are busy, they may ignore surveys on topics that are not of great interest to them. If faculty members are not interested in information literacy or simply have not considered the topic, this needs to be addressed before attempting to integrate information literacy into the curriculum. While challenging, this is a potential area for library leadership through advocating for the importance and relevance of information literacy in the entire university curriculum.

Faculty respondents who are already interested in information literacy, or at least interested enough to complete a survey and participate in focus groups, can be valuable allies in increasing interest in information literacy amongst their colleagues. Leveraging existing relationships between individual faculty members and librarians to advocate the importance of information literacy may be a way to increase interest. Using existing means of faculty development, such as workshop series and online resources, may also be a way to increase faculty engagement as noted by previous research.²² In order to take advantage of these opportunities, librarians need to increase leadership and advocacy activities to ensure that information literacy is embedded and assessed across the curriculum as suggested by other research studies.²³

Increasing the Explicit Link Between Information Literacy and Critical Thinking

Another way of increasing faculty interest in information literacy may be to make more explicit the link between information literacy and critical thinking. This link is not a new idea; however, it has yet to be fully explored.²⁴ Critical thinking has been a staple of education literature for some time and faculty generally have a greater awareness of critical thinking versus information literacy, even though the concepts have substantial overlap.²⁵ Leveraging existing faculty awareness of the critical thinking competency may be an opportunity to more deeply integrate information literacy competency into the curricula.²⁶ As noted previously, faculty study participants were intrigued and interested in using links between the two competencies in teaching and assessment.

Previous research, especially by J. Weiner,²⁷ has shown great overlap in the terms and concepts between these two competencies that can be used to promote information literacy across the curriculum. As many faculty members are already familiar with critical thinking and its importance to higher education, they may be more receptive to information literacy if it is positioned as an allied competency. This has the potential to simplify the creation of learning activities and assessments by assessing both competencies through a single, well-designed assignment, and thereby reducing faculty workload. While faculty participants in this study were very positive about the rubric and its potential use, they appeared more excited when discussing the possibility of overlapping assessments with critical thinking. This is an area that deserves further study and work to evaluate the most effective ways of combining assessments of these two core competencies.

Maintaining Information Literacy as a Long-Term Priority

Many universities are now required to devote time and energy to the assessment of information literacy since accreditation bodies, such as WASC and Middles States Commission on Higher Education,²⁸ include information literacy as one of the core competencies that students are expected to master by graduation. As institutions prepare accreditation self-study reports, they will be looking for evidence of the teaching, learning, and assessment related to all core competencies. If the university develops a deep repository of information literacy teaching and assessment materials, along with providing support to faculty to integrate information literacy, it will aid in the collection of assessment evidence. This is another area in which librarians can provide leadership through their expertise in information literacy in both the creation of materials and the training of faculty from other disciplines.

One way to maintain information literacy as a priority on campus for instruction-based assessment may be to increase collaboration among librarians and other faculty members through course-integrated instruction, co-development of information literacy assignments, and shared assessment materials as noted by previous studies.²⁹ It is important to sustain interest and energy surrounding core competency assessment even without the pressure of an imminent visit from an accrediting team. Institutions will need to ensure that they integrate the assessment of these competencies into their ongoing assessment protocols and work to sustain the efforts put into motion prior to the most recent accreditation cycle.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study was successful in exploring faculty members' perspectives on information literacy and gaining a baseline on information literacy activities, there are limitations that interferes with the generalizability of the results. The survey response rate was low and no faculty members from the College of Business were represented in the survey, thus preventing the generalizability of the results.³⁰ Further studies are needed in order to allow for generalizability. Other ways of soliciting feedback or ensuring completion of surveys are needed to increase survey response rate. Comparison studies of other universities' campus-wide initiatives for assessment of information literacy would be useful in delineating best practices for ensuring faculty buy-in of information literacy teaching and assessment and providing support for faculty to implement them in the classroom. Future research could also compare results internationally, which would greatly expand the generalizability of the results. Also, research on interventions by librarians in the area of leadership surrounding information literacy initiatives should be assessed to inform best practices.

Conclusion

Information literacy learning and assessment are critical to supportive student learning experiences across the curriculum, and they provide a unique opportunity for library leadership. The accreditation demands provide a structure and rationale to include and develop faculty expertise. As such, it is crucial to understand faculty perceptions of information literacy and the status of campus information literacy instruction in order to plan an effective way forward in terms of information literacy teaching, learning, and assessment. Building and revising an

information literacy assessment rubric based on faculty feedback from diverse academic disciplines is an important step towards engaging faculty and developing a sense of efficacy. Linking information literacy competency to critical thinking competency may further enhance faculty interest in and attention to the crucial role of information literacy in higher education. Providing opportunities for faculty to co-present and co-teach with library experts strengthens their professional knowledge and builds the institutional capacity to serve students.

While this study's results have limitations in generalizability, they do suggest a process that can be adapted to local needs to assess the present state of information literacy instruction and assessment on campus. Furthermore, results from the discussions with faculty members can provide ideas for librarian-led information literacy initiatives to increase information literacy activities on a campus-wide level. The results support the previous research that has highlighted the link between information literacy and critical thinking, the untapped potential for increased librarian-faculty collaboration, and the need to find ways to increase student information literacy learning that can be assessed and are sustainable.

Increasing information literacy instruction and assessment benefits students, faculty, and administration; students will be better prepared for lifelong learning, faculty will be able to integrate core competencies in their courses, and university administration will be able to document student achievement for accreditation reviews. Librarians can use their expertise to become and remain leaders on campus in the area of information literacy, which provides yet another way to visibly demonstrate the importance and value of librarians in campus-wide curriculum initiatives.

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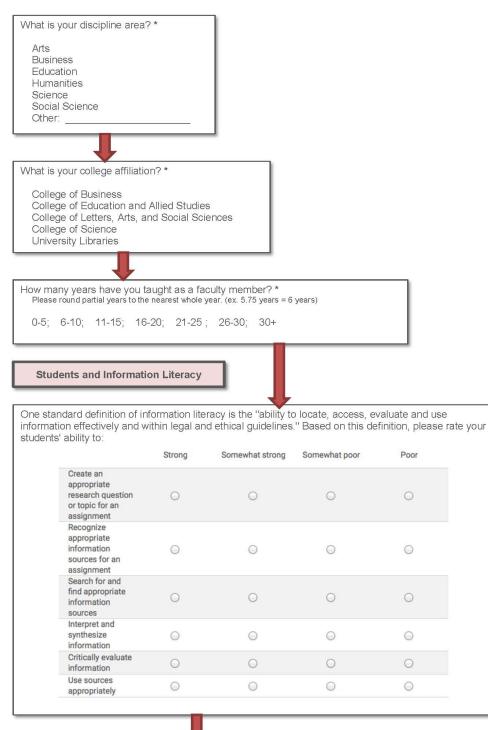
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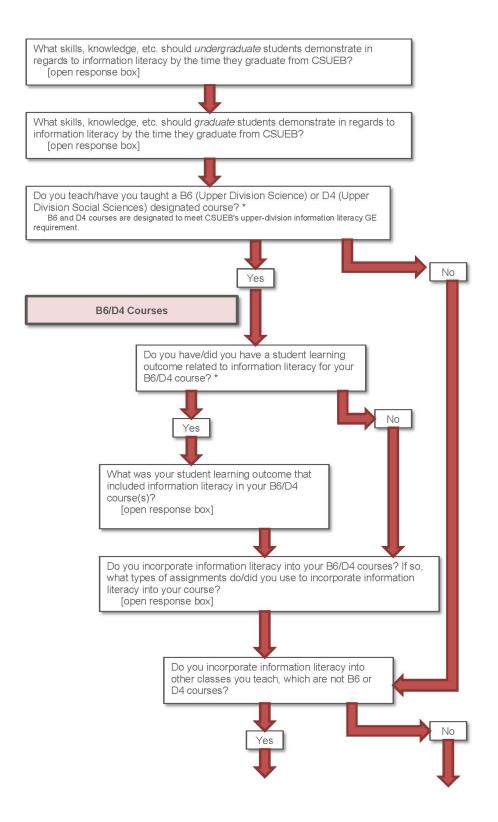
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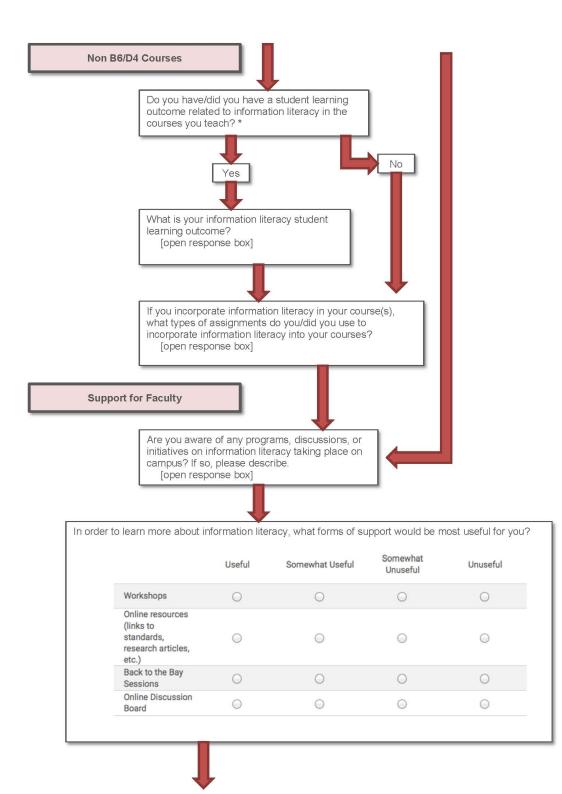
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Appendix: Survey Questions and Design

Survey on Information Literacy Instrument









In learning more about incorporating information literacy into your courses, what forms of support would be most useful for you?

	Useful	Somewhat Useful	Somewhat Unuseful	Unuseful
Sample assignments	0	0	0	0
Assignment rubrics	\bigcirc	\odot	\bigcirc	\bigcirc
Talking with other faculty members who have incorporated information literacy into their courses	0	0	0	0
Faculty Learning Community	\bigcirc	\odot	\bigcirc	\odot
Assigned time for curriculum redesign	0	0	0	0

How do you define information literacy in the context of your courses or discipline? [open response box]

We need to have focus groups to hear more details about the thoughts and needs on information literacy from faculty like you. If you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview or a focus group, please enter your contact information.

[open response box]

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