

# Characteristics of Programs of Information Literacy that Illustrate Best Practices: A Guideline

*Approved by the ACRL Board of Directors, June 2003; revised January 2012 and January 2019.*

Note: Links in **bold** within the text will take you to an annotation of the highlighted terms.

## Overview

The “Characteristics of Programs of Information Literacy that Illustrate Best Practices: A Guideline” articulates elements of exemplary information literacy programs for undergraduate students at two- and four-year institutions. The characteristics identify and describe notable features in information literacy programs of excellence. The characteristics are not, however, descriptive of any one program, but rather represent a set of elements identified through examination of many programs and philosophies of undergraduate information literacy.

In addition, though guided by the definitions found in the “Final Report of the ALA Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/whitepapers/presidential>)” (1989), “A Progress Report on Information Literacy: An Update on the American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/whitepapers/progressreport>)” (1998), and the “ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>)” (2015), the characteristics themselves do not attempt to define **information literacy** per se. Instead, the focus is on defining the elements of best practices in information literacy programming.

Although the characteristics are categorized and organized for ease of use and logical presentation, the order does not reflect any judgment of priority.

## Purpose and Use

The characteristics are primarily intended to help those who are interested in developing, assessing, and improving information literacy programs involving all course delivery modalities. This audience includes faculty, librarians, administrators, and technology professionals, as well as others involved in information literacy programming at a particular institution. These characteristics represent a set of ideas that can be used when establishing, developing, advancing, revitalizing, or assessing an information literacy program.

The characteristics are descriptive in nature and are the result of an examination of many programs. They provide a framework within which to:

- Categorize details of a given program
- Analyze how different program elements contribute to attaining excellence in information literacy
- Benchmark program status
- Implement program improvement
- Map out long-term development

It is important to note that no program is expected to be exemplary with respect to all characteristics as this list is not meant to be prescriptive. Rather, the characteristics are meant to serve as a guide when considering library and institutional contexts when establishing information literacy program goals and strategies.

## Category 1: Mission, Goals and Objectives

The mission, goals, and objectives of an information literacy program:

- Include a definition of information literacy in the **mission statement**.
- Communicate the importance of the integration of information literacy across the curriculum for students’ academic pursuits, effective lifelong learning, and professional development.

- Establish measurable outcomes for evaluation of the program in the goals and objectives that accommodate sequential growth of students' skills and understanding throughout their education.
- Align with the library's stated mission, goals, and objectives statements to correspond with the larger mission statement, goals, and objectives of the library and the institution.
- Are guided by ACRL documents on information literacy, such as the "ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>)."
- Accommodate input from and incorporate institutional stakeholders, clearly reflecting their contributions and expected benefits.
- Appear in appropriate institutional documents.

## Category 2: Planning

Planning for an information literacy program:

- Articulates and develops mechanisms to implement and/or adapt components of this document.
- Ties plans to library, institutional, and information technology planning and budgeting cycles.
- Incorporates findings from **environmental scans**.
- Accommodates the level of the program, department, and institution.
- Encourages librarian, faculty, and administrator collaboration at the outset.
- Provides a timeline for systematic revision.

## Category 3: Administrative and Institutional Support

Administration within an institution:

- Assigns information literacy **leadership** and responsibilities to appropriate librarians, faculty, and staff.
- Understands the nature of the work of instruction librarians as described in "ACRL's Roles and Strengths of Teaching Librarians (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/teachinglibrarians>)."
- Provides sufficient funding to establish and ensure ongoing support for teaching facilities, current and appropriate technologies, appropriate staffing levels, and professional development opportunities.
- Appoints and supports librarians and other professionals who exemplify and advocate for information literacy and lifelong learning; are knowledgeable about curriculum development and assessment of student learning; and apply appropriate processes in the systematic development of instruction, including analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation of instruction.
- **Rewards** individual and institutional achievement and participation in the information literacy program.
- Provides staff regular evaluations about the quality of their contributions to the program and areas for improvement.

## Category 4: Program Sequencing

Program sequencing within the curriculum for an information literacy program:

- Identifies the scope, depth, and complexity of understandings and practices to be acquired on a disciplinary level and at the course level.
- Sequences and integrates understandings, practices, and dispositions throughout a student's academic career, progressing in sophistication.
- Uses local **governance structures** to advocate for institution-wide integration into academic or vocational programs.
- Specifies the programs and courses where information literacy instruction will occur.

- Is formalized and disseminated throughout the institution.

## Category 5: Pedagogy

Pedagogy within an information literacy program:

- Uses as a guide and as appropriate, the “ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>).”
- Employs diverse approaches to teaching and learning in order to improve student engagement.
- Emphasizes learner-centered teaching.
- Demonstrates a commitment to an inclusive learning environment.
- Is suitable to the type of instruction (e.g., one-shot, dedicated course).
- Uses relevant and appropriate information technology and other **media resources** to support pedagogy and learning.
- Promotes critical thinking, reflection, and recursive learning.
- Employs effective and well-known instructional approaches (e.g., flipped classroom techniques, scaffolding).
- Contextualizes information literacy within ongoing coursework appropriate to the academic program and course level.
- Works within the context of course content and other learning experiences to achieve information literacy outcomes.

## Category 6: Communication and Advocacy

Communication and advocacy for an information literacy program:

- Identify and reach out to relevant stakeholders and support groups both within and outside of the library and the institution.
- Clearly define and describe the program and its demonstrated value to targeted audiences.
- Foster collaboration among disciplinary faculty, librarians, and other institutional stakeholders at every stage (planning, delivery, assessment of student learning, and program evaluation).
- Identify goals shared with other curricular or extra-curricular programs and draw on these shared goals to engage in dialog with campus leaders and stakeholders.
- Provide, in collaboration with other campus professional development staff, workshops and programs that relate to information literacy.
- Use a variety of communication methods, including **formal and informal** networks and media channels.
- Contribute to information literacy’s advancement by sharing information, methods, and plans with peers and stakeholders.

## Category 7: Assessment and Evaluation

**Assessment and evaluation** of information literacy includes program performance and student outcomes.

**Student outcomes assessment:**

- Acknowledges differences in learning and teaching preferences in the outcome measures.
- Employs a variety of pre- and post-instruction outcome measures, for example, needs assessment, pre-tests, post-tests, portfolio assessment, oral defense, quizzes, essays, direct observation, anecdotal, and experience.
- Focuses on learner performance, knowledge practices and acquisition, and disposition appraisal.
- Assesses learners’ creative **processes and products**.

- Includes learner-, peer-, and self-evaluation.

### **Program evaluation:**

- Follows a process for program planning, evaluation, and revision.
- Measures progress toward meeting program goals and objectives (see Category 1 Mission, Goals, and Objectives).
- Integrates with course and curriculum assessment, institutional evaluations and regional and professional accreditation initiatives.
- Uses appropriate assessment/evaluation methods for relevant purposes, for example **formative**, **summative**, short-term or longitudinal.

## **Annotations for "Characteristics of Programs of Information Literacy that Illustrate Best Practices: A Guideline"**

### **Assessment and evaluation**

Although in this document the terms evaluation and assessment are used interchangeably, for educators these terms have different meanings. For example, according to Frank Hodnett, "Evaluation is to determine significance or worth or judging the effectiveness or worth of educational programs. Assessment is to determine a rate or amount and is used as an activity to measure student learning and other human characteristics. Put more simply we assess people and evaluate things or objects." (Frank Hodnett, Evaluation versus Assessment, Spring 2001)

### **Collaboration**

Collaboration implies not only cooperation, but also active sharing in the work of the instructional program.

### **Environmental scans**

Environmental scanning is "the systematic collection of external information" related to "social, economic, and political" trends that may affect an organization's future. ("Environmental Scanning," by James L Morrison. In Meredith A. Whiteley, John D. Porter, and Robert H. Fenske, eds. The Primer for Institutional Research . Tallahassee, FL: The Association for Institutional Research, 1992, pp. 86-99.)

### **Excellence**

Excellence has been a topic of discussion throughout the development of these characteristics, both within the Best Practices groups and with outside contributors. The usual question is "Can a program which exemplifies only some or most of the characteristics be considered excellent?" Because these characteristics are meant to be considered within the context of an individual library and its institution, it is probable that some characteristics would be inappropriate for some information literacy programs. Therefore, a program could be considered excellent that incorporates only some of the characteristics.

### **Formal and informal networks and media channels**

Formal mechanisms may include official reports or documentation, journal articles, meetings, forums, library newsletters and websites, etc. Informal may include meetings, email, phone, hallway conversations, billboards, text alerts, classes, and social media, etc. Media channels may include radio, television, student newspapers, faculty newsletters, and any other such news sources for the institution. It could also include media channels directly connected to the library such as library newsletters, websites and social media.

### **Formative and summative**

Formative assessment is conducted while a project is in process, which allows for adjustments during the course of the project, and summative assessment or evaluation is conducted upon project completion. Either method may be conducted in short- or long-term assessments. However, other methods may be more appropriate for the purposes of the evaluation.

## **Governance structures**

Governance structures are the bodies in an institution that have authority over the decision-making processes of that institution.

## **Information literacy**

An institution will develop an institution-wide definition and operationalization of information literacy and associated outcomes. These may be based on national guidelines or standards such as those promulgated by ACRL.

## **Institutional stakeholders**

Examples of institutional stakeholders include the library, students, faculty (adjunct and tenure-track), institutional support services, campus assessment offices, centers and programs.

## **Leadership**

Leadership refers to those in charge of the program, how the leadership fits into the organizational structure of the institution, and who is expected to participate in the program, including any support staff.

## **Media resources**

Media resources may include analog, digital or virtual media, or any other type of media that can facilitate teaching and learning.

## **Mission statement**

The mission statement describes the overall purpose of the organization. It may reflect the values and priorities for the organization. (Jeffrey Abrahams. *The Mission Statement Book: 301 Corporate Mission Statements from America's Top Companies*. Revised. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1999.)

### **Examples of mission statements:**

The Southern Oregon University Hannon Library's Information Literacy and Instruction Program serves students, faculty, and staff by supporting the instructional mission of the Library and the University. Our mission is to teach students to think critically and use information for their academic, professional, and personal lives--helping them define information needs, then locate, evaluate, and use all available information resources effectively and responsibly. We are committed to anticipating and embracing changes in the information and instructional environment, and collaborating with the academic community to foster a shared sense of enjoyment and empowerment in the pursuit of lifelong, self-directed learning. (2015)

The mission of the Leatherby Libraries Information Literacy Program is to provide the Chapman University community with lifelong information literacy skills. Information literacy "is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. It enables learners to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning."<sup>1</sup> The program supports the University's mission "to provide personalized education of distinction that leads to inquiring, ethical, and productive lives as global citizens" and the Library's mission "to provide personalized services and relevant collections in support of the curricular, creative, and scholarly needs of the Chapman University community to ensure the development of the information-literate global citizen." (Chapman University, 2016)

Lane Community College Library strives to educate information-literate lifelong learners. Information literacy enhances the pursuit of knowledge by preparing students to think critically and use information for their academic, professional, and personal lives. [no date]

## **Process and product**

Student outcomes should be measured in terms of the quality of the product as well as the processes the student used to create the product.

## **Rewards**

In many institutions this would mean that such involvements and achievements would be acknowledged as important in the awarding of tenure and/or promotion. In most, it would certainly count for yearly performance assessments and salary increases.

## **Staffing levels**

In this instance, appropriate staffing levels refers to all involved in an information literacy program, and could include any of the academic support units or centers on campus, such as learning centers, teaching centers, and IT units.

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## **Document and Revision History**

The characteristics were developed through a multiphase process which involved professionals from multiple sectors of higher education, including librarians, faculty, administrators, and professional organizations. Beginning in April 2000, suggestions for an original draft of the characteristics were gathered through a Web-based Delphi polling technique. Members of the Best Practices Project Team and Best Practices Advisory Panel then wrote a document based upon these suggestions and revised it several times. A working draft was distributed widely for comment and went through a further revision. A penultimate draft was completed in March 2001 and was used as the basis for selecting ten institutions for a national invitational conference on best practices in information literacy programming, which was held in Atlanta in June 2002. As part of that meeting the characteristics were further refined. The revisions culminated in a final edition.

In 2008 members of the ACRL Information Literacy Best Practices committee (ILBP) undertook a revision of the characteristics. Committee members agreed that certain language needed to be changed in order to better represent the current state of information literacy at academic institutions. Members of ILBP began the process by offering suggestions for revisions; these suggestions were then collected, keyed to the original text, and then disseminated for comments from the ACRL membership by sending the links to the original document and the proposed revisions to the ILI-L, COLLIB, and CJC e-mail discussion lists. After collecting the comments provided by ACRL members, the document was re-examined, and a new draft was created using the track changes feature, which allowed readers to look at proposed changes and the differences in meaning that would result from making those changes. The changes were then integrated into the original document and submitted to ACRL Executive Committee for approval.

The 2015-16 Information Literacy Best Practices (ILBP) Committee of the ACRL Instruction Section began a review and revision of the "Characteristics of Programs of Information Literacy that Illustrate Best Practices: A Guideline" document. A six-member subcommittee was formed to address this decision. After initial reading and discussion of the current Characteristics document, the group agreed to proceed with a full revision in order to (1) bring the document in alignment with current practices, approaches, and guidelines; and (2) update the language and syntax to ensure uniformity and clarity.