



FROM INFORMATION LITERATE TO INFORMATION FLUENT

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I. WASHBURN UNIVERSITY

Washburn University is a co-educational, public municipal institution of higher learning in Topeka, Kansas. The institution offers undergraduate and graduate educational opportunities, along with numerous professional programs such as law. Washburn's 500 faculty members teach more than 6,100 undergraduate and nearly 800 graduate students on its 160 acre campus in Topeka.

Founded in 1865, as Lincoln College, a private Congregational school, Washburn University has a history committed to access to education. From its beginning Washburn admitted women and minority students, and remains proud of its ongoing commitment to open admissions.

II. PROJECT GOALS

The Washburn University Libraries seek to create open source Information Literacy Modules for use by area middle and high school students. The goal was to provide free online Information Literacy modules and an accompanying curriculum to create equity in education and improve critical thinking skills for students in the Northeast Kansas target area. In addition, the goal was to provide a model replicable on a national scale using open access resources adaptable to any classroom curriculum.

The Northeast Kansas target provides Washburn University the significant majority of its undergraduate student population. It is an area across which area schools employ librarians who lack the time to teach, often because of the management of technology initiatives. In other instances, schools in the target area no longer employ professional librarians. In an effort to improve readiness for postsecondary education, partnering with the target schools is an effort to increase the success of Washburn University's students during their transition into college. It is also a push to help prepare all students, both those who pursue postsecondary education and those who do not, for the Knowledge Economy.

Four principle project goals and expected outcomes shape the project, From Information Literate to Information Fluent:

1. Teach Information Literacy and Critical Thinking skills.
Outcome: Middle and High School students learn to effectively evaluate information sources.
2. Teach Civil Reasoning skills.
Outcome: Middle and High School students learn to interpret, discuss and teach others about information.

3. Create an Information Literacy education model that is easily adaptable and replicable.
Outcome: Advances Information Literacy and Critical Thinking skills using a nationally replicable model before students graduate high school.
4. Create and disseminate Information Literacy educational resources.
Outcome: Enable students to embrace and become lifelong learners.

Multiple recent studies shape the ongoing goals of this project, all of which indicate the alarming rate at which university students cannot determine the credibility of information presented digitally. Having access to more information than ever before but lacking the ability to identify and determine the credibility of sources puts students at a disadvantage for understanding the world and threatens the stability of American society. When disinformation spreads and remains unchecked, history makes clear that democracy is jeopardized. In an effort to counteract this effect, information literacy promotes critical thinking, civic engagement, digital inclusion, economic vitality and lifelong learning. Quality information literacy skills prepare students for life in the Knowledge Economy and for postsecondary educational success. Critical thinking that develops from information literacy goes beyond dissecting sources and results in students engaging their peers with information and reflecting collectively upon it in order to better understand the world.

In addition to the societal need for basic information literacy skills, this project addresses another serious issue: The time constraints facing school Librarians, the Information Literacy professionals. For example, in USD 501: Topeka Public Schools, the school district within which Washburn University resides, the distribution of middle and high school librarian's time is under continual stress due to a 1:1 laptop initiative for all middle and high school students. In Topeka Public Schools, librarians are occupied with technology support during working hours because the 1:1 initiative is their responsibility to oversee and operate. Librarians are the technology support for laptop issues and with an average ratio of students to school librarian at 486:1 in the middle schools and an average of 1,344:1 in the high schools (Kansas Report Card), laptop troubleshooting takes up a majority of school librarians' time. This leaves increasing less time for librarians to create Information Literacy lessons or educate students about how they become critical thinkers. For obvious reasons, therefore, supporting the teaching role of Middle and High School Librarians in the target area remains a prime goal of this project.

From Information Literate to Information Fluent advances research on Information Literacy by focusing on teaching basic skills such as the evaluation of resources and how to engage peers with that information. This project seeks to inform educators on the importance of engaging populations in information literacy learning through the development of open educational resources and curriculum. The results are replicable in other Information Literacy courses and adapted to diverse learning environments to assist students in determining credibility of resources and engaging in meaningful discussion in the Knowledge Society. Beyond the results of the project, students will apply the skills they learn in class to a larger context by engaging not just their peers inside the classroom but their families and larger communities outside the classroom.

III. ACHIEVEMENTS

The project, From Information Literate to Information Fluent, with support from the LYRASIS Catalyst Fund, has seen the Washburn University Libraries accomplish six tangible outcomes. Three of these are directly related to replicable work being conducted by Washburn Librarians, involving the created materials. Another is beginning to take shape, conference presentations to other academic librarians encouraging them to partner with their service area Middle and High School Librarians in the teaching of Information Literacy. A fifth achievement was the learning experience of Washburn University students who both provided significant insight into student Information Literacy needs and then worked to provide the project some of its technical assistance. Finally, establishing growing and ongoing conversations with Middle and High School Librarians will provide the largest project benefit over time because support from LYRASIS allowed for the beginning of bridge building between Librarians operating in different educational settings.

Four of the six achievements are available for further examination at the links below:

1. Created and continue to create online Information Literacy tutorials for Middle and High School students in both English and Spanish.

See:

<https://www.washburn.edu/mabee/tutorials/Information-Literacy/story.html>

<https://www.washburn.edu/mabee/tutorials/Information-Literacy-Espanol/story.html>

2. Created a suggested lesson plan to accompany the tutorial and assist librarians in implementing information literacy instruction.

See:

<https://libguides.washburn.edu/c.php?g=884913&p=6359243&preview=2c80f556d79984b75f1b5f1e00b3a1e1>

3. Created an assessment activity to be administered post-information literacy discussion.

See:

<https://libguides.washburn.edu/c.php?g=884913&p=6359243&preview=2c80f556d79984b75f1b5f1e00b3a1e1>

4. Presentation to academic librarians at CULS Conference (College and University section of Kansas Library Association).

See:

<https://libguides.washburn.edu/c.php?g=884913&p=6359243&preview=2c80f556d79984b75f1b5f1e00b3a1e1>

5. Involved Washburn college students in assisting the creation of the module- as voice actors, translators and tutorial editors.
6. Established and continue to further relationships with area Middle and High School Librarians.

VII. PROCESS

The process for the project From Information Literate to Information Fluent existed in three primary phases.

Phase I: Origination

The first phase, idea origination, was a relatively straightforward one rooted in a local recognition that students transitioning from High School to University studies had relatively weak Information Literacy skills. This ongoing observation of the Washburn University Librarians is supported in scholarship and led to the position that addressing said shortcomings should begin before students reach their postsecondary institution.

The LYRASIS Catalyst Fund offered the opportunity to obtain funding dedicated to addressing this issue during a time in which new institutional funding is scarce. Moreover, outside support, both financial and operational, meant the possibility that the project would impact students beyond Washburn's service region.

Phase 2: Relationship Building

Immediately upon receiving the LYRASIS Catalyst Grant the Washburn University Librarians began outreach to Middle and High School Librarians in their service region regarding the project. Among lessons learned, two immediately occurred in this phase of the project:

1. All Information Literacy materials needed to be produced in English and Spanish.
2. Middle and High School Librarians are incredibly busy.

The larger lesson, one always worth remembering, is building relationships takes time. For the project to have long-term sustainable and replicable success all partners needed to become invested in its creation and deployment. Naively the University Librarians, led by their Dean, believed that partner Librarians would simply appreciate the "help with Information Literacy teaching and resources." What followed was a learning experience of immeasurable value in process and collaboration. The first Middle and High School Librarians with whom contact was

made liked the idea of a collaborative project, while pointing out that all materials needed to be produced in a bi-lingual, English and Spanish format, University personnel are largely unencumbered by the regular need to teach parents/guardians/family members, focusing only on tuition paying students, but for the Middle and High School Librarians there was an immediate recognition that entire families need to be taught the basics of Information Literacy in order for the project to have legitimacy. In addition, the Middle and High School Librarians contacted made clear that they maintain hectic schedules beyond what University Librarians understood in their literature reviews.

It is in the relationships being built with LYRASIS support that the long-term impact of this project will take place and succeed. The Middle and High School Librarians are absolutely key to ensuring that students access and use the learning materials being produced. Simply producing the materials is insufficient if the goal is genuinely to improve Information Literacy skills that promote student success during their transition into postsecondary learning.

Phase 3: Project Execution

This third project phase, like the first, is relatively uncomplicated. Building Information Literacy modules is a technical process with which the Washburn University Librarians have significant comfort. It was, however, beneficial to include Washburn students in this phase of the initiative. They improved the project in multiple ways because they further allowed a refinement of the project by allowing the University Librarians to better view it through the eyes of students. In addition, they also provided voice and translation talents to the project while reporting their own improved understanding of Information Literacy.

VIII. WHAT'S NEXT

Two distinct efforts will shape the next steps in this initiative:

1. Additional Relationship Building.

In order for future collaborative projects with our local school librarians to be successful, we must continue to develop close relationships with our local school librarians. We can create modules and various products to give to them, but without the school librarian's buy-in and understanding of our motivations, we cannot have the robust impact on our local secondary school students that will help prepare them for college-level research and critical thought. We hope to do this through an in-service event for school librarians, possibly attending School Board meetings, among other options.

2. Building and Revising Information Literacy Modules.

As conversations around information literacy in the library community continue to develop, we will need to update and expand the modules to maintain currency. This will include updates to the subject matter in order to stay relevant, as well as updates to

visual presentation of the modules. We would also like to continue to develop additional modules in order to give the school librarians various modules from which to select the best subject approach for their students.