

Information literacy grants

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In the absence of an institutional mandate to incorporate information literacy into majors (degree programmes), libraries can still find ways to foster faculty-librarian collaborations and develop a successful information literacy programme. Described below is an approach that we have been using at the Lafayette College library.



Located in Easton, Pennsylvania, Lafayette College is a private, liberal arts residential college with 2,616 undergraduate students and 239 full-time faculty members. It offers a bachelor of arts in 37 fields and a bachelor of science in 14. Information literacy has been an integral part of the college's first year seminar (FYS) programme since the programme's inception in 1992. Each FYS is assigned a librarian who meets with the FYS at least twice to introduce students to library resources, how to conduct college-level research, and how to evaluate and use information.

Beyond the FYSs, there is no campus-wide information literacy requirement. To encourage faculty members to integrate information literacy into 200-level and above courses (degree programmes), the library and the Provost's Office started to offer [information literacy grants](#) in spring 2002. The funding for the grants (\$1,500 each) is provided by the Provost's Office.

Eligibility

To ensure continuity, preferences are given to tenure-track faculty members. Each person can apply for and receive one grant. For a course to be eligible, the professor must collaborate with a research and instruction librarian and include projects that require students to find, evaluate, and use information throughout the spring semester. In addition, they need to incorporate projects that would help students discover the nature of scholarly conversation, examine the research process, or explore issues pertaining to the production and use of information. The following fall, grant recipients participate in a presentation to share their experiences with the campus community. The lunchtime event, now a part of the new faculty orientation, is co-sponsored with the Center for the Integration of Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship.

Process

Each September, the Provost's Office sends out a call for grant proposals. Those who are interested in applying are encouraged to meet with me before submitting their proposals. The two to three page proposals are due in the middle of December. After discussing the proposals with my colleagues on the research and instruction team and recruiting librarians to work with different courses, I recommend successful applications to the Provost in January. A formal letter is then sent by the Provost to each recipient, highlighting the information literacy work that they are committed to. The letter is also copied to the relevant department head or programme chair.

Outcomes

Since 2002, we have worked with [44 faculty members](#) on their grant-funded courses. Our collaborations start during the application process when professors approach me to discuss their goals and ideas, including how they plan to fully integrate information literacy into their courses. After the grants are awarded, the course librarians meet with the respective recipients to work out details about assignments and library sessions. Librarians also attend class discussions when time permits and provide feedback on students' projects. Some embed in the grant courses or [co-teach](#) them with the professors.

The close collaborations between faculty members and librarians have resulted in more meaningful information literacy experiences. Grant recipients are overwhelmingly satisfied with the quality of their students' projects and the skills that students are able to develop and practice. Recipients credit the librarians' extensive involvement for the positive experiences in their grant courses. Many, especially those who are in their early teaching careers, appreciate having librarians to turn to for pedagogical support. A recipient remarked, "I have never had someone who helped me like this before."

One of our goals for the grant programme is that faculty members will continue their information literacy efforts after the grant ends. In the lunchtime presentations and interviews that we do for the library's newsletters, most of the recipients point out that they regard the integration of information literacy as an opportunity to be innovative in their pedagogy and that the collaborative experiences have influenced how they structure their courses and design assignments in general. As a result, they are continuing to build information literacy into their courses, including the one that they received a grant for and other courses that they teach.

Through presentations, interviews, and conversations within their departments and/or faculty groups, recipients have also become information literacy advocates. Thanks to their advocacy, we no longer need to recruit applicants. When faculty members apply for a grant, they often cite collaborating with a librarian to improve their course as the main reason and indicate that they are happy to integrate information literacy into their course with or without a grant. The advocacy of the recipients has also led to curriculum changes. For instance, all studio art professors now involve librarians and assign similar research projects for the *Materials and Methods* course, a grant-funded course in 2014. As another example, due to the work of a biology professor in a neuroanatomy class in 2006, information literacy has been built into the general introduction to biology course taught by different faculty members of that department each year.

Conclusion

The grant approach has generated more interest in information literacy on our campus and it has also led to closer and more meaningful faculty-librarian collaborations. By no means do I imply that it is the best approach or that it would be appropriate for all libraries. On one hand, it could be hard to obtain funding. On the other hand, there is also the question of which librarians will work with which grant-funded courses. The workload distribution could be particularly challenging for libraries that use a discipline-based liaison service model. Unlike the top-down information literacy curriculum mandate, the grant approach is person-specific and can be slow to take effect. Regardless of the approach that libraries take, it requires long-term thinking as well as diligence, innovation, patience and persistence on librarians' part to establish a vibrant information literacy programme.

These views are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of UKSG.



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