Assessing an institution-wide information fluency program: Commitment, plan, and purposes

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Assessing an Institution-wide Information Fluency Program: Commitment, Plan, and Purposes

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Abstract: University of Central Florida faculty and administrators recently endorsed a library-initiated proposal to integrate information fluency across the curriculum. The information fluency proposal was drafted in response to a university-wide call for proposals for a quality enhancement plan, which is a requirement for reaffirmation by the institution’s regional accrediting body. After selecting information fluency as the winning proposal, university administrators, program and library faculty, and other support units collaborated to develop a comprehensive implementation and assessment plan. This article describes the role and purpose of a quality enhancement plan and the process by which information fluency was selected as a campus-wide core competency. The purposes to which program assessment results can be used are offered as is a description of the information fluency assessment plan at the University of Central Florida. The article concludes with observations regarding the anticipated impact of implementing and assessing information fluency on the Libraries and other support units.

Keywords: information fluency, information literacy, library instruction, assessment, collaboration, accreditation

INTRODUCTION

Information fluency was recently adopted by University of Central Florida (UCF) faculty and administrators in response to the request for a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) by the Southern Association for Colleges and Schools (SACS) Commission on Colleges, the institution’s regional accrediting body. In its Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, the Commission on Colleges (2004) states that the QEP is a component of the accreditation process that both reflects and confirms a commitment to enhancing the quality of higher education and that places student learning at the heart of the mission of academia. The Commission on Colleges further defines a QEP as a part of the reaffirmation process that
“is an opportunity and an impetus for the institution to enhance overall institutional quality and effectiveness by focusing on an issue or issues the institution considers important to improving student learning. The QEP describes a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined topic or issue(s) related to enhancing student learning.” (p. 22)

Student learning is broadly defined within the context of the QEP, but is generally identified by “changes in students’ knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or values that may be attributable to the collegiate experience” (Commission on Colleges, 2004, p.22). Successful implementation of a QEP requires widespread acceptance by all institutional constituents. To garner support of the QEP a broad spectrum of UCF affiliates, including representatives from faculty, academic area administrators, student services, administrative support services, students, staff, and alumni, were invited to discuss potential QEP topics and rate them according to the perceived importance of the impact the initiative could have on the institution and its students (UCF, 2006). The following section describes the institution and the process by which information fluency was selected as the university’s QEP topic.

**SELECTING UCF’S QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN**

The university QEP selection team, which was comprised of high level administrators and funded by a budget from the Provost, used a variety of strategies to identify potential topics for the initiative. Team members reviewed the institution’s strategic plan, other institutions’ quality enhancement plans, UCF institutional effectiveness assessment results, and institutional results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), and the graduating senior survey. Representatives of the QEP selection team visited strategic groups on campus, including UCF Libraries, to discuss potential topics that associated faculty could identify
The QEP selection team synthesized suggestions into eight major topic areas and sent a request for proposals to the university community to develop pre-proposals. A committee from the library responded by submitting a pre-proposal to integrate information fluency across the curriculum. Fourteen pre-proposals were received and eight, including information fluency, were selected for development into QEP white papers. The intent of the white paper was to analyze various issues associated with a quality enhancement plan, including the significance, scope, commitment, risk, and existing support for the topic. The library committee developed the two-page pre-proposal into a lengthy white paper that addressed the need for the program, identified potential student learning objectives and options for assessing them, and provided a detailed description of existing resources available to implement the program.

To build the case that there is a need for an information fluency program at the institution the library committee cited existing research studies that suggest college students lack basic information use skills, proclamations from business professionals that students are emerging from colleges unprepared to enter the workforce (and one area of great concern is their inability to effectively locate, evaluate, and communicate information), and findings from studies conducted at the institution, which also indicated students were deficient in basic information use skills. Findings from local research served to connect the literature to the university’s student body and illustrated the need for an information fluency program on campus.

The library committee identified learning objectives and assessment options as two additional areas important in building the case for information fluency as an appealing and viable quality
enhancement plan. Fortunately, both of these goals were achievable due to the considerable effort expended by the Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL) task force that developed the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (ACRL, 2000) and recent progress in assessing information competence skills. The library committee appended the standards and described their utility in selecting student learning outcomes and subsequent integration into program curricula. An unintended but beneficial consequence of using the standards was their pedagogical value in conveying the concept of information competence and their potential for application across disciplines to the white paper readers. A variety of assessment methods were presented, and included detailed descriptions of standardized, commercially-available instruments and options for locally developed measures.

Four of the eight white papers advanced to the final review. These were Enhancing Student Communication and Critical Thinking, Integrating Information Fluency across the Curriculum, Creating Globally Competent Citizens, and Improving and Expanding Student Learning Outcomes by Means of Integrating Research-Centered Learning, Faculty Research, and Curriculum Development. At the final topic review meeting, the QEP selection team discussed which topic would make a substantial difference with UCF students and be realistically achievable. The research-centered learning paper was thought to apply to too narrow an audience while the topic of communication and critical thinking was considered to be too broad. The two remaining topics, information fluency and globally competent citizens, were recognized as strong proposals, with the final decision made in favor of information fluency.

The library proposal committee is convinced that what made information fluency appealing enough to be selected as the QEP and thus become a campus priority can be attributed to three persuasive
factors. These factors are the existence of the nationally-recognized ACRL information literacy standards, the availability of standardized assessment instruments such as those offered by Project SAILS and the Educational Testing Service, and the preliminary assessment data collected by the library. This data described UCF students’ information literacy skills proficiency and illustrated to the QEP selection committee that there was a need for additional instructional effort to bring these skills to acceptable levels.

**DEFINING INFORMATION FLUENCY AT UCF**

After initial acceptance of information fluency as the QEP, program and library faculty met with the QEP development team during a week-long professional development institute. The purpose of the institute was to arrive at some understanding of what information fluency encompasses and how it would be defined at UCF. At the end of the week conference attendees agreed that the Associated Colleges of the South’s (ACS, 2003) definition of information fluency was more closely aligned to what they envisioned than any other description. As represented by Figure 1, ACS perceives information fluency as the nexus of information literacy, technology literacy, and critical thinking.

![Figure 1: Associated Colleges of the South's Information Fluency Model](This is an ACS graphic. It may need copyright permission.)

ACS (2003) further defines the information fluent individual as one who “integrates the abilities to:

- collect and use information necessary to consider a problem or issue
· employ critical thinking skills in the evaluation and analysis of the information and its sources
· formulate logical conclusions and present those conclusions in an appropriate and effective way.”

The ACRL definition of information literacy was discussed, but rejected in favor of the ACS model, which was perceived to be broader than, and subsume, the ACRL definition of information literacy. These differences are distinct and had bearing on what measures were chosen to assess students’ information competency levels.

Institute attendees further elaborated on the ACS definition by acknowledging that students progressively acquire information fluency skills as they build upon information and technology skills introduced in the lower division. These skills are expected to be enhanced and mastered as students matriculate into their upper division courses, major programs, and culminating capstone experiences. Figure 2 illustrates concepts and activities associated with infusing information fluency across the curriculum as envisioned by the UCF development team (UCF, 2006).

Basic technology and information skills are foundational to the model and are built upon by program faculty who are selected to participate in the QEP. Participating faculty define the characteristics that their information fluent students should be able to perform upon exiting the program and are primarily responsible for implementing and assessing information fluency concepts across the program. Student learning outcomes and instructional activities are introduced and mapped throughout the curriculum, which are then followed by assignments that provide opportunity for students to develop critical thinking in relation to information use. Assessment is integrated throughout each of the participating programs and at different levels. A final critical dimension of the model is the instructional, curricular, and assessment support provided to the participating
program faculty by units external to the program.

![UCF's Information Fluency Integration Model]

**INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT AND BACKGROUND**

Widespread recognition exists for the importance of information literacy instruction as a cumulative and continuous process woven through the curriculum (cf. Grassian & Kaplowitz, 2001; Hagner & Hartman, 2004; Iannuzzi, 1999; International Society for Technology in Education [ISTE], 2000), with the implication being that the integration of information literacy instruction – and its assessment – is a shared responsibility across all in academia. At the outset four academic programs were selected as first year participants to implement information fluency throughout their respective curricula. These programs are Philosophy, Nursing, University Honors, and a student success program operated by Academic Development and Retention. Additional programs will be added annually through a competitive call for proposals.
Participating faculty have primary responsibility for implementing and assessing information fluency concepts within their program areas, but institutional support was likewise recognized as a critical factor for success of the QEP and representatives from units with expertise in the content area, including faculty development, instructional support, and assessment services, were added to the development team to support program faculty. Participating faculty have already started working closely with representatives from the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning, Operational Excellence and Assessment Support, the Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness, and the UCF Libraries and Course Development and Web Services. These units have the most prominent roles in supporting the QEP and are described here for purposes of comparison to academic support services found on other campuses.

The Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning (FCTL) is the UCF center for faculty development and teaching and learning success. The FCTL is utilized by all colleges as a campus resource, and its staff provides workshops and one-on-one assistance to faculty and administration on course, program and college assessment, strategic planning, and the integration of effective pedagogies that support student learning. The FCTL will work with faculty to modify syllabi and course assignments to address information fluency objectives, design course level assessments, and assist participating programs with mapping learning objectives throughout their curriculum.

The office of Operational Excellence and Assessment Support (OEAS) coordinates the university’s institutional effectiveness efforts, administers institution-wide assessments, such as NSSE and the graduating senior survey, and supports all discipline units in developing their program student learning outcomes. For the past decade the Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness (RITE) has been collecting and analyzing longitudinal data monitoring learning effectiveness and faculty and
student satisfaction with UCF’s distributed learning program. RITE also provides leadership and support to individual faculty members who are conducting research in effective pedagogy. OEAS and RITE are responsible for developing or purchasing institutional assessments, administering them, analyzing results, and writing progress and final reports for the accrediting body.

UCF Libraries reports to the division of Instructional Technology and Resources, as does Course Development and Web Services (CDWS). The Libraries will assist FCTL in working with course faculty to develop sound pedagogical practices, assignments, and assessments, as well as provide course-integrated information literacy instruction. CDWS instructional designers are working with library faculty to develop online, interactive instruction tutorials with embedded assessments. CDWS provides oversight and faculty training for the course management system used at UCF and will also promote relevant instructional resources to distance faculty and students.

The objective of the QEP is to implement a focused initiative that enhances educational quality and evidence of how the QEP has impacted student learning will need to be presented to the accreditation review team. As such, it is not surprising that assessment is a persistent theme that runs throughout the QEP. Assessment will be conducted at the institutional and program level, including the pilot academic programs and the library instruction program, to gauge instructional efficacy. Additional purposes to which assessment results can be used and a description of UCF’s information fluency assessment plan follow.

**PURPOSES OF PROGRAM ASSESSMENT**

Assessment of instruction is conducted for a variety of reasons and results of assessment studies are
of interest to diverse audiences. At the institutional and program level assessment outcomes can be used to improve instructional programs and to document effectiveness for external reviewers. Library instruction assessment efforts can likewise inform instructional decisions and feed into broader campus initiatives. Assessing information literacy skills also presents the opportunity to contribute to our understanding of information competence as a theoretical construct. Results of information fluency assessments at UCF will be used for all of these purposes.

Perhaps the most fundamental reason for conducting program assessment is to improve the quality of instruction itself. Assessment can help determine what students know and don’t know, in turn allowing program administrators to evaluate the efficacy of their instructional programs and improve upon them as warranted. Understanding how instruction impacts student outcomes is a necessary first step to evaluating and improving planning, curriculum, and instruction decisions (Hernon & Dugan, 2004; Lopez, 2002; Maki, 2002). Assessment data can also be used to justify an instruction program to library or university administrators and to provide evidence for additional support or resource allocation.

Assessment results are not limited to use for internal decision-making, they also have value as evidence of program effectiveness to external audiences. Information competency skills recently have been recognized as fundamental to success in today’s rapidly changing, information-intensive environment (c.f., American Association of School Librarians & Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1998; ACRL, 2000; ISTE, 2000; Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2002; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2002; New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2005), and institutions are challenged to provide evidence that their instructional programs have a positive impact on student academic success.
Assessment of instructional programs is often overlooked by libraries, but results also can be used to document effectiveness for institutional audiences and program reviews. In academia, the library’s mission is to support the institution’s educational programs. To that end, the library is expected to uphold its part of the academic pact and teach students to effectively use library and information sources as an integral part of their learning process. Corollary to this endeavor is assessment. Assessment attempts to answer the question, “How effective are we?” and supports institutional integrity by providing evidence that accomplishments match intentions (Grassian & Kaplowitz, 2001; Hernon & Dugan, 2004).

UCF Libraries collected assessment data to reveal its level of effectiveness in support of the academic mission of the institution. Results of these assessment efforts were used in the initial QEP proposal to describe students’ information literacy skill levels and to illustrate the need for additional instruction. Prior to the opportunity presented by the QEP, library faculty were already using assessment results to start a discussion with program administrators and teaching faculty. As noted earlier, a number of professional organizations and accrediting agencies recognize the need for competent information users and library assessment efforts provided an entry into working with program faculty. In some instances these efforts led to designing and assessing assignments with program faculty to provide evidence the programs were meeting accreditation criteria.

Other compelling reasons for assessing instruction related to information use exist that are not related to institutional or program needs. Information literacy is a concept that has only come into existence in the last 30 years and use of the term and what it encompasses has dramatically expanded during this time. Assessment results can help define what information literacy is and what it is not,
what constitutes its boundaries, and what holds it distinct from other constructs. Questions abound as to the differences between information literacy and information fluency or critical thinking and to what extent technology facility influences information literacy skills. Although information literacy as a distinct construct is appealing, it nonetheless is very recent and claims as to its validity remain unconfirmed.

Assessment can also build pedagogical theory by analyzing which factors contribute to the greatest learning gains. Over time, assessment may reveal the most effective methods for transmitting knowledge of effective information use. Is it the number of instructional sessions a student attends or are the greatest learning gains achieved by completing assignments that require increasingly sophisticated information use? To what extent do instructional opportunities mapped through program curricula impact learning or does intensive feedback and attention paid to student performance have more significant impact? Ultimately, assessment results may lead us to a deeper understanding of the theory underlying information literacy and identify which factors produce the greatest learning gains.

**THE UCF INFORMATION FLUENCY ASSESSMENT PLAN**

Assessment of student development and growth in information fluency skills is required to demonstrate that the information fluency initiative is impacting UCF students. Approaches to assessing student learning are classified as direct or indirect. Direct methods assess students’ knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or values based on products or performances and can consist of commercial or locally developed tests, rubrics, one minute papers, or other cognitive or performance-based assessments. Indirect methods rely on data that imply student learning has
occurred, and may include students’ perceptions of their learning experience based on exit surveys or focus groups or use institutionally collected data such as graduation rates or student levels of engagement. Results of direct measures are generally preferred by external reviewers as constituting primary evidence of progress toward meeting learning outcomes, but indirect measures can offer additional insight into the environment in which learning occurs.

At the outset the UCF implementation team reviewed commercially-available tests that could be practical to use for large-scale assessment. The ACS-adapted definition of information fluency used at UCF has elements of technology proficiency, information literacy, and critical thinking. The QEP assessment team examined several existing tests for each component of the information fluency model. Among the tests examined were:

- the TekXam series of tests for technology literacy,
- the Project SAILS test for information literacy, and
- the California Critical Thinking Skills Test for critical thinking.

Another instrument that appears to most accurately reflect all dimensions of the information fluency model used by UCF was reviewed. The Educational Testing Service’s (ETS) Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy Assessment purports to measure students’ cognitive and technical skill levels in an authentic technology-intensive environment (ETS, 2004). Members of the UCF planning team met with ETS representatives to discuss test validation procedures, expectations for score reports, and administration costs. UCF had served previously as a beta test administration site and faculty who reviewed the test supported its use for the information fluency initiative.

The American Association for Higher Education (2005) writes that learning is multidimensional,
integrated, and revealed in performance over time. To validate an assessment program and to successfully measure the range of student achievement, multiple methods of assessment, administered at critical points throughout the learning process, are necessary (Lopez, 2002; Maki, 2002). To achieve this goal assessment methods that supplement standardized test results are being planned for use at UCF. Program and library faculty are currently developing discipline-specific assessment instruments that include objectively scored tests and interpretive instruments. Rubrics will be used to assess term paper bibliographies, analyze writing, and evaluate embedded information literacy components in student portfolios and the capstone course final project.

Methods that indirectly measure students’ information literacy skills levels will be used in conjunction with direct methods. Several programs plan to administer existing self-efficacy surveys (Beile & Boote, 2002) and library anxiety scales (Bostick, 1992) with cognitive instruments. Institutional level data, such as student success and persistence rates and survey results, are generally kept as a matter of record. Student engagement levels as indicated by the National Survey of Student Engagement have been successfully correlated with student learning outcomes (Mark & Boruff-Jones, 2003), and these indirect measures will be used to explore factors beyond instruction that may impact student success and the learning environment.

The multi-method assessment approach will also be multi-level, and students’ information fluency skills will be assessed at various points throughout their tenure at UCF. The assessment team is currently collecting baseline data and will track students’ development of information fluency skills both at the general education level and within the discipline. As students matriculate through their coursework assessment will transition from the use of nationally normed tests that measure learning outcomes at the general education level to methods that reflect knowledge of information production
and use pertinent to the discipline. Disciplinary learning outcomes will be measured by locally developed assessments that reflect skills desired of successful candidates in the program area. The context of the assessment will vary across levels, but will continue to be directed at determining to what degree students are gaining information fluency skills.

**Collecting baseline data**

Collecting baseline data is the first step in the assessment plan. The assessment team will administer the ICT Literacy Assessment and test results will be used to establish UCF students’ information fluency skill levels before any strategic interventions are established. These data are needed to establish effectiveness of the instruction; after instruction, it is hoped that students’ knowledge will increase and in turn be reflected in higher test scores. A preliminary administration of the ICT Literacy Assessment was conducted in April 2006 to test the feasibility of administering the instrument to a large group of test-takers. Preparing for the delivery of the test was not insignificant and involved scheduling computer labs, preloading ETS software and checking minimum computer requirements, recruiting and training proctors, and communicating with prospective student test takers. This exercise resulted in 38 students completing the test and was a critical first step in preparing for wide scale administration.

For future administrations a sample of 400 students will be selected from the population of students enrolled at UCF. Students will be selected to participate based on demographic variables and enrollment status in one of the information fluency pilot programs. Specifically, the identified sample will be representative of the student population across gender, student classification, and ethnicity characteristics and will consist of students who are enrolled in one of the four information fluency pilot programs and an equal number of students who are not enrolled in one of the programs.
ETS (2004) identifies the seven components of information literacy as the ability to define, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, create, and communicate information. For participating colleges and universities, ETS will analyze and report student level data on each of the components. The QEP development and assessment teams will review the ETS-supplied baseline assessment results to determine skill areas that need most development and where institutional energy should be channeled to optimize improvement in information fluency skills. Test results can also be used to compare student performance concurrently, by contrasting students enrolled in a participating program with those not enrolled, and over time, to see whether student skills increase between entering and exiting a program.

Assessing program effectiveness at the general education level

Two of the pilot programs, University Honors and student success, offer the bulk of their courses at the general education level. The Burnett Honors College hosts the University Honors and Honors in the Major programs. As the program selected to participate in the information fluency initiative, University Honors is geared toward incoming freshmen or students transferring from a community college with an Honors A.A. degree. The focus of University Honors is to combine smaller classes with greater expectations for a student's performance.

The second general education level pilot program is the student success program supported through Academic Development and Retention. Rather than an academic program, student success is comprised of several support services. Students can participate in intensive advising and study skills sessions, academic exploration opportunities, tutoring and supplemental instruction, and other programs designed to enhance students’ academic success. Students also attend classes as a cohort,
and the core course, SLS 1501, will offer information intensive instruction and assignments.

Information fluency learning objectives will be mapped in selected core courses found throughout each program’s curriculum and assessed at both the course and program level. The purpose of assessment at this point is to determine the effectiveness of the instructional intervention. The ICT Literacy Assessment will be the primary tool for assessing information competency of general education students, but will be supplemented with locally developed measures. Results of students enrolled in the pilot programs will be compared to three controls: baseline data previously collected, students who have not participated in an information fluency intensive program, and student performance at benchmark institutions.

Attaining information fluency is viewed as a progression, and basic skills will need to be mastered before students continue in their coursework. Assessment results primarily will be used to provide insight into the effectiveness of the information fluency instructional program. However, assessment results also provide information at the individual student level. In the future, UCF may require general education and transfer students to attain a certain skill level prior to entering their major. In that case participating faculty will provide supplemental instruction in the form of tutorials, open labs, and individualized assistance for students who do not meet minimum standards.

Assessing program effectiveness at the discipline level

As students advance to their program areas the focus of assessment will shift to discipline-specific strategies. This will entail moving from objective measures to interpretative methodologies, from general education skills to discipline-specific abilities, and from emphasizing cognitive knowledge to behavioral performance. Although the ICT Literacy Assessment is considered a performance-based
measure, to date it does not explicitly relate to individual disciplines. UCF will rely less on the ICT Literacy Assessment and employ more authentic assessment techniques that relate to students’ demonstrated ability to use information within the context of the discipline.

Course level assessments continue to be important in the major, but discipline-specific, program level capstone assessments will be the primary means of determining how well program goals and student learning outcomes have been met. Program goals and learning outcomes unique to the discipline are in the process of being determined, and will precede choosing appropriate assessment methods. Program faculty in Nursing and Philosophy, the two pilot programs in the major, will decide what the information fluent student should look like upon exiting the program and what they should be able to demonstrate during their capstone experience.

Faculty will then work back from there to create assignments that have an embedded information fluency component and create activities and assignments particular to the discipline. For example, in a Nursing course, a possible information intensive exercise might consist of students examining a problem concerning a patient diagnosis where they must locate and analyze information, produce an integrated report of their analysis, communicate their results and interpretation to different audiences, and respond to critical feedback from their instructors and peers. Students will apply the information skills learned during course assignments to the capstone experience.

Current capstone assignments at UCF include group and individual presentations, research projects, papers, and poster sessions. Rubrics can be applied to these experiences to evaluate the level of information fluency skills demonstrated by graduation candidates. In the case of programs like Philosophy, which may require a lengthy student paper as the capstone experience, a program goal
may be for students to produce better researched and documented papers. In this instance rubrics can be used to evaluate the quality of sources cited by the student (c.f., Beile, Boote, & Killingsworth, 2004; Haycock, 2004; Kohl & Wilson, 1986).

Similarly, if a goal is for students to critically analyze the research in their field and synthesize it in papers, theses, and dissertations, then tools that evaluate the sophistication of thesis development and structure of the literature review can be employed (Boote & Beile, 2005). Another assessment strategy that straddles the transition between freshman or transfer student through graduating senior is a student-created portfolio. Portfolio samples can be collected at specific points throughout a student’s academic life and evaluated using rubrics created to assess information fluency skill levels.

Program level assessment results will be analyzed by RITE and/or OEAS and shared among the QEP development team and program and library faculty. At the discipline level assessment results will be used to determine the effectiveness of the instructional program and to decide how to improve the instruction itself. Data will also feed into the institutional level, where it will be amalgamated and reported to the accrediting body as evidence of educational quality enhancement. The assessment process will be on-going and continuous and culminate in an environment of assessment that informs and improves student learning.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The two main purposes of this article are to describe how information fluency became a core student competency at the university and to summarize an institution-wide implementation and assessment plan. To thoroughly document the process a discussion of how responsibilities among support units were defined and subsequent implications for the library is also needed. The clearly defined manner
in which the QEP selection process and implementation and assessment plan is presented here may lead the reader to conclude that all aspects of the initiative were thoroughly considered and that all units involved either had or were allocated the resources they needed to discharge those responsibilities. The reality is that the QEP is the selection committee’s best estimate of how to implement and assess an institution-wide information fluency plan and this evolving structure has necessitated on-going negotiation.

The library-submitted information fluency white paper was rewritten by the QEP selection team and recently submitted to, and approved by, the SACS Commission on Colleges as the institution’s quality enhancement plan. During the year-long rewriting process the QEP selection team met with program faculty and support units to gather input on the QEP plan. Several recurrent issues emerged during the preliminary discussions and new ones have surfaced with the implementation phase of the initiative.

The first issue of differing conceptualizations of information fluency exists primarily between the participating program faculty and the library faculty. At the outset library faculty were prepared to convince program faculty that information fluency was an important concept and that it was worthwhile to integrate into their instruction. This has not been the case at all. Instead, participating program faculty have embraced the concept and are eager to implement it throughout their programs. What the library faculty were not prepared for is the tendency for program faculty to disaggregate the three components of information fluency into discrete silos. For example, one program that teaches critical thinking and ethics has emphasized the critical thinking portion of the ACS information fluency model to the exclusion of technical literacy, and to a lesser extent, information literacy. Library faculty are continually pointing out information fluency is an integrated concept that is
concerned with the nexus of information literacy, technology literacy, and critical thinking skills.

The second issue focuses on the process by which various support units negotiated their roles in assisting program faculty with identifying student learning outcomes, mapping them throughout the curriculum, revising existing course syllabi, designing effective pedagogical practices and online teaching aids, and developing course and program level assessments. Individual units were assigned particular responsibilities and allocated FTE based on a detailed task plan. However, many of the responsibilities were jointly assigned, some were not assigned at all, and several units felt they lacked the resources to be able to absorb the task.

Some tasks, like library tutorial development, are clearly the responsibility of one or two units. Other tasks that are broader in nature do not have residence in any one unit. As program faculty requested assistance with pedagogy or assessment development it quickly became apparent that several entities would need to be involved. To address this issue support units met as a group and negotiated who would be primary on particular tasks and which other units would also need to be represented at meetings or workshops.

Although it is still very early in the implementation stage the information fluency initiative has had a significant impact on the library’s resources and organization. Specifically, the QEP budget supported one FTE library position. After reviewing the number of library tasks and the level of anticipated engagement the Director of Libraries decided to create a Department of Information Literacy and dedicate one in-kind department head position. The task plan also calls for a library representative, at an estimated .25 FTE allocation, for each of the participating programs. This translates to one FTE position the first year and progresses to two FTE positions in the third year,
when eight programs will be participating. These positions, likewise, are in-kind. The internal reorganization also entails additional reallocation of positions; the library instruction co-ordinator will now report to the new information fluency department head and percentages of the distance learning librarian and outreach services librarian also have duties within the new department.

The development and implementation process has not been without its share of challenges, but considerable progress has already been made. All parties involved knew no one model exists to emulate, but instead have worked together to pull best practices from the extensive literature on the subject to develop our own model. The institution has a solid plan, an engaged faculty, and dedicated support units. There is every opportunity to meet the accrediting body’s mandate by integrating information fluency throughout the curriculum, and in doing so bring together disparate units and programs in a unified effort to enhance student learning.
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