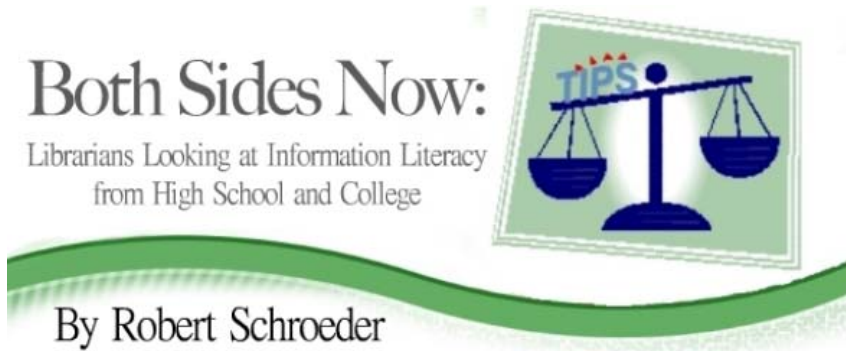


Mike    


Introduction

I initially became interested in the transitions students make from high school to college when I worked as a librarian in a community college in Washington state about ten years ago. At Portland State University I am currently the liaison to the General Education Department (called University Studies), and so still teach research and information literacy skills to thousands of freshmen each year. These freshmen come to college with a wide variety of research and information literacy skills.

The Question

In October 2007, the Oregon Association of School Libraries (OASL) invited me to speak at their annual conference. The question they asked me was, "What information literacy and library research skills do academic librarians think entering college freshmen should have?"

The question the OASL librarians asked me was a good one, but I had to expand on it. I wanted to see what research skills both academic and high school librarians thought transitioning students needed. What skills would the academic and high school librarians agree the students needed and what skills would be favored by each group? In the following article I will explain the surveys I conducted in order to research these questions, and I will give you some idea of their significance to all of us – librarians in high schools or in colleges.

The Survey Respondents

I posed two similar questions to different groups of librarians in Oregon. I asked the high school librarians, "What library research or information literacy related skills or abilities are most essential for entering freshmen to have mastered prior to going to college?" I asked the academic librarians, "What library research or information literacy related skills or abilities are most essential for entering freshmen to have mastered prior to coming to your college?" I received responses from about 40 Oregon librarians. Because the respondents were not randomly chosen, the survey data is not generalizable but the responses are interesting and are a good place to begin a discussion of how both groups of librarians define "critical research skills" for their students.

The 14 responses from high school library staff were about equally divided among small, medium and large schools. About 80% of the high school respondents were librarians or media specialists– 60% were over 50 years old and 90% were over 40 years old. (It should be noted that according to 2006-2007 numbers, only about one-quarter of the high school libraries in Oregon meet the minimum state standards of one "certified Library Media Specialist" and one "Library Media Support Staff".) (Maurer p. 2) Roughly one-third of the respondents had been at their job for 1 to 5 years, one-third for 6 to 10 years, and one-third for more than 10 years.

Of the 26 responses from the academic libraries, about one-half came from community college librarians and the other half came from university librarians. About one-half of the respondents teach mostly freshman and one-quarter teach a range of undergraduates, from freshmen to seniors. One-half of the academic librarians were over 50 years old, and 85% of them were over 40. 40% had been teaching for 1 to 5 years, and 50% were teaching for over 10 years.

How Well Prepared ARE College Freshmen?

I asked each group of librarians if they thought students entering college were adequately prepared to do college level research. Specifically I asked them what percentage of entering freshmen they thought were adequately prepared. The survey gave the librarians five response categories to choose from: "0% - 20% are adequately prepared", "21% - 40 % adequately prepared", etc. The results are shown in table 1 below.

Table 1. The Percentage of Freshmen "Adequately Prepared" to do College Research



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% Students "Adequately Prepared"	High School Librarian Respondents	Academic Librarian Respondents
81-100%	1 (7%)	0
61-80%	3 (21%)	0
41-60%	3 (21%)	1 (4%)
21-40%	4 (29%)	6 (23%)
0 -20%	3 (21%)	19 (73%)

The difference in the two groups' responses is startling. About one-half of the high school librarians thought that between 40% and 100% of their graduating seniors were prepared for college research, while almost all (96%) of the academic librarians thought that less than 40% of the entering students were prepared. In fact almost three-quarters (73%) of the academic librarians thought less than 20% of their entering students were adequately prepared. Are high school seniors exposed to "anti-information literacy" influences from the June to September after they graduate? Or might it be each group of librarians has their own definition of what information literacy skills would make a student "adequately prepared" for college-level research?

Categorizing the Survey Responses – Using the ACRL IL Standards

I received approximately 300 suggestions from the librarians about what skills entering college students would need to succeed. I needed a schema or lens with which to categorize all of the suggested skills. The ACRL and the AASL standards for information literacy correlate well: each highlights accessing, evaluating, and using information as well as the need for understanding the ethical and legal issues around information. Because of my familiarity with the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, I coded the responses to those five standards (The Standards are available online at <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency.cfm> .)

The following table summarizes the results of the survey. The standards are listed on the left hand side and the second column shows the percentage of all the librarians (high school and academic) whose responses were coded thusly. The third column shows the percentage of high school responses, and the fourth column shows the percentage of academic librarians' responses coded to the standard. (A more detailed breakdown with the librarians' responses listed is available at http://library.pdx.edu/media/library_Survey_Responses.doc.)

Table 2. Librarians Suggested Information Literary Skills Coded to the ACRL Standards

	All Respondents	High School Librarians	Academic Librarians
Standard 1: The information literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed.	19%	10%	25%
Standard 2: The information literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.	33%	28%	36%
Standard 3: The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.	14%	20%	10%
Standard 4: The information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.	5%	8%	2%
Standard 5: The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.	11%	13%	10%
"Other"	19%	21%	17%

Discussion of Librarian Responses

Overall, about one-fifth of the total responses were coded to Standard 1, but there is a marked difference in the responses between the groups. While one-quarter of all the academic librarians' responses fell to this standard, only one-tenth of the high school librarians' responses did. Over twice as many academic librarians responses related to Outcome 1.1.c, "Identifies the value and differences of potential resources in a variety of formats". The academic librarians especially seemed to think that successful students needed to know what reference sources (like encyclopedias, dictionaries, and atlases) were, and when and how they should be used during the research process.

Unsurprisingly Standard 2, which deals with accessing information, received a full one-third of all the responses. But again the academic librarians' responses were 10% higher. All of the librarians highly rated Performance Indicator 2.2 - "The information literate student constructs and implements effectively-designed search strategies", but over twice as many academic librarians' responses related to Performance Indicator 2.3 - "The information literate student retrieves information online or in person using a variety of methods". Again, as with the first standard academic librarians seem concerned with the students' recognition and correct use of different sources.

Before I had done this survey I would have thought that Standard 3, which deals with evaluation of sources, would have garnered more than 14% of all the responses. The high school librarians' response percentage was twice as high as academic librarians on this standard, while the high school librarians had over three times the response rate on Performance Indicator 3.2 - "The information literate student articulates and applies initial criteria for evaluating both the information and the sources".

Standard 4, which deals with the application of the information found, received only 5% of the responses. This is about the percentage I would have guessed as "how the information is applied" is much more the bailiwick of writing or course instructors. However three times the percentage of high school librarians responses were coded here - 8% to 2% for academic librarians. In Oregon, high school librarians must be certified to teach, and I suspect their training and position as "teacher librarians" would add to their justified concern in this area.

Standard 5, concerned with the ethical and legal use of information, received about 10% of the responses overall, and the two groups of librarians were very close in their total responses coded to this standard. Almost twice as many high school librarians responses to academic librarians' (9% to 5%) related to Outcome 5.3.a - "Selects an appropriate documentation style and uses it consistently to cite sources". Again, this would seem reasonable, as high school is the place many students get introduced to citation styles and the citation process.

The biggest surprise to me was the number of responses (one-fifth of the total) I received that were skills not described in any of the five ACRL Standards. These "Other" skills related primarily to research as a process, libraries, and librarians. The kinds of skills that relate to the research process were somewhat metacognitive in nature. They dealt with the students having a broad overview of the iterative and sometimes messy process that is research; knowing that research takes time; and how to apply effective strategies to different steps in the process - to see research as a means to an end, not an end in itself. The ACRL Standards address parts of the process, but nowhere are there outcomes that speak to internalizing the whole process.

Both groups of librarians believed that seeing the library as an important tool for research and being familiar with it and its processes were requisite skills for student success. Both groups also thought that knowing that librarians can be crucial and helpful allies was key – one librarian wrote that students should, “Know what a reference librarian is and how to use one”.

How many times do you think the “L” words (library or librarian) are mentioned in the ACRL and the AASL Standards? If you look in the standards themselves (not the introduction to them) you will find a grand total of one reference to library (or three if you count “interlibrary”) in the ACRL Standards, and zero references in the AASL standards! What is interesting to me here is the importance that these Oregon librarians put on the library and librarians in regards to student success, but the apparent lack of recognition in our standards. (An interesting topic for another article – what was left out of the standards.)

Conclusions and Recommendations

As with most interesting questions, what came out of this research are many more questions. After looking at the data from this survey of Oregon librarians, I am filled with even more questions that deal with how we look at our graduating seniors/ incoming freshmen in regards to their skills vis a vis information literacy. What this survey really underscored for me was the need for both academic and high school librarians to talk to each other about what and how we are teaching information literacy to our students.

One of the main things I learned from this survey is how important it is for all of us, academic and school librarians alike, to see our students as engaged in one long information literacy continuum. Our students not only progress from high school to college over time, they often take classes in high school and at institutions of higher education simultaneously. One of the major “take-away” messages from my survey that I would share with my colleagues (in academe or schools) is that we need to find ways of starting or continuing the dialog among all types of librarians. The data in my survey shows that Oregon librarians agree on many of the “essential information literacy” skills our students need to succeed, but the data also show that school and academic librarians each have some unique takes on these skills as well.

An interesting next question to explore would be “Why do we have differing viewpoints on what information literacy skills are essential for student success?” I would suggest that we need to understand the constraints and pressures each group of librarians live with and respond to in our jobs to understand why we value the skills that we do. The only way to understand each others jobs is to continue our discussions. Unfortunately in many states academic librarians and school librarians don’t even belong to the same organizations. In Oregon for example academic librarians most often are members of the Oregon Library Association and school librarians and media specialists join the Oregon Association of School Libraries. We tend to mix, strangely enough, mostly at ALA conferences, but often at national venues our local issues and concerns get lost in the big picture.

Local and regional groups can be most effective at tackling local and regional issues around information literacy. But how can such groups be created and sustained? Luckily we are not alone in our efforts to bridge the gap between librarians from different types of institutions. There are some great model programs - in Central Pennsylvania, Rochester New York, and Athens Georgia, for example, that have been bringing academic and high school librarians together for some time (See the appendix for links to their programs). What they have all done is to recognize that “their” students are really the same students, and for their success in high school, after graduation, and at college it is incumbent upon all of us to work as closely together as possible.

Appendix: Examples of K-12-College Skills Continuums

Central PA K-16 Librarians Information Literacy Network: <http://www.libraries.psu.edu/psul/ils/outreach/k-16.html>

Rochester Regional Library Council – Information Literacy Continuum Committee
<http://www.rrlc.org/tabid/492/mid/851/default.aspx>

CLOC: Community Librarians Outreach & Collaboration
http://www.libraries.uga.edu/cloc/como_presentation2006.html

Blueprint for Collaboration
<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/publications/whitepapers/acrlaasblueprint.cfm>
By the AASL and ACRL Task force on the Educational Role of Librarians.

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About The Author



Robert Schroeder is a Reference/Instruction Librarian and Coordinator of Information Literacy at Portland State University in Oregon. His main liaison area is with the University Studies department that teaches general education classes, mostly to freshmen and sophomores, hence his interest in the information literacy skills of high school seniors. He hosts a few informal Portland Area Information Literacy Group meetings each year that bring together public, school and academic librarians around the

issue of info lit and instruction. He can be reached at schroedr@pdx.edu.