Modernizing Information Literacy Language in the General Education Requirements for Communication A Courses – Summary

Our goal is to modernize the 1994 information literacy language to reflect a contemporary understanding of information literacy, and to align these revisions with approved course criteria and faculty understanding of the Information Literacy component of the course. (2011/12 Gen Ed University Assessment Funds Proposal)

The authors of the 1994 General Education Requirements recognized that “information seeking skills and strategies” (along with written and oral communication) were critical learning outcomes for the Communication Requirement. Today, these skills, reframed as information literacy, are included in national frameworks for student learning and assessment including AACU LEAP (at UW-Madison, the Essential Learning Outcomes) and accreditation standards from the Higher Learning Commission. The ability to find, evaluate, and analyze information is critical to our graduates’ success.

The 1994 learning outcomes provide a foundation for collaboration among a number of stakeholder groups, and in the case of information literacy, provide a foundation for integration of the required library module (CLUE tutorial and a library instruction session) with the curricula of the five Communication A courses. The outcomes have served us well over the last two decades, but because they were written at the dawn of a significant transformation of the information environment, they have become dated. In 1994, for example, the World Wide Web was nascent and very little information was available online. The intent of the modernization is to focus on enduring, intellectual and practical skills that will equip students to be effective in an environment that will continue to transform rapidly. The modernized language drops references to technologies and delivery mechanisms (e.g. print article index, scholarly article) and focuses on higher-order knowledge, skills and abilities needed to navigate a changing environment (e.g. evaluation).

We began this process with a review of notes and documentation related to the 1994 outcomes, published reports and internal evaluations, current instructional practices, and national frameworks (e.g. Essential Learning Outcomes, Information Literacy Standards). The modernized language was vetted with the Library’s Communication A Working Group and the Communication A Course Directors Subcommittee of the University General Education Committee (UGEC). It is notable that a number of people who participated in the review also participated in the development of the original language. The process was discussed throughout the year with the UGEC and included in the annual report to UAPC, who approved the modernized language.

Original Outcomes (from 1994):

Information Seeking Skills and Strategies

A. Identifying and retrieving source materials needed to evaluate, organize, and select information from print and electronic sources
B. Acquiring basic critical, technical, and mechanical skills needed to find relevant information

Modernized Outcomes: (2012):

Information Seeking Skills and Strategies

A. Develop and adapt information seeking strategies in order to access information effectively
B. Evaluate information retrieved and select information sources appropriate to the particular research need