



WALTER E. HELMKE LIBRARY
219-481-6512

To: Senate Library Subcommittee

From: Library Operations Committee members:

Judith Violette, Chair	Dee Holliday
Marla Baden	Joyce Saltsman
Ken Balthaser	Pamela Sandstrom
Margit Codispoti	Sue Skekloff
Larry Griffin	Cheryl Truesdell

Date: October 13, 2000

Re: Proposal to establish an IPFW task force on information literacy

In helping students who come to the library, librarians who do the bulk of reference work, research consulting, and library instruction have discovered that they are repeatedly engaged in the process of teaching students how to determine the extent of information needed, how to access the information effectively and efficiently, how to evaluate the information and sources critically, how to incorporate it into one's knowledge base, and how to understand the legal and ethical issues surrounding the use of information, both printed and electronic. Discussions are taking place among librarians on the IPFW Library Operations Committee as to how to meet these demands and assess them. As a result of these discussions it is apparent to librarians that the concept of information literacy is not being dealt with in the same way across the campus as are writing skills and computer literacy. General Education Subcommittee and Senate documents do not appear to clearly address the issues of (1) what competencies are expected in information literacy, and (2) who is responsible for teaching and assessing them.

Librarians are in the position of teaching students both one-on-one and in groups how to determine what information is needed, how to access it and evaluate it, and put it into the context of an assignment with little more than a course syllabus or the student's interpretation of an assignment. While some collaborative efforts have occurred between librarians and faculty, it has not been enough. There is a need for librarians to be a part of an instructional team and participate fully in designing the library component of a course. At the present time librarians must simply fit in as best they can, which often leads to frustration or misunderstanding on the part of the student, the librarian, or the faculty member.

Librarians at IPFW view *computer literacy* as a training issue involving the technical aspects of using PC hardware and software. *Information literacy*, because of the increasing number of

electronic and online databases of information available at Helmke Library and on the Internet, makes use of computer literacy, but it is a separate competency that makes a greater demand on cognitive skills as opposed to psychomotor skills. For example, knowing which databases are likely to produce results on a specific research topic requires different competencies from knowing how to use a mouse, how to do a Power Point presentation, how to download information, or how to make queries in Microsoft ACCESS. Librarians can demonstrate through examples of the work they do that they are teaching (as opposed to training) when they help students with their library assignments. As defined by the Association of College and Research Libraries, "Information literacy... is an intellectual framework for understanding, finding, evaluating, and using information" (*College & Research Libraries News*, March 2000, p. 208).

A librarian's role in the academic library of the 21st century is different from what it was prior to the advent of the Internet, online access, and personal computers. Knowing resource options, establishing a search strategy, and evaluating information relevancy have always been in the purview of a reference librarian. However, librarians have traditionally used a standard set of print resources that changed very little from year to year. Now almost all librarian-user interactions involve exploring a multitude of electronic and print research options, many of which both librarians and users are seeing, learning to use, and evaluating for the first time while answering a reference question. At the same time, librarians may be interpreting student library assignments through the eyes of students who are unaware of the purpose of the assignment or its details.

Thus, IPFW librarians are wrestling with the question of what information literacy competencies are expected of its graduates and to what extent, if at all, librarians are expected to teach them. Because problem solving and critical thinking occur in every session a librarian has with a student needing research assistance, IPFW librarians are in fact teaching information literacy. Our concern is that we are doing so without knowing which competencies are expected in a plethora of courses taught by hundreds of faculty members.

IPFW librarians therefore propose that a university task force be formed to establish information literacy expectations for students in specific terms, to recommend implementation guidelines for meeting these expectations, and to determine means of assessing the outcomes. It is the belief of the IPFW librarians that information literacy is as important as computer literacy and needs to be addressed by faculty and librarians working together. A working partnership between individual faculty and subject librarians is crucial for courses having a library component that requires students to select, access, and critically evaluate information. The membership of the task force should reflect such a partnership and be composed of both librarians and teaching faculty. The university administration should also support the concept of teaching information literacy skills by funding the library appropriately to do the job well.

copies: General Education Subcommittee
Academic Computing and Information Technology Advisory Committee