"Information Literacy lies at the core of lifelong learning. It empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion of all nations"

(UNESCO, 2005 – The Alexandra Declaration.)

Personal note – it may also be a basic human obligation.

Implementing and integrating Information Literacy in UoLW Programmes

Introduction

As the title suggests, this account focuses on University London Worldwide (UoLW) programmes. For this reason, the accounts of information literacy and other information capabilities used here may differ from wider and more general accounts.

This difference arises because students on UoLW programmes cannot be assumed to have the same almost constant and high-bandwidth access, to information and library sources and to the wider Internet, that are enjoyed by most students on mostly face-to-face University of London courses. This in turn means that they cannot reasonably be required or expected to be able to locate and access information in a variety of formats including print books, newspapers, radio, television, videos, and the other internet sources.

So UoLW must provide as many as possible of the necessary resources and materials, ideally all, whether literally "inside the box" or through the provision of PDFs, access to online editions of books, and links to Library and selected databases. This provision ensures that UoLW student have access to the essential course materials and readings. But it can make it harder to develop students' information capabilities beyond the basics suggested here.

Basic Information Literacy

In UoLW, we can usefully take basic information literacy to mean the abilities to:

1. Locate and gain access to a specified source; for example, a journal article; given a reference and / or web link to the source[1].
2. Use the information appropriately; and
3. Reference the source properly in accordance with a defined referencing system.

Basic information literacy elements 1 and 3 are essential technical abilities for academic work at any level. The abilities are for the most part generic across disciplines, although disciplines may also have particular sources and resources which students need to be able to access and reference correctly.

These basic abilities may be technical, but they are not trivial. Students need support to become, not just confident, but skilled and fluent in them.

Element 2 by contrast is a fundamental part of the practice of a discipline. It should, for the most part at least, be learned within the discipline.

Implementing Basic Information Literacy

Undergraduate students should be required to develop, and to demonstrate through assessment, basic information literacy during their first or second semester of study, acknowledging the

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[1] Even when links are provided to sources, these links may fail or change. Hence it is advisable for students to be able to find sources from references as well as from links.

challenge of demonstrating this in an examination. So should any postgraduate students who have not already achieved it. All students should continue to practise and develop basic information literacy throughout their studies.

The set of abilities we are here calling basic information literacy may be included as a separate learning outcome, or it may be considered to be an assessment criterion for any student work that refers to published material. It is in the nature of academic work that these abilities will be required in most if not all modules.

For students to practise these basic abilities, they will need to be able to use Library information systems and a range of academic databases and sources as required by their discipline. There is perhaps no need to assess separately the skills to use such systems. These skills are essential components of item 1 described above. Also, systems and gcne skills change, for example with the new OpenAthens-LDAP.

Library and online resources are available to support the development of basic information literacy.

However sophisticated our information capabilities may become, as explored below, this basic information literacy remains essential.

An example of how a UoLW programme develops basic information literacy is provided at Appendix 1.

Moving beyond Basic Information Literacy towards Critical Information Fluency

We understand the wish in distance learning to simplify student access to materials. Why the need for students and graduates to go beyond basic information literacy? Some reasons:

- The number of information sources, and the amount of information available, are vast, and are growing rapidly. This makes search and selection larger and more complex tasks.
- The varied quality and reliability of both sources and information requires a critical approach.
- Valid and useful information and knowledge are turning over at a growing rate. To put it another way, the half-life of valid and useful information knowledge is decreasing.
- There is growing specialisation in much academic and professional practice.
- There is also a growing need for inter-disciplinary and inter-professional working, which requires students to have some familiarity with a range of disciplines and professions.
- The QAA expects honours graduates to be able "to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (for example, refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline)" (QAA, 2019). This goes well beyond basic information literacy.

A blurry boundary

The boundary been between basic and advanced information skills is somewhat blurry, contestable. This does not reduce the value of the distinction. It just makes us less dogmatic about what is, and what should be, variously called basic and advanced.

Critical Information Fluency

We offer, as a work in progress, an account of what we have called Critical Information Fluency. The importance of Critical will be self-evident. Fluency suggests that this is more than a set of capabilities. Rather, Critical Information Fluency should be a habit, a set of things that we do regularly and naturally, as part of our academic and professional practice. The development of any fluency requires support, practice, and feedback. Like basic information literacy, it should be

included in course learning outcomes, teaching and assessment, again starting early but coming to fruition in later years of the course. Critical information fluency is likely to be more discipline specific than basic information literacy.

We suggest that Critical Information Fluency involves the abilities to; in each case critically:

1. Identify what information is needed;

2. Identify why it is needed;

3. Locate and obtain it efficiently;

4. Evaluate it rigorously according to explicit and appropriate criteria;

5. Use / process it for the intended academic / professional purpose(s), and

6. Communicate it to the intended audience(s) clearly, accurately, appropriately and ethically.

7. Also, justify decisions and actions about information at each stage.

This clearly goes well beyond finding a source from a reference or link and referencing it properly, as we described in considering basic information literacy.

This account is still incomplete. It still offers a linear account. It does not capture the dynamic and highly interactive nature of real information searches. It does not describe the iterations that most searches require. It does not include the wide range of types of search, from "I know exactly what I'm looking for" through to, perhaps, "I wonder if there's anything out there that may help me with this?" or even "I have a vague memory…". Work on a definition continues. But if this, or something like it, is accepted as a necessary set of academic and professional capabilities, how do we get there?

Some issues in implementation:

- Students will not suddenly become critically information fluent. We should provide a staircase for them to climb, steps marked by new skills and by enhanced levels of each skill.

- Critical information fluency includes 7 abilities. This simplifies the design of progression – each ability can sometimes be worked on separately.

- Also, these distinct abilities need not always be developed in the order above.

- Development of critical information fluency lends itself to a spiral curriculum, in which the steps are practised and returned to with increasing sophistication (Bruner 2003).

How can this work in practice?

Where students are all studying the same content, using the same sources and undertaking the same assignments, basic information literacy is probably enough; although even here we might encourage them to use a wider of sources, or even to find one or two sources themselves, as in appendix to. However, and acknowledging possible complexity and cost, there are strong educational arguments for greater individualisation of study, if possible starting on a small scale in the first year and steadily increasing through the degree:

- Encouraging students to follow their own interests and enthusiasms, within the course syllabus and learning outcomes, can use and increase students' motivation and engagement.

- Even a modest differentiation of student focus and student assignments can increase the quantity and value of student collaboration and peer learning.

- The scope for student-student plagiarism is reduced.

- Project and dissertation modules are typically a feature of later years of a degree, although less so in distance learning programmes. Such modules are powerful and effective vehicles for the development of critical information fluency as an element of independent studies.

- Hopefully such independent studies are a feature of postgraduate programmes, particularly when these are taken by students who are already in employment and who bring both considerable expertise and particular interests and questions to their studies.

Implementing Critical Information Fluency

We might, in programme and module documents, say something like:

> Students will be supported, encouraged, and assessed on their ability to go beyond studying the core readings provided, and to:

1. Identify what information they need in order to complete a particular piece of work;
2. Identify why it is needed;
3. Locate and obtain it efficiently[2];
4. Evaluate it rigorously according to explicit and appropriate criteria;
5. Use / process it for their intended academic / professional purpose(s), and
6. Communicate it to intended audience(s) clearly, accurately, appropriately and ethically.
7. Also, justify their decisions and actions about information at each stage.

> They should do all this, in increasingly sophisticated ways, at increasing academic levels, and in ways appropriate to their particular field of study.

> They should do this in relation to their particular interest / assignment / project / dissertation.

> Criteria and methods for doing each of these things will be explored as part pf the course and with support from subject specialist information professionals.

> Feedback will be given on students' work in respect of critical information fluency.

> These abilities will be assessed.

Responsibility for implementing Basic Information Literacy / Critical Information Fluency

The teaching, learning and assessment of basic information literacy / critical information fluency all need to be designed into courses, and included in learning outcomes or assessment criteria.

Students would probably welcome guidance and examples on how these abilities are interpreted and implemented in particular disciplines and programmes.

The teaching and learning of these abilities may best be achieved through cooperation between subject specialist academics and subject specialist information professionals.

An example of how a UoLW programme develops some more advanced information capabilities is provided at Appendix 2.

These abilities are fundamental parts of academic and professional practice.

Work on IL will be more effective in a policy framework. Suggestions on policy have been made.

A checklist and toolkit will hopefully be developed from this paper.

Support on implementation is available from UoLW Library – Sandra.Tury@london.ac.uk and from the UoL Centre for Distance Education – cde@london.ac.uk .

References

Bruner, J. (2003). *The process of education*. 1st ed. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

QAA (2019). *UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards*.

Appendix 1 – Basic Information Literacy – Example

Sarah Singer, SAS

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[2] Perhaps these should be two separate points. Locating it– establishing where it is – and obtaining it – making it available to read and use – may be separate abilities, although clearly closely linked.

MA Refugee Protection

Within the MA Refugee Protection and Forced Migration Studies, core modules include an Information literacy activity (E-tivity) in which students are provided with an online tutorial on how to use the e-library, the databases and primary source materials it has access to.

For core module 1 the E-tivity is geared towards accessing materials on international law, while for core module 2 it focuses on accessing materials related to Forced Migration Studies.

The E-tivity itself focuses on retrieving a journal article, which it is expected will be students' primary use of the E-library.

E-tivity 2 – 5% Information retrieval (Weeks 1 and 2)

In this E-tivity students are asked to retrieve a piece of academic commentary from UoL's e-Library. To facilitate this activity, students are provided with an online tutorial on how to use the e-library, the databases and primary source materials it has access to. This not only helps students fulfil the E-tivity but also provides the necessary research skills to fulfil the module requirements.

Purpose: To retrieve this piece of recommended reading for Week 1 from the e-Library: [*journal article*]
Task: Please follow the following link [UoL E-Link] which will lead you to the library online tutorial. Complete the online tutorial and use the skills you have learned to access the above piece of academic commentary.   In the E-tivity 2 forum, comment on any difficulties you found in accessing this item and any interesting or useful resources you encountered in using the E-Library, particularly in relation to accessing reading materials for Week 1. Please post your comments by Monday of Week 2.
Respond: In the E-tivity 2 forum please post comments on your peer's E-tivity task by way of sharing your own experiences, between Monday of Week 2 and Sunday of Week 2.

Appendix 2 – With Elements of an Advanced / Critical Approach - Example

J Simon Rofe, SOAS

Global Diplomacy Example: E-tivity 1

Purpose: To access e-resources and use a bibliographic database to find articles from an academic journal through the online library.

Task: Watch the tutorial on retrieving information from the online library. Using an appropriate database search for articles relating to 'Diplomacy'.

Produce a bibliography containing two articles chosen by you. One that is available through the University of London's online library, the other through the SOAS library.

Write a short paragraph of no more than 200 words to accompany your bibliography telling your colleagues why these particular articles are worth reading and what they will gain from using your bibliography.

Post the bibliography and its rationale in the e-tivity 2 Forum.

Respond: Return to the e-tivity 2 Forum and explore a bibliography recommended by one of your colleagues.

Post a reply under this entry giving your thoughts on the selection of articles that were recommended to you. How useful and interesting did you find this selection? Could you recommend an article to add to this bibliography?

Submit both forum entries to TurnItIn no later than 11.59pm (London time) on the date of the submission. E-tivity submission dates are detailed in the Study Calendar.

Outcome: You will be able to search the University's databases, identify and access and evaluate appropriate academic journal articles, and present the required bibliographic information accurately.

We recommend you spend a minimum of 2 hours on this e-tivity, and as much time as you are able participating in the forum.

This Rofe Model draws on the work of HEA National Teaching Fellow, Professor Gilly Salmon. Her work in 2002 established the of value of E-tivities as the "frameworks for online active and interactive learning" http://www.atimod.com/e-tivities/intro.shtml and the five stage model of implementation http://www.atimod.com/e-tivities/5stage.shtml

Appendix 3 – Reference Management Software

Students can usefully be encouraged and supported to use reference management software as a tool for information literacy / fluency at all levels. Of course, students should use it critically. Their use of it should be founded on sound knowledge and understanding of referencing conv

entions, and of the purposes of referencing. This knowledge and understanding will enable them to check what the reference management software produces, and to produce a defensible reference when the software misbehaves or does not deliver.

However, with these precautions, and used properly and intelligently, good reference management software:

- Increases the accuracy of referencing;
- Reduces the need to memorise referencing systems, although the need to be able to reference manually is not removed;
- Increases student versatility, because good reference management software can generate references in a wide variety of referencing systems; and
- Helps each student to build a bank of references in the discipline.