



Building Community Through Research: An Inquiry Into Information Literacy

Professionals in any field need a reason to collaborate. Collaborative research is an effective way to gain valuable experience while building a faculty community and generating meaningful results. At Durham College, we had the opportunity to conduct collaborative research in an effort that spanned across the college community. It all started with a seemingly simple question posed by a colleague: “Are students actually using their textbooks?”

This question led to a few colleagues getting together to discuss our thoughts and experiences with student information literacy (IL) practices. Information literacy is defined as a set of abilities requiring individuals to “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (American Library Association, 1989). Part-time and full-time faculty, staff, and community stakeholders were called together to collaborate on this undertaking, which reaffirmed existing professional ties and opened new professional connections for future opportunities. This collaborative team created an IL measure called Your Information Literacy Practices (the YILP).

Information Literacy is an important skill for everyone to have, during college and in the workplace, but it can be difficult to measure. Existing IL tests, such as the Information Literacy Test developed by a research team at Ryerson University, have issues. In 2007, Reed and colleagues investigated student outcomes in IL when a librarian and an instructor co-taught a university preparation course that focused on the development of IL skills. To measure their students’ IL development, they created the Information Literacy Test (ILT) they used as a pre-test and post-test across the semester. The ILT seemed far too focused on specific library skills to accurately measure IL skills more globally. Since the course focused on teaching students library skills, it is not surprising they observed significant increases in students’ IL skills over the course of the semester.

From our consultations with internal and external stakeholders, and keeping in mind the perceived shortcomings of the ILT, we created a behavioral self-report measure that aligns with the newly developed *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (2016) by the

Association of College and Research Libraries, also known as the Framework. Specifically, the YILP includes questions related to all six of the *Framework’s* concept categories:

1. Authority is constructed and contextual.
2. Information creation as a process.
3. Information has value.
4. Research as inquiry.
5. Scholarship as conversation.
6. Searching as strategic exploration.
7. Our Research Project

College students were recruited through their general education courses and were invited to complete three online measures. In all, 42 students participated, and each received a \$5 e-card as compensation. Most students (88 percent) were in their first semester and came to college directly from high school (67 percent). Of those students who did not come directly from high school, more than three-quarters worked full time prior to attending college. Those students who elected to complete the study first provided some demographic information, then completed the YILP, ILT, and the Academic Resourcefulness Inventory, or ARI (Kennett, 1994).

The ILT is an objective measure of abilities and is comprised of 23 questions mostly focused on specific skills or content from the course, such as library search skills. The ARI includes 22 questions that students rate on a Likert scale. Finally, YILP is the 16-question self-report measure we developed in consultation with our community.

Results and Discussion

By comparing the results obtained in the Reed et al (2007) university student sample to those of our college student sample, our project measured and compared the IL skills of students using the ILT. This allowed us to compare college and university students’ baseline (pre-test) performance. And, because our sample also completed the YILP, we were able to examine relationships among these variables.

Compared to the previously published university samples, our sample scored slightly lower on the ILT (M = 30.67 percent vs 46 percent), and we found fewer students earning a passing grade (25.71 percent vs 35 percent). For resourcefulness, we found a similar mean in our sample ARI scores compared to the published university samples, differing only by approximately 1 point. However, our college sample showed more variability (SD = 21.02 vs 17). Our YILP measure of IL showed a .39 correlation

with both the ARI and the ILT and, in our sample, ILT scores were highly correlated with the ARI ($r = .70$).

Interestingly, differences between university and college students' scores may stem in part from differences in metacognitive abilities, which may affect their ability to reliably self-report (Lang, 2012). However, given the moderate correlation between the self-reported YILP and the more objective ILT, this possible explanation does not appear to be problematic.

It also appears that life experience has a positive effect on outcomes, as participants who did not enter directly from high school scored slightly better on all three measures. Since most non-direct entry respondents reported they were working full-time prior to attending college, it is possible that working before attending college provides respondents with the opportunity to develop their resourcefulness skills, which they then transferred to an academic setting once they began their postsecondary program

Conclusions and Future Directions

The ILT seemed far too focused on specific library skills to accurately measure IL skills globally. The YILP seems to effectively measure IL without being overly-correlated with resourcefulness (ARI) and being relatively strongly correlated with students' specific library-related skills (ILT), which are an important component of IL skills. Given the ease of administering the YILP, it could be used to measure how students' IL practices progress through their program or course over time. Future research will investigate whether the YILP can capture changes in students' IL skills over time.

Elizabeth McIntosh, *Professor, Business*

Lynne N. Kennette, *Professor, Psychology*

For more information, contact the authors at Durham College, elizabeth.mcintosh@durhamcollege.ca and lynne.kennette@durhamcollege.ca.

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