Information Literacy:
The Search for Practices and Policies

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With the ever-increasing amount of information now available in a variety of formats, librarians and library organizations have become more compelled to develop guidelines or standards which define skills essential for consumers of information to efficiently and effectively utilize this information. Around 1992, members of the Indiana Library Federation's Bibliographic Instruction/User Education (BIUE) section became interested in developing criteria and coming up with a working definition of information literacy which might be used in Indiana. The BIUE Steering Committee appointed and charged a working group to address this. After determining desired skills and competencies, the working group re-evaluated its charge and examined practical means of meeting it. As of 1997, this group's charge has narrowed slightly, to investigate what other state agencies and organizations have done regarding making formal statements or documents on information literacy standards, goals, and objectives.

The working group conducted electronic surveys (through BI-L, an electronic listserv pertinent to library instruction issues) to solicit information regarding other state's policies. So far, the committee has gathered formal policy statements from the following organizations:

• Michigan Library Association—Bibliographic Instruction Roundtable
• Maryland Library Association—The Task Force on State Guidelines
   for Bibliographic Instruction
• The Community College System of New York
• Wisconsin Association of Academic Librarians—Education and
   Library Use Committee

The working group also examined pertinent documents from various groups in Washington state and California. In addition, the *Model Statement of Objectives for Academic Bibliographic Instruction* prepared by the Association of College and Research Libraries Bibliographic Instruction Section (ACRL/BIS,) Task Force on Model Statement of Objectives (1987) was consulted.

Although the term "information literacy" is often politicized, it appears to be the predominantly used term. Many institutions are beginning to examine the need for some sort of standards or guidelines regarding what skills students and general library users require to effectively and efficiently utilize available information. Much of the early dialogue regarding information literacy appears to have emanated from institutions of higher education, or organizations with connections to that community (e.g. academic library divisions of state or national organizations).

When developing policies, guidelines, or standards of proficiency regarding information literacy, the ACRL/BIS *Model Statement of Objectives...* serves as a good model. While more detailed than some institutions may require, the *Statement* provides a solid framework of desired skills for library users. It includes general and terminal objectives in four areas:

- How information is identified and defined by experts
- How information sources are structured
- How information sources are intellectually accessed by users
- How information sources are physically organized and accessed

Upon examining each of the previously mentioned formal policy statements, similarities and differences became apparent. Regardless of the "publisher," each document identified certain goals and objectives to achieve particular levels of proficiency. For example, each document included statements addressing library users' ability to identify and define a need for information. This generally includes identifying major topics and disciplines involved, formulating appropriate questions and search strategies, and determining the appropriate "type" of information needed (e.g. popular/ scholarly, contemporary/retrospective, quick facts, reference sources, indepth information from books, magazine or journal articles, etc.). In addition, these documents mentioned skills related to library users' ability to *use* library tools and resources. Skills range from being able to select appropriate subject/key words, to understanding the physical arrangement of materials, to the ability to use appropriate electronic databases. The documents also include objectives which focus on the ability to critically analyze and evaluate information for its authority, content, and general appropriateness.

The Indiana Library Federation's Bibliographic Instruction/User Education section will continue examining information literacy policies and standards, as well as monitoring pertinent discussions of information literacy issues. We are also involved in the process of actively forming connections with persons involved in information literacy issues who represent public

libraries, school libraries/media centers, and the Department of Public Instruction in Indiana. Hopefully these connections will provide further insight into information literacy activities and policies as they pertain to libraries in the state of Indiana.

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Recommended Library Skills and Competencies for Graduates of Community Colleges in New York State. Prepared by special task force. 1987.