CASLO Assessment Implementations Suggestions: Information Literacy

The following suggestions, action plans, and best practices derive from AY 13-14 CASLO assessment meetings. Please consider these suggestions for implementation of improvements to program maps, course outlines, syllabi, and instruction. Report on changes in response to CASLO assessment in annual program reviews.

Utilize the library as an information literacy learning center:

- **Gap:** Faculty avoid research projects or assign research projects with minimal information literacy instruction and practice. These faculty cite issues of workload and courses already overloaded with curriculum that they need to cover.
  **Action plan:** Outsource a portion of the information literacy to the experts in the library. (See bullet points below.)

- Utilize librarians to update students on the latest information literacy tools, resources, and strategies. This can take the form of a classroom presentation or learning module that takes place in the library.
  **Best practices:** Time presentations and learning activities so that students immediately practice skills and apply knowledge to research activities. When possible, instructors should coordinate with librarians to customize presentations and assignments to specific course assignments.

- Design library-based learning modules to address key information literacy challenges such as using library databases, evaluating sources, or applying smart search strategies.

- Librarians should work with instructors of developmental and “gateway” courses to design learning activities that bring students into the library and expose them to library resources.

- Develop library handouts for instructors to use in conjunction with research assignments, perhaps with checklists of essential research steps and resources.

- Create an online chat/Skype system where UHMC librarians are available to interact with distance learning students. Create online versions of information literacy learning modules that cater to online students.

- Develop a routine library protocol for instructors who need assistance incorporating library instruction into research assignments.

- **Gap:** Some faculty are out of date with the latest research techniques and resources. For example, some faculty have never researched using the EBSCO databases. How do faculty themselves stay up to date with research strategies?
  **Action plan:** Ask librarians to offer faculty sessions on information literacy strategies through IT-C. Also, faculty can continuously renew their understanding by inviting librarians into their classroom for learning activities and participating in these activities along with students.

Build information literacy skills development into the program and require demonstration of exit-level skills.

- **Gap:** Some programs do not require students to demonstrate exit-level skills. For some, ENG 100 is the highest requirement and it does not meet an appropriate standard for exit-level.
**Action plan option 1**: Create an IR (research intensive) designation and require one in a 200-level course for the AA degree and others as appropriate. Note: This option could be double-dipped with the WI requirement.

**Action plan option 2**: Create a freshman-level course in addition to ENG 100 that focuses on research and/or technical writing.

**Best practice**: Map assignments into each program that require students to demonstrate exit-level skills for the CASLO standards. For example, any 200-level course that lists a “3” for CASLO assessment should ask students to demonstrate information literacy skills that show readiness for upper division course work.

Information literacy plays a powerful role in modern life. The college should work toward wide integration of information literacy as a routine component of higher education. A college that does not integrate this skill throughout its curriculum is vulnerable to the perception of being out of touch with the way graduates live and work after graduation.

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**Sequence courses to promote efficient development of information literacy skills**:

- Design educational sequences within programs to develop information literacy skills with increasing depth and complexity through (1) scaffolded assignments within individual courses and (2) repeated exposure, reinforcement, and development throughout the program.
- Use prerequisites to encourage early attainment of information skills. Design subsequent coursework to reinforce and improve information literacy skills throughout a program.
- **Best practice**: Meet students where they are. Design information literacy activities and assignments that match appropriate expectations of students abilities based on the prerequisites for the course. For example, a course which includes a college-level research paper should have ENG 100 as a prerequisite (or a plan to accommodate students with deficient skills).
- When appropriate, instructors should coordinate with instructors of the prerequisite course to build on previous curriculum and create a smooth transition.

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**Recognize reading comprehension as a key challenge in developing information literacy for many of our students**.

- **Gap**: Too many students do not sufficiently comprehend reading material and, as a result, struggle to present source ideas effectively in research assignments. **Action plan**: Integrate practice in reading for comprehension throughout the curriculum via activities such as those detailed in the bulleted items below. **Note**: This is may be a big opportunity to increase the educational value of our many courses which have no prerequisites and enroll primarily developmental students.
- **Best practice**: At all stages of the curriculum, develop assignments that ask students to practice reading for comprehension and demonstrate their understanding through written or spoken summary/paraphrase in their own voices. This deepens knowledge of reading material while preparing students to communicate information from a source—an essential information literacy skill.
Best practice: Turn a reading assignment into a “micro research paper.” In a one paragraph summary of a key idea from a reading, students can practice many information literacy skills—reading for comprehension, summarizing accurately, incorporating basic research elements like a signal phrase, parenthetical citation, and/or work cited entry.

Best practice: Use a rubric to model self-evaluation of the quality of a summary. Is the summary true to the original source? Is it captured in the student’s authentic voice (showing “ownership”)? Is it presented in clear writing? Does it employ academic conventions such as signal phrase and parenthetical citations. Minimize the workload, ask students to evaluate their own or each other’s summaries.

Gap: Students resist reading technical and academic writing. For research they often prefer getting information from “general reader” websites which are easier to comprehend than journals with technical or academic writing. Action plan: include activities that require students to struggle with comprehension of academic or technical writing? Incorporate reading strategies into instruction so that students have strategies to employ when they encounter difficult reading. Have students sign up for Reading Across the Discipline training.

Attend RAD (Reading Across the Disciplines) training to develop specific strategies to improve student learning through effective reading.

Build information literacy practice into more course assignments.

Gap: Students struggle to integrate source material effectively into research papers and presentations. Action plan: Increase instruction and practice in this practice throughout the curriculum via activities such as those bulleted below.

Integration of sources is a complex, multifaceted activity that involves reading for comprehension, evaluating source quality, summarizing/paraphrasing effectively, synthesizing varied sources of information into a singular paper or presentation, document source material according to academic conventions. In order to prepare students for exit-level skills. These activities should be developed and practiced at numerous levels throughout the curriculum.

Best practice: Incorporate an annotated bibliography as a preliminary assignment in a research project. This approach allows for practice of discrete skills on a manageable assignment before asking students to deal with the full complexity of a research paper or presentation.

Design research assignments with a manageable faculty workload.

Gap: Instructors do not have time to substantively evaluate the quality of sources incorporated into student work. Action plan: Have students write brief CRAAP reports (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, Purpose) on a few of their sources and submit this as a preliminary activity in a research project. This creates a manageable workload for instructors, ensures that students engage meaningful in source evaluation, and helps instructors identify red flags early in a research project. Note: This type of assignment would work well in conjunction with a library module on evaluating sources.
- Incorporate available resources into assignments, especially when there is a gap between the challenge of the assignment and the perceived skill level of students—librarians, Brainfuze, TLC tutors, and an online writing lab.
- Outsource information literacy instruction to the experts in the library.

**Engage students with assignments relevant to their daily lives and long-term goals.**
- Design assignments that allow students to research in their areas of interest. In English department courses, keep assignments flexible enough to allow research in fields of genuine interests. In other discipline courses, allow students to deepen their awareness of current and developing trends in their chosen field through research topic choice. Allow students to apply the documentation styles and other research conventions appropriate for their field of study.
- Exit-level assignments should invite students to rehearse the kind of skills they will perform in entry-level position or other typical post-graduation research situation.
- When possible, ask students to apply research in the aim of solving a real world or common workplace problem.

**Design learning experiences that meet students where they are.**
- **Best practice:** Use diagnostics to determine your students’ level of information literacy and cater assignment and lessons to their skill level.
- **Best practice:** When appropriate to the discipline, design research projects that include an oral presentation which encourages students to develop expertise and to “own” their knowledge. Knowing that they will present their knowledge to a “live” audience, encourages deep learning.
- **Best practice:** Use hands on practices when introducing research skills with students at their own computers following along.
- Provide clear guidelines for search strategies and appropriate sources in the assignment instructions so that students know they need more than Google and Wikipedia.

**Help students avoid plagiarism.**
- **Best Practice:** Use technology to check paraphrasing and the mechanics of APA. Require students to use Turnitin before submitting the assignments to help them self-correct and thus learn without the penalty of shame or the plagiarism tag.
- **Best practice:** recognize that plagiarism is primary a college-wide learning issue. Students are less likely to plagiarize the more they practice essential components of the research process:
  - finding and evaluating sources
  - reading carefully for comprehension
  - expressing ideas from sources accurately in one’s own words.
  - synthesizing multiple sources in a single paper or presentation
  - integrating source materials in accordance with academic conventions