

The Library and Digital Fluency

Digital fluency is fundamentally interwoven with information literacy, which has formed the basis of the library's mission for decades. This document asserts the integral part the library must play in any effort to build digital fluency among UMW students by documenting the library's history of promoting information literacy, documenting the relationships between information literacy and digital fluency, and outlining how the library will be involved in the university's digital fluency efforts.

Definitions

In 1989, the Presidential Committee on Information Literacy of the Association of College and Research Libraries established a definition of information literacy that has served as the foundation for the subsequent standards and frameworks promulgated by the Association. The Standards for Information Literacy in Higher Education, adopted in 2000, state:

Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. It enables learners to master content and extend their investigation, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning. An information literate individual is able to:

- *Determine the extent of the information needed*
- *Access the needed information effectively and efficiently*
- *Evaluate information and its sources critically*
- *Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base*
- *Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose*
- *Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally.* (ACRL Standards)

In 2016, ACRL adopted the Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education in response to changes in the higher education environment and in the information ecosystem. Working with partner organizations and drawing on 15 years of research into information literacy based on the original standards, ACRL updated the definition of information literacy to read:

Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning.
(ACRL Framework)

The Digital Fluency Working Group defined digital fluency as “the ability to consume and produce digital knowledge critically, ethically, and responsibly, as well as to creatively adapt to emerging technology.” (Digital Fluency Working Group report, 2017).

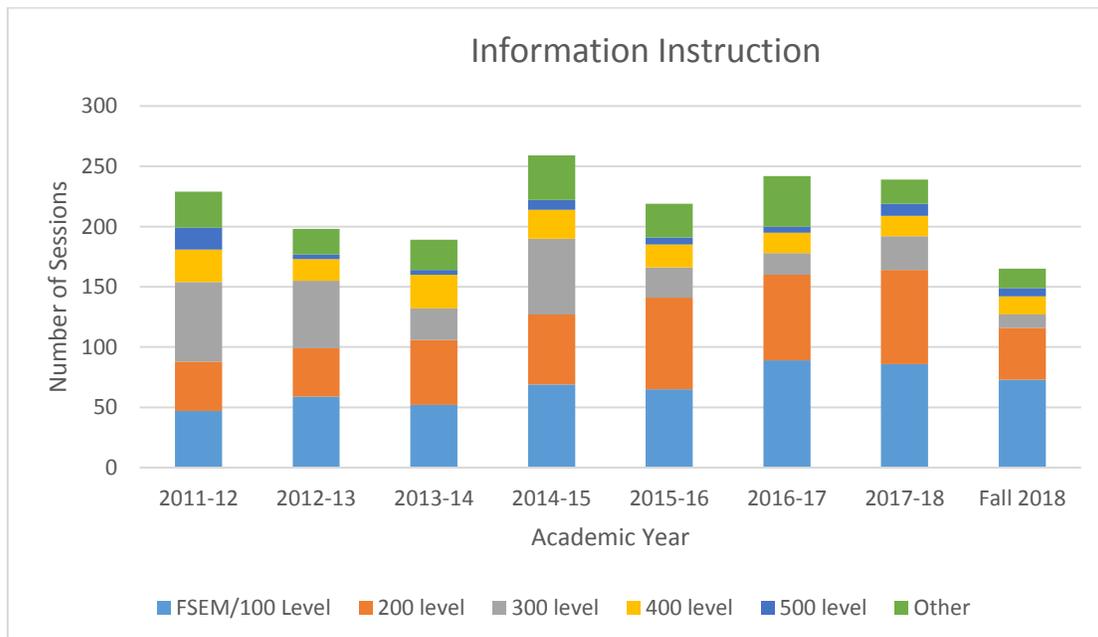
The interrelatedness of the two definitions is clear, and we believe that digital fluency cannot exist independent from the wider understanding of information literacy and information fluency, as articulated by ACRL.

UMW Library Efforts

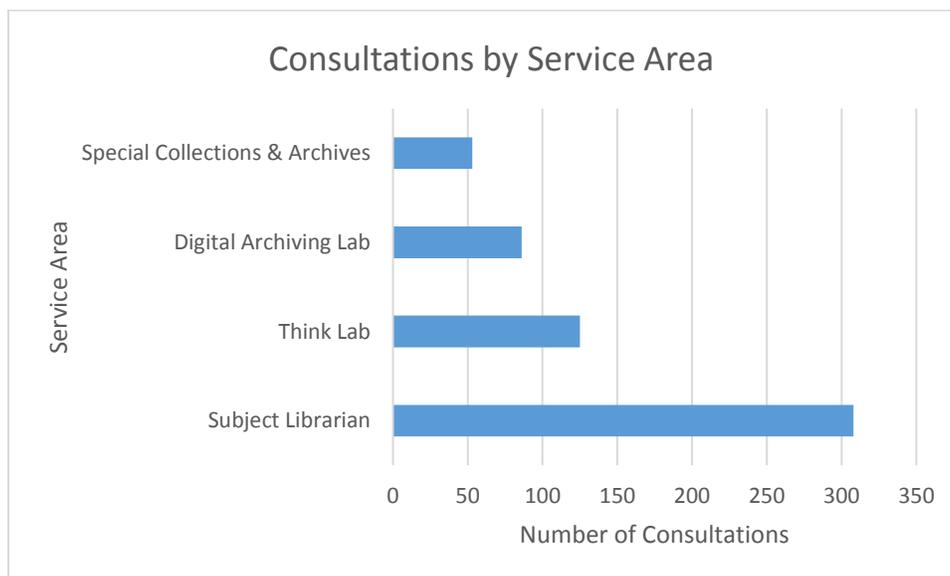
Research has demonstrated that there is a strong correlation between student interaction with the libraries and librarians and academic success and retention. Gaha, Hinnifeld, and Pelligrino (2018) found a statistically significant increase in GPA among graduating students who had at least one library instruction session. Soria, Fransen, and Nackerud (2013) reported that experiencing library instruction in the first semester leads to higher fall-to-spring semester retention. Additional research examining the impact of library services across academic libraries of all sizes can be found through the ACRL/OCLC Literature Analysis Dashboard (<http://experimental.worldcat.org/valresearch>).

The UMW Libraries have a long history of teaching information literacy concepts. Before the concept of information literacy became widespread in the profession, librarians offered bibliographic instruction classes that introduced students to library resources and search techniques. In addition to our classroom instruction, librarians work with students at the reference desk and through individual consultations on research. Each contact with a student is an opportunity for information literacy instruction.

The UMW Libraries' information literacy program begins with the FSEM. Through classroom interactions with Peter Catlin, Reference Librarian and Coordinator of First Year Programs, and through the online modules developed for the QEP, students are introduced to basic information literacy concepts. At this level, our focus is on teaching students to locate information resources efficiently, evaluate them critically, and use them effectively. As a student progresses through the General Education core and into the major, reference librarians work with faculty to introduce them to more advanced information literacy competencies as outlined in the ACRL Framework. The table below shows our classroom instruction statistics by level from 2011 through 2018.



Outside of the classroom, librarians work with students at the Reference Desk, by email, chat, and phone, and in individual consultations about research projects. In 2018, librarians and other library staff answered over 2600 reference questions at all library service points. We conducted 572 consultations on research and other projects with 851 students. The table below shows the breakdown of consultations by service point.



In tracking all forms of library instruction, we do not distinguish between what is digital and what is not because the line between the two is so fluid. Any interaction with a student may include work with print resources, online bibliographic databases, digital tools such as Zotero and Omeka, the green screen room on the Stafford Campus, and numerical data sets. In the ThinkLab maker space, consultations range from how to solder to complex projects involving 3D print, Arduino programming, and wearable technologies. What unites these various kinds of interactions is the fundamental concept of information fluency: finding information efficiently, evaluating it critically, and using it effectively to accomplish a goal.

Because of the QEP, we have excellent data on how well students learn the basic information literacy concepts. Mr. Catlin reviews a set of research papers for each FSEM to evaluate student learning, and he uses those results to plan changes to the next year's classes. We do not, however, have uniform data on how well students achieve the higher order information literacy outcomes, since the assessment of upper level courses is up to the department. We do know, however, from examination of Honors papers and other capstone assignments that have been submitted to Eagle Scholar, that some students achieve a high level of information literacy proficiency.

The Library Vision

While we support the university's efforts to improve students' digital fluency, we believe that digital fluency cannot be achieved without a focus on information literacy. In fact, our perspective is that digital fluency is so interwoven with information fluency that the two cannot be separated without losing all meaning.

Moving forward, we recommend the following:

1. Librarians are information professionals, and digital fluency is part of our training. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the General Education Committee to integrate information literacy into the General Education core.
2. Information literacy outcomes should be developed and integrated into the General Education program and for each major, and student achievement of these outcomes should be assessed at all educational levels.
3. We encourage a broadening of the understanding of digital fluency to recognize the close relationship of digital fluency and information fluency.

References

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