Information Literacy

One of the more recent developments in pedagogy is the emergence of "information literacy" as a benchmark skill which students need to acquire as part of their education. Information literacy is defined as "a set of abilities requiring individuals to 'recognize when information is needed and to have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."[1] While this does not appear to be any different than what educators currently strive to achieve in their classrooms, the theory behind information literacy is conditioned by the changes in technology over the past two decades and the current overabundance of information choices that exist—particularly from the internet. A person who is "information literate" ideally will be able to:

1. Determine the extent of information needed
2. Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
3. Evaluate information and its sources critically
4. Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base
5. Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
6. Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and use information ethically and legally

Again, what makes these skills particularly crucial is their relationship to the technology at hand, and increasingly "information technology skills are interwoven with…information literacy."[2] Therefore, in addition to tangible vetting skills (ie., being able to find accurate information from accepted sources and being able to distinguish credible from non-credible sources), students and teachers are going to need to master hardware and software that are growing in complexity. The effective classroom of the future will be a hybrid that mixes traditional modes of information acquisition (lecture and content emphasis) with individual and group problem solving activities designed to amass and assess primary, secondary, and tertiary sources. This will also involve use of diverse technologies beyond even the standards of today (like PowerPoint and Blackboard).

Tangible exercises for classrooms involve:

1. An orientation into our library, its services, and website.
2. Instructing students about primary, secondary, and tertiary sources.
3. Orientations or trips to local and regional archives, libraries, and museums.
4. Requiring students to develop a project around primary, secondary, and tertiary sources from a variety of repositories. (The major project in my classes involves three groups which are charged with designing a museum on some aspect of Jewish history. This entails traditional research into a number

[1] American Library Association, *Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, Final Report* (Chicago: ALA, 1989), and http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm, 1.

[2] http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm, 2.

of sources and repositories, but it also entails an understanding of space and how information is conveyed in museum space.)

5. Evaluating websites that share similar content.
6. Requiring students to synthesize academic literature on a particular question via internet databases such as EBSCO-HOST.
7. Developing a new language skill.

The inclusion of information literacy as a standard has not been without fits and starts. There is a perception among some academicians that information literacy will displace, or is currently displacing, content knowledge in favor of an abstract skill set. The questions that we should discuss further are whether and how Faculty Senate can assist in the incorporation of information literacy into the culture of our classrooms while respecting the diversity of individual teaching methods.