Freshman Information Competence at CSUN: A Status Report

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According to the 1995 report on Information Competence in the CSU, information competence "is the fusing or the integration of library literacy, computer literacy, media literacy, technological literacy, ethics, critical thinking, and communication skills." Information competence is a part of CSUN's General Education learning outcomes: "Students will progressively acquire information competence skills by developing an understanding of information retrieval tools and practices as well as improving their ability to evaluate and synthesize information ethically." Students must demonstrate information competence through the successful completion of two IC designated courses, one course in the Basic Skills section and one course in the Subject Explorations section. University 100 Freshman Seminar is an IC course in the Lifelong Learning Area of our new GE program.

The Oviatt Library has a robust instruction program that works with instructional faculty to both identify and improve student information competence and library research skills through general education and the disciplines. Through our ongoing University 100 information competence instruction and assessment program, we have observed freshmen students who are often ill prepared to apply the necessary research skills required to succeed in their courses.

At the beginning of the fall 2008 semester, 820 freshmen enrolled in all 34 sections of University 100 were asked to complete an online knowledge-based survey of information competence skills, which were based on the Association of College and Research Libraries' Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education[1].

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[1] http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.cfm

CSUN Freshmen Information Competence, Fall 2008 Summary	
Competency Tested	**Percent Correct**
Recognize an article citation	32.2
Identify a scholarly journal	35.1
Know why to use a periodical database	41.4
Choose the most appropriate source	45.5
Identify keywords from a topic statement	46.0
Identify elements needed for a citation	49.3
Recognize a book citation	51.1
Critical thinking: Recognize potential bias in information resources	52.5
Understand how to refine a topic	57.0
Know that the Boolean "and" narrows a search	63.0
Choose the most up-to-date news source	73.8
Critical thinking: evaluating Internet resources	74.1
Know to use the catalog to identify books	86.1
Understanding plagiarism	86.4
Average Percent Correct:	56.7

Five hundred and fifteen surveys were returned, for a response rate of 63%. 57.5% of the University 100 students indicated that they had formal library instruction prior to coming to CSUN, and 59% felt that their information competence skills were good to excellent. However, as summarized in the table above, only an average of 56.7% of the questions were answered correctly, with some basic skills testing well-below average. Clearly, with some exceptions, such as understanding plagiarism, critically evaluating Internet resources, choosing the most up-to-date news source, recognizing Boolean logic, and using the library catalog to find books, freshmen do not come to CSUN well prepared to undertake assignments requiring basic library research skills.

Assessing the information competence skills of freshmen continues to provide both librarians and faculty with the needed tools to design better learning experiences for our students as they undertake college level work and advance toward graduation.