Fall 2015

The Importance of E-Government and Data Information Literacy for Student Success

Darren L. Sweeper
Montcair State University, sweeperd@montclair.edu

"A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a Farce or Tragedy; or, perhaps both".

James Madison

The old adage, "From the cradle to the grave" takes on greater significance when we consider the important role that E- Government and Data Information Literacy plays in the success of students. For students majoring in public health, knowledge of, access to and the ability to retrieve vital public health data is fundamental to the informational needs that will arise in their professional lives. For this reason it is important that librarians assess the learning outcomes of students. What students learn or for that matter fail to learn, will have real world implications. As the library budgets remain flat and the need for public health information grows. Freely available government information is being undervalued and under-utilized.

In an effort, to meet these challenges and informed by the ACRL Information Literacy Framework, The Harry A. Sprague Library, at Montclair State University applied for and was asked to participate as one of 70 libraries in the _ACRL Assessment in Action program_, beginning March, 2014 and culminating with a poster presentation of the results from our project at the American Library Association, Annual Conference June, 2015. Our team sought to demonstrate the value of our library. The Assessment in Action (AiA) project is part of ACRL's [Value of Academic Libraries](#) initiative. It is supported by the Association for Institutional Research (AIR), the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APUL), and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

The AIA program was designed with the expressed purpose of assisting librarians in the development and implementation an action learning project which examines the impact of the library on student success as well as contributing to the assessment activities on our campus. Our project was entitled, "**Assessing the Impact of Government Documents and Data Information Literacy Instruction on Student Success for students in the Masters in Public Health program**". The project team was assembled to include representatives from the library, the teaching faculty and the university administration. The team consisted of Dr. Mary Mallery, Associate Dean for Technical Services, Darren Sweeper, Head of Government Documents and Data Librarian, Dr. Lisa Lieberman, Graduate Program Coordinator, Master Public Health and Irina Koroleva, Coordinator, Assessment Program, Office of the Provost.

"The project had three main goals, first, to develop the professional competencies of librarians to document and communicate the value of the library to institution's goals for student learning and success, second to build and strengthen collaborative relationships with university stakeholders around the issue of library value and lastly, to contribute to the university assessment work by creating approaches, strategies' and practices that document the contribution of the library to the overall goals and missions of the university".

In our project we used a multi-modal assessment process, including measuring the outcomes of one-shot information literacy classes in government documents and data information literacy combined with embedded online research guides and one-on –one research appointments with the government documents librarian. From our project we learned that multi-model assessment methods are the most effective means to address different learning styles, that one-shot information sessions are effective as introductions to basic searching and data retrieval. We learned that one-on-one research consultations are effective when students have targeted research questions. We also learned that research libguides help students focus on their search strategies. Our project sought to demonstrate the value of government documents while promoting life-long learning through data information literacy instruction. Our overarching goal was to help students meet the Core Competencies for the Masters of Public Health Community Health Education Concentration.

An equally important goal was to build and strengthen the collaborative relationships with university stakeholders and to make a contribution to the overall goals and mission of the university by demonstrating the value of the library. We sought to contribute to the university assessment work by designing an instructional curriculum, which was useful for students in the future, which included developing search strategies and documenting best practices that help students become better researchers.

The AiA initiative's stated aim is to further academic libraries' efforts to participate in higher education discussions of accountability by teaching librarians how to demonstrate their roles in student learning and success. Our project makes a significant contribution in this regard. It demonstrates the value of librarians, libraries and their collections. The project helped us lay the ground work for creating a culture of assessment within our organization, one in which we recognize the importance of assessment as a way to demonstrate the library's value to the university. The project helped our students develop critical competencies that they will need and use in their future professional work. Our project also helped promote the idea of using government information and data in the process of life-long learning. Data Information Literacy (DIL) is an emerging specialization within the field of Library and Information Science and as the amount of electronic information and data continues to grow. Our project shows that Data Information Literacy (DIL) is a valuable concept, and assessing its impact on learning outcomes and student success can produce measureable and important results.

The importance of E-Government, Data Information literacy and life-long learning cannot be overstated. We live in a world where opportunities for learning are ubiquitous and communal. Freely available and easily accessible, health data is needed now more than ever. The Montclair State University AiA project, confirmed this fact for our team. Assessing the learning outcomes of our students is important and valuable. We hope that our project will inspire others to apply to the AiA program next year, as well as, help to create and foster a culture of assessment in their libraries. Students instructed in the use of E-Government and data information literacy will be better students and more importantly, the knowledge and skills gained from our assessing their learning outcomes will help them to become more engaged and better informed citizens. E-Government and data information literacy is here to stay and librarians of all backgrounds will be asked at some point to instruct students in its use.   **We Are All Government Documents Librarian Now!**