

Kevin Fosnacht

# Information literacy and NSSE

## Introducing the Experiences with Information Literacy Module

In 2013, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) launched a new version of its popular survey for undergraduates. Along with the new version of the core survey instrument, NSSE partnered with college and university librarians to create the Experiences with Information Literacy module for the 2014 edition of the survey. The module, a short set of add-on questions institutions may choose to administer to their students, asks about undergraduates' information use and how much their instructors emphasized the proper use of information. Data from the module can be used to assess institutional efforts to develop information literacy skills for college students.

### Development

Approximately ten years ago, the Institute for Information Literacy's College Student Surveys Project Group identified NSSE as vehicle to study and assess how students engage in activities related to information literacy.<sup>1</sup> This effort resulted in an experimental item set that was appended to NSSE in 2006 and 2008 for selected institutions.<sup>2</sup> However, due to length constraints, the information literacy items could not be incorporated into the core survey instrument, and the project group was eventually disbanded.

In 2011, two Indiana University librarians, Carrie Donovan and Diane Dallis, reapproached NSSE about adding more information literacy content to NSSE. At the same time, NSSE was working on revising the core

survey and decided to add modules to the core survey, which provided an opportunity to create a set of questions dedicated to information literacy experiences. This meeting led to an open meeting at the 2011 ALA Annual Conference about student activities related to information literacy and later an informal NSSE/Information Literacy Working Group.<sup>3</sup> The working group first identified a number of information literacy outcomes and then drafted survey questions related to these outcomes. The group initially unveiled the NSSE information literacy initiative and the draft module questions at an ALA 2012 presentation. During this session, the group also gathered feedback to improve the module.

NSSE tested an experimental version of the module in the Winter and Spring of 2013. A total of 23,621 undergraduates attending 47 institutions responded to the experimental module. NSSE staff examined the validity of the data in the Summer and Fall of 2013. The module was slightly revised due to the experimental survey results, to improve wording clarity, and to reduce its length before it was officially added to the survey for the 2014 administration. In the Winter and Spring of 2014, the module was administered to nearly 53,000 students attending 84 U.S. and Canadian institutions, making it the third

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most popular of the eight NSSE modules. The module has also been translated into French for francophone students.

### **The module**

When constructing the module, the working group sought to investigate student engagement in activities that develop information literacy skills. Student engagement includes the frequency that students participate in these activities and the extent to which institutions promote them. To create the specific survey items, we identified activities demonstrating information literacy skills identified by existing standards and rubrics. As the module is administered to both first-year and senior undergraduates at many institutions, the working group was partially constrained in the activities investigated as they had to be applicable to both class levels at a wide variety of institution types. However, we sought to investigate activities that represent varying skill levels.

The module has three sections. The first question inquires about how often students and faculty engaged in various activities that develop information literacy skills. The second question focuses upon how much instructors emphasized the proper use of information. The final question asks students to assess whether their college experience has improved their ability to use information effectively.

### **Initial findings**

One of the most positive findings from the module is the role of faculty in promoting information literacy skills development.<sup>4</sup> While it is not surprising that virtually all students reported that faculty frequently emphasized not plagiarizing and appropriately citing information sources, the vast majority of students believed that their instructors emphasized the use of scholarly or peer-reviewed sources, questioning the quality of information sources, and using the practices of a specific discipline. Additionally, many instructors modeled the information seeking and use process by breaking large papers

or projects into smaller assignments (e.g., outline, annotated bibliography, rough draft, etc.) and frequently provided feedback to students on their use of information.

Less positive were the ways students engaged with information sources. While most students frequently used information beyond required readings to complete assignments, many students appeared to do so uncritically. Three out of ten students never decided to not use an information source due to its questionable quality. Less than 40% of students frequently changed the focus of a paper or project while conducting a literature review. Additionally, a majority of students never or infrequently looked for an information source that was cited in something they read.

Overall, the module results suggest that faculty emphasize the development of information literacy skills in the classroom. However, these teachings regularly do not translate into student actions. Given the importance of information literacy as a liberal learning outcome, the findings provide support for reassessing information literacy instruction methods to have a greater impact on undergraduates' behaviors.

### **Going forward**

NSSE provided the module data and results to participating institutions in August 2014. These institutions will have the opportunity to link their NSSE data to their internal student records, which may highlight activities and/or programs that promote engagement in information literacy activities. The Experiences with Information Literacy module will be a part of the 2015 NSSE administration, allowing institutions to administer the module to their students next year.

I plan to further investigate the module data and present the findings at future ACRL and ALA convenings. The impending update of the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education also provides an opportunity to revise the module's content to keep up

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pair in the 1960s, but has been fully restored to its former glory and is open to those who desire a glimpse into Portland's past.

- **Portland Japanese Garden (611 SW Kingston Avenue, <http://japanesegarden.com>).** Emphasizing the connection between visitors and the environment, the Portland Japanese Garden offers five distinct styles of Japanese gardens. The garden is beautiful in all seasons. In March, you may see cherry blossoms or other early blooming shrubs, such as azaleas or camelias.

- **World Forestry Center Discovery Museum (4033 SW Canyon Road, [www.worldforestry.org](http://www.worldforestry.org)).** Explore the importance of forests and trees in our lives through a birds-eye view of the forest, a virtual trip to forests around the world, or a ride to the top of the forest canopy.

## Sports

Portland hosts three professional sports teams playing basketball and soccer. At the time of writing, the 2015 schedules were not available, so check back to see if any events will take place during the ACRL conference.

- **Portland Timbers ([www.timbers.com](http://www.timbers.com)).** Join the rowdy and enthusiastic

Timbers Army to cheer on the home men's soccer team, if you can get a ticket. Every home game since the team's first match in March 2011 has sold out. Games are held at Providence Park (1844 SW Morrison).

- **Portland Thorns ([www.timbers.com/thornsfc/](http://www.timbers.com/thornsfc/)).** Established in 2012, Portland's women's professional soccer team has a strong following. Like the Portland Timbers, the Thorns play at Providence Park (1844 SW Morrison).

- **Portland Trail Blazers ([www.nba.com/blazers/](http://www.nba.com/blazers/)).** Portland's men's professional basketball team plays in the Moda Center, located in the Rose Quarter (an easy walk from the convention center).

- **Rose City Rollers ([www.rosecity-rollers.com/](http://www.rosecity-rollers.com/)).** More than 400 smart, tough, athletic women compete on multiple teams within this all-female flat track roller derby league. Most events take place at The Hangar at Oaks Amusement Park (7805 SE Oaks Park Way).

This is just a sampling of the performances, museums, gardens, and sporting events offered across the Portland area. Many opportunities await you during your upcoming visit to Portland. ♪

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with the rapidly changing information literacy skills needed by today's students.

Finally, the Experiences with Information Literacy module is the product of a true interdisciplinary, multi-institution collaboration. The module would not exist without the input and expertise of members of the NSSE/Information Literacy Working Group and NSSE staff. Additionally, the comments and suggestions of many librarians and institutional researchers helped shaped the module. I thank everyone for their assistance in creating the module.

## Notes

1. Bonnie Gratch-Lindauer, "Information Literacy Student Behaviors: Potential Items for

the National Survey of Student Engagement," *C&RL News* 66, no. 10 (2005): 715–18.

2. Bonnie Gratch-Lindauer, "Information Literacy-Related Student Behaviors: Results from the NSSE Items," *C&RL News* 68, no. 7 (2007): 432–41.

3. Working group members are Char Booth, Polly Boruff-Jones, Carrie Donovan, Mark Emmons, Nancy Fawley, Kevin Fosnacht, Linda Goff, Lisa Hinchliffe, Rhonda Huisman, Ava Iuliano, Martha Kyrillidou, Jan Lewis, Krystal Lewis, Amy E. Mark, Loanne Snavely, Karen Sobel, John Watts, and Carroll Wilkinson.

4. Results are available at [http://nsse.iub.edu/2014\\_institutional\\_report/pdf/Modules/NSSE14%20Module%20Summary-Experiences%20with%20Information%20Literacy.pdf](http://nsse.iub.edu/2014_institutional_report/pdf/Modules/NSSE14%20Module%20Summary-Experiences%20with%20Information%20Literacy.pdf). ♪