

An Ohlone Story

Information Competency As A General Education Requirement

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Overview

It is hard to believe that less than 20 years ago, students used card catalogs and print indexes to do college level research. The ready availability of the Internet and World Wide Web has changed forever student information seeking behaviors – not always for the better. Our time is characterized as “the Information Age.” Students can access bewildering amounts and varieties of information any time of day or night. This super saturated information environment is not without its drawbacks. Faculty are alarmed by the inability of students to differentiate between fact and opinion. Cut and paste behavior is the norm. Plagiarism is rampant. Teaching Information Competency skills is one way to help students develop the technological and critical thinking skills necessary to succeed in today’s overabundant information environment.

The implementation of Information Competency as a General Education requirement in 2004 demonstrates the faculty’s understanding of the challenging information environment in which students live. The Information Competency requirement seeks to ensure that students know how to find information and use information effectively and ethically. This requirement combines computer literacy, specifically World Wide Web literacy, with critical thinking skills. The Library and the campus curriculum committee played important roles in defining, shaping and implementing the Information Competency requirement.

Students can take one of the following classes to fulfill the GE requirement: LS101 Steps to Successful Research, LS 151 Internet for Research or CAOT 153 Introduction to the Internet. Students who feel they have the required skills can take a “test out” examination in lieu of a required class. As librarians we work hard to instill Information Competency concepts into library orientations, instruction sessions, and one on one work with students at the reference desk. Students learn not just how to find information but to evaluate the quality and think critically about sources of information. The proper citing and attribution of information sources and critical issues relating to intellectual property and the ownership of information are emphasized.

Relationship to college values

We provide life long learning opportunities for students, college personnel and the community.

It is highly unlikely that the information culture in which live will become less complex in the future. Information Competency is critical to functioning effectively in personal life and the workplace. Through our Information Competency efforts we are teaching students to think about the world of information beyond the walls of the college; how information is produced and distributed.

We open access to higher education

The Information Competency skills mastered at Ohlone are essential as students continue their upper division coursework. Students gain exposure to the literatures and information methodologies in their fields of study. Four year colleges depend on our college to teach transfer students Information Competency skills.

We maintain high standards in our pursuit of excellence.

Many community colleges throughout California teach Information Competency skills. Ohlone made a serious commitment to Information Competency by adding it to AA/AS General Education requirements.

Contribution to Achieving College Goals

Develop across the curriculum the Learning College Model, utilizing methods and technologies that hold the most promise for improving student course and program completion success rates.

The Library was a leader in using technology to organize and distribute information. Students are able to access freely high quality sources of information through the World Wide Web. Our research skills class, LS101, is taught fully online.

Develop strategies to increase the proportion of full-time students including learning communities, cohort groups, enhanced facilities and improved course availability.

The Steps to Successful Research course (LS101) is a natural partner for any classes that require students to do research. We have teamed up with the English and Counseling Department to offer an online learning community, "On the Road to Research and Student Success." We want to continue partnering with other departments to make connections with students in disciplines other than English.

Demonstration of Meeting One or More of the Accreditation Standards

Standard II. C.1.b.

b. The institution provides ongoing instruction for users of library and other learning support services so that students are able to develop skills in information competency.

The Library has taken the lead in helping students develop information competency skills. Through one on one work at the reference desk, library instruction sessions, a well-developed Library Web site, a fine stable of high quality electronic library resources and library skills courses, Ohlone College provides ongoing opportunities for students to develop information competency skills.

Expression of Accreditation Themes

Institutional Commitments

Ohlone College has taken action to meet Standard C.1.b by requiring Information Competency as a General Education requirement as of the catalog year 2004-05. The campus community was and continues to be extremely supportive of the Library's efforts to teach Information Competency skills.

Dialogue

The development of the Information Competency requirement involved a great deal of academic dialogue amongst faculty from a variety of disciplines. The Library, the General Education Committee, the Curriculum Committee, and the Faculty Senate were active in facilitating this dialogue and shaping the final result.

Student Learning Outcomes

The central aim of the Information Competency requirement is student learning. The focused outcomes recognize that technology competency and the ability to think critically about the wealth of information that can be gathered electronically are essential life and career skills. To be an educated person in the information era requires competency in finding and analyzing information. Thus, this requirement addresses very important student learning outcomes.