

July 2014

Oregon's Goal: Healthy, Knowledgeable, Successful People. How? A Strong Information Literacy Continuum

Michele Burke
Chemeketa Community College

Laura Zeigen
Oregon Health & Sciences University

Recommended Citation

Burke, M., & Zeigen, L. (2014). Oregon's Goal: Healthy, Knowledgeable, Successful People. How? A Strong Information Literacy Continuum. *OLA Quarterly*, 18(2), 6-11. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1353>

© 2014 by the author(s).

OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

Oregon's Goal: Healthy, Knowledgeable, Successful People. How? A Strong Information Literacy Continuum

by **Michele Burke, MLS**
michele.burke@chemeketa.edu
Chemeketa Community College

and

by **Laura Zeigen, MA, MLIS**
zeigenl@ohsu.edu
Oregon Health & Science University

At the core of librarianship is a belief that knowledge transforms lives. Librarians believe that people have a right to engage with information and to experience the transformative power of knowledge (OLA Book Discussion Group, April 2012). Altruism aside, people need information skills to be economically competitive. We know that people must be information literate, able to navigate and use information effectively, in order to meet the increasing demands of participating in a knowledge society. We are preparing Oregonians with the flexible, transferable skills they will need to create, succeed, and earn money in information-saturated careers that may not even exist yet. It takes time for an individual to build these Information Literacy (IL) skills, and it happens along a continuum over the course of education and the lifespan. Librarians from across the state, from diverse institutions and types of libraries, work together to maintain Oregon's IL continuum. The IL continuum is an instructional and resource infrastructure that supports Oregonians throughout the process of developing the individual IL skills they need to reach personal and educational goals, and a strong IL continuum is essential to Oregon's economic vitality. In this article, we examine the current landscape around professional advocacy and Oregon's K–20 IL continuum.

We must be proactive about communicating with key stakeholders.

Advocacy efforts need to get out in front of decisions, rather than being reactionary. A proactive approach takes forethought and dedicated communication work. We are working in a climate characterized by rapid change, where decisions are often made and announced without the turnaround time needed to gather input. At the point where a school district announces a decision to eliminate library positions, we are already fighting an uphill battle. Much better to continuously build relationships with powerful statewide partners who understand and support the need for IL instruction and the role of librarians within that continuum.

It isn't enough to talk about our own work. We need to promote each other's work and promote understanding of an IL continuum.

Sometimes when people have or hear about a positive library experience, they attribute it to the remarkable qualities of one particular individual, rather than the product of a healthy IL system. Terri Keuchle, who has been praised for her work in developing the Highland Park Middle School 8-step research model, is quick to point out this problem; Keuchle has heard many times, "But Terri, that's just you," a remark that underplays expertise within the library profession and too readily chalks up a positive outcome to one gifted educator, without an accompanying understanding of IL as a discipline or continuum. As Keuchle explained at the 2012 Oregon IL Summit, "The fact remains that with the elimination of Media Specialists in Beaverton School District, the Highland Park research model will slowly disappear over the next few years. And, it won't be because I am gone, it will be because there is no media specialist who has a passion for teaching this all-important curriculum."

What is the role of the K–12 librarian and why is this professional important?

Librarians and their associated IL efforts prepare students for the critical thinking, resource evaluation, and analysis required to earn a college degree. As ACRL-OR (Association of College and Research Libraries) stated in their May 2012 online petition to the Beaverton School District, "School librarians support the development of all of these crucial skills. Stu-





Advocacy make you squirm?

Try another name

If the idea of advocacy puts you off, try looking at it through one of these lenses ...

- *Outreach*
- *Transparency*
- *Marketing*
- *Updates*
- *Visibility*
- *Communicating with Stakeholders*
- *Accountability*
- *Staying in touch with your community*

dents who have not had the opportunity to develop their research skills with a librarian have significant gaps to fill in college.”

The Oregon Education Investment Board (OEIB), chaired by the Governor, was established in 2011 to oversee “an effort to create a seamless, unified system for investing in and delivering public education from early childhood through high school and college so that all Oregonians are well prepared for careers in our economy.” The OEIB’s “40-40-20” calls for a seamless transition from pre-school through graduate school and part of their charge is, “Developing an education investment strategy to improve defined learning outcomes from early childhood through public schools, colleges and universities.” (<http://www.oregon.gov/Gov/OEIB/OregonEducationInvestmentBoard.shtml>). School and higher education librarians have already been doing this! We have articulated IL learning outcomes that describe skills needed at key points throughout a learner’s life span, and we have a strong professional community with a history of collaborating with each other, across institutions, and across disciplines. Librarians can and should contribute our knowledge to the OEIB discussions. We are natural partners.

Along with many other states, Oregon is in the process of implementing K–12 Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The goal of the CCSS is to prepare high school graduates to meet college and career expectations. In the English Language Arts area, increased rigor is achieved by requiring the use of a higher percentage of informational texts and by increasing the level of text complexity.

School librarians are uniquely trained to find, to make accessible, and to make use of informational texts of varying complexity. School librarians can save the school money by teaching instructors and students how to use the internet and statewide research databases to find and select appropriate informational sources, skills our students need that may also provide an alternative to purchasing textbooks to supplement the CCSS. Adoption of the CCSS indicates an appreciation for the vital role IL plays in student success, but we have not seen a corresponding appreciation for the role of the school librarian within research instruction. “The changes associated with the Common Core and Smarter Balanced are moving so quickly that educators find it difficult to be authentically involved,” explains Dr. Nancy Knowles, Professor of English/Writing for Eastern Oregon University, Director of the Oregon Writing Project, and Chair of the Oregon Writing and English Advisory Committee. Stakeholders need to know that a solid literacy foundation begins in preschool and is grown throughout the lifespan. Losing K–12 librarians impacts our students’ literacy foundations, including their potential to meet the Common Core standards and to be college and career ready.

Information Literacy (IL) skills are nurtured and honed over time, and research at any stage is a recursive learning process. “The fact remains that cementing this process takes dozens of opportunities to practice, not just one or two. Each time a student undertakes a research project they will hopefully add to their understanding and skill level,” explains Keuchle. K–12 school librarians have a distinct and essential instructional role in the IL learning process and in preparing students for college. The K–12 librarian is a professional with the credentials and expertise needed to teach students how to navigate the multiple formats and streams of information they will be expected to access and use effectively. They teach students how to find information, create new knowledge, use information ethically, adapt to new learning situations, and foster a lifelong interest in discovery. The blanket elimination of school librarians leaves a gaping hole in Oregon’s IL continuum and sets a



disturbing precedent for budget officials statewide. Eliminating all IL faculty members, the entire instruction group for the IL discipline, as if it is part of a standard cut, is alarming. What would happen if all sports instructors were cut? Or all math teachers? If a body like the OEIB recognizes and says it is not acceptable to eliminate an entire instructional group for a discipline as fundamental to career and college success as IL, it might give other districts pause before making the same drastic decision. Otherwise, librarians are in danger of sending revised versions of the same advocacy letter to other school districts at a point when it is already too late to be of benefit or effect a change.

What advocacy for information literacy is already happening in Oregon?

Various library and associated groups in Oregon are working to advocate for IL instruction across the educational spectrum and otherwise advocate for librarians. These include the Oregon Library Association (OLA), Oregon Association of School Libraries (OASL), the Oregon State Library, the People for Oregon Libraries Political Action Committee (POL-PAC), ACRL-OR, the Information Literacy Advisory Group of Oregon (ILAGO), and the Oregon Writing and English Advisory Committee (OWEAC).

Oregon Library Association (OLA) The majority of OLA advocacy work is done by the Library Development and Legislative Committee (OLA LDLC). Lobbyists working with the LDLC explain that advocacy efforts are more effective when a common voice and common language are used to communicate about an issue. The LDLC is working with IL groups to draft an IL position statement that will provide some common language and talking points for use in IL advocacy. OLA lobbyists also explain that patron stories are very effective in lobbying efforts, so the LDLC is encouraging libraries to gather these narratives. According to OLA President Abigail Elder, “As an organization, OLA is certainly interested in hearing what other types of advocacy work the association can do that would be helpful to academic librarians.” Although OLA does not have a PR unit, there is a publications committee, and Elder sees potential for outreach such as press releases, social media, speakers’ media, and speakers’ bureaus.

The Oregon Association of School Libraries (OASL) works to make sure that Oregon students and educators are effective users of ideas and information, and one way they do this is by advocating for information literacy for all students. The OASL promotes visibility in education, government, and the community, and has maintained a broad-based understanding of the school librarian’s role in supporting reading instruction. One way to further the visibility of the school librarian’s role in preparing students for college and career success is to explain both the ways that early reading experiences connect to the development of all literacies and the ways that school librarians support this development throughout the K–12 curriculum. With the recent merger, OASL became a division of OLA, similar to the Public Library Division or Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). The closer relationship between OASL and OLA will make it easier to coordinate outreach and advocacy efforts between school and higher education libraries.

The OLA Library Instruction Round Table (LIRT) was formed to promote library/IL instruction as a means to empower library users to become life-long learners. The LIRT enthusiastically embraced the recent OLA and OASL merger as an opportunity to promote cooperation and fellowship among Oregon librarians engaged in library instruction. A co-



sponsor of the annual Oregon IL Summit, the LIRT provides a forum for librarians along the IL continuum to exchange ideas and materials related to IL instruction.

The Oregon State Library is reaching out to establish relationships with the OEIB and to the Early Learning Council. The State Library, along with OLA, the Information Literacy Advisory Group of Oregon (ILAGO), and the Oregon Writing and English Advisory Committee (OWEAC), forwarded an Information Literacy Proclamation to the governor asking that Oregon officially recognize October as Information Literacy Month, just as President Obama has recognized it federally. The IL Proclamation was approved and will be used as a springboard for IL advocacy efforts in and around October this fall. In preparation for information Literacy Month, the OLA Library Development and Legislative Committee is asking libraries to gather patron stories of positive experiences that can be used in outreach efforts. Libraries might also invite a legislator or stakeholder to observe an academic, school, or public library activity or program. Watch the OLA Hotline and blog for updates on IL month.

The People for Oregon Libraries Political Action Committee (POLPAC) is a group of library supporters who work to support library issues and library legislation in Oregon. Oregon needs elected officials who understand the unique role libraries play in our community, and while the OLA cannot support political candidates, the People for Oregon's Libraries can. This political action committee funds library-supportive candidates as well as local library ballot measures.

The Association of College and Research Libraries—Oregon (ACRL-OR) is a division of OLA. ACRL-OR sent advocacy letters explaining the need for school library positions in the Beaverton School District, and explaining the need for an MLS librarian in an accredited college when Clatsop Community College was in danger of losing its only MLS librarian. ACRL-OR is also preparing to release an advocacy tool kit for libraries/librarians that find themselves in crisis situations and need advocacy resources (see ACRL-OR article in this issue of the *Quarterly* for more detail).

The Information Literacy Advisory Group of Oregon (ILAGO) is a group of librarians and other faculty concerned with IL instruction. The primary focus of ILAGO has been serving the 725,000+ students at Oregon's higher education institutions by making sure that two- and four-year schools share a common understanding of the skills necessary for students to be successful in research at the undergraduate and upper division levels. In partnership with the OLA LIRT, ILAGO is currently working to strengthen communication between higher education and K–12 school librarians. ILAGO is also in the early stages of a proactive outreach project to communicate with statewide stakeholders the importance of instruction along the IL continuum. Steps in the ILAGO outreach project:

- Compile talking points drawing on documents such as the OLA-LDC position statement, the IL Proclamation, and documents from partners like ACRL-OR and OWEAC
- Create presentations tailored for each target audience
- Present on the importance and benefits of IL and the IL continuum before various stakeholders, including all of the governing boards in the state within a year (e.g., the Oregon School Boards Association and COSA, the Council of Oregon School Administrators)



The Oregon Writing and English Advisory Committee (OWEAC) is a professional community of writing and English higher education faculty with over 20 years of experience partnering around articulating outcomes and improving instruction and learning for Oregon students. OWEAC is comprised of faculty at two- and four-year colleges and universities, is a strong partner with ILAGO, and has been a role model in terms of sharing work between institutions and disciplines.

What can you do? Many hands make light work!

Let's move Oregon towards a coordinated understanding of IL:

You can become active in and between these key organizations and work to develop and articulate partnerships with other IL professionals along the K–20 continuum. Here are a few ways to participate:

- Help draft and share common language and talking points (contact Michele Burke, michele.burke@chemeketa.edu and watch the OLA Hotline for updates)
- Share information about IL advocacy work across groups to establish the presence of a shared voice
- Work with the OLA LIRT to strengthen partnerships and IL articulation between school and higher education librarians (add LIRT to your OLA membership and participate in the IL Summit)
- Work on the ILAGO outreach project to touch base with Oregon stakeholders (contact Brian Greene, bgreene@cgcc.cc.or.us and watch the ILAGO listserv and blog for updates and a call for volunteers)
- Add OASL to your OLA membership and join the OASL listserv
- Collect data and evidence to support observations (e.g., how is student performance affected by school library models?)
- Start qualitative and mixed methods research to gather and tell stories backed by evidence. OLA lobbyists report that stories from supporters are effective in lobbying efforts and we need these for October IL month advocacy (contact Laura Zeigen, zeigen@ohsu.edu) 

Finally, encourage academic and school librarian involvement in OLA: OLA is not just for public libraries. Librarians of all types (public, school, special, and academic) need to work together to help Oregonians succeed in their education and information literacy development. Together we can be proactive on a larger scale, and we can help protect vital K–12 and other library positions. We can educate our community members about the roles librarians play in developing healthy, knowledgeable, and successful Oregonians. Don't wait for someone to contact you—make the first move!

Resources of interest

Ignoring the Evidence: Another Decade of Decline for School Libraries

<http://tinyurl.com/c7w3px2>

ACRL-OR—Association of College & Research Libraries

<http://www.olaweb.org/mc/page.do?sitePageId=61032>

<http://acrloregon.org/>



Common Core State Standards - Oregon Department of Education
<http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=2860>

Early Learning Council
http://www.oregon.gov/Gov/OEIB/OregonEducationInvestmentBoard.shtml#Early_Learning

ILAGO—Information Literacy Advisory Group of Oregon
<http://ilago.wordpress.com/>

OASL—Oregon Association of School Libraries
<http://oasl.memberclicks.net/>

OCCLA—Oregon Community College Library Association
<http://occla.pbworks.com/w/page/8392595/FrontPage>

OEIB—Oregon Education Investment Board
<http://www.oregon.gov/Gov/OEIB/OregonEducationInvestmentBoard.shtml>

OLA—Oregon Library Association
<http://www.olaweb.org>

OLA—Library Development and Legislative Committee
<http://www.olaweb.org/mc/page.do?sitePageId=63286>

OLA—Library Instruction Round Table
<http://www.olaweb.org/mc/page.do?sitePageId=58311>

Oregon State Library
<http://oregon.gov/OSL>

OWEAC—Oregon Writing & English Advisory Committee
<http://oweac.wordpress.com/>

POLPAC—People for Oregon Libraries Political Action Committee
<http://pfolpac.weebly.com/>

Many thanks to Kristina DeShazo (Oregon Health & Science University) and Ray Henry (Portland Community College) for valuable input to this piece and to Terri Keuchle (Highland Park Middle School), Nancy Knowles (Eastern Oregon University), and Abigail Elder (Tualatin Public Library) for offering insight into current IL efforts in Oregon.

