CONUL Advisory Committee on Information Literacy
Information Literacy Survey 2012

Introduction

This report highlights the findings of a survey conducted by the CONUL Advisory Committee in March 2012. The main objective of the survey was to gain feedback on the nature, value and impact of the input of a librarian to specific courses and modules across all undergraduate programmes within the CONUL institutions. To achieve this, the survey targeted academic staff who scheduled their students to attend library classes and workshops in Semester one of the academic year 2011/2012. The survey does not therefore aim to represent the entire information literacy activities of CONUL institutions across a full academic year.

Survey Demographics

Table 1

CONUL Institutions	Response Percent	Response Count
Dublin City University	15.6%	28
Dublin Institute of Technology	20.6%	37
National University of Ireland, Galway	10.6%	19
National University of Ireland, Maynooth	8.3%	15
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	4.4%	8
Trinity College Dublin	9.4%	17
University College Cork	4.4%	8
University College Dublin	10.0%	18
University of Limerick	16.7%	30
	Total:	**180**

Table 2

Discipline	Response Percent	Response Count (180)
Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	3.3%	6
Architecture	3.9%	7
Arts/Humanities	12.8%	23
Biological/Medical/Health Sciences	27.2%	49
Built Environment	5.0%	9
Business/Commerce	7.2%	13
Computer Sciences	2.2%	4
Earth, Atmospheric and Ocean Sciences	1.7%	3
Engineering	14.4%	26
Law	6.7%	12
Physical Sciences and Mathematics	2.2%	4
Social Sciences	13.3%	24

Key Findings

Academic staff surveyed:

- Assess their students' information literacy skills and knowledge by paying attention to the **quality of the bibliography or reference list** produced by students; looking for evidence that their students have **read widely and cited a range of sources**, and seeking evidence that students **understand key concepts or theories contained within the literature**.

- Indicated, in the majority of cases, that their module or course had **explicit information literacy learning outcomes**.

- Recognise that library staff input leads to **improvements in the quality of sources used** by students in projects and assignments and **improved student engagement** with course content and materials.

- Indicated that library staff involvement in their course or module allowed them to tap into a **source of expertise outside of their own** and introduced them to other **resources and services** available to students and staff.

- Recognise the information **expertise** of library staff and the **contribution** they make to ensuring their students can find, evaluate and use good quality sources in their assignments.

- In some cases believe the input of library staff leads to **improved student grades**.

- Would like to see the availability of a broader range of **online information literacy resources** and **sample information literacy tasks** that they can use in their own teaching.

- See value in conducting a **study** which would **track the impact** of information literacy interventions over a specified time-frame.

Main Findings

1. Librarian's Input

For nearly 85% of respondents, this was not the first time that they had input from a Librarian on their module/course. Where it was a first time intervention, it tended to be from staff in the disciplines of Built Environment, Computer Science and Law.

Table 3

Is this the first time you have had input from a librarian on your module/course?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	15.4%	25
No	84.6%	137

2. Nature of Input

Overall, workshops were the most common kind of input provided by library staff. This was followed by lectures. Other interventions ranged from advice, information about online learning support and walk-in library sessions to dedicated problem-based learning workshops.

Table 4

Nature of recent IL intervention	Response Percent	Response Count
Workshop(s)	65.8%	106
Advice	48.4%	78
Lecture(s)	46.0%	74
Direction to library walk-in sessions	24.2%	39
Online Learning Tutorial(s)	19.9%	32
Problem Based Learning Session(s)	11.2%	18

Discipline Differences:

- In Arts/Humanities and Architecture, lectures were more common, while in Agricultural Sciences/Veterinary Medicine and Earth, Atmospheric and Ocean Sciences advice was the most likely type of input.
- Computer Science and Law interventions were spread quite evenly across all forms of input.
- Problem Based Learning interventions were rare in all disciplines except Physical Sciences where 25% of respondents reported this type of input.

3. Reasons for working with Library Staff

Academic staff chose to work with library staff for two main reasons:

- They want their students to be able to find, evaluate and use good quality sources in their assignments (92%)
- They recognise the information expertise of library staff and the value of their contribution to the learning process (85.8%)

"The subject support library personnel in my field are exceptionally knowledgeable and helpful; it would make no sense at all to bypass this support teaching which the students appreciate very much"

"I am aware that students don't take the time to seek out library staff and are unaware that they have a wealth of knowledge which should be tapped into when doing academic work"

"The Librarians are available to contribute to the programmes and are very supportive to the students and keen for them to understand the importance of effectively searching the literature to support evidence based practice"

- 45.7% of respondents wanted their students to 'understand what plagiarism means and to develop good citing and referencing skills'
- 41.4% of respondents were 'concerned by the poor quality of information sourced by students and poor referencing and citing skills'.

Table 5

Why did you decide to work with a Librarian?	Response Percent	Response Count
I wanted my students to be able to find, evaluate and use good quality sources for their assignments	92.0%	149
I recognise the information expertise of library staff and the value of their contribution to the learning process	85.8%	139
I wanted my students to understand what plagiarism means and to develop good citing and referencing skills	45.7%	74
I was concerned by the poor quality of information sourced used by students and poor referencing and citing skills	41.4%	67
I took over the module/course from another lecturer who had worked with the library	13.6%	22
I was approached by library staff	6.8%	11

Discipline Differences:

- Business/Commerce and Physical Sciences were more likely to report (66.7% and 75% respectively) that they worked with library staff to help their students understand plagiarism and develop good citing and referencing skills.
- 80% of respondents in the category 'Agricultural Science, Veterinary Medicine', and 75% in the category 'Computer science', reported that they worked with library staff because they were concerned by the poor quality of information sources used by students and poor referencing and citing skills.
- A higher percentage of Law respondents (22%) reported that they worked with a librarian because they took over a module from someone who had previously worked with a librarian.
- 20% of Engineering staff reported that they were approached by library staff.

4. Information Literacy Learning Outcomes

Over 60% of respondents indicated that their module or course had explicit learning outcomes relating to Information Literacy.

Table 6

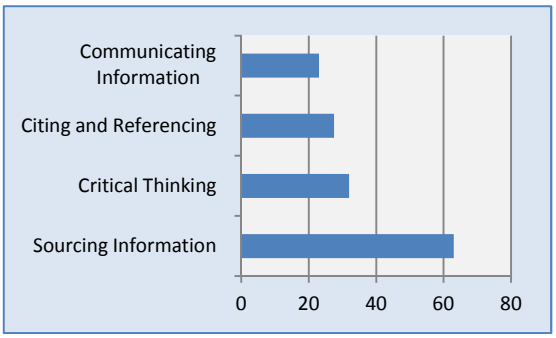
Does your Module have explicit learning outcomes relating to Information Literacy?	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	61.1%	99
No	38.9%	63

Discipline Differences:

- Computer Science and Physical Sciences lecturers were more likely to report explicit IL related learning outcomes.
- Earth, Atmospheric and Ocean Sciences and Law were less likely to report explicit IL related learning outcomes.

An analysis of the 69 comments where respondents were invited to provide examples of their course information literacy related learning outcomes, highlight the areas where greatest emphasis is placed across the undergraduate programmes surveyed.

Table 7



Examples under these headings include:

Sourcing Information	44 of the 69 comments listed ***finding/sourcing/searching/identifying*** information as an explicit learning outcome. In the learning outcomes where it is not explicit it is implied. Examples include "ability to source information", "identify different types of literature", "access a journal article online", "find literature quickly and efficiently".
Critical Thinking	22 listed ***critical thinking/ critical reading/ critical appraise/ evaluation/ review skills/discerning approach*** as a learning outcome. This was expressed in the following way: "critical reading", "evaluate appropriate resources" and "demonstrate critical appraisal skills".
Citing and Referencing	19 explicitly listed ***citing & referencing skills*** as learning outcomes. This also implicitly and explicitly includes avoiding plagiarism. Quotes include "how to cite and reference", "cite and source original research" and "demonstrate how to search and cite information".
Communicating Information	16 outlined ***communicating information /argument*** as a learning outcome. This included the ability to make a "coherent argument", "reach certain presentation standards," structure a review", "write in an appropriate academic style" and "demonstrate theoretical principles".

5. Assessing Students' ability to find, evaluate and use information

In terms of assessment of information literacy within their course or module, academic staff pay particular attention to:

- the quality of the bibliography/reference list produced by students
- evidence that students have read widely and cited a range of sources
- evidence that students understand relevant key concepts/theories/ideas and arguments contained within the literature.

Table 8

Do you assess your students' ability to find, evaluate and use information?	Response Percent	Response Count
I assess the quality of the bibliography/reference list produced as part of an assignment	88.5%	139
I assess whether or not students have demonstrated that they have read widely by checking to see if they have cited a range of sources in their assignments	86.0%	135
I look for evidence of an understanding of relevant key concepts/theories/ideas/arguments	79.6%	125
I look for active discussion on the searching for, and evaluation of, information and its sources in Problem Based Learning (PBL)/groupwork	26.1%	41
I use a quiz developed by the library	5.7%	9
I get students to complete a worksheet developed by the library	3.2%	5
No, I do not assess my students' ability to find, evaluate and use information in my module/course	1.9%	3

Discipline Differences:

- Agricultural Science, Veterinary Medicine and Physical Sciences were more likely to use a quiz developed by the library, while Physical Sciences were also more likely to use a worksheet developed by the library.
- Agricultural Science, Veterinary Medicine, Architecture and Biological, Medical and Health Sciences were all more likely to look for active discussion on searching and evaluating information in PBL or group work.

6. Impact of Librarian's Contribution on Students

Academic staff felt that the intervention had resulted in a positive outcome in terms of the improvement in the quality of sources used by students in their assignments and improved student engagement with course content and materials.

Table 9

Did the librarian's input contribute positively to any of the following areas?	Response Percent	Response Count
Improvement in the quality of sources used by students in projects and assignments	88.6%	132
Improved student engagement with course content and materials	68.5%	102
Improved grades	34.9%	52
Other (please specify)		17

"Unable to comment on grades as of yet as students have not completed their assignments but in the past grades have improved as a result of librarian input"

"While it may have been the case that the librarian's input helped to improve grades in some cases, it is difficult to track this influence - there is certainly a need for some longitudinal evaluation instruments that would allow instructors to assess the actual impact of instruction"

"Helped students to view library skills as essential skills"
"It made the students aware of sources and means of sourcing academic material that they would not have otherwise discovered"

"It also boosted student confidence and benefited the general relationship between students and faculty"

"*Makes a huge contribution to the module; brings students into the library (our sessions are in the library seminar room), they meet library staff whom they can later approach; the students get a real appreciation of the rich resources which our university library holds (including electronic resources) and are enthused, resulting in many cases in postgraduate study plans"*

Discipline Differences:

- Almost half of the Built Environment, Computer Science and Engineering respondents thought the librarian's input had improved student engagement with course content and materials. They were more likely to report an improvement in the quality of sources used by their students in projects and assignments.
- Agricultural Science, Veterinary Medicine and Architecture were more likely to think that the librarian's input contributed to improved grades, while Built Environment and Earth, Atmospheric and Ocean Sciences were less likely to report this.

7. Impact of Librarian's Contribution on Academics

Academic staff valued the input from library staff because it allowed them to tap into a source of expertise outside of their own and it made them aware of other library resources and services.

Table 10

Did the Librarian's input help you (personally) with your module?	Response Percent	Response Count
It allowed me to tap into a source of expertise outside of my own	72.0%	113
It made me aware of other resources and services that were available to students and staff	71.3%	112
It saved me time	60.5%	95
No, the librarian's input did not help me (personally) with my module	3.2%	5

"Librarian's input was tailor made for my needs; very positive cooperation between us"

"I always attend the librarian's input sessions, and invariably learn something new"

"It also allowed us to put across the message more strongly that the Library and librarians are core elements of undergraduate education, and should be viewed by students as an invaluable resource"

Discipline Differences:

- Social Sciences were more likely to report that the librarian's input didn't help them personally, but this group were also more likely to report that the input saved them time.
- Earth, Atmospheric and Ocean Sciences were also more likely to report that the input saved them time.
- Architecture were most likely to say that the input made them aware of resources and services available from the library, while Physical Sciences and Arts and Humanities were more likely to report that it let them tap into a source of expertise outside their own.

8. Additional resources required

Academic staff would value access to a broader range of online information literacy learning resources including assessment tasks that they could use in their own teaching.

Table 11

Which of the following would you find helpful when developing your students' information literacy skills?	Response Percent	Response Count
A broader range of online information literacy resources that I can use in my class (e.g. online tutorials; online database demonstrations; video interviews)	80.6%	116
Availability of a range of sample information literacy assessment tasks that I could use in my teaching	65.3%	94
Other (please specify)		13

"The [Librarian] gives input on resources at the point of project design, but if perhaps that same person could double-mark the project at the end on the basis of information literacy it would I think be an encouragement to the students to learn all they can from the library session, and would allow the [Librarian] to see the impact of their work in practice. I would prefer to build on something that is already working rather than start something separate"

"I find that the online tools are ignored by the weaker students who really need them. I prefer a face to face session to help weak students"

9. Tracking impact over time

Over half of the respondents would be interested in working with library staff to track the impact of information literacy interventions over a specified time period.

Table 12

Yes, interested in tracking impact	Response Percent	Response Count
Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	3.4%	3
Architecture	2.3%	2
Arts/Humanities	12.5%	11
Biological/Medical/Health Sciences	34.1%	30
Built Environment	1.1%	1
Business/Commerce	9.1%	8
Computer Sciences	2.3%	2
Earth, Atmospheric and Ocean Sciences	2.3%	2
Engineering	11.4%	10
Law	3.4%	3
Physical Sciences and Mathematics	1.1%	1
Social Sciences	17.0%	15

Recommendations

1. Develop an online information literacy toolkit aimed at teaching staff within the CONUL institutions. This would build on the CONUL ACIL brochure "Integrating Information Literacy into the Curriculum" and provide:
    - Additional sample information literacy case studies
    - Teaching and learning strategies for developing students' information literacy skills
    - Assessment strategies and examples
    - Links to resources (print and online) for class use

2. Investigate funding options and mechanisms to support a study that would track information literacy interventions over time.