

**Associated Colleges of the South Information Fluency Grant Proposal:  
Assessing Student Awareness of Core Library Resources**

Submitted on behalf of the University of Richmond by:

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1. Title of Program: Assessing Student Awareness of Core Library Resources

2. Name of and Contacts for Leaders:

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3. Brief Abstract: The University of Richmond and Washington and Lee University will bring an underrepresented and essential constituency into the ACS information fluency project. That constituency is our undergraduate students. They will participate in the project by completing a brief survey which will give these two institutions, and by extension all ACS members, valuable information about student awareness of fundamental library resources. This information can be used for IF program planning and as a tool for engaging faculty interest in IF.

4. Rationale: The intended beneficiaries of ACS and member institution efforts in information fluency are our students. Thus far, with minor exceptions, students have been absent from ACS's IF project. Those exceptions have been: the participation, by telephone, of a single student on a panel from Mt. Holyoke College during the February 2000 IF symposium at Southwestern University; W&L's currently funded project which uses students as peer mentors; and Southwestern's project in which students create Web resources in classics. Students need to be brought into the project in an additional visible and valuable way. Their involvement will give it credibility with students and enrich planning by taking in the student perspective.

Discussions with student leaders at the University of Richmond have shown that students have an interest in IF and would like to improve their knowledge of the information sources available to them for use in their academic work. These students and the student government organizations they represent are eager to be partners with the library in its efforts to reach UR students. Conversations between Washington and Lee students and the W&L library have demonstrated similar concerns and willingness to work on IF issues.

These students leaders are very close to their constituencies and their concerns deserve a hearing. They report that their fellow students have expressed frustration over learning what

resources are available to them through their library. Richmond and Washington and Lee jointly propose to survey students to determine if the anecdotal evidence presented by the student leaders reflects the student body's actual awareness of the resources available to them through their library. Observation by librarians at both universities is in line with the students' anecdotal and impressionistic assessment of the situation. Nevertheless we need to take steps to confirm, modify, or refute this interpretation of the evidence. The first step is to measure student awareness of key library resources.

Given the similarities in key characteristics of ACS institutions (largely residential institutions serving students in the "traditional" college age range and emphasizing liberal arts curricula and quality teaching), a survey of student awareness of library resources at two ACS institutions can be replicated at others and, perhaps, be generalized across the entire ACS membership.

The proposed survey project would for the first time involve students in a significant way in the ACS IF project. Furthermore, the data gathered through the survey would provide valuable data for IF program planning, both within the two institutions and for all of ACS; it also has significant potential to be a tool for engaging faculty interest in IF issues.

5. Preliminary Description: The survey to assess student awareness will involve the following steps:

- a. Identify of a list of twenty core information resources that all students should be aware of. Contents of this list will be determined jointly by reference librarians at Richmond and W&L. The number twenty has been selected on advice of the students with whom we have conferred. They have cautioned that if we distribute a survey longer than that we risk "turning students off" and losing respondents. Indeed, they predict that a longer survey would be ignored by such a high percentage of students that it would not yield useful results.
- b. Develop the survey—questions to be asked (e.g., class, major) and order of the twenty resources to be included
- c. Use the expertise of a survey research expert, (Prof. Linda Hooks, Economics, W&L, has indicated her willingness to assist), to review the survey and advise on distribution and response rate needed.
- d. License copies of SurveySuite software (<http://intercom.virginia.edu/products.html>) for producing the survey instrument
- e. Gain approval of Human Research Subjects review committees at UR and W&L
- f. Review survey with a sample of students at UR and W&L
- g. Distribute the surveys at each institution during March 2002. A notice about the survey would be sent to all students. To make the notice as attractive as possible to students, it would be sent under the auspices of the student government at UR. That notice would include a link to the survey. After clicking on this link, students would be able to complete the survey online. The student leaders have informed us that, if we want a meaningful response, we need to offer the students an incentive to participate. At UR they have recommended that each respondent receive a credit of forty units on their accounts for printing at campus computer labs and the library. At 5¢/unit the cost will be \$2/respondent. They have additionally recommended that every respondent be entered into a drawing for a gift certificate for \$50 for use at the campus book store or a local retailer such as Target.

In order to contain costs of the project below a certain ceiling, only the first 500 respondents at each institution would receive the incentive.

At W&L, the students with whom we consulted suggested both an online and paper distribution by the library and the incentive of a free drink at the Snack Bar.

The respondents would be self-selected. However by offering the incentive to respond, the self-selected cohort will be reasonably enough representative of the students bodies at UR and W&L that the survey will yield meaningful results. Without the incentive it is likely that only students who have a well established interest in or connection with their campus library would respond.

- h. Compile results, interpret them, recommend next steps, and disseminate information on campus. After the project leaders or their designees compiled the local results, the Richmond project leader or a designee would spend a day at Washington and Lee with his/her counterpart to analyze the results, compare institution-specific results, and plan for follow-up and dissemination.
- i. Credit printing units to UR respondent's accounts; hold drawing.  
Arrange for free beverages at W&L Snack Bar; hold drawing.

6. Plans for Follow-up and Evaluation: Follow-up will involve additional discussion with the student leaders with whom we have been conferring. If the surveys show weak student awareness of the resources, we would solicit ideas from them on effective means to increase awareness. If the surveys show strong student awareness of the resources, we would solicit ideas from them on how to bring students to the levels of knowing how and when to use those and other information resources.

The results will also be reviewed with appropriate faculty committees at each institution. At UR, the Library Advisory Committee, composed of faculty and students, will consider the results in the context of previous discussions about information fluency. At W&L, the University Library Committee, composed of faculty and students, will consider the results in the context of previous discussions about information fluency. The library committee's analysis of the results may result in data for use by the committee charged to review general education requirements next year.

This project will also help two ACS institutions assess value of the methods described above as a means of gathering from students information that can be used for planning.

7. Plans for Dissemination of Results to ACS and Beyond: Because it will be easy to compile the data and because the SurveySuite software exports data to Excel, it will be very easy to analyze the data and to share the data and interpretation(s) of that data with all other ACS institutions.
8. Suggestions for Replication at Other Campuses: By conducting the survey at two ACS institutions we will demonstrate that the survey can be replicated at any other ACS institution that wishes to do so. Use of inexpensive, easy-to-learn software will also contribute to the ease of replicating the survey elsewhere.
9. Preferred Time for Event: The survey will be conducted in March 2002. This period is attractive because ACS will, we hope, have funded this proposal and because students are still fully engaged in their academic work.