

# Information Fluency in the Service of Community

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## Project Consultants:

Faculty of the Environmental Studies Department  
Faculty advisors of each individual student in the course  
Founders and current board members of the Friends of the Wekiva River (FOWR)

**Abstract:** As part of a community service project, students in Honors 302 (The River Community) will bring their various majors to bear on the study of issues affecting our local Wekiva River. In the context of a course on the history and literature of Florida's rivers, they will be engaged in archiving and web-site production in cooperation with the Friends of the Wekiva River (FOWR). Fully half the course will be devoted to how information from the most complex levels of their discipline can be helpful and productive in a variety of public forms of information.

**Rationale:** Rollins has a long tradition of pragmatic and experiential education. This course extends IF in each student's discipline to the wilderness, the schools, courts, county commissions, zoning boards, state agencies, neighborhoods, and non-profit organizations, in a word, to all that constitutes the community of the river.

- 1) All the students in the class will be exposed to the full range of options that information fluency can provide for gathering, organization, preservation, storage, and appropriate dissemination of public information (see workshop agenda below).
- 2) Each student will see how the theory and information from his/her discipline works in practice in the issues surrounding the river community of plants, animals, and people in their watershed.

- 3) Each exercise of the workshops will provide the skills to help the student build a research project that serves the community interests and is published or at least described on the River Classroom web site.

**Description:** The Friends of the Wekiva River, Inc. is a local grassroots organization responsible in the past twenty-five years for extraordinary protections for the river and its basin, recently designated a National Wild and Scenic River. Just this year, the Olin Library Archives and Special Collections has agreed with FOWR to add its historical documents and its collection of scientific and government studies to the college's Special Florida Collection.

This presents an extraordinary opportunity for students in Steve Phelan's Honors 302 class (The River Community) to see from their own disciplinary vantage points, the full range of public information which filters down from university levels into the public forums and educational facilities of central Florida. All the majors in a liberal arts college have something practical to contribute in resolving the issues surrounding the river community. This is an example of the educational movement across the country in watershed curriculum development.

In the first version of this course (Spring 2001), eight students worked individually in the last third of the semester to do research, write a paper, and generate a set of web pages for inclusion on the FOWR web site, in a section called The River Classroom. Preparation for this project involved an introduction to Olin's archival material on Wekiva, a short workshop on library versus internet searching, and a long workshop on web site production, including the elements of scanning and editing photographs. The Honors 302 web site was arranged according to the disciplines of the students (see <http://www.wekivariver.org/documentary/trc-rivcom.htm>).

Next spring the course will expand the community service and information fluency tasks to the level of half of the course work and begin that task immediately with eleven workshops. Students will be looking at the full range of FOWR materials being prepared for Archives and will help in the critical thinking about the value of each kind of information and the best forms for it to be made available to the public. In doing so, they will be consulting with their faculty advisors in their own departments and with their professional counterparts among the FOWR board members (largely by email).

Workshop Agenda (each Thursday class with relevant river materials and tasks):

- 1) How to Use Blackboard/Email to Run a Course or FOWR - SP
- 2) Searching by Discipline at Rollins: On-line Catalog versus the Internet – WZ
- 3) Introduction to Archives and The Florida Special Collection – WZ
- 4) Evaluation of the Friends of Wekiva Web Site (Frontpage) - SP
- 5) Evaluation of the FOWR materials and records for archiving – SP
- 6) How to Make a Web Page (Composer) – LW
- 7) How to Scan Documents and Images – LW
- 8) How to Use Powerpoint – IT staff
- 9) How to Get the Message into the Media – BB
- 10) How to Make a Documentary Film (incl. Interviews) – BB
- 11) How to Use Film and Music on a Web Site - LW

These workshops will entail more than just computer literacy. Students will combine critical thinking, aesthetic design, and information literacy all-in-one, as they learn to use the information technology. The practical tasks started in the Thursday afternoon workshops and due the following Tuesday will involve both good judgment in terms of their discipline and good technique in terms of their use of computer software. The remaining Thursdays classes will be devoted to reports on projects and building a set of links from one student project to the others, past and present.

Some might think this agenda is too ambitious for the time frame, but these are Honors juniors who will come with some of the skills and pick up the remaining ones quite quickly. They will be supported after the workshops and at the point of creation of their own projects by individually scheduled work sessions with the intern. Furthermore, other technical assistants will help both the students and the archives handle the bulk of the digitalization.

**Evaluation:** The course will begin with an inventory (self evaluation) of the students' skill levels. Each of the workshop sessions will conclude with a brief evaluation and at semester's end the course evaluation will produce further long-range feedback on the value of the workshops, individually and collectively, as a way to teach information fluency. A broad sample of responses of the students and the providers will be put on the ACS project report site.

**Outreach and Replication:**

- Other Rollins Honors 302 Sections
- Other Rollins Courses Using the Wekiva River for Case Study
- HS Teachers from the Three County School Systems in the Wekiva Basin
- Other ACS Honors Programs
- Other Community Service Courses at Rollins and ACS Schools

An interdisciplinary course like this is ideal for spreading the news about a useful set of resources or an imitable form of community service. The information fluency part of this course is deliberately expanded to the limit, in order to give the student a comprehensive picture of the flow of river information. However, it can easily be adapted for other community service projects where the community resources have a problem of getting the message out and of filtering the complexity of university knowledge across or down to the level of public information and education, including even the elementary schools.

**At Rollins** we have many professors whose professional expertise reaches out into the local community. The professors do community service projects in their courses and thereby provide material for research and publication as well as a chance to involve majors in practical applications of their discipline. We can advertise this paradigm easily at Rollins through our office of community service.

Furthermore, faculty at Rollins have a long history of using the river for field trips and studies. The comprehensive gathering of educational materials on the Wekiva River will generate new courses and projects, primarily for our Environmental Studies majors and a

half-dozen faculty doing courses involving community issues related to the river. It is as an ongoing body of background information for courses, that the Olin Archives was interested in FOWR's materials. Now each new version of this course can build on the previous one. Finally, the new corpus of Wekiva materials in the Olin Archives should be a fruitful resource for thesis topics in our Master of Liberal Studies program.

**At ACS** institutions this paradigm of information fluency can be replicated in a number of courses and disciplines if we can find a way to inform them. We are willing to take advice on the best ways to do so, perhaps first by canvassing deans for the right resource people to broadcast the paradigm to their constituents. We are willing to send someone to a symposium, if that is going to be available, or otherwise post enough relevant documents for other institutions to see the advantage of such a community service project. The crux is to find a course which is working in the university-community-education complex.

**Timeline:**

Summer 2002 – participants plan the workshops and the evaluation

Summer and Fall 2002 – FOWR members sort through and categorize their materials

Spring 2003– course taught with 50% of class periods and work devoted to IF

Summer 2003 – evaluation and report to ACS via a web site and/or a symposium

Fall 2003 – presentation to the Rollins faculty interested in community service