

Proposal: ACS Information Fluency Project  
2002  
Trinity University

1. Title: Implementation of a curriculum-centered information fluency program

2. Grant Leaders:

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3. Abstract:

This is a proposal to bring an ACS-Information Fluency Circuit Rider to the Trinity University campus to work with three faculty groups involved with elements of the curriculum:

- a. The University Curriculum Council (which is engaged in a curriculum reform effort this year),
- b. the First Year Seminar Committee (a group charged with oversight of the First Year Seminar program), and
- c. the English Department/Writing Workshop Committee.

In these discussions, we will identify particular research competencies that would be appropriate at each level of a student's 4-year college experience, and determine ways to build those into the curriculum. The short-term goal would be to jump start these discussions on campus and add urgency to the desire to address information fluency in the curriculum. Long term, the ideal result would be a model that would be shared, first with departments on Trinity's campus, then with other ACS colleges.

Background:

In summer 2002, Trinity University learned that it had received a \$1.3 million grant from the Priddy Family Foundation to convert the main floor of the library into an information commons. Plans are underway, and construction will begin in spring, 2003. The renovated commons will open in fall 2003 with the start of the new school year.

Central to the creation of the information commons is the idea of information fluency. Today's students have spent their high school careers using the free Internet to locate information. Messages from the media (which have been happy to highlight the Internet as the ultimate source for information) and from teachers and marketers have convinced many students that the library is unnecessary and antiquated.

Unlike previous decades, most entering freshmen today have never experienced the research process. Many have had no opportunity to learn about libraries and know little

about intellectual property, citing sources, finding and tracing sources through footnotes, and distinguishing good-quality publications (in all formats) from spurious ones. It follows that one relatively new concept for higher education is the notion of actively teaching the research process in the academic library.

At the same time, teaching faculty members have also been caught off guard by changes in technology. Previously, college students understood that the directive, “You will submit a 15-page research paper” meant spending time in the library and using books, reference materials, and scholarly journals. Today’s students do not necessarily make that connection. To produce information fluent graduates, faculty members need to find ways to be more explicit about the need to use the library, its reference service, and the variety of sources—both print and electronic--that are available, even as students also use new technologies to research and produce their own work.

At many liberal arts colleges, teaching faculty support the idea of having students gain "information literacy" over the course of their college careers. The barrier seems to be identifying the mechanism for ensuring that this will happen. It can be hard to imagine how information fluency can be folded into the curriculum, and that challenge sometimes overwhelms the discussion and dooms the effort. We can benefit by hearing from those who have implemented successful programs to learn about their thought processes and methodology.

Trinity has long had one of the largest and best-funded library collections among ACS schools. However, the information revolution and introduction of the World Wide Web in the late 1990’s had a devastating effect on student use of the library. Student circulation and “gate count” dropped precipitously, and it became clear that Trinity students perceived the library as less than relevant. Faculty members began to observe that research submitted in papers was sketchy at best and sometimes shoddy, and incidents of plagiarism increased (probably more through ignorance than malice). Teaching faculty now report that they are spending valuable class and grading time addressing basic research techniques and the need for careful and accurate citation. This is time they would rather spend on content issues.

#### 4. Rationale:

This proposal is part of an effort to re-introduce the library, its services, and its resources to the students through an integrated information fluency model. It is also an attempt to build an information fluency component into the Trinity curriculum reform effort. Successful completion of these goals, if only in selected areas, can serve as models for other Trinity departments as well as for ACS institutions facing similar changes in student behavior.

Ideally, we will begin to implement a new information fluency program with the opening of the information commons in fall 2003. This grant provides Trinity with a chance to hold dedicated discussions about the relationship of information fluency to the curriculum, and the role of the information commons in helping students gain

information fluency. To date, we have not created a compelling information fluency model at Trinity. With the advent of the information commons, this is an ideal time for some outside fertilization with key constituencies.

#### 5. Description:

- a. The consultation visit will last for 3 days in spring semester, 2003.
- b. The consultant will work with three faculty groups:
  - the University Curriculum Council (UCC)
  - the First Year Seminar Committee
  - the English Department/Writing Workshop faculty

Individual meetings may be arranged over meals with other interested teaching and library faculty and department chairs.

#### Tentative agenda:

Day One: Travel, arrive in San Antonio in the morning.

Lunch with workshop participants from Writing Workshop

Afternoon: Writing Workshop group.

Consult with participants about current program, what works, what doesn't. Examine examples of assignments that include basic research experiences, brainstorming exercise to provide participants with a concrete plan for including IF in their courses. (Includes one afternoon break)

Evening: Dinner with University Librarian; and two others. Possibly the Chair, UCC; Coordinator of the Writing Workshop?

Day Two: Workshop/consulting with University Curriculum Council

Morning: Presentation of integrated, tiered approach to information fluency in the curriculum (Includes break)

Lunch on campus with UCC members

Afternoon: Continue development of a model that could be applied to selected disciplines. Are there programs that lend themselves more easily to a tiered IF experience than others? What are likely candidates? What already exists that we can build on? How can teaching faculty and library faculty collaborate on this? How will the information commons fit into this plan? (Includes break)

Evening: Dinner with University Librarian, and two others.

Possibly: Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs for Curriculum & Student issues; First Year Seminar Committee Chair.

Day Three: Workshop/consulting with First Year Seminar Program Committee

Morning: Consult with participants about current program, what works, what doesn't. Examine examples of assignments that include basic research experiences, brainstorming exercise to provide participants with a concrete plan for including IF in their courses. (Includes break)

Lunch on campus with FYS Committee members

Afternoon: Wrap up and feedback to library faculty: what can they do to facilitate this process? What has to happen in the information commons to make our services accessible and attractive to students?

Depart San Antonio in late afternoon.

c. Participants will be invited to attend these consulting sessions as part of their committee or council assignment. Lunches and breaks will be provided to participants.

d. The target audience will be the units responsible for developing general curriculum guidelines, those involved with the required first year program, and those who work with students taking Writing Workshop courses or tutoring. These groups have the greatest potential for making information fluency a component of their programs.

#### 6. Plans for follow-up and evaluation

Immediately after the sessions, participants will be asked to provide a preliminary assessment on a brief evaluation sheet. Later, they will be contacted by library faculty members to discuss next steps: Are there assignments librarians and faculty can create together? What is the appropriate level to drive learning in this area? Are there select departments that wish to attempt a four-year, tiered approach to information fluency competencies as a model? The response to these questions will help us assess the short-term success of the project. Long-term assessment will take the form of library use and faculty feedback: Is student circulation up? Are there more hits on library-provided electronic resources? Are reference statistics up? Do faculty members in the participating departments or programs perceive an increase in the quality of their students' research work?

#### 7. Dissemination to the rest of ACS and beyond

Assuming our efforts are successful, Trinity faculty can share their experience a number of ways. As librarians at Trinity are faculty, we are expected to produce publications and presentations as evidence of our commitment to the academic enterprise. We envision that Trinity librarians will be more than happy to do one or all of the following: create a website that describes the Trinity Information Fluency program, prepare a presentation on the experience for a conference, or work with other institutions to create their own models.

## 8. Suggestions for replication at other campuses

Other campuses will be interested in considering successful models for building information fluency into the curriculum in a collaborative environment. The development of an integrated information commons will also drive interest. Trinity will be pleased to share our approach, methodology, successes and failures with other ACS institutions. The unique climate at each institution will determine the success of such an effort, but the more we make workable models available to other institutions, the more likely we are to see information fluency become a standard part of the curriculum, not unlike the Writing across the Curriculum movement.