

Information Literacy in Public Affairs Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

In this article, a librarian and a professor who work at the same university trace the development of information literacy standards. These standards were applied retrospectively to a graduate course that the professor teaches; the librarian was one of his students at that time. The article offers suggestions for guiding students on how to use and evaluate information resources, in order to complete a term-long research project. It also addresses librarians' efforts in educating both students and other faculty on information literacy.

"LITERACY" AND ACADEMIC TRAINING

In the past few decades, advocates of disciplines and practices that include science, math, business, geography, finance, computers, technology, culture, multiculturalism, health, media, law, management, and economics are mostly metaphoric when using the term "literacy." The term "innumeracy," for example, was coined as the numerical equivalent of illiteracy (apparently so math and language could be equal contenders in the battle for educational dollars). While researching this paper, we found a growing menu of metaphoric catchphrases such as "parental literacy" (Kambhampati & Pal, 2001, p.97), "deposit insurance literacy" (Smith & Walika, 1993, p.36), "family literacy" (McCaleb, 1998, p.48), and the "literacy of thoughtfulness" (The Futurist, 1991; Holt, 2005). These expanded concepts of "literacy" first surfaced in the mid-1950s world of economics (Jones & Lee, 1956).

Well-established within this traditional turn-of-phrase is the term "information literacy," which is defined as "the ability to effectively access and evaluate information for a given need. It includes an integrated set of skills (research strategy and evaluation) and knowledge of tools and resources" (Breivik

& Gee, 1989, p.24). Information literacy has its roots in public policy debates, when then-New York State senator and librarian Major R. Owens (1976) wrote that information literacy was needed for greater work effectiveness, for increased efficiency, and for the survival of democratic institutions. As information services expanded and changed amid complex social, economic, and technological environments, the push to eliminate illiteracy took the spotlight, and early references to the needed growth of information literacy surfaced among pre-conference materials and delegates' remarks (Benefeld, 1978; Boorstin, 1979) during the first White House Conference on Library and Information Services. Breivik and Gee (1989) recommended closing the gap between the classroom and the library, and integrating the library into the curriculum so that students could become self-directed, independent learners. The potential controversy of designating these skills as "information literacy" is the following:

1. *Taught Already?* By so designating them, one may create a presumption that these skills are not already taught in the curriculum, which may not in fact be true.
2. *Opportunity Costs?* By adding a "literacy" status to information skills, one may be side-stepping questions of relative value, as compared to other skills that would compete for the curriculum.
3. *Pre-matriculation?* There is little evidence that these skills would be considered for admissions or other pre-matriculation standards for graduate schools. Undergraduates might prefer to attain some of these skills in a quality program.
4. *Locus of Teaching?* The term seems to imply a skill that once was part of library work, which could bias the discussion regarding the locus of teaching.

Today, the hypothetical notion of requiring information literacy is past. Accreditation organizations, such as the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (in the Mid-Atlantic region), have set accreditation criteria related to information literacy, as discussed in the next section. On the other hand, standards regarding library services of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA, 2006) are of much more limited scope, as evidenced by the following:

8.2 Library Services. All students and faculty shall have reasonable access to library facilities and services that are recognized as adequate for master's level study in public affairs and administration. This would normally include texts, monographs, periodicals, serials, pamphlets, and research reports. The program faculty should have a major role in selecting library acquisitions for its program (p.12).

Colleges and universities operate in a multiple-accreditation environment, so they must meet the standards of all of their accrediting bodies. While particular programs may not face concerns over information literacy, it is unrealistic to think that these criteria could exist in a vacuum and be ignored. Professors, on the other hand, may consider these standards to be intrusive, ill-conceived, or interfering with academic freedom.

This paper examines information literacy concepts integrally taught in a public affairs curriculum, through a substantive graduate-level course. This integral approach differs from alternative delivery models such as library workshops, librarian visits to classrooms, or simply assuming that students start graduate programs with the requisite skills. This paper centers on an Ethics and Public Decision Making course that involved both of its authors. One was taking the class; the other taught it. Because the concept of integrating information literacy into public affairs curricula is not limited to this particular course, other examples are mentioned.¹

ACCREDITATION

In 1989, the American Library Association's (ALA) Presidential Committee on Information defined information literacy as the ability "to recognize when information is needed and to have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information" (ALA, 1989). Since then, information literacy standards, performance measures, and outcome measurements for higher education have been approved by the Board of Directors of the Association of the College and Research Libraries (ACRL), an ALA division. In 1999, the standards were endorsed by the American Association of Higher Education, and by the Council of Independent Colleges in 2004 (ALA, 2000).

Regional standards for accreditation were being revised to include fuller references to information literacy as an expected outcome of graduate and undergraduate education (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2002; Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, 2005; North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, 2003; New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2005; Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 2001).

According to the ACRL's standards (ALA, 2000), information literate students will

- Determine the nature and extent of information needed;
- Access needed information effectively and efficiently;
- Evaluate information and its sources critically and incorporate selected information into their knowledge bases and value systems;
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose; and
- Understand many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and access and use information ethically and legally.

LEARNING GOALS

In *Developing Research and Communication Skills: Guidelines for Information Literacy in the Curriculum* (2003), the Middle States Commission on Higher Education said it does not “require that information literacy be defined and accessed separately from other student learning goals, because it may well be reflected in the achievement of other goals” (p.1).

Instruction in ethics and information literacy instruction share goals of life-long learning. Significant debates exist in each area of study on how best to accomplish this teaching across the curriculum — whether course-integrated or separate courses of instruction are preferable. Hejka-Ekins (1998) suggested that for public administration providing both is optimal, but idealistic.

Similarly, Galvin (2005) concluded, “librarians need to strive for the ideal in the future, but live and work in the present, with its limitations” (p. 352). Recently, the *College Students’ Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources: A Report to the OCLC Membership* (De Rosa, 2006) found that the majority of college student respondents were not making high use of libraries’ available electronic resources (including online magazines, databases, and reference assistance.) The report confirmed what Martin (2006) wrote: Google dominates students’ online search processes. Bell and Shank (2004) have advocated that the marginalization of the academic library requires the “blended librarian,” whom they defined as “an academic librarian who combines the traditional skill set of librarianship with the information technologist’s hardware/software skills, and the instructional or educational designer’s ability to apply technology appropriately in the teaching-learning process” (p.374). Ducas and Michaud-Oystryk (2004) noted that with new skills librarians may now undertake increased roles in evaluating, analyzing, and filtering information, and also may become active partners with faculty in both the educational process and in scholarly communication. However, their survey of faculty found a contrast between librarians’ willingness to collaborate and a lack of interest by faculty (2004).

Although committed to information literacy as a priority, so perhaps as a self-reflective exercise, the ACRL President’s Program from the 2006 ALA Conference (advertised as a “great debate”) was entitled “The Emperor Has No Clothes: Be It Resolved that Information Literacy is a Fad and Waste of Librarian Time and Talent.” The program description asked the following:

Is information literacy a concept created by academic librarians to make themselves more relevant to the curriculum or is it one of the most important roles? Is information literacy critical thinking in disguise or is there a real body of knowledge to be communicated? Does civil society’s dependence on life-long learners require the acquisition of information literacy

skills? Can libraries justify the expenditures they've made on teaching information literacy or do the data suggest otherwise? This debate will test our assumptions and beliefs about a core element of the academic librarian's role in the education process (ACRL 2006, para. 2).

These questions are being debated within and beyond the library profession. The goal for supporters is the development and implementation of information literacy initiatives across their curricula. Such programs have been detailed by Brown, Murphy, & Nanny (2003), D'Angelo & Maid (2004), and Owusu-Ansah (2004). Risë L. Smith (1997) called for librarians to shift their focus from students to faculty — in order to teach the faculty how to teach information literacy. However, Oberman (in Grassian & Kaplowitz, 2001) observed that the librarians' success with infusing information literacy programs into university curriculums also requires them to realize they “don't own information literacy and information literacy is not always described in terms that librarians would use” (p. xxix).

East (2005) suggested that, if academic librarians' efforts to develop more effective information literacy programs were less successful than expected, then

Perhaps this is partly because we tend to plan our training programs on the assumption that we, the librarians, are the best judges of what the trainees need to know. The new postgraduate student, however, will be much more interested to find out how senior colleagues find and use information than to learn what librarians think about this process. If the advice given by a librarian is to be taken seriously, it must tally with the observed behavior of successful researchers (p.134).

For example, simply using the term “information literacy” may introduce unacceptable jargon to traditional academics, and thereby create barriers rather than linkages. As we discuss the role of academic librarians, we explore implications for the future of information literacy that include improving faculty-librarian collaborations, and assessment.

INFORMATION LITERACY AT BARUCH COLLEGE

Bernard M. Baruch College (Baruch) is a senior college within the City University of New York (CUNY). Baruch's School of Public Affairs master's program places special emphasis on “educating responsive and accountable leaders who combine managerial expertise, creative and critical thinking, and rigorous analysis in the formation and execution of public policy” (Baruch

Graduate Bulletin 2003-2005, p.81). Assignments in public affairs offer students opportunities to expand their knowledge of public administration principles and practices. It also gives them a chance to question, to discuss, to debate policy issues; to gain an understanding of the foundations of economic and statistical analysis; and to develop written and oral communication skills in many media and format varieties. A capstone seminar also is required for graduation (Graduate Bulletin, 2003-2005).

The *CUNY Council of Chief Librarians Information Literacy White Paper* urges that information literacy be fully integrated across the university (CUNY, 2001). At Baruch College's William and Anita Newman Library, and elsewhere, librarians endorse information literacy. Baruch's librarians, who hold faculty rankings, seek to incorporate information literacy in their reference work with students and other faculty by offering an undergraduate minor in information studies. Librarians provide faculty-requested, course-integrated, and course-related instruction for freshmen English classes and other undergraduate/graduate courses, and they also provide workshops that are open to all students.

According to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2003), "the principles underlying information literacy are as old as higher education itself. Faculty and administrators have expectations for how students will acquire, analyze and use information related to courses that the institution offers" (p.1). However, to make the case that students who graduate are information-literate, the Middle States Commission (2003, p.40) notes that "it is the institution's responsibility to ensure that information literacy goals are defined, and that various elements found scattered across the curriculum are identified."

This paper now discusses a specific course to explore the language and constructs of information literacy in the public affairs curriculum.

COURSE CONTEXT

The course "Ethics and Public Decision Making" is taught by the academic co-author of this paper in a Master's of Public Administration program. The librarian co-author of this piece completed the course online in Fall 2000, while in pursuit of a master's degree in Public Administration. The course now is offered solely in the traditional classroom setting.

The word "ethics" has an extraordinarily broad range of uses, even when limited to matters involving professional education. Public administrators have a variety of reasons to be concerned about ethics. Some of these are the need to (a) understand common concepts, (b) handle special problems, (c) understand multiple, specific ethical statuses, and also because (d) ethics occupies a unique place in political theory. It is quite a challenge to address these matters in a typical semester with a primarily naive audience. Adding the asynchronous and quasi-anonymous nature of the Internet does little to improve this learning environment. Furthermore, it is unsatisfactory to teach an assortment of facts

about these matters. It is essential to teach students competent reasoning skills for handling the types of ethical matters they might face in their professions or personal lives.

To meet these challenges, one course objective uses skills that ordinarily are taught in a philosophy course, so that students learn to reason about the ethical matters that public administrators might realistically encounter. In the classroom, these skills are taught through student-led discussions, professor-led cross-examinations, student-to-student instructions, staged debates, defense of disagreeable positions, and other devices aimed at separating students from their emotive commitment to a particular view. The idea is to develop the student's ability to provide a full and fair presentation of a situation.

While course details vary from year to year, the core structure remains the same. The early weeks are designed to loosen the students' notions of ethics away from any naïve notions they may have. This is accomplished largely by exposing them to views outside their norm, which include things like (a) addressing the Aristotelian view exhibited in the Kurosawa-directed film *Ikiru [To Life]* (1952), (b) defending the views of George Washington Plunkitt (Riordon, 1982), (c) reading Goodsell's *In Defense of Bureaucracy* (1985), and (d) reading *Holes* (Sachar, 2000), a young-adult fiction work that portrays juvenile justice issues. A simpler student eye-opening method is exposure to other people's views of potentially important moral issues. To do this, students bring in a local newspaper clipping that presents an issue of interest. National news items are not allowed, so that the subject remains localized to personal interests. For the online course, a URL link serves as the "clipping." The purpose of this "loosening" effect is to provide students with a broader understanding of their basic environment and help them gain perspective. We expect this ultimately creates public servants with a foundation of strength, and fosters a sensible, open-minded approach to the reasoning process.

Next, a research project on an ethical dilemma begins. This semester-long project is woven through the ongoing process, where students are learning or relearning the more difficult decision-making tactics. About halfway through the semester, each student submits a research project proposal that aims to discuss and attempts to resolve the ethical dilemma chosen in earlier weeks.

To qualify as "ethical," the problem must be one that cannot be resolved by knowing more facts — it must lack a ready-made answer. To qualify as a "dilemma," a problem must have at least two plausible solutions. Quite often, students choose an issue with many possible solutions, but have no idea which one they ultimately will support. Other times they start out as totally unable to see any possible answers to the issue. Regardless, the professor advises the class that he is good at "smoking out" people with "false" dilemmas, where students use the paper-writing assignment as an opportunity to craft a polemic in favor of one predetermined view.

Project proposals were required to include at least 10 citations showing that there is available research material, and the citations had to be from quality sources, which meant they had to extend beyond peer-reviewed journal sources and extend to books, studies, and reports. When students asked, “What if I cannot find 10 sources?” they were advised to select a different topic, because the 10 sources were only the beginning of the research, not the end.

Shortly after submitting their proposals, students experienced their first attempt to tackle a dilemma in real time. This demonstrated a “reenactment” of the Friedrich-Finer debate (on the nature of administrative responsibility) (Friedrich, 1940, pp.3-24; Finer, 1941, pp.335-350), where students were arbitrarily assigned to one side of a debate, and were required to switch sides several times throughout the session. This taught them how to defend a moral viewpoint that they did not necessarily agree with, and it simultaneously familiarized them with a substantial concern of American political thought. This particular element of the class was not successful in the online version of the course.

The students’ ultimate achievements are the semester projects, which reflect their attempts to resolve the dilemmas that they selected to work on. Because students also receive guidance on keeping things balanced, they are taught to divide the project into the following stages:

1. *Exposition*: Provide a straightforward account of the arguments offered by proponents of the issue.
2. *Strengths and weaknesses*: Evaluate the straightforward account to discover what might be strong or weak about the situation. Focus on errors of fact, errors of argument, and misleading accounts of normative views.
3. *Remediation*: Fix the errors. Make arguments as strong as possible. Explore the possibility of misunderstandings, where arguments do not actually oppose each other, but provide more perspective.
4. *Synthesis or selection*: Try to achieve a resolution, either by finding that the arguments are compatible, or by selecting one argument on which to focus.
5. *Honest failure* is permitted.

In summary, here we have reviewed the basic structure of the course Ethics and Public Decision Making. The course serves as an example of integrating the curricular objectives of a master’s program with another set of curricular objectives that are labeled as “information literacy.” The second author of this paper is familiar with several courses that exhibit information literacy characteristics such as research methods, program evaluation, and the history of public administration (an undergraduate course). In the following analysis, examples are drawn from these or other courses, as well as from this core example.

INFORMATION LITERACY COMPONENTS

To identify elements of information literacy in a graduate public affairs course, the ACRL standards on information literacy (ALA, 2000) are used from the Middle States Commission of Higher Education’s *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education Eligibility: Requirements and Standards for Accreditation* (2002), and from *Developing Research & Communication Skills: Guidelines for Information Literacy in the Curriculum* (2003). Applicable performance indicators from these documents are summarized and retrospectively applied to the Ethics and Public Decision Making course in Table 1.² [See Table 1]

FRAMING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Guidelines on information literacy from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2003) set an expectation that, after training, a graduate student “articulates a focused research question; reevaluates it for clarity or precision; redefines the question; and considers the costs and benefits of

Table 1.
Information Literacy Standards and Performance Indicators Incorporated into a Graduate School of Public Affairs Course: PAF 9010 Ethics and Public Service

Information Literacy Components	Middle States Learning Goals (Quality Criteria): Graduate Student	ACRL Standards and Performance Indicators	Incorporated into Graduate Course PAF 9010 Ethics and Public Service
Framing the Research Question	<p>Source: Middle States Commission on Higher Education. (2003). <i>Developing research & communication skills: Guidelines for information literacy in the curriculum</i>, p.11. Philadelphia: Middle States Commission on Higher Education.</p> <p>Articulates a focused research question, reevaluates it for clarity or precision, redefines the question, and also considers the costs and benefits of completing a particular research project based on available financial resources.</p>	<p>Source: Association of College and Research Libraries, American Library Association. (2000). <i>Information literacy competency standards for higher education</i>. Chicago: American Library Association.</p> <p>Standard 1: The information-literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed.</p> <p><i>Performance indicators:</i> Student defines and articulates the need for information.</p>	<p>Students post value-laden ethical dilemmas to be resolved. After professor’s and students’ comments, revised research questions are more focused; library offers print and electronic research resources, and free interlibrary loan service.</p>

Table 1.
Continued

<p>Accessing Sources</p>	<p>Understands how information is produced and disseminated; develops and implements a search strategy appropriate to the discipline.</p>	<p><i>Performance indicators:</i> Students identify various types and formats of potential information sources.</p> <p>Standard 2: Information-literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.</p> <p><i>Performance indicators:</i> Selects the most appropriate investigative methods or retrieval systems for accessing needed information; retrieves information on-line or in person by using a variety of methods.</p>	<p>Blackboard, e-mail and AOL Instant Messenger are used for Web-based class communication.</p> <p>Research paper instructions include a minimum acceptable number of academic sources. Students begin research process by using subscription databases, print resources, and the World Wide Web to present a preliminary list of resources to consult.</p>
<p>Evaluating Sources</p>	<p>Reviews retrieved information in order to assess the reliability of each source; modifies search strategies to ensure that information retrieved is as comprehensive as possible</p>	<p><i>Performance indicators:</i> Students refine search strategy, if necessary, then extract, record, and manage the information retrieved.</p>	<p>Students are introduced to academic journals in the subject area and review initial research results. They also review, evaluate, and revise information retrieved, and continue research process if more information is needed. Results of initial literature reviews are posted for comments and suggestions from the professor and other students.</p>
<p>Evaluating Content</p> <p>(Includes the following: Learner achieves understanding, and then incorporates selected information into his/her knowledge base and value system.)</p>	<p>Understands the value of information within a discipline or profession, as well as its contradictions, the author's research methodology, and other unique characteristics. Selects information that provides evidence needed at a professional level, and skillfully integrates new information with prior knowledge</p>	<p>Standard 3: Information-literate student critically evaluates information and its sources. Selected information then is incorporated into the student's knowledge base and value system.</p> <p><i>Performance indicators:</i> Students summarize main ideas from information gathered; articulate and apply initial criteria for evaluating information and its sources; and synthesize main ideas to construct new concepts.</p>	<p>Students prepare drafts of papers on resolving an ethical dilemma, and include evaluations of information sources, plus possible actions or policies to resolve dilemma. Resolution may result in advocating one course of action and presenting reasons why this approach is preferred.</p>

Table 1.
Continued

<p>Using Information for a Specific Purpose</p>	<p>Expertly organizes content that supports the student's product or performance; produces new knowledge in the discipline or develops new strategies as a practitioner; and also considers the value of further research that uses alternative methods or strategies</p>	<p><i>Performance indicators:</i> Students compare new knowledge to prior knowledge, and determine contradictions, added value, or other unique characteristics of information. They validate understanding and interpretation by discourse with other individuals, subject-area experts and/or practitioners. Standard 4: Information- literate student — individually or as a group member — effectively uses information to accomplish a specific purpose. <i>Performance indicators:</i> Revises development process for the product or the performance; effectively communicates the product or performance.</p>	<p>Students use information and reasoning to resolve ethical dilemmas, or to state why they cannot be resolved. Students offer alternatives to existing policies, procedures, or priorities. Drafts of papers are reviewed by students and professor; comments and suggestions are received; then papers are revised and final versions are submitted.</p>
<p>Understanding Issues Affecting the Use of Information</p> <p>Observing Laws, Regulations and Institutional Policies</p>	<p>Understands issues of intellectual property, copyright, the fair use of copyrighted material, human subject research, and other emerging or reemerging ethical issues.</p>	<p>Standard 5: Information- literate student understands many of the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information; also can ethically and legally access and use information. <i>Performance indicators:</i> Students follow laws, regulations, institutional policies, and etiquette related to the access and use of information resources.</p>	<p>Students understand the privacy and security concerns of some ethical dilemmas, and use proper citations to acknowledge use of information sources and works by others.</p>

Note. Table format and contents adapted from “Developing Research & Communication Skills: Guidelines for Information Literacy in the Curriculum (Figure 2. Learning Goals Across Academic Level),” by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools’ Commission on Higher Education, 2003, pp.11-12. Copyright 2003 by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

completing a particular research project in light of available financial resources” (pp. 11-12). The ACRL’s (ALA, 2000) first standard, “the information literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed,” is supported with a performance indicator on whether students define and articulate the need for information.

In the Ethics and Public Decision Making curriculum, students were (a) assigned a research question, (b) given guidance on the particulars of a topic that will satisfy the assignment, and (c) instructed in the use of peer-reviewed journals or similar sources to continue formulating their questions. Course criteria required the question to be an unresolved “dilemma” for the student conducting the research, which meant that it generated more than one possible resolution, but it lacked a ready-made answer. The dilemma also had to be normative, as measured by the criterion that “facts” alone would not resolve it. And the dilemma had to be one that could benefit from research, based on the criterion that it should generate 10 quality citations. To further focus their research, students received comments from each other and from the professor.

The students’ perspective on the project is that this research paper is specially designed to provide a skill that may be needed later in life — the ability to objectively weigh emotionally charged, competing views. Students were obliged to select a value-laden dilemma that was related to government and defined as a “problem involving value considerations for which there is more than one competing solution, where alternatives appear incompatible” (Williams, 2000a, p.1). Considerable effort was put toward explaining that “value-laden” meant no amount of fact-finding was going to solve the matter. “Values” were choices and callings to one’s ultimate beliefs. “Dilemmas” had to be situations with at least two plausible solutions. If the student already knew which solution was preferred, it was not a dilemma.

In the final paper, not to exceed 20 pages, students had to provide “reasons and evidence for a variety of views concerning the selected issue, and not simply provide a polemic in behalf of one perspective” (Williams, 2000b, 1). Further requirements were a balanced discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of relevant points of view, followed by an attempt to resolve the dilemma. The course syllabus provided topics addressed by previous students, such as whether public pension plans should continue to invest in companies that manufacture tobacco products, and whether trans-national adoptions should be permitted. Ultimately, students were free to select any topic of interest, as long as they could identify 10 or more academic references for their research. The expectation was that students would find sufficient literature to assist with resolving their moral dilemmas. The objective was to build their capacity to do this again at some point in the future, when the dilemma was not a removed academic exercise, but a real and pressing issue in the student’s professional or personal life.

As seen both from the curriculum and from student experiences, the

information literacy attribute is not an add-on or adjunct to the course. Instead, it is a central element of the teaching goal.

ACCESSING SOURCES

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education guidelines for information literacy (2003) set an expectation that, after training, a graduate student “understands how information is produced and disseminated; [and] develops and implements a search strategy appropriate to the discipline” (pp.11-12). The ACRL’s (ALA, 2000) second standard is that the “information literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently” (p.8). Related performance indicators are

- Selecting the investigative methods or retrieval systems most appropriate for accessing needed information, and using a variety of methods to retrieve information online or in person; and
- Identifying a variety of types and formats for potential information sources.

In Ethics and Public Decision Making, students were instructed to use appropriate bibliographical sources, full-text sources, and databases to identify a minimum of 10 appropriate citations that related to at least two competing solutions to the ethical dilemma. The minimum of 10 citations demonstrated that there would be sufficient material for the report. The professor instructed students on searching electronic subscription resources that were available through EBSCO Host databases, JSTOR databases, and ProQuest’s ABI Inform/Global.³ Available library support included reference assistance, access to print and electronic research resources, and free interlibrary loan service.

The student’s perspective of how to solve a dilemma brings us to the information part. Whether impartial, fair, or balanced, consideration of value-laden, competing views depends greatly on the best possible advice. Where do you get that advice? Students do not necessarily have much insight for answering this question. They may well thrash about and take whatever advice they can find. But they were advised that the final paper should be thorough.

How can librarians help students find this advice? Although the Middle States Commission on Higher Learning goals call for students to be able to develop a search strategy for a discipline (2003), according to Grassian and Kaplowitz (2001), adult learners in the course may select research topics that have personal relevancy, but that also are often interdisciplinary, which makes them complex and time-consuming to research. The “information literacy” librarians can beneficially communicate about information access as it relates to multiple disciplines. Specifically, they can show students (a) the current methods of finding peer-reviewed journals, (b) how to distinguish levels of quality in non-

peer reviewed journals, (c) how to find reliable, non-acquired (free) services, and (d) how to use print resources.

For this assignment, students were not expected to pay for any information, or access to it. The Commission on Higher Learning goals say that students may need to be “considering the costs and benefits of completing a particular research project, in light of available financial resources” (2003, pp.11-12). The criteria apply to employed, part-time adult learners, whose time is greatly valued. By researching a complex topic, students may need to (a) reduce work hours, (b) purchase supplies, (c) construct materials, which may include otherwise unavailable data; or (d) pay for interlibrary loan services, a cost that Baruch’s Newman Library assumes.

In fact, the library never should become a narrowing gatekeeper; it instead should maximize access. To meet their needs for information, Baruch students have on-campus and remote access to more than 100 subscription databases that span all disciplines, funded partly by a student technology fee. In addition to having access to other CUNY libraries, Baruch College students could use research resources at The New York Public Library, and the Queens and Brooklyn Public Library systems. If needed, through the Newman Library’s membership in the Metropolitan New York Library Council (METRO, www.metro.org), librarians may arrange for students to access materials available only at participating academic libraries, or in special collections. Additionally, the Library of Congress, Google Scholar, other search engines, and several journals, membership associations, think tanks, and services for publications provide access to full-text items.

Orientation at the Baruch School of Public Affairs includes some guidance in the basics of searching online catalogs, using subscription databases, and working with Microsoft Excel. Upon request, the Newman Library’s liaisons to Baruch’s School of Public Affairs conduct course-related lectures on the library’s services, and on its print/electronic resources that feature computerized classrooms for hands-on experience. As noted, they are well-suited to provide guidance on search strategies and evaluating search results.

EVALUATING SOURCES

Guidelines on information literacy from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2003) set an expectation that, after training, a graduate student “reviews information retrieved to assess the reliability of each source; [and] modifies search strategies to ensure that the information retrieved is as comprehensive as possible” (pp.11-12). ACRL performance indicators (ALA, 2000) specify that “students refine the search strategy if necessary and extract, record, and manage the information retrieved” (p.10).

During the Ethics and Public Decision Making class, students were taught how to find articles, and how to use scholarly peer-reviewed journals. Because normative arguments appeared in some quality, non-peer reviewed journals,

students also were allowed to use top-tier commercial publications such as *Atlantic Monthly*, but were prohibited from using lower-quality material. The professor's guidelines are shown in Table 2. [See Table 2.]

Table 2.
Guidelines for Finding Appropriate Literature

1. Prefer peer-reviewed journals. How do you know a journal is peer-reviewed? With electronic databases, you select the "peer-reviewed" box. If this is not available, the more arcane the title, (such as "Journal of..."), the more likely the journal is to be peer-reviewed.
2. Non-peer-reviewed articles are acceptable for this paper, but they must come from high-quality sources. <i>The Atlantic Monthly</i> is high quality; the <i>New York Daily News</i> is not. Students are advised not to limit themselves to non-peer-reviewed materials unless there are no peer-reviewed articles. The total absence of peer-reviewed material is a hint that this could become a very difficult paper to write.
3. Books, studies and other published material may be acceptable. Be cautious, as "trade" publications are not necessarily of the same quality as academic presses and academic-sounding sources may not in fact be academic. Pay attention to the availability and quality of citations. In general, the newest material is published in journals.
4. Do not expect that empirical evidence will settle the matter. So, do not obtain articles that solely contain statistical charts, tables or equations.
5. Make certain that the article exhibits reasoning.
6. More is better.

These guidelines were designed to make sure that students used quality material and effective reasoning methods. In today's open-information environment, students need more skill to determine whether information is credible or whether it is a hoax. Course guidelines also prohibited the shortcuts

and evasion caused by asking to treat each branch of dilemmas as a separate, complete search. Completeness was a demanding criterion, especially among part-time graduate students who preferred to decide for themselves how many citations would be enough.

During the literature development phase, students provided feedback to each other. In the one time this course was offered online, it involved posting and commenting via e-mail. In the live classroom version, students worked in small groups to provide feedback. The professor also gave feedback on the quality of the literature. The professors also set similar expectations in Program Evaluation or Capstone courses, where students were referred to literature in order to (a) learn what already was known about a subject, and (b) frame related questions. Unlike the ethics course, the literature review in these empirical courses served as a preliminary stage of preparation for later work. Again, students were given guidance on what literature to seek and how to find it. They also received guidance on what literature to avoid. Note that, when applying Table 2 to empirical courses, Step 2 would be modified and Step 4 would be reversed.

When researching an interdisciplinary topic for the first time — with information from numerous stakeholders in varied formats — it was difficult for students to know when they had done enough research. A sensible suggested guideline to follow was “You know you have found (most everything) when everyone is citing other articles/authors that you are reading, and no one else.” However, it may fall short of the Middle States Commission on Higher Learning goal that the information retrieved should be as comprehensive as possible (2003). These days, information possibilities have indeed proved to be nearly endless, and it could take longer than a semester to review all retrieved information.

Thus, a minimum requirement of 10 academic sources for Ethics and Public Decision Making research papers is a realistic number and enables students to revise their topics if 10 are not easily located. When students share preliminary findings with and get feedback from fellow students and the professor, they generally give suggestions on where to expand and/or narrow the focus. In recent years, Internet “alert services,” offered through free and subscription databases, and the availability of “blogging,” means that students and researchers can keep up on newly available information — which is important if the timing is key to resolving the dilemma.

Historian and Librarian of Congress Daniel J. Boorstin (1980) contrasted information from knowledge, and noted that “knowledge is orderly and cumulative, information is random and miscellaneous” (p.3). More recently, Marcum (2002) opined, “information is not knowledge” (p.8). In the process of making ethical policy decisions and laws to resolve dilemmas, the need to locate and critically examine information is not new. When examining solutions to “the railroad problem” in a *McClure’s Magazine* series in the early 20th century, Baker (1906) opined, “it becomes of incalculable importance, then, to know where

the information upon which we now base our thinking is coming from. Are the sources clear? Is the information true?" (p.535). Baker (1906) also wrote that people had a duty to inquire about the sources of information; "they are entitled to know, when a man is presenting an argument, whether he represents himself or is paid by someone else. It is one thing to inform the public's mind, and another thing to deceive it" (pp.535-536).

"Following the money," these days may be more difficult, but academic librarians can help students (a) locate print resources, (b) access databases of political and charitable contributions, (c) trace the registered owners of Web sites, and (d) learn their backgrounds and resources. Tips for evaluating information found on Web sites are readily found on libraries' Web sites, and are easily shared with students in lectures, workshops, or handouts. Additionally, librarians can help students find feedback on previous research, speeches, reports, and information to supplement the subject expertise of the professor. When combined, these resources work toward teaching students to be self-directed problem-solvers, which fits the standards set by the Middle States Commission on Higher Learning, in the publication titled *Developing Research and Communication Skills* (2003, p.10).

EVALUATING CONTENT

The previously noted guidelines on information literacy (2003) state that, after training, a graduate student, "understands the value of the information within a discipline or profession; its contradictions, the author's research methodology, and other unique characteristics; selects information that provides the evidence needed at a professional level; [and] skillfully integrates new information with prior knowledge" (pp. 11-12). The ACRL's third standard says, "The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system" (ALA, 2000, p.11). This standard is supported by a performance indicator that shows whether students can (a) summarize main ideas from the information gathered, (b) articulate and apply initial criteria for evaluating both information and its sources, and (c) synthesize main ideas to construct new concepts (ALA, 2000).

The criterion simply restates the aim of the whole project and, in a greater sense, the aim of education: That students learn to discover information and learn to think. In the project assigned for Ethics and Public Decision Making, students work through a series of thinking steps to reach the goal of either resolving — or discovering that they cannot resolve — an ethical dilemma. This work is not based on intuition, but on established knowledge and reasoning processes. This is the essence of intelligent thought. During the course, students receive very specific criteria for thinking through the problem, and either resolving or failing to resolve the dilemma.

USING INFORMATION FOR A SPECIFIC PURPOSE

Guidelines on information literacy (2003) further state that, after training, a graduate student, “expertly organizes content in support of the student’s product or performance; produces new knowledge in the discipline or develops new strategies as a practitioner; and considers the value of further research using alternative methods or strategies” (pp.11-12). The ACRL’s fourth standard says that an “information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose” (ALA, 2000, p. 13). This standard is supported through performance indicators that say students should do the following:

1. Compare new knowledge with prior knowledge to determine added value, contradictions, or other unique characteristics of the information; and validate understanding and interpretation through discourse with other individuals, subject-area experts and/or practitioners.
2. Revise the development process for the product or the performance, and communicate the product or performance effectively (ALA 2000, p. 13).

The Ethics and Public Decision Making curriculum calls for students to develop proposals, papers in draft, oral presentations of papers, and a final written paper. In the online version of this course, the draft was posted to a discussion board. After drafts of papers are reviewed by students and the professor, and comments and suggestions are received, the student revises the paper and submits a final version. In the classroom setting, students meet in groups to discuss drafts and give an oral presentation to the entire class. The second half of the course is built around learning the skills needed to write a final paper, draft it, receive feedback, and redraft a final version.

In a Capstone course, also taught by the professor of the Ethics course, students similarly learn how to conduct independent, empirical projects by using secondary data found through libraries and other resources, such as the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) (<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/>). They also use information resources that are similar to those described for the ethics and program evaluation courses. Critical skills learned in this course include how to integrate an empirical study with existing research, and how to communicate findings in a Capstone paper.

Public policy decisions often are made in situations with conflicting ethical and moral issues, according to Garcia-Zamor (2001). The assigned course readings, and related classroom or Web-based discussions, offer varied opportunities for considering issues, conflicts and possible resolutions of past dilemmas, as well as what students choose to research and to resolve. This is

accomplished through classroom discussions and by circulating drafts of papers via Blackboard. Then, the authors are questioned about the papers and proposed resolutions. Rabinowitz (2002) found that helping students determine how to ask the right questions is required in order to develop transferable knowledge and become successful lifelong learners in any chosen profession. Prior to revising and submitting the final project paper, students had the opportunity to consider peer questions and the professor's written comments. More importantly, students, and the professor, had opportunities to learn from each other.

The dilemmas selected by students, and their corresponding viewpoints, are as varied as the demands placed on public employees. They also reflect a student community at one of the most diverse colleges in the United States (*U.S. News & World Report*, as cited in Baruch College *Campus News*, 2010). As Pickus and Dostert (2002) wrote, "An understanding of ethics as collaborative judgment recognizes that, in the absence of a privileged standpoint from which a determination of absolute truth could be made, our ethical judgments will have to be carried out in community with others" (p.16).

UNDERSTANDING ISSUES AFFECTING THE USE OF INFORMATION

The Middle States guidelines on information literacy (2003) continue by saying that (after training) a graduate student "understands issues of intellectual property; copyright, the fair use of copyrighted material, human subject research, and other emerging or reemerging ethical issues" (pp.11-12). The ACRL's fifth standard states that an "information literate student understands many of the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information and access and uses information ethically and legally" (ALA, 2000, p.14). This standard is supported by a performance indicator that requires students to follow the laws, regulations, institutional policies and etiquette related to the access and use of information resources (ALA, 2000, p.14).

To eliminate uncertainties on how sources should be cited, *A Pocket Style Manual* (Hacker, 2004) is a required text. The professor's discussion of citations, while openly related to plagiarism, focuses on demonstrating that students perform work in the form of conducting library research, which makes the focus more positive than negative. Students also are encouraged to seek help from librarians — in person at the reference desk, through e-mail, or via chat reference services. If writing help is needed, they can use the English Department's Writing Center. In requested workshops, librarians also can discuss plagiarism and how to avoid it.

But the issues surrounding access to and use of information are broad, and range from basic literacy, to policy decisions on censorship, privacy, the security of public records, and intellectual property issues. All of these subjects are the subject of class discussions and of some research papers. Throughout the Ethics and Public Decision Making course, students are exposed to new and tested ideas and theories that come from revered thinkers, as well as new experts and

authors, new print and electronic resources, new technology, and new methods of viewing, discussing, researching and resolving ethical problems in the public sector. Hopefully these things will be applicable to the issues faced by these students, as hopefully they are becoming well-rounded candidates for future careers in public service.

ANALYSIS

As shown in this review, practices that contribute to “information literacy” are entirely consistent with educational objectives for an ethics course in public affairs and with other courses in the public affairs curriculum. The educational goals for the ethics course specifically include and integrate five standards that are specified by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, as well as some similar guidelines and performance standards from the Association of College and Research Libraries. Elements of other courses also integrate these guidelines. In fact, for these information-rich courses, it is unclear what the course would be without substantial information literacy components. Regarding the controversies raised at the beginning of the paper, we see that two of the four controversies can be merged together. These include: *Taught Already?* and *Opportunity Costs?* As described for the Ethics and Public Decision Making course, the subject of information literacy is being taught and, therefore, the question of whether or not to teach information literacy is relatively weak. For the subjects described in this paper, the information literacy component is a substantial element of the course’s purpose. Therefore, it is not realistically possible to talk about meaningful opportunity costs.

This also addresses the issue of pre-matriculation, although not completely. There are elements described in the ethics course that are reasonable to expect the student to arrive with (otherwise it is not meaningful to offer the course to the student). On the other hand, a student who arrives with some knowledge of using searchable full-text databases, peer-reviewed journals, and quality commercial journals, is better prepared and requires less classroom training than a student who knows none of these. Likewise, a student who knows how to cite appropriately is more prepared for the course.

So, this brings us back to the locus of teaching and the concept of collaborative work between the classroom, the professor, and the librarian. As described here, some elements of the information literacy content in this course call on the professor’s formal training and knowledge within the substantive field. For Ethics and Public Decision Making, the professor brings specific knowledge of ethical issues as related to public affairs, and brings knowledge of the rigorous form of reasoning applied in moral philosophy. Looking back at Table 1, this knowledge is especially crucial for framing the question, evaluating content, and using information for specific purposes. The area most amenable to librarian leadership is accessing sources. The remaining two areas — evaluating sources

and understanding issues — are best conceived as a joint venture.

Clearly, a librarian has superior knowledge of rapidly changing information resources. While a professor could be an experienced library user, he or she might not be aware of recent changes or be skilled in specialized techniques, such as use of a database's thesaurus. On the other hand, a professor could have better knowledge of the respect that the academic community grants to particular journals and, therefore, would know more than a librarian about the journals that students need for a particular discipline, course or research assignment. Similarly, the librarian and the professor each is able to provide useful guidance to help students find the effective set of appropriate materials for a particular course or research assignment. For example, the professor may provide guidance about the preferred standards of books or articles, timelines, and guidelines like those shown in Table 2. Librarians know about the use of citation indexes, the use of citations as sources, subject guides, open access journals, and recently published or acquired materials. The students can benefit the most if given both sets of guidance in the most effective forms. In recent years, librarians have offered instruction on citations and use of material per the limitations of copyright law. However, professors provide guidance on which of several citation styles to use, and provide similar guidance for other activities that fall beyond the scope of the library's services and sources.

Some librarians consider a professor's classroom demonstration of information resources as encroaching on librarianship. Why does the professor do this? From the professor's perspective, the librarian is invited into the classroom to demonstrate library services and resources as a guest lecturer. Understanding guest lecturer status is critical for successful performance, and affects the opportunity for return invitations. In this respect, the professor focuses on the course objectives, and not on the information literacy objectives. More explicitly, any coincidence between the course and information literacy criteria results from information literacy objectives that coincidentally match the teaching objectives of the professor. It is not from a deliberate plan. Unless the professor and librarian engage in collaborative teaching, as described by Stein and Lamb (1998), librarians have no access to the classroom, and they would have to put the professor's objectives ahead of their own. This could result in the dilemma faced by Radford University instructional librarians: "We wanted to teach what the professors thought would be most helpful for their students, yet it was obvious that they did not realize how long it would take to adequately cover the proposed topics" (Benges-Small & Brainard, 2006, p. 80). At the McConnell Library, their practical solution is "an instructional *a la carte* menu" that allows faculty to use an online request form and to select topics that include time estimates and costs for a course-related guest lecture.

From the librarian's perspective, the challenge of being a guest lecturer for a single course session includes many of the same challenges that face the

classroom professor. For starters, there is limited time to discuss an expanding subject, and the students have varied degrees of experience and interest in the subject matter, as well as varied degrees of expertise in using the resources for writing research papers that typically are offered through an academic library. If a session is arranged in haste, too little information might be shared about course objectives, or the objectives of the research assignment.

Because librarians sometimes overlook the fact that information literacy encompasses skills and concepts learned over time, according to Galvin (2005), they should not overlook out-of-class opportunities to promote and support information literacy. Galvin suggests pathfinders or subject guides for specific courses or assignments, which can serve as tools that enable students to learn at their own pace. Specific suggestions on how librarians and faculty might plan for a guest lecture and encourage students to look for the best resources (which may, or may not, include those that are the easiest to locate) are offered in Table 3. [*See Table 3*]

These suggestions include the possibility of the librarian attending the course prior to being a guest lecturer, and also enable follow-up by both the professor and the librarian, with invitations to later oral presentations by students for discussing research. Staffing and time constraints could limit the feasibility of these suggestions. More formal evaluation and assessment measurements than those suggested might already be in place.

CONCLUSION

This paper offers an attempt to retrospectively apply information literacy criteria to a graduate course in Ethics and Public Decision Making, in order to analyze whether it assists with meeting the accreditation criteria — required as evidence of the way we use information literacy as a learning outcome within the curriculum. According to Newcomer (2003),

In the current mission-oriented accreditation environment, we are supposed to articulate our program's vision, mission, and measurable objectives. We are then supposed to collect data that will tell us the extent to which our objectives are met. However, in the fluid environment we now confront, how is this possible? One of the most difficult puzzles we confront as faculty today is creating a shared sense of what our students need, how we can structure a curriculum to address these needs, and finally how we can prepare ourselves to implement what we decide upon and to anticipate what we cannot envision (p.38).

The current status of information literacy — explored at the previously noted 2005 Conference at Baruch College — focuses on undergraduate education, so it is not directly related to the previous discussion in this paper.

Table 3.
Planning and Goals of Guest Lecture by Librarian

Professor provides or reviews with librarian	Librarian provides for professor	Students will have
Specific course objectives and objectives of research assignment	Understanding	Received info prior to lecture and understand the purpose
A sense of the subject matter and the students' level of research experience; whether a single lecture or ongoing librarian support through research cycle is being requested	If possible, prior observation of class for understanding of content and to gauge level of students' knowledge; prepare the content and pace of lecture to meet the level of students' knowledge and experience; commit to ongoing support if requested	Explanations of jargon and terms from professor and/or librarian
Any special needs of students to accommodate during the lecture	Understanding and accommodation	Accommodation of special needs
Specific objectives of research assignment	Understanding and agreement on assignment	Understanding, or will direct questions to professor
Whether students are researching individual topics or if the same broad topic is being examined by groups or individuals	Basic understanding of topic; if a multi-disciplinary topic, understanding of sources and information most likely to be requested; provide means of access if not available through campus resources	Received the assignment; perhaps will have narrowed topic or assigned tasks (if group project)
Specific objectives of guest lecture, including possibly: Demonstration of databases and/or Web sites or print resources with hands-on opportunities for students Retrieval of specific types of literature (books, peer-reviewed journals, newspapers, trade or other non-peer-reviewed journals, case studies) or background sources, perhaps within specific time periods of publication Citation style	Understands requests, reviews databases, Web sites and print resources Alerts professor of new resources and discusses features and advantages; agrees to demonstrate requested databases and sources and to avoid demonstrating databases that have not been requested; offers hands-on opportunities	Understanding of basic searching and retrieving process to get information from demonstrated resources; receives handout or similar for reinforcement of search strategies and resources; will seek additional help with locating resources from librarian or professor after lecture Understanding of which citation format to use for the research paper
Requests demonstration of sources for locating works of specific writers, events or items in specific journals, and explains why they are being specified	Understands the requests; Is prepared to offer brief evaluative comments to students to support the faculty's inclusion of selected resources	Understanding of basic distinctions between resources; review process to obtain needed resources
Attends lecture and offers feedback to librarian on presentation; if desired, provides additional feedback after student research papers are submitted; invites librarian to any oral presentations	Accepts immediate and post-event feedback; alerts professor to any questions on assignment that were left unanswered; attends oral presentations if schedule permits	Understanding of and ability to meet deadlines for drafts and final paper; learned from the sharing of viewpoints and conclusions drawn of others' research and subject expertise of professor

However, engaging in educational reforms without an empirical basis is unwise.

The evidence adduced here is qualitative, retrospective, and to some degree self-reported. This suggests that information literacy already exists at the university level in some public affairs courses. Before engaging in reform, perhaps we should ask the following: To what degree can information literacy be found throughout the university system? Opportunities for future research exist — particularly in the area of assessment — because faculty and librarians share goals of preparing students for their future careers, which are certain to create a demand for information, analysis, critical thinking and ethical behavior. Both librarians and professors have expert information to share with colleagues and students. Both share the need to develop assessment tools.

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FOOTNOTES

- ¹ In developing this study, we recognize substantial methodological concerns. These include the fact that the events are reported by participant observers who at the time were not seeking to conduct a study. These conditions can produce considerable opportunity for bias and misrepresentation. Nevertheless, we present this case study for the purpose of finding common understanding and potential good practices. Clearly, this study should be treated as exploratory.
- ² The authors presented this table at a poster session during the 2005 Baruch College Integrating Information Literacy and Communication Skills Across the Curriculum: Learning Goals and Assessment Conference, New York, March 11, 2005. It is available online at <http://newman.baruch.cuny.edu/facultyhandbook/InformationLiteracyConference.htm>
- ³ In research for this paper, the determination of improved functionality of PAIS and Philosopher's Index has led to including them in future curriculum.

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