EXPERIENCES WITH INFORMATION LITERACY

In the Spring of 2015, Champlain College administered the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). For the first time, the college included the Experiences with Information Literacy module—an additional, optional module developed in collaboration with academic librarians. The module asks students about the following interactions over the past year:

- Students’ personal use of information. *How often they have sought, used, and evaluated information in relation to assignments or course of study.*

- Instructor emphasis on aspects of proper information use. *How often their course instructors emphasized plagiarism, citation, source type, use of disciplinary conventions, etc.*

- The institution’s contribution to students’ effective information use.

In this web-based, quantitative survey, responses exist on a four point Likert scale for all questions. In the first question block, students rank their self-reported frequency of personal information use on a scale of (1) never; (2) sometimes; (3) often; and (4) very often. In the second and third question blocks, students rank how much their instructors emphasized proper information use and their experience at the institution’s contribution to effective information use from (1) very little; (2) some; (3) quite a bit; to (4) very much.

The NSSE survey was administered to all first-year and senior students. NSSE provides participating schools with the distribution of all responses as well as the means for all questions for both cohorts and their comparison groups. NSSE also reports on the effect size and marks any means that are higher or lower than the comparison groups and statistically significant at p<.05, p<.01 or p<.001.

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RESPONDENTS

Approximately 193 Champlain first-years and 143 Champlain seniors responded to the Experiences with Information Literacy module for response rates of 42% and 37%, respectively. The first-year respondents had over-representation of women and Information Technology & Sciences students and under-representation of Stiller School of Business students. The senior respondents had over-representation of women and Education and Human Studies students and under-representation of Communication and Creative Media students.

The comparison group was comprised of 57 different institutions. The inclusion criteria for this group were public and not for profit institutions with enrollments between 1000-5000 students. Although these institutions do not necessarily fall within Champlain College's defined overlap or aspirational comparisons, they do provide a useful benchmark for comparison of students’ self-reported information literacy experiences with other institutions of higher education. Champlain College’s response rate was 10-15% higher than that of the comparison groups.

CHAMPLAIN’S INFORMATION LITERACY PROGRAM

At Champlain College, information literacy (IL) is one of nine college-wide competencies. As such, it is an integral part of Champlain’s education and a lifelong learning skill in which we strive to make students proficient. To support this, the Champlain College Library has developed and implemented a scaffolded, course-integrated information literacy instruction program. Our IL program is embedded within the Core Curriculum, the college’s highly interdisciplinary general education program. Through this program, we are able to reach all students at least seven times in the course of the first three years of their Champlain experience. Our innovative program relies on inquiry-based instructional delivery that encourages students to think critically about how they access, evaluate and use information. In alignment with Champlain’s “radically pragmatic” educational ethos, our team of teaching librarians stresses the value of information literacy, and its related skills and dispositions, in personal, professional and academic contexts. Though our IL instruction is embedded in the Core Curriculum, we strive to build connections to the work students pursue in their professionally-oriented majors, emphasizing IL as a means to improve, promote and make visible integrative learning. Each year, our teaching librarians conduct assessment of first- and third-year student work to determine evidence of student learning. This ongoing, longitudinal assessment has highlighted many of the skills with which students struggle, including source evaluation and synthesis, as well as those with which they have proven to be proficient, including the search for and selection of a variety of sources.

As it relates to the results of the NSSE Survey, our IL program addresses, either directly or indirectly, each of the “interactions” highlighted by the information literacy module. In a first year lesson, we discuss annotated bibliographies and equip students with the necessary information to evaluate the quality and reliability of their resources. In addition, we discuss the value of using sources they have already found to uncover additional relevant perspectives. In the second year, we offer a selection of courses that address the ethical use of information, both within the context of academic writing and the context of professional exceptions. As noted above, our assessment of student work has shown that students have the ability to search for and select a variety of sources, and, therefore, our IL instruction leans towards developing critical thinking skills over discussing the mechanics of performing database searches. That said, we use each classroom visit as an opportunity to reinforce the broad set of resources accessible to students through the library’s print and electronic holdings. As a supplement to the ongoing assessment work conducted by the teaching librarians, the results of the NSSE Survey provide us additional insight into students’ experiences with information literacy, beyond what we are able to observe from our delivery of instruction within the Core Curriculum.
RESULTS

The NSSE results provide several points for analysis:

- Individual Champlain cohort (first-years and seniors) responses and the distribution of their answers
- Comparison between Champlain first-years and seniors
- Comparison between Champlain students and their comparison groups

The NSSE survey is administered to students every three years, meaning that they will be surveyed as first-year students and then again as seniors. In addition to the three analyses listed above, over time, the results will allow for a longitudinal examination of how students’ opinions on their information literacy experiences change and develop during their course of study at Champlain College. However, because responding is optional, the same students may not choose to take the survey both times, meaning that we will have longitudinal cohort data, but not necessarily longitudinal data at the individual student level. Longitudinal data are particularly useful because we can see a cohort’s answers change over time. Furthermore, we can examine changes in results in relation to changes in our practices or teaching.

Because this is the first time administering this module, the descriptions in this report seek to establish a baseline for Champlain students’ experiences with information literacy.

CHAMPLAIN FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

Champlain first-year students reported strong engagement with information literacy in several areas:

- Completing an assignment that used an information source other than course readings (mean=3.3)
- Working on a paper or project that had multiple smaller assignments such as an outline, annotated bibliography, rough draft, etc. (mean=3.1)

They reported less engagement in other areas:

- Completing an assignment that used the library’s electronic collection of articles, books, and journals (mean=2.4)
- Deciding not to use an information source in a course assignment due to its questionable quality (mean=2.4)
- Changing the focus of a paper or project based on information found while researching the topic (mean=2.4)

First-year students reported that their instructors most emphasized appropriately citing the sources used in a paper or project (mean=3.3), and least emphasized using practices (terminology, methods, writing style, etc.) of a specific major or field of study (mean=2.9).

FIRST-YEAR COMPARISON GROUP

Champlain College first-year students reported less use of their library’s electronic collection than students in the comparison group. However, Champlain first-year students reported more frequently choosing not to use a source because they found its quality questionable.

All mean responses regarding the amount of instructor emphasis on proper information use were in line with the comparison group, except for one—students reported significantly less instructor emphasis on not plagiarizing than the comparison group.
CHAMPLAIN COLLEGE LIBRARY
NSSE-IL REPORT, 2015

CHAMPLAIN SENIORS

Similar to the first-year students, in their experiences with information literacy, Champlain seniors reported most frequently completing an assignment that used an information source other than course readings (mean=3.3).

They reported the least engagement with two areas:

• deciding not to use an information source in a course assignment due to its questionable quality (mean=2.5)
• changing the focus of a paper or project based on information found while researching the topic (mean=2.5)

Seniors reported that their instructors most emphasized appropriately citing the sources used in a paper or project (mean=3.3), and least emphasized questioning the quality of information sources (mean=2.9).

SENIOR COMPARISON GROUP

In their personal interactions with information, Champlain College seniors’ responses were very consistent with the comparison groups. However, they less often used information other than course readings, and, similar to first-year students, more often chose not use an information source due to questionable quality that their comparison group.

Champlain College seniors reported less instructor emphasis on all questions regarding plagiarism, appropriate citation, use of scholarly sources, questioning of source quality and the use of practices specific to a field than their comparison group.
HIGHLIGHTED QUESTIONS

In the following section, the results of three particularly relevant questions will be described in more detail.

USE OF THE LIBRARY’S ELECTRONIC COLLECTION

Champlain College’s collection of books focuses on interdisciplinary works that support faculty teaching and student research needs. The print collection is purposefully small, and as online enrollment continues to grow, the majority of collection growth and development focuses on the electronic collection consisting of articles, eBooks and streaming video. On the NSSE survey, students were asked how often they completed an assignment using the library’s electronic collection of articles, books and journals. In response, Champlain first-year students’ mean was flagged as statistically lower than comparison institutions (see figure 1).

However, Champlain seniors’ responses were consistent with their comparison group. There was also positive growth in the use of the electronic collection from Champlain first-years to Champlain seniors, meaning that as our students move through Champlain, they may become more familiar with our heavily online collection and as a result, engage with it more. Student ability to determine which article or book collection is most relevant to their research undoubtedly factors into their usage of the collections. The responses to this question reveal that greater, and earlier, promotion and instruction around our electronic resources may be warranted.

QUESTIONING THE QUALITY OF SOURCES

Both Champlain College first-year and senior students more frequently reported deciding not to use an information source due to its questionable quality than their comparison groups. Furthermore, Champlain seniors reported this happening more frequently than the first-year students (see figure 2). Although in comparison these results look desirable, examining the distribution of the answers on the four point scale reveals that the majority of Champlain students, both first-years and seniors, report never or only sometimes doing this, and responses to this question revealed lower engagement than all other questions for both first-years and seniors. Therefore, although Champlain students may be questioning their sources more than their peers, continuing to promote the importance of questioning source quality remains a library priority.
AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

Many campus discussions occur around appropriate citation. In fact, both Champlain first-years and seniors reported higher instances of their course instructors’ emphasis on appropriately citing sources than all other questions of instructor emphasis. However, both Champlain first-years and seniors reported significantly lower instructor emphasis on not plagiarizing another author’s work than all comparison groups (see figure 3). In fact, these results were the most dramatically different than all other questions on the NSSE Information Literacy module, had the largest effect size and were statistically significant at p<.001. Therefore, although students report their course instructors have strong emphasis on appropriate citation, direct emphasis on not plagiarizing may be lacking. These results raise questions about the types of discussions surrounding plagiarism and citation, including where these conversations are occurring and who is instigating them—librarians, course instructors, or a combination of both? So far, these results have spurred informal conversations across campus, but we anticipate more formal action informed by these results across both librarian and teaching faculty.

![Figure 3: Amount of instructor emphasis on not plagiarizing](image)

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

While the NSSE Experiences with Information Literacy module does not answer all questions about students’ information literacy engagement, it does provide useful data points regarding common interactions with research and information use at Champlain College. The results of this survey provide an interesting baseline from which the library will continue to observe, measure and analyze Champlain students’ personal use of information as well as their opinions on the frequency of their instructors’ emphasis on proper information use.

The library plans to continue running this survey every 3 years when the College administers NSSE. Therefore, the first-year students whose responses were detailed within will again take the same survey as seniors, providing unique insight into the changes of information use within a cohort over their time at Champlain College. The library will continue to turn to these data to influence our instruction and outreach as it provides a chance to better understand how our students experience information literacy.