


Aiming for Assessment:  
Notes from a Pilot  
Information Literacy Course  
Assessment Project

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**LIB 120**  
**Introduction to Information Literacy**

- Eight years, 1200 students
- 3-credit Gen Ed elective course
- Teaches research methods for academic and real world applications

## Why Assess?

- LIB 120 uses ACRL IL Standards as a benchmark; determining if students are actually learning the concepts is a key concern
- Some instructors gave a final exam, some didn't
- No standardized instrument to evaluate our or student success
- To further our continuous efforts to improve the content and delivery of our course

## Why Assess?

- To proactively get student learning outcomes for accreditation purposes
- To select our own instrument, rather than having one chosen for us
- To compare our success to other institutions -- once other institutions have used the tool



## Instruments Considered

Bay Area Community Colleges Information  
Competency Assessment Project

<http://www.topsy.org/ICAP/ICAPProject.html>

Project SAILS

<https://www.projectsails.org/>

ETS ICT Literacy Assessment Test (now called  
iSkills)

<http://www.ets.org/iskills/>



## And the Winner Is...

The Bay Area Community Colleges  
Information Competency Assessment  
Project

## Why the BACC?

- Most closely reflected what we teach and tested at the introductory level of "competency"
- Easy to get permission to use it
- Covers Standards 1-3 and 5 well
- Useful for comparing with national-level data (or at least California schools)
- Good documentation - explanations of how each question was developed and field tested
- They were willing to share for FREE!

## The Runners Up

- Project SAILS
  - On hiatus for assessment when we were looking
  - This might be an appropriate option for your institution
- ETS ICT/iSkills
  - More focused on computer skills than our course
  - Pros: They do all the grading for you
  - Cons: Costs money; was for final-year students, not for an introductory course
  - New: iSkills now has different levels, so that might be a feasible option. At the time we were considering tools, there was just one level

## What the BACC Looks Like

Two part exam

- 47 multiple choice, matching, and short answer items
- 12 performance-based exercises, several with sub-parts – the story questions
- Four demographic questions at the end

## Time Needed

- 2 hours +/- 15 minutes for the vast majority of students
- Some took less than 1.5 hours, some took up to 3
- Possibly faster because it was delivered electronically



## How We Adapted It

- Reviewed the test question by question to determine what might or might not be appropriate
- Tried not to change the intent of the questions or what ACRL Standard they mapped to
- Maintained the format for the questions (multiple choice, short answer) to preserve the original mix of question types



## How We Adapted It

- Some adaptations were simple: Swapping out screenshots of catalog and databases
- Some were hard: One question required students to compare two passages, the originals of which we felt were slightly vague

## Using WebCT to Deliver the Test

- Put the questions in WebCT quiz format
- Adjusted the visual display and reviewed for typos
- Performed usability testing with grad students
  
- Automatic grading on WebCT did not work well for the story questions and matching; we broke some of the questions into pieces to facilitate this
  
- Gave students a sample quiz in WebCT to make sure they knew how to use the interface and could navigate its quirks

## Triumphs!

- Automatic grading of many questions
- Can send a copy of the exam to another person (we used Gmail for this to bypass local mail server quotas)
- Majority of students passed!

## Problems

- Using MLA format causes URLs in citations to vanish
- Automatic grading not great for essay answers
- Couldn't provide detailed feedback to students
- The statistical output left something to be desired: exams were sent before being graded by a human, so the story questions were all originally given 0s by WebCT.

## Analyzing the Test

- Addresses ACRL standards 1,2,3, and 5
- The BACC Project has already mapped the questions to the appropriate standards

## Survey Says - Early Results

- Students' scores were good overall
- The average student score Fall was 75%
- When mapped to the ACRL standards:
  - Our **average** scores for Fall 2006
    - Standard 1 79.61%
    - Standard 2 73.67%
    - Standard 3 76.79
    - Standard 5 72.55

## Getting a Closer Look

- Each standard is broken down into separate components, for example:
  - Averages for Standard 2 components
    - 2.1 71.52
    - 2.2 59.39
    - 2.3 76.90
    - 2.4 94.32
    - 2.5 71.91

## Some Things We Learned

- The vast majority of students were at C level or better, a promising result as we did not significantly adapt our teaching to "teach to the test"
- Some questions that the students did poorly on were examples of things we need to highlight more aggressively during the semester

## Changes for the Second Round

- Reviewed all questions where more than 30% of students answered incorrectly
- Revised the compare and contrast question *again*
- Copied, pasted, and emailed graded exams rather than relying on the automated emailing of ungraded exams

## What's Next? - Future Plans

- Second round just given
- Spring semester average scores were just over 80%
- We plan to analyze those results, and determine whether to continue with the project.

## What Does the Test Do?

- Project assesses 3 things:
  - The students' performance
  - The class content and delivery
  - The test itself

## How Can I Use it Elsewhere?

- The BACC is best suited to evaluate a multi-session or ongoing information literacy effort; single-session instruction classes can't address the amount of content measured by the instrument.
- However, any IL effort could benefit from assessment like this.

## Possible Adaptations

- You can easily customize the screenshots to apply to your library and resources
- You can select the most relevant questions
  - If you're focusing on in-library research, you can omit the questions not about library-specific resources
  - You can select the standard that you want to teach to, and select those specific questions

## Possible Adaptations

- Demographics easily customizable
- Adapt the questions to apply to a subject specific population. For example, selecting specific questions to assess a nursing info lit program.
- Remove the story questions to shorten the exam, but you lose some of the picture of the searching and evaluation skills
- JUST do the story questions: get less IL theory but more on search and evaluation

## Possible Issues

- Not a stand-alone class?
  - Design an instrument that could be uploaded into the CMS tool used by course you're collaborating with
- No tech? Give the test on paper
- Time and money?
  - BACC is free
  - Grants
  - Divide the labor



Questions?



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