Information Literacy Partnership: Training the Next Generation of UH Students

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**Introduction**

In an article about the evolving role of academic libraries, authors Ablrecht and Baron state, “Libraries are no longer keepers of information, but teachers of information.”\(^1\) While this perspective may not be shared by all libraries, it has been advocated by school library and media centers across the nation for some time. A decade ago, in the book, *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*, the American Association of School Librarians and The Association for Educational Communications and Technology defined the pivotal role of librarians in teaching information literacy:

> We must teach students to be learners because in their lifetimes so much new knowledge will be generated that they cannot expect to stop learning when they leave school. What are learners? They are people who inquire, who seek information, evaluate it, apply it to new problems, questions or decisions, and assess how well the information has met their needs.\(^2\)

The responsibility for information literacy as outlined in *Information Power* is not limited to school libraries. The Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL) includes information literacy as a key component of accreditation and points to Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Standard 2.2 of the Teaching and Learning section which states that colleges and universities must “also ensure the development of core learning abilities and competencies including, but not limited to, college-level written and oral communication; college-level quantitative skills; information literacy; and the habit of critical analysis of data and argument.”\(^3\) Information literacy skills are recognized on most educational fronts as the prerequisite for student success in the information society of the 21\(^{st}\) century.
A review of the strategic planning documents for the University of Hawaii at Manoa (UHM), Hamilton Library, and the Hawaii State Department of Education (DOE) indicate that these State institutions recognize the importance of information literacy skills as well. While varied in their missions and the language they use to express their visions and objectives, they share a common goal – to improve public education through information literacy training.

Hamilton Library, with its highly qualified information professionals and quality information resources, is well positioned to emerge as a leader in public education and workforce development - two primary concerns of the Hawaii State Legislature, a major library stakeholder.

It is the position of this paper that an information literacy partnership between Hamilton Library and its feeder public high schools would strategically benefit both institutions and constitute a high return investment for Hamilton Library and its partners.

Model Partnerships

The American Library Association (ALA) identifies a number of information literacy partnerships between universities and high schools. They include Duke University and Durham Public Schools; Northwestern State University and Louisiana School for Math, Sciences and the Arts; Oregon State University and local district schools; University of California Berkeley and Oakland/San Francisco Unified School District, University of Maine at Farmington and its local school district; University of Northern Colorado and state K-12 schools; University of Oregon and state K-12 teachers; and Wayne State University with Ferndale and Northwestern High Schools. In addition, an exemplary partnership exists between University of California at Irvine (UCI) and the Orange County School District. Started in 1999, the School Partnership for Instruction, Research, and Information Technology (SPIRIT) represents an “outreach program into the communities from which UCI recruits students.”
Through its SPIRIT program, UCI provides information literacy training to students and teachers in ten feeder high schools. The program is coordinated by the University-School Outreach Librarian and the Outreach Services Librarian. The UCI library staff first conduct information sessions at the high schools to explain the program and activities. Then the high school students are invited to the campus for a day-long session in the UCI library. At the session, students receive a library orientation, complete an information literacy activity guided by peer assistants, take a campus tour, and have lunch. The staff gives out evaluation forms before and after the visits to assess the impact of the sessions.

UCI Library invested a significant amount of time and effort into the development of the program. “Preparations included the design of student assessment tools, evaluation forms, syllabi for library instruction based on the class assignments, an instructional packet for the students, the identification of additional assistants for the library instruction session, and obtaining printing and lunch cards for students.” In addition, the staff sent letters to the school principals, met with school administrators and teachers, visited school labs to determine available technology support, and met with individual instructors to develop relevant learning activities. Through this hard won partnership with its feeder high schools, UCI is able to increase the information literacy preparedness of incoming freshman and impart life long learning skills to students. In this way, UCI increases the retention and success rates of its students and builds public support for the UCI library.

In addition to serving high school students, UCI also provides innovative information literacy workshops for school teachers of all grade levels. Upcoming workshops for October 2007 through July 2008 include:

- Developing Research Skills for Science Fair Projects
UCI’s information literacy partnership with its future students and their teachers provides an exemplary model for Hamilton Library to follow.

**Partnership Value**

The shared value of an information literacy partnership is evident in the UHM and DOE strategic plans. According to both planning documents, the two State institutions share a common overarching goal and strategy – to improve the effectiveness of public education in Hawaii through partnerships. Hamilton Library echoes this outreach focused goal in its own mission statement to “Support the teaching, research and information needs of faculty, students, staff and the community.” An information literacy partnership between Hamilton Library and Hawaii’s public high schools would promote Hamilton’s role in the advancement of the following UHM strategic imperatives:

- Partner with the Department of Education to improve overall effectiveness of public education in Hawaii
- Share new technologies and computer resources with underserved public schools and others.
- Initiate new learning centers that respond to societal needs such as public policy, environmental sustainability, and other interdisciplinary offerings.
- Improve recruitment, retention, and degree completion for highly qualified undergraduates.
• Recruit, reward, and support outstanding faculty, staff, and students committed to research and graduate education.

• Strengthen public and private partnerships.\textsuperscript{14}

Currently, a review of UHM’s Strategic Plan Implementation Progress Report\textsuperscript{15} does not result in sufficient evidence of partnership efforts with the DOE to implement the initiatives above. The only UHM/DOE partnership documented there is the Science Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) academy created by a National Science Foundation grant to focus on tropical research and education.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, Hamilton Library’s policy on instruction requests from Non-UH affiliated groups reads, “As a publicly-supported institution, the Libraries welcome groups of non-affiliated persons to use its resources. However, direct instruction will not be provided by Library staff.”\textsuperscript{17} The existing evidence reveals a clear shortcoming in UHM’s partnering efforts with public education.

UHM’s incremental benchmarks which appear to be linked to improvements in public education, including annual increases in undergraduate retention and the percentage of adults in Hawaii with post-secondary degrees, have not yet been attained according to the UHM Benchmarks Progress Report.\textsuperscript{18} To fulfill their stated goals, UHM and Hamilton Library need an innovative partnership with high level relevance for public education. UCI’s information literacy partnership model is the answer.

A review of the DOE’s strategic plan indicates that a partnership which equips high school students and educators with current information literacy training is vital to DOE’s attainment of its goals. Whether it realizes it or not, the DOE has stated its vision to necessitate an information literacy initiative.

All public school graduates will:
• Realize their individual goals and aspirations;
• Possess the attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary to contribute positively and compete in a global society.
• Exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; and
• Pursue post-secondary education and/or careers without need for remediation.\(^{19}\)

The skills of independent learning, active participation in a global society, responsible citizenship, and higher order thinking skills essential in college all involve information literacy. In addition, five of the six DOE general learner outcome statements represent information literacy skills.

Public school students will be able to:

• Be responsible for their own learning.
• Work well with others.
• Engage in complex thinking and problem solving.
• Recognize quality performance and produce quality products.
• Communicate effectively.
• Use a variety of technologies effectively and ethically.\(^{20}\)

Like UHM, the DOE mentions partnering in its strategic goals, specifically, to “Provide students with expanded learning opportunities that support standards-based education through partnerships with families and the community.”\(^{21}\) The DOE is also concerned with improving school quality and the performance of its staff. One strategy it identifies toward this end is to “provide assistance and support to teachers to enable them to become highly qualified in their instructional areas.”\(^{22}\)

Based on the 2005 Hawaii Opinion Poll on Public Education,\(^{23}\) the DOE is in dire need of
a partnership that supports its efforts to improve public education. The general public’s impression of the DOE is not positive. 66% of adults surveyed (N=600) expressed that public schools in Hawaii have stayed the same or gotten worse in the last five years. In the same study, 72% of adults polled gave the DOE as a whole a grade of C or below. The top problem facing public schools of Hawaii as identified by this group is lack of resources, and the number two problem is poor teaching and lack of commitment or motivation. An information literacy partnership between Hamilton Library and the public high schools can address both of these issues by providing both access to information resources and training in current information literacy skills and technologies.

**Organizational Structure**

An effective organizational structure involves clarifying the partnership’s purpose, power and authority, participation, positions, and processes. The partnership’s information literacy purpose would have to be clarified and agreed upon by all representatives in the partnership. A good starting point would be the creation of a mission statement and goals. Rather than starting from scratch, the UCI model may be turned to for ideas. UCI’s partnership goals include:

- Teach life long learning skills to high school students;
- Enhance the academic performance and readiness of students by teaching them library research skills and information competence;
- Facilitate student and teacher access to and use of scholarly, electronic resources;
- Increase student understanding and confidence related to functioning in a research university environment; and
- Support efforts to increase the number of UC eligible students at target high schools that attend and graduate from UCI.
Once the mission and goals are in place, the rest of the organizational structure can be created to support the partnership’s purpose for existence.

The power structure of the partnership needs to be determined next. For quicker responsiveness, a flat organizational structure is best with one coordinator representing each partner and working members chosen from appropriate departments on each campus who make decisions collaboratively and in consultation with relevant experts. Initially, however, representatives at various levels of the existing UH and DOE bureaucracies may need to be consulted. From UH, the library’s Student Learning Program’s and Services Librarian, the Public Services department head, the University Librarian, and a UHM student services representative should be involved. The information literacy partnership between Hamilton Library and public feeder high schools would fit appropriately under Hamilton’s Public Services section. Ideally, this section would have an Outreach Coordinator who oversees all outreach and public relations responsibilities and an Information Literacy Specialist under this position to carry out the planning, implementation and evaluation of the specific partnership and its activities.

The participation level of members of the partnership would be high. Because of the flat structure, very few responsibilities will overlap and each member’s contributions are essential. A coordinating committee should be formed with a Hamilton Library representative as chairperson who compiles the agenda, keeps the group on task, and holds members accountable for follow through. A secretary should also be appointed to record, disseminate, and archive minutes. During the planning phase, monthly meetings might suffice and as the date of implementation draws closer, meetings may need to be more frequent. Minutes should be recorded at each meeting, emailed to all participants within a week of the last meeting, and archived in a central
place where all involved can access them electronically. Ongoing consultation and communication via email, phone, or teleconferencing would support the cohesiveness of the partnership, avoid misunderstandings between partners, provide valuable feedback, and improve responsiveness to last minute or unforeseen changes in plans. Each academic year, a report of the activities and outcomes of the partnership should be produced in both electronic and paper format for web posting and sharing with internal and external constituencies including UHM and DOE faculty, students, parents, and administrators, state officials, and the general public.

**Evaluation Instrument**

The success of the partnership should be assessed at two levels: operational and instructional. Effectiveness of partnership operations can be determined via focus groups of faculty, attendance at meetings, individual faculty interviews, faculty satisfaction surveys, or attainment of partnership benchmarks. Instructional effectiveness can be assessed by pre- and post- knowledge surveys, objective or essay tests, research projects, student satisfaction surveys, session attendance, or student focus groups. Taken together, objective and subjective assessments provide a well rounded view of partnership outcomes. The questionnaire on the following page is based on the ACRL Information Literacy Standards and serves as an example of a basic tool to assess high school teachers’ perceptions of student attainment of information literacy outcomes.
**UH Hamilton Library Information Literacy Program Outcomes Evaluation**

Instructions: Please rate your students on the attainment of the following information literacy outcomes based on your observations of student performance on research tasks in your course this semester.

Course: ___________________________ Instructor: ___________________________

Information Literacy Session Date: __________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACRL Standards</th>
<th>Outcomes Rating</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exceeds</td>
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<tr>
<td>develops an effective research strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>selects appropriate information access tools</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>accesses need information efficiently</td>
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<tr>
<td>evaluates information and its sources critically</td>
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<td>applies ethical principals to information access and use</td>
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Additional comments or suggestions (continue on back): __________________________
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Return questionnaires by ________________________________ to your campus Date

Information Literacy Committee representative:

________________________________________

Name  Office  Phone Number
The advantage of a brief, simple rating instrument is that it respects the teachers’ busy schedules and targets only the key information literacy standards promoted by ACRL. A short, easy evaluation tool has a better return rate and results are easier to interpret and report to stakeholders. The disadvantage of such a simplistic instrument is that it may not elicit detail or depth of information about the numerous factors that either helped or hindered students in achieving the target learning outcomes. An instrument like this would be enhanced by focus groups of participating students and teachers as well as data from student research project outcomes.

**Conclusion**

An information literacy partnership between Hamilton Library and UHM feeder high schools is not a ground breaking idea; however, if well planned, executed and evaluated, it has the potential of becoming a powerful mechanism for library advocacy and support. Realistically, such an effort would require a considerable investment of time, resources, and personnel, and in the current economic climate, Hamilton Library may not have any of these to spare. UHM administrators, library administrators, and public officials are on the lookout for evidence of improved student learning and positive contributions to public education and state workforce development. If Hamilton can draw clear connections between information literacy standards and the skill needs of the State’s students and future workforce, it may be able to garner the resources it needs to implement such a partnership. This partnership has the potential for becoming a centerpiece for institutional effectiveness, contributing significantly to the preparedness of incoming college students, and elevating the library to a more prominent and favored status among its internal and external stakeholders.
Endnotes

4 University of Hawaii at Manoa, Strategic Plan http://www.manoa.hawaii.edu/vision/defining_our_destiny/ (accessed 28 October 2007).
8 The UCI Libraries, “SPIRIT Program (School Partnership in Instruction, Research, and Information Technology)” UCI Irvine Libraries Update: A Newsletter for Faculty 19, no. 3 (Spring 2000): 2.
9 Ibid., 2.
10 Ibid., 2.
11 Ibid., 2.
13 Office of the University Librarian, 1.
16 Ibid., 1.
19 Hawaii State Department of Education, 2.
20 Ibid., 3.
21 Ibid., 1.
22 Ibid., 11.
24 Ibid., iii – 7.
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Hawaii State Department of Education. Strategic Plan.  


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