Librarians have a different role today in helping college students navigate their information needs. We believe that information literacy is essential to critical thinking and lifelong learning. These skills will help students succeed in the workplace, make better and more informed decisions in their personal lives, and contribute to community.

Project Information Literacy has been following college students from over 60 American higher education institutes since 2008, gathering answers from surveys. We pay attention to the national survey results because it guides us with our library instruction curriculum for our own UWL students.

How students resolve issues of credibility, authority, currency, and purpose is our concern. According to survey results, first year students say that it is especially difficult to formulate efficient online searches, to select and locate research sources, to read and comprehend materials, and, figure out faculty expectations.

The paradox that students will also be confronted with is that information is quick and easy to find, but that finding credible and relevant answers is harder than ever. By participating in our program, Gaining Ground, we are confident that college-bound seniors will take away new thoughts on information seeking habits and skills.

What does it mean to be a college student in the digital age?

GAINING GROUND
Building College Information Literacy Skills

How college students learn to resolve information problems will follow them in their professional lives.

Gaining Ground: Building College Information Literacy Skills
How do students feel about college-level research?

Well, that’s complicated...

“When you have to pick your own topic you don’t know if it’s a good one or not. How do you know if it will work with a class?”

“Why can’t I just use Google?”

“There’s just too much information to choose from.”

“Because high schools don’t have the same resources, it’s hard to get ready for that moment in college when the professor says, ‘Go research this.’ There are so many resources, I don’t know how to use them yet. Do I use Ebsco? Britannica? Or other things?”

* Most students surveyed were not comfortable or confident creating a research question.

* 84% of students said that just getting started was the hardest part.

Source: Project information Literacy (PIL) is a large-scale, national study about early adults and their research habits, conducted in partnership with the University of Washington’s iSchool.
Student takeaways
Professors want students to succeed too. Sometimes it’s not easy to understand exactly what they want in their assignments. They will expect students to ask questions and take advantage of their office hours. Getting to know professors help with finding internships, recommendation letters, identifying scholarships, and may even kickstart a new interest in a subject that may become a major or a minor.

Feel comfortable asking
Academic librarians are in the library to answer your questions. They can help you navigate the library’s web pages, databases, collections, citations, and with any step of your research. You can even reach them via chat and text now.

Librarians: it’s not just about books anymore.
What can a librarian do for students? Student perceptions of what librarians can do for them consistently show that the field is still directly associated with books. At a college level, this no longer tends to be 100% true. “Information manager” might better describe what we do. We’d like students to be comfortable asking questions and become autonomous, confident, and efficient researchers.

Four factors that make college research different

1. The academic library collection increases in size as digital resources proliferate.
2. The research approach involves combining and using new and different sources.
3. Research calls for selecting quality research sources, evaluated for their credibility.
4. Assignments require independent choices and encourage intellectual exploration.

Source: Project Information Literacy Research Report: “Learning the Ropes”
December 4, 2013 | Alison J. Head
What about the research skills and expectations students already have?

Google
Google is easy. You put some words in the search box and you get results. It’s like playing around with the piano. You press a piano key, and you get a note. But learning to play well takes skill, just as learning to use Google’s amazing potential takes critical thinking skills. Google is not always going to be the place to turn. College-level research will require more from student’s research skills. The online experience and skills that first year students already have are valuable and important to bring along to college. We’ll help them refine those skills and help them become efficient information consumers.

Wikipedia
Wikipedia a great pre-search tool, but not necessarily a source to cite. Wikipedia helps students to gain important background knowledge on a new subject, to brainstorm keyword search terms that they can then plug into a database, or to take them through links to outside references and sources that might be reliable to use. Wikipedia is part of the journey, but not the destination.

Critical Thinking Skills
We live in an information age, however, increasingly we are our own gatekeepers as to what kind of information we let in. Therefore evaluating skills have become indispensable, not only for college students, but also for job performance and personal research. Because it is increasingly our own responsibility to find quality information for our needs this type of gate-keeping requires a critical mind. This doesn’t mean criticizing everything, but rather constantly asking questions that take researchers and information consumers further so that they can navigate results and stay in control, instead of buying into the first thing that looks credible or believable. Evaluating is the next step after finding information, and defines what information literacy is all about: knowing what it is, where it came from, its purpose, and how it fits into the bigger picture of the student’s research or information need.
What advice do you have for students anxious about the college transition?

College Writing and College Students
Professor Darci Thoune is UWL’s First-year Writing Program Coordinator and Associate Professor in the Department of English. Students who participate in Gaining Ground will have a chance to work with her and talk about their expectations, hopes, questions and concerns of college writing and research. In order to better customize each school’s visit, we are asking each visiting school’s students to answer two questions, have their teacher compile the answers in one document and send to Professor Thoune in an email at least 2-3 days before the visit at dthoune@uwlax.edu. The two questions for students to answer are:

1. What do you imagine that the main differences will be between a high school writing (English) class and a college writing class? Try to list at least three differences.

2. Over the course of your undergraduate career you will have to take several writing courses. Why do you think universities place such an emphasis on writing? Try to list at least three reasons.

UWL McNair Scholars
College students give different kinds of advice—it’s candid, frank, and useful. Your students will have a chance to interact with a small panel of McNair students for an interesting and relevant discussion.

Campus Tour
The UW-L Admissions Office provides friendly and well trained campus tour guides called Vanguards. Even though your high school students may have already taken a tour, any Vanguard will tell you that no tour is the same. We’ll take a break during the morning for a campus tour with a student Vanguard—a chance to ask more questions!
Workshop break-down

Morning
  Introductions & agenda
  Pre-assessment exercise
  Keyword activity
  Intro to search tools
  Library of congress system
  CRAAP test & web evaluation
  Scavenger hunt
  Debrief conversation
  Cycle of research game
  Personalization of search results & filter bubbles
  Campus tour with UW-L student tour guides

Afternoon
  Lunch (provided)
  Mock research in pairs
  UW-L student panel
  Q&A with First-year Writing Coordinator Darci Thoune
  Post-assessment exercise
  Final questions

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is this pilot workshop designed for?
  College-bound local high school students.

What if we cannot stay for the entire program?
  Please contact Teri or Liz for any scheduling issues.

Can our students bring their own research?
  We are open to working with students at any stage of the research process.

How do our students acquire access to UW-L’s resources?
  We will provide a guest password.

What is included?
  Bus transportation with your regular company, lunch, a campus tour and the program.

How does the bus transportation process function?
  Please reserve transportation with your regular company.
  Send the bus bill to: Murphy Library - UW-La Crosse
                     1631 Pine Street
                     La Crosse, WI 54601
What to do

• Have students answer the 2 questions about college writing and compile their responses in one email to Darci Thoune at dthoune@uwlox.edu

• Respond to the e-form sent to you in an email including lunch options.

What to bring

• Laptop computer and smart phone if possible.

• 3 to 5 questions to ask the panel of UW-L students.

Who to contact

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ehumrickhouse-lee@uwlox.edu

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