INFORMATION LITERACY AND LIFELONG LEARNING: THE MAGICAL PARTNERSHIP
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ABSTRACT
Within today's information society, the most important learning outcome for all students is their being able to function as independent lifelong learners. The essential enabler to reaching that goal is information literacy.

Let me start by asking a question. How many of you entered the field of higher education with the expectation of becoming rich? Oh good, then you have not been disappointed. My assumption is that your careers – like mine – have been motivated by the desire of making a difference for the better in people's lives. And that desire is the foundation for my remarks today. In this next hour, I want us together to explore four things: (1) the essential link between lifelong learning and information literacy; (2) the setting for our discussion within an exciting time of opportunity; (3) how the commitment to graduating independent lifelong learners can be fostered on our campuses; and (4) the personal face of independent lifelong learning.

THE MAGIC PARTNERSHIP
To a large extent the essential connection between information literacy and lifelong learning started to be forged in my thinking when I was one of the keynote speakers at Australia's first national conference on information literacy in Adelaide in 1992. Listening to another keynote speaker, Phillip Candy, I was struck by the relevance of his presentation on lifelong learning to the very goals at which information literacy efforts were directed. Moreover, desired learning outcomes necessary for people being information literate or lifelong learners, could not be achieved in the textbook-lecture approach to learning. That Dr. Candy felt the same is evidenced by his playing a leadership role in bringing the concepts together in many people's minds. For example, the Australian government report entitled Developing Lifelong Learners through Undergraduate Education was edited by Dr. Candy and contains a section on information literacy. More recently he and Christine Bruce edited a book entitled Information Literacy: Advances in Programs and Research which is being published this year.

So what is the linkage between information literacy and lifelong learning? I would suggest to you that lifelong learning is the goal for which information literacy is an essential enabler. Many campuses have a growing commitment to the learning needs of their students after graduation as well as to graduates of other institutions. These institutions can meet some of the lifelong learning needs of graduates through extension and distance education courses and other 'offerings', but they can never hope to meet all the learning needs their graduates will face in their work, civic, and personal lives. Academic institutions, in fact, will have failed their graduates if they do not empower them to be independent lifelong learners who can access, evaluate, and effectively use information to address needs or questions which confront them. Their needs can be as wide ranging as how do I get a traffic sign changed near my child's school, to how can I best prepare for an interview with an international corporation, to seeking the latest information on my favorite hobby.

Given the range of learning needs people face daily, and the ever continuing expansion of available information, schools and academic institutions can never directly meet all the learning needs of their graduates throughout their lifetimes, but they can assume significant responsibility for ensuring that their graduates can learn outside of formal learning situations. They can assume significant responsibility for creating generations of independent learners. They can ensure that their students acquire information literacy abilities.

Information literacy can be illustrated by this literacy umbrella where basic literacy is the handle and the various aspects of information literacy abilities are the spokes. A person thus equipped is well prepared for whatever challenges and changes arise in their careers or personal lives.


The most widely accepted definition of information literacy appeared in the 1989 American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy Final Report. In it information literacy is defined as the abilities to know when there is a need for information, and to be able to identify, locate and effectively use that information for the issue or problem at hand. In a world in which information is expanding at an exponential rate, and the technology which provides access to much of that information is rapidly changing, such abilities are fundamental to lifelong learning.

So, on the one hand, information literacy abilities both enhance student performance in formal learning settings and allow students to learn independent of such offerings. But on the other hand, information literacy is a solution without a problem or audience if people do not understand their need of lifelong learning. The challenges facing our communities and our nations can only be met by people committed to lifelong learning and who are savvy information consumers. In other words, neither information literacy or lifelong learning can attain their full potential toward individual empowerment without the other. Together they can produce almost 'magical' and ongoing benefits in people's lives.

A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Never has there been a better time for promoting information literacy and lifelong learning goals for student learning, but this was not the case very long ago. Indeed, in some ways it is rather remarkable that we should be gathered here today to be discussing such issues. It was during the 1980s that the United States entered into its most recent cycle of educational reform with the publication of *A Nation at Risk*⁴. What was particularly interesting in relation to our topic is that, with the exception of only two of the many, many reports that were issued, there was no acknowledgement of the existence of the Information Age — despite the announcement of its arrival in 1970 by Alvin Toffler in his highly popular *Future Shock*.⁵ There was no mention of lifelong learning, information technology, information literacy, or even libraries — except for an occasional reference to the possibility of some learning taking place outside of the classroom in museums or libraries.

The educational leaders of that decade were in very high ivory towers. They evidenced no awareness of

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the information society in which their graduates would need to live and work. Instead, their reports called for longer school years, more homework, and higher teachers' salaries — as if more of what did not work could be a solution. Indeed, it is to be questioned whether we would be seeing the openness to placing lifelong learning and information literacy on the priority lists of colleges and universities had not our consumers made their demands for something more than business-as-usual.

Dr. Candy mentioned the sources of these outside pressures in his remarks: government, employers, professions, and students themselves. Certainly, this is our experience in the United States, where whatever is left of educational reform is being driven by the continuing frustrations in those sectors regarding graduates who cannot communicate well, think critically, work well in teams, be flexible, or be lifelong learners. One such group is the Aspen Institute Forum on Communications and Society. Within the Forum top level CEO's come together to focus "on the implications of communications and information technologies on democratic institutions, individual behavior, instruments of commerce, and community life." They seek "to promote thoughtful, values-based decision making in the fields of communications, media and information policy." In 1998 and 1999 this group addressed issues around information literacy and implications for educational reform and economic development. Their recommendations included promoting awareness of information literacy, assessing and holding educators and political leaders at all levels accountable for students' proficiency in information literacy, and to increasing funding for research in education and information literacy. Fortunately, outside voices such as these are loud and strong enough that our campuses are listening, and we can be here today as part of an international movement that can benefit both individuals and our countries.

Moreover, there is now a widening window of opportunity for a better hearing on the importance of empowering people for independent lifelong learning. A concern that is becoming the issue of note in more and more speeches by politicians, government-sponsored conferences, and the newspapers is what has been labeled the 'digital divide.' The amount of investment that has been made in technology compared to any documentable improvement in education, economic development, or quality of life for the at risk is almost non-existent. The Clinton-Gore administration has striven to get internet connections into every school and every public library, but the learning that is taking place in American schools for the most part is no better off than in pre-internet days, and the poor keep falling farther behind the rich. In Silicon Valley, where I live, the online industry has produced a significant crop of young millionaires. But that is the problem. Technology is broadening the gap between the haves and have-nots. The gap is so great that Silicon Valley Company employees, who are not among the company owners and investors, increasingly cannot afford to live within commuting distance; so in order to be able to stay in business, the companies are now being forced to consider relocation.

This concern for the growing digital divide is not unique to the U.S. There exists, for example, an eclectic group known as the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) made up of representatives from governments, UNESCO organizations, banks, foundations, etc. GKP is "committed to sharing information, experiences and resources to promote broad access to, and effective use of, knowledge and information as tools of sustainable, equitable development." This partnership with its emphasis on empowering the world's poor (both individuals and countries) clearly sees the importance of — not only access — but also the effective use of knowledge and information.

The fear of the consequences of the growing digital divide presents an enhanced opportunity for us to catch policymakers' attention and sell the need for people empowerment as a key component in realizing a reasonable pay-off for the technology investment that has and continues to be made. We can picture the three aspects of a sound national policy to ensure the optimal benefits from this investment, by a simple triangle.

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Access is key; and in the U.S. the goal is universal access by providing everyone connectivity to the Internet through public and school libraries. The quality of the information and programming is the second element; however, in a democracy we promote freedom of expression with one result being a lot of junk on the Internet. Our unwillingness to impose quality controls (not to mention the impossibility of enforcing quality controls on the net) places a heavy burden on having policy that will ensure that people can successfully navigate through the unreliable, out-of-date, biased, and poor quality information, to what can benefit them. Imagine, for example, a public policy that ensured that all government funded research related to technology included a percentage requirement for ensuring that people could effectively use that technology to locate and use information! (This might involve teacher or community training, public awareness raising, and the creation of web-based tutorials.)

Finally, there is also a major movement within education that is pushing wider the window of opportunity to promote independent lifelong learning. The need for individual empowerment to function effectively in our Information Society is more recently in the United States being supported by growing pressures for institutions to be accountable for what students have learned and can do as a result of their schooling. This assessment movement, along with distance education, are the two 'hottest' issues in American education today. Assessment efforts hold the key to the institutionalization of opportunities for students to acquire information literacy abilities. If student learning outcomes are adopted campus-wide that include statements based upon those articulated by the Association of Colleges & Research Libraries (ACRL) earlier this year (www.ala.org/acrl/ilcomstan), then professors will be obliged to provide learning experiences that will allow students to build their abilities to do research and to be effective lifelong learners. Indeed, the very existence of the ACRL information literacy standards for student learning outcomes will make the drafting and adoption of campus standards far easier since not everyone will need to start from scratch. I should note that long before the ACRL standards were adopted, Kings College in Pennsylvania had already developed growth plans in information literacy for students across the curriculum. For example, all senior level marketing majors are "to be able to design and implement sophisticated search strategies to conduct marketing research to support a Marketing Plan," and they must demonstrate their ability to do so by preparing "a Marketing Plan at a professional level for the introduction of a new product."8

Without faculty adopting such learning outcome statements, it will remain highly unlikely that most students will acquire the abilities they need for independent lifelong learning. What is particularly promising in the U.S. is that information literacy is being seriously promoted by two of the regional accrediting agencies. (American higher education as a voluntary regional approach for institutions meeting reasonable quality standards; among the benefits of achieving accreditation as qualifying for federal student loan funds.)

In summary, there are three converging movements that make this a most propitious time for promoting the goal of having all graduates prepared for independent lifelong learning. These are: (1) demands of external constituencies for graduates who are good communicators, critical thinkers, problem solvers and lifelong learners; (2) concern regarding the growing digital divide and; (3) the move to assessing student learning outcomes.

FOSTERING A COMMITMENT ON OUR CAMPUS

I had a mother who ensured that my upbringing was solidly anchored by some oft repeated admonishes (admonitions?) such as: "Don't let anybody rob you of the joy of the moment." (Good advice which I have passed on to my son.) Among these was a somewhat more humbling question: "Patricia, for a girl who is so intelligent, how can you be so stupid?" The value of this admonition has also proven itself over the years. For it really does not make any commonsense to increase adult literacy if people are not also empowered to locate and evaluate information that can improve their quality of life. Nor does it make much commonsense to understand the importance of people becoming information literate and motivating them to be effective lifelong learners if our institutions are not going to take practical steps to ensure that graduates systematically acquire information competencies.

So what commonsense steps should we commit to taking when we return to our campuses? What will it take to make this magical partnership flourish? Let me briefly outline six steps.

1) **Build partnerships.**
Seek out those on campus whose values include concerns related to information literacy and lifelong learning. There are a lot of initiatives in higher education that

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have in common a commitment to more active learning environments which are necessary to preparing students for independent lifelong learning (e.g. problem-based learning, undergraduate research, resource-based learning, and community service). Bringing leaders in such efforts together around common values, and building a shared vocabulary and vision can lay the groundwork for consolidating efforts and being more effective within limited campus resources.

2) Foster an environment for pedagogical change and enhancement.
There is another kind of campus partnership which is essential, i.e. the partnership of classroom faculty with library, academic computer, and instructional design personnel to design and facilitate the kinds of more active learning cited above. Such teamwork also needs to be accompanied by faculty development opportunities, so that all the instructional players can develop the skills and techniques to implement a significant pedagogical shift: the shift from focusing on faculty teaching to focusing on student learning.

3) Articulate, publish and disseminate information on student learning rights within today's Information Society.
Students who understand the what and why of the abilities they need to master can themselves go a long way toward mastering such abilities. Faculty who understand and have articulated to their students the benefits of their developing independent lifelong learning abilities are more willing to rethink how to structure learning opportunities to ensure their achievements. Such learning cannot be an add on or an extra library assignment but be integrated into curriculum and across the curriculum.

4) Institutionalize information literacy efforts.
This should be done at both the general education and discipline specific levels of the curriculum. General education courses should incorporate a systematic acquisition of fundamental information access, evaluation, and management skills which can serve as a basis for more targeted learning in advanced courses.

Within each major, planning should start with envisioning what practitioners in the various fields will need to do by way of accessing, evaluating, and using information. From that, determinations can be made as to what information literacy abilities are needed in the various work settings, and these should be articulated as desired learning outcomes. The next step is to determine how those abilities can best be mastered within existing curriculums.

Attention should be given to the particular challenges of transfer and distance education students as well as the differences caused by varying cultural backgrounds.

5) Guard against the lure of the Internet.
The Internet is a powerful tool if used thoughtfully, but it is not 'THE' answer to information access and lifelong learning. To be adequately prepared for lifelong learning, students need to have repeated experiences, throughout their studies, of using the full range of information resources including doing library-based research, conducting surveys, interviewing experts, going to government agencies and local history archives, etc.

6) Celebrate and reward accomplishments.
There is so much to do that far too often we fail to stop and assess how far we have come, which often leads to burnout in those who are the most committed to institutional change. It is a good idea to set goals and objectives among those committed to institutional change, assess progress annually, and to publicly celebrate accomplishments. Moreover, highlight successful faculty efforts in facilitating students' acquiring information literacy abilities; and documentation of outcomes (e.g. improved student research and projects) is a great way to encourage other faculty to adopt new approaches.

THE PERSONAL FACE OF LIFELONG LEARNING

So what about the people side of information literacy? Let me share a personal story with you. Years ago, before I had completed my BA, I had a work experience in a public library on the lower eastside of Manhattan. I worked in the children's room, and the children were 100% whatever they were. The Jewish children were orthodox, and the Chinese girls were so shy I had to guess what they wanted. In addition, the library had dozens of black and white photographs of immigrant children who had come through Ellis Island with their parents. The showed the children literally lined up for blocks waiting for the doors of the public library to
open. Their parents had sacrificed everything to come to America to gain a better future for their children, and that better life involved access to a library and the information it contained. In that children's room, years after those pictures were taken, I knew I was making a difference for the better in children's lives; and for the first time I began to understand the power of getting people to information they needed.

Now, many more years later, I chair the National Forum on Information Literacy, a broadly based group of almost 80 organizations committed to individual empowerment for quality life in today's information society (www.infolit.org). But the dream is the same: a better future for our families and our communities.

So, as I close, let me ask you a question. Which of you have children, grandchildren or some child that means a great deal to you? Please think about one of them for a minute. Envision the future you want for that very special young person. Now, the fact that you are here today bodes extremely well for that young person whom you are thinking about, being among the have in our world. But, if the digital divide continues to grow, the weight on society and government for supporting the have-nots will impact negatively on our loved one's future. It is, in fact, the future of my three grandchildren, and by transfer, the future of your children and grandchildren that drives me to promote information literacy goals as a necessity to quality education that results in independent lifelong learners.

So I ask each of you here to build effective partnerships on your campuses and in your communities to promote the opportunity for all people to develop the information literacy and lifelong learning abilities that will empower them to make effective use of information technology and resources. Such efforts, I believe, will prosper and be blessed, for in building up the "least of these" we are aligning ourselves with eternal priorities. Won't you please commit anew to such a calling today?!

9. Matthew 25:40