Employers Seek More Information Skills From New Hires

Project Information Literacy (PIL) is a non-profit organization dedicated to conducting research focusing on young adults’ research habits in the modern digital age. The PIL report, Learning Curve: How College Graduates Solve Information Problems Once they Join the Workplace, was released in October 2012. This is the initial report of a new research initiative. It highlights the gaps between the research skills of recent college graduates and the information competencies and strategies expected by their employers when they enter the job market.

The PIL study was conducted in collaboration with Harvard University’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society, where the Project Director Dr. Alison J. Head is also a Fellow. The research group conducted interviews with twenty-three employers across a variety of industries and locations, and held five focus group sessions with recent graduates of four U.S. colleges and universities. The following is a very brief summary of this report.

View of Graduates on the Job

Recent college graduates say the transition from college research assignments to workplace information problems is a culture shock. The deadline pressure is greater, “like there’s a perpetual thesis due,” as one recent graduate interviewed put it. Researchers believe this contributes to the tendency to seek the quickest answer they could find.

Information problems in the workplace are rarely as well-defined as they are in college. Also, problems are assigned with very little direction or support on the job. New hires feel disoriented by the combination of increased pressure and decreased direction.

The social aspect of information takes recent graduates by surprise. Sometimes the most efficient way to find information is to ask someone, but a new hire may be concerned about showing a lack of knowledge. One of the study participants admitted to being intimidated by “talking to strangers.”

Despite the information challenges that new hires face, they find

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Library’s Curriculum Materials Center:

The Curriculum Materials Center (CMC) has been an integral part of the Johnstown Campus Library since the Owen building opened in 1970. Its primary purpose is to support the needs of future teachers in the Education Division by providing resources teachers would use in their future roles. Although designed primarily to support the Education Division, the CMC is open to all students and faculty with no restrictions.

Located in Owen Library on the second floor in Room 206, the CMC houses two basic collections of material appropriate for children and young adults in a school setting, the Juvenile Literature collection and the curriculum materials collection. The Juvenile Literature collection ranges in content from early childhood to young adult levels, including material from Dr. Seuss to the *Hunger Games*. These are used by students for presentations and projects. Curriculum materials include textbooks ranging from elementary through high school levels. Teacher’s edition textbooks, guides and other workbooks, cover many different subjects, including language arts, science, mathematics, and reading. These assist student teachers in developing and executing lesson plans. There are also picture books for storytelling, educational videos, kits and games, including materials for seat work and manipulatives.

The relatively odd sizes of the books as compared to the general collection and special shelving needs for much of the material account in part to the practical decision to shelve these collections separate in their own room. Other material which supports general education subjects on an academic college level, such as teaching theory and history, educational psychology, learning, teaching strategies and child development are shelved in the general collection or the reference collection, as appropriate.

The CMC collection was greatly enhanced in the 1990’s as a result of the Education Division receiving an Eisenhower Grant for Math and Science education. Though the Eisenhower Grant funding ceased some years ago, the Library continues to support the Curriculum collection by acquiring new and relevant material, as well as reviewing the collection to ensure its condition.

New material is added each year to the CMC from faculty and student suggestions and by pursuing award winning titles recommended by professional organizations, such as the American Library Association, National Science Teachers Association, National Council for the Social Studies, the Children’s Book Council and others.

Congratulations Kindle Fire Raffle Winner!

Owen Library would like to congratulate freshman Keith Gratzer, the winner of the Kindle Fire in the SAILS 2012 raffle drawing. The drawing was held subsequent to the SAILS (Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills) survey. Nearly 800 students on the Johnstown Campus completed the SAILS Survey in the Fall term. The University of Pittsburgh offers the SAILS survey each year as a way of assessing students’ information literacy skills and compares the results to other universities. This year’s survey was open to all PITT students, in order to give the University a better picture of the year-to-year student progress in the development of their information skills. We appreciate everyone who participated in the survey.

Keith Gratzer (left) receives his new Kindle from Paul Bond, Library Instruction Coordinator.
many of the skills developed in college to be very valuable. The skills they listed as most important are the ability to evaluate information sources, critical thinking and analysis skills, the ability to synthesize information from multiple sources, and the ability to develop a research strategy through inquiry. Using the competencies acquired in college, they try to find ways to adapt to the workplace.

The Employer’s View

Employers place a high value on information skills. The PIL Report noted in the National Association of Colleges and Employers’ Job Outlook 2011, employers rated the “ability to obtain and process information” as one of the most important skills they look for in job candidates. The specific competencies they expect of graduates are the ability to find information independently, the ability to search beyond Google, and the ability to pull information together into an optimal solution.

The employers surveyed in the study were favorably impressed with the computer savvy skills of recent graduates, but pointed out some important competencies they found lacking. The first, which was also acknowledged by the graduates, was in the social aspect of information. New college hires often fail to engage their co-workers in research tasks and solving information problems. This was the most commonly cited deficiency of new hires. The second highest deficiency noted was the over-reliance on the internet in seeking information. Employers stated that workers are expected to also consult traditional resources, like reports, manuals and books. Most college hires, it was thought, relied too much on their computers and internet search engines to find the quickest answer.

New hires were also described as often lacking the patience and persistence to deal with print resources. Synthesizing information, “finding patterns and making connections” among data and information sources, is a struggle for many recent graduates. Performing in-depth and thorough research, a workplace requirement, was another problem. One employer cited the example of college graduates who found useful articles but didn’t bother to look through the references for additional information.

Summary of PIL Findings

In summary, some of the major findings from the interviews of employers and the focus groups include:

- Employers value search skills, especially placing high value on the ability to go beyond the use of search engines in finding information and identifying the best solution from all the information gathered.
- Employers noted that new hires often show a high level of computer proficiency, which hid some basic deficiencies, notably in the research techniques necessary to resolve information problems.

New hires tend to take the quickest route to an answer, rather than taking the time and effort to seek the best answer to resolve information problems.

- The majority of employers stated that new hires rarely look beyond their computer screens for information, noting that they tend to overlook the value of printed documents and telephone contacts.
- Graduates in the PIL focus groups said the skills developed in college helped them solve information problems efficiently, particularly skills in evaluation, reading and synthesis.
- Graduates recognize their skill gaps and try to adapt, typically through seeking mentors.

The new hire’s aversion to doing in-depth research has also been noted in other research studies. How Teens Do Research in the Digital World, a research report released in November 2012 from the Pew Internet & American Life Project (http://www.pewinternet.org/), states that tools like Google train people "to expect to be able to find information quickly and easily." Since Google generally gives searchers thousands of hits, it discourages thoroughness and using "a wide range of sources when conducting research." While Pew studied AP high school students, it is logical to expect this to continue through college and into the workplace.

What does this mean?

Project Information Literacy recognizes that their report “raises more questions … than it answers.” Obvious questions arise as the results of the study are reviewed…how can college students be better prepared to meet the expectations of future employers? How can these deficiencies be addressed before they graduate and enter the job market?

For instance, could/should…..

- assignments be designed to incorporate a greater variety of formats in the resources students use and develop competence?
- there be more opportunities for students doing in-depth, thorough research?
- more students be given projects that engage the social aspect of information, such as expert interviews, field experiences, or informational interviews?
- students take more advantage of experts on campus in developing their research strategies, including librarians?

You may access this important report online at: http://projectinfolit.org/pdfs/PIL_fall2012_workplaceStudy_FullReport.pdf

If you have comments or questions, feel free to contact Paul Bond, Library Instruction Coordinator at paulbond@pitt.edu or On x7287
This Spring, Cambria County will be reading *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett.

In Jackson, Mississippi, in 1962, there are lines that are not crossed. With the civil rights movement exploding all around them, three women start a movement of their own, forever changing a town and the way women--black and white, mothers and daughters--view one another.

In conjunction with the reading of *The Help*, Owen Library will be hosting a free showing of the feature film, *The Long Walk Home*, on Tuesday, March 26, 7-9 pm, in 138 Blackington Hall. Everyone is welcome to attend!

When Odessa Cotter, a quietly dignified woman who works as a housekeeper for Miriam Thompson honors the 1955 Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott by walking an exhausting nine miles to and from work, Miriam offers her a ride. Defying both Miriam's racist husband and the powerful White Citizen's Council, Miriam and Odessa put their lives in danger for civil rights. Their shared experiences draw them closer as a deep respect and lasting friendship forms. Together, in a difficult world of black versus white, they manage to discover a common ground.
These 1-hour workshops are free & everyone is welcome!

All workshops held in Owen 209

Please RSVP at least one week in advance by contacting Paul Bond at paulbond@pitt.edu or stopping at the Library Circulation Desk.
New on the Shelf


**When I Left Home: My Story**, by Buddy Guy with David Ritz.  ML419 .G86 A3 2012


The story of Susannah Cahalan and the life-saving discovery of the autoimmune disorder that nearly killed her -- and could perhaps be the root of "demonic possessions" throughout history.


Library Staff News

Julie Dewey
In October Julie Dewey departed Owen Library to accept another position on campus. She served in the position of Library Administrative Assistant for more than six years and was a valued member of the staff. Her smiling face and strong commitment to providing service to library users will be sorely missed.

She is now the Administrative Assistant in the Health & Wellness Center on the UPJ Campus. We wish her all the best in her new position!!

Tawny Vallana
Tawny Vallana started in January as the new Administrative Assistant in Owen Library. She has an Associate degree in Early Childhood Education and was employed the last five years at the Barbara Thompson Early Literacy Center, the last two years as director. The Barbara Thompson Early Literacy Center was featured in the documentary How to Choose a Quality Preschool. Her passions include reading non-fiction and spending time with her family. She has three children.

Stop by and welcome Tawny Vallana to the Pitt Johnstown Campus!!

Books with Movie Tie-ins

Life of Pi: a Novel, by Yann Martel. PS3555 .R42 R68 2012
The movie has received eleven Oscar nominations.

Movie has received seven Oscar nominations.

Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close, by Jonathan Safran Foer. PS3606 .O38 E97 2005

Basis for the movie Lincoln. Movie has received twelve Oscar nominations.

Movie has received eight Oscar nominations.

Film nominated for Best Foreign Language Film (Norway).

Hunger Games, by Suzanne Collins. PZ7 .C6837 Hun 2008

Anna Karenina, by Leo Tolstoy; translated from the Russian by Louise and Aylmer Maude. PG3366 .A6 1992
Movie has received four Oscar nominations.

National Book Award Winners

Fiction

Arts & Letters (nonfiction)
Behind the Beautiful Forevers: [Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity], by Katherine Boo. HV4140 .M86 B66 2012

Poetry

Young People’s Literature

Library Phone Numbers

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