

Rubric Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (RAILS)

Abstract

Rubric Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (RAILS) is a three-year (July 2010-June 2013) research project that investigates a rubric approach to information literacy (IL) assessment in higher education.

Need – Assessing student learning is a major focus of higher education institutions. To demonstrate impact on learning, academic librarians require a variety of assessment tools, including analytic rubrics. For students, analytic rubrics communicate what they need to learn, provide direct feedback, facilitate self-evaluation, and make scores meaningful. For teaching librarians, rubrics communicate agreed upon learning values, focus on standards, align with educational theory, and provide results that can be applied to improve instruction. In addition, rubrics provide librarians with inexpensive IL assessment tools that are usable over time or multiple programs, promote valid and reliable scores, and offer descriptive results data.

RAILS addresses five research outcomes. (A) To **develop and disseminate rubrics** to be used/adapted by librarians and faculty to assess IL learning outcomes. (B) To **develop and disseminate training materials** to prepare librarians and faculty to apply rubrics. (C) To **develop a data analysis model** for rubric assessment to ensure valid and reliable results. (D) To **investigate the characteristics** of librarians and faculty who produce valid and reliable assessments. (E) To **collect and share information** about the use of rubric assessment data to improve IL instruction and increase student learning.

The RAILS project consists of 5 phases and 2 iterations of the assessment cycle. **Cycle 1** includes Phases 1-5; **Cycle 2** repeats Phases 2-5. **Phase 1** – PI develops drafts of rubrics to assess IL outcomes. **Phase 2** – Academic librarians select one rubric to adapt and test on their campus. PI trains librarians to “norm” rubrics at their home institution. **Phase 3** – Librarians return to their home institutions and recruit librarians/faculty to participate in rubric norming and rating of student work samples. PI travels to institutions to train librarians/faculty. Participants complete a Rubric Evaluation Survey. **Phase 4** – PI analyzes data to determine the scoring expertise of each participant, identify “expert” scorers, and evaluate student skills. Aggregated data describing student learning is returned to each librarian’s institution. PI examines the Rubric Evaluation Surveys to analyze the skills/characteristics of librarians/faculty who are identified as expert scorers. **Phase 5** – Librarians complete Closing the Loop Surveys designed to 1) determine what instructional improvements resulted from their institution’s rubric assessment data and 2) gather evidence of increased student learning. PI disseminates assessment results and revised training materials via the RAILS website, conference presentations, publications, and LIS course content. **Cycle 2** – Phases 2-5 repeat, integrating lessons learned and revised materials developed in Cycle 1.

RAILS will produce the following impacts:

- Academic librarians will gain useful, generalizable tools that can be customized for local needs and be prepared to demonstrate the value of academic libraries, respond to calls for accountability, participate in accreditation processes, strengthen instructional programs, and improve student learning—both alone and in collaboration with faculty.
- Students participating in IL instruction in institutions of higher education will demonstrate increased learning due to improved instructional programs.
- Academic libraries will produce more reliable, valid, and descriptive data about their contributions to learning. As a result, they will adopt evidence-based decision making, reflective practice, and cultures of assessment; respond to calls for accountability with confidence; improve instruction to students; increase student learning; and serve as role models on their campuses.
- LIS students will espouse assessment as integral to a librarian’s professional ethics and gain skills required for leadership roles in academic libraries.
- The profession will benefit by demonstrating that librarians contribute to student learning.