

Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (SAILS) Phase III

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Mabee Library, Washburn University

Project Description

The Project for Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (SAILS) is a national pilot project involving the Association of Research Libraries, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), and Kent State University. The purpose of Project SAILS is to develop a standardized instrument for programmatic level assessment of cohorts of college students' information literacy skills that is valid and reliable. The assessment program developed allows librarians and administrators in higher education to determine if library instruction has an institutional impact on students' information literacy skills.

At each participating institution a minimum of 200 undergraduate students complete a Web-based or paper test. The Web-based test consists of 45 randomly-generated, multiple choice questions selected from a pool of approximately 252 questions (items). The paper test has four different versions, each containing from 31 to 34 multiple choice questions. The questions are designed to address certain information literacy "skill sets" as defined by the researchers, which are based upon the Association of College and Research Libraries' Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. Ideally, the testing takes place in a "highly monitored" environment in which students are together in a classroom or computer lab monitored by a librarian.

Phase I of the project took place in 2002-2003 with 14 participating institutions across North America. Phase II took place in 2003-2004 with 38 institutions and almost 14,000 student participants. Phase III, the third and final phase of the pilot, took place in 2004-2005 with 67 US and Canadian institutions and over 39,000 undergraduates participating. Administration of the SAILS survey will cease for a year while the project team analyzes the accumulated data, completely redesigns the system to eliminate the Web front end, and re-engineers the administrative tools to create a customer interface similar to that of LibQUAL+™. By the time of the American Library Association annual conference in 2006, the project team hopes to offer an improved product to libraries on a cost-recovery basis.

Project Methodology at Mabee Library

- Instruction librarians sent targeted announcements to all faculties and personally contacted known faculty, Assessment Committee members, the Assistant Director of Student Activities and Greek Life, English faculty, and Library Committee members to solicit faculty/student participation in the project.
- Participating faculty agreed to donate one or more class periods in which students would complete the SAILS test in a regular classroom or in the Library's electronic classroom.

- The Assistant Director of Technical Services worked with the SAILS team and Washburn's ITS department to develop the Web front end.

Timeline of SAILS at Washburn University

January 2005	Curriculum Resources Librarian attends Phase III meeting at ALA Midwinter meeting in Boston
February 2005	Instruction librarians begin contacting potential faculty participants
February-March 2005	SAILS testing period begins (Feb. 14-March 18)
March 2005	Excel Spreadsheet of student participants is sent to Institutional Research for demographic data
April 2005	Deadline to submit demographic data to SAILS team (April 22)
June 2005	Curriculum Resources Librarian attends Phase III meeting at ALA Annual meeting to obtain institutional report

Summary of Washburn University Results

The administration of a Web-based and a paper version of SAILS at Washburn University resulted in 359 useable responses (see the appendix for demographic characteristics of the test takers).

Results are reported by four of the five ACRL standards (Standard IV is not included) and by the 12 skill sets developed by the Project SAILS team. Each skill set is analyzed separately by student sex, ethnicity, class standing, major field of study, and where applicable, special code or group ID. All analyses use the average student response as a reference point or benchmark. This benchmark is based on a combined analysis of the SAILS test scores from all participating institutions.

How Washburn compares to the benchmark

- The average student at Washburn University performed on all standards at about the same level as the average student from all institutions combined.
- The average student at Washburn University was **more** likely to answer items correctly on Skill Set 1 (developing a research strategy), Skill Set 2 (scholarly communication/structure of disciplines), and Skill Set 5 (selecting search terms) than the average student from all institutions combined.
- The average student at Washburn University was **less** likely to answer items correctly on Skill Set 8 (evaluating and revising search results) than the average student from all institutions combined.

Recommendations

- Analyze, interpret, and communicate SAILS results to the Washburn community.

- Investigate other information literacy assessment tools, such as the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Educational Testing Services' ICT Literacy Assessment.
- Reassess the library instruction program in light of SAILS and other library assessment results.

Appendix

Demographic Characteristics of Test Takers.

Characteristic	Washburn (U.S.) (N=359)		All Institutions Combined - U.S. (N=30,804)		All Institutions Combined - Canadian (N=3,707)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Sex						
Female	201	56.0	15861	51.5	2319	62.6
Male	150	41.8	11988	38.9	1002	27.0
not reported	8	2.2	2955	9.6	386	10.4
Ethnicity - U.S. institutions						
African-American	19	5.3	1864	6.1		
American Indian	13	3.6	224	0.7		
Hispanic	15	4.2	2698	8.8		
Non-resident Alien	1	0.3	290	0.9		
Pacific Islander and Asian	3	0.8	1580	5.1		
White	221	61.6	17320	56.2		
not reported	87	24.2	6828	22.2		
Class Standing - U.S. institutions						
Freshman	33	9.2	15920	51.7		
Sophomore	52	14.5	4442	14.4		
Junior	110	30.6	3021	9.8		
Senior	124	34.5	3733	12.1		
Other	3	0.8	211	0.7		
not reported	37	10.3	3477	11.3		
Class Standing - Canadian institutions						
First Year					1037	28.0
Second Year					803	21.7
Third Year					804	21.7
Fourth Year					442	11.9
Other					87	2.3
not reported					534	14.4
Student G.P.A.						
<= 1.5	3	0.8	615	2.0	69	1.9
1.51 - 2.00	14	3.9	1489	4.8	73	2.0
2.01 - 2.50	44	12.3	2797	9.1	94	2.5
2.51 - 3.00	108	30.1	5981	19.4	152	4.1
3.01 - 3.50	92	25.6	5876	19.1	126	3.4
3.51 - 4.00	58	16.2	6188	20.1	364	9.8
not reported	40	11.1	7858	25.5	2829	76.3
Groups (n > 9)						
Group 0			16	4.5		
Group 2			13	3.6		
Group 3			127	35.4		
Group 4			29	8.1		
Student Major (Majors are listed only when there are four or more students in that major.)						
Business, Mgmt, Mktg			114	31.8	3445	10.0
Communication, Journalism			40	11.1	808	2.3
Computer and IS			4	1.1	372	1.1
Education			15	4.2	1916	5.6
Health Professions			12	3.3	2074	6.0
Parks, Rec., Leisure, Fitness			21	5.8	546	1.6
Psychology			32	8.9	1063	3.1
Public Admin. & Social Serv.			5	1.4	99	0.3
Security / Protective			6	1.7	279	0.8
Technology Education			7	1.9	35	0.1
Visual & Performing Arts			6	1.7	959	2.8

All other majors combined			17	4.7		
Not reported			80	22.3		