

Academic BRASS

Published by the
[BRASS Business Reference in Academic Libraries Committee](#)

Vol 8 (1), Spring 2013

Ann Agee
Senior Assistant Librarian
Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. Library
San Jose State University

Information Literacy In The Work World

As business librarians, we take pride in fostering the ability of students to find, evaluate and use information effectively. These abilities result in A+ research papers, but what happens after these students graduate? Will the work world appreciate the information literacy skills they have mastered? The short answer is: yes, a lot.

The term “information literacy” does not appear frequently in the workplace, but the skills it encompasses are critical in running a company effectively. Information management, knowledge management, critical thinking, decision making, complex problem solving—all of these are essential in business and all of them require the abilities librarians know as information literacy (Conley and Gill 219; Head et al 92; O’Connor 113).

In a national workforce study conducted by the University of Phoenix, when asked to name the most important skills evaluated in new hires, 82% of the respondents rated “critical thinking and problem solving” as very important (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation 4). Sixty-nine percent also rated “the ability to analyze and synthesize information” as very important. Both skills are key components of an information literate person.

Supporting these findings is a qualitative study of recent college graduates and their employers conducted by Project Information Literacy that found evidence that companies across a variety of industries value the online research skills new hires bring to the job. Examples of the new recruits’ tasks included “locating information about industry competitors, tax regulations, conference planning, or news coverage of a particular issue” (Head et al 86). Managers felt that their new employees should explore additional resources—such as the information available from their coworkers and print material—but their ability to find and evaluate information was highly appreciated by all 23 employers surveyed (Head et al 87).

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