Political Science Research Competency Guidelines

Approved by the ACRL Board July 1, 2008

Introduction

The following guidelines and associated examples developed by the Law & Political Science Section of ACRL (Association of College & Research Libraries) are intended to illustrate the application of information literacy standards to research in political science and related disciplines, including public administration, law, criminal justice and civic education. The core ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, from which these guidelines are adapted, can be found at http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/standards.pdf.

Political science research includes the use of typical academic sources such as scholarly journals and books, but it also relies heavily on primary sources that may be difficult for the undergraduate to find and understand. Notably among them are government documents produced by local, state, federal, or international bodies and data sets that can be analyzed with statistical software. The outcomes and the examples in this document reflect this diversity of sources expected in political science research.

These adapted standards are targeted to academic librarians who work with political science faculty to

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Standard One: Know and Plan	**Determines nature and extent of needed information.**

Performance Indicator:
1. Defines and articulates the need for information.

Outcomes:	**Examples:**
Identifies an area of interest or class topic and explores general information sources to increase familiarity with the topic.	Uses assigned readings, textbook, referenced sources (encyclopedias, handbooks), and news sources as appropriate; literature-search tools (such as PAIS); and consultations with faculty, librarians, and peers to develop lines of inquiry and identify what major issues and/or controversies characterize the topic.
Recognizes that a 30-page research paper, a policy memo, or an essay-type "response paper" will require different types of information.	Decides whether data needs to be collected or if statistical sources will suffice. Knows when scholarly articles referenced in a database or editorials appearing in the popular press are needed to develop the argument, theme, or literature review. Determines whether primary sources or secondary sources are necessary.
Defines or modifies the information need to achieve a manageable focus.	Selects a geographic area, demographic group, or institution, etc., to help define focus. Focuses on balancing issues of sovereignty with the issues of "morality" in a paper on the imposition of U.S. sanctions on a sovereign country for human rights abuses.
Identifies key concepts and terms that describe information need.	Gathers keywords related to the topic through reading background sources and knows keywords may include the names of laws, regulations, or court opinions; political actors; and words describing variables and theories.
Recognizes that existing information can be combined with original thought, experimentation, and/or analysis to produce new information. **F**	Compares statistics on child poverty among several different states and compare with state laws and regulations regarding "workfare" programs.
Develops a thesis statement or research question. Articulates appropriate theory on which to structure an answer and form investigative questions. **F**	Focuses on explanations of differences in turnout levels across Western European countries.
Chooses among different methodologies and explains their relative merits; Creates and carries out a formal research design. **F**	Develops a research design for an empirical investigation, including identifying hypotheses and variables (measurement and operationalization).

Performance Indicator:
2. Identifies a variety of types and formats of potential sources for information.

Outcomes:	**Examples:**
Knows how information is formally and informally produced, organized, and disseminated.	Understands that journal articles referenced in an academic periodical index are of a different nature than newspaper editorials, or that some commercial sources of data may be biased.

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Standard Two: Access	**Accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.**
Performance Indicator: 1. Selects the most appropriate information retrieval systems for accessing the needed information.	
Outcomes:	**Examples:**
Identifies appropriate investigative methods and determines their applicability and/or benefit. **F**	Determines whether to rely on published scholarship, primary data, case studies, or another method of researching. Chooses qualitative or quantitative research methods. If the latter, identifies major sources for statistical data.
Investigates scope, content, and organization of information retrieval systems. **L**	Navigates library's website for research recommendations. eterminesr3

Constructs a search strategy using appropriate commands for Internet search engines. **L**	Types quotes around the phrase “death penalty” to limit the search to the phrase. Uses + symbol next to Texas to require the word in the results. Selects the advanced search to learn how a particular search engine allows further search limits.
Implements the search strategy in various information retrieval systems using different user interfaces and search engines, with different command languages, protocols, and search parameters. **L**	Uses browseable Internet portals (such as SOSIG) and subject directories to pinpoint useful information on the Web.
Understands that databases, search engines, and indexes may range from covering a multidisciplinary area to a very specific aspect of political science, and chooses the most appropriate resource for the information need. **L**	Recognizes that *Academic Search Premier* and *Expanded Academic Index* cover multiple disciplines. Understands that *JSTOR* is a collection of high quality journals. Recognizes that *Worldwide Political Science Abstracts* and *PAIS* offer political science-specific references to journal articles.
Understands that aggregate data sources may range from covering a multi-subject or multi-geographic area to a very specific subject or locality and chooses the most appropriate resource.	Recognizes the difference between *Europa World Yearbook* vs. *India 2000.*

Performance Indicator:
3. Retrieves information online or in person using a variety of methods.

Outcomes:	**Examples:**
Uses various search systems to retrieve information in a variety of formats. **L**	Navigates the library”

Uses surveys, letters, interviews, data and other forms of inquiry to retrieve primary information.	Interviews local city planners about the role of developers in the city's decision-making process.
Saves information retrieved.	Saves, prints, or emails full text articles from databases.
Determines what information can be found locally.	Searches to determine what specific books, documents, or journals are available in his/her library.
Performance Indicator: 4. Refines the search strategy if necessary.	
Outcomes:	**Examples:**
Assess the quantity, quality, and relevance of the search results to determine whether alternative information retrieval systems or investigative methods should be utilized.	Determines that search on protectionism in a political science database is not comprehensive and may require searching in a related disciplinary database, such as Econlit.
Identifies gaps in information retrieved, determines if search needs revising.	Realizes that a search on trade and protectionism might be more focused by using search terms based on examples of protectionism such as "tariffs".
Repeats the search using revised strategy as necessary.	Searches additional databases, statistical sources, and/or websites for updated or more focused information as required to satisfy information need.

Performance Indicator:
4. Compares new knowledge with prior knowledge to determine the value added, contradictions, or other unique characteristics of the information.

Outcomes:	Examples:
Determines whether information satisfies the research or other information need.	Realizes that a search of LexisNexis, while useful in determining mainstream media views, will need also to use other indexes or sources, such as Alternative Press Index, to get alternative viewpoints on popular topics.
Uses consciously selected criteria to determine whether the information contradicts or verifies information used from other sources.	Evaluates information about HIV/STD prevention on CDC site.
Tests theories with discipline-appropriate techniques. **F**	Tests hypothesis on electoral participation using an

Performance Indicator: 7. Determines whether the initial query should be revised.	
Outcomes:	**Examples:**
Determines if original information need has	

Posts permission granted notices as needed for copyrighted material. **L**	Includes: Reproduced with permission: From The Scout Report, Copyright Internet Scout Project 1994-2005. http://scout.wisc.edu/.