

Hail: Hoosiers and Information Literacy

By Susan Clark

In October 2010, the Board of Directors for the Academic Libraries of Indiana (ALI) endorsed an initiative proposed by the membership of its Information Literacy Committee (ILC). Named HAIL—Hoosiers and Information Literacy—this project was developed to purposefully and actively involve Indiana librarians in a leadership role in the teaching and promotion of information literacy skills. This paper chronicles the development of the HAIL project.

In late summer, 2010, the Information Literacy Committee (ILC) of the Academic Libraries of Indiana (ALI) met to develop the committee's working plan for the coming year. The ILC membership determined based on the literature and what members were seeing in their libraries, that the time had come for a significant statewide effort to address information literacy needs across Indiana. In 2008, McAskill contended that academic librarians, in understanding the critical need for the development of strong information literacy skills, should step up to the challenge of assuming "the leadership role" (p. 3). This supported the belief of the ILC that ALI, 71 libraries strong, was in an excellent position to organize and coordinate such an effort.

In discussions leading to the creation of HAIL (Hoosiers and Information Literacy), the members of the ILC recognized that information literacy deficiencies that are maddeningly evident when students walk through the doors of their college libraries begin many years earlier—often from the time these students are infants. The literature observes that information literacy skills can be taught to toddlers, but the majority of preschool instructors do not have the opportunity to work with librarians to help determine instructional goals and develop the curriculum (Heider, 2009, p. 514). Prospects do not appear to improve in grade school or

Indiana Libraries, Vol. 31, Number 1

high school in Indiana, a matter of growing concern especially in light of recent cuts to library positions. ALI members supported a letter written by that organization's president to school administrators around the state expressing concern for the number of school librarian positions being cut just the previous year (A. W. Hafner, personal communication, June 28, 2010).

The mission of HAIL, the ILC determined, would be to incorporate the development of information literacy skills into all areas of Hoosier lives. However, if information literacy begins in the cradle, how could the academic librarians address the earliest years, how could they tackle the effort in grade schools and high schools, and how could they reach adult individuals with medical, social, or legal information needs? The ILC quickly realized that by themselves they could not be successful in this endeavor. This challenge would need to be shared by librarians from all areas of the profession: public, academic, school, health science, and special. In endorsing the HAIL initiative, the ALI Board of Directors voiced strong support for the idea of forming partnerships and alliances among the state's library community.

A golden opportunity for ILC members to spread the word about HAIL presented itself early in 2011 in the form of district meetings sponsored by the Indiana Library Federation (ILF). In almost all of the districts around the state, proposals were accepted for roundtable HAIL discussions. ILC members who volunteered to lead these discussions wanted to learn as much from those attending as they wanted to share the concept of HAIL and gather ideas for growing the initiative. From February through May, the ILC volunteers fanned out over the state and reported back to the main committee. What the discussion leaders learned was that librarians in Indiana

have a great interest in information literacy and are acutely aware of the need for individuals within their communities to be information literate, but the session leaders also learned about the information literacy challenges librarians face: the difficulty of raising awareness in their communities, a lack of understanding as to the definition of information literacy and its importance to the development of critical thinking skills, and that efforts made are not having enough of an impact. Happily for the HAIL project, session attendees at each district meeting expressed enthusiasm for the core idea of librarians from all over Indiana working together to tackle information literacy needs across the state.

Most of the librarians attending the HAIL sessions reported they were from public libraries, and a question repeatedly asked of the ILC discussion leaders concerned the action steps ALI and its Information Literacy Committee were planning with regard to the HAIL initiative. The discussion leaders emphasized that the academic librarians had recognized the need for librarian partnerships and joint efforts and that their goal was to welcome librarian voices from all areas of the profession so that everyone—not just a few—could work together to determine the direction for HAIL and the initiatives that would make up its composition.

When the ILC members who attended the ILF district conferences reported back to the larger group, a small ILC subcommittee was formed to plan an information literacy gathering that would attempt to bring stakeholders together in the summer of 2011. The ILC planning team determined that the best approach for this first gathering would be to host a daylong Information Literacy Summit and invite officers from the state's library organizations and representatives from the State Library and the Department of Education. The event was scheduled for July to allow school librarians to participate.

At a Saturday lunch gathering in late winter, a small group of ILC members met with a few school librarians at their request to share

more about the HAIL project and to gather thoughts and ideas from their constituency's perspective. Like the public librarians, the school librarians who attended the lunch, members of the Association of Indiana School Librarian Educators (AISLE), were very enthusiastic about a statewide effort that would bring librarians together to discuss the issue of information literacy. They recalled the ALI letter of support from the preceding year and expressed hope that the HAIL initiative would help to make a difference in the lives of school-age children and, at some point, cause school administrators and school boards to rethink the need for school librarians in the crucial effort of creating information literate students.

Invitations were sent in February to Indiana library officers and organization leaders. In the invitation, each group represented was asked to prepare a brief presentation in which they would discuss, from their constituency's view, the current state of information literacy as well as challenges, opportunities, and possible goals for the future. The ILC planning team determined that rather than bring in an information literacy expert to speak to attendees, for this first summit the emphasis should be on meeting one another, sharing thoughts and experiences relative to the topic, and beginning the process of becoming an active working body. On the day of the summit, the organizations represented were:

Association of Indiana School Library Educators
Indiana Academic Library Association
Indiana Black Librarians Network
Indiana Chapter of Special Libraries Association
Indiana Department of Education
Indiana Public Library Association
Indiana Health Sciences Librarians Association
Indiana Library Federation- Instruction and Education Division
Indiana Library Federation
Indiana Online Users Group
Indiana State Library

In the presentations, some of the themes addressed included the growing need for information literacy skills for people seeking

medical care; the information literacy component which will be included in all areas of the Common Core Standards set to be fully implemented in all grades in Indiana by 2014-2015; efforts to teach information literacy skills to preschool children; and providing fundamental skills in information access and use for people looking for work, planning retirement, paying taxes, and the countless other occurrences in life that send individuals on the search for information.

During the last session of the day, attendees separated into six groups and were given the task of providing the ILC with at least three suggestions for next steps for the HAIL project. The summit leaders assured attendees that their suggestions would be considered by the full committee. After meeting separately, the groups came together and concluded a successful summit with a review and discussion of suggested next steps.

In August, the ALI Information Literacy Committee met for its annual planning meeting. After reviewing and evaluating the summit itself, members turned to the topic of the HAIL project and plans for that effort in the coming year, and the suggestions of next steps were discussed. Suggestions included determining ways to efficiently and effectively communicate with the larger group now established (Summit attendees and ILC members), continuing to raise awareness of HAIL, consideration of outreach efforts with regard to teacher education programs, and conducting surveys and gathering statistics.

After considerable discussion, ILC members agreed that the first "next step" would be working through ALI to establish a listserv devoted to the HAIL project and those wishing to actively participate in the initiative in order to facilitate and encourage discussion and information sharing. Secondly, four working groups were established: PR/Marketing, Teacher Education, Outreach, and Professional Development.

For this phase of the project, a third step addressed assigning each working group a

facilitator from the ILC whose responsibilities include welcoming participants to the group, formulating a list of goals for the group, arranging a first meeting, and serving as the group liaison to the ILC. From the point of the first meeting, each working group will decide on its leadership (not necessarily academic librarians) and the work of the group will begin. Groups will interact and keep each other informed primarily through the newly established HAIL listserv, report regularly to the ILC, and pursue initiatives approved and/or suggested by the ILC and the ALI Board of Directors.

At this point, the working group facilitators have established initial goals and have started the process of setting up group meetings. The ILC continues to actively recruit members interested in joining the listserv and becoming active participants in the HAIL working groups. The HAIL project is still very new and much time and effort will be needed for its impact to be felt around the state. Of course, adding to the challenge is the fact that busy, working librarians in all areas of the profession, already with plenty on their plates, have taken on this huge responsibility of moving information literacy instruction forward. But since the evidence indicates that information literacy is vital to our state and its citizens, it is now up to HAIL members and others joining the effort to raise awareness of the meaning of information literacy, to promote and develop initiatives that actively teach information literacy skills in all areas of life, and to build programs in schools and colleges across the state that firmly establish a commitment to the incorporation of information literacy in all areas of the curriculum. To this point, McAskill (2008) observes that librarians in educational institutions have the "responsibility to ensure that their faculty teaching partners understand what it is and how it will benefit not only students but faculty as well" (p.13). Of course, librarians strongly believe faculty will not prove difficult to convince.

Given the economic, social, and educational challenges the state and the country face today, it should not be difficult to convince

anyone of the growing need for people to possess this critical skill set. Of course, there is recognition that what should be does not always match reality, but as school librarians begin to partner with academic librarians in dual credit initiatives, and hospital administrators come to see the value in medical librarians partnering with public librarians to provide health-related information literacy instruction to seniors, there exists the hope that Indiana citizens will agree with the conviction expressed in the report on the High-Level Colloquium on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning held in Alexandria, Egypt, in 2005 that being information literate means that an individual has learned how to learn, and that ability, in turn, is the key to lifelong learning (Garner, 2006).

REFERENCES

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BIO

Susan Clark received her MLS from Indiana University-Indianapolis. Her professional experience includes working as a reference

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The mission of HAIL is to actively promote information literacy efforts beginning with Indiana's youngest citizens and continuing through adulthood to foster in Hoosiers skills for finding the information they need and the ability to use that information effectively while building a knowledge base that will serve them throughout their lives.

For information about joining the HAIL initiative, please contact Susan Clark at jsclark@ivytech.edu.