

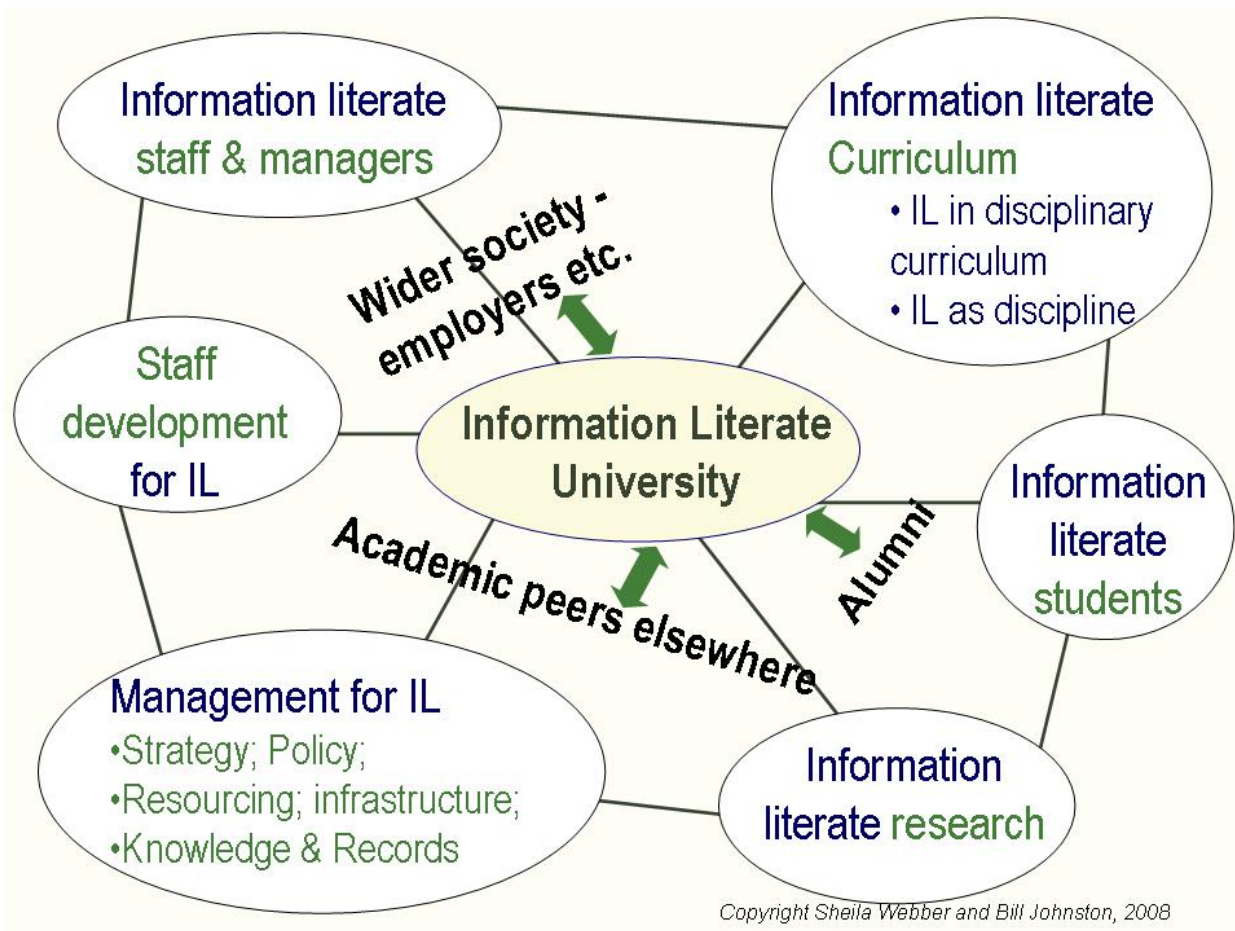
## The Information Literate University

Supporting note for a discussion held in **Infolit iSchool** (in the virtual world, **Second Life** (SL), 26 Feb 2008 at 12 noon SL time

The chatlog (transcript of the discussion) is at <http://sleeds.org/chatlog/?c=236>

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Sheila introduced the idea of the ILU with reference to this notecard (handout) and the following diagram:



### What is the Information Literate University (ILU)?

This concept was developed by Sheila Webber and Bill Johnston (real life names). It is expressed graphically in the above diagram. To quote from Webber and Johnston (2006), this "diagram identifies as linked constituents of the ILU:

- "- Management for information literacy: strategy, resourcing, policy and infrastructure;
- "- Information literate research;
- "- Information literate students and graduates;
- "- Information literate curriculum; acknowledging information literacy as a subject of study, and encompassing learning, teaching and assessment;
- "- Staff development for information literacy;

"- Information literate librarians.

"Our vision of the ILU requires everyone in the university become information literate, whether administrators, students, researchers, librarians or academics. Management for information literacy implies rethinking internal communication and structures. It could also mean greater ability to function as a knowledge-creating organisation and more a creative response to an increasingly complex external environment. *Academic peers elsewhere* and the *Wider society* (including employers) are also represented on our diagram as elements in the ILU. An ILU can be seen as a response to a fast changing Information Society."

### **What is different about this?**

We think the difference lies in thinking about taking an information literate approach to the whole organisation, not just to particular functions. Universities create, manage and share a great deal of information, and they (and their communities) would benefit by be information literate in the way they do this. It would imply disseminating and sharing information with the local community and with the wider world in an information literate way; managing staff and student records in an information literate way, and so forth.

### **Perspectives on the ILU.**

In our research into UK academics' conceptions of information literacy we asked them about how they might conceive of an ILU. They came up with some very interesting ideas (see Webber and Johnston, 2006; Webber and Johnston, 2004). As an example, to quote from a Civil Engineering faculty member "it's almost like an ideal like an exchange of knowledge and experience and skills, um... and an university that is highly information literate would provide access to information and advice to a much larger constituency than just students [...] an information literate university, I would say, is one that enables those kinds of enriching process of where people interact in many, many unplanned and unlooked-for ways, but you have to enable that... you need buildings and communication methods that break down barriers and help people to bump into one another so that ideas flow." (Civil Engineering 16)

It was the responses from academics, in particular, which encouraged us to pursue the idea.

### **Indicators of an Information Literate University**

Some indicators for an ILU are proposed in Webber and Johnston (2006): we list characteristics relating to three levels of information literacy: embryonic; intermediate and what we term "Threshold ILU".

Characteristics are identified in relation to Management; Librarians; Approach to learning and teaching; Students; Academics.

The "Threshold ILU" characteristics are given here as an example (copyright Webber and Johnston: please cite Webber & Johnston (2006) if you copy them)

#### **Students**

- Information Literacy is named as a Graduate Attribute
- Students cannot graduate until they have demonstrated that they are information literate
- Students understand what is meant by "information literacy" and can give an account of the stage they have reached in their education for information literacy
- Students recognise the value of information literacy. They recognise it as a real subject of study upon which they have to expend effort in order to achieve success and they see its relevant to their future lives

#### **Management:**

- Information literacy is mentioned in strategic documents, such as the teaching and learning plan
- The person with management responsibility for information and library services (i.e. including information literacy) is involved in decisions on, and is informed about, issues which are strategic to the university.

- A good information literacy programme is seen as a Unique Selling Proposition (USP) which the university mentions when it is promoting the university to prospective students etc. Librarians are involved in recruitment and retention campaigns.
- Academics and senior managers have an understanding of what information literacy is
- People talk about information literacy "education" rather than "training"

### **Academics**

- Discussion of information on Information literacy is included routinely as part of a new lecturer's induction programme.
- Academics cite their teaching of information literacy as evidence of their own good teaching (e.g. in applying for teaching excellence awards)
- Librarians work with academics in developing new courses and modules
- Academics consult with them on information literacy education when changing a course
- Academics respect librarians' expertise and use librarians as consultants in areas concerning information literacy
- Academics and librarians have worked together to map information literacy progression into individual courses of study, and can indicate learning outcomes for each level of study

### **Librarians**

- Librarians, academics and students have a clear idea of their own and each others' involvement and responsibility in the learning process
- A substantial proportion of librarians have "Information Literacy" in their job title and/or information literacy education is described in their job description as being a key part of their job.
- The majority of librarians understand and enjoy their role as educators, and are reflective practitioners, developing their own approach to teaching
- Some librarians have teaching qualifications gained with the support of the library.
- There is regular discussion and exchange of experience amongst librarians about teaching, learning and assessment. There are formal and informal channels to foster sharing of experience
- Librarians are able to identify good and bad teaching practice amongst their colleagues and academics, and are confident in their dealings with academics
- There is collaboration with IT services and those providing academic support
- All librarians have a good, holistic understanding of information literacy and many keep up-to-date with developments in the subject

### **Approach to Learning, Teaching and Assessment**

- Academics and librarians have worked together to map information literacy progression into individual courses of study, and can indicate learning outcomes for each level of study
- Information literacy is assessed and assessed work is credit bearing
- A variety of teaching learning and assessment modes and methods are used, as appropriate to the specific topic.

Webber, S. and Johnston, B. (2006) "Working towards the information literate university." In Walton, G. and Pope, A. (Eds) *Information literacy: recognising the need. Staffordshire University, Stoke-on-Trent: 17 May 2006*. Oxford: Chandos. pp 47-58. <http://dis.shef.ac.uk/sheila/staffs-webber-johnston.pdf>

Webber, S. and Johnston, B. (2004) "Perspectives on the Information Literate University." *SCONUL focus*, (33). <http://www.sconul.ac.uk/publications/newsletter/33/12.pdf>

**Sheila Webber, March 2008**