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LILAC: Planted at CUNY Ten Years Ago and Still Blooming

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LILAC: Planted at CUNY Ten Years Ago and Still Blooming

by Galina Letnikova (LaGuardia)

CUNY's Library Information Literacy Advisory Committee (LILAC) will celebrate its tenth anniversary in February 2015. A decade ago twenty librarians from all CUNY libraries came together to review the mission of a new professional committee and establish its charge. Since then the committee members have been working hard and have succeeded in integrating information literacy across the City University curriculum. They have been creating information literacy tutorials and assessment tools, providing support to all CUNY librarians by coordinating and running professional development meetings, seminars, and conferences. This CUNY-wide professional organization, its structure, achievements, and ongoing work deserve to serve as a model of a successful voluntary professional development management group.

In order to reconstruct the history of the committee the author interviewed some of its past and present members and searched through archival papers and documents. I would like to express great appreciations to the interviewees: Curtis Kendrick, University Dean for Libraries and Information Resources; Marie Cimino Spina, Institutional Archivist and Public Service Librarian at LaGuardia Community College; Professor Alexandra de Luise, Coordinator of Instructional Services at Queens College Rosenthal Library; Professor Mariana Regalado, the Head of Information Services at the Brooklyn College Library; and Professor Robert Farrell, Coordinator of Information Literacy and Assessment at Lehman College Leonard Lief Library. Also, I would like to thank Professor Alexandra de Luise's for giving to me access to LILAC's archival papers starting from the beginning of 2005. And special gratitude goes to the first LILAC's co-convener, Dr. Lucinda Zoe, who is now Dean for Undergraduate Studies of CUNY.

The CUNY library system embraces 28 academic libraries with more than 350 librarians who all have faculty status. As faculty members, CUNY librarians provide students and departmental faculty with a high level of professional library services, and, at the same time, the librarians do research, publish, teach, and lead information literacy programs. CUNY Central Office of Library Services (OLS), directed by the University Dean for Libraries and Information

Resources, in collaboration with CUNY Council of Chief Librarians pays close attention to the information literacy projects across the University. The idea of a CUNY-wide Information Literacy initiative started right after the Middle States Commission on Higher Education had revised its standards for accreditation and identified information literacy as an essential element of any general curriculum. The draft of updated Middle States Commission on Higher Education guidelines was published in November 2000[1]. Shortly after that, on April 16, 2001 CUNY's Council of Chief Librarians reviewed University Library related policies and published a *CUNY Council of Chief Librarians Information Literacy White Paper* [2] which defined a much more significant participation for librarians as faculty in students' education.

"The White Paper, drafted by chief librarians on each campus, received wide recognition and excited many of us" remembers Alexandra de Luise. "I was certainly excited when it first came out. It called for CUNY-wide recognition of information literacy, with training, partnerships, ongoing studies, and campus task forces. The White Paper invited University provosts to appoint the task forces with "not only librarians, but those with knowledge of learning theory, instructional design and testing, and teaching faculty who already incorporate IL in their teaching"[3] to sit on it. Not every piece came to fruition, but it set the stage for the formation of the LILAC Committee."

According to Dr. Lucinda Zoe an **Information Literacy Working Group** was formed by CUNY Central Office of Library Services in 2000. The Working Group investigated a number of Information Literacy tutorials and selected nine tutorials from "Information Competence Project" developed at Colorado State University. The rights to use and modify these tutorials were arranged for CUNY. By January 2002 the Working Group had modified the first of the nine tutorials. It was a hard and challenging process. Mariana Regalado and Marie Spina were with the Working Group from the beginning. "It was successful in the sense that we did it and we worked really-really hard at it. But we also learned the hard way how very difficult is to maintain a useful tutorial on volunteer time" says Marian Regalado. Marie Spina adds to it: "we had little or no technical web design skills; no special web designer was part of the group." The Working Group's activities and challenged faced by its members proved the need for a larger professional organization dealing with the issues. The formation of LILAC became a logical development for the process of integrating the information literacy to the University curricula.

"We started LILAC in 2004 because we believed that a group with a broader purview with regard to coordinating information literacy across CUNY libraries was needed" says Mariana Regalado and continues: "We saw it as opportunity to advise the University Librarian on issues related to information literacy, as well as to coordinate information literacy across CUNY."

Alexandra de Luise continues: "LILAC was charged to form a committee in the fall of 2004 but began meeting a short time later, in February 2005. The original charge can still be found online, at: http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/OLS/Lilacadmin/committee-charge.html. It took its energy and most of its early members from an earlier Information Literacy Working Group devoted solely to the CUNY Competency tutorial. It had the very important job of selecting and adapting a set of already-created tutorials that would be customized to the CUNY environment."

From the beginning all committee members were Coordinators of Instruction at the individual colleges or actively involved in teaching Library courses. Key members in the early years were: Jerry Bornstein who had been with the Newman Library of Baruch College since 1994, Kathy Killoran from John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Miriam Laskin from Hostos College Library, Alexandra de Luise from Queens College, Edward Owasu-Ansah from College of Staten Island Library, Mariana Regalado from Brooklyn College, Marie Spina from LaGuardia Community College, Polly Thistlethwaite (now she is a Chief Librarian at the CUNY Graduate Center), Tess Tobin from NYC College of Technology Library, and others.

Curtis Kendrick, University Dean for Libraries and Information Resources, recalls the early days of the committee: "I began my tenure as University Librarian in September 2004, and LILAC was formed around that time. The purpose of LILAC was to inform me and the Council of Chief Librarians of matters relating to information literacy, and to provide a forum for practitioners to come together to discuss IL and related subjects. I do recall a lot of enthusiasm and energy for the committee as it began. People were very interested in sharing what they were working on. After a while the group began to coalesce more to have a university-wide perspective, and I think that perspective continues to this day."

The name of the new committee was easy to choose. By that time there was a well-functioning CUNY Electronic Resources Advisory Committee (ERAC). "How the name – LILAC – was selected, why? Well, we knew it was the IL Advisory Committee, so adding Library to the beginning made sense to us, though we talked about it a bit. In a way there didn't seem to be any way to avoid it," noticed Mariana Regalado.

The initial structure of LILAC was subcommittee-driven. Each subcommittee had its own tasks, meetings, members, and a junior and senior co-chair. This structure was considered to be flexible and the idea was that committees would be formed and unformed as necessary. From 2005 to 2011 LILAC had four subcommittees: Articulation, Assessment, Information Literacy Tools, and Public Relations.

The Information Literacy Working Group became, **The Information Literacy Tools** subcommittee which had a task of "creating a tutorial that would be accessed by all students and would serve as an assessment tool of Information Literacy" says Marie Spina. Later the tutorials created by Working Group were moved from University Central Office of Library Services website to Hostos College server and was even translated into Spanish.

The **Articulation subcommittee** was charged to develop common objectives and information literacy standards for all CUNY students.

The **Assessment subcommittee** was developing common assessment rubrics that would provide transparent criteria for information literacy skills evaluation and would be easy to use.

The **Public Relations subcommittee** was charged to create LILAC's website that would provide CUNY faculty with the resources needed to successfully integrate information literacy into their curricula. The website would reflect the work done by LILAC and by Information Literacy

groups of the individual CUNY campuses. At the same time it would be designed in a way to be compliant and uniform with all of CUNY's webpages.

In 2008 new CUNY learning objectives for students across the university were created by LILAC, approved by the Council of Chief Librarian and by CUNY Provost's Council, and posted on CUNY Portal. Answering the interview questions Curtis Kendrick wrote: "I've been very impressed by LILAC's ability to work across the system to develop CUNY-wide information literacy learning goals and objectives. One of the first LILAC projects was an articulation survey on information literacy outcomes that paved the road to development and outline of the learning goals and objectives for students through 60 credits, and later to the draft of information literacy guidelines of skills for students through 120 credits."

Robert Farrell, the present LILAC's co-convener, says "I think the early articulation surveys and the outcomes for students at 60 credits document were important ways LILAC has helped the libraries become less insular. LILAC has really helped bring some transparency to what people are doing across campuses with respect to teaching and learning and that's been its biggest contribution from the beginning."

By 2008 there were a large number of new electronic tools that could be used by faculty and students increasing their interest in building information literacy initiatives, and attracting collaborative opportunities. The new goal for LILAC members became sharing information literacy related resources for use across all CUNY campuses. Trying to find new and more effective ways to serve the purpose of the committee LILAC members slowly shifted its focus towards organizing efforts around projects through working groups.

Robert Farrell: "This allowed us to be more flexible about taking on new projects/ initiatives. To some degree, we've become more decentralized. Anyone on the committee can propose new projects and can find associate members in CUNY to help with them once those projects are approved. We've also cut down on the amount of minutes/formal meetings that occur over the course of the year, thereby avoiding some bureaucratic busywork and freeing people up to do other things. "

Currently LILAC members concentrate their efforts on a few ongoing projects.

The project, **Integrating Information Literacy in the Disciplines,** is focused on the development of an innovative CUNY-wide model for integrating information literacy in the disciplines. LILAC holds workshops dedicated on helping library and disciplinary faculty to collaboratively articulate desired information seeking behaviors for CUNY graduates in the disciplines. At this time five colleges within CUNY system are at various stages of piloting the project. There are more workshops scheduled by LILAC for the 2014-2015 academic years and beyond. Robert Farrell noticed that "seeing the "Integrating Information Literacy in the Disciplines" project beginning to pick up steam" has been the "most rewarding experience as a professional so far."

The other rolling project has a goal to explore CUNY Collaboration with New York public libraries. LILAC members meet with the representatives from NYPL, Brooklyn Public Library

and Queens Public Library to discuss the ways how academic and public libraries can help each other in serving current library mission and workflows. Newly named, **CuPL – Public Libraries & CUNY Collaboration,** conversations on collaboration are emerging for 2014-2015. Shawn(ta) Smith-Cruz, Reference Librarian at the Graduate Center is the contact for developments on CuPL.

The project, **Guide on the Side Sandbox,** should be mentioned as well. Mariana Regalado says that she has "high, if tempered, hopes for our current exploration of the Guide on the Side project" targeting the creation of online tutorials which would be embedded in the CUNY libraries' electronic databases.

According to Robert Farrell the committee members also have "been engaged in more outreach of late to other parts of the University. We've also made presentations to the university's Coordinated Undergraduate Education Committee, the cross campus WAC/WID groups, and the University's Centers for Teaching and Learning group. We're beginning, he says, to present at conferences on some of LILAC's work, which is a new thing as well."

It is necessary to mention at least few recent professional events sponsored and co-sponsored by LILAC for CUNY librarians and for larger audience:

In April 2012 a session co-sponsored by LILAC and Gale, a Cengage Learning Company "Workplace Readiness?: Gaps in Critical Thinking Skills of Early Career Professionals " gave a chance for librarians and disciplinary faculty to hear how they were doing in preparing early career professionals with the critical thinking skills needed to succeed in the workforce. Representatives of the employers from various fields were invited to John Jay College of Criminal Justice to speak with librarians, subject faculty, and CUNY career development specialists.

In May 2013 "Computers and Crowds: Unexpected authors and their impact on scholarly research," an exciting half-day session took place in the Graduate School of Journalism. Librarians from all CUNY colleges were introduced to a new content production models by Google and other search engines.

In Spring 2014 during the workshop "From Stale to Stellar: Practical innovations for teaching information literacy" practical ways to reinvigorate Library Instruction were discussed, including new instructional approaches such as flipped instruction, gaming, and distance learning.

In Fall 2014 LILAC collaborated with ACRL NY and Barnard College Library a very well attended program "Librarians on the Threshold: An Overview and Panel Discussion of ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education."

The committee pays great attention to its members' professional development and intellectual stimulation inviting well-known professionals to speak at the LILAC's meetings. Our guests were: Professor Trudi Jacobson, Head of the Information Literacy Department for the University at Albany Libraries and co-chair of the ACRL IL Competency Standards Task Force discussing new information literacy threshold concepts and using of badges to motivate students' learning,

Professor Di Su, Head of Reference from York College, who presented his new book "Library Instruction Design: Learning from Google and Apple," and Professor Brian Winterman of Indiana University who spoke on his library database project called ILIAD (http://iub.libguides.com/iliad.

When asked "How do you see the future of LILAC?" the interviewees responded:

I hope that LILAC will find useful ways to create learning objects that can serve all CUNY libraries. I think a challenge for CUNY libraries as a whole is to find better ways to support the establishment and maintenance of shared learning objects.

— Mariana Regalado

I am very hopeful that collaboration will continue to be encouraged. Our students need and deserve guidance we can provide for the essential cognitive role inherent in what we call information literacy.

— Marie Spina

Through the committee work and meetings we have held I have had the privilege for these past ten plus years, of learning from other colleagues doing similar or more interesting things at their libraries. They have given me great ideas, they have motivated me and their energy and commitment have inspired me.

— Alexandra de Luise

I would like to see LILAC work towards developing a "CUNY philosophy" of teaching and learning in the libraries, something that allows us to coordinate our efforts and leverage our resources to increase our professional abilities through professional development.

— Robert Farrell

"I would like to see LILAC become integrated into the work that is being done between CUNY and the NYPL Department of Education. The current DOE/CUNY Collaborative has developed one model that has been more curriculum based, but I think there are other avenues that can be explored between the two systems that speak more directly to information literacy. I think too that there is a lot more work that needs to be done in reaching out to faculty to help them understand their responsibility in fostering information literacy among students."

— Curtis Kendrick

[1] http://www.msche.org/publications/Developing-Skills080111151714.pdf

[2] http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/OLS/LILAC/infoliteracy/whitepaper.pdf

[3] http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/OLS/LILAC/infoliteracy/whitepaper.pdf