Library Minutes for April 25, 2016

Present: Adrian Blevins, Adrianna Paliyenko, Anna Herling, Clem Guthro, Marilyn R. Pukkila, Raffael Scheck, and Tasha Dunn.

At the end of AY 2014-2015, the expanded library committee recommended in its final report that the College (1) form a planning committee and (2) have a serious conversation about information literacy as soon as possible. Although the planning committee has been formed and is at work, the library committee fears that concerns about students’ information literacy problems are not being fully addressed.

Lisa McDaniels, Assistant Director of Scholarly Resources and Service, gave a talk to inform the committee of just what “information literacy” really is and to share what research is finding about students’ information literacy nationwide. The story is not pretty: 82% of college students in the US “go to Wikipedia to obtain background information,” 80% “don’t ask librarians for help,” and “the majority of students say research is more difficult for them than ever before.”

Most in the library committee agreed that they are encountering much the same problems at Colby, admitting also that information literacy is a much more complicated problem (or educational opportunity) in the Internet Age than it was in earlier centuries (suggesting that old solutions like reference desks can’t work as before), since, in addition to “meta literacy,” students need “data literacy” and “visual literacy” in order to function well not only at Colby and other educational institutions, but, in fact, in what is for some reason called the “real world.”

The committee agreed also that students are not getting enough experience with or time in the library, and that it is the college’s responsibility to teach students the skills they will need to function in the information-rich world long after they graduate from college. Raffael Scheck mentioned that the use of books should also part of information literacy training because we can no longer take it for granted that students know how to use a physical book or even an e-book (browsing, looking for the index, the introduction, the conclusion, potentially an abstract).

A discussion ensued about how we might get the students the research skills they desperately need. Should there be a full-semester seminar? Who would teach it and what would the implications be on library staffing? Should the information be taught as part of the Writing Program? How would this work given the variance of needs and preferences across departments and programs? Should library staff have a conversation with each department and program to figure out what would work best on a more individual basis? How would the college get faculty buy-in?

There was no general agreement as to the best method for instruction, but library staff and committee members agree that a concrete proposal for an information literacy program should be a major agenda item for next year’s library committee.