

INFORMATION LITERACY INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES FOR UNDERGRADUATE MUSIC STUDENTS

A Project of the Music Library Association,
Bibliographic Instruction Subcommittee

By Paul Cary and Laurie J. Sampsel

The Music Library Association (MLA) Reference and Public Service Committee's Bibliographic Instruction Subcommittee has created a set of information literacy instructional objectives for undergraduate music majors based upon "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education" (ACRL Standards) developed by the American Library Association's (ALA) Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL).¹ The subcommittee began by first attempting to adapt the five ACRL competency standards for music, but later decided that instructional objectives would be more specific, concrete, measurable, and thus potentially more useful for music information literacy efforts. The instructional objectives presented below (MLA Objectives) include the full text of ACRL's document with music-specific objectives inserted as needed, and have been approved by both the MLA Board of Directors and ACRL. This introduction explains the need for a music-specific information literacy tool; describes the subcommittee's goals, models, and process; and concludes with a few suggestions for implementation.

Music librarians, generalist librarians, and music faculty have been teaching college students how to use music libraries and the information in them for decades. This instruction takes place in one-on-one or group settings (both small and large) in the library, in the classroom, and, more recently, in the online environment. It takes the form of face-to-face instruction, annotated bibliographies, pathfinders, library scavenger hunts, research papers, online tutorials, chat, and instant messaging.

First published in *Notes*, 62, no. 3 (2006): 663-679.

Paul Cary is director, Jones Music Library, Baldwin-Wallace College. Laurie J. Sampsel is associate professor and faculty director, Howard B. Waltz Music Library, University of Colorado, Boulder. The members of the MLA Bibliographic Instruction Subcommittee who contributed to this project in addition to the authors are Karen Burke, Beth Christensen, Judy Marley, Kristina Shanton, and Cheryl Taranto.

1. Association of College and Research Libraries, "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education" (approved 18 January 2000), <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm> (accessed 23 November 2005).

The collections involved range from small music collections that are integrated into main campus libraries to large, independent music libraries that hold hundreds of thousands of volumes. Some students are performers who want to play their instruments at the highest possible level. Others are budding educators or musicologists with strong interests in particular areas of knowledge. Some instruction is delivered in “one-shot” sessions that may be less than an hour long, with little opportunity for follow-up. Other circumstances allow for semester-long courses at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Expectations vary widely from just knowing that there is a music collection to writing documented research papers on obscure topics.

Despite this diversity of objectives, approaches, and resources, music librarians have always sought common ground. We want to know what others are teaching, how they are teaching, and what we might learn from their methods. We want assurance that we are teaching the right things and that our students will be prepared as they go on to the next stage of their lives, professional or educational.

Evidence of this search for common ground can be found in the prevalence of programs on user instruction at MLA conferences, and in a stream of publications examining what and how we teach (and how the students learn).² The present set of instructional objectives concentrates on what we teach, rather than how, and points to a common set of skills for undergraduate music students.

Perhaps the first attempt to develop commonly accepted standards for library instruction in music was “Bibliographic Competencies for Music Students at an Undergraduate Level,” published in *Notes* in 1984 by members of the Bibliographic Instruction Subcommittee of the Midwest Chapter of MLA.³ These standards define skills that undergraduates

1 The following publications on music information literacy have appeared since the ACRL Standards were approved in 2000. Listed chronologically: Beth Christensen, “Building on Tonic: Integrating Information Literacy into the Music Curriculum,” *College Music Symposium* 41 (2001): 1–6; Diane VanderPol and Cheryl Taranto, “Information Literacy: A New Tune for Library Instruction to Music Students,” *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (2002): 15–24; Kathleen A. Abromeit and Victoria Vaughan, “Info Lit and the Diva: Integrating Information Literacy into the Oberlin Conservatory of Music Opera Theater Department,” *Notes* 60, no. 3 (March 2004): 632–52; Beth Christensen, “Warp, Weft and Waffle: Weaving Information Literacy into an Undergraduate Music Curriculum,” *Notes* 60, no. 3 (March 2004): 616–31; Gregg S. Geary, “Creating Information Literacy Instruction for Undergraduates in the Music Library,” in *Music Library Instruction*, MLA Basic Manual Series, 3, ed. by Deborah Campana, 1–45 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004); Deborah L. Pierce, “Information Literacy and the Music Library,” *Notes* 60, no. 3 (March 2004): 613–15; and Deborah L. Pierce, “Incorporating Information Literacy into the Music Curriculum: A Look at ACRL’s Best Practices Initiative and Successful Music Programs,” *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (2004): 57–76. The Bibliographic Instruction Subcommittee has given workshops and presentations on information literacy at the MLA annual meetings from 2002 through 2005.

2 Bibliographic Instruction Subcommittee, MLA Midwest Chapter, “Bibliographic Competencies for Music Students at an Undergraduate Level,” *Notes* 40, no. 3 (March 1984): 529–32.

should possess, divided into two broad categories: developing a logical approach to music research, and finding and evaluating scores and recordings. They are a very concrete, usable set of standards, set forth clearly and concisely. The article encourages the development of critical thinking skills, but it does not define specific outcomes in this area, as it does for finding sources. The process that led to the current document was initiated by a desire to update this 1984 article, incorporating more recent thinking, sources, and issues.

In 1996, another committee of MLA's Midwest Chapter, the Public Services Committee, initiated a fresh look at the issues involved in library instruction for music students.¹ By this time, information literacy was gaining acceptance as a framework for instruction. ALA defines information literacy as the ability to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."² Information literacy moves the focus of instruction and learning away from specific sources and topics toward critical thinking, evaluation of sources, and a conception of the research process that works across disciplinary boundaries. The article by Maple, Christensen, and Abromeit does not present a set of standards. Rather, by posing a series of questions to ask when designing instruction, it offers a framework for music information literacy programs. The questions emphasize critical thinking, evaluating sources, and understanding the research process. They define skills and knowledge that music undergraduates should possess in regard to the creation, organization, access, and structure of information sources.

The MLA Bibliographic Instruction Subcommittee set out in 2002 to update these two documents and make them usable by today's music librarians and others. As we began this task, we quickly found ourselves turning to the ACRL Standards, and chose them as a framework. These standards were approved by the ACRL board in 2000 and became widely known and adopted in library instruction programs by many colleges and universities around the country. Further, the ACRL Standards offered a conceptual approach that was less likely to become quickly outdated. The goals of the present adaptation were to provide a subject-specific version useful for clarifying instructional goals, assessing instructional outcomes, supporting existing information literacy education, and advocating new

1 Amanda Maple, Beth Christensen, and Kathleen A. Abromeit, "Information Literacy for Undergraduate Music Students: A Conceptual Framework," *Notes* 52, no. 3 (March 1996): 744-53.

2 American Library Association, "Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report" (10 January 1989), <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/whitepapers/presidential.htm> (accessed 23 November 2005).

programs.⁶ We wanted to present the information in a way that would be useful for music librarians, generalist librarians, music faculty, and administrators. Finally, we hoped that using ACRL's standards as our basis would lend credibility to our work and facilitate MLA approval and adoption of the document.

The five ACRL Standards and twenty-two performance indicators are broad enough in nature to apply to all disciplines. In some cases we simply inserted the word "music" as an adjective before terminology such as "student," "information," "sources," and so on. In other places we added parenthetical music-specific examples. Occasionally, entirely new outcomes were created.

The subcommittee presented a draft of the ACRL Standards adapted for music at the 2004 MLA annual meeting in Washington, DC.⁷ Although response to the draft was generally positive, as a group we were dissatisfied. This approach did not highlight the music-specific elements as much as we had hoped. The resulting language remained broad; even within our small group we found the document was open to interpretation. Feedback at this meeting supported the choice of ACRL's framework, however.

ACRL's follow-up document, "Objectives for Information Literacy Instruction: A Model Statement for Academic Librarians" (ACRL Objectives), approved by the ACRL board in 2001, offered a more detailed approach that we hoped would allow us to be more specific in outlining music research skills and music sources while still keeping the ACRL Standards as a framework.⁸ We did not use the text of ACRL's Objectives verbatim, but as an example. We selected outcomes from the ACRL Standards that we believed had special significance or required further elaboration for music.

The objectives can be described as one level more specific than the outcomes. Objectives are discrete, measurable skills, which an instructor might use to establish content for a course, or even for a single class meeting or assignment. Objectives can also be used to assess the success

1 Other subject-specific versions of the standards include two drafts available at the ACRL Web site: "Information Literacy Standards for Science and Technology" (<http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/infolititech.htm>) was developed by an ALA/ACRL/STS Task Force on Information Literacy for Science and Technology; and "Research Competency Guidelines for Literatures in English" (<http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/researchcompetenciesLES.htm>) was compiled by the ACRL Literatures in English Section (both accessed 23 November 2005).

2 Subcommittee members were Paul Cary (chair), Karen Burke, Beth Christensen, Judy Marley, Laurie Sampsel, and Kristina Shanton.

3 ACRL, "Objectives for Information Literacy Instruction: A Model Statement for Academic Librarians" (2001), <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/objectivesinformation.htm> (accessed 23 November 2005).

of a course or assignment to determine how well the students have learned the skills or concepts.

All of the music-specific competencies identified previously in the standards were converted into objectives. The resulting document, like its predecessor, is dependent on ACRL's Standards (which are present in their entirety in the music objectives) and may be used in conjunction with the ACRL Objectives as well.

One variation from the ACRL Objectives is the presence of objectives for Standard Four, "The information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose."⁹The ACRL Task Force of the Instruction Section wrote objectives "only for Performance Indicators in the Competency Standards that could best be addressed by the librarian or by the librarian and course instructor collaboratively."¹⁰We decided to include objectives wherever they were deemed necessary. Many times in information literacy programs the music librarian is an equal partner with teaching faculty in all aspects of the research process. Other times music research or bibliography classes for music undergraduates are taught or co-taught by music librarians. We thought it would be best to include instructional objectives in Standard Four for use by whoever (music librarian or music faculty) needed them.

The subcommittee presented a draft of the MLA Objectives at the 2005 MLA annual meeting in Vancouver, B.C.¹¹The MLA board also approved the draft at that meeting. In the months following the Vancouver meeting, the document was sent to ACRL for review in hopes of receiving that body's endorsement as well as permission to use the ACRL Standards. ACRL's executive director, Mary Ellen Davis, in turn sent the document to two readers, both experts in information literacy.¹²

After incorporating changes based upon the readers' thoughtful comments it was sent back to the MLA board, which suggested a few additional revisions. A revised draft was tentatively approved by the board in August 2005, at which time the document was sent back to ACRL for a second review. ACRL's endorsement and associated permission and MLA's approval both became official in September 2005.¹³

1 See Standard Four in the MLA Objectives, below.

2 See n. 8.

3 Subcommittee members were Paul Cary (chair), Karen Burke, Beth Christensen, Laurie Sampsel, and Cheryl Taranto.

4 The reviewers were Susan Barnes White of Linfield College, and Craig Gibson of George Mason University. White also consulted with a music faculty member.

5 Mary Ellen Davis, e-mail message to Sampsel, 6 September 2005; and Bonna Boettcher, e-mail message to Sampsel, 1 August 2005.

Following the publication of the “Information Literacy Instructional Objectives for Undergraduate Music Students” in this journal, the document will be posted on the MLA Web site. ACRL has agreed to provide a link at their Web site as well. We hope that making the MLA Objectives available as widely as possible, with the endorsement of both MLA and ACRL, will encourage their adoption.

Implementation of the MLA Objectives will differ substantially from one school to another. One might implement all of the objectives while others may pick and choose. One school may primarily use in-class instruction while another uses online tutorials. These decisions will be affected by curriculum, instructional resources, and institutional culture. Colleges that are already using the ACRL framework should find that the MLA Objectives fit into their information literacy programs quite easily. Those that are not using ACRL already may want to adopt it campus-wide, or they may want to modify the MLA Objectives to fit into a different instructional framework. In each instance, individual instructors and librarians will need to define goals for specific courses and assignments. Objectives may be lifted straight out of this document or they may be modified. Instructors are encouraged to make the MLA Objectives their own. The Bibliographic Instruction Subcommittee welcomes feedback on all aspects of the MLA Objectives.