

EPC Report on the Digital Information Literacy Pilot Project

March 22, 2002

In February 2001, the EPC presented a report to the faculty of Arts and Sciences on the status of the 1993 computing proficiency requirement at the College. (<http://www.wm.edu/FAS/Meetings/DOCS/ED-POL/DIL2.html>) The EPC addressed the high variation in standards across disciplines for the Concentration Computing Requirement (CCR) and recommended a common proficiency that would be completed by all students early in their academic career regardless of concentration. This would have the advantage of providing all William and Mary students with a baseline understanding of digital information and technology on which discipline-based requirements might be built.

EPC presented a proposal for a pilot project to study digital information literacy in April 2001. (<http://www.wm.edu/FAS/Meetings/DOCS/ED-POL/Computing-A&S.htm>) The Faculty of Arts and Sciences approved this proposal, and a subcommittee was formed in May 2001 to design the pilot project. The committee designed four modules (each with a tutorial and a quiz) and a feedback survey for the overall pilot project. The modules covered the following topics: Searching on-line databases, evaluating information on the Web, information ethics, and communication through the internet. (<http://cfdev.wm.edu/dbprojects/dil/dilindex.htm>)

The testing of the pilot project was unsuccessful first semester and a success during the second semester. Initially, the project was run through Blackboard. During Fall 2001, 200 randomly selected students from the freshman class were asked to complete the tutorials and quizzes over a two week period. Unfortunately, only seven students completed all four modules and the vast majority did not attempt the pilot project at all.

The pilot project was run for a second time at the beginning of the Spring 2002 semester. It was redesigned to be more user-friendly by converting to a web-based format which gave students more flexible access to the tutorials and quizzes. The structure of the quizzes was also redesigned. In addition, students were sensitized to the importance of participating in this project through editorials in the Flat Hat about the status of the current computing proficiency and how it could be made more useful to all students regardless of concentration. Another group of 200 students was randomly selected to complete this second round. Of this group, 95 completed all four modules (7.3% of the freshman class). Although the quizzes were very short (5-6 questions) and a couple of quiz questions experienced technical difficulties, the students performed well. According to the survey responses, a majority of students felt the modules were useful to them, particularly the information covering database searches and plagiarism.

As a result of this pilot project, the EPC believes these modules are an appropriate beginning for creating the fully developed Digital Information Literacy program as outlined in the EPC report presented to the faculty in February 2001. A major difference between William and Mary's approach versus other Virginia institutions is that we have addressed both digital/computing literacy and information literacy in a single proficiency. This proficiency will ensure that all freshmen begin their academic career at William and Mary with a common set of knowledge about digital technology and the ways to use and evaluate the information obtained from it. The EPC does not intend this proficiency to replace the Concentration Computing Requirement, however we do believe the DIL program will give departments and programs more flexibility in formulating their discipline-specific Concentration Computing Requirements.

As noted in the February 2001 report, existing resources appear to be adequate to enact this program. The goal of the EPC is to have the full DIL program in place by the Fall of 2003. We recommend that all freshmen be required to demonstrate proficiency in this area by passing all modules with a score of 70% or higher, a level consistent with the writing proficiency. Those who do not pass the proficiency in their first attempt, would be given the opportunity to receive tutoring assistance and to retest. To keep the program current, the EPC recommends it be reviewed every two years once it is fully implemented.