project SAILS

Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills

What is SAILS?

SAILS is the Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills. It is a knowledge test with multiple-choice questions targeting a variety of information literacy skills. The test items are based on the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education.

Project SAILS is a response to a growing need to measure information literacy of college students with a valid and reliable instrument. SAILS is easy to administer and provides data for both internal and external benchmarking. Focusing on both basic and ad-

vanced information literacy skills and concepts, the test asks students questions about research strategies; selecting sources; understanding and using finding tools; developing and revising search strategies; evaluating results; retrieving materials; documenting sources; and legal and social issues related to ethical and effective use of information. SAILS measures information literacy skill levels of cohorts of students.

Project SAILS is located at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. SAILS has been funded and supported by a number of agencies,

including the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Association of Research Libraries, the Ohio Board of Regents, the Academic Library Association of Ohio, and Kent State University.

Significant additional support was provided by the 82 institutions of higher education in Canada and the U.S. that participated in the research and development phase of the project.

For More Information

- Visit us at projectsails.org

- Sign-up for email announcements

- Contact us at sails@kent.edu

Benefits of SAILS

SAILS is designed to give librarians, professors, and administrators accurate information about the information literacy skills of their students. The SAILS test identifies areas where students have strong information literacy skills and where skills need to be strengthened. Librarians and their collaborators can target instructional efforts accordingly.

SAILS can be used to gather baseline information and to track the development of information literacy skills of groups of students. For example, the test can be administered to students at different

stages in their college careers, allowing for comparison of freshmen to seniors. Or, students in one major can be compared with students in other majors, or with students in that major from groups of other schools. These group comparisons are another way that SAILS can inform instructional activity.

SAILS offers librarians an opportunity to engage in conversations with campus partners about the importance of and need for students to develop strong information literacy skills. SAILS is an objective measurement tool that

provides comparative data, which appeals to administrators meeting assessment goals.

Personnel from schools that use the SAILS test will join a community of professionals assessing information literacy skills. Participants share their thoughts and strategies on a wide range of activities, from collaborating with classroom faculty to administer the test, to reporting out to their campuses, to making changes based on SAILS results.
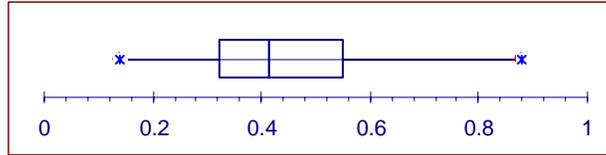
The information about student skills provided by SAILS makes it possible to explore even larger questions about the role of the library in information literacy, and how information literacy affects student success.

What SAILS Provides

At the end of a test session, schools receive reports detailing the performance of their students on the SAILS test. Results are organized by ACRL standard and by skill sets. These skill sets were developed by the project team and reflect conceptual and pragmatic groupings of the information literacy objectives from the ACRL document, "Objectives for Information Literacy Instruction: A Model Statement for Academic Libraries" (http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/objectivesinformation.htm).

Within each skill set, the overall average student performance is presented along with breakouts by class standing, major, and any special groups designated by the institution.

Student performance is also compared to performance at groups of other schools. Additionally, the report shows which information literacy objectives are the most difficult and which are the easiest. Graphical presentation of data and explanatory text facilitate understanding of results.

The report also contains documents about the test and the testing session in which the school participated. This includes the test questions, the skill sets, and demographic profiles of participating schools.

Technical Requirements

The technical requirements for administering SAILS are very minimal. Registration and set-up are done through the SAILS Web site. The test is designed to be administered to students on the Web, so the only needs are Internet access and a Web browser. SAILS is compatible with all current Web browsers.

Although the ideal testing environment is on the Web, the SAILS test can also be distributed on paper. Schools are provided with a PDF of the test for copying and with contact information for purchasing SAILS-specific scan form answer sheets.

The primary contact from each participating institution must have regular email and Web access for communication and ongoing monitoring of testing progress.

Administering SAILS

Administration of SAILS is handled almost entirely through the SAILS Web site. Schools register, customize the test-delivery system, and make payment online. Students complete the Web-based test directly on the SAILS Web site. There are two SAILS test administration sessions in each academic year, Fall and Spring. At the end of each session, data from all the schools that have finished testing are analyzed, benchmarks are created, and PDF reports generated for downloading.

SAILS administration training workshops are offered for each session, at no additional cost to the school. The workshops are held in conjunction with the annual and midwinter conferences of the American Library Association.

The current cost of participation is $3.00 per student up to a cap of $2,000 per administration.* Fees are calculated once a school finishes testing and are based on actual numbers of students completing the test. Those administering paper versions of the test are responsible for paper and scan form costs.

up to 5000 students. If you are testing 5000+ students, contact SAILS for pricing.

Session	Training workshop	Start date	End date	Reports available
Fall	ALA Annual (usually June)	July 15	December 14	Mid- January
Spring	ALA Midwinter (January)	January 1	May 31	Mid- June
There is no testing from December 16—December 31 and June 1—July 14, when the system is offline for maintenance. All administration must end by May 31.				

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