



Date : 13/06/2006

## The access to the information, the information literacy and the universities

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<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>129 Latin America and the Caribbean</b>
<b>Simultaneous Interpretation:</b>	<b>Yes</b>

WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 72ND IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL  
 20-24 August 2006, Seoul, Korea  
<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla72/index.htm>

### SUMMARY

*Latin America presents important disadvantages before the demands of the Society of the Information and the Knowledge. For that that today a special emphasis is made in the value of the knowledge and in the possession of this, as well as its application and enrichment. The Latin American universities have undertaken programs of information literacy, with different names that include the use of the technologies and the benefits and uses of the digital society and a full access to the knowledge. Of our time the university is connected to multiple roads of information, because without these won't be able to survive; its great challenge is not to be equipped neither to have budget for it, but preparing its professors and students so that, through this technology, "learn how to acquire the knowledge" "the learn know how" and "they learn how to make that adapted with that knowledge." Mexican and Latin American Universities have structured different programs to support the information literacy and encourage access to information.*

**1.- Access to information and information literacy.-** Information Society and Knowledge Society acknowledge two points of an intellectual and social process, one as consequence of the other; having access to information is not enough if we do not read such information, think on its content and abstract its message.

Education today, therefore, shall favor the possession and use of knowledge, inviting to reflection, and above all, forming attitudes and capacities allowing its application

and innovation. In addition, the use of a proper and updated knowledge shall be sought according to the project or issue to solve within the family, institutional, national or local environment, demanded by a social and economic development program.

The information society, more than ever, must encourage and promote access to information, and therefrom, prepare knowledge and foster communication, discussion, acceptance or discrepancy in a democratic, free and equal environment where differences, diversity and plurality are acknowledged and accepted.

Access to information may be established through multiple ways and modes, from the current environment of a technology over-exposed society and from more primary contexts such as paper printed, oral, and audiovisual information. Dual scenarios are common in Latin American countries where there are different demographic cores with unequal development levels, where access to information and communication technologies is not generalized. Therefore, only few may have access to knowledge oral transmission; others, to the printed text, and the least to full use of the Communication and Technologies (ICT's).

Certainly the starting point consists in facilitating the access to information, but it is also fundamental that such information exist and be known, available and easy to reach, read and use<sup>1</sup>. Such actions must be guaranteed by public policies promoted and authorized by the State and the society.

If people do not know what to do with the accessed and recovered information, however, we do not move forward on the knowledge path; therefore, it is necessary that both child and adult know that information is necessary to solve life issues, either large or small, personal or national issues; likewise, it is essential that they know how to locate answers to a myriad of vital questions to assess, select and apply proper and relevant information.

Such scenario lead us to two basic actions of the literacy world and culture: read and write<sup>2</sup>, two actions that come from a continuous cycle in which we may include: read and examine, analyze what we read and write on that.

Such reflection on reading and writing is accompanied by the identification of needs related to an education according to the demands of a knowledge society; a society where the change value is a knowledge generating richness, which is obtained based on competition of individuals and among markets, on production and consumption economy in the offer and demand of products and services in the same way as cultural, educational and research products.

Globalization and Knowledge Society demands involved the modernization of teaching-learning processes, as well as the offer of educational models that may

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<sup>1</sup> Estela Morales Campos, "Los derechos del usuario de información, entre la creación y el consumo", conferencia presentada en el 3er Seminario Hispano-Mexicano de Investigación en Bibliotecología y Documentación, México, D.F., 29-31 de marzo de 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Ángel Rama, *La ciudad letrada*, Hanover, Ediciones del Norte, 1984, 176 p.

allow education for learning to learn, to learn during the whole life in order to develop a critical and reflective thought that allow to apply, recreate and create knowledge.

Knowledge Society is a fact of today and a globalization need; the key to deal with it is the education privileged by knowledge. The urgent and necessary answer by the world library community to such demands has been the setting of a permanent program on **information literacy**, which compels the librarian to cooperate in the same level than academy to develop skills and knowledge on the use of information the Information and Knowledge Era must have. The above shall allow facing the education and society demands.

When an individual is literate on information, is because he/she has developed skills to<sup>3</sup> a) note when information is needed; b) locate, assess and effectively use information, and c) meet his/her needs: questions, tasks and decision making.

This individual, therefore, knows how to: a) learn to learn; b) organize information; c) find information; c) use information.

**Answer from professional associations and international bodies.-** As soon as 1990, Michael Eisenberg summarized the set of problems in Information Literacy, outlining logic stages performed in solving an information problem; such stages were known as the Big Six Skills<sup>4</sup>: 1. Task definition, 2. Information, seeking strategies, 3. Location and access, 4. Use of information, 5. Synthesis, 6. Assessment.

On this discursive basis, several professional associations delivered an answer represented in rules, standards or guidelines to collaborate in the teaching-learning process of the knowledge school/university:

1. In the United Kingdom, Society of College and National University Libraries (SCONUL), proposed the "Skills for information access and use" in 1999<sup>5</sup>.
2. In the United States, the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL / ALA), proposed to the community the "Standards on competencies in information literacy for higher education" in 2000<sup>6</sup>.
3. In Australia, the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL), , submitted the "Standards on competencies in information literacy" in 2001<sup>7</sup>.
4. An in México, the group called by the Universidad Autonoma de Ciudad Juarez, published the Standards on information literacy in higher education (*Normas sobre alfabetización informativa en educación superior*<sup>8</sup>) in 2004. Such document has been influenced by a few countries from Latin America as from said group activities.

<sup>3</sup> Lizabeth Wilson, "Information Literacy-Fluency Across the Community", en *La instrucción de usuarios ante los nuevos modelos educativos*, Jesús Lau y Jesús Cortés (edits.), Chihuahua, Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, 2000, p. 21-39.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Eisenberg & Robert E. Berkowitz, *Information Problem-Solving: The Big Six Skills Approach to Library and Information Skills Instruction*, Norwood, New Jersey, Ablex, 1990. 156 p.

<sup>5</sup> "Introduction to SCONUL", <http://www.sconul.ac.uk/intro> [consulta: 19-04-2006]

<sup>6</sup> ALA, "Information Literacy Competency Standard for Higher Education", <http://www.ala.org/acrl/acrlstandards/standards.pdf> [consulta: 19-04-2006]

<sup>7</sup> Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL), <http://www.caul.edu.au/> [consulta: 19-04-2006]

<sup>8</sup> *Normas sobre alfabetización informativa en educación superior* [folleto], Jesús Cortés, Diana González, Jesús Lau, et al., Chihuahua, Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez / Dirección General de Información y Acreditación, 2002, 12 p.

In early XXI Century, multiple international bodies, worried about the development of countries, issued strong and open statements on education quality, since it is acknowledged as the only way to reach development and to improve life conditions reduce differences and reach welfare. Bodies such as the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) or the World Bank (WB), in its educational arrangement, highlight the value of information as an input for the construction of knowledge, which requires the stage of an Information and Knowledge Society.

As from the Millennium Meeting 2000, a note was prepared for the international seminar “Latin America and the Caribbean: challenges facing the millennium development goals”, organized by the International Development Bank (DB), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL for its initials in Spanish), in Washington, D.C., on June 10 and 11, 2002. There they sought an answer to an international common minimum (before differences in the national and regional scope) and achieve that the globalization becomes a positive strength for all the world inhabitants based on a less unequal benefits distribution. For that, four areas were highlighted: poverty, education, gender equity and child death rate. To that respect, CEPAL adopted the objectives and goals of Latin America and the Caribbean reality taking into account any requirements on information matters: “to improve regional capacity to produce information timely and relevant information”, considering information as an input for education and social and economic growth, and so promote democracy based on human rights respect (where we emphasize the right to information and knowledge)<sup>9</sup>.

In the regional scope, Ibero-American States Organization for Education, Science and Culture, regarding Ibero-American Meetings, during XV, held in Salamanca<sup>10</sup>, (OEI, for its initials in Spanish) Spain in October, 2005, attention was called to the region weaknesses regarding education and its relation to social and economic differences in our countries. The aspects below are essential:

1. Literacy, unfortunately not information literacy, but basic literacy to learn the alphabet and other cultural codes allowing access to fundamental knowledge.
2. Access to Knowledge Society.
3. Ibero-American Agreement for Education (Pacto Iberoamericano por la Educación), that promotes a sustainable investment in this field and an exchange of foreign debt for investment in education.
4. Information and Education for the Integration of Ibero-America as from the acknowledgement of cultural diversity and inequality.

In 2005, the participants of the High Level Colloquy on Informational and Learning Literacy through Life, in the Alexandria Library, November 6 to 9, stated that: “The

<sup>9</sup> *Construcción de sociedades del conocimiento: nuevos retos para la educación superior / Constructing Knowledge Societies: New challenges for Tertiary Education* (resumen ejecutivo), *Perfiles educativos*, vol. 23 (92), 2001, p. 99-113.

“La CEPAL ante los objetivos del desarrollo del milenio”, *Perfiles Educativos*, vol. 23 (94), 2001, p. 91-100.

<sup>10</sup> Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura (OEI) “XV Cumbre Iberoamericana de Jefes de Estado y de Gobierno”, <http://www.oei.es/xvcumbredec.htm> [consulta: 19-04-2006]

informational literacy and learning through life are the Information Society lights illuminating the routs towards development and prosperity"<sup>11</sup>.

**Illiteracy in Latin America.-** Latin America has simultaneous processes of oral society and lettered society, which represent a material disadvantage before the Information and Knowledge Society demands.

Illiterate population is defined by the UNESCO as the population that "is not able to read and write a simple and brief text related to its daily life", unfortunately, in the region, we have countries with worrying rates to aspire to a minimum welfare such as Haiti, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Bolivia; other like Republica Dominicana, Peru and Brazil. With some illiteracy problems as Latin America is a contrasting region both within each country and among countries, we have examples of those countries where there is a low illiteracy rate reflected in better development opportunities, such as Barbados, Cuba, Trinidad y Tobago, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Colombia.

México reported in the census of population 2000 yet alarming figures, since from a total of 105,699,000 inhabitants, there is an illiterate population of 5,942,091, of which 62% are women and 38% are men<sup>12</sup>.

## MÉXICO

### ILLITERACY 2004

Total	ILLITERACY			
	Women	Men	Total	%
105 699 000	6 553 338	4 016 562	10 569 900	10%

<sup>11</sup>UNESCO. "Beacons of the Information Society: The Alexandria Proclamation of Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning", *IFLA Journal*, 32 (1), 2006, p. 66-67.

<sup>12</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, <http://dgcnesyp.inegi.gob.mx/cgi-win/sisesim.exe/Consultar> [consulta: 20-04-2006]

LATINA AMERICA & CARIBBEAN<sup>13</sup>

## ILLETERACY2004

País	Población Total	Alfabetizados	Analfabetos	% Analfabetos
Argentina	38 372 000	37 220 840	1 151 160	3
Barbados	269 000	269 000	0	0
Belice	264 000	203 280	60 720	23
Bolivia	9 009 000	7 837 830	1 171 170	13
Brasil	183 913 000	161 843 440	22 069 560	12
Chile	16 124 000	15 479 040	644 960	4
Colombia	44 915 000	42 220 100	2 694 900	6
Costa Rica	4 253 000	4 082 880	170 120	4
Cuba	11 245 000	11 245 000	0	0
Ecuador	13 040 000	11 866 400	1 173 600	9
El Salvador	6 762 000	5 409 600	1 352 400	20
Guatemala	12 295 000	8 483 550	3 811 450	31
Haití	8 407 000	4 371 640	4 035 360	48
Honduras	7 048 000	5 638 400	1 409 600	20
Jamaica	2 639 000	2 322 320	316 680	12
México	105 699 000	95 129 100	10 569 900	10
Nicaragua	5 376 000	4 139 520	1 236 480	23
Panamá	3 175 000	2 921 000	254 000	8
Paraguay	6 017 000	5 535 640	481 360	8
Perú	27 562 000	24 254 560	3 307 440	12
R. Dominicana	8 768 000	7 715 840	1 052 160	12
Santa Lucía	159 000	143 100	15 900	10
Surinam	446 000	392 480	53 520	12
Trinidad y Tobago	1 301 000	1 274 980	26020	2
Uruguay	3 439 000	3 370220	68 780	2
Venezuela	26 282 000	24 442 260	1 839 740	7

Unfortunately such figures represent the Latin American region contrasts that, in turn, have an impact on library and information services, since, in many cases, before having a hope to develop information literacy programs, there is a need to start and support basic literacy programs in children and adults population. People not only have to decipher the alphabet, but also practice and perform reading as a way towards knowledge and know-how's that are useful for life, together with an arithmetical language and the acquisition of cultural codes of the environment for integration to the communitarian life, job and, why not, welfare.

Due to such deficiencies and inequalities suffered by the different social groups forming a country, library services have to face its responsibilities depending on socioeconomic characteristics of the environment and information literacy programs

<sup>13</sup> UNICEF, <http://www.unicef.org/spanish/infobycountry/latinamerica.html> [consulta: 20-04-2006]

that have been solid and constant in the University World, more than in basic education and in school and public libraries. To accept such reality also means that we are addressing a small percentage of population.

For example, in Mexico, with a total population of 105,699,000, individuals registered in higher education are 223,680,000, that is, 2.11%. In percentages, we may find a constant in Latin America.

#### MÉXICO<sup>14</sup>

##### UNIVERSITY REGISTERS 2000-2002

TOTAL	HIGHER EDUCATION REGISTER	%
105 699 000	2 236 800	2.11

#### LATINAMERICA<sup>15</sup>

##### UNIVERSITY REGISTERS 2000-2002

País	Población Total	Inscritos	Porcentaje
Argentina	38 372 000	1 724 397	4.49
Bolivia	9 009 000	289 723	3.21
Brasil	183 913 000	3 479 913	1.89
Chile	16 124 000	584 657	3.62
Colombia	44 915 000	878 174	1.95
Costa Rica	4 253 000	144 899	3.40
Cuba	11 245 000	144 972	1.28
El Salvador	6 762 000	109 946	1.62
Guatemala	12 295 000	152 798	1.24
Honduras	7 048 000	114 606	1.62
México	105 699 000	2 236 800	2.11
Nicaragua	5 376 000	93 401	1.73
Panamá	3 175 000	126 551	3.98
Paraguay	6 017 000	82 265	1.36
Perú	27 562 000	837 635	3.03
R. Dominicana	8 768 000	286 134	3.26
Uruguay	3 439 000	95 634	2.78
Venezuela	26 282 000	803 755	3.05

<sup>14</sup> *La educación superior en el mundo 2006. La financiación de las universidades. Serie Guni sobre el compromiso social de las universidades. Global University Network for Innovation, 2005, p. 261-265.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ídem*

**4.- University and information literacy programs.-** If certainly today there is a special emphasis in the knowledge value and in the possession of such knowledge by students, as well as in its application and enrichment, we also have to accept that, lately the conceptual poverty of contents of many university programs has been exaggerated, as well as the negligence of human inherent activities and attitudes as a fundamental aspect of social groups: reflective thought, reading and abstraction.

Development leader countries have already passed, in a natural way, from the trinomial school + books + information to the necessary and unavoidable trinomial: reading + reflection-abstraction + knowledge. Notwithstanding, many countries seeking such development, as Latin American countries, have lived and are still living cultural and educational cycles and processes in a simultaneous way, not sequential. The passing from one trinomial to the other is not as easy as it seems, since while some groups are still illiterate, others have already begun to discover reading, and others, since they are already immerse in reading, move naturally in the daily use of information and dedicate time to reflection and fully value the possession of knowledge.

Recently (2000), the World Bank, in its document *“Knowledge Societies Construction: new challenges for higher education”<sup>16</sup>*, favored accumulation and application of knowledge as key factors within economic development as well as the role played by the technological revolution of information and communication as driver of growth, as a way to access information and data interchange. Therefore, current economy is based on knowledge and know-how, in their creation and use. Within the strategic framework for future Bank support, the close relationship between investigation and instruction with the improvement and extension of information and communication technologic infrastructure (ICT’s) is highlighted to reduce the digital gap between industrialized nations and developing countries, as well as to promote the use of information and knowledge through national or multinational agreements.

Within the context of demands by the world economy, the university, and the knowledge societies, Latin American Universities have started information literacy programs with different names such as: user formation, information skills development, information for learning to learn, etc. The names may vary, but all of them join in supporting education in order that the youth learn to learn during their whole lives and possess the necessary skills to understand the advantages of applying the acquired knowledge and how to seek and use information to reach a solution, an action or a decision. That is, the librarian, in a clear way, is part of a multidisciplinary team that, in educational programs, encourage the students to get involved in the knowledge process and participate in the construction of a local and global life and society where the benefits of development may reach everyone.

Such programs include the use of technologies, the benefits and uses of a digital society and a full access to knowledge. They also include access to all means where knowledge is registered, not only technology means (ICT’s), but to information that may be obtained therefrom.

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<sup>16</sup> *Construcción de sociedades del conocimiento: nuevos retos para la educación superior Constructing Knowledge Societies: New challenges for Tertiary Education (resumen ejecutivo), Op. cit.*

Universities in Mexico and in other Latin American countries, since years ago, have been worried about the formation of information users. With education modernization programs according to the knowledge society programs, the designing of information literacy programs and co-participation with academy to facilitate the formation of youths in the development of future professionals became imperative.

In Mexico, Libraries of State Public Universities work in a collegiate way organized in Networks and Councils. In 1997 called by the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juarez, they formed a work group that periodically organizes the Information Skills Development (ISD) University Programs National Meeting. The call has been surprising and very productive, since each time there are more integrating Mexican Universities and they share experiences with other Latin American and American Institutions. They have published and adopted several *statements* submitted before those academic authorities that have given them the reference framework needed to work, together with the academy, information literacy programs, which step by step have been influencing in the formation of teachers and students.

- a) Statement on "Information Skills Development in Higher Education Institutions in Mexico" Oct. 10, 1997.
- b) Statement on "Library Function in Educational Models Oriented to Learning". Oct. 8, 1999.
- c) Statement on "Standards on Information Literacy in Higher Education". Oct. 11, 2002.

Such standards have been a guide to implement, improve and orient information literacy programs. They have the purpose to develop eight competencies and forty five specific skills arising therefrom<sup>17</sup>. The competencies are related to the "Six Great Skills" detected in 1990, which are as follows:

1. Understanding of the knowledge and information structure.
2. Skill to determine the nature of an information *need*.
3. Skill to outline effective strategies to *seek and find* information.
4. Skill to *recover* information.
5. Skill to *analyze* and *assess* information.
6. Skill to *integrate, synthesize* and *use* information.
7. Skill to *submit* results of the information obtained.
8. Related to intellectual property.

With such products and these realities, Mexican and Latin American Universities and their librarians are on the right way traced by countries, professional associations, international bodies and Information and Knowledge Society (see attachment 1 and 2).

University of our time is crossed by and connected to multiple paths of information, because without them University cannot and will not survive. Its great challenge is not just to acquire equipment or have budget for that, but to prepare its students for, through such technology, "learning to acquire" knowledge and "learning to make the proper thing with such knowledge" for, thereafter, actually doing it. It has to design

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<sup>17</sup> Normas sobre alfabetización informativa en educación superior [folleto], *Op. cit.*

alternate ways for its academic community, students and professors, navigate in the superhighways of information, in the so called cyberspace, participating in the wide service range of tele-learning that may make knowledge available, to which they may reach either in a virtual or real way.

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## Anexo 1

### **MÉXICO**

#### **El Colegio de México:**

Alfabetización informativa.

#### **Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey-Chihuahua:**

Programa de Educación Continua para Usuarios de Bibliotecas (PECUB).

#### **Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey-Querétaro:**

Desarrollo de Habilidades Informativas.

#### **Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur:**

-Círculos de lectura

-Apoyo (Lecto-Escritura).

-Formación de usuarios de la Información.

#### **Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos:**

Formación de Usuarios de la Información (FVI).

#### **Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí:**

Formación de usuarios.

#### **Universidad de las Américas:**

Recursos para la docencia universitaria (actualización de profesores).

#### **Universidad de Ciudad Juárez:**

Desarrollo de Habilidades Informativas (DHI).

#### **Universidad de Colima:**

-Tecnologías de Información para Docentes.

-Información y documentación para el posgrado.

#### **Universidad de Quintana Roo:**

Técnicos para el manejo de recursos documentales.

**Universidad Iberoamericana- Golfo Centro:**

Formación de Usuarios. Lectura Crítica.

**Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México-DGB:**

DHI para alumnos y profesores (antecedente, 1970-Facultad de Química).

**Universidad Veracruzana:**

Programa de Formación de Usuarios.

## **ANEXO 2**

### **CHILE**

**Pontificia Universidad de Chile:**

Formación de usuarios-Gnosis II- guía de aprendizaje (software de auto aprendizaje).

**Universidad Católica de Valparaíso:**

Ágora. Formación de usuarios

**Universidad Católica del Norte:**

Programa de educación en información. PEI. 2003

**Universidad de Tarapacá:**

Desarrollo Habilidades Informativas (DHI, Programa de Habilidades Informativas y alfabetización digital).