**FIRST SEMESTER Learning Inventories -**

**Shoshana Graff**
I had to do a research paper this semester and went to the Cornell library for the first time. Wow! The amount of books (in Olin especially) is daunting. After looking in the online catalog I went to the stacks to find the book I wanted. When I got there I looked at the book and realized that even though the title sounded like exactly what I needed the book was not at all what I expected. I ended up browsing through the books surrounding it and found many more that were actually useful. In the end, I learned that even though looking up research online is helpful, there is still a need for tangible resources. If I had just had that original book sent to me I would not have been successful at all. Even though the world is becoming more digitized, it will never completely replace actually going to the library!

**Erick Torres**
I thought I would spend a lot more time pre-writing my papers when I came to Cornell. However, nothing really changed, I would just open up a word processor and start typing all my thoughts out and then go back through to expand and reorganize the paper. How I write papers hasn’t really changed, but I have noticed flaws, such as being too vague, that I’m going to start working on a lot more.

The difference between writing for college and writing for high school is that I bullshit a lot less. I make more of an effort to back up my claims and make sure everything has a solid foundation.

I was not required to do any independent research this semester.

My information literacy hasn’t much changed. I still Google to get overall ideas, then look for books in the library and/or educational reading online. However I depend on books a lot more than in high school because of the wide variety available.

I’m just as knowledgeable as ever at avoiding plagiarism, however I have learned to use the Chicago citation method, which I definitely prefer to the MLA style I’ve been using up to this point.
I did not do anything beyond composing papers.

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**John DeSantis – jad365 Learning Inventory for Literacy Project**

Now that the Fall 2009 semester is coming to an end, I can safely say that I have learned a great deal of information from my courses at Cornell. Although I did learn a lot of things through this semester, you may find that I did not learn things that would be considered the norm for freshman college students. Specifically, since I am a student at the School of Hotel Administration, I was involved in a Managerial Communications course as opposed to the standard freshman writing seminars that Cornell freshman typically take. In this written message, I will briefly address the following points:
• The assumptions I had about college writing versus what I actually learned about college writing

• The steps I undertook to drastically increase my “digital literacy” – my ability to work with computers and technology in order to produce audio/visual output that can help others learn

**College Writing:** College writing is very different than I thought it would be, especially in the School of Hotel Administration. I thought college writing would essentially be like high school writing with slightly higher expectations from instructors. I now realize that college writing is more about discovering and presenting new and interesting information than simply restating already known information

**My Original Assumption about College Writing:** I originally assumed that college writing would be just like writing in high school. Specifically, I thought that college writing would simply involve an instructor giving me a question or prompt about something I had read in class and then simply answering that prompt by restating information. I also thought that earning a high grade on a college paper would only require using fancy, intelligent sounding wording.

**My Realization about College Writing:** At least from what I have experienced in my Managerial Communications course, college writing is more about finding new information and presenting that new information in a clear and concise manner. For example, this semester, a partner and I had to write a memo report about first year internships; the total length of the report was 65 pages. In this report, we had to contact alumni who had experience in internships and ask those alumni a series of questions about their internships. Unlike high school writing, I didn't just have to look up some information, write a paper about that information, and simply cite the information; for this assignment, I had to find new information, compile that information to create topics and points about first year internships, and of coursecite my resources.

**Digital Literacy:** This semester, I greatly enhanced my “digital literacy,” or my ability to work with computers and technology in order to produce audio/visual output that can help others learn, by taking a Business Computing class in the School of Hotel Administration. I gained a lot of knowledge about computers from taking this course; specifically, I became proficient in Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. Although many students may feel that they are already proficient in the Microsoft Office application suite, I now know that Microsoft Office is a collection of extremely powerful tools that contain a lot of interesting features that most people do not know about. I feel confident saying that I am an expert in Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel after taking this course; being proficient in these three pieces of software has helped me become much more digital literate because I now know how to do new things with popular software applications that can help me as both a student and a member of the professional world.

**Mengxiang Jiang**

In my writing seminar, I learned the importance of revising a paper. Before, I thought revising was just about correcting grammar and spelling mistakes.
Although revising is about correcting this minor mistakes, it is also much more. Revising helps fix confusing parts of the paper, suggests better word choices, suggests new ideas, and improves paper in many other ways.

On another note, I took a class called "Computing in the Arts" which definitely enhanced my "digital literacy." I learned about how to make poems, music, and two dimensional art using computerized processes. For my final project in the class, I made a virtual kaleidoscope which was able to randomly shake objects around, zoom in, zoom out, and add new objects.

Overall, this semester has been an enlightening experience for my literacy.

**Kristin McFarlane**

This first semester I learned a great deal about writing! In high school, I didn’t write too many papers. In total, we probably had to write one big paper (a mere 5 pages) each year. However here at Cornell, within the first month, we were asked to write a 5-7 page paper on a topic that we had to develop without much guidance. It was scary. I think the TAs and professors here assumed that most people had a somewhat strong background in writing all sorts of papers, but unfortunately, I did not. Thank goodness for peer editing! It literally saved my life on every single essay I was asked to write. I begged my fellow freshmen to read my papers and just make comments on it, whether they were verbal or the hard-core red-pen comments. I took the papers to Writing Walk-Ins and my TAs before even dreaming about handing them in. In high school, I had developed the terrible habit of procrastination, but in college, writing a paper you’ve had weeks to write a night or two before its due, does not cut it. I went to a couple information sessions on how to use the internet for your benefit when writing a paper and they were insanely helpful! I switched from being a strictly Google girl to a solely Web of Knowledge database or Google Scholar student. I was never even close to plagiarizing, because my freshman year of high school we focused a lot of citations and other things. As for using media and technology, I just have one word that sums up my learning experiences with new medias: Blackboard. I have never even heard of it! Before I was even able to figure out how to log on and register for my classes on the program, I was being asked to do surveys on it and to submit assignments on it and to initiate discussion board threads. It was overwhelming, but luckily, I got the hang out it fairly quickly.

Overall, this whole semester has been one giant learning experience on how to survive in the college literacy world.

-Mac

**Apurva Sisodia:**

I discovered that the way I write has changed a lot from high-school. In high-school I preferred to stay up late and write but in college I actually write better when i wake up early in the morning and write, so when i had essays due i would get up at 4 am and write papers.
One thing I also did more of was working in peer groups this semester.

Something else I learned this semester was that Cornell has more resources than I thought, such as the ability to get resources from other colleges around the world.

My high-school was very strict when it came to plagiarism and citing sources, we used turn-it-in for most classes and I was always encouraged to use noodlebib when citing sources.

Something I did learn that increased my digital literacy was through work, we talked about advertising and how the smallest things can make a difference like when using clipart picking ones that looked more multicultural and reflected the diversity of the people we were trying to reach.

Jennifer Werbitsky – jrw323

Over the course of first semester, I have realized that outlining papers before beginning them, a tool emphasized in high school but something I avoided using when I could, is absolutely necessary in college. Especially for thesis papers, which in college require the student to completely come up with her own thesis with very little direction given, one would be lost and unable to remain organized if outlining is not used.

Similarly, I have found that college students are expected to do a lot more independent work on their papers, and because of the usual flexibility given, I feel like my papers are more my own.

My methods of finding information--which is basically starting at "Google" and seeing where that takes me--have remained the same, as that is what has worked for me and still works for me in terms of efficiency and ease of use. I also, however, have learned that librarians themselves are valuable resources.

As far as citation goes, I’ve had to readjust from MLA to APA for certain subjects, which was somewhat confusing, but I think I’ve figured it out, for the most part. I did not take on any projects that required me to compose beyond paper. I learned how "Google Alerts" works, which I used to compile articles over an extended period of time for a business project.

Rick Pflasterer

The way I begin writing has changed this past semester. I used to try and just start writing right away as a flow of my conscious stream. I now do much more brainstorming and note taking. In addition, I give myself more time to complete writing assignments. I start earlier and slowly add ideas as they come to mind. In the past, I give myself a couple of hours and work until I fulfill the requirements.

The difference between writing for college and for high school is the level of expectation. I used to be able to get away with my previous form of writing. My work would not flow very well but it would get the message through. What I have
noticed about college teachers is that they evaluate the quality of the work on a structural level rather than solely the quality of my idea. It takes me much longer to construct something that is acceptable now.

- I did not do much research. The research that I did do came from mostly internet sources or off of my own experiments. There are numerous ways to cite sources and Cornell provided a website with information on how to cite numerous types of text.
- I have always been able to find what I needed. The combination of keywords that I choose has always given me successful searches through google. I still use the same techniques to do so.
- I understand plagiarism of words as well as ideas. Cornell provided some tools to help with citing sources.
- I did one group project involving a poster board for Biology. We used the scientific writing format with: Introduction, Materials/Methods, Procedure, Result, and Discussion. We used graphs and charts to visually display our results with relevant pictures to draw interest. I am pretty familiar with such projects. The poster board presentation for science is common through school and not just college.
- Involving media, I learned how to connect screens up to my computer – tv's, external monitors – this was not for work but rather for fun.

Allison Fleck:
I didn't take a writing seminar, so I don't feel that my literacy changed in any major way. However, while doing research I used different resources than I ever have before, including the Cornell library website and other data bases with scientific papers. I mostly use programs to cite sources for me, so I'm still as confused as ever as to how they work and why.

Neil Sen:
In general, my writing has matured since high school. I revise my papers more whereas high school trained me to crank things out in short amounts of time, usually in preparation for standardized testing.

As far as research habits go, I tend to use books more now in lieu of the internet.

Citing information never has been a problem for me, and I still cite information the way they should be according to the format (MLA, Chicago, etc.).

My "digital" literacy has not really gone up.

Elizabeth Carnes
There are many things that I have learned about writing during my first semester during Cornell. In high school, I used to think I was a pretty good writer, and I typically always enjoy the writing process, but here at college I have learned a few new things.
The essay questions prompted by a specific course topic, for example “Memoir and Memory”, and how it relates to a memoir are more complex than typical high school essay topics. After a few “rough” essays, I learned how to stay focused and support the task I’m addressing in a paper. Another thing that I learned was support! It is difficult not to leave a quotation just hanging around in a paper. What marks a more experienced writer is the amount of support given after each quotation. As the length of the quotation grows, so should the length of it’s explanation.

In my other courses, such as NS 1150, I learned how to do researching using the PubMed website through the Cornell Library. I was amazed to see how many different MESH terms there are and how specific one needs to be in identifying criteria. Another thing I learned was how to write well in a paper reporting facts as well as in papers that are more theoretical and interesting.

Overall, my semester at Cornell built upon my previous high school experiences in all dimensions, from using search engines to citations. It was enjoyable to see how with every writing assignment, the process was the same yet a little more challenging. With finished product in hand, I would say it is fair to call this a rewarding semester.

Victoria Morgan:
- Going into the fall term, I assumed that writing at Cornell was similar to writing in high school. But I know now that writing in college takes a lot more planning and preparation than writing in high school. One cannot just sit down at the computer and expect gold to flow from one’s fingertips – writing is a structured and rigorous process that cannot be undertaken lightly. To do so is to risk failing at expressing oneself.
- I learned how to utilize the Cornell library catalogue and how to search for science articles on JSTOR and ISI Web of Knowledge. These skills made it easier to find sources and are proving useful to me even today. What I know about researching with Google has also been supported by what I learned at Cornell; Google is still a very useful search engine that can get you quick answers when you don’t want to dig through piles of scientific papers for a particular answer.
- I know as much about citing sources as I always have, though the Cornell library has provided me with an additional resource that I can use to cite sources. Before, I used CitationMachine, or some offshoot of it, but now that the Cornell Library has given me access to RefWorks, I now use that too.
- I only ever did projects on paper. None of my projects involved audio-visual components.

Alyssa Wetterau:

When reflecting on the questions you asked about the progress of my literacy, I realized that I had made several changes and learned a lot from my first semester here at Cornell. Writing has become a much more lengthy process for me than it ever was in high school. I used to assume that I could sit down the night before a paper was due, dash off a quick outline, spend a few hours writing my paper and be done with it. I quickly learned that writing for college took a lot more than that. I now have to start a paper a few days before it’s due date. I spend the first day writing out a detailed outline and collecting
all the evidence I plan to use in the paper. I make a point to walk away from the paper and occupy myself with other work or activities for a while and then come back to my outline and review it. I check to see that my argument will hold under presentation of conflicting opinions and I make sure that I have not included any extraneous information. After making sure I have a sound outline, I write my paper while paying extra attention to make my writing as concise and clear as possible. The following day, I go back to my essay and re-read and edit it for submission. I have found that by spacing out my writing, I am able to look at it more objectively and edit it more thoroughly. I have not yet been asked to write any research papers, so I have not had much practice with the research process since the beginning of last semester. In general, when I am looking for information, I am more likely to try to find it myself in a textbook or online than to ask for help. I have become a lot more computer-fluent this last semester and depend on the internet a great deal for staying in touch with friends through Facebook and communicating with my parents via email. I have needed internet sites such as Blackboard for almost all of my classes and have become a lot more familiar with such sites as a result.

**Did Not Do Fall Learning Inventory:**
Renae Curless
Maria Karla Hernandez
Jean-Carlos Polanco
Kevin Vasquez
Patience Nwachukwu
Josie Bates
Nafeesa Lalwalla
Tiara Marshall
Joanna Smith
Matt Gruber
David Hietala
Second-Semester Inventories

John DeSantis

Here is my description on what I have learned over the past year at Cornell: I have learned a lot of things related to literacy over this past year at Cornell. Specifically, I have learned how to become a better writer, utilize new technology when communicating, and research academic material.

Over this past year, I have become a much better writer, especially in respect to the content and grammar of my writing. In respect to content, I have learned how to develop ideas and claims that are true and interesting for the reader, how to support those claims with data and information, and how to surface those claims at the beginning of a paper so the reader can easily understand what I am trying to say and why I am trying to say it.

I have also become much more efficient and skilled with my use of technology to communicate with others. First and foremost, I have become very proficient in the majority of the Microsoft Office application suite; specifically, I am very good with Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. I have also become better at using “cloud,” or internet, applications; I have become familiar and proficient with useful web tools, such as GoogleDocs, which allows multiple users to edit documents over the web at the same time, or Wiggio, which gives users in a group tools to communicate with each other. Last, but certainly not least, I have become a very good communicator over email. I used to think email was a bit of a novelty: it was just another form of communication that websites would use to send me spam-mail about offers. Now, I have learned that email is a very quick and easy form of written communication that can facilitate good communication. I have learned proper email etiquette, and I have learned what situations are appropriate to communicate with someone via email and which situations are not.

Finally, I have learned how to research and properly cite academic material. I have learned that simply “Googling” something is not the best way to find information on it; although Google is a wonderful resource that allows people to easily find information, information found on Google does not always derive from credible sources and, therefore, is not always the best to use when making an academic argument on a paper or presentation. Over this past year, I have learned that using good academic sources is the only way to find trustworthy information for a paper or presentation. I have also learned where to find good academic information: the library and academic databases that Cornell offers to its students. The library is a great resource to find great information; although most people do not particularly like researching information for a topic, the libraries of Cornell do make it easy to find such information. For example, if researching a topic, you can find information on that topic by simply searching the library book database for that topic or by asking a librarian to assist you. Cornell also offers information outside of the library and online to students via academic databases; these databases contain full academic articles and journals that provide solid information on various topics.

Although I am only finishing up my freshman year here at Cornell, I feel as if I have already learned a great deal of information, especially pertaining to literacy. Specifically, I have learned how to write better, utilize technology when communicating, and research good academic information. I now look to the future, hoping that I continue to gain more knowledge pertaining to literacy over the next few years.
LIZ CARNES:
My first year at Cornell has been a huge learning experience. Through my freshman writing seminars, experience with the library system, and scientific writing papers, I have gained so many valuable skills that I will be able to take with me into my future.

In my freshman writing seminars, I have learned how to pace myself on a paper so that I accurately explicitly address the task at hand. Rather than waiting until the last minute to whip out a paper, I have learned to truly consider what I am writing about and how to be as specific as possible in my writing.

In my science classes, I have learned to make good use of the technology database that Cornell has access to. I have learned to use PubMed to research articles and how to narrow down on my searches, rather than reverting to using Google to find the information I need.

Another area of literacy that has really expanded for me is reading a textbook. Until this point, I haven’t really thought of reading textbooks as being associated with literacy outside of being able to read them. What I have learned this year has been, and undoubtedly will be, the skill I will take with me through the rest of college: how to read an assigned reading as efficiently as possible. This I have found very difficult to do, especially because it is not uncommon for the reading to be challenging or uninteresting. Cornell has taught me to make the most of the tools I have and how to expand my use of the assigned readings to my benefit.

Before coming to Cornell, I enjoyed reading and English was my favorite subject in high school. Since coming here, the world of writing has expanded so much for me, and while I have been challenged, I am appreciative of the work I have put into bettering myself as a writer. What is particularly nice about learning how to improve my use of technology and communication is that these skills are transferrable to other areas of my life.

ALLISON FLECK: I don’t believe I became more literate during my first year at Cornell. While I’ve learned how to research better, beyond typing something into Google, the other areas of my literacy haven’t been affected much. I never had to do anything besides write papers, something I don’t think I got significantly better at, and I actually read a lot less for pleasure. For me, computers are still mostly a way to stay in touch with friends and to procrastinate. They have not become a significant part of my learning.

Alyssa Wetterau
My reading and writing have become much more academic this past year. I no longer have time to read for pleasure and I’ve stopped journaling entirely. Though I do find some of my reading for classes interesting, it’s not as enjoyable and I have to force myself to open books. I’ve found that by highlighting textbooks and outlining the reading I can improve my understanding and recall and I do that regularly while reading. My writing has also gotten increasingly technical and become a much longer process over the course of the year. I’ve found myself struggling when called on to write creatively in my FWS this semester because last semester’s writing was entirely analytical. I feel that I’ve lost some creativity over the year as a result of this but I’ve been making efforts to regain it. My
digital literacy has stayed largely the same throughout the year; I use Facebook to communicate with friends and email to stay in touch with family members and I use Microsoft Word, Power Point and Excel regularly. In information literacy I rely largely on Google scholar for online research but have recently become more comfortable with the Cornell Library and Database catalog and have found it very helpful in research.

Erick Torres:
My reading habits have probably been what has changed the most. I have shied almost completely away from reading the fantasy novels I enjoyed (unless there are for class) to read classic fiction, non-fiction, and books on philosophy. I try to read for at least 30 minutes before I go to sleep every night, though many things get in the way so I’ve only finished "The God Delusion" and some books on mythology. Writing, not much has changed. I write in the same way (more or less), not having learned many new writing techniques, and am still successful. I still use Facebook daily, and now mildly use Twitter to keep up with some distant friends, but do not do any other social networking online. Academically, I have learned how to use GoogleDocs and wiggio.com, both have really helped with group work and organizing groups I am a part of. My information literacy is something I wanted to improve but never did. I can find books in the library and google terms I am researching, but don't know how to use more information databases available here at Cornell.

Apurva Sisodia:
This semester I had a different type of writing to do than last. For the most part this semester I only really had to write lab reports. However my writing process is still more or less the same, I prefer to wake up early and write rather than to do it late at night.

Actually my writing for both college and high school were at about the same level, my teachers in high school were very strict, if anything the lab reports for college were easier than the ones for high school.

I've gotten lazy about research this semester, for the only class I had to do research for, I mainly used google scholar instead of working my way through a database.

One thing I’ve now begun to do when it comes to finding things is ask people; a lot of times the people I know will frame what I want to find out in a different way. This different way will often help me broaden what I’m looking for and might even return different results that are more relevant to me.

I'm the same amount of knowledgeable about plagiarism as before.

This semester one of my classes had a required blog, something I haven't had to do in a while, so the use of the website helped increased my digital literacy.