

# **UCLA**

## **Information Literacy**

### **Title**

Faculty Focus Groups: UCLA Information Literacy Initiative

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**Faculty Focus Groups**  
**UCLA Information Literacy Initiative**  
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**Abstract**

The UCLA Library's Information Literacy Initiative sponsored faculty focus groups in May 2003 to gather information on faculty's perspectives on undergraduate students' abilities to locate information efficiently, evaluate it, and use it effectively and ethically. Twenty-seven faculty from a variety of disciplines and departments across the campus participated in the discussions.

A review of the transcripts indicates that the participants have many concerns surrounding this issue. Most notably were students' lack of understanding regarding the issues surrounding plagiarism and intellectual property; the inability of students to critically evaluate the quality of the material they have found; and students' lack of understanding of what constitutes the scholarly process (how that differs in different disciplines, how to not only gather information, but to analyze it, synthesize what is found and come up with their own interpretation of the material).

Faculty indicated that they handled the problem in a variety of ways. Some did not assign papers or projects that required the students to gather information from the literature in the field. Rather these faculty members had students analyze designated material or data sets, either in print or online, and draw conclusions from them.

Of those who did make assignments that required the use of the literature in the field, some restricted students to predetermined material either by putting it on reserve or giving students lists of titles and/or resources that were acceptable. While they acknowledged that this did not directly teach critical thinking and evaluative skills, the faculty hoped students might learn by example. The rest of the faculty that required literature-based research, tried to give the students some direction, but allowed the students to research on their own.

Other possible approaches were discussed from the perspective of the library, the faculty and the campus at large. Solutions included creating assignments or adapting ones already used to help introduce students to the problematic concepts and to the appropriate use of library materials; developing library sponsored and librarian taught courses to address the issues and bringing the issues to the attention of curriculum oversight committees on campus. Faculty and librarian collaborations were viewed as very effective approaches to dealing with these issues.

**Background**

The UCLA Information Literacy Initiative (ILI) began in December 2001. Its goals are to

- To assess information literacy skills at UCLA
- To improve information literacy skills at UCLA
- To increase awareness of information literacy concepts among members of the UCLA community, within the context of changing information needs and environments

Based on the 1999 report entitled *Information Competence at UCLA: Report of a Survey Project*, <http://www.library.ucla.edu/infocompetence/>, it was clear to UCLA librarians that students lack many of the skills that comprise information literacy or IL. The Librarians Association of the University of California (LAUC) Information Literacy Task Force defines IL as the ability to identify an information need, locate information efficiently, evaluate information, and use information effectively and ethically. For more on IL see the American Library Association web page at <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlissues/acrlinfolit/infolitoverview/introinfolit/introinfolit.htm>.

Although librarians have had informal conversations with faculty on this topic over the years, it was felt that with the launching of the Information Literacy Initiative at UCLA, a more formal approach might yield valuable information. A major component of the initiative is to develop strategies that will improve our students' educational experiences during their years at UCLA. With a clear understanding that the library cannot accomplish this component in a vacuum, it was decided to hold faculty focus groups to gather information on faculty's perspectives on undergraduate students' abilities to locate information efficiently, evaluate it, and use it effectively and ethically. These focus groups were planned for May 2003 and were coordinated by the Informing sub-group of the ILI.

It should be noted that the faculty invited to participate in these focus groups were identified by UCLA librarians. Therefore the faculty members who agreed to attend the sessions were somewhat familiar with libraries, librarians, and the instructional services provided by them. Many may have already taken advantage of these services for their classes and their students.

## **Participants**

Joan Kaplowitz, chair of Informing, contacted all UCLA librarians and requested suggestions of faculty, who might be interested in participating in the ILI focus groups. Faculty names were divided into four groups: Arts and Humanities; Sciences; Social Sciences; and GE Clusters (year-long, collaboratively taught, interdisciplinary courses that are focused on a topic of timely importance such as the "global environment," or "interracial dynamics." These courses are open only to entering freshmen).

Dr. Kaplowitz and the three members of Informing (Cinthya Ippoliti, Aura Lippincott, and Pauline Swartz) each contacted a different group of faculty with the goal of recruiting 5-10 people from each area. Separate focus group meetings were to be scheduled for each of the above groups. Four focus group sessions were held. Each session was 90 minutes in length.

Focus group meetings were held between May 12<sup>th</sup> and May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2003. A total of 27 faculty participated. The breakdown is as follows:

Arts and Humanities:	8
Sciences:	5
Social Sciences:	8
GE Clusters:	6

## **Methodology**

Faculty were invited to lunch at the UCLA Faculty Center. After examining the literature in the field, it was felt that someone not directly involved in the ILI should act as moderator (Glitz 1998; Sevier 1989; Shoaf 2003). Jason Frand, Adjunct Assistant Professor and Assistant Dean of Computing Services – Anderson Graduate School of Management, was chosen to be the moderator for the discussions. Members of the various ILI subgroups were recruited to act as recorders for the sessions. Two recorders were assigned to each focus group meeting to help the comprehensiveness of the reports. Dr. Kaplowitz also attended each of the meetings in her role as coordinator for the project.

Participants were invited to discuss the issues involved, and to identify problems they see in their student's abilities to locate information efficiently, evaluate it, and use it effectively and ethically. They were also invited to comment on any assignments and/or solutions they have already tried to address these issues, and to suggest future directions they feel might be helpful. A copy of the questions used to initiate discussion is attached. See Appendix A.

## **Results**

The resultant eight transcripts were analyzed to identify major themes. These themes are reviewed below. (See Appendix B for a summary of the data).

### **Things Currently Done**

Twenty out of the 27 participants indicated that they do assign papers or projects that would require their students to make use of library provided resources and material. Several of the participants indicated that they have worked with librarians at various UCLA libraries to incorporate librarian delivered instructional support into their curriculum. In some cases librarians went to the class itself to discuss the appropriate techniques, strategies and resources. In other cases, the students were sent to the library to work with the librarian. A third option was to have the librarian develop course-specific web resources for the students' use.

### **The Problem**

There was a general consensus that a problem exists on campus. However, the extent of the problem was dependent on how much each faculty member required independent research of the

literature in his or her field. This was equally true across subject areas. Faculty from each of the four groups indicated that if they either presented students with the research to be used in advance or required them to use set and particular resources (data sets, lists of journals, bibliographies of acceptable web sites etc.) they did not see a problem. However, faculty who assigned papers or projects requiring students to gather information on their own, and use critical thinking skills to select appropriate material were less satisfied with students' efforts.

The following is a list of problems identified by the participants. They are presented in rank order starting with the most often frequently mentioned issues.

1. Students' lack of understanding regarding the issues surrounding plagiarism and intellectual property.
  - It was felt that although a small number of students deliberately copy material, most are just ignorant of when it is appropriate to credit other people's ideas and text.
  - The ability to cut and paste from web sites and the misperception that anything on the web is in the public domain contributes to this problem.
  - Also related to this issue is the difficulty of enforcement of plagiarism violations and the necessity to apply standards uniformly for all students.
2. The inability of students to critically evaluate the quality of the material they have found.
3. Students' lack of understanding of what constitutes the scholarly process (how that differs in different disciplines, how to not only gather information, but to analyze it, synthesize what is found and come up with their own interpretation of the material).
4. The variability of backgrounds and abilities exhibited by students in individual classes. Both transfer students and students coming directly from high school were included in this discussion. The variety in preparation of students entering UCLA is considered an issue as is the lack of paper requirements in these "feeder" institutions.
5. Students' expedient nature - looking for the quick and easy rather than the best. This relates in some way to the lack of critical thinking in that students will often use the most convenient material (usually web sites or online versions of books and/or journal articles) rather than selecting quality material from a range of possibilities.
6. Concern about getting the necessary resources (both in the classroom and in the library) to support any wide scale solution to these problems.
7. The decreasing number of papers being assigned coupled with the lack of time and staff needed to grade these papers. This relates to the resource issue above.
8. The inability of students to select relevant databases to locate material, choose appropriate keywords to conduct their searches and to refine their searches as needed i.e. when they get too many or too few results or when results are not directly on the topic in question). This also relates to both the critical thinking issue and the lack of understanding of the scholarly process.
9. The necessity to integrate these scholarly process and information gathering and critical evaluation skills into the regular coursework and assignments in order to make them relevant to the students.

10. The difficulty of assessing scholarly process and information gathering and evaluating skills.
11. Information overload was mentioned as a contributing factor. There is so much to choose from that students are overwhelmed and unable to select appropriately and tend to choose the easiest route to information. This relates to the expediency issue above.
12. Concern about transfer of training from one course to another and the necessity to sequence instruction to avoid redundancy and to build upon previous instruction was also discussed.
13. The layout and location of the library, the organization and complexity of tools/search engines/databases needed to locate material, the lack of library resources on particular topics, the time needed to acquire material via interlibrary loan were also mentioned as barriers for students who are being encouraged to engage in scholarly research.

### **Suggested Solutions**

The participants in all groups engaged in lively discussions about what might be done to address these above listed concerns. Suggestions focused on a variety of fronts including what individual faculty could do within their own classes; what librarians could contribute; campus-wide initiatives; and collaborative efforts between various interested parties.

Possible solutions are presented below - again in rank order starting with the most frequently mentioned solutions and ending with those mentioned less often.

1. Creating assignments or adapting ones already used to help introduce students to the problematic concepts listed in the above section and force the use of library materials. Faculty felt the more structured the assignment and the clearer the directions about what is expected in terms of scholarly research the better the final product. It was also suggested that detailing how the assignment would be graded would also benefit the students.

Specific suggestions included:

- Working through the assignment in parts with faculty and/or TA feedback at each step - topic selection; bibliography of resources found, draft proposal and/or outline; final paper.
- Design assignments that ask the students to critically evaluate material - i.e. would primary or secondary sources be more appropriate for a given topic; have students critically evaluate web sites especially poor quality ones.
- Research journal to accompany paper that describes the steps taken to acquire material and why particular items were included.
- Multiple short papers instead of one long one.
- Peer critiquing of papers.
- Look at older, heavily cited articles and examine how they are used in subsequent literature.
- Require a mix of types of resources in bibliography - some journals, some books, only a small percentage web sites.

- Make students cite older material to force them beyond material available on the web.
- NOTE: A few faculty members indicated that they do not assign tasks that require this type of research and have students look at specific data sets and web provided figures instead.

2. Develop library sponsored and librarian taught courses to address the issues.

Ideas for types of classes included

- One unit required course
- One unit course paired with discipline course to integrate librarian taught material into course content
- Customized courses for different disciplines
- Three-hour intensive workshops
- Large, but focused, sessions during Orientation weeks stressing the importance of library research.
- Optional one unit seminars - pass/fail
- Pair librarian taught course with research methods class.
- NOTE: Faculty felt librarians should include material on plagiarism, how to properly cite material, note taking, evaluation of web sites, as well as how to efficiently conduct literature searches. It was also felt that it would be useful for these courses to be taught within the library itself in order to familiarize students with its layout, services and material.

3. Faculty also felt they had a role in this instruction especially in the realm of introducing students the scholarly process. Some possibilities for the faculty role included:

- Providing lists of resources that were acceptable for use.
- Putting material to be used on reserve.
- Making sure there is sufficient material on topics being researched by students.
- Include a plagiarism cause (honor code) in syllabus and/or on course web site.
- Offer students a list of pre-selected topics from which to choose their assignment.
- Emphasize critical thinking and evaluation skills.
- Explaining the nature of research in the discipline in question. This includes indicating what type of sources are considered scholarly as well as emphasizing the students role in analyzing and synthesizing the research gathered and developing his or her own interpretation of the material.
- Build writing into the curriculum.
- Provide explicit structure and clear deadlines for assignments.

4. In addition to the role played by librarians and faculty, focus group participant indicated there was a role for a more coordinated effort at the campus level. Some suggestions about approaches included:

- Campus oversight committees to examine the entire curriculum rather than focusing on individual courses.
  - Add writing/research/critical-thinking requirement in all disciplines and more emphasis on writing throughout the curriculum.
  - Working through the GE requirements - adding an information literacy requirement. Adding a library research/information literacy component to GE Cluster classes and increase the number of cluster classes so that every freshman could take one.
  - Requiring some kind of certificate of completion indicating students have taken some form of information literacy/library instruction.
  - Change culture of Orientation to emphasize the importance of library education.
  - Create a university team that randomly checks papers for plagiarism.
5. Faculty and librarian collaborations were viewed as a very effective approach to dealing with these issues. For example,
- Faculty felt that students write better papers as a result of librarian involvement in the class. Involvement could include in-class presentations, librarian prepared handouts and/or web sites, and individual or small group consultations with students.
  - The integration of the librarian presented material within the context of the course material itself was felt to be a key factor in the improvement of students' understanding of the concepts being presented.
  - Librarians can work with faculty to identify where information literacy could logically be introduced within the faculty's curriculum.
  - Librarians were also felt to be a useful resource when new academic programs are in the developmental stages.
6. As indicated in the above section, integrating library instruction into the course material itself is considered of vital importance. Faculty felt successful library instruction was based upon
- Library use being linked to real projects/assignments.
  - Assignments that reinforce the concepts taught during the library instruction.
  - Tying the librarian taught session(s) to the assignments - i.e. time the class visit to the point in the quarter when they will need to use the information being presented.
7. Librarian developed web pages geared directly to the needs of specific classes were mentioned as an excellent and most appreciated approach to assisting students in their assignments. These pages could include
- Links to appropriate resources (books, databases, quality web sites) for a specific class and/or assignment.



- Tutorials on how to use specific resources, databases etc.
  - Tutorials or other types of guide material showing how to choose keywords, refine search strategies, identify peer reviewed journal articles, primary versus secondary material etc.
  - Information on plagiarism (how not to do it), proper citation writing etc.
8. Faculty had the following suggestions for the types of information that should be included in any type of library (information literacy) instruction either in person or virtually.
- Critical evaluation of material. How to determine when a resource (web and/or print) is good and when it is not.
  - Examples of primary versus secondary material and how to differentiate.
  - Examples of scholarly versus popular literature and how to differentiate.
  - Use of web as a research tool. How and why the web is used to communicate information.
  - Emphasize citing ideas, not just words.
9. Faculty suggested that librarians engage in more outreach, letting faculty know what the library has, and what librarians can do to assist them. This can be in person, or virtually via email. If possible, librarians should ask to attend faculty meetings. Let the faculty know how information literacy instruction can save the faculty time and effort and result in higher quality in students' products. Tell the faculty member, "If you are going to give a project, this is what I can do to help."
10. "Turnitin" software was mentioned several times as a way to combat plagiarism. It was felt, however, that the use of this or any other mechanism to combat plagiarism should be used uniformly for all students.
11. Faculty indicated some interest in working through TAs. That is, having TAs work with librarians to increase the TAs' awareness of the problematic concepts so that TAs could be of more assistance to their students.
12. Finally faculty mentioned how difficult it is to assess students' research skills and abilities and indicated that if a test were designed to do this they would use it.

### **Evidence of Success**

Participants shared the types of assignments they have used both successfully and less successfully during their courses. Many indicated that the inclusion of library instruction had a positive effect on the students' work. After library instruction students are better writers, think more critically, and are better able to design their own experiments. When asked how they evaluated this improvement, faculty replied that evidence of success include

- Bibliographies that include citations that go beyond books; include primary and secondary sources; complete citations; and the appropriate use of the cited material in the body of the paper.
- All items on the bibliography are actually used in the body of the paper and are referred to appropriately. Faculty seemed suspicious of items that are only referenced once in the body of the paper.
- Students identified sources with differing viewpoints and engaged in a discussion of those viewpoints.
- The use of resources students would not have known about without the librarian's assistance.
- Examination of student research logs should indicate a range of resources used, and the appropriate selection of search terms.
- Students write papers that teach the faculty something he or she did not know.
- Students themselves report getting something valuable out of the instruction.

## **Conclusions**

The above examination of the focus group transcripts clearly indicates that the participants had major concerns about the quality of their students' work. They are dissatisfied with students' skill levels when it comes to gathering quality information in support of their assignments. They see students taking the most expedient route when doing their assignments, selecting easily obtainable material over quality items, using the web inappropriately, being unable to design search strategies that get them the information they need, and having a negligible grasp on the concepts surrounding plagiarism and intellectual property. A major theme running through all the discussions is that, for whatever reasons, students are not being introduced to the concepts surrounding the scholarly research process. And there is great concern that students are not being required to engage in the type of paper writing that would encourage the development of an understanding of that process.

The faculty who participated in these focus groups indicated that these are concerns that should be addressed. However, they recognized that diminishing resources makes finding a solution particularly challenging. The participants feel that possible solutions lie in many different arenas. Faculty, themselves, can modify their assignments to emphasize the concepts in question. They can also work with librarians to incorporate library and information literacy instruction within the curriculum of individual courses. Faculty also sees a role for librarians to develop and teach their own courses either independent of or in conjunction with faculty taught courses. Furthermore, faculty indicated that the concerns identified during the discussions should be brought to the attention of curriculum oversight committees responsible for undergraduate curriculum in the hopes of developing a campus-wide response to these issues. Collaboration between the library and the faculty was also considered vital in these endeavors.

Key to the success of any solution proposed is that the students are presented with the material in a way that makes it relevant to their needs. Library and information literacy instructional solutions cannot be developed in a vacuum, but must be closely tied to the curricular needs of the students. Whether the material is taught in independent courses or in conjunction with regular curriculum courses, students must be made aware of how the material being covered enhances

their educational efforts. As a result of engaging in these instructional efforts students will produce higher quality assignments, receive better grades, and develop the life-longer learning skills that should help them in their future careers.

The Library is extremely grateful to the faculty who participated in these focus group discussions and so articulately expressed their concerns surrounding their students' abilities to locate information efficiently, evaluate it, and use it effectively and ethically in support of their educational endeavors. It is our hope that the results of these focus group discussions can be used to explicate the issues across the campus and to begin conversations among the various constituencies that will lead toward innovative solutions that will improve students' educational experience during their years at UCLA.

### **Next Steps**

- Develop a mechanism to survey additional faculty to discover if the issues identified by the focus group participants are of universal concern.
- In collaboration with faculty develop information literacy competencies for UCLA students.
- Explore a variety of delivery mechanisms – both in-person and virtual – that can begin to address the identified concerns and ensure that UCLA students develop the information literacy competencies needed to become an information literate individual.
- Develop mechanisms for assessing the information literacy skills at UCLA.

### **Personal involved**

#### Project Coordinator

Joan Kaplowitz - Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library  
Chair - ILI Informing Group

#### Recruitment of Faculty done by the ILI Informing Group:

Cinthya Ippoliti - Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library  
Aura Lippincott - Rosenberg Management Library  
Pauline Swartz - College Library

#### Moderator

Jason Frand - Adjunct Assistant Professor and Assistant Dean of Computing Services – Anderson Graduate School of Management

#### Recorders

Jenifer Abramsom - Reference and Instructional Services - Young Research Library  
Stephanie Brasley - College Library  
Patti Caravello - Reference and Instructional Services - Young Research Library  
Anita Colby - Science and Engineering Libraries  
Christopher Coleman - Reference and Instructional Services - Young Research Library  
Judith Hershman - Art Library

Diane Mizrachi - College Library  
Dominique Turnbow - Biomedical Library

Director, Information Literacy Initiative  
Eleanor Mitchell - Head, College Library

### Resource List

- Glitz, Beryl. 1998. *Focus groups for libraries and librarians*. New York: Forbes.
- Sevier, Robert. 1989. Conducting focus group research. *Journal of College Admissions* 122 (Winter):4-9.
- Shoaf, Eric C. 2003. Using a professional moderator in library focus group research. *College and Research Libraries* 64 (2):124-132.

## **Appendix A**

### **Moderator's Protocol GE Cluster, Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Sciences Faculty Focus Group May 2003**

I will introduce myself to each participant as they enter the room.

Introduction: I interviewed several faculty members from around campus regarding changes they have seen over the years for a talk I was giving on PKM. One colleague described his undergraduate students as “hunter-gathers, cutters-pasters” and complained of the lack of critical thinking in putting their research papers together, along with all the related problems of copyright, plagiarism, etc. Our UCLA librarians have had similar experiences, specifically as it's related to undergraduate students' on-gathering skills for their research papers and projects.

This brings us to our focus group. To gather faculty perspectives on undergraduate student's ability to locate information efficiently, evaluate it, and use it effectively.

We have organized our time around three themes:

1. Identify: What is the problem and how wide spread is it?
2. Solutions: What have you tried that works (or doesn't)?
3. Reach: Should this problem be brought to the broader campus community?

Focus group process: we have several questions for which we would like everyone's input. I'll be moderating the session together with Joan Kaplowitz's assistance, and the other team members will serve as recorders. The final report will be reporting all data anonymously so we would appreciate your candid remarks.

Our format will basically be that we will be covering the areas outlined. I will propose a question. We'll go around the room and would appreciate a short response from each of you. After we go around, I'll open for additional thoughts and discussion on the question. Joan or I may also ask follow up questions if it seems to help us flesh out the issues of concern.

Facilitator's prerogative: As moderator, I'll do my best to keep us on target and focused. If I feel we're wandering, I'll do my best to bring us back, and to assure we have time for each of the four areas.

Any questions or comments before we get started?

So, let's start with the first question, so please introduce yourself and tell us what department you are from?

Theme 1 Identify: What is the problem and how wide spread is it?

1. Do you assign papers, projects, presentations, etc., that require your undergraduate students to gather information from library provided resources or from the Internet? If yes, can you give us an example of such an assignment? If not, did you once give such assignments, and if so, why have you stopped?
2. What are the major problems that the undergraduate students seem to have with these assignments? What are your thoughts regarding undergraduate student's ability to locate information efficiently, evaluate it, and use it effectively?
3. Do you think your undergraduate students understand and employ the principles surrounding the ethical and legal use of information such as plagiarism, fair use, and copyright?
4. Do you tailor your instructional goals and choice of assignments according to your undergraduate students' ability to locate information efficiently, evaluate it, and use it effectively? E.g., do you not give certain kinds of assignments because of your concerns?

Theme 2 Solutions: What have you tried that works (or doesn't)?

1. Have you had any experience trying to assist undergraduate students to do a better job in information-gathering for their research papers and projects? What worked and didn't work? Any recommendations on how to improve undergraduate students' information-gathering skills?
2. What evidence would indicate to you that your students have improved their information-gathering skills?

Theme 3 Reach: Should this problem be brought to the broader campus community?

1. How important/critical are concerns regarding students' ability to locate information efficiently, evaluate it, and use it effectively, in terms of meeting instructional objectives?
2. From a strategic (long term) perspective, to whom do you think this issue should be presented, and how? What would constitute supporting evidence for this problem?
3. From a tactical (short-term) perspective, do you have some suggestions about how individual faculty/departments might be able to work with librarians to try and ameliorate the problem?

## Appendix B

### Focus Group Discussion Themes Summary Data Number of Times Mentioned in Transcripts

#### The Problem

Plagiarism and intellectual property issues	42
Critical thinking and evaluation of material	38
Lack of understanding of the scholarly process	28
Varying levels of knowledge and expertise	
Among students	23
Students tendency toward expediency	21
Lack of resources (both for faculty and library)	19
Lack of writing requirements that encourage scholarly process and literature-based research	18
inability of students to select appropriate keywords and to refine searches as needed	17
Library instruction needs to be integrated into the curriculum to be effective	15
Layout of library and complexity of resources as barriers	7
Lack of transfer of training from one library instruction to another and need for coordinated sequencing of instruction	4
Difficulty of assessing concepts involved	3

#### Suggested Solutions

Create or adapt assignments	21
Library sponsored courses	20
Faculty introduce students to the scholarly process	19
Campus-wide initiatives/ examination of undergraduate curriculum as a whole	17
Collaboration between faculty and librarians	15
Integration of library instruction into the curriculum	14
Librarian developed web pages geared directly to the needs of specific classes	11
Librarians outreach to departments	6
Turnitin software to deal with plagiarism	5
Faculty teaching more about the scholarly process and plagiarism	5
Work with TAs	3
Honor code on course syllabus and/or web page	2
Development of instrument to assess students'	

research skills and abilities 1

**Evidence of Success**

Better, more varied and appropriate resources used. 4

Improved writing and critical thinking skills 3

Students identified sources with differing viewpoints and engaged in a discussion of those viewpoints. 1

The use of resources students would not have known about without the librarian's assistance. 1

Examination of student research logs indicate a range of resources used, and the appropriate selection of search terms. 1

Students write papers that teach the faculty something he or she did not know. 1

Students themselves report getting something valuable out of the instruction. 1