Is there a documented need for this project?

Among college students in general, deficiency in IL skills has been documented extensively in the literature, and initiatives undertaken at a wide range of institutions also testify to the need. In the SACS region alone, 11 institutions have based their QEPs on information literacy. Beyond our region institutions of all types in all regions have started IL programs. The California State University institutions, UCLA, University of Massachusetts, University of Rhode Island, and a group of selective Midwestern liberal arts colleges including Carlton and Grinnell are just some of the institutions that have formally addressed information literacy.

Do Armstrong students need more IL instruction? It is unlikely that Armstrong students differ greatly in this regard from students at all kinds of institutions all over the country. We’ve never undertaken a direct assessment of IL across the student body, so we do not have bulletproof data, and of course we do not have time to undertake such a study before the completion of the QEP selection process. We do have the LIBQUAL+ and NSSE results referenced in the original proposal, and we have anecdotal evidence from teaching faculty and librarians. For example, two years ago Dr. Finlay and Dr. Kraft asked the reference librarians to co-teach a graduate course in the MALPS program because they believed that these students needed further instruction. Two or three years ago, Dr. Hopkins asked librarians to develop a module on plagiarism for her departments Historical Methods class (HIST 3500), because students needed instruction in incorporating scholarly information into their own work properly and ethically. Dr. Logan brings her Intro. to Education students to the library every week to teach them IL skills. Librarians regularly encounter students at the reference desk who are taking 3000 or 4000 level classes and have no idea how to find scholarly information sources on their topic.

Beyond students’ need for more IL instruction, intentionally promoting and advancing IL at Armstrong is another way the institution can differentiate itself from similar schools. Armstrong’s vision, as expressed in the strategic plan, is to become an “academically selective institution of first choice, recognized nationally for undergraduate, graduate and professional education.” A successful IL QEP would help move the institution in that direction.

While the three phases in your project are noted as possibilities, the plan has not been concretely described. How exactly will this plan be implemented? Specifically how will library faculty be involved, and how will faculty in the academic disciplines contribute to the project differently from what they’re already doing?

To answer the last question first, some faculty will continue doing what they are already doing because they already address IL learning and IL outcomes are included
in their course learning outcomes. Some faculty teach courses in which IL instruction would make little sense, like college algebra or beginning Spanish; those faculty will go on doing what they are already doing. Faculty interested in improving IL might tweak existing courses by adding an IL exercise, maybe one designed and graded by librarians. If the QEP were to offer grants in the form of release time, as we propose, some faculty might re-design a course or create a new one. In many instances, the only change necessary would be assessment of the IL instruction that is already happening, and we said as much in our original proposal.

What will librarians do? Library faculty will provide support to teaching faculty in a number of ways. We will assist interested faculty in creating new IL assignments or learning activities, and we will assist them in evaluating students’ work where appropriate. As a pilot project, we would embed librarians in online or on-site classes, where they could give students personal attention and support in gathering and using information sources. Finding IL assessment tools or designing our own, offering workshops for interested faculty to show them new resources, and assisting in planning and writing the QEP are among the other ways librarians would contribute to the project. Librarians will also provide some direct instruction. We will continue presenting 50-minute one-shot sessions for instructors who prefer that format, and we will work cooperatively with those instructors to assess the learning outcomes. For Fall 2011, we will have a library faculty member teaching a two-credit FYE class on information literacy. If the class goes well we will make more librarians available to teach those classes.

As we tried to make clear in the proposal, we do not know exactly how this plan will be implemented. We suggested a three phase implementation, but we’ve since become aware of problems with that model. Doug Frazier recently met with David Wheeler and Beth Howells, who expressed serious reservations about the addition of yet another set of learning outcomes to the required composition courses. With that in mind, we agree that our proposal would need to be reworked to be effective. Our point is that faculty and librarians, using their respective strengths, can bolster student information literacy at Armstrong.

- Could you please provide some examples of how this project would work?

University of Central Florida’s QEP, begun in 2006, offers a good example. After that campus decided that information fluency (as they called it) would be the topic for their QEP effort, composition professor Dr. Martha Marinara (who used to teach at Armstrong) was selected as co-coordinator and later sole coordinator for the project. It is worth noting that one of the selection criteria was that the coordinator(s) had to have a strong background in the classroom and an interest in assessment. It was the library that highlighted the need for information literacy, but a member of the teaching faculty, Dr. Marinara, led the planning. She lead a team that selected three programs on campus as pilot projects (they did not attempt to reach every student.) The three pilot projects were in Nursing, their Honors program and their freshman year experience. Again, this was decided during the implementation phase, and they looked for programs on campus ready, and willing, to work in information literacy.
They provided these programs funding to learn and develop a program that included concepts of information fluency. Dr. Marinara and her team also provided training/workshops on information fluency as part of regular faculty development. As incentives for faculty members to incorporate IL into their courses, they offered small course development or travel grants of $1,000. UCF’s librarians supported the project by providing workshops on library resources, collaborating with teaching faculty using library resources in their classes and creating several online tutorials that provide basic learning objects on plagiarism, citation style, search strategies, and more, to support classroom learning, and aid assessment of students information literacy skills.

- **Considering the various objectives for AASU’s core courses, would teaching students about researching scholarly sources apply to core courses across disciplines? If so, please explain.**

Information literacy is much broader in scope than just “researching scholarly sources,” and courses in many disciplines could address IL learning outcomes. Here are some samples of different ACRL learning outcomes. We’ve added relevant disciplines in bold face.

1. Differentiates between primary and secondary sources, recognizing how their use and importance vary with each discipline. **History, Literature, Political Science.**

2. Identifies appropriate investigative methods (e.g., laboratory experiment, simulation, fieldwork). **Psychology, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Education, Sociology, Health Sciences, Physical Therapy.**

3. Restates textual concepts in his/her own words and selects data accurately. **Any discipline.**

4. Recognizes prejudice, deception, or manipulation. **History, Education, Sociology, Political Science, Health Sciences, Statistics.**

5. Tests theories with discipline-appropriate techniques (e.g., simulators, experiments). **Psychology, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Education, Sociology, Health Sciences, Physical Therapy.**

6. Chooses a communication medium and format that best supports the purposes of the product or performance and the intended audience. **Any discipline**

- **As for feasibility, with which academic constituencies have you discussed this plan, and how have they offered support of it? Please answer in terms of altered teaching loads, curricular changes, new and redirected costs, and changes in tenure and promotion guidelines.**

We did talk to the Dean and Assistant Dean of Liberal Arts, and we have had informal discussions with faculty in various departments. In a message to Doug Frazier, June Hopkins wrote “I did have a look at the proposal and find that I agree with just about everything. In the history department we actually now do much of what you list, although not in a systemic way [emphasis added].” As
mentioned earlier, Doug Frazier also met with David Wheeler and Beth Howells of LLP, though not until after submission of the proposal. While we can’t point to any faculty who have completely committed to supporting our proposal, nobody has said that they would not support an IL QEP in some form.

With regard to the rest of the question, we do not pretend to know the answers, and we acknowledge that our proposal is lacking in specificity. To put it bluntly, our work simply does not put us in a position to answer these questions with any authority. Teaching loads, curricular changes, and so on are beyond our domain. What we do know is that these questions can be addressed, because other institutions have successfully implemented IL QEPs, drawing on the teaching faculty for leadership. We know that an IL QEP is doable because it has been done elsewhere successfully, and we know it is worth doing.
Answers to questions raised by the QEP Steering Committee regarding the FYE Civic Engagement Proposal

- **Please be specific regarding expected outcomes:** Students will gain field specific knowledge. The field experiences will be tied to classes and tied to assignments. Some examples are as follows:
  - Last fall Jane Rago’s students volunteered at the Forsyth Park Farmer’s Market with the goal to promote nutrition and healthy living to disadvantaged citizens. The farmer’s market offers a deal to families with W.I.C. vouchers: at the farmer’s market that can double the dollar value of those vouchers. As a result of their civic engagement, students returned to their classroom and could write more knowledgeably about the challenges of healthy living on a limited income.
  - Mary Anne Brock taught a learning community designed for pre-health professions majors, during which they studied demographics and health risks. Although the learning community was several years ago and the students did not go out into the field, this kind of class is a prime example of how civic engagement could be incorporated.

According to these faculty, research shows that volunteerism by itself, such as AASU’s one day of service, is good PR for the university, but it does little to enhance student learning. However, if tied to a class/assignments and if structured to facilitate continued field experiences, civic engagement makes stronger students. The jargon these days is *deeper learning,* and there’s a lot of research out there examining that.

- **Would you be willing to rephrase your passage about Armstrong being a fragmented university?** If the committee would like this group to do so, they will. However, Mary Anne Brock is our faculty member writing our SACS report. Her experience with SACS tells her that SACS would not be alarmed by such a term. In fact, her experience shows her that SACS applauds a university’s ability to recognize a problem and honestly take measures to address that problem.

- **Who falls under the umbrella of professional staff?** These authors had in mind salaried staff members with master’s degrees who already have a stake in freshman learning communities (and are already teaching some seminars), such as the staff of student affairs and the advisement centers. Although the term *professional staff* is not limited only to staff working in those two offices, the authors of this proposal do not intend to *require* any staff person to participate in this project.

- **With which administrators have you discussed this project, and from whom have you garnered support?** This group of faculty talked to administrators until they ran out of time to do so. No one opposed it. According these authors, the dean of liberal arts supports it, June Hopkins supports it, the advisement office supports it, David Wheeler expressed support last fall, and the curriculum committee supports it. These authors also discussed the idea with John Kraft. In face, these authors wanted to do a one-time pilot of a civic engagement course, but they chose not to pursue it because doing so would require going through the university curriculum
committee and the faculty senate, and time did not permit those processes to take place. However, when they discussed the idea with curriculum committee members, those members were supportive. The group of authors repeated the assertion that no one opposed this project as they discussed it across campus.

- **Have you considered how the FYSE tags will affect students with long programs of study?** According to these authors, the College of Science and Technology has the longest programs of study, and no one in that college opposed the idea when discussed with them. In fact, some students in those programs already take another kind of seminar course with an additional credit hour, and they don’t complain. At some point there was a conversation with Dean Barrett about removing a P.E. requirement to make room for the extra one hour. That idea went no further than a discussion, however. The authors recognize some faculty might oppose that accommodation.

- **Please offer some specific information about costs and how department heads and administrators will cover the costs of limiting class sizes and requiring some faculty to take overloads:** The authors didn’t anticipate this project to be free. They expect the university to invest in its students, so they hope higher administrators will “pony up.” At the same time, they discussed some ways to adjust enrollments. Take for instance, HIST/POLS 1100, which has (I think) around 40 students. For each FYSE section that has 25 students, maybe another non-tagged section could have 55 students. This group of authors does not advocate increasing class sizes, but that was one way they could think of spontaneously to redirect costs.

- **Which freshmen will be involved:** Traditional first-year students. Down the line, maybe the project could offer some tagged courses for non-traditional or transfer students. They don’t expect students to meet this civic engagement requirement in their first year, however. They know because of pre-requisites of some core courses and because of students’ varied schedules, some students might have to meet this requirement later in the program of study. But they want the requirement to state that students must meet this civic engagement requirement at some point before they graduate.

- **Because this project targets the core, won’t the COLA and CST carry most of the workload?** Because of the way the core is outlined, it looks that way. However, our history with learning communities has shown that the College of Education and the College of Health Professions have participated most in those seminars because sections are designed specifically for students anticipating those majors. FYSE seminars could be tailored to attract students in HP and Ed majors, and in that way, the other two colleges could participate.

One more thing: Over the past couple of years, Jane Rago and Mary Anne Brock have been working on the Enrollment Management Council (of which Andy Clark is also a member), the task of which is to examine matters of recruitment, admissions, enrollment,
retention, housing, etc. The committee has written an extensive enrollment management plan, which outlines a best-case scenario plan of how to strengthen student enrollment, retention, etc. In several ways, the civic engagement proposal overlaps the recommendations of the enrollment management plan, which was composed after years of research. Andy Clark could probably elaborate on this for us if we need him to.