

In the first four items, our students report being asked to grapple with information in a number of ways, including integrating information for papers and projects, synthesizing or organizing information in new ways, judging the soundness of information, arguments, and methods, and using information to perform new skills. In most of these categories COM students report similar, although slightly lower, rates of engagement with information literacy tasks. COM students report being asked to synthesize information at a higher rate than the national average.

One finding that is cause for concern: in Item Six, COM students report being asked to write fewer papers than students in the national cohort by a significant amount: 46% vs. 60%. Although writing more papers does not necessarily equal better learning, the more students engage in writing, the more opportunity they have to hone information literacy skills, at least when papers require outside sources of information. Similarly concerning, Item Seven indicates students at COM report being asked to use technology at a significantly lower rate than students nationwide (46% vs. 64%). Again, technology use does not equate to learning, and, indeed, the relationship between technology and learning is complex. Having said this, gains in developing information literacy skills for college students depend more and more on students developing facility with technology.

Reading. Item Five – the number of “un-assigned” books that COM students read – is heartening. Our students report reading for pleasure at a slightly higher rate (26% vs. 23%) than students in the national cohort. This is good news for the library, which has invested a great deal of time and money in making its physical collections more conducive to browsing, by improving the look of the “stacks,” increasing and refining signage and, in Spring 2015, adding a new Leisure Reading Collection. Since the last accreditation visit, the most important gain in this area has been COM Library’s membership in MARINet, which has improved access to materials for pleasure reading and academic enrichment exponentially.