

# Research Readiness Self-Assessment measures health care research proficiency

## Professor shines light on dangerous reliance on Internet for health information

Lana Ivanitskaya's recent study educates people on new health media and helps them safely surf the Web for answers to health questions.

Ivanitskaya, assistant professor of health science and health administration; Anne Marie Casey, associate dean of libraries; Irene O'Boyle, assistant professor of community health; and other CMU colleagues, have spent the past five years administering the interactive online Research Readiness Self-Assessment (RRSA) test to more than 1,000 Central Michigan University undergraduates, graduates, and library professionals.

## Study measures student knowledge

The study has explored three basic questions:

- How proficient are university students at finding and evaluating health-related information?
- How well do they understand the difference between peer-reviewed scholarly resources and opinion pieces or sales pitches?
- How aware are they about the level of their health information competencies?

"In addition to skills and knowledge, we measured people's beliefs about the Internet and their self-perceptions," Ivanitskaya said. "I learned that about 80 percent of students believe they are good or excellent at finding and evaluating information. The truth is actually that at least 50 percent of them need to improve their skills considerably."

## Many people search online

More than 55 percent of Americans look for health information online.

"These people will be at greater risk of making bad health decisions based on noncredible information if they conduct a Google search than if they search a scholarly library database," Ivanitskaya said. "We're talking about potentially harmful information on such subjects as cancer rates, smoking cessation methods, and fever management in children. People need advanced skills and knowledge to find high-quality health information on the Internet."

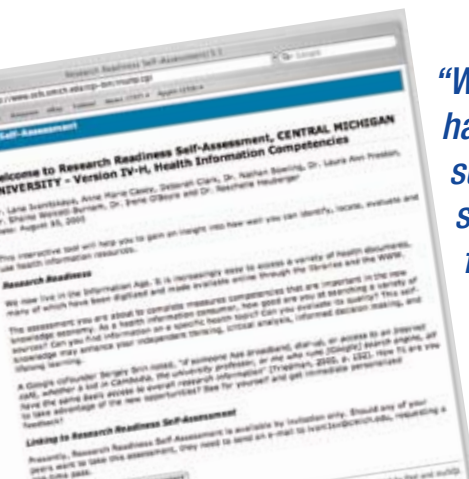
Ivanitskaya's goal with the ongoing study is to help students and eventually others learn how to locate the relevant health information they need on the Web and in library databases, evaluate the quality of the documents, make evidence-based decisions, and become more aware of their own skill level.

Currently, she is looking for partnerships with other universities in order to study a broader range of U.S. society.

"We are doing cross-cultural comparisons with Canadian students and developing a Chinese version of the assessment," she said. "I think this will make an interesting comparison. I want to reach out to other countries and work together making people mindful about how they navigate digital resources." ■

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— Lana Ivanitskaya,  
assistant professor  
in the School of Health Sciences



Anne Marie Casey, Irene O'Boyle, application programmer Wesley Leonard, and Lana Ivanitskaya, left to right, discuss health information on the Internet.