

Elizabeth Dolinger

Defining and teaching information literacy

Engaging faculty and the Framework

For librarians at Keene State College, the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education solidified moving away from one-shot instruction sessions and toward initiatives that would better integrate information literacy into the curriculum. This approach meant moving away from the idea that librarians must be teaching information literacy and instead adapting the idea that faculty within the discipline are best positioned to teach information literacy through their disciplinary context.

An important part of this transition was offering a series of curricular development workshops we titled “Defining and Teaching Information Literacy.” The workshops were an opportunity to engage faculty in the design of lessons and assignments aimed at explicitly developing students’ information literacy within their course. At Keene State, despite information literacy being listed as one of the outcomes for the general education program, it is an outcome noticeably missing on course syllabi beyond the first-year research and writing course.

While planning the workshops, I sought ideas from other librarians who had run similar workshops, and I posted to the Information Literacy Listserv. I received many inquiries from librarians interested in what we were planning but no responses from librarians who had run similar workshops for faculty based on the Framework (yet). As a result, I thought sharing our workshop

outline, process, and what we learned might benefit others.

Funding and application

To engage faculty in the level of curriculum development needed to integrate information literacy into their course, we received funding to pay six faculty a small stipend to participate. The application to participate asked faculty to describe the course they anticipated working on, to articulate the challenges or successes they experienced with students’ information literacy skills, and to list if they currently taught and assessed information literacy in their course.

We also encouraged teams from the same department to apply together, hoping that this would promote conversations of how information literacy could be scaffolded within the curriculum from lower- to upper-level courses. In addition to the workshop, we expected faculty to attend at least one planning meeting over the next year as the lessons and assignments they developed were implemented.

Planning the workshops

Librarians brainstormed titles for the pro-

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gram but agreed that “Defining and Teaching Information Literacy” captured what we wanted to communicate to faculty about the workshops, such as:

- The workshops would not focus on the library and library resources.
- The workshops would not focus on how “we” as librarians defined information literacy.
- The workshops would focus on developing an understanding of information literacy through the lens of their own discipline.
- The workshops would focus on developing activities and assignments that would develop students’ information literacy understanding within their discipline.
- The workshops would be grounded in the Framework for Information Literacy and ask faculty to interpret the Framework for themselves.

The call for participation explained that the workshops would focus on five essential questions:

- How is authority defined and constructed within your discipline?
- How can we better support students as they engage in an iterative research process that asks new questions that lead to additional lines of inquiry?
- How can we teach scholarship as a conversation and promote student participation that engages varied perspectives and interpretations?
- How can we facilitate students’ understanding of the political, sociological, and economic aspects of the information environment through the lens of their discipline?
- How can we prepare students to engage as citizens in the contemporary information environment outside of the academy?

We planned for the two-day workshop to occur in late May 2017. Then, over the summer and fall semesters, librarians would follow up and work individually with participants to finish planning lessons and assignments. We hoped this would lead to information literacy being listed as a course

outcome and that information literacy would be included on their assessments of student learning.

Workshop outline

We weren’t expecting faculty to produce finished curriculum in two days. We sought to increase their understanding of information literacy through their disciplinary lens and to develop drafts of course outcomes, activities, and assignments.

Workshop goals included:

- define information literacy through the lens of your discipline,
- increase understanding of information literacy as more than information skills,
- draft information literacy outcomes for a course,
- draft at least one assignment in the course that addresses information literacy,
- draft at least one activity that addresses information literacy concepts,
- increase ability to recognize student challenges related to information literacy, and
- increase confidence to teach students information literacy concepts and skills.

While the participants came from different disciplines (Health Science, Management, Biology, and Philosophy), the challenges they articulated in their applications were similar:

- identifying primary from secondary sources,
- search terms—disciplinary literacy still developing,
- “quality” and “reliability,”
- attribution,
- sustained research,
- peer reviewed/scholarly information,
- which search engines to use,
- students make assumptions about quality because it includes data,
- distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant,
- students take information out of context,
- lack motivation—they don’t “get it,”

- what constitutes scholarship and authority in the discipline is very diverse, and
- instructor confidence to teach information literacy and familiarity with own field.

We used the challenges they highlighted to focus the workshops. We discussed the importance of clarifying and defining expectations for information sources and the language used to describe information on assignments. For example, both the Health Science and Management faculty ask students to use “primary sources.” However, their expectation and definition of a primary source is different. Health Science faculty are looking for primary research articles published in peer-reviewed journals, while the Management faculty were looking for text of interviews with those in the field or business data.¹ Crossdisciplinary discussions were essential in helping participants to understand the nuances of the terms they were using to describe information and how easily confusion can occur among students who are taking classes across multiple disciplines within a week, or even a day. Participants recognized how information and authority is valued differently in each discipline.

Faculty were provided a complete copy of the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy, but we focused on the four frames we felt would most resonate with the challenges the faculty identified in their applications.

The four frames we focused on were:

- Research as inquiry (day 1),
- Scholarship as conversation (day 1),
- Authority is constructed and contextual (day 2), and
- Information has value (day 2).

We believed it was important to model active learning techniques and present exercises that faculty could easily adapt to use with their students. Each day we followed a similar pattern: we opened by providing time to reflect on past experiences, we introduced a frame and engaged with the information literacy concepts through activities, we had

scheduled time for reflection on one’s own learning and ideas for their course, and we ended by sharing ideas on how the concepts we just worked through could be applied in our courses. We repeated this pattern for each frame.

The types of activities we used included drawing pictures, making timelines, watching videos, listening to short presentations, making lists, sorting, participating in Sticky Notes activities, and sharing and building upon each other’s understandings of information literacy in their discipline.

For each frame, we engaged the faculty in activities meant to promote consideration of their own experiences and understandings. They reflected on their experiences as an undergraduate student, as a graduate student, and now as a professor who engages in their disciplinary field. We worked with them to make explicit some of their own understandings and behaviors that have become implicit. Following the same pattern for each frame helped faculty to know what to expect, and they all commented how important the reflection time was for their processing and thinking. They wrote down ideas, asked questions, talked with colleagues, and expanded on one another’s ideas.

Homework between the two workshop days was to consider which specific frames and knowledge practices and/or dispositions were most relevant to their discipline and their students’ needs and to draft course or assignment level outcomes. We provided a template for writing outcomes.

In addition to the Framework, the participants also read a short 2015 article from AAC&U that discusses why information literacy needs to be considered a liberal art and asks readers to question what information literacy looks like within their discipline.²

Keene State College is a public liberal arts college, so it is important to consider how information literacy fits within the liberal arts. We also normalized the experiences of students’ challenges with research

from Project Information Literacy³ and introduced two ideas of understanding information literacy: Christine Bruce's "Seven Faces of Information Literacy"⁴ and Carol Kuhlthau's "Information Search Process."⁵

Follow up (not)

The expected follow up included meeting at least once with a librarian to discuss the lessons that would be taught in the course. While the librarians followed up with the participants, I did not provide the librarians any expectations or standards to guide the follow-up meetings. Therefore, each librarians' follow-up meeting was different and did not necessarily focus on refining lessons and activities regarding information literacy in the course. For some, the follow-up meeting consisted of an email check-in asking if the participant had any questions. The participants had hoped for a group follow-up meeting, but we couldn't accommodate everyone's schedules.

Realizing that I had dropped the ball on following through with the workshops, this spring semester I met with participants to discuss the workshops and their experiences, and to see what lessons and activities they had developed or taught, if any. Results were mixed.

Each participant had positive feedback about the workshops and strongly recommended we offer them again. One suggested that there be more time for interaction between faculty from the same discipline. Everyone agreed that the follow-up needed to be more thorough and consistent. The application of what they learned about information literacy was also mixed. For example, one participant was interpreting the Authority is Constructed and Contextual frame as a way for students to "become their own authority on [a subject] based on their own personal experience."

Through clarification about each of the frames and specific assignments in the course, I guided him to use the Scholarship as Conversation frame to help students see

how a topic has evolved over time, where their own experiences might fit within that, and where they could enter the conversation occurring among experts in the field.

For this participant, the workshop was helpful in thinking about information literacy and his course, but the need for a follow-up conversation with a librarian was palpable while he was designing assignments.

Another follow up highlighted that the evaluation of information and arguments is contextual. Her field requires the use of logic and proofs to determine the validity of an argument, rather than other sources or experts in the field. She often finds students believe information to be reliable "just because it has some data" and wants to help students move away from that assumption. She was one of the most adamant that we continue to offer the workshops and that the experience helped her to think about how she could better scaffold information evaluation for her students.

Conclusion

Overall, we believe the workshops were a success at engaging faculty in thinking deeply about information literacy in their disciplines and in using the Framework to shape their lessons. There were many aha moments during the workshops, and we are planning to run them again. Unfortunately, our lack of timely follow-up was a missed opportunity to continue developing a community of practice around information literacy.

Other thoughts for the "Defining and Teaching Information Literacy" program are to offer the workshop specifically for instructors who are teaching research and writing intensive courses to first-year students. In any case, follow up and assessment will be a key focus of the next workshop series we offer. I hope that our approach will benefit other librarians seeking a model to use the Framework with faculty.

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important to touch base in person when planning an instruction session in order to make certain that the planned session still makes sense within the current reality of the course. For each planned classroom intervention, one face-to-face meeting is recommended. Structuring these in-person meetings along the lines of a reference interview allows not only for further clarification of session objectives, but also for the informal interaction conducive to building an enduring working relationship.

Conclusion

The foregoing is premised on the suspicion that a fear of upsetting a dynamic in which the librarian/archivist is presumed to be the junior partner or helpmeet of the discipline-side instructor often prevents librarians and archivists from being assertive both in establishing the parameters of their relationship to discipline-based faculty, and shaping their course interventions. While it is undeniable that the hierarchical nature of the academy makes it a reasonable assumption that many collection-side instructional partners hold this view consciously or subconsciously, we do ourselves, our instructional partners, the materials with which we have been entrusted, and our students, a great disservice if we do not challenge this way of thinking. There is a distinct possibility that clarity and

assertiveness on the part of librarians and archivists would be welcomed by our instructional partners, and could become a highly beneficial professional norm. This article is meant to encourage collection-side professionals to confidently and effectively assert their expertise born of training and experience and in so doing, do justice to students' education.

Notes

1. J. Archer, A. M. Hanlon, and J. A. Levine, "Investigating primary source literacy," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 35(5), 410–20.

2. ACRL RBMS, SAA Joint Task Force (2017), "Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy [PDF document]," retrieved from www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org/acrl/files/content/standards/PrimarySource20Literacy2018.pdf.

3. E. Yakel (2004), "Information literacy for primary sources: Creating a new paradigm for archival researcher education," *OCLC Systems & Services: International Digital Library Perspectives* 20 (2), 61–64.

4. S. Horowitz, "Putting the Draft Guidelines on Primary Source Literacy into Practice," blog post retrieved from www.archivejournal.net/notes/putting-the-draft-guidelines-on-primary-source-literacy-into-practice/. *z*

(*"Defining and teaching information literacy," continues from page 13*)

Notes

1. For more on this see Laura Saunders, "Faculty Perspectives on Information Literacy As a Student Learning Outcome," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 38, no. 4 (2012): 226–36.

2. Todd J. Wiebe, "The Information Literacy Imperative in Higher Education," *Liberal Education* 101, no. 4-v102 (2016).

3. Alison J. Head and Michael B. Eisenberg, "Truth Be Told: How College Students Evaluate and Use Information in the Digital Age," Project Information Literacy Progress Report (2010), www.projectinfolit.org

[/uploads/2/7/5/4/27541717/pil_fall2010_survey_fullreport1.pdf](http://uploads/2/7/5/4/27541717/pil_fall2010_survey_fullreport1.pdf) (accessed April 26, 2018).

4. Christine Bruce, "Seven faces of Information Literacy in Higher Education," Website of Christine Bruce, www.christinebruce.com.au/informed-learning/seven-faces-of-information-literacy-in-higher-education/ (accessed April 27, 2018).

5. Carol Kuhlthau, "Information Search Process," Rutgers School of Communication and Information, <http://wp.comminfo.rutgers.edu/ckuhlthau/information-search-process/> (accessed April 27, 2018). *z*