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Intentional Co-Instruction

Bringing the Framework and Guidelines into Conversation for Undergraduate History Information Literacy Instruction

In 2019, the newly appointed history subject liaison at the University of Delaware sought a collaborator from the Special Collections Department for a three-hour history capstone instruction session on environmental history. That initial collaboration sparked an ongoing commitment between us, a special collections librarian and the history liaison, to provide co-instruction sessions that introduce history students to hands-on archival research.

When first approached about this lengthy class session, we met with the instructor to gain a better understanding of the goals for a 400-level summative writing course and asked questions such as: *What skills are the students supposed to learn from this class? What is the final assignment? What skills are they supposed to demonstrate in their final research assignment?* After receiving the above information and a copy of the assignment and syllabus, we designed the session and created a set of learning objectives integrating the ACRL Information Literacy Framework (Framework), the Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy (Guidelines), and the historical research process as our pedagogic backbone.

Session Design

The Framework needs little introduction to this audience. The Guidelines were created by the ACRL RBMS-SAA Joint Task Force on Primary Source Literacy and outline the "knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, and ethically use primary sources within specific disciplinary contexts."[1] The Guidelines were created to complement the Framework, and the two "can be used in unison to encourage informed collaboration between archivists ... who work with primary source material and information literacy librarians at the college or university level."[2] Below, we will show the alignment between the learning objectives described in the Guidelines and the concepts articulated in the Framework, as we see them. Rarely is there a one-to-one connection between the Guidelines and the Framework; rather, we see the learning objectives as articulated in the Guidelines correlating to the different concepts described in the Framework. While each learning objective is important for our students, two receive more attention in our sessions than the rest, and we discuss these first. Although we do not explicitly tell students that we are embarking on these specific points from the Guidelines and the Framework, we use these as a foundation for the objectives we create for each lesson.

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Read, Understand, and Summarize (Guidelines) & Research as Inquiry (Framework); Searching as Strategic Exploration (Framework); Authority Is Constructed and Contextual (Framework):

Understanding the format, context, and information content of primary sources is an underdeveloped capacity for many history majors, who must learn how to analyze a variety of sources in different formats (e.g., newspapers, photographs, audio recordings) and use them cohesively in developing their arguments. The same principles can be applied to secondary sources, understanding the scholarly consensus around their research topics. This objective relates to the Framework's concepts around searching and identifying resources, as well as understanding the context around an information products' creation.

Interpret, Analyze, and Evaluate (Guidelines) & Research as Inquiry (Framework); Information Creation as a Process (Framework); Authority is Constructed and Contextual (Framework); Scholarship as Conversation (Framework); Information Has Value (Framework):

Our goal is to help students see beyond the original function of a primary source and help them think about repurposing sources for their research. This is a critical ability for an information-literate student: to take an information product, analyze it, and recontextualize it for their research needs while maintaining the integrity of its original purpose. This objective finds itself echoed in almost every one of the Framework's concepts. The same skill set can be applied to secondary source research as well. For example, emphasizing critical thinking helps students become engaged citizens and conscious information consumers.

Conceptualize (Guidelines) & Information Creation as a Process (Framework); Authority is Constructed and Contextual (Framework); Scholarship as Conversation (Framework):

Key conceptualization skills include articulating the difference between primary and secondary sources while understanding their interrelatedness and defining appropriate types of primary sources for their research project. Within the Framework, these skills align with the ability to assess the relationship between an "information product" (a primary source) and an "information need" (the research project), understand the existing scholarship on their topic, and identify where their research fits into the scholarly conversation.

Find and Access (Guidelines) & Searching as Strategic Exploration (Framework):

This is the most direct comparison between the two resources. The purpose of both is to help students develop appropriate search strategies to execute a research project using both primary and secondary sources and to locate both across a variety of information systems. The information landscape is immensely complex and overwhelming for everyone; our job is to help students learn how to navigate these various pathways successfully. Of chief concern for our history students is getting them familiar with archival finding aids and understanding how finding aids are distinct from library catalogs and databases.

Use and Incorporate (Guidelines) & Research as Inquiry (Framework); Scholarship as Conversation (Framework); Information Has Value (Framework):

Most of our sessions are tied to a course assignment. As such, it is important for students to utilize a variety of resources to construct and defend their scholarly argument. This end goal for using primary sources aligns strongly with the knowledge practices described under the concepts "Research as Inquiry" and "Scholarship as Conversation." Part of using sources is proper citation and attribution of others' ideas, which is something we always cover, because students may not understand how to cite individual primary documents or archival collections.

Finally, we always highlight the cyclical nature of the historical research process to show students that they can approach their research from a variety of starting points. For example, a student can create research questions by looking through primary sources or they can discover a topic through a secondary source. Though flexible, by the time students begin writing, they will have engaged in every step of the process.

Historical Research Process. Created by Kaitlyn Tanis, University of Delaware.

Session Outline

Although our sessions have varied widely in their content, execution, and academic level over time, each has the same fundamental structure we created for that first class. In the sample lesson packet accompanying this article, we have provided the basic structure of how we organize and think through an instruction session, including some examples of activities that we utilize. Typically, the instruction session invitations we receive have a strong research component, and the activities we select for a particular session are informed by the information needs of students that directly apply to their culminating research assignments.

Sessions typically begin with introductions, including a bit about our backgrounds as history majors to show students the utility of a history degree. We then transition into a discussion of the basics of a research question, the historical research process, and how to find secondary sources. These topics are usually covered by the History liaison, who talks about search tips, subject headings, historical keywords, the library catalog, and the use of academic databases to find relevant sources. These topics can be extensively or briefly covered based on input from the instructor. If students are in their first research methods course, we discuss basic research skills. With senior History majors, however, we can cover more complex search strategies.

At this point, the special collections librarian leads the class into a primary source discussion. After reviewing what primary sources are in historical research, we discuss locating primary sources either in the library catalog or in our finding aid database. While demonstrating how to navigate our finding aids, we cover the basics of a finding aid: its structure, the major components, and how it differs from the catalog and databases they are more accustomed to using for research. Finally, we dive into the active learning portion of the session, where students interact with physical and/or digital primary sources. Depending on the instructor's learning objectives, the students' experience with primary source analysis, and the length of the session, we engage in different activities.

At the end of the session, we debrief the experiential learning activities as a group and discuss proper citation for both archival material and secondary sources. We may also, if appropriate to the session, introduce the differences between physical and digitized primary sources and the advantages and pitfalls of using each in their research. Although we keep this basic structure for each class we are invited into, we cater to each class's objectives.

Information Literacy Activities

If students have not developed a research question, we give them time to think through their research topic by having them look up encyclopedia articles (using Credo Reference) or use Wikipedia to find a topic that interests them; then develop their potential topic into a question by creating a mind map. Students find a topic and then have to connect different ideas to that theme, ultimately drilling down to smaller topics or questions. Then we use a combination of Special Collections material related to the class theme, primary, and secondary source databases online to find relevant sources to back up their topic.

We have also used Special Collections material to have students ask potential research questions as an activity.[3] Our goal is to answer the question: how could this material provide evidence to answer a research question? Students then are asked to think critically and engage with a single physical primary source, which pushes students to apply their own knowledge of the topic or theme of the class to a piece of history. Students are invited to use these sources in their future research project. These two activities are based on combining Conceptualize (Guidelines) and Information Creation as a Process (Framework), along with Authority Is Constructed and Contextual (Framework) and Scholarship as Conversation (Framework).

If we see students after they have developed research topics, we ask for a list of those topics ahead of the class period so that we can pull Special Collections material that aligns with their areas of interest. Students are then asked to find a primary source from the collections brought into the classroom that could provide evidence to support their argument. In this version of the class, students read a primary source closely and answer specific questions about its content, context, and research value, which gets them to engage and critically analyze these sources.[4] This activity is based on combining Read, Understand, and Summarize (Guidelines) and Research as Inquiry (Framework), along with Authority Is Constructed and Contextual (Framework) and Searching as Strategic Exploration (Framework).

Each of these exercises asks students to learn and conceptualize research as a cyclical process filled with opportunities to engage and critically question and evaluate their ideas. They also ask students to manage and create parameters for their research instead of trying to answer large complex questions that could be covered in a dissertation or monograph. Regardless of what other exercises we include in the session, we always ensure students practice locating secondary and primary source material.

Although our sessions are usually rooted in historical research practices, it is important to remember that primary sources exist in every academic discipline. For students in any major, primary sources are a valuable experiential learning opportunity that promote critical engagement with different viewpoints and make them more well-rounded researchers. This provides a model for how subject specialists and special collections librarians can work together to create a cohesive instruction session that uses primary sources within a particular discipline to support teaching standard information literacy skills. For instance, an environmental science class could use farmers' journals, documenting climate conditions in the mid-19th century,[5] and *The American Woods*, a fourteen-volume series containing over 350 wood samples of native American trees,[6] some of which are now extinct, to study the progression of climate change over the past 150 years. This provides historical context and shows students that data can be found in historical, local material and can inform their contemporary scientific research. This also adds to students' understanding of Interpret, Analyze, and Evaluate (Guidelines); Research as Inquiry (Framework); and Scholarship as

Conversation (Framework), which shapes how students' approach and think through their research.

The structure of these sessions can also be integrated into other information literacy areas based on student and course need. Looking at the outline of the lesson plan and overall class structure, a librarian could easily take the points of being a digital-literate person and use the Framework to create a digital information literacy session. For example, a librarian could create a lesson for students in which they "find, understand, and evaluate information in a technical setting"[7] and connect it with several Framework concepts (e.g., Research as Inquiry or Searching as Strategic Exploration) to create an engaging learning environment that addresses the holistic student and learner. Our lesson plan[8] creates a scaffolded structure for librarians to use these concepts objective by objective, building a natural structure that combines important goals for students to learn in a fast-changing information landscape.

Takeaways

Since our initial session in fall 2019, and despite three consecutive semesters of reduced instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have taught twenty-eight sessions together, reaching over 275 enrolled history students. Having deployed this instruction model over multiple academic years, we have begun to see the same students for multiple sessions, helping them refresh and refine their research skills while introducing more advanced research topics. For example, students we see in senior capstone courses, who have previously attended our sessions for their research methods course, have a solid foundation of information literacy skills, which allows us to teach more advanced searching tips and work one on one with students to provide more individualized instruction. Feedback from instructors has been overwhelmingly positive, with four faculty members asking us to teach sessions for the same course in subsequent semesters.

Despite our successes, we continue to refine our practice. Having a growing number of instructors who engage with us regularly has allowed us the opportunity to experiment with the flow of the session, try new activities, and swap sources to pinpoint the Special Collections material students find most engaging. Although we believe the ideal format would be multiple sessions in a semester, one focusing primarily on secondary sources and another dedicated to primary source literacy, finding instructors willing to surrender a full week of instruction has been challenging. Although we always ask for student and instructor feedback, we are trying to find ways to build more robust assessment into reviewing our teaching.

Putting the Framework and Guidelines in conversation with each other has allowed us to create dynamic library sessions that can adapt easily to all expertise, research levels, and academic subjects but ultimately create experiential learning opportunities that develop important information literacy skills for students of all majors. ≈

Notes

1. ACRL RBMS-SAA Joint Task Force on the Development of Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy, "Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy," adopted 2018, 2, https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/Guidelines%20for%20Primary%20Souce%20Literacy_AsApproved062018_1.pdf.

2. Ibid., 17.

3. John Caldwell and Kaitlyn Tanis, "Primary Source Sample Lesson Packet," University of Delaware, 2024, 5–6, http://www.udel.edu/0012192.

4. Ibid., 6.

5. MSS 0097, Item 0082, Benjamin Webb weather diary, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.

6. Romeyn Beck Hough and Marjorie G. Hough, *The American Woods: Exhibited by Actual Specimens and with Copious Explanatory Text* (Published and sections prepared by the author, 1910).

7. Digital Literacy Taskforce, *What Is Digital Literacy* (American Library Association, 2011).

8. John Caldwell and Kaitlyn Tanis, "Primary Source Sample Lesson Packet," University of Delaware, 2024, 1–2, http://www.udel.edu/0012192.