

Esther Roth-Katz

One step at a time

Integrating the Companion Document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education: Social Work into an existing instruction program

The Smith College Libraries facilitate a robust instruction program for students enrolled in the college's Master of Social Work (MSW) program. In 2021, I used the Companion Document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education: Social Work as an opportunity to take stock of the pedagogical aims of the instruction program.¹ Mapping the learning outcomes of course-specific workshops to the Companion Document supports an ongoing effort to provide a programmatic approach to instruction. In an effort to focus on frame 3 of the Companion Document, Information has Value, librarians integrated language about proprietary and nonproprietary sources into a workshop for a required first-year MSW course, Introduction to U.S. Social Welfare Policy. Frame 3 presents information access as a privilege and one that impacts social workers and their clients, a topic which aligns with the themes of the course. This column will focus on the initial work that has been done to incorporate the Companion Document into the instruction program and plans for the future. By taking a side-by-side look at the Companion Document and the MSW curriculum, I will demonstrate how librarians can incorporate a theoretical framework into their practical instruction planning.

Background

Smith College, located in Northampton, Massachusetts, is primarily an undergraduate institution with a small number of specialized graduate programs. The School for Social Work (SSW) provides MSW and PhD degrees with an average of 400 full-time students enrolled in the school. MSW students complete their coursework in three 10-week summer sessions (sessions 1, 3, and 5), while during the traditional academic school year they complete two 34-week field internships, sessions 2 and 4 (see figure 1).

Teaching, Learning and Research (TLR) librarians at Smith College have a long history of supporting the graduate SSW program through a series of course integrated workshops focused on preparing students to complete the research portions of their course work. The format and content of these workshops has evolved over time as the curriculum and staffing have shifted. Since 2019, I have taken the lead on planning the instruction program for

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the SSW supported by additional TLR librarians. Owing to the impact of COVID-19, the summer 2020 and 2021 SSW programs operated remotely using the course management system Moodle and the video conferencing platform Zoom.

Session One June-August Smith College campus	Session Two September - April Field Internship	Session Three June-August Smith College campus	Session Four September - April Field Internship	Session Five June-August Smith College campus
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Figure 1. Smith College School for Social Work MSW Block Plan.

Prior to 2019, the library instruction program for SSW had grown in scale to a size that had become unsustainable for the members of TLR to staff. I was tasked with restructuring the program to make it feasible to staff during the summer sessions. In 2019, this involved paring back our program and focusing on strategically meeting with MSW students during their summer course work each year (see figure 2). In 2020, the focus of the librarians was moving what had been a successful summer 2019 program to a remote environment and providing support and services at a distance. Moving into summer 2021, I hoped to reevaluate the workshop content to ensure that lesson plans built upon the instruction of previous summers and also helped to prepare students for their careers after graduate school. In the past this program has focused intensely on preparing students to complete their coursework with less consideration for their information needs after graduation. This was one of my top considerations when re-approaching the instruction curriculum.

Session One SSW 500 SSW 501 SSW 505 SSW 510 SSW 514 SSW 516 SSW 520 SSW 522 SSW 525 SSW 530 Introduction to U.S. Social Welfare Policy (S) SSW 540 Principles of Social Work Research (A) Elective Courses	Session Three SSW 600 SSW 601 SSW 615 SSW 618 SSW 627 Agency and Community Practice (S) SSW 631 Social Welfare Policy II (A) SSW 648 Elective Courses	Session Five SSW 785 Evidence Based Practice in Social Work (S) Elective Courses	Code Key (S) Synchronous Instruction (A) Asynchronous Instruction* *Asynchronous Digital Learning Objects were added in 2020 & 2021
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Figure 2. MSW Core Courses and Library Instruction.

Information literacy instruction for Social Work students

As outlined in the literature on information literacy instruction and social work education, there are a number of challenges that librarians consistently face when providing support to this student population.² A common theme, and one that will be familiar to librarians working in other disciplines, is the tension between preparing students to complete academic work and preparing them for the information landscape they will encounter after graduation.³ In social work education, students are frequently required to use peer-reviewed (and often empirical) studies in their research. These resources are typically located behind paywalls. Social work practitioners rarely have access to the breadth of resources they had

available to them as students. At Smith, as is true elsewhere, we are faced with the challenging task of preparing students for their academic assignments, as well as their professional careers, knowing that the information available in these two spheres can be discrete.

The publication of the Companion Document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education: Social Work coincided with curriculum planning for Summer 2021. As stated in the Aim section of the document, “The overarching goal of creating this companion document is to clearly demonstrate where the ACRL Framework and social work educational competencies and standards, as well as professional ethics and values, intersect.” By examining the ACRL Framework in conjunction with professional standards,⁴ the authors of the Companion Document set about addressing the concerns outlined in the literature and providing a structure by which to examine and plan for information literacy instruction in the field of social work.⁵

The Companion Document is structured along the same lines as the ACRL Framework, with the same six overarching frames. From there, the Companion Document includes sections titled, “Social Work Perspective,” “Connection to Professional Standards,” and “Examples of Learning Objectives and Activities.” Articulation of the challenges around information access and privilege appear throughout the six frames in the Companion Document. For example, it states under frame 6, Searching as Strategic Exploration, “As the bulk of scholarly literature for social work exists behind a paywall, it is imperative that practitioners know how to search for and retrieve open access sources.”⁶ The issue of information access—both during and post-graduate training—was a key concern of mine, and it became one of the guiding themes of realigning the curriculum.

Integrating the Companion Document

As I thought through integrating the Companion Document into curriculum planning for the SSW information literacy program, I sketched out a rough program outline connecting existing course-integrated library workshops with specific frames (see figure 3). This was done based on my previous experience providing instruction to these courses and while referencing the syllabi. I decided that focusing on a single course as a starting point in summer 2021 was pragmatic and achievable, with the intention of expanding the project in 2022.

In evaluating content for the SSW workshops, the natural starting point was the course Introduction to U.S. Social Welfare Policy. This is a required course that all MSW students take in session 1. Librarians provide a combined orientation and instruction program on the second day of class meetings. I selected frame 3 of the Companion Document, Information Has Value, as the frame of focus for this course. This frame presents information access as a privilege that impacts social workers and their clients. The Companion Document states,

Social workers understand their own information privilege and how systems of knowledge creation and dissemination may marginalize some individuals or groups. They leverage their critical understanding of these dynamics to make informed decisions as both information consumers and creators.⁷

In preparing students in this class to complete their first assignment, librarians share a number of suggested research resources compiled on a class research guide. These include eBook

reference resources, the Smith College Libraries Discovery interface, and a custom Google search box, which searches position papers, briefings, and reports from various nonprofits and social agency websites.⁸ While examining the previous workshop outline in light of the Companion Document, I realized the lesson plan was already

Course	Session	ACRL Frame
SSW 530 - Introduction to U.S. Social Welfare Policy	One	Frame 3 - Information has Value
SSW 540 - Principles of Social Work Research	One	Frame 1 - Authority is Constructed and Contextual Frame 5 - Scholarship as Conversation
SSW 627 - Agency and Community Practice	Three	Frame 4 - Research as Inquiry Frame 6 - Searching as Strategic Exploration
SSW 631 - Social Welfare Policy II	Three	Frame 2 - Information Creation as Process
SSW 785 - Evidence Based Practice in Social Work	Five	Frame 1 - Authority is Constructed and Contextual

Figure 3. Library Workshops and ACRL Frames.

engaged in providing students with both subscription and open access resources. What was lacking was a meta conversation about this distinction and its impact on the research process.

Since library instruction in this course is the foundation upon which subsequent workshops build, it is an ideal time to introduce concepts around access and information privilege. This was initiated by presenting the same resources as previous summers while clearly naming them as proprietary and nonproprietary sources alongside a concise definition of this terminology. Figure 4 shows the graphic we used on our slide deck at the start of this conversation. In reframing this discussion, we hope to make explicit the privileges students enjoy by being part of an academic community while honestly presenting the reality of the information

Proprietary vs. Non Proprietary Sources

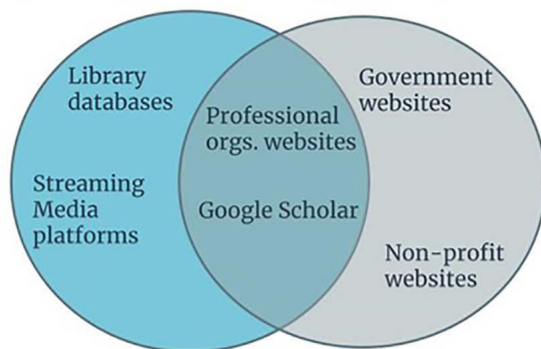


Figure 4. Proprietary vs. Nonproprietary Sources.

landscapes many of them will face post-graduation. Reframing this content in an existing workshop required careful thought, however it did not require a total overhaul of the lesson plan or detract time away from other content. Moving forward, the goal is to continue to integrate this language into the lesson plan for Introduction to U.S. Social Welfare Policy. For the course assignment, groups of students are given a social issue (examples include economic inequality and border detention), and then individual students are assigned a role to inhabit (like politician or agency director). They then consider the social issue from the perspective of their designated role. A further iteration of the discussion could include asking the students to consider if the person they

are assigned to represent would actually have access to the same resources that they have as graduate students and to consider the implications of different levels of information access.

Next steps

Using the Companion Document in an ongoing refinement of the library curriculum for the MSW program at Smith College's School for Social Work has allowed us to home in on the crucial challenges of working with this population; challenges that have been observed at Smith College, established in the literature, and addressed by the Companion Document. While library workshops with social work students will not solve the pervasive problem of uneven access to information, it will hopefully lay bare some of the challenges they can anticipate facing as practitioners and give them the tools they need to succeed in school and in starting their professional journeys.

Looking forward to summer 2022, I have tentatively mapped out connections between the core classes we plan to meet with and individual frames from the Companion Document (see figure 3). Similar to the integration of frame 3 into Introduction to U.S. Social Welfare Policy, TLR librarians likely will start small, finding points of commonality with existing workshop outlines and selected frames. For example, librarians plan to use the workshop scheduled for the course SSW627 Agency & Community Practice in session 3 to focus on information seeking from primarily nonproprietary, web-based sources. The course assignment asks students to research a specific community and issues of racial justice in that community. While some proprietary databases will undoubtedly support student research (for example, those focused on regional newspapers), nonproprietary sources (like government and nonprofit websites as well as social media) will be key to conducting thorough research. Over time we can continue to build upon the lesson plans discussed here with the objective of more explicitly tying together the frames and practices outlined in the Companion Document and the information literacy program for the Smith College School for Social Work.

Notes

1. CRL/EBSS Social Work Committee, "Companion Document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education: Social Work," 2020, <https://acrl.libguides.com/sw/about>.

2. Sarah C. Johnson, Margaret Bausman, and Sarah Laleman Ward, "Fostering Information Literacy: A Call for Collaboration Between Academic Librarians and MSW Instructors," *Advances in Social Work* 21, no. 1 (June 14, 2021): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.18060/24697>; K. Pendell and E. Kimball, "Academic Library Instruction, Evidence-Based Practice, and Social Workers: An Exploratory Survey," *Behavioral and Social Sciences Librarian* 36, no. 4 (2020): 209–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639269.2017.1775763>; Tricia Jane Bingham, Josie Wirjapranata, and Shirley-Ann Chinnery, "Merging Information Literacy and Evidence-Based Practice for Social Work Students," *New Library World* 117, no. 3/4 (March 2016): 201–13, <https://doi.org/10.1108/NLW-09-2015-0067>.

3. Johnson, Bausman, and Ward, "Fostering Information Literacy."

4. Companion Document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education: Social Work. The Companion Document incorporates The Council on Social

Work Education's (CSWE) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) and the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) Code of Ethics.

5. CRL/EBSS Social Work Committee, "LibGuides."
6. Ibid., 12.
7. Ibid., 5.
8. Credit for the custom Google search box must be given to my wonderful colleague Sika Berger, user experience librarian at Smith College. ♪