

Troy Swanson

# Sharing the ACRL Framework with faculty

## Opening campus conversations

In the fall of 2015, my colleague Tish Hayes and I conducted a six-week professional development course for faculty on the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education. The course, entitled “A New Framework for Information Literacy,” was offered through the Moraine Valley Learning Academy (MVLA) at Moraine Valley Community College and organized by the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). MVLA is a professional development program aimed specifically at faculty with the goal of improving teaching and learning. It is directed by a committee of faculty and implemented by CTL staff. MVLA offers face-to-face, online, and hybrid courses for faculty. By taking these courses, faculty earn credits that can be applied to promotions.

Seven faculty members participated in our course, representing a variety of disciplines, including writing, philosophy, history, medical assisting, and ESL/GED.

### “A New Framework for Information Literacy” course

Our course set out to introduce faculty to the ideas of threshold concepts, encourage faculty to think about the Framework, and to develop a context for implementing the Framework on our campus. Additionally, this was an opportunity for us to get up close and personal with our faculty and the Framework in order to build a context for our own campus.

Overall, the course was positive, offering insight into the ways that faculty may

approach the Framework. Ultimately, we identified gaps between the methods that classroom faculty and librarians use to approach scholarship, but we also identified potential partnerships and common ground.

We followed a standard, hybrid template often used in MVLA courses. It consisted of an initial meeting to discuss the outline and goals of the course followed by an in-depth discussion of threshold concepts. After this initial meeting, we held four weeks of online sessions that consisted of videos about each frame from the ACRL Framework and online discussions by participants. Finally, we held a final face-to-face meeting for participants to discuss sample projects that they developed for their classes.

### Introducing threshold concepts

None of the faculty who participated in our course had heard of threshold concepts. We had asked them to read Jan Meyer and Ray Land’s article “Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge: Linkages to ways of thinking and practicing within the disciplines” before our first conversation.<sup>1</sup> We were not sure if faculty members would embrace threshold concepts, but all of the participants found them to be useful ways of thinking about course content. They felt that the novice-to-expert trajectory outlined by

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threshold concepts presented a useful way to define the relation between faculty member, student, and learning outcomes.

During our initial conversations, faculty quickly pulled out examples of threshold concepts within their own disciplines. One of our writing instructors noted that writing for an audience and thinking about the audience is an important threshold for first-year writers. Our philosophy instructor defined the distinction between universals and particulars to be a significant threshold in the curricula. The ESL instructor offered valued insights on the liminality of his students. Language learners exist within a liminal space that is different from the comfort of their traditional or home learning and different from the environments that they will enter after they have mastered the content. Learning the rules of grammar, spelling, and ways of thinking around a language can be a kind of disembodiment for some students.

### **The Framework “made sense”**

After our opening conversations, we moved away from general conversations about threshold concepts and looked specifically at the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education. Largely, the Framework made sense to faculty. Each week we discussed two of the frames and asked faculty to offer perspectives from their disciplinary and curricular backgrounds. The faculty from traditional academic disciplines made easy connections to their assignments, but it was some of the discussions from our career programs faculty that offered the most insights.

For instance, the discussions around “Authority is Constructed and Contextual” included discussions around bias and recognizing one’s own biases. Our instructor who taught medical assisting noted how important self-reflection and open-mindedness are for her students. She shared the idea of “intellectual humility,” which the faculty in her program discuss. She noted that this was an important threshold for her students, and it spoke directly to several of the frames. Students regularly move from the safety of

the classroom, where knowledge is neatly packaged, to the highly variable world of the clinical setting, where knowledge is highly variable. They also interact with patients of diverse backgrounds and problems that are not easily answered. Self-knowledge is important so that judgments are not clouded by assumptions. For this program, information literacy consists of real-world decision making.

During these discussion, the faculty easily moved to using the Framework as a tool for assessment. This happened without prompting by either of the course facilitators. The faculty connected to Knowledge Practices in the Framework with their own learning outcomes. In fact, the trajectory of novice-to-expert was particularly helpful in contextualizing assessment. The faculty noted that the Framework still allowed them to assess skills and knowledge, but by providing a direction for learning, it helped them connect thresholds across their courses and could open up conversations with colleagues about the progress of student learning.

### **“I didn’t think about assessing that”**

The faculty noted that several of the frames fell under the purview of classroom faculty to teach and to assess as opposed to being assessed by librarians or others. But they also noted that some of the frames defined concepts that they had not previously considered. As one of the participants noted, “It is difficult to assess a thing if you don’t know that it is a thing in the first place.” For instance, the different types of value and the community nature of this value under the frame “Information Has Value.” Another example would be using “Scholarship as Conversation” to contextualize the teaching of citations and academic integrity. This could lead to a richer discussion and assessment beyond teaching the simple mechanics of citations styles.

The Framework offered new ideas to different faculty members, but the faculty agreed that part of the Framework’s value came from the fact that it was written from the librarians’ disciplinary perspective. The intellectual turf

defined by the Framework that is at once between and within disciplines helped faculty members step away from their own disciplinary biases and gain perspectives. The frames connected to their course content, but also connected their course content to that of other courses. They felt that this could be a valuable tool for our campus as we discuss general education assessment.

### **A very librarian view of the world**

The one frame that was the most problematic to faculty was “Information Creation as a Process.” The initial discussion board posts around this frame revealed some confusion. They especially seemed confused at the idea of connecting evaluation of sources to the ways that the information was created. They didn’t recognize the judgments often made when scholars consider investigative journalism, opinion pieces, peer-reviewed works, trade publications, and other types of sources. The process, philosophical understandings, and approach to the writing communicate meaning to the experienced scholar or professional.

At our face-to-face discussions, we explored this frame, and faculty recognized that they make these evaluations regularly. Out of all of the frames, this one seemed to be the most deeply entrenched in the world of librarians. It felt as if the librarian’s familiarity with dealing with information sources as products to be discovered and manipulated was not as familiar to the faculty. Faculty members said that they do reference different information formats to students, but that they do not often discuss where these formats originate or how that may influence their credibility.

Additionally, faculty members agreed that they highly valued the librarians for teaching search techniques. When we discussed “Searching as Strategic Exploration,” they quickly offered praise and emphasized how important this was. Searching instruction was needed, and they were grateful for librarians who taught it. However, it was clear that the faculty viewed searching as a skill that was adjacent to their curricular content. This was

a skill necessary to reaching other learning goals, but they did not seem to view the searching process as a learning process that they could guide and develop. They did not see this as a place where ideas started to be formed. We worked to offer a more in-depth view of searching beyond the transactional process it can become.

### **She almost cried**

In the spring 2016 term, several of these faculty revised their assignments or course to emphasize the Framework. The philosophy instructor who participated revised her classes to emphasize the research process and developing learning outcomes related to the Framework. She also outlined threshold concepts within philosophy and worked to make these explicit to her students. She told me that when she read the discussion board posts about expertise and critical thinking, she “almost cried” out of happiness. She noted that students show more depth of knowledge and self-awareness than previous students studying the same content. She shared the following student quote,

I hesitate to declare myself an expert at any of the above fields. Being an expert doesn’t mean that you’re confident in that you know everything about a given field, but that you have a comprehensive knowledge and that you’re always researching the topic.

### **Next steps**

Our MVLA course on the Framework was eye opening in many ways. The discussion around threshold concepts proved to be very useful. They made sense to faculty and offered a new avenue to discuss students learning. The Framework proved to be a valuable lens for connecting courses to each other and thinking about how disciplinary knowledge is organized. The most important takeaway for us, based on the rich conversations we had about information literacy, is that the Framework can be a powerful tool for opening wider

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*Abstract:* This article examines the behaviors and preferences of medical and nursing students in relation to their required textbooks and library reserves. The findings are based on an April 2015 survey at the University of Illinois-Chicago satellite Library of the Health Sciences in Urbana, where the library provides access to textbooks through traditional “closed” reserves in addition to an “open” reserves collection. Results indicate several barriers to usability regarding traditional reserves services and suggest that students prefer open reserves for convenience and savings. While broad applicability of the model warrants further investigation, academic libraries may be better able to meet patron needs by implementing open textbook reserves.

• John M. Budd. “Faculty Publications and Citations: A Longitudinal Examination.” *Abstract:* This investigation seeks to study the publication and citation activity of faculty at research universities, as defined by membership in the Association of Research Libraries. It constitutes the fourth iteration in a study of publishing behaviors, conducted over more than 20 years. The present data indicate a substantial rise in publications, both in total and as measured on a per capita basis. These data are compared with those of the previous three studies. In addition, and for the first time, citation data are also examined. The reason for the addition of citations is that there is cause to believe that citations are becoming common evaluative criteria for individuals, academic programs, and departments. There are implications for academic libraries with regard to all these data.

• Arthur Taylor and Heather A. Dalal. “Gender and Information Literacy: Evaluation of Gender Differences in a Student Survey of Information Sources.” *Abstract:* Information literacy studies have shown that college students use a variety of information sources to perform research and commonly choose Internet sources over traditional library sources. Studies have also shown that students do not appear to understand the information quality issues concerning Internet information sources and may lack the information literacy skills to make good choices concerning the use of these sources. No studies currently provide clear guidance on how gender might influence the information literacy skills of students. Such guidance could help improve information literacy instruction. This study used a survey of college-aged students to evaluate a subset of student information literacy skills in relation to Internet information sources. Analysis of the data collected provided strong indications of gender differences in information literacy skills. Female respondents appeared to be more discerning than males in evaluating Internet sources. Males appeared to be more confident in the credibility and accuracy of the results returned by search engines. Evaluation of other survey responses strengthened our finding of gender differentiation in information literacy skills.

### Note

1. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/11/09/trump-won-because-college-educated-americans-are-out-of-touch/?utm\\_term=.507003ad8ebb](https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/11/09/trump-won-because-college-educated-americans-are-out-of-touch/?utm_term=.507003ad8ebb) ❧

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conversations within our faculty. We are planning to reach out to several key departments using the Framework as a basis for dialogue. Information literacy has been one of our college’s learning outcomes for many years, and the Framework will provide an opportunity to revitalize the conversations about assessing information literacy in our college.

### Note

1. Jan Meyer and Ray Land, “Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge: Linkages to ways of thinking and practicing within the disciplines,” *Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses*, [www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/docs/ETLreport4.pdf](http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/docs/ETLreport4.pdf). ❧