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Redeveloping a course with the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education

From skills to process

Most of us are now aware of ACRL's new guiding document on information literacy. In February 2015, the ACRL Board of Directors officially adopted the new Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, which includes six concepts, or frames, at its core: 1) authority is constructed and contextual, 2) information creation as a process, 3) information has value, 4) research as inquiry, 5) scholarship as conversation, and 6) searching as strategic exploration. The standards themselves will not be immediately retired, but will live in conjunction with the framework for the time being.

Conceptually, the framework departs from the standards in several ways. It emphasizes scholarship as an ongoing conversation instead of a finite product. It recognizes that research inquiries are born of these conversations. The idea of authority as contextual and constructed is also central to the framework. While the standards implicitly grant authority only to sources and systems found in academic libraries, the framework recognizes that authoritative information can be found through a variety of formal and informal channels, in many formats, and that to engage in research is to tackle the question of authority.

As the initial drafts of the framework were released, I began to think about revising the information literacy (IL) course that I teach in light of this new focus.

The standards in LIB 201

Each semester, Western Illinois University (WIU) Libraries offers a three-credit IL course (LIB 201) to help students develop their academic research skills. The elective course includes students from many majors, in different years of study, and with varying academic ability. As stated in the WIU Undergraduate Catalog, LIB 201 "introduces concepts and techniques required to determine information need, develop search strategies, and access and evaluate print and online resources effectively and efficiently." From this description, it is probably clear that LIB 201 was conceived with the standards in mind.

I began teaching LIB 201 in the spring of 2013. As a relatively new library instructor, I relied on the standards to guide the development of my curriculum. My six course objectives were taken directly from the five standards. Language from the performance indicators made its way into my assignment descriptions and grading rubrics. The standards were tightly woven into the fabric of my course. Yet, I was uncomfortable relying on them so heavily. My biggest issue with the standards was how tidy IL seemed under its prescription. The document describes a

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universe where one can “determine the extent of an information need,” where search strategies are “designed,” and useful information is “extracted.” My students’ actual information-seeking process involved a lot more uncertainty, a lot more trial and error.

When I saw the first draft of the new framework, I was both pleased and apprehensive. The document articulated the need for a more holistic approach to IL instruction, but it also highlighted the problems with the

LIB 201’s learning objectives in light of the new framework. I wanted to determine how many of my objectives still belonged in the course. I also wanted to know whether I would need to create additional objectives. I found that some of them were still relevant and important and should be left as-is, while others needed to be revised or completely reworked. The old and new objectives can be found in the table below, with changes in italics:

Old Objectives (Informed by Standards)	New Objectives (Informed by Framework)
1. Develop compelling research questions.	1. Develop compelling research questions.
2. Identify appropriate tools and sources to answer research questions.	2. Identify <i>contextually</i> appropriate tools and sources to answer research questions.
3. Develop effective and efficient search strategies to find a range of appropriate information sources.	3. Develop effective and efficient search strategies to find a range of appropriate information sources.
4. Critically evaluate information using sets of self-defined criteria.	4. <i>Understand the concept of authority as it relates to research.</i> 5. Critically evaluate information using sets of self-defined, <i>question-specific</i> criteria
5. Use information ethically, avoiding plagiarism and respecting the intellectual property of others.	6. Use information ethically, avoiding plagiarism and respecting the intellectual property of others.
6. Weave new information into the student’s own knowledge structure in order to create a scholarly product.	7. <i>Contribute to ongoing scholarly conversation.</i>

current standards, and by extension, the problems with my course. I was most struck by the framework’s recognition that the major work of consuming and creating information was knowing not only where to look, but how to understand what you’ve found. In my mind, the rigid, hierarchical world of the standards had been dismantled, and I wondered how much of LIB 201 would be left standing. I decided that I wanted to revise the course in order to find out.

Revision

My first step in this revision was to examine

I determined that four of my six learning objectives were still relevant under the new framework. I added the words *contextually* to the second objective and *question-specific* to the fifth objective in order to capture the idea that the appropriateness of tools and sources depend on the nature of the inquiry and the unfolding of the research process. I added the fourth objective because the framework’s description of authority as “depend[ing] upon the resources’ origins, the information need, and the context in which the information will be used” is one of the most personally important “aha”

moments of the new framework. I needed my students to understand that there is no single, rigid hierarchy of source validity, but rather that authority is dependent on context. Finally, incorporating concepts found in the scholarship is a conversation frame, I abandoned “knowledge structures” in favor of “scholarly conversation.” While my revisions to course objectives were minor, they caused a ripple effect. Slight amendments necessitated major changes to course content. New and revised objectives would need new and revised assignments and activities, the design of which was both time and energy intensive.

In earlier iterations of LIB 201, I required students to complete seven individual assignments that would demonstrate mastery of the learning objectives. During the revision, I determined that four out of the seven assignments needed to be overhauled to remain aligned with the revised objectives. In addition, six of the in-class exercises that prepare students for these assessments would need revamping. Because I liked the idea of the framework emphasizing metacognition and metaliteracy, I would require students to keep a research journal, asking them to reflect on their developing abilities as they work toward greater understanding of course concepts. I hoped that through this documentation and reflection, students would develop a deeper understanding of their own research process.

Instead of creating all of this needed material from scratch, I mined the sample assignments included with the framework. Here, I found concrete suggestions that I was able to incorporate. I also included framework samples as questions for students to reflect upon in their research journals and complete as in-class exercises. The sample activities saved me time, were well-aligned with my new objectives, and gave me ideas for how to teach IL in new ways. Of course, I still needed to create some new content from scratch, but the process wasn’t nearly as onerous as it would have been without the sample assignments.

Earlier versions of LIB 201 saw students attempting to learn a discrete set of skills rather than understand a continuous process. I also sensed a gap in the way students interacted with the content of the course, a gap between “how I should do it” and “how I actually do it” when it comes to seeking and using information. My hope was that this updated version of the course—as well as my own updated thinking on IL—would allow students to more clearly see the point of developing IL skills and dispositions.

I taught the revised LIB 201 for the first time during the fall 2014 semester. While I did not collect formal assessment data, I recorded my observations on students’ learning. This class did seem to grasp certain concepts better than previous groups. For instance, these students developed stronger, more intriguing research questions. Instead of asking students to rely solely on library reference sources to develop their questions, as I had done previously, I developed exercises and an assignment that required students to observe scholarly conversations taking place over social media, or through the comments sections of high-quality articles. I also asked students to use informal discussion and use of reference sources to develop their questions. While the quality of the questions themselves improved over previous semesters, I found that students did not fully understand the concept of scholarly conversation. They had a hard time identifying experts in a field and then tracking their online presence, which was a skill I wanted them to grasp.

During an in-class exercise that I adapted from the framework materials, I asked students to compare a scholarly article and a blog post on the same topic. They were, predictably, more impressed with the scholarly article. Later, when I revealed that both works were written by the same reputable expert, students were fairly insistent that the blog post had no place in research. While I emphasized the role of such materials in developing working knowledge, students did

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scholars interested in further study, a bibliography of slave and former-slave narratives by William L. Andrews is also included. *Access:* <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/index.html>.

• **Slavery and Abolition in the U.S.: Select Publications of the 1800s.** Reflecting both sides of the slavery question, these publications from the 1800s include speeches, tracts, pamphlets, books, legal proceedings, religious sermons, and personal accounts. This collection from a cooperative project by Millersville University and Dickinson College includes more than 24,000 individual pages. *Access:* <http://deila.dickinson.edu/slaveryandabolition/index.html>.

• **Slaves and the Courts 1740-1860.** From the Library of Congress's American Memory Project this site consists of trials and cases, arguments, proceedings, and other historical works of importance that relate to the prosecution and defense of slavery as an

institution. The collection contains more than 100 pamphlets and books published between 1772 and 1889. *Access:* <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/sthtml/>.

Confederacy

• **The Museum of the Confederacy.** Various primary sources are accessible, including a collection of photographs, documents, and artifacts relating to Lee and Jackson, the "Roll of Honor and Battle Accounts" from Confederate soldiers, and a searchable database of their collections. *Access:* <http://www.moc.org/collections-archives?mode=general>.

• **The Papers of Jefferson Davis.** A selection of documents from the published papers of the same name that includes speeches, reports, and correspondence. The documents are organized by volume with brief annotations. *Access:* <http://jeffersondavis.rice.edu/documentslist.aspx>. *ZZ*

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not seem receptive. They were appropriately skeptical about social media conversations and their role in research, accurately noting that anonymity often makes it hard to evaluate the legitimacy of comments on articles and blogs. However, I wanted them to better understand that authority does not need to be hierarchical, that experts do engage with material outside of peer-reviewed publishing channels.

Students were required to think about the kinds of sources they would use, and what they would expect to find there, before actually searching for material to answer their research questions. This was new from previous semesters. I was impressed that they identified a wide array of sources—from government documents to political blogs. However, they didn't always accurately identify what they could expect to find there. One student thought she would find statistics in an academic journal, for instance. As other librarians have noted, this disconnect between students' expectations and real-

ity accounts for much of the frustration in student research. This is an area to address with later classes.

While these informal observations are not assessment data, they have helped me plan for the next time I teach this course. I do believe that the framework has made an impact on this small group of LIB 201 students. I saw them grappling conceptually with ideas of authority and scholarly conversation, as well as with discrete skills like using a subject thesaurus. The conceptually based framework is more aligned with our profession's current thinking than the standards. It is harder to translate broad concepts into course objectives, assignments, and activities. Yet, this should not stop instructors from undertaking the task. In my experience, the process required deeper reflection, a greater internalization of the concepts found in the frames, lots of reading, and much trial and error—basically the kind of work that we expect of our students. *ZZ*