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Review of Information Literacy: Research and collaboration across disciplines

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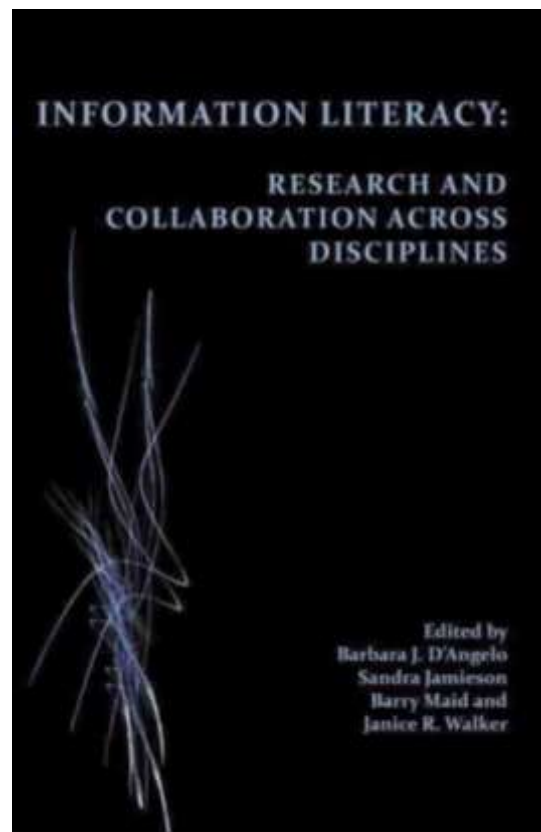
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Changes in the information landscape in the last few decades have prompted both librarians and faculty to reexamine the concept of information literacy (IL). The goal of this collection of essays and case studies is to provide a thorough examination of IL as a concept. It highlights the multiple perspectives from past and present and illustrates the theoretical foundation of the recently introduced *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). In addition, the volume highlights the research of, and collaborations between, faculty and academic librarians associated with IL.

This collection on IL in the series *Perspectives on Writing* is very timely. The shifts in the information ecology and how students navigate this landscape – from collectors of information objects to active participants in creating and sharing new knowledge – prompted ACRL to examine the shortcomings



and critiques of the previous *Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education* (ACRL, 2000). Despite their widespread adoption for instruction and assessment by librarians and faculty, *IL Standards* was critiqued for having a narrow, skill-based, and decontextualized view of IL. For example, the view that information sources are goods or commodities that can be acquired by manipulating search platforms drew the attention of critics. However, the disciplines of Composition and Writing Studies emphasize context, conversation, and active participation as key elements in literacy of all kinds. When students engage in research, they do not simply extract and record new information, but wrestle with the content, draw connections with what they already know, and generate more questions (Foasberg, 2015).

In response to these criticisms, ACRL introduced the *Framework for IL* in 2015. Section I of the collection provides a perspective on how IL has evolved as a concept in general, and the development of the *Framework for IL* in particular. This section focuses on the recent shift from competency-based conceptualization to situating IL as a set of broad interrelated threshold concepts and metaliteracy, covering the domains of behavioral, cognitive, affective, and metacognitive. This section highlights the key elements of the *Framework for IL*. Among them are threshold concepts, which can be thought of as portals that open a new, transformative, and qualitatively different way of thinking about a subject (ACRL, 2015). Based on the work of Meyer and Land (2003), the ACRL Task Force for the *Framework for IL* introduced the threshold concepts of information literacy, represented by six frames:

- Authority is constructed and contextual
- Information creation as a process
- Information has value
- Research as inquiry
- Scholarship as conversation
- Searching as strategic exploration

For each of these frames, or foundational concepts, there are associated knowledge practices through which students demonstrate their understanding and growth on the continuum of novice to expert in their IL competencies (ACRL, 2015). Even after a few years since the introduction of the *Framework for IL*, there is still much debate over whether each of these frames or individual knowledge practices constitutes a threshold concept. Nevertheless, each frame describes an essential foundational concept that reflects students' information skills and competencies demonstrated through knowledge practices.

In addition to threshold concepts, the volume highlights another aspect of the *Framework for IL*: metaliteracy. According to the *Framework*, metaliteracy examines four domains of student engagement within the information landscape: behavioral, affective, cognitive, and metacognitive. The *Framework for IL* emphasizes metacognitive engagement with the information environment as particularly important for students to regulate their own learning (ACRL, 2015). The implications of this shift are important for new academic librarians with a teaching role, as the essays in this section make a strong connection between prior research in rhetoric and writing and the theoretical foundations of the *Framework for IL*. The *Framework for IL* presents challenges to both the discipline of Writing Studies and practice of IL in academic librarianship. This further emphasizes a broader call for a robust and sustained conversation on how students navigate these troublesome threshold concepts in an increasingly complex, ever-changing information landscape. As noted in Chapter 5, 21st century IL skills are often conceptualized and measured through 20th-century assessment practices. In addition, the essays highlight some of the deficiencies of instructional approaches, such as the predominant one-shot IL library instruction sessions based on the decontextualized, skill-based, and prescriptive

lens of the previous *IL Standards*. The approaches discussed in these chapters are not prescriptive. Instead, they recognize the complex and process-oriented nature of information interactions, such as construct mediation, construct modeling, and validation processes (Chapter 5) in information seeking. In addition, conceptualizing IL through the lens of metaliteracy involves cognitive, behavioral, affective, and social interpretations of these information interactions – a recurring theme in section I.

The abstract nature of the *Framework for IL* makes it problematic in terms of assessment of the knowledge practices associated with each of the threshold concepts or frames. Section II highlights the approaches to IL research using case studies on topics like the Citation Project (Chapter 6), the measures of students' use of platforms and resources (Chapter 9), and the scaffolding of research assignments through low stakes learning activities (Chapter 7) and effective collaboration efforts between writing faculty and librarians. The underlying theme in these chapters is the understanding of students' ability to use information and construct knowledge, and approaches to researching these phenomena. The research on IL is vast, and the selected case studies are by no means exhaustive, but they represent a broad spectrum of approaches to researching IL pedagogy and assessment.

Section III extends this knowledge by introducing the subject-specific practices of implementation and evaluation of IL. The emphasis here is on the design, employment, and assessment of IL in a variety of subject areas ranging from humanities to social sciences. These chapters further reinforce the value of cross-disciplinary IL collaborations between faculty and librarians incorporating subject-specific IL assignments such as use of infographics (Chapter 12), citation management applications such as Zotero (Chapter 14), and quantitative reasoning in research instruction (Chapter 15). These

studies develop an understanding of how research instruction expands the development of disciplinary epistemology. Just as with the previous section, these chapters stress the importance of shared responsibility, dialogue between faculty and librarians to understand how students navigate these threshold concepts as they learn to collect relevant information using appropriate platforms and venues of information, as well as analyze, contextualize, and integrate new information with their existing knowledge base. The continuum of this growth, from novice to expert in terms of IL skills, is not a one-size-fits-all model. These chapters stress the importance of discipline specificity, prior background knowledge, and motivation as some of the key features that play a significant role.

The last section includes essays that examine the broader efforts to build collaborations with all the stakeholders of IL in the academy: faculty, librarians, administrators, and accrediting bodies. The essays acknowledge the need to move away from the decontextualized, one-shot IL instruction, and towards more inclusive, cross-disciplinary concerted efforts that implant IL throughout the continuum of students' academic career and beyond. These case studies describe programmatic efforts that integrate IL at an institutional level (Chapters 16 & 17), and ways to operationalize and assess these initiatives and build communities of practice around these efforts (Chapters 19 & 20). The challenge, however, is the necessary shift in perspectives of both faculty and librarians often in identifying and acknowledging the broad-based ownership and responsibility of IL. The chapters provide interesting models of these faculty-librarian-administrator collaborations that can potentially be adapted at other institutions.

Each chapter can stand on its own. It is not until Section III, however, that the collaboration and integration of IL across different disciplines gets an in-depth

treatment. The preceding sections organize the foundational concepts of IL in general, and the theoretical scaffolding of the *Framework for IL* in particular, which will be beneficial for readers who may be new to the teaching of IL in higher education. Because of the variety of subject areas and models of collaborations presented in these chapters, it would be unreasonable to expect a natural flow within sections. Nevertheless, the underlying theme of the interdisciplinary context of IL is consistent within and across sections among these loosely related chapters.

Despite its broad goal of illustrating how IL has been conceptualized in the past and how it continues to evolve (with the *Framework for IL* as a guiding document), the volume provides the reader with a glimpse of research in IL, particularly in the context of developing collaborative IL initiatives for programmatic IL integration as the title suggests. Research and instruction librarians would find these initiatives useful for identifying common grounds to build partnerships with faculty. The set of models facilitate the discussion of faculty assumptions about IL and expectations of student outcomes related to IL. As subject librarians know all too well, faculty expectations and assumptions vary across disciplines along with subject epistemology, the ways of structuring the knowledge within a particular discipline, and subject-specific information venues and

platforms. The biggest challenge, however, is understanding the disciplinary practices as they relate to IL, and confronting the barriers in developing and fostering IL in collaboration with the faculty, an important aspect rather lacking in the volume.

The target audiences for this collection are academic librarians with a teaching role as well as writing faculty looking for approaches to integrating IL in their courses. The collection also serves as a primer for the ACRL guiding documents for IL in higher education: *IL Standards* and the recently introduced *Framework for IL*, along with the critiques of the *IL Standards*, and the theoretical foundations of the *Framework for IL*. The research on IL instruction covers many aspects: curriculum design, implementation, assessment approaches, and models of collaboration between librarians and faculty. This collection highlights this progressive landscape of IL. It presents the *Framework for IL* as a new guiding document for the teaching of IL within higher education. The volume points to unique aspects of research in IL that will advance pedagogical practices of both librarians and faculty. Another important contribution of this collection is its emphasis on the cross-disciplinary nature of the research and practice of IL, which provides a strong synergy between prior research and its implications for teaching IL.


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