Teaching Information Literacy and Writing Studies
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In 2011 when I began my doctoral dissertation on information literacy and writing studies, I discovered two fields—library science and writing studies—that both claimed interest in information literacy and researched and wrote about it. Information literacy (IL) has been the topic of discussion in multiple disciplines, but only in librarianship is information literacy crucial to the life or death of the discipline. I may be exaggerating a bit here, but the situation in librarianship in the early 21st century is such that the existence of libraries is being questioned and librarians have felt a pressing need to prove their worth.

Since the 1980s, information literacy has borne a large portion of the burden of this proof in academic librarianship. With the increasing pressure from accrediting bodies to assess outcomes, librarians, with their traditional emphasis on storage and retrieval of physical items, have been hard pressed to prove their worth through the traditional numbers of items held or books checked out. Even the traditional librarian function of indexing and cataloging data is increasingly centralized; services such as OCLC provide more and more of the cataloging before physical items reach the library, and database providers have already indexed and cataloged their information.1 The traditional “how to use the databases” function of the librarian is also being eroded by the rapidly growing adoption of discovery services, which pre-index all of a library’s database content into one searchable database. The emphasis on learning outcomes, coupled with the growing availability of materials in electronic formats, has made the traditional means of assessing the library (i.e., collection size) nearly irrelevant. Information literacy, then, not only provides student learning outcomes that can be assessed, but it has been an area of the curriculum not already staked out as the possession of another discipline.
Information literacy also plays a key role in the health of Rhetoric and Composition. A perpetual underdog discipline, Rhetoric and Composition has struggled to gain a foothold in English departments where it has been placed. Other academic departments often see it as only a stepping-stone to “real” writing, defined by them as writing in their academic discipline. By forming and strengthening partnerships with library faculty, compositionists will gain valuable allies in the constant fight for institutional capital. Even more important, the coordinated efforts of two disciplines with overlapping masteries in information literacy should have a positive effect on student learning. Students who learn to skillfully incorporate high-quality sources into their academic writing will make both the librarians and the writing instructors valuable colleagues to their peers in the other disciplines.

With a few exceptions, though (Arp, Woodard, Lindstrom, & Shonrock, 2006; Black, Crest, & Volland, 2001; Elmborg, 2005; Farber, 1999; Julien & Given, 2002; Mazziotti & Grettano, 2011), the two disciplines generally stayed in their respective corners. Both disciplines had their own approaches and their own domains (i.e., what they expected to “own” and what they expected the other discipline to cover) (Ackerson & Young, 1994; Bizup, 2008; Britt & Aglinskas, 2002; Leeder, Markey, & Yakel, 2012; Spivey & King, 1989).

With the publication of the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing (2011) and the ACRL’s Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015), the disciplines, which had been approaching each other in the intervening years, began to branch out and cover nearly every area where they converged, and even to find new convergences.

Into this conversation, then, comes this volume, which examines information literacy as it is taught to and used by first-year college students in first-year writing (FYW) programs. Schools use varied terminology for first-year programs, so some chapters will refer to first-year composition (FYC) or first-year experience (FYE) classes as well as FYW. These chapters offer practical suggestions for successfully incorporating information literacy into first-year writing classes, with theoretical support from key scholars in both librarianship and writing studies. In many cases, these chapters are cowritten by librarians and writing specialists who are collaborating on a local level as they investigate information literacy teaching through different theoretical lenses and pedagogical styles.

The book is divided into five sections. Part I, “Lenses, Thresholds, and Frameworks,” examines the disciplines as they negotiate the teaching of information literacy in various higher education settings. It appeared to many of us who were working in the intersection of writing studies and information literacy that in 2014–2015, there occurred a “fortunate convergence of exigencies” as Chapter 1 contributors Anderson, Blalock, Louis, and Wolff Murphy term it, involving the introduction of the ACRL’s Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015), the revised WPA Outcomes Statement (WPA, 2014), and the publication of Naming What We Know (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015), which each highlighted threshold concepts and desired outcomes in their respective disciplines. In Chapter 1, Anderson and her coauthors
describe their institution’s reaction to a curriculum revision that was mandated during this time period, and the efforts of librarians and writing faculty to allow the disciplines to collaborate in designing a new freshman-level course that would combine writing and research by allowing the two disciplines to inform each other.

Similarly, Margaret Artman and Erica Frisicaro-Pawlowski compare the ACRL Framework with the WPA Outcomes Statement (WPA, 2014) from the point of view of writing program administrators redesigning local curriculum. They posit that the WPA document, centered on outcomes, lacks attention to students’ processes, but that this gap is supplied by the ACRL Framework. By supplementing the Outcomes with the Framework, they feel more confident about attending to the process of student learning during first-year composition than if they had relied on the Outcomes Statement alone.

Brittney Johnson and I. Moriah McCracken describe a model information literacy lesson plan that uses threshold concepts from both the Framework and from Naming What We Know (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015) (i.e., from information literacy and writing studies) as its foundation. Focusing on Scholarship as Conversation as a particularly accessible frame for first-year writers, they describe the design and teaching of a multiple-session information literacy module within a first-year writing course. Using two students’ experiences, they show how first introducing students to the idea of Scholarship as Conversation and later inviting them to enter the conversation can enrich students’ research experiences.

Part II, “Collaboration and Conversation,” is composed of examples of various approaches to teaching IL to first-year students based on the work of faculty from both the library and writing studies working together. There is not just one model; in fact, this section of the book describes multiple possibilities for faculty and librarian interaction with first-year students all centered around information literacy and writing. Valerie Ross and Dana M. Walker describe the University of Pennsylvania’s move away from the research paper in its first-year writing courses to the more authentic literature review. At the University of Alabama in Huntsville, Alanna Frost and her coauthors, working with the university’s Honors College, collaborated to design a semester-long group research project focused on giving advice to incoming students in the Honors Program. This project allowed students to become familiar with information they themselves would need to successfully navigate their college experiences, while also introducing them to the knowledge-making function of research and writing.

William FitzGerald and Zara Wilkinson take the opportunity provided to two newcomers to leadership roles to design the First-Year Composition sequence to incorporate information literacy frameworks’ threshold concepts from both disciplines in both semesters of instruction, while Katherine Field-Rothschild highlights the Research as Inquiry frame as she problematizes students’ research behaviors. Librarians and writing professors think of Google as the “junk food” of research, yet all too many students—and professors—are content with poorly constructed and insufficiently answered research questions. Community college students, often underprepared for college research, are the audience for Melissa Dennihy and Neera Mohess’s scaffolded, flipped information literacy curriculum.

In Part III, “Pedagogies and Practices,” scholars use different pedagogical lenses to
take a fresh look at teaching information literacy. Robert Hallis challenges professors to teach to an appropriate level of satisficing through reflective mentoring and appreciative inquiry, while Emily Standridge and Vandy Dubre collaborated to use commercially marketed information literacy tutorials in conjunction with reflective writing to ensure that students reached higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy in their thinking about information literacy. Crystal Goldman and Tamara Rhodes describe the use of primary sources as objects for study in first-year writing courses. They find that primary sources generate interest in first-year writers as professors use them to model information-literate behaviors and to deepen critical thinking.

In Part IV, “Classroom-Centered Approaches to Information Literacy,” we are treated to a wide range of innovative approaches to teaching information literacy in first-year classrooms. Cassie Hemstrom and Kathy Anders are using a discourse communities project to teach information literacy, weaving in both the ACRL Framework and the Elon Statement on Writing Transfer (“Elon Statement on Writing Transfer,” 2013). A librarian and an English professor discover Joseph Bizup’s (2008) BEAM schema independently and use that synchronicity to build a partnered instruction program that also incorporates a metaphor of research based on an umbrella’s structure in Amy Lee Locklear and Samantha McNeilly’s piece.

Tom Pace finds that having his students incorporate research into personal writing leads them toward some of the ACRL Framework’s threshold concepts; the exigency of a personal situation can evoke more curiosity and questioning than the standard research paper assignment, while M. Delores Carlito involves students in researching not only the topics of their research but ways to present that research in a multimodal setting. Dagmar Stuehrk Scharold and Lindsey Simard engage Hispanic students in project-based learning to heighten their awareness of real-world information literacy concerns, and Emily Crist and Libby Miles, also working with second-language students, describe a curriculum that employs social narrative to scaffold information literacy learning throughout the course.

The final section deals with what happens after the class: transfer and assessment. In Part V, “Making a Difference,” Nicholas Behm, Margaret Cook, and Tina Kazan write about the use of dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) in assessment. As a local and organic process, DCM allowed librarians and writing instructors to develop shared vocabulary and goals for assessment. Lilian W. Mina, Jeanne Law Bohannon, and Jinrong Li advance an assessment methodology that uses the ACRL Framework as a rubric of sorts for measuring students’ research activities. By studying multilingual writers in this way, they not only identify a methodology, but they offer specifics of second-language learners’ difficulties and coping strategies in researching to write in English.

Brewer, Kruy, McGuckin, and Slaga-Metivier focus on the embedded librarian. How can the effect of an embedded librarian in a composition class be assessed? Is this model an effective and efficient way to teach information literacy? They report on an ongoing attempt to utilize the embedded librarian as a complement to the composition instructor in first-year composition courses.

Jerry Stinnett and Marcia Rapchak examine the traditional instructor of first-year writing, a graduate student in English, often literature, who has no previous experience in teaching writing. A lack of awareness about information literacy as well as about rhetoric
can limit these teachers’ ability to pass on information literacy skills to their students; Stinnett and Rapchak recommend acquainting the novice teachers with the threshold concepts in both areas to give them the “bigger picture” view of the two disciplines.

A team at Central Connecticut State University reports on the embedded librarian model of information literacy teaching. After scaffolding the research process with several librarian visits, they used the AAC&U’s Information Literacy VALUE Rubric (2014) combined with an indirect measure to assess information literacy learning in first-year writing students. The volume concludes with a call for deep collaboration among librarians and writing instructors with the goal of fully sharing vocabulary and outcomes in order to maximize student learning.

Conversation and collaboration between librarians and writing professors can only strengthen the two disciplines, as each group brings its own strengths to the table. By demonstrating early in students’ careers that librarians and teaching faculty work hand-in-hand and emphasize the same habits of mind, we can give them a solid foundation as they progress into their majors. Of course, this conversation and collaboration doesn’t end after students’ finish their Composition classes, and the forthcoming Volume 2 of Teaching Information Literacy and Writing Studies will address information literacy and writing studies’ work with other levels and sectors of the academy.

REFERENCES


NOTE

1. Often this process is automated, or at best provided by nonlibrarians who are not as expensive to employ.


