Faculty Voices on the Framework: Implications for Instruction and Dialogue

LuMarie F. Guth, Judith M. Arnold, Veronica E. Bielat, Maria A. Perez-Stable, and Patricia Fravel Vander Meer

abstract: Librarians from two research institutions developed a qualitative and quantitative survey to bring faculty voices into the discussion of incorporating the “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education” into instruction. The survey aimed to (1) gauge the level of faculty support for information literacy; (2) solicit rankings of importance for the concepts in the Framework; and (3) elicit responses concerning its language. Results from 237 participants showed support for information literacy and for the Framework, with reservations about its language. Librarians can use these findings to explore a “common” language for promoting the Framework and to identify areas for instructional collaborations.

Introduction

Since the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) introduced the “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education” (the Framework) in 2015 and then adopted it in 2016,¹ the library literature has been filled with articles attempting to contextualize the Framework and find ways to fit it into information literacy (IL) instruction. Much of the recent discussion focuses on applying the Framework to disciplinary-focused instruction in such areas as art, music, and health sciences;² or on its advantages for assessment.³ Much other literature deals with the Framework’s promise for transforming IL instruction, as expressed by William Badke, bringing to light the challenges of moving beyond using IL for teaching the superficial nature of “finding stuff.”⁴ He argued that we have let the nature of one-shot instruction limit the focus of teaching librarians and asserts, “The Framework is a bold attempt to embrace scholarship in a big way, placing IL in its larger context.”⁵
Understandably, much of this discussion is written from the librarian’s perspective, grappling with the task of transforming a skills-based curriculum, as exemplified in the earlier ACRL “Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education” (the Standards), to a concept-based one. This pedagogical transformation was demonstrated in a 2017 article by Zoe Fisher discussing how the Framework can provide structure for an IL credit course. The change is further illustrated by other discussions and examples of how to rethink approaches to teaching or how to design instructional activities to help students master the concepts that form the basis of the Framework. Largely absent from this conversation about the Framework is the faculty voice, though a review of the literature reveals that faculty have much to say about student IL skills (or lack thereof).

**Literature Review**

**Faculty Voices on Information Literacy**

Many higher education faculty have definite opinions regarding their students’ research skills and believe that students need improvement in this area for academic success. Begun in 2000, the triennial Ithaka S+R US Faculty Survey randomly sampled the evolving teaching, research, and information practices of the professoriat in the United States. The results of the 2015 Ithaka survey, as reported by Christine Wolff-Eisenberg, Alisa Rod, and Roger Schonfeld, indicated that 54 percent of “respondents strongly agreed that their undergraduate students had poor skills related to locating and evaluating scholarly information.” That figure represented a 7 percent increase from the 2012 survey. About two-thirds of faculty respondents also “strongly agreed that improving their undergraduate students’ ‘research skills’ . . . was an important educational goal for the courses they teach.”

The 2015 Library Journal and Gale Cengage Learning survey “Bridging the Librarian-Faculty Gap in the Academic Library” did not directly ask college faculty to comment on their students’ IL skills. However, the survey found that 85 percent of faculty considered the instruction of students in IL either “essential” or “very essential.” In fact, they rated this teaching as the most vital service offered by their academic libraries.

Stuart Boon, Bill Johnston, and Sheila Webber interviewed 20 English department faculty in the United Kingdom who saw their students as deficient in research skills. Several faculty were interested in making students aware that developing their individual research abilities would make them marketable and desirable in the real world; in other words, the skills would appeal to potential employers. Laurie McNamara Morrison interviewed 15 faculty members at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada, who considered improving students’ research skills integral to their courses’ outcomes. They, too, mentioned the transferability of research skills to the workplace. Faculty felt the need to address their students’ research skills not only because they recognized the students’ need for it but also because they believed it their role as educators. Nicole Pagowsky also discussed this transferability issue. She called it preparing students “to meet the demands of the global knowledge economy, and to find jobs.”

Laura Saunders conducted a random national survey of faculty in anthropology, English literature, political science, psychology, and science and technology to explore fac-
ulty perspectives on IL. She suggested that disciplinary faculty have been largely absent from the broad IL discussion in higher education. Faculty in her survey overwhelmingly reported that IL was important for their students. Asked to rate their students’ ability in seven IL competencies, respondents rated their students “somewhat strong” in six of the areas and “strong” in searching the general Web. Few faculty ranked their students “very poor” or “poor” in any area. Saunders concluded that, while there was room for improvement, students showed some ability with IL skills. She then interviewed 25 faculty members, and the qualitative data told another story. Faculty agreed that students generally need help in developing their IL skills, especially for locating and evaluating information, and that students exhibited poor judgment in selecting sources.

In 2012, Patricia Fravel Vander Meer, Maria Perez-Stable, and Dianna Sachs reported that faculty rated their undergraduate students’ ability to find information using the library’s resources as less than satisfactory, although juniors and seniors ranked slightly above satisfactory at searching the free Internet. These findings supported those of Anita Cannon and several other studies of faculty views on IL and library instruction. Maria Pinto surveyed faculty at the University of Granada in Spain regarding their perceived importance, as researchers, of four areas of IL: (1) searching, (2) evaluation, (3) processing, and (4) communication/dissemination. Faculty ranked searching and communication/dissemination as “very important” and evaluation and processing as “important.” Faculty’s understanding of the importance of IL paves the way for librarians to partner with them in delivering IL to students.

Sophie Bury conducted 24 semi-structured interviews with faculty in business and the humanities, sciences, and social sciences at York University in Toronto, Canada. Faculty agreed that IL skills were fundamental in academic research, even for undergraduates. While most faculty agreed that students were skilled at searching the free Internet, they mentioned concerns regarding their students’ ability to identify a workable research topic; too much reliance on Google and Wikipedia; little knowledge of print sources; inability to successfully search for scholarly information; a lack of critical thinking, especially for sources found on the open Web; and poor skills in documenting and synthesizing sources, occasionally delving into plagiarism.

Information Literacy and the Faculty/Librarian Disconnect

The research on faculty opinions of IL showed a disconnect between the competencies faculty value, which they find most lacking in their students—evaluation and synthesis of information—and those that instruction librarians view as their primary responsibilities—search strategies and tools. Shelley Gullikson conducted a survey of faculty at five Canadian universities asking them to rank information concepts that she had mapped to the outcomes in the Standards. Of the top 10 overall ranked outcomes, 40 percent linked to the evaluation and synthesis outcomes in Standard Three, “evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge.
base and value system.” Twenty percent related to outcomes on determining the information need in Standard One, “defines and articulates the need for information,” and 20 percent to outcomes on the ethical use of information in Standard Five, “understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.” Ten percent each linked to search outcomes in Standard Two, “accesses needed information effectively and efficiently,” and scholarly communication outcomes in Standard Four, “uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.”

Gullikson cross-referenced faculty rankings with the ACRL “Objectives for Information Literacy Instruction: A Model Statement for Academic Librarians,” outcomes deemed the responsibilities of librarians. Of the top 10 ranked concepts that were also the responsibility of librarians, five were mapped to the determination of information need in Standard One and three were mapped to evaluation and synthesis in Standard Three. This indicated a gap between the stated values of faculty and the responsibility expectations of librarians.

In a study published in 2011, Bury asked faculty at York University to rank the importance of 12 IL competencies on a scale of 1 (not important at all) to 7 (extremely important). While all the competencies ranked high, with mean scores of 6 or above, the scores relative to one another showed a similar focus on evaluation and synthesis. The highest-ranked competency, with a mean score of 6.64, was related to Standard Three, “Understand how to critically evaluate library information sources found.” The lowest-ranked competencies pertained to Standard One, “Identify information appropriate to a given research topic,” with a mean of 6.00, and to Standard Two competencies, “Able to identify appropriate search tools to find needed information” and “Capable of formulating effective search strategies when looking for needed information within online research tools,” tied at a mean of 6.21.

In the Saunders survey published in 2012, which queried faculty on the information competencies of their students, faculty ranked students highest at searching the Web and lowest at synthesizing information. Saunders followed this study with another that surveyed librarians on which competencies they regularly covered in their instruction. Specific search tools ranked highest, with 97.3 percent coverage, and evaluating information ranked fourth, with approximately 80 percent coverage. When asked which competencies librarians spent most time on in their instruction, Saunders found that 68.7 percent devoted most of their teaching time to general or specific search strategies and tools. Only 12 percent reported spending most of their instruction time on evaluating information.

Faculty and the Framework

Much of the research on faculty perceptions of IL dates from the era of the ACRL Standards and suggests that faculty understand and value the broader concept of IL within the context of their disciplines. Similarly, recent articles have noted that the disciplinary focus is important for teaching the threshold concepts, transformative ideas that lead to a new level of understanding, embodied in the Framework. For example, Rebecca Kuglitsch argued that “teaching for transfer” (applying learning from one context to another) can resolve the inherent tension between IL as a skill that can be generalized
and as a discipline-specific capability. She argued for placing threshold concepts within a discipline, which would promote a more subtle understanding of the ideas and offer ways to facilitate transfer of the more general threshold concepts to the discipline and then draw analogies with other disciplines.28 Bringing a faculty writing studies director into conversation with a librarian, Brittnee Johnson and I. Moriah McCracken contended that threshold concepts offer a common ground and language for collaboration between librarians and faculty—a space in which to discuss IL. They incorporated the disciplinary lens by using a similar document from the field of writing studies, comparing it with the Framework, and then explored how threshold concepts that are common or complementary within the two documents provide a platform that can inform collaborative instructional goals and objectives.29

While Bury noted that few studies on IL report from the faculty perspective, her interviews unearthed themes showing that faculty ideas about IL focused on higher-order thinking, a value that should mesh well with the Framework and threshold concepts. Although she found no major disciplinary differences in their IL definitions, Bury reported that faculty associated IL with other digital literacies.30 A 2017 article by Troy Swanson also represented faculty views. In a librarian-led faculty development course on the Framework, discipline-specific examples helped faculty understand the idea of threshold concepts. When discussing individual frames, faculty could readily link many of the concepts, such as “Authority Is Constructed and Contextual,” directly to their teaching.31 Some frames, however, were unfamiliar to faculty because they were formulated from the perspective of librarianship. “Information Creation as a Process” was one of these; faculty sometimes failed to make the connection that how information is created relates to source evaluation. “Searching as Strategic Exploration” also had a distinctively librarian focus; while faculty value searching skills, they viewed searching as a “transactional process” instead of a “learning process.”32 Kathy Shields and Christine Cugliari described a discipline-focused collaboration between a librarian and faculty member using the frame “Scholarship as Conversation” as the organizing principle and found a stronger and more active learning experience.33 This finding dovetailed with what Johnson and McCracken argued, that reordering the frames, introducing “Scholarship as Conversation” first as the “driving” threshold concept, would facilitate teaching and understanding of the other frames.34

Regarding terminology in the Framework, the literature review unearthed a lack of research on faculty reactions to the language of the document. Gullikson’s survey, as noted earlier, addressed faculty perceptions of the Standards, and her findings indicated that some faculty found the language confusing and in need of clarification. One respondent described the term information literate as a “horrible term.”35 The author recommended that libraries engage in focus groups with faculty to explore outcomes and promote understanding.36 Additionally, when Jonathan Cope and Jesús Sanabria examined faculty perceptions of IL, interviews indicated that faculty gave serious consideration to IL concepts but thought of them in terms of the theory and language of their own disciplines.37 This outcome aligns with the results of Saunders’s 2012 study, which found that the descriptions faculty gave regarding the skills students need aligned with the idea of IL as defined by librarians; however, librarians and faculty did not necessarily share the same definition of IL.38 In a follow-up study from 2013, Saunders concluded
it was more important than ever that librarians incorporate the language of the various disciplines into regular communication with faculty. In other words, IL needs to be seated in the “language of faculty, specifically the language of the discipline.” Badke stated that the Framework’s complexity makes it difficult to communicate to faculty but that it does reflect scholarship in the disciplines, which is the concern of faculty.

Context and Rationale for the Study

The literature shows that faculty say students are not information literate, and, in particular, students are weak in searching and evaluation skills. Noting that faculty have not been consulted in any large-scale study regarding the Framework and its language, the priority in setting up this research was to include the faculty voice. Teaching librarians recognize that implementing the Framework must, like any good collaboration, include faculty, but where is the faculty input as the Framework approaches its third year? The Framework includes a “For Faculty” section that suggests opportunities for a disciplinary perspective and then offers various approaches to implementing the Framework.

A few recent articles have gathered faculty input. For example, Swanson reported informal findings from a workshop on the Framework with seven faculty. Grace Kaletski’s study in 2017 analyzed 66 faculty survey rankings of the knowledge practices in the Framework but did not report on disciplinary differences. Individual efforts to collaborate with faculty in implementing the Framework have been mentioned in the literature review and provide practical examples of how the Framework can offer a common ground for collaboration, especially at the disciplinary level. These small study populations and findings, however, because of this singular disciplinary perspective may not reflect a broader faculty perspective on the Framework or apply across disciplines.

A second impetus for the research grew from acknowledging that higher education institutions and their student and faculty populations vary widely, which leads librarians to question how transferable findings are from one institution to the next. Therefore, the researchers designed a project that would include faculty from more than one institution to expand the range of perspectives and possibility for meaningful data. Vander Meer, Perez-Stable, and Sachs, three librarians from Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, had previously gathered faculty input to identify collaborative opportunities and to help shape their instruction program. With a joint project between two similar, research-focused institutions, the librarians could gather data that would expand on the earlier research study on faculty views of library instruction and student skills. Similarly, this research study could be compared with Bury’s 2016 analysis that reported faculty definitions of IL and perspectives of student skills that included disciplinary distinctions. The researchers embarked on a cross-institutional survey involving faculty at Wayne State University (WSU) in Detroit and Western Michigan University (WMU) to determine whether the Framework would provide librarians and disciplinary faculty
with a common language to move forward with instruction that is more productive and integrated and that encourages critical thinking.

With those objectives in mind, and since no study in the literature had investigated a range of disciplinary faculty responses to the importance of the individual frames and their language or incorporated perspectives from across institutions, the authors defined the scope of their study to be: (1) to ascertain whether there is a baseline of faculty support for the goal of IL across two research-intense institutions; (2) to solicit faculty feedback on the concepts embodied in the Framework, pinpointing what frames are a priority for their students; and (3) to elicit a response from faculty concerning the language of the Framework to see if disciplinary perspectives could be elicited. By answering these questions, the researchers aspired to explore language for introducing and promoting the Framework. Faculty rankings of the frames in the survey could then serve as catalysts for instructional collaborations. Conversations could subsequently begin with the Framework priorities expressed, informed by any disciplinary perspectives revealed.

**Methodology**

Having made the decision to survey teaching faculty, the three librarians at Western Michigan University reached out to two colleagues at Wayne State University Libraries (a member of the Association of Research Libraries) to inquire if they wished to collaborate on this research study. In 2015–2016, the student enrollment at WMU was 23,556, and at WSU, it was 27,222. The potential pool of respondents included 897 faculty at WMU and 1,720 at WSU.

Both institutions received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct the anonymous, online survey using Qualtrics in the spring 2016 semester. Faculty received an e-mail invitation to take part. The survey consisted of 10 qualitative and quantitative (Likert scale) questions. The survey appears in Appendix A. The investigators formulated the following three research questions and developed survey items to obtain faculty responses:

**Question 1:** For faculty, how important is information literacy for student success?
**Question 2:** How do faculty “rank” the individual frames in importance, and are there institutional or disciplinary differences?
**Question 3:** How do faculty react to the language of the frames, and are there disciplinary differences?

Faculty reported demographic data, including their institution, their primary departmental affiliation, and the number of years teaching at the postsecondary level.

Next, faculty answered the question “How important do you think it is for university students’ academic success to know how to find, evaluate, and use appropriate information resources responsibly in their assignments?” using a scale of 1 to 5. Faculty then ranked each of the concepts comprising the six frames on a Likert scale (1 = lowest, 5 = highest) according to how important it was for students to understand the concept.

In the ratings of the frames, the Likert scale mistakenly included a zero. When reviewing the data, the researchers were unsure what the respondents meant when they chose zero and theorized that they selected it in lieu of an N/A (not applicable) option.
These occurrences may have impacted the results; however, after running analysis with and without those data points, the researchers found that the rankings or significance of the findings did not change. In succeeding surveys, the investigators would adjust the scale to include only the choice of 1 to 5. Additionally, in the future, the authors would make the quantitative questions required, because a substantial number of respondents had to be removed because they omitted some rankings.

Faculty were asked the open-ended question “Regarding the information literacy concepts above, what alternate terminology might you suggest for relevance and understanding for students in your discipline?” This query invited faculty to suggest other ways of expressing the concepts from their disciplinary perspective to help make the frames more relevant and understandable to their students.

Several additional questions addressed faculty’s collaboration with librarians on the delivery of IL, including what they liked or did not like about IL instruction. The survey also asked faculty to explain why they did not take advantage of collaborating with librarians to deliver IL instruction. The researchers plan to report on the data regarding collaboration, which were enlightening, in a future article.

**Summary of Demographic Findings**

Data from both institutions were combined in analyzing the results. The researchers received 79 usable surveys from WMU (8.9 percent response rate) and 158 usable surveys from WSU (9.4 percent response rate). Faculty self-reported their departmental affiliation in an open-ended field. Departments were categorized into nine consolidated areas based on disciplinary affiliation. For example, the discipline of kinesiology and exercise science was placed under education, consistent with categorization at both institutions. After conferring with the WMU Statistical Consulting Center (https://wmich.edu/statistics/center), the categories were further compressed into the following five areas to achieve higher counts for statistical analysis: education, fine arts (including communication), humanities, social sciences (including business and social work), and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, including health sciences, computer science, and the hard sciences). The largest response came from social sciences (31 percent), followed by STEM (26 percent), education (16 percent), fine arts (14 percent), and humanities (13 percent).

Faculty were asked to indicate their years of teaching experience: less than two years, two to five years, 6 to 10 years, 11 to 20 years, or 21 or more years. The results indicated that most faculty respondents, 58 percent, had 11 or more years of college teaching. Twenty percent of the participants had five or less years of college teaching, which was comparable to the 22 percent of faculty who reported 6 to 10 years of academic teaching experience.

**Results**

**Faculty and Information Literacy**

As a cornerstone to this research study, faculty responded to the question regarding how important IL is for college students’ academic success. On a sliding scale of 1 to 5
Faculty Ranking of Individual Frames

To explore faculty perceptions regarding the individual frames, faculty were asked to rank each frame from 1 to 5 in terms of how important each frame was to students’ academic success. All frames averaged above 4.0. Faculty ranked the frames as follows: “Research as Inquiry” (4.50), “Searching as Strategic Exploration” (4.46), “Information Has Value” (4.40), “Scholarship as Conversation” (4.32), “Information Creation as a Process” (4.19), and “Authority Is Constructed and Contextual” (4.08).

In examining the ranking of individual frames by unit, “Research as Inquiry” was ranked the highest by humanities at 4.70 and received no score from any discipline lower than 4.44 (social sciences). To achieve high enough counts for statistical analysis, the Likert rankings were placed into three categories, low (0–3), medium (4), and high (5). “Authority Is Constructed and Contextual” was the only frame that showed a significant difference among the areas in a chi-squared test (p = 0.03, standard deviation = 1.09). Humanities ranked it the highest at 4.40 and STEM the lowest at 3.89. “Information Has Value” ranged from 4.61 (education) to 4.21 (STEM). “Scholarship as Conversation” showed a slightly smaller range between the high (humanities, 4.50) and the low (fine arts, 4.12). There was little variation in the ranking of “Information Creation as a Process” by academic area. “Searching as Strategic Exploration” ranged from 4.58 (education) to 4.27 (humanities).

Kaletski’s faculty survey of the importance of the 45 knowledge practices included under the six frames indicated that all the knowledge practices received a mean score of either “very important” or “somewhat important.” Of the 10 top-rated knowledge practices, five came under the frame “Research as Inquiry.” This result dovetailed with the findings of this study, in which “Research as Inquiry” was the frame rated the highest by WMU and WSU faculty. Two of the knowledge practices included in the top 10 were related to the frame “Searching as Strategic Exploration,” which was also consistent with our study.

Faculty and the Framework Language

With the adoption of the Framework in early 2016, the researchers seized the opportunity to explore faculty’s responses to the language of the document. Coupled with the research question regarding how faculty value IL skills in their students, this survey solicited faculty views about how those skills could be understood in the language of their disciplines. The survey presented the open-ended question “Regarding the IL concepts above, what alternate terminology might you suggest for relevance and understanding for students in your discipline?” The authors hoped to elicit feedback that would address any disciplinary rephrasing of the language of the Framework, which could prove useful for instructional librarians.
Table 1.
Faculty perceptions of the importance of IL to student academic success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Information literacy importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine arts</td>
<td>4.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>4.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>4.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>4.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on their literature review, the researchers recognized that disciplinary perspectives affect how faculty and their students comprehend the meaning of IL. The survey collected department affiliations to determine if differences might emerge. This data point would indicate whether some disciplines voiced language issues more often than others and if there were recurring themes associated with particular disciplines.

Sixty-six text responses provided suggestions regarding different language for the frames. The replies were manually coded using themes identified through review of the content. Unique answers or those that did not reflect the coding scheme were not included in the final analysis. For example, a singular response of “paradigm shift” was excluded. Overall, the responses offered critiques of the Framework or of a particular frame.

Faculty also used the opportunity to reflect on the importance of a particular IL competency from their perspective. Some answers were coded for more than one theme, resulting in a total of 105 coded responses. The themes identified through the coding process are presented in Table 3. Examples of coded faculty responses appear in Appendix B.
Table 2.
Faculty perceptions of the importance of Framework concepts to student academic success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>“Authority Is Constructed and Contextual”</th>
<th>“Information Creation as a Process”</th>
<th>“Information Has Value”</th>
<th>“Research as Inquiry”</th>
<th>“Scholarship as Conversation”</th>
<th>“Searching as Strategic Exploration”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Mean 4.26</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>4.58</td>
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<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard deviation* 1.032</td>
<td>0.835</td>
<td>0.595</td>
<td>0.726</td>
<td>0.978</td>
<td>0.552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine arts</td>
<td>Mean 4.00</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>4.36</td>
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<tr>
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<td>N 33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard deviation 1.090</td>
<td>1.014</td>
<td>0.827</td>
<td>0.834</td>
<td>0.960</td>
<td>0.994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>Mean 4.40</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>4.27</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 30</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard deviation 0.855</td>
<td>1.064</td>
<td>1.033</td>
<td>0.535</td>
<td>0.682</td>
<td>0.740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>Mean 4.04</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.44</td>
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<td>73</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard deviation 1.148</td>
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<td>0.766</td>
<td>0.866</td>
<td>0.815</td>
<td>0.799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>Mean 3.89</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 63</td>
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<td>63</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard deviation 1.123</td>
<td>0.976</td>
<td>1.220</td>
<td>1.090</td>
<td>0.971</td>
<td>0.817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Mean 4.08</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>4.46</td>
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<td>237</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard deviation 1.087</td>
<td>0.980</td>
<td>0.932</td>
<td>0.872</td>
<td>0.892</td>
<td>0.794</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lack of clarity and use of jargon in the frames was the most frequent theme identified in the comments, representing 31 percent of the coded responses. This sentiment was echoed by a faculty member from education who stated, “The jargon used is quite dense. The literacy levels expressed in the statements are stratospheric [sic]: astroliteracy required.” Other noteworthy comments coded as “lacks clarity or uses jargon” were “These are in no way succinct” (business); “The language around them was so jargonistic it was hard to tell what the point was” (social science); and “The language presupposes a high academic English level” (education).
Anecdotally, many librarians have experienced this conversation about the jargonistic language of the Framework at conferences, workshops, and within their own institutions. For example, the 2015 discussion thread initiated by Jody Caldwell, “[acrlframe] Info Lit definitions for students,” archived in the ACRL Framework e-mail list, spoke to students’ understanding of the frames. Librarians discussed that threshold concepts appear more theoretical, making the Framework more challenging to impart to students; one librarian even described the Framework language as “forbidding.”

Over 20 percent of comments concerned language that related to types of authority. Given that “Authority Is Constructed and Contextual” ranked low in importance when faculty were asked to rank the frames, this apparent conflict made us wonder if faculty may have failed to grasp that “Authority Is Constructed and Contextual” relates to evaluating authority. Was the concept of contextual authority too esoteric to faculty, who typically ask students to primarily consult scholarly sources? Kaletski reported that faculty responded positively to the more specific and perhaps understandable knowledge practices language relating to authority, specifically, “use research tools” and “indicators of authority.”

Responses by Discipline

As reflected in Table 4, the concern with jargon and students not understanding was a strong theme throughout all disciplines. However, a 2017 research study questioned this concern. Rachel Scott explored student understanding of the Framework in a small two-part study with first-year honors students. She integrated the Framework as a foundation of a one-credit course and found that students could demonstrate understanding of the concepts and language. Table 4 presents the number of language-related comments for all themes and the number of mentions for each theme by discipline area.

Social sciences faculty contributed 33 percent of the coded responses, the largest of all groups. Their greatest area of concern related to types of authority, a theme which STEM faculty also considered important. For some, “the hierarchy of journal quality” or “being able to differentiate and find primary resources (research in peer review journals) and distinguish it from a news bite on Fox News.” Language such as “determine credibility” and “peer review” was used.

The second most often-mentioned theme by social sciences faculty was types of sources, which is closely allied to the types of authority theme. One respondent expressed concern that students “need to be able to distinguish primary, secondary, and tertiary sources,” which echoed a similar response on the value of primary sources in the humanities group. Social sciences, STEM, and education faculty were the only groups to remark that the frames “made sense” in their disciplines.
Table 4.
Faculty comments on Framework language by theme and area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lacks clarity or uses jargon</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of authority</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will not understand</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of sources</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>research versus Research/evidence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too abstract/not concrete enough</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes sense in my discipline</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital literacy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information versus knowledge</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual literacy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy versus fluency</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sense” in their disciplines. Social sciences was the only group that failed to mention either digital or visual literacy.

STEM faculty accounted for 21 percent of the coded comments. The theme of types of authority and that of research (lowercased)—versus Research (capitalized) or evidence—that is, the actions and outcomes of library research as distinct from empirical or scientific research—were reflected the most in their suggestions. Types of sources received mention and, not surprisingly, discipline-associated terms such as “evidence-based,” “peer review,” “impact factor,” and “reproducibility” were evident in their examples of alternate terminology.

Responses from education faculty constituted 18 percent of the recorded comments. They were most concerned with the theme research versus Research/evidence, as reflected in this comment: “We share what we learn and the information we develop at least in part as a way of testing what we have learned against what others have published.” A few respondents affirmed an understanding of the frames from a disciplinary perspective; in other words, the frames “make sense” in their discipline. Additional remarks from education faculty addressed the public or community-based nature of scholarship, a theme echoed in other disciplinary groups.

Observations from fine arts and communication faculty, which constituted 14 percent of the coded responses, understandably specified an interest in the themes of visual literacy as well as digital literacy. One faculty member expressed this theme as “the ability to communicate visually from state to state or out of the country.” Faculty commented on “ethos” or the authority of the author/speaker (types of authority) as well as the research versus Research/evidence theme.

Themes in comments from humanities faculty, which comprised 14 percent of the comments, most frequently mentioned types of sources, types of authority, digital literacy, and the research versus Research/evidence themes, followed by literacy versus fluency and the knowledge versus information distinction. Unlike most other groups, humanities faculty emphasized the importance of primary sources and “older information,” as this response from a history faculty member indicates: “I pose questions about the past and expect students to use primary sources to then compose a thesis that answers those questions.”

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Faculty’s ranking of the importance of IL for students’ academic success was high across disciplines, varying little from the average of 4.81. IL was defined in this context as the ability to “find, evaluate, and use appropriate resources responsibly in their assignments.” This finding should encourage librarians to continue their efforts to integrate IL into the curriculum.

Although faculty perspectives of IL have been studied, their perspectives on the Framework have been largely absent to date. This absence limits the ability of librarians to use the frames as starting points when collaborating with faculty on IL learning
outcomes. Faculty’s individual rankings of the frames, which averaged above 4.0 for each, demonstrated that faculty value the concepts embodied in the Framework as goals for student success. The two most highly ranked frames, “Research as Inquiry” and “Searching as Strategic Exploration,” whose knowledge practices also scored among the top 10 in Kaletski’s study, represent more traditional goals often requested by faculty for instruction sessions. “Information Has Value” placed third at 4.40, but there were no open-ended comments from faculty to elaborate on this ranking. A surprising result in the rankings was that “Authority Is Constructed and Contextual” averaged the lowest and was the only instance where a significant difference occurred among disciplines. Given that faculty often voice the value of critical thinking and emphasize evaluation of sources, the researchers were puzzled by the lower ranking of this frame. While humanities faculty scored it at 4.40, STEM faculty averaged 3.89. The authors hypothesized that the phrasing of the frame using “constructed” and “contextual” might have caused some discomfort in data-driven disciplines such as those in STEM.

In Kaletski’s rankings as well, the knowledge practices associated with “Authority Is Constructed and Contextual,” which spelled out the relation between format and authority and the relativity of recognized authority among scholars, appeared in the lowest-ranked practices. However, the more traditionally phrased criterion of authority stated as “Use research tools and indicators of authority to determine the credibility of sources, understanding the elements that might temper this credibility” placed in the top-ranked knowledge practices. Open-ended comments elicited strong faculty support for teaching students to evaluate information and sources, and would suggest that conversations with faculty about this frame should make clear how it advances source evaluation and credibility. Ambiguity on the value of critical thinking and evaluation indicates that more communication on learning priorities and time allocation for different IL elements (searching, evaluation, citing, and the like) in instruction needs to occur between faculty and librarians.

“Scholarship as Conversation” ranked fourth overall (4.32) in this survey. However, humanities (which includes writing studies) faculty’s ranking averaged 4.50, which reflected Johnson and McCracken’s recommendation that this frame serve as the pedagogical starting point for writing studies. The second-lowest ranking was “Information Creation as a Process” at 4.19, appearing to echo the observation in Swanson that faculty do not think as much about the information creation process and its impact. Perhaps this frame reflects a librarian’s perspective and is not necessarily central to the goals of instruction in the eyes of faculty.

This joint survey’s rankings indicate that faculty think it most important to teach students how to formulate a research question (“Research as Inquiry”) and then to instruct them in how to find the answer or answers with a creative and critical approach to searching (“Searching as Strategic Exploration”). Instruction librarians wishing to incorporate the Framework in their sessions might consider starting their conversations with these frames but also think about how to incorporate “Authority Is Constructed
and Contextual.” Although faculty did not rank this frame as primary, their open-ended responses relating to Framework language highlighted their concerns about students’ lack of skills in evaluating credibility of sources, a valued learning goal. Although there were not stark differences among disciplines regarding value and interpretation of the individual frames, some variations did occur. Liaison librarians should explore and be sensitive to the perceptions of faculty in their institutions to better serve the needs of faculty and their students.

In faculty statements addressing the language of the frames, the most common concern, voiced by all disciplines, was the use of jargon and lack of clarity. From the researchers’ perspective, these responses serve as a reminder that teaching librarians need to connect the frames in everyday terminology or disciplinary language that reflect faculty’s concerns regarding their students’ IL skills. Faculty went beyond the language of the Framework to voice their frustration with students’ inabilities to distinguish between different types of authority. This was a specific concern of faculty in the social sciences and STEM. The researchers theorized that this was another indication that faculty did not fully comprehend “Authority Is Constructed and Contextual,” or if they did, they felt it needed to address specific indicators of authority, including peer review and the distinction between primary, secondary, and tertiary sources. This frame, especially, needs to be explored more in depth with faculty to better understand their perceptions.

Another faculty concern that emerged was the opinion that students would not grasp the language of the frames. The researchers saw this as evidence that some respondents viewed students as a direct audience of the document, which was never the intention of the authors of the Framework. Indeed, faculty may view the knowledge practices detailed in the Framework as more practical learning objectives than the summaries of the frames that were provided in the survey.

This study surveyed academic libraries at two large research institutions. Although few differences were found when comparing the two schools, additional studies could take place in other institutions to determine if the results are transferable. Even though this study surveyed faculty in all disciplines, additional research more focused on individual disciplines would be useful. As the Framework matures, further case studies of Framework implementation in faculty/librarian collaborations should emerge. In addition, perhaps librarians need to investigate the impact of the Framework regarding program accreditation standards. Some faculty in our study surmised that the Framework and its language would not be well understood by their students. As mentioned earlier, Scott conducted research with honors students that indicated promising potential on the part of students for understanding the frames. Subsequent studies might expand research in this regard and include feedback from a wider sampling of students in relation to their perceived value and understanding of the Framework. Future research could also seek student input related to the relevancy of the knowledge practices to their future professions and personal enrichment. As educational standards continually look at the skills needed in the labor force, research could be considered that seeks connections among the tenets of the frames and a skilled workforce.
The goal of this research project was to incorporate the faculty voice into the modern concepts of IL as expressed in the “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.” As the environment around information changes, with increased confusion surrounding such issues as the validity of information, biased sources, polarization of the news, and selection of research tools, the conversation between faculty and librarians will become more crucial than ever to fostering an information-literate society. Acknowledging disciplinary differences within the academy regarding faculty’s needs for IL and the Framework, encouraging dialogue between librarians and teaching faculty, and considering corresponding language that is the most meaningful to each discipline can further serve to contribute to the development of best practices in information literacy.

As educational standards continually look at the skills needed in the labor force, research could be considered that seeks connections among the tenets of the frames and a skilled workforce.

LuMarie F. Guth is an assistant professor and business librarian at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo; she may be reached by e-mail at: lumarie.guth@wmich.edu.

Judith M. Arnold is a librarian IV and liaison coordinator (retired) at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan; she may be reached by e-mail at: judith.arnold@wayne.edu.

Veronica E. Bielat is a librarian III and student success librarian at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan; she may be reached by e-mail at: veronica.bielat@wayne.edu.

Maria A. Perez-Stable is a professor and instruction and outreach librarian at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo; she may be reached by e-mail at: maria.perez-stable@wmich.edu.

Patricia Fravel Vander Meer is a professor and instruction and outreach librarian at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo; she may be reached by e-mail at: pat.vandermeer@wmich.edu.
Appendix A

Survey of Faculty Perspectives on Information Literacy

To begin, please give us some information about yourself (which shall remain anonymous and presented in aggregate).

I am a faculty member/instructor at:
___ Wayne State University
___ Western Michigan University

Please enter your primary departmental affiliation at your university (e.g., English, Mathematics, Social Work, Center for Latino/a & Latin American Studies, etc.).

________________________

Years teaching at the postsecondary level:
___ Less than 2
___ 2–5
___ 6–10
___ 11–20
___ 21 or more

The following set of questions will reference information literacy, the ACRL “Framework,” and definitions provided below.

4. Please indicate on the following sliding scale (1 = lowest, 5 = highest) how important you think it is for university students’ academic success to know how to find, evaluate, and use appropriate information resources responsibly in their assignments (information literacy).

Importance of IL to student academic success          1          2          3          4          5

5. The ACRL Framework:

An important part of becoming information literate involves students gaining understanding of a framework of related information/scholarship concepts. Please rate (1 = lowest, 5 = highest) the importance of students’ understanding each of these six concepts, as defined by ACRL in the Framework, for their academic success.
“Authority Is Constructed and Contextual”
Information resources reflect their creators’ expertise and credibility, and are evaluated based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used.

Authority is constructed in that various communities may recognize different types of authority. It is contextual in that the information need may help to determine the level of authority required.

“Information Creation as a Process”
Information in any format is produced to convey a message and is shared via a selected delivery method. The iterative processes of researching, creating, revising, and disseminating information vary, and the resulting product reflects these differences.

“Information Has Value”
Information possesses several dimensions of value, including as a commodity, as a means of education, as a means to influence, and as a means of negotiating and understanding the world. Legal and socioeconomic interests influence information production and dissemination.

“Research as Inquiry”
Research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions whose answers in turn develop additional questions or lines of inquiry in any field.

“Scholarship as Conversation”
Communities of scholars, researchers, or professionals engage in sustained discourse with new insights and discoveries occurring over time as a result of varied perspectives and interpretations.
“Searching as Strategic Exploration”
Searching for information is often nonlinear and iterative, requiring the evaluation of a range of information sources and the mental flexibility to pursue alternate avenues as new understanding develops.

6. Regarding the information literacy concepts above, what alternate terminology might you suggest for relevance and understanding for students in your discipline?

7. How have you collaborated with librarians at your university to help students develop information literacy? Please select all that apply.
___ A librarian teaches a session (in-person or online) on library research skills for my course(s).
___ I have worked with a librarian to define information literacy learning outcomes for my course(s).
___ I have worked with a librarian to develop an assignment that helps my students develop information literacy skills.
___ A librarian has developed online videos and tutorials for my students to use to develop information literacy skills.
___ A librarian has created a course-specific research guide for students.
___ There is a librarian presence in my course management system (e.g., Blackboard, D2L).
___ I do not work in collaboration with a librarian, but I refer my students to a specific librarian for help.
___ I have not worked in collaboration with a librarian at my university.
___ I teach these information literacy skills myself.

8. If you have collaborated with a librarian in a course, please explain what motivated you to do so. What did you like, or did not like, about the instruction experience?

9. If you have not taken advantage of working with a librarian in a course, please tell us why.

10. Any final comments?
### Appendix B

**Examples of Faculty Comments on Framework Language by Theme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Faculty comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lacks clarity or uses jargon</td>
<td>“The first 2 didn’t seem very relevant to scientific inquiry. The language around them was so jargonistic it was hard to tell what the point was.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of authority</td>
<td>“If studies have contradictory findings, it might say something about the situations/people to which the findings can be generalized—i.e., there is no one Truth can differ for different subgroups of population.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will not understand</td>
<td>“I would ask the students themselves. A dialogue that concludes with how the students would word these concepts could be quite productive.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of sources</td>
<td>“On a practical level, they need to be able to distinguish primary, secondary, and tertiary sources. I’m sick of people sticking definitions from Webster’s or the Oxford dictionary into a technical paper.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>research versus Research/evidence</td>
<td>“The term ‘Research’ has multiple meanings in the academy for faculty and students. A primary distinction is ‘research’ as exploring a given question, facet, or dynamic versus ‘research’ as a completed scholarly addition to the field. Both are scholarly pursuits, the first is preparatory whereas the second is actively shared and participatory.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too abstract/not concrete enough</td>
<td>“Terms such as ‘Authority Is Constructed and Contextual,’ ‘Information Creation as a Process,’ etc. disconnected and foreign to our needs.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes sense in my discipline</td>
<td>“This vernacular is used in my discipline.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital literacy</td>
<td>“‘Digital literacy,’ given growing reliance on mediated resources and databases.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information versus knowledge</td>
<td>“Data/information does not speak for itself.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual literacy</td>
<td>“. . . ability to communicate visually from state to state or out of the country.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy versus fluency</td>
<td>“I’m not sure exactly where this fits in, but I feel like it is important to help students differentiate between searching (the normal use of search engines to find answers to everyday questions) and researching (which requires more in-depth knowledge of databases, Boolean logic, etc.).”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes


5. Ibid., 73.


10. Ibid.


22. Gullikson, “Faculty Perceptions of ACRL’s Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education,” 589.


24. Saunders, “Faculty Perspectives on Information Literacy as a Student Learning Outcome,” 229.


26. Ibid., 140.


32. Ibid., 14.


34. Johnson and McCracken, “Reading for Integration, Identifying Complementary Threshold Concepts,” 186.

35. Gullikson, “Faculty Perceptions of ACRL’s Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education,” 591.

36. Ibid.


38. Saunders, “Faculty Perspectives on Information Literacy as a Student Learning Outcome,” 231–32.


42. Swanson, “Sharing the ACRL Framework with Faculty,” 12–14, 48.


44. See, as noted earlier, Shields and Cugliari, “Scholarship as Conversation,” which built instruction around the “Scholarship as Conversation” frame, and Johnson and McCracken, “Reading for Integration, Identifying Complementary Threshold Concepts,” which developed a crosswalk between the Framework and threshold concepts in writing studies.


52. A supporting observation that the language of information literacy is more humanities- and social sciences-based and sometimes exclusive of the sciences, which value data and tighter definitions for information, can be found in Kate Manuel, “Generic and Discipline-Specific Information Literacy Competencies: The Case of the Sciences,” *Science & Technology Libraries* 24, 3–4 (2004): 291–93, doi:10.1300/J122v24n03_05.
54. Ibid., 29.
57. Scott, “Part 1. If We Frame It, They Will Respond,” 1–18, and Scott, “Part 2. If We Frame It, They Will Respond,” 19–32.