

ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education

bit.ly hyperlink

what is it?

The ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* offered a set of learning outcomes with associated skills that students were expected to master as they progressed through the standards. The revised *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (the Framework) is a more flexible document that focuses on threshold concepts, the ideas and themes that form the underlying foundation of a discipline and pave the way to think both about it and within it, rather than specific skills or standards.

There are six threshold concepts identified in the Framework:

1. Scholarship as conversation
2. Research as inquiry
3. Information creation as process
4. Authority is constructed and contextual
5. Searching as strategic exploration
6. Information has value



© M. Thuna 2014

how does it work?

The Framework is split into six units/frames. Each unit includes the definition of its threshold concept and its associated knowledge practice/abilities (learning outcomes) and dispositions (attitudes and experiences).

Librarians can use the Framework to guide the redesign of information literacy instruction across all levels of study by mapping the threshold concepts and their associated knowledge practices and dispositions onto the local curriculum. The Framework is flexible to allow for its application to individual instruction sessions, assignments, courses, and curricula.

who's doing it?

In summer 2012, the ACRL established a [Task Force](#) to develop a new Framework for information literacy in higher education intended to replace the ACRL's [Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education](#). The Task Force included librarian experts in the area of information literacy from a variety of universities and colleges across the US, as well as other higher education stakeholders. The draft process allowed for the broader ACRL membership and higher education community to contribute significant feedback that shaped the framework.

The Framework guides the theory and practice of current librarians in higher education settings, as a tool for them to think through learning outcomes, research skills, assignment design, and assessment. The threshold concepts, with their attendant knowledge practices and dispositions, are particularly useful for librarians training and practicing in information literacy instruction, but their impact can be shared more broadly with other librarian colleagues, faculty, and institutional partners.

why is it significant?

Threshold concepts have been lauded as “jewels in the curriculum” because “they can serve to identify crucial points in the curriculum that provide opportunities for students to gain important conceptual understandings” (Land et al., 2006, p. 198). In terms of information literacy instruction, rather than trying to meet an overwhelming list of skills, threshold concepts provide parameters but allow leeway in what and how librarians teach. The threshold concepts presented in the document also consider the students as content creators and information in a dynamic technological landscape.

In addition, the second draft of the Framework states that it “opens the way for librarians, faculty, and other institutional partners to redesign instruction sessions, assignments, courses, and even curricula...” (ACRL, 2013, p. 2). The threshold concepts outlined in the Framework help us rethink the way we deliver information literacy but retain some elements of the former standards.

ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education

*bit.ly hyperlink***further reading**

Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). (2013). *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education – second draft*. Retrieved from <http://acrl.ala.org/ilstandards/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Framework-for-IL-for-HE-Draft-2.pdf>

Flanagan, M. (n.d.). Threshold concepts: undergraduate teaching, postgraduate training and professional development: a short introduction and bibliography. Retrieved from: <http://www.ee.ucl.ac.uk/~mflanaga/thresholds.html>

Land, R., Cousin, G., Meyer, J.H.F., & Davies, P. (2006). Implications of threshold concepts for course design and evaluation. In J. H. F. Meyer & R. Land (Eds.), *Overcoming Barriers to student understanding: Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Meyer, J.H.F. & Land, R. (2003). *Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising within the Disciplines*. Edinburgh University, UK. Retrieved from: <http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/docs/ETLreport4.pdf>

August 2014
Revised May 2015
Whitney Kemble, Silvia Vong,
Jenaya Webb, John Bolan, &
Mindy Thuna
University of Toronto Libraries

what are the challenges?

The idea of the threshold concept may itself be considered *troublesome knowledge* for some. While there are many challenges that can arise depending on a librarian's working environment, mainly in the area of application. For most librarians, one-shot instruction is the current reality. The structure of one-shot instruction does not allow time for deeper discussion around a concept, let alone the six concepts. Another challenge that may arise is buy-in from faculty. Many instructors request the demonstration of searching a particular database or the catalogue. With the short amount of time with one-shot instruction, an instructor may only request a demonstration.

where is it going?

Since it was released in February 2014, the Framework has gone through three drafts based on a process of community feedback through formal questionnaires, in-person and online forums, social media channels, and direct communications. The final draft of the Framework was approved by the ACRL's IL Standards Committee and sent to the ACRL Board of Directors in January 2015. The Board accepted the Framework in February 2015 and, as such, it now becomes part of the collection of official ACRL documents used by information literacy practitioners. You can read the Board's statement [here](#). However, the Board notes that the Framework will not replace the ACRL's [Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education](#) (approved by the Board in 2000).

Librarians in the US and Canada are engaging with the Framework and its threshold concepts in various ways including writing blog posts, hosting workshops, and attending (and leading) conference presentations on the topic. Instructional librarians from Ryerson University, York University, and the University of Toronto have also begun to compile resources and ideas in an open wiki at: <http://try-2014-acrl-framework.wikispaces.com/>

what are the implications for libraries?

Given the far-reaching impact of the previous ACRL IL Competency Standards, it is likely that the Framework will have a significant impact on information literacy related instruction in higher education for many years. The flexible and conceptual nature of the Framework, as opposed to the more enumerative and prescriptive nature of the Competency Standards, requires sustained and deep engagement from libraries for local implementation. In particular it will require a substantial amount of front-loaded effort. Librarians will need significant time and opportunity to convene to digest and discuss the Framework and to contextualize it to their own situation in order to adapt it to the local environment. Libraries may want to bring other instructional partners into their conversations as well. Allotting time and resources for pilot projects to test and assess implementation strategies will probably be desirable as well.