Eastern Michigan University

DigitalCommons@EMU

2022

Reining in Informaiton Literacy Instruction: Using Faculty Survey Data to Guide the Process

Veronica Bielat

LuMarie Guth

Judith Arnold

Maria Perez-Stable

Patricia Vander Meer

Recommended Citation

REINING IN INFORMATION LITERACY INSTRUCTION: USING FACULTY SURVEY DATA TO GUIDE THE PROCESS

VERONICA BIELAT, LUMARIE GUTH, JUDITH ARNOLD, MARIA PEREZ-STABLE AND PATRICIA VANDER MEER

INTRODUCTION

The ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education* (2016) has prompted a new mandate for information literacy (IL) programs accompanied by the need to take the reins and guide stakeholders towards change. A cursory search of the library literature since 2014 shows that over 50 articles (and countless conference presentations) offer evidence that librarians are seeking meaningful ways to incorporate the *Framework* into IL programs.

While this librarian-centered discussion is fruitful, a successful and sustainable IL program depends upon dialog between librarians and teaching faculty. We need to remember that we do not work in a vacuum, independent of the teaching faculty. The recent *Ithaka S+R US Faculty Survey* (2016) finds an increased concern from previous surveys over students' lack of IL skills, while growing numbers of faculty acknowledge the library's role in improving these skills. With faculty primed, the time is right to gather their perspectives on how to direct change for our IL programs.

RATIONALE

Aligning instruction with the expressed values of faculty will help strategically guide integration of the *Framework* into programs and leverage strengths in light of constricting budgets and staffing. To that end, the researchers conducted a survey of the teaching faculty at two large Midwestern universities.

The survey was designed to explore:

- Faculty's perceived importance of IL for students' academic success
- How faculty rated each of the six Frames
- Different language pertinent to their disciplines that faculty might use to describe the Frames
- How faculty collaborate with librarians
- Reasons why faculty do not or have not collaborated with librarians

METHODOLOGY

The authors conducted a survey of the teaching faculty at Wayne State University and Western Michigan University. Collaborating served to secure a larger, more diverse pool, and helped to determine where there were commonalities and/or differences based on academic unit and years of experience. We used Qualtrics to administer a 10-question, anonymous survey via

email, which consisted of quantitative as well as open-ended questions. The surveys were administered in the spring semester of 2016 and were open until early May.

The survey included demographic questions such as respondents' home institution, department affiliation, and number of years teaching at the postsecondary level. There was a response rate of 9.8 percent at Wayne State University, with 164 usable surveys out of a total faculty pool of 1,729; and a response rate of 8.9 percent at Western Michigan University, with 79 usable surveys out of a total faculty pool of 897.

SURVEY POPULATION

Affiliation by Academic Unit

For the purposes of this presentation, we combined the results from both institutions. Participants were asked to specify their department via a free text field, and the researchers standardized those into nine academic units. Five units—social sciences (21 percent), health sciences (17 percent), education (16 percent), fine arts (14 percent), and humanities (12 percent)—comprised a combined 80 percent of the responses; this was not too surprising since these disciplines are often heavy users of the library and research instruction. Conversely, the response from the sciences was fairly low (5 percent). Similarly, faculty responses from business (5 percent), engineering and computer science (4 percent), and social work (3 percent) were small.

Number of Years Teaching

The majority of faculty, 58 percent, reported 11 or more years of teaching. Approximately 22 percent of the faculty reported teaching experience of six to ten years. Twenty percent of the respondents were in the range of five or less years of instruction.

FACULTY AND THE ACRL *FRAMEWORK*

Combined Faculty Ranking of IL and the Frames

Respondents were asked to indicate on a sliding scale (1=lowest, 5= highest) how important they thought it is for college students' academic success to know how to find, evaluate, and use appropriate information resources responsibly in their assignments (IL). We also asked faculty to rate the importance of students understanding of each of the six concepts, as defined by ACRL in the *Framework*, for their academic success. In general, IL and all of the Frames were ranked above 4.0 on a 5.0 scale, with IL as a whole ranking quite high at 4.81. The top-ranking Frame was Research as Inquiry (4.49), followed closely by Searching as Strategic Exploration (4.47). The remaining Frames were ranked in the following order: Information Has Value (4.40), Scholarship as Conversation (4.33), Information Creation as a Process (4.19), and Authority is Constructed and Contextual (4.08). Given the teaching faculty's emphasis on the quality of sources used by their students, it was a bit surprising that Authority is Constructed and Contextual was ranked last. However, all Frames scored above 4.0, reflecting the faculty's acknowledgement of the importance of the six Frames.

Faculty Ranking of IL and the Frames by Academic Unit

The authors also analyzed the ranking of IL in general and the six individual Frames by academic unit. Information Literacy as a whole was rated just below 5.0 by health sciences, followed by humanities, sciences, social work, education, fine arts, social sciences, and business, in that order. The lowest ranking was given by engineering and computer science at 4.11.

Looking at individual Frames by academic unit, Research as Inquiry was considered most valuable by humanities and sciences. Searching as Strategic Exploration, while given the second highest composite score of the Frames, received a relatively low score from engineering and computer science. While Information Has Value was rated third overall, it was rated above 4.0 by all departments and was the highest valued Frame among business faculty. Engineering and computer science rated only three of the Frames above a 4.0, namely Research as Inquiry, Information Has Value, and Authority is Constructed and Contextual. The lowest scores for Authority is Constructed and Contextual were given by health sciences and social work. Faculty's ranking of Research as Inquiry and Searching as Strategic Exploration as the most important Frames may reflect their continued appreciation of some of the more traditional perceptions of IL.

Faculty Reflections of the Frames

When Swanson (2017) presented the ACRL *Framework* to faculty at a professional development workshop, he reported that "largely, the *Framework* made sense to faculty." Our study opened an opportunity to solicit unfiltered faculty perceptions of

the language of the *Framework* from their disciplinary perspective. After asking respondents to rank each of the Frames, faculty were asked to respond to the following question, "Regarding the information literacy concepts above, what alternate terminology might you suggest for relevance and understanding for students in your discipline?*"* Responses were gathered in an open-ended text entry.

Respondents who did not provide a response, answered N/A, or responded that they agreed with the language with no additional explanatory text were eliminated from review. The remaining responses were manually coded using themes identified through review of the content of the responses. Unique responses, or those that did not reflect the coding scheme, were not included in the final analysis (for example, a response of "paradigm shift"). Sixty-one responses were including in the final analysis.

Many of the responses were a critique of the *Framework* or of particular Frames, or a reflection on the importance of an IL competency. Our coding scheme identified themes within these broader concepts; the following are themes coded in 12 responses or more:

- Lacks clarity or uses jargon
- Students will not understand
- Types of authority
- Types of sources
- Big "R" research (scientific inquiry) vs. little "r" research (library research/searching for evidence)

Although it has been stressed by librarians that the Frames are not intended to be presented to students as a direct teaching tool, student understanding of the language was a concern expressed by the faculty. The ACRL *Framework* listserv archive has a discussion from August 2015 that speaks to student understanding of the language of the Frames (http://lists.ala.org/sympa/arc/acrlframe/2015-08/msg00039.html) and the same concerns were echoed. Over 20 percent of the faculty responses reflected language related to types of authority, which was an interesting discovery given that Authority is Constructed and Contextual scored lowest when faculty were asked to rank the Frames.

FACULTY-LIBRARIAN COLLABORATION

Several questions in the survey asked faculty about their collaboration with librarians. In one question, they were asked to select from a list one or more ways that they collaborate. Possible responses ranged from extensive engagement—such as designing learning outcomes, having a librarian participate in a Course Management System (CMS) or providing in-class IL instruction—to no involvement, or teaching IL themselves.

Methods of Collaboration

The traditional librarian course session was by far the most frequent choice, reported by 42 percent, which may reflect that librarians market this option most vigorously. It may also be that this is a popular choice because we often hear anecdotally from faculty the value that they place in this method in statements such as "I learn something new from the sessions," "I want the students to SEE the library," and " I want students to hear about the importance of information literacy from somebody else besides me."

Following the course session, the most frequently reported responses were "Teach information literacy myself," "No collaboration," and "Use a course guide," which round out the top four reported behaviors in answer to the question, "How do you collaborate?" It is interesting that these four reflect polarities of engagement. The librarian course session, which involves planning and setting common goals, contrasts with the next most popular option, "teach information literacy myself." Similarly, the next two reported methods are "no collaboration" and "course guide," which are also at opposite ends of the collaboration spectrum.

High engagement collaborations, such as a librarian presence in a CMS or collaborative learning outcomes, were less frequently reported options. Many professors do not like to use a CMS, which could influence the reluctance to use that option.

As we examined this data, we wondered if users of the course guides were also predominantly course session users since the two methods are often paired by librarians. Seventy-seven percent of online course guide users also engaged in librarian course sessions. Finally, referrals to librarians were a frequent option for those reporting no collaboration or those who teach IL themselves.

Practices by Unit

In order to use this data to help shape and prioritize our instructional programs, the authors looked at associations between units (discipline/department) from both institutions as a whole. In general the fine arts was the biggest participant in teaching info lit themselves (58 percent). Humanities, education and social work all had at least 50 percent engagement in course sessions, with the social sciences close behind at 46 percent. Humanities and social work were the heaviest users of online course guides, which shows a pattern similar to that mentioned earlier that those faculty who used librarian courses sessions also used online course guides. Social work ranked highest (38 percent) in referral to a specific librarian. In general there was little use of online tutorials reported, except for education (32 percent). Those who responded from business reported no use of tutorials (0 percent). There was low engagement reported overall from sciences, and engineering and computer science. Efforts to engage faculty in the humanities, social sciences and social work are reflected in the higher engagement levels reported here and promise a more fruitful environment for collaboration than the sciences.

Faculty who Teach IL

We were curious about the 33 percent of the faculty who reported no collaboration in the form of teaching IL themselves. A breakdown of those responses by number of years teaching yielded an interesting chart that showed those with two years or less of teaching experience ("new" faculty) at 50 percent, and those with 21 years or more (veterans) at 40 percent, accounting for the highest levels of teaching IL themselves. Those in the six to 10 years' experience range exhibited the lowest levels of teaching IL on their own.

What does the steep drop from 50 percent for faculty with two years' experience or less to 30 percent for faculty between two and five years' experience say about new faculty? Perhaps when new, they are learning the system and then later realize students' difficulties with using library databases and other resources. Possibly they are teaching large survey courses with no library assignments. This finding also signals a need to market to new faculty in appropriate courses. The increase in teaching it themselves at 21 or more years was high at 40 percent. Perhaps veteran faculty feel that their increased experience gives them the confidence to teach IL themselves.

Anecdotally, the researchers are seeing a pattern of periodic instruction where a professor will use librarians every other or every third semester for a refresher and then teach alternate semesters with aid of the course guide. Is this a model librarians should think more deliberately about instead of pushing a course instructional session every semester?

Why No Collaboration?

Open-ended responses to the question, "If you have not taken advantage of working with a librarian in a course, please tell us why," offer a qualitative lens to analyze faculty attitudes towards collaboration. The responses to this question provide insight that can help direct efforts of instruction programs by identifying barriers to collaboration and by suggesting whether pursuing a collaboration might be worth the effort.

The responses to this important question were manually analyzed and coded for themes. Twelve themes were identified and tracked in the open-ended responses and four major themes (defined here as 13 or more responses) were found in 80 responses out of the total 116. They included:

- **No Need:** The course does not require research (e.g., "I teach piano").
- **Unaware of Service**: Some respond that they are unaware of the potential for collaboration.
- **Time**: Those who report time as an issue do not elaborate on why.
- **Open to Collaboration**: Even when reporting they do not collaborate due to the preceding reasons, some respondents indicated a willingness to consider it.

In addition to these most frequently occurring themes, another popular response was teaching IL themselves, given as a reason for not collaborating. This theme is in keeping with the reported methods of collaboration question, which revealed 33 percent of the respondents selecting the option that they teach IL themselves.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While we may not be riding into sunset, we are riding into the dawn of new collaborative opportunities with faculty that focus on our combined needs for building information literate students.

The faculty survey data that we collected in our collaborative research will influence our instructional programs. We have gathered important feedback that can help guide our efforts in shaping our instructional priorities and initiatives. We also have

analyzed faculty responses to the new ACRL *Framework* and extracted some guidance on how to talk to faculty about the Frames. Finally, we have examined how and why faculty do or do not collaborate with librarians.

Our lessons learned include:

- Faculty find the language of the *Framework* confusing, which has implications for setting outcomes.
- Librarians should be sensitive to *Framework* preferences, particularly by discipline (e.g., do not stray too far from the practical).
- We have identified obstacles to faculty-librarian collaboration and need to consider how to overcome these in approaching faculty for collaboration.
- Let the sciences, engineering and computer science lead the discussion on IL collaboration.

For the future, we will analyze the data in more depth, particularly on the institutional level, and write an article. In practice, we will apply what we learn about our local environments, and hold focus groups with faculty to gather more insights.

REFERENCES

Association of College & Research Libraries. (2016, January 16). *Framework for information literacy in higher education*. Appendix 1: Implementing the Framework. http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframeworkapps

Swanson, T. (2017). Sharing the ACRL Framework with faculty. *College & Research Libraries News, 78*(1), 12+. http://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/9600/10987

Wolff, C., Rod, A.B., and Schonfeld, R.C. (2016). *Ithaka S+R US faculty survey 2015*. https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.277685