

DON'T PANIC: THE ACADEMIC LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO BUILDING COMMUNITY AROUND THE ACRL FRAMEWORK

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INTRODUCTION

Before the official adoption of the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education on January 11, 2016, Nichols Hess (2015) asserted that “shifting and integrating the new threshold concepts into everyday practices may require professional learning and training opportunities, both external and job-embedded” (p. 772). Attempts to create these Framework-based learning opportunities have since taken many forms, including:

- Books (Bravender, McClure, & Schaub, 2015; Burkhardt, 2016; Oberlies & Mattson, 2018; Godbey, Wainscott, & Goodman, 2017);
- Listservs (American Library Association, n.d.);
- Clearinghouses for user-provided lesson plans and activities (Association of College and Research Libraries [ACRL], n.d.-d; Project CORA, n.d.);
- Conference presentations at ACRL, LOEX, and other local and regional forums;
- Formal in-person training sessions (ACRL, n.d.-a);
- Online courses (ACRL, n.d.-c); and
- Webinars (ACRL, n.d.-b).

Though the most current data was collected in 2016, a survey by Charles (2017) showed that even with the plethora of learning opportunities, a majority of academic librarian respondents (65%) were “not fully confident” (p. 228) in “communicating to their fellow librarians, teaching faculty, and administrators the needed changes to their instructional programs resulting from the *Framework*” (p. 227). Another 2016 survey of academic librarians, this time specific to those practicing in New Jersey (Julien, Gross & Latham, 2018) found that only 31% of respondents indicated that the Framework had a “significant influence” on their instruction (p. 187). The reason for the lack of confidence and deficiency of Framework-based instruction could stem from many issues including the lack of accessible learning opportunities or barriers to employing the Framework such as time, knowledge, librarian buy-in, or institution-specific factors.

No matter the reason for the lack of confidence or incorporation of the Framework in librarians’ teaching practice, this interactive workshop at LOEX 2018 was developed to help academic librarians explore different methods of learning about the Framework and implementing it. The presenters took a holistic participant-centered approach, providing a guided brainstorming session for attendees to leave with a practical, concrete plan to use available learning opportunities and to create their own, if desired.

DISPOSITIONS TOWARDS THE FRAMEWORK

The workshop began with participants selecting from a set of emoji stickers (Figure 1) that were placed on each table. Participants were prompted to choose a sticker that represented “how they feel about the Framework.” Of the 32 stickers selected, 21 (66%) were positive, depicting a smiling face. The other stickers selected depicted expressions of fear, puzzlement, and questioning, except for one (3%) showing a frown. This initial assessment illustrated that participants seemed to be in favor of using the Framework to inform their instruction. The expressions of fear, puzzlement, and questioning, led the presenters to believe that there were knowledge gaps or difficulties in implementing the Framework. Simply by choosing to attend this workshop, participants indicated that they have a desire to improve or further develop some aspect of employing the Framework at their institutions.

Figure 1: Picture of emoji stickers



While most participants had a positive attitude toward the Framework, several obstacles stand in the way of implementing the Framework into the instructional design of academic library instruction sessions. Participants were asked to share their challenges to learning more about the Framework and employing it by posting their issues in an online workshop-specific chat tool, [Today's Meet](https://todaysmeet.com) (<https://todaysmeet.com>). Numerous difficulties surfaced surrounding the following themes:

- Lack of “buy-in” from colleagues due to opposition or apathy;
- Shortage of time;
- Difficulty understanding the framework;
- Trouble communicating the needed changes to faculty;
- Confusion on where to start;
- Problems of developing expertise with staff turnover; and
- Need of instruction that will fit in a one-shot session.

These various challenges show that there is no “one-size-fits-all” method to implementing the Framework, but instead what is required is an individual-centered approach, one that considers where each individual is situated in their institutional context and one or more communities of practice (CoPs).

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) define communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge or expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). Henrich and Attebury (2010) outline defining traits of CoPs: a group consisting of members who join voluntarily, share a purpose, and create a sense of safety that allows members to build and share knowledge together. Through a series of interviews conducted with librarians at various career stages, Bilodeau and Carson (2014) highlight the effectiveness of CoPs for ongoing professional development: “the centrality of people in the librarian’s learning environment remained consistent throughout their careers” (p. 36).

The structure, purpose, and collaborative nature of CoPs make them an ideal model for learning about the Framework. Nichols Hess (2015) draws on adult learning theory to outline strategies for effective Framework-related professional development, arguing that:

providing collaborative environments where academic librarians can learn from each other may help them to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills required to embody a new instructional role, develop a plan to enact change in their teaching practices, or determine how to renegotiate or build relationships around their new understandings of information literacy instruction. (p. 774)

Based on social learning theory, Nichols Hess suggests that “developing groups of equal peers” who grapple with the Framework and learn from observing each other may lead to transformative learning (p. 775). CoPs provide an ideal structure to support the kind of social learning that Nichols Hess describes.

Communities of practice are also ideally suited to help librarians address many of the challenges identified in the literature and by workshop participants. By encouraging participants to share resources and expertise, CoPs may streamline the process of learning about and implementing the Framework, reducing the time commitment required for busy instruction librarians. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) note that communities of practice help participants to “be more daring in taking risks or trying new things, knowing they have a community to back them up” (p. 15). This sense of security may help librarians overcome the intimidation or disorientation that comes with implementing a new approach to information literacy instruction. The external accountability provided by a CoP may offer the motivation Nichols Hess points out is necessary for learning and growth. Through an emphasis on active participation rather than passive observation, the community of practice model may help librarians address a lack of buy-in due to apathy. CoP participants can also focus their collaborative efforts on common obstacles to understanding or implementing the Framework, including the size and language of the document itself, the difficulty of addressing conceptual understandings in a one-shot model, and the challenge of building collaborative relationships with faculty.

EXAMPLES OF ACRL FRAMEWORK COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

In the next section of the interactive workshop, presenters shared examples of communities of practice they have participated in around the Framework to offer inspiration to participants as they began to brainstorm the CoP that they currently belong to or aspire to join.

Local

Rather than offering a set of prescriptive guidelines for applying the Framework, the document encourages librarians to approach implementation by drawing on local context. This emphasis on customization-based institutional context means that our own libraries, departments, and universities are ideal starting points for joining or creating a Framework-related CoP.

At the University of Minnesota Duluth, librarians who teach frequently meet to discuss topics of interest related to teaching and learning. As an initial step in exploring the Framework, this local CoP participated in a jigsaw activity designed to invite librarians to read and discuss Framework-related scholarship. In this activity, small groups of librarians worked together to read and reflect on one recent article about the Framework. After reading and meeting in small groups to discuss their assigned article, each group shared their reflections about what they read and its connections to our institutional context with the full group of librarians. This activity is an example of one way Framework-related CoPs can construct learning through collaboration.

At Old Dominion University, library staff and faculty members formed a CoP in order to informally discuss and engage with each of the six frames (Stott, 2017). Participants met for hour-long brown bag discussions with the goal of creating a shared understanding of the Framework. These sessions helped librarians feel more comfortable engaging with the Framework and communicating about it with faculty. Both of these examples are adaptable and low-barrier ways to engage with the Framework that do not require significant librarian time or expertise.

Regional

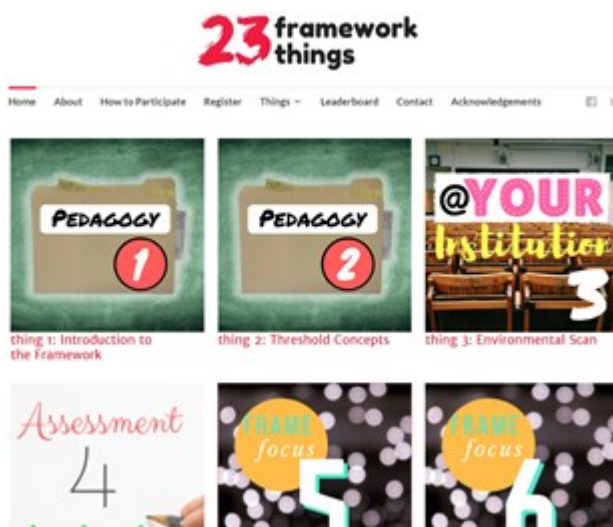
There are many opportunities to get involved in communities of practice at the regional level. Library consortia, state library organizations, and other regional groups organized around library type, institution, or work role are all possibilities when thinking about how to engage with the ACRL Framework with colleagues who share interests and responsibilities. For example, a librarian in Minnesota might utilize one of the many regional CoPs that exists such as [Minnesota Library Association](https://www.mnlibraryassociation.org/default.aspx) (<https://www.mnlibraryassociation.org/default.aspx>), [Cooperating Libraries in Consortium \(CLIC\)](https://www.clic.edu/), (<https://www.clic.edu/>), [Minitex](https://www.lib.umn.edu/digital/dash) (<https://www.lib.umn.edu/digital/dash>), and [Digital Arts Sciences + Humanities \(DASH\)](http://dash.umn.edu/) (<http://dash.umn.edu/>) to collaboratively learn more and engage with the Framework.

One example of a Framework-related CoP organized at the regional level is a recent workshop that members of the Minnesota Library Association’s Instruction Roundtable organized to provide support and resources for librarians interested in engaging with the Framework. The Instruction Roundtable does not have access to substantial funding, but was able to reach out to their members and professional network to find librarians with experience and expertise in the Framework to share. Every workshop presenter brought something to the table, sharing their own Framework inspired knowledge on topics such as: writing student learning outcomes, designing lesson plans, outreach to faculty, measuring process and persistence, rubric-based assessment, and creating a roadmap to engage with the Framework. In the end, all the pieces came together into a holistic professional development experience showcasing not only the collaborative nature of this work, but also the possibilities even for those libraries without access to robust resources and funding.

National

For decades, librarians have been participating in online communities of practice, starting with listservs and Usenet groups (Anderson, 2017). The rise of Web 2.0 technologies and social media have made it possible to easily expand CoPs to a national or even international scale. Seeing a need for more interactive CoPs aside from listservs, the presenters created an online professional development program, *23 Framework Things* (Figure 2; <https://23frameworkthings.wordpress.com/>).

Figure 2: Image of the 23 Framework Things website

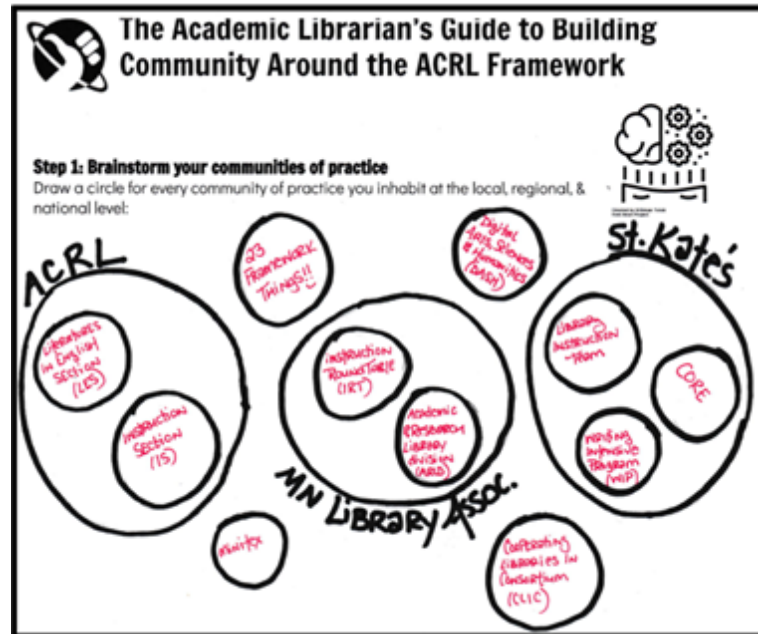


The *23 Framework Things* program, with participants largely based in the United States, brings together librarians into a CoP surrounding the pedagogy and implementation of the Framework. The blog-based program presents members of the CoP with prompts to read an article, watch a series of videos, perform an institution-specific assessment, or carry out another activity. When the CoP member completes the activity, they are asked to reflect and post a response either in the blog’s comments section or with an online video. The members of the CoP are encouraged to interact and consider the experiences and reflections of those who have previously completed each prompt. The site has created a valuable repository of ideas regarding pedagogy behind the Framework as well as how best to implement it regarding specific library challenges. Beyond using *23 Framework Things* as a static resource, it has created a connection between librarians across the country, incorporating them into a diverse CoP.

IDEAS GENERATED FROM WORKSHOP

In addition to the examples reported by the presenters, workshop participants were asked to identify the communities of practice they inhabit by writing them on a handout they were given or discussing them with others at their tables. This task allowed participants to reflect on their connections and to brainstorm where to turn for assistance in implementing the Framework. Figure 3 shows an example of what participants drew for this prompt.

Figure 3: Picture of a sample communities of practice brainstorm



Participants were also prompted to answer five questions regarding working with one of their communities of practice identified in the previous exercise. The questions asked were about the people, educational resources, funding sources, best format of communication, and which specific aspects of the Framework the participant wanted to focus on in their CoP. See the handout and list of questions [here](https://goo.gl/m6sKcZ) (<https://goo.gl/m6sKcZ>). Questions could be answered on the handout or discussed with other participants. The intent of this activity was to develop a plan to engage with the Framework within one of the participant's identified CoPs.

Much discussion stemmed from these questions and several plans for engagement with the Framework in CoPs emerged. Most of the CoPs selected for this activity focused on the local context, though there were some at the regional level. Among the ideas generated were:

- Mapping current instruction approaches to the Framework;
- Mapping the Frames to the curriculum;
- Bringing up the Framework in faculty department meetings;
- Developing a workshop series for faculty regarding the Framework and how it fits within their disciplines;
- Partnering with other offices on campus, such as offices of faculty excellence and writing centers;
- Creating dialogues and trainings for staff at libraries in the region, including high school librarians;
- Facilitating a Twitter chat on the Framework in the style of the very active [#critlib](#) cop; or
- Inviting the [ACRL Framework Roadshow](http://www.ala.org/acrl/conferences/roadshows) (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/conferences/roadshows>) to their institution or consortium.

The themes that produced the most discussion involved connecting the Framework to a specific discipline and all that is entailed, including getting faculty buy-in and mapping instruction where it ideally fits in the curriculum.

RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

If you didn't make it to this session, don't panic! All resources utilized at this interactive session including the slides, handouts, resources on the Framework and information on communities of practice are freely available [here](https://goo.gl/mUxji4) (<https://goo.gl/mUxji4>) so that you can get started engaging with the Framework within your own communities of practice.

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