A Constellation to Guide Us: An Interview with Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe about the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*

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Abstract: Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe, Professor/Coordinator for Information Literacy Services and Instruction in the University Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, shares her views about the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.* She believes that that the *Framework* is one among many documents adopted by the Association of College and Research Libraries that academic librarians can and should use to promote information literacy. This interview was conducted in May 2016.

Introduction

In May 2016, representatives from eleven member libraries of the Pennsylvania Consortium for the Liberal Arts (PCLA) gathered on the campus of Dickinson College for a grant-funded workshop entitled "Implementing the New *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* at PCLA Libraries" [Implementing the New *Framework*, 2016]. The goal of this gathering was to provide participants the opportunity to discuss issues and concerns surrounding the implementation of the *Framework* [Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015], to identify areas for cross-campus collaboration that would assist in the implementation process, to seek advice from experts about how the *Framework* can best be used in academic libraries, and to share transformed ways of thinking about the *Framework* with the wider librarian community.

The event featured keynote speaker and facilitator Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe, Professor/Coordinator for Information Literacy Services and Instruction in the University Library and Affiliate Faculty in the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Among her many accomplishments, including numerous publications, awards, and speaking engagements, Hinchliffe was President of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) in 2010-2011 when the Value of Academic Libraries Initiative was launched. She is the co-lead designer for ACRL's training program for the *Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* and the IMLS-funded *Assessment in Action* project. Additionally, Hinchliffe was the recipient of the 2015 ACRL Instruction Section Miriam Dudley Instruction Librarian Award as well as the 2009 ACRL Special Presidential Recognition Award for the Information Literacy Immersion Program.

Prior to her presentation [Hinchliffe, 2016], Hinchliffe agreed to sit down with the workshop's organizers to answer a series of questions about the *Framework*, some of which were submitted ahead of time by workshop participants. While Hinchliffe is not currently on the ACRL Board of Directors and was adamant that she does not claim to speak on behalf of the organization, her experience as past president of ACRL and her involvement as a panelist in the Delphi study that informed the *Framework* provides Hinchliffe with valuable insight regarding ACRL policy-making, the development of the *Framework*, and its broader intention. Her responses to the questions reflect her deep knowledge and enthusiasm as an engaged practitioner who sees the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for*

Higher Education [Association of College and Research Libraries, 2000] and the *Framework* as parts of an exciting information literacy landscape.

Since the time of this interview in May 2016, the ACRL Board rescinded the *Standards* (ACRL Board of Directors). Because of that development, an additional question was posed via email to Lisa in July 2016. Her answer appears at the end of this piece.

Original Interview May 2016

The ACRL's Board of Directors stated that the Framework *and* Standards *are components of a constellation of documents on information literacy. What does that mean to you?*

I think the metaphor of a "constellation" is really evocative. What does it mean for things to be in a constellation? If we think about the sky, all of these constellations that we see are never in exact focus. There are points, and by drawing connections among those points and imagining what they might be, we bring different images into focus.

The *Framework* and the *Standards* are two documents in our constellation, and by my count there are fifteen to eighteen information literacy documents. Depending on the way we turn ourselves, or if you will, the seasons of the year, we see constellations in different ways. I think we can take the term "constellation" as telling us that it's really a matter of bringing a perspective to these documents -- seeing which of them are in brighter relief for us at a given point in time and which are most useful for us to move our programs forward. That will create the shape or the image that we see.

How can the Framework *help librarians who teach transform their work in the classroom?*

The *Framework* is very clearly generative of some creative pedagogy. A number of the frames in the *Framework* are metaphors – "Scholarship as Conversation," for example. Metaphors are generative of divergent and imaginative thinking. Librarians are finding some creative ways of connecting students with big ideas that underscore the kinds of skills and abilities that we want them to develop. Since the *Framework* itself says that the frames are concepts -- they're not learning outcomes -- we still need something else that we're teaching towards. The frames help us create a *way* of teaching, but we still have to decide what we are teaching *for.* That could be the *Standards*. It could be our campus learning outcomes. It could be performance skills and abilities that are embedded in a particular certification or accreditation. There are a lot of things we can be teaching *for*, as the ends, but the *Framework* has been generative of pedagogy which is the "how," or the creative approaches we might use in the classroom.

What are some examples you have seen of successfully integrating the Framework *into information literacy programs at college and university libraries?*

The examples we've seen of the good work with the *Framework* have mostly been at the individual librarian level innovating their own personal pedagogical practice. I think that is very positive.

I would point to Nicole Pagowsky's work at the University of Arizona [University of Arizona Libraries, 2016] as an example where they use the *Framework* to think about the big picture ideas. They started

their work before the *Framework* was finalized so I'm not sure which version they based it on. But, since the *Framework* itself is intended to be a flexible document and not intended to just be adopted wholesale without reflection, I don't necessarily know that it matters, per se, which version.

The University of Buffalo ended up making a seventh frame because they found that "Searching as Strategic Exploration" is complex and has more knowledge practices than any other frame. As they studied that, they felt that there was another frame, which is "Information Has Structure" [University of Buffalo, 2016].

I see innovation and it is certainly wonderful to see that creative practice. I am long enough in this field that I know that the *Standards* had the same effect when we adopted them. I think there is a degree to which having a new document generates fresh ideas regardless of what the document is. Prior to the *Standards*, we had a whole series of documents going back to the 1970s. Every time a new version or an update or an alternative way of thinking was issued, we saw that refreshment of pedagogy and reconsideration of programs. Which is not to say that the *Framework* isn't causing this, but that it is not unique in causing this.

In your experience, how have faculty members responded to the Framework*?*

I would say some faculty have found this generative of some creative classroom practice. Certainly a number of faculty respond very well to the conceptual approach. One of the things that is a little difficult is that we don't know if the faculty who are reporting as being really excited about this reacted so because their librarians have presented information literacy to them for the first time, brought about because of feeling energized by the *Framework*. It is a little bit difficult to peel back the cause. I also know that there are some faculty who do not find the theory of Threshold Concepts [Meyer and Land, 2003] compelling. In fact, that theory itself is sufficient for them to reject the *Framework*. There has been a variety of reactions to it in the faculty just like there has been a variety of reactions among librarians.

I think this is a question of where you are in your own program. If you have a fully robust program with a well-developed assessment plan, you've been gathering data, you're iterating your practice, and students are developing skills, you might not be feeling stuck. On the other hand, if you have really struggled at finding a way to integrate this into the curriculum because the *Standards* are processed-based, then the *Framework* might create new avenues for certain faculty because they are more conceptual.

If you had the opportunity to edit the Framework*, what about it would you change?*

I give the Task Force credit that after the final round of public feedback, they re-did the document and moved it away from the exclusive emphasis on Threshold Concepts. But there are two things I would edit in the *Framework* if I had a chance to serve as the official editor of the final version.

Another round of basic editing could clarify that this is now a framework that presents six big ideas but is not asserting the "Thresholdness" of those big ideas. I think it's confusing in a couple of cases, the way the language was edited. It's not as clear as I believe they intended, and as a member of the Task Force later articulated on Twitter. I was there for the discussions, but the document has to stand on its

own. Librarians who graduate from library school this year and weren't involved in that debate don't have access to the intentions; they have access to the document. So that is an editing thing I would do for clarity.

The second edit that I would make to the *Framework* is a recommendation that I made in my feedback on the last round of the draft. I recommended adding a section about what the *Framework* is *not* intended to be. It asserts what it is intended to be, but that leaves open the possibility that it could be other things. The things it is not are in the document but not as explicitly. For example, the *Framework* asserts that it is not a standard; therefore, it is also not a basis for doing a standardized test because standardized tests are based on standard sets of outcomes. Likewise, it is not meant to be prescriptive for library instruction programs across the country, and it does say that. But I think, especially given the number of places that we see adopting it as if it is a set of outcomes, it would have helped the thousands of librarians who are now encountering this document to be more clear. We all have to interpret the document, but the document itself could still give better guidance.

For institutions that articulated information literacy outcomes based on the Standards*, how should they approach the* Framework*?*

The *Framework* itself gives a good piece of advice for how anyone should approach it, which would include those that have articulated outcomes based on the *Standards*. You should read the *Framework*, consider it carefully, and then decide whether it has something to offer the outcomes that you have or are developing. Does it reveal gaps in your outcomes? Does it reveal additional areas that you would like to include in your outcomes? It is also completely possible to conscientiously read the *Framework* and say, "This *Framework* offers us good conceptual content and creative pedagogy that will help us craft learning experiences for students that will help them reach our already articulated outcomes." It may be that you look at the *Framework* and say "Our outcomes have integrity, they have coherence, they have completeness, they are in conversation with our campus' learning outcomes and our majors' learning outcomes, and we don't need to make revisions at those levels." Even when we have a set of learning outcomes, we can always be asking ourselves if there are ways to innovate our curriculum and our pedagogy to help students better meet those outcomes. The whole point of doing assessment is to improve our practice.

So I think it's quite possible that the *Framework* might still – and likely will – help us innovate our pedagogy and our student experiences while at the same time not necessarily demanding a revision of our outcomes. According to the *Framework* that would be acceptable, because it is not asserting any particular set of outcomes as correct and it is asking you to conscientiously consider these things. If you have written your outcomes and you reconsider them, I think you've met both the letter and the spirit of the *Framework*.

Given that the Framework *is not a standard, not prescriptive, and not a set of outcomes, how would you imagine that ACRL could assess the effectiveness of the* Framework*?*

I think we can be asking ourselves this question in two different ways. ACRL can ask whether the *Framework* has been effective for the profession in innovating our practice. Innovating our practice could mean innovating the outcomes, it could mean innovating our pedagogy, it could mean innovating our assessments, it could mean all sorts of things. The Board has said, "…we have accepted the

Framework and it will assume its place among the constellation of documents used by information literacy practitioners" [Williams, 2015]. It clearly has joined the constellation because not only did ACRL approve, articulate, and disseminate it, but we see that people are using it. By what I can see, any of the uses we talked about – innovating your outcomes, your assessment, your pedagogies, your methods, your student learning experiences – would be "right" according to the *Framework*.

Now, if what we're talking about is whether or not students learn the things in the *Framework*, there's a couple of things. First of all, since the *Framework* itself asserts that this is not prescriptive, it is saying that therefore not every student necessarily need develop these concepts. This is tricky, because at other points in the document it sounds like this is an incomplete list but it is also not saying parts of it are optional.

If we want to look at the effectiveness of whether students attain the conceptual understandings in the *Framework*, we then are at a question of how to assess conceptual knowledge. We assess conceptual knowledge typically by looking at what behaviors and performances indicate that somebody has gained that conceptual knowledge. The founders of Threshold Concept theory are of the belief that Threshold Concepts should not be assessed and possibly cannot be assessed. If we take the *Framework* out of Threshold Concepts and just talk about assessing conceptual knowledge, we all know that it's not possible to directly assess conceptual knowledge. The only way you can assess conceptual knowledge is by asking how would somebody with that conceptual knowledge comport themselves in the world. Then we are looking at learning outcomes. This, I believe, is where the mapping processes that people have done can really help us, because the *Standards* were intended to help you assess student conceptual knowledge. If you are able to map, for example, Standard 1.2 to Frames 2 and 5 (as we did in the workshop example [Hinchliffe, 2016]), then the *Standards*, which guide you how to assess whether people have attained that standard, can be then mapped back as evidence of that conceptual development in the *Framework*.

What opportunities does the Framework *provide for librarians who want to engage in multi-college, cooperative efforts?*

Because this a new document, we can come together as a community and talk about this. We can get different ideas, different approaches. Certainly there's just the mere opportunism. When something is new, it is easier to say, "Hey let's get together, let's do something with this," as opposed to a document that feels familiar.

I've challenged myself to make sure that I know what the *Standards* say. I've gone back and tried to read them anew, if you will, as if seeing them for the first time. The *Standards* is a robust document. There is a richness in the *Standards* that is not reflected in practice. For example, the fifth Standard on "legal and ethical uses of information" has been put into practice primarily as a "cite your sources and don't plagiarize" curriculum. The Standard itself doesn't say "cite your sources and don't plagiarize;" it says much more than that. As enacted, it has been narrowed. I was actually quite inspired by a few things, especially when I went back and re-read the introductory essay that frames the *Standards*. Its section on "Information Literacy and Pedagogy" is powerful.

Again, I think that new documents can help us create new programs. They can create new life. In my experience, it is typically better to say, "We have something good and how can we improve on it?" as opposed to always setting up things so that in order to pursue the new we have to run down the old. I

don't think the *Standards* have to be bad in order for the *Framework* to have value. I see this a lot in our profession where we suddenly turn on the old in order to embrace the new. I think we can be thinking about the next step without having to denigrate the historical.

Is there still a role for the Standards*?*

I believe there is. The *Standards* gives us a common point to which we are trying to get students and is one document to which we might be teaching and are particularly well-suited to serve as a guiding document for program planning and assessment as compared with classroom practice.

We need to remember that the *Standards* are geared toward an undergraduate degree; they're programmatic. We've never had a set of defined outcomes for graduate programs. Information literacy at the undergraduate level has been conceptualized as one of those general education learning outcomes such as critical thinking, writing ability, and global awareness. We don't see that same kind of approach to graduate curriculum.

The *Standards* applies to any undergraduate student, any curriculum, just like critical thinking and writing skills apply to any student and any curriculum. There are other standards that have been developed in ACRL that are discipline-specific. We have the information literacy standards for journalism students and for nursing, as examples. There are also accreditation standards, and competency-based standards for particular disciplines, for example, engineering. The *Standards* gives us a very good *general* approach to information literacy. It's not the *only* approach to information literacy.

The *Standards* can be a bridging document for curriculum mapping. We know that our states, as they regulate higher education, have expectations that a class at one school matches a class at another school to facilitate as students transfer from school to school. For articulation of courses to a common state standard, or even just for that student who starts at one school and finishes at another, the *Standards* allows that student to have some sense of skill continuity because we can map all of our programs to something that's sort of a crosswalk. Just like other crosswalking works to move libraries from say, the Library of Congress classification numbers to Dewey numbers. It doesn't work perfectly, but it facilitates moving from one system to another.

Follow-up July 2016

At the ALA Annual Conference in June 2016, the ACRL Board voted to rescind the Standards. What do you advise now for libraries that have information literacy programs based on the Standards?

From learning outcomes perspectives, what I said in May 2016 is still what I would advise. Use the *Framework* to reflect on your program and decide whether you want to make any changes. The challenge is that, if you decide that those *Standards*-based outcomes are still the best choice for your program, you no longer have the authority of ACRL behind them and ACRL will no longer be offering any training and support for libraries who are working in that mode.

There is a large community of practice built up around the *Standards* and I am confident that many of us will be quite willing to do what we can to help our colleagues fill the needs gap left by ACRL's decision. What that doesn't address is the fact of losing the organizational authority of ACRL. For libraries that need that as part of advocacy and demonstrating their value in their local context, I think it is worth

considering the IFLA Guidelines on Information Literacy for Lifelong Learning, the AAC&U VALUE Rubric, and/or the Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile language on research and information use. I believe that none of these documents are as well-suited to the task as the ACRL *Standards* were but, given the Board's decision, libraries will have to look elsewhere if they find local value in a standards-based approach.

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