

# Culture and Collaboration: Fostering Integration of Information Literacy by Speaking the Language of Faculty

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Information literacy is an essential skill for college students, and has been widely endorsed by various higher education associations, accreditation organizations, and research institutes. Although there appears to be general agreement about the importance of information literacy competencies, instruction and assessment for information literacy seems to be stalled at the course level on most campuses, while integration into the disciplines and at the program level remains minimal. Integrating instruction and assessment of information literacy into an academic curriculum beyond the one-shot or course level, depends on the willingness of teaching faculty and librarians to collaborate in the planning and delivery of these programs.

Information literacy, often defined as the abilities to locate, access, evaluate, and use information effectively, has its roots in traditional library instruction and librarians continue to be some of the biggest proponents of information literacy. The American Library Association (ALA) developed one of the first fully realized definitions of the concept,<sup>1</sup> and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) provides one of the most widely-accepted sets of standards.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, libraries often exist outside of the academic departments that define the majors, courses, and programs that make up the curriculum. As such, library instruction sessions are not always regarded as part of the formal curriculum, nor are librarians necessarily

included on the committees that make decisions regarding the curriculum. Librarians need buy-in and cooperation from the faculty members who oversee the curriculum and who have direct and ongoing contact with students in order to move information literacy beyond the course level and to integrate it in ways that will be meaningful and relevant to students.

Librarians often perceive obstacles in their attempts to collaborate with faculty, and they point to a number of barriers to integration of information literacy programs. While most faculty members seem to agree that information literacy competencies are important for their students, there seems to be a lack of consensus on who should be responsible for teaching those competencies, and where such instruction belongs in the curriculum. Librarians tend to believe that faculty are hesitant to give up class time for information literacy instruction because they already have too much content to cover. Further, faculty members tend to focus on their discipline area, and might believe that information literacy falls outside of their purview. Some teaching faculty assume that students have already developed information literacy competencies by the time they come to college, or that they should learn them within general education programs. Finally, faculty members may not view librarians as instructors, and indeed librarians themselves often feel unprepared for that role.

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One area that has not received much attention is the role that organizational culture might play in affecting how librarians and faculty interact with each other, and how successful they are at collaborating. Culture, within this context, can be defined as the “patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institution of higher education and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus.”<sup>3</sup> While each college and university has an overall culture that permeates the whole institution, different groups and departments within the institution may also have their own culture, sometimes referred to as subcultures or organizational cultures, separate from the institutional culture. As such, students, faculty, administrators, and librarians at the same institution likely all have unique cultures that differ from one another. Further, individuals within different areas of the same department, or faculty in different disciplines, also might have unique organizational cultures. Because culture guides communications and interactions, confusion or misunderstanding can arise when people from different cultures need to work together. Yet, very little research exists on the interactions between librarians and faculty from an organizational culture perspective. This paper attempts to fill an existing gap in the literature by examining how these cultural differences affect faculty understandings of information literacy, and the extent to which librarians understand and respond to those differences when working with faculty on information literacy instruction. For this paper, *institutional culture* refers to the overall culture of the college or university, while *organizational culture* denotes the various subcultures that exist within the institutional culture.

### Literature Review

The overall culture of an institution is grounded within its mission, and generally influenced by its founders, leaders, and institutional history. The institutional culture binds the community together, and offers guides for interaction and making sense of events.<sup>4</sup> Although some institutions will have stronger cultures than others, institutional culture is usually deeply rooted, so much so that the assumptions, beliefs, and values that make up that culture are often taken for granted.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, different divisions and departments often develop their own organizational cultures that may vary in important ways from the institutional culture.

Each of these organizational cultures “relates differently to all aspects of university life, some perceiving themselves to have a more central place within particular customs, activities, and initiatives than others.”<sup>6</sup>

Faculty are identified as operating within four distinct cultures: the academic profession, the academy as an organization, their discipline area, and their institution.<sup>7</sup> As academic professionals, faculty generally value teaching and learning, research and scholarship, creativity, and autonomy. However, faculty are also heavily influenced by and acculturated to their academic discipline. Indeed, the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) notes that “professors exhibit significant differences in attitudes, beliefs, practices, and lifestyle” across the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and professional studies.<sup>8</sup> Faculty are generally socialized to their discipline culture as graduate students, and that culture tends to dominate their careers. Further, Toma notes that even in the same discipline, faculty members can be divided by different paradigms of inquiry.<sup>9</sup> These differences across and within disciplines affect how the department supports and promotes the institutional mission and goals, including learning goals such as information literacy. Becher describes the separate organizational and institutional cultures as a set of distinct tribes with an overarching community culture: “each tribe has a name and a territory, settles its own affairs, goes to war with others, has a distinct language or at least a distinct dialect and a variety of symbolic ways of demonstrating its apartness from others. Nevertheless, the whole set of tribes possess a common culture.”<sup>10</sup>

Despite agreement that these different cultures exist across disciplines, only a few studies examine and identify these differences. For example, Lee found explicit differences across five disciplines in areas such as instrumental orientation, multiculturalism, and interpersonal orientation, as well as differences in the extent to which these discipline cultures overlap with the institutional culture.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps most importantly for this study, some research suggests that disciplines vary in their preferences and approaches to teaching and collaboration. Neumann notes a number of differences in approaches to teaching and learning across what she terms the ‘soft pure,’ ‘hard pure,’ and ‘hard applied’ disciplines in terms of amount time spent on teaching and/or preparing instruction, and preferred methods of teaching, with humanities fields spending more time on lecture, and sciences spend-

ing more time on labs and field trips. She also noted differences in assessment methods, stating that hard areas put greater emphasis on memorization and application, as opposed to analysis and synthesis in soft fields.<sup>12</sup> The hard and soft fields vary in similar ways in their approaches to collaboration.<sup>13</sup>

These cultural differences are an important consideration for faculty interactions. In fact, some researchers contend that the faculty member's identification with their academic discipline or field may outweigh their loyalty to their institution, suggesting that organizational culture might trump institutional culture in these cases. Regardless of the precise balance between organizational and institutional culture, the values, priorities, and communication methods of the discipline definitely impact faculty interactions. As such, when communicating with faculty campus constituents like librarians must approach them "in a way that is sensitized to current practices, discourses, and meaning construction in their departments."<sup>14</sup> For instance, literature and language professors might respond to carefully crafted stories or quotes, while those in the sciences might want to be convinced by data, and different reward systems might motivate each.<sup>15</sup>

Librarians are cognizant of some of the differences in faculty behavior and values, including emphasis on field or discipline, research, content, and academic freedom.<sup>16</sup> Librarians also tend to view faculty members as lacking understanding of libraries and information literacy, and as being territorial, and unwilling to 'give up' or 'share' class time and teaching responsibilities with librarians.<sup>17</sup> Badke contends that faculty members tend to emphasize content over process. He notes that faculty generally engage in research strategies such as citation linking or chaining that are different from those presented in typical library instruction, and that these differences prevent faculty from recognizing the value of library instruction.<sup>18</sup>

However, much of the library science literature tends to generalize these attributes to the faculty as a whole. Hardesty warns librarians against assuming there is "a dominant, monolithic faculty culture," but rather recognizing that faculty come from multiple cultures often defined by their discipline areas.<sup>19</sup> While there is a wealth of literature discussing library instruction within different disciplines,<sup>20</sup> there is less discussion of the differences across disciplines or how librarians respond to those differences. Faculty across disciplines largely agree that information literacy in-

struction would be beneficial to their students, but they vary in the extent to which the disciplines incorporate information literacy into their courses, with professional schools and sciences generally showing the lowest level of incorporation, and social sciences and humanities the highest.<sup>21,22</sup> Research shows differences by discipline in resource usage and citation,<sup>23</sup> and faculty often acknowledge and appreciate that librarians tailor instruction sessions to the particular course, rather than offering generic overviews to the resources.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, however, Badke contends that librarians too often tailor sessions to specific assignments—assignments that may not have been developed with information literacy learning outcomes in mind to begin with—and that as a result students do not necessarily grasp how the strategies and competencies introduced in these sessions transfer to other information needs.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, one of the main areas of faculty criticism of library instruction sessions seems to be "misdirection," or when the librarians' instruction does not conform to the assignment instructions given by the faculty member.<sup>26</sup>

### Research Design

This paper serves as a follow-up and companion to a previously reported study on faculty perspectives on information literacy.<sup>27</sup> The original study consisted of a nation-wide survey and 25 interviews of faculty members in five discipline areas intended to compare their conceptualizations and understandings of information literacy. Overall, the original study found that faculty believe both that information literacy is important for their students, and that students generally need instruction and support to develop information literacy competencies. Further, faculty appear to conceive of information literacy as comprising both a general set of broadly applicable skills, as well as a repertoire of more refined competencies that are specific to each discipline. In particular, interviewees emphasized different sources of information and different methods of evaluating sources within the disciplines. The purpose of this paper is to build on the previous study by explore the perspective of librarians on discipline differences in information literacy, and compare the findings to those of faculty members in the original study. In particular, this study examines the following questions:

- To what extent and in what ways do librarians tailor information literacy sessions by discipline?

- Do these variations tend to center more on differences in resources, search strategies, evaluation methods, or other areas?
- Which information literacy competencies receive the most attention during library instruction sessions?
- Does the competency emphasis vary by discipline?

This study relied on a survey of instruction librarians. An email invitation was sent out to the ili-1 list-serv hosted by ALA. The invitation briefly explained the purpose of the study, and provided a link to a web survey hosted by SurveyMonkey. The survey was live for two weeks, and received 345 responses. Participants were asked about the number of instruction sessions they teach, the focus of the instruction sessions, the amount of time they devote to various information literacy competencies, and how they tailor their instruction sessions to fit the needs of the particular course or assignment. While the response rate for the email was good, it is important to note that this is a non-random sample, and that those who responded to the survey are likely those who had a particular interest in the topic. As such, the results are not statistically generalizable to the larger population of librarians.

### Findings

Survey respondents were overwhelmingly females (87.1%), holding an MLIS degree (95.1%). The majority of participants had been in the field for fewer than 10 years (59.9%), and most were between the ages of 31 and 50 (53.7%). The respondents came from institutions that were fairly evenly distributed across all Carnegie classifications. One-third (33.3%) of respondents indicate that they hold graduate degrees in addition to the MLIS, with the largest proportion holding additional degrees in the Humanities (61.7%), followed by Social Sciences (33.3%), and Business/MBA (8.3%). Only two respondents (3.3%) indicate a degree in the Natural Sciences, and none of the respondents hold additional degrees in the Health Sciences.

Just over half (55.1%) of those surveyed indicate that their position is considered either a subject specialist or liaison. It is worth noting that, while the survey only allowed respondents to choose one subject area, several respondents noted that they are assigned to more than one department and in some cases these

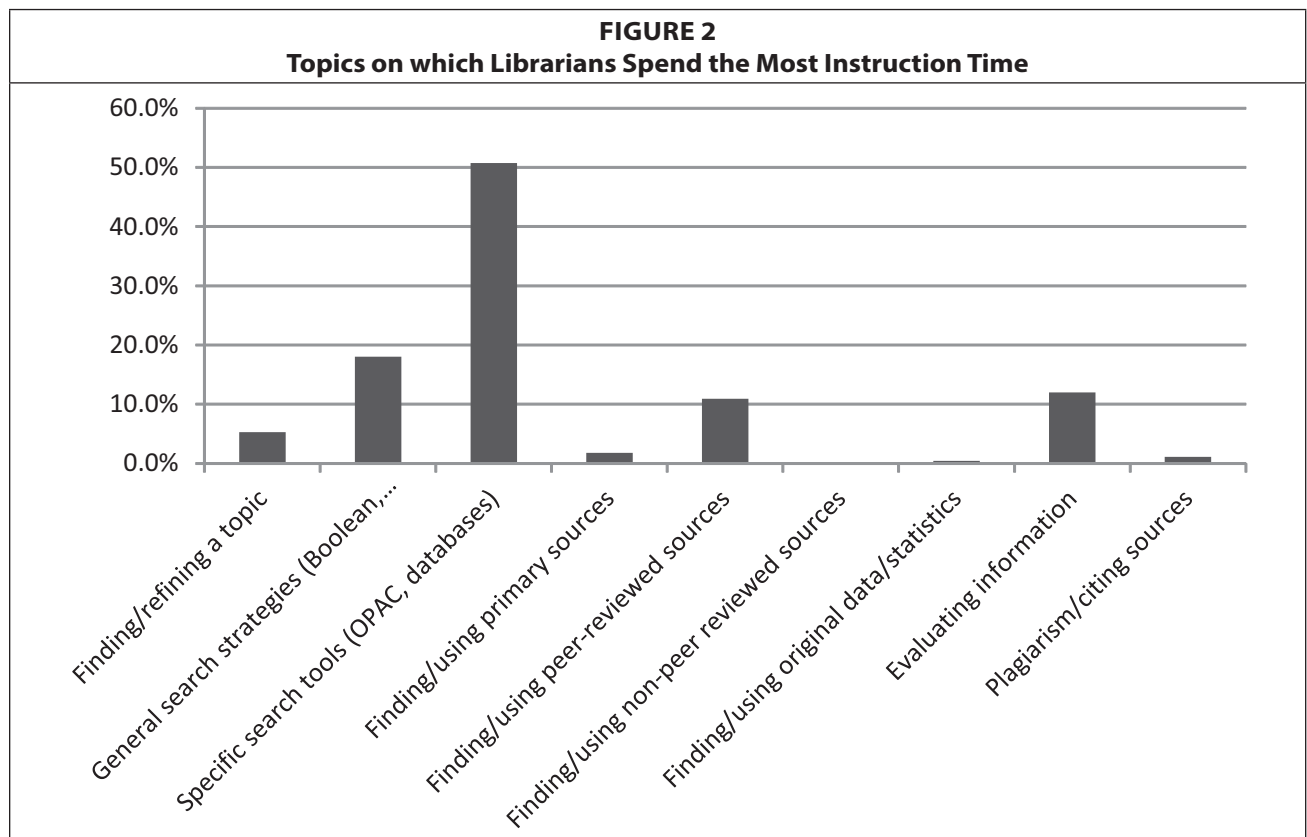
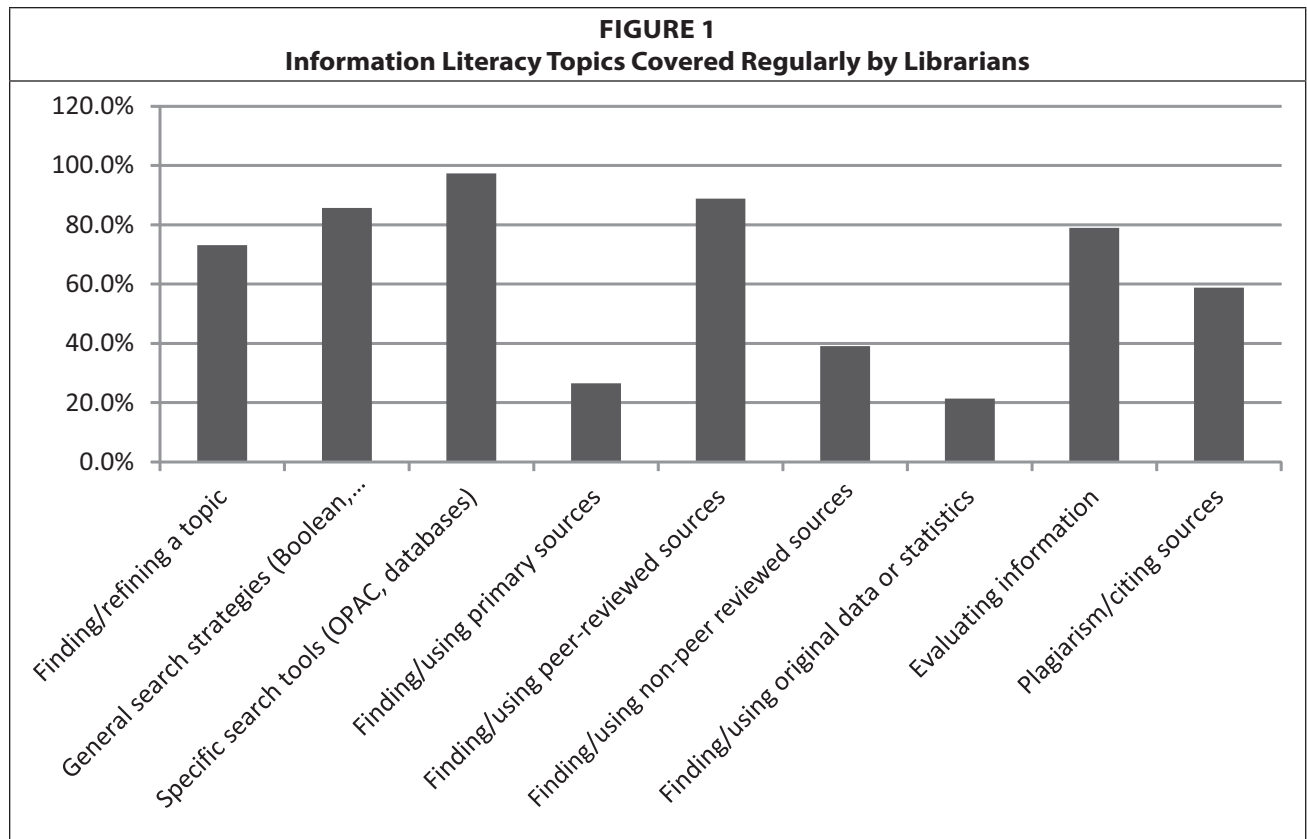
assignments spanned several broad disciplinary areas. Most librarians are assigned to subjects or departments that overlap with the field in which they hold additional degrees, but there are instances in which the librarian is assigned to liaise with a department that is outside of her field of concentration, such as librarians with advanced degrees in the humanities who are assigned to business or social sciences departments. Finally, respondents to the survey are heavily involved in instruction, with 67.0% reporting that they taught more than ten instruction sessions in the current semester.

### *Instruction Focus and Tailoring*

Respondents were given nine information literacy topics and asked to indicate which areas they cover regularly in their sessions, as well as to rank order the topics according to the amount of time spent on each, and to indicate which topic receives the most attention overall. The nine topics include:

- Finding and refining a topic
- General search strategies (Boolean, proximity, etc.)
- Specific search tools (library catalog, databases, Google, etc.)
- Finding and using primary sources
- Finding and using peer-reviewed sources
- Finding and using non-peer-reviewed literature (opinion pieces, blogs, newspaper articles, etc.)
- Finding and using original data or statistics
- Evaluating information
- Plagiarism/academic integrity/ citing sources

Each of these nine topics is covered regularly by at least some of the instruction librarians, as depicted in Figure 1. Nearly all librarians across all academic disciplines (97.3%) include specific search tools as a regular feature of their instruction. Finding and using peer-reviewed sources is also covered regularly by nearly all librarians (88.8%), followed by general search strategies (85.7%). In addition to indicating all of the topics they cover regularly, participants were asked to indicate the one topic on which they spend most of their instruction time. As Figure 2 illustrates, more than half (50.7%) of librarians indicate that they spend the greatest amount of time on specific search tools, making it by far the most popular library instruction topic, followed by general search strategies (18.0%) and evaluating information (12.0%). None of



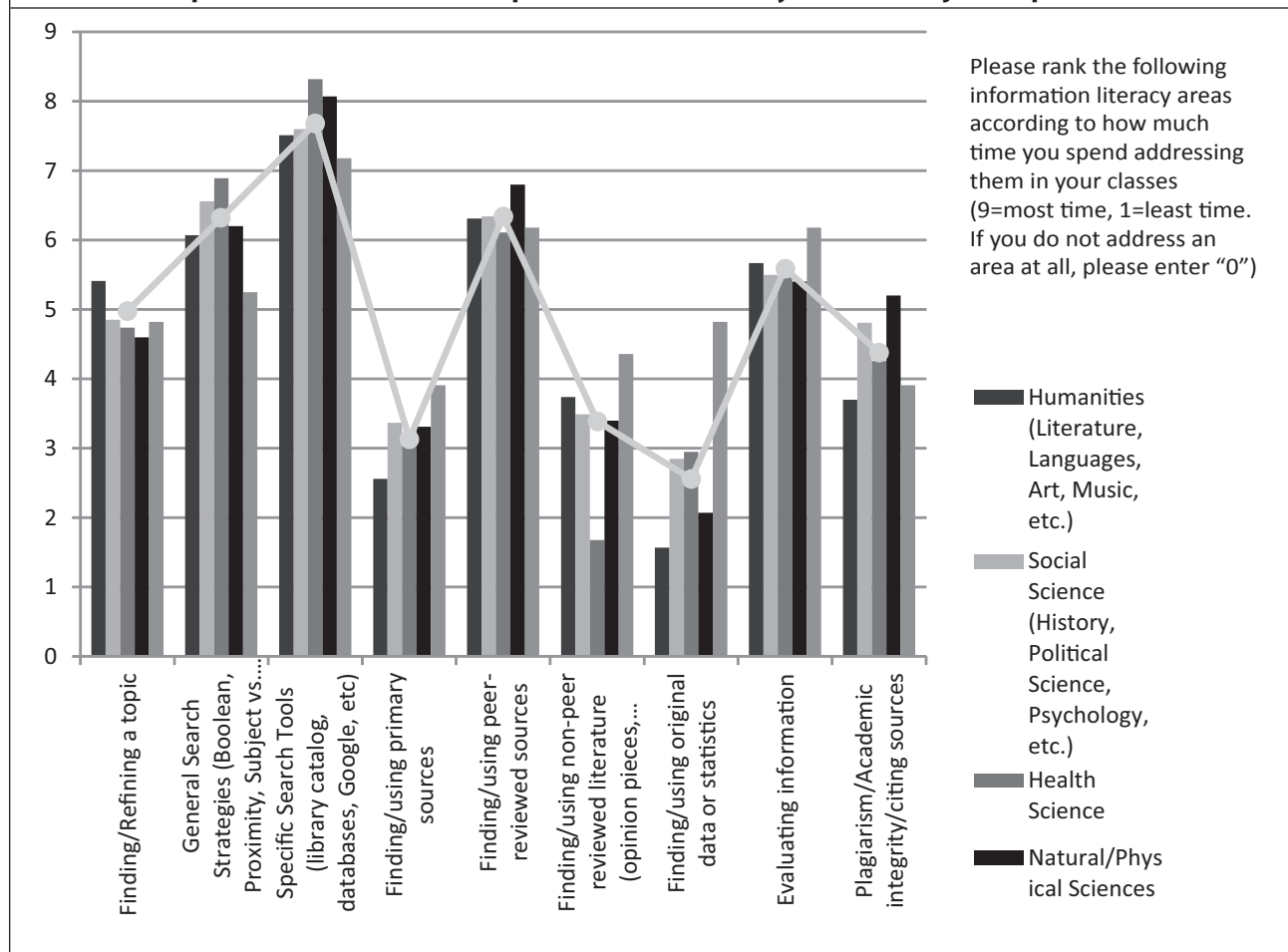
the respondents indicate they spend the most time on finding and using non-peer reviewed materials, and only 0.4% spend the majority of their time on finding and using original data and statistics. Finally, topics of plagiarism and citing sources is the bulk of instruction time for only 1.1% of respondents.

According to the survey, librarians almost invariably tailor their instruction sessions to suit the perceived needs of the specific audience, with 98.6% stating that they tailor their instruction to the particular major or discipline of the course. These librarians mostly report varying the specific sources of information (96.4%) and the types of documents or literature (73.8%) they cover, with fewer librarians changing or adapting the search strategies (48.7%) or evaluation techniques (31.9%) that they present.

While all nine topics are rated as receiving regular attention by at least some librarians, some respon-

dents indicate that there are areas that they do not address at all. In particular, 30.9% of respondents say they do not cover finding and using original data and statistics, and 22.2% do not cover finding and using primary resources. Librarians who are assigned to Humanities or Social Sciences departments appear most likely to include some primary resources in their instruction sessions, with 26.0% and 36.5% respectively saying they address the topic. Conversely, the majority of librarians in the health sciences (31.6%) and natural sciences (30.8%) indicate they do not address primary sources at all. Those in the Business/MBA departments are proportionally more likely to incorporate original data or statistics (61.5%). On the other hand, the majority of respondents in the Humanities (40.9%), Social Sciences (24.2%) and Natural Sciences (46.7%) indicate that they do not address original data or statistics at all.

**FIGURE 3**  
**Topics on which Librarians Spend the Most time by Liaison/Subject Department**





Moreover, further analysis of the data shows that while some librarians are covering topics like primary sources, data, and statistics, they are not necessarily doing so in depth. Even those librarians who are addressing these topics consistently say that they spend the least amount of their instruction time on the areas. Only five librarians (.03%) spend most of their instruction time on primary sources, while 23.0% say they cover them but spend the least amount of time on the topic. Only one claims to spend the majority of instruction time on original data and statistics, while 17.8% of those who cover the topic spend the least amount of time on it. Figure 3 shows the respondents' ranking of time spent on topic by academic department or subject to which they are assigned.

### **Interactions with Faculty**

The librarians responding to this survey overwhelmingly indicate that they talk to their faculty about information literacy (87.6%), and the percentages are consistent across disciplines. In other words, liaisons and subject specialists in different academic areas appear to discuss information literacy with their faculty members at similar rates. Librarians were also asked whether they perceived their interactions with faculty to be different based on the discipline of the faculty member. Overall, the majority of respondents (62.5%) indicate that their interactions with faculty do vary depending on the discipline of the faculty member. Interestingly, this perception held true for the majority of librarians by academic department, except for those assigned to Humanities departments. A majority of Humanities librarians (56.5%) claim that their interactions with faculty do not vary by the faculty member's area of specialty or discipline focus.

The survey also included an open-ended question asking respondents to describe how interactions with faculty vary across disciplines. Those librarians who indicate that their interactions do not vary tend to suggest that the general receptiveness of faculty to information literacy is more a function of individual personality and interest than academic discipline. These respondents comment that they try to treat all faculty equally, and that there are both interested and supportive faculty as well as uninterested faculty across all disciplines. As one respondent summed it up "[my interaction] has not varied based on area of specialization, within the same department some faculty are interested and some are not." Another states

"my interaction with faculty comes down to their person...I am in their life as much or as little as they want... it is not discipline specific."

Other respondents, however, note that their interactions with faculty do vary by discipline, and observe specific differences across those disciplines. In some cases, respondents make broad generalizations stating that humanities and social sciences tend to be more open to information literacy, or listing certain areas such as musicology, speech, nursing, and art history as supporters of information literacy, while singling out others such as math, creative writing, or applied programs as less likely to be involved with information literacy. Several participants note that those departments that they consider to be more supportive are also more likely to design assignments with library or information literacy components. One respondent contends that "in disciplines that require research from the beginning of a course of study (such as history) information literacy is an easy sell. For other disciplines (such as literature, philosophy) that don't require sources outside the course readings, it is difficult to talk about information literacy."

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study suggest that librarians are attuned to differences of culture among faculty members, and they often tailor their instruction and communications to accommodate those differences. Faculty in the original study noted differences in types of sources and documents for their disciplines, with subjects like political science emphasizing primary sources and some use of non-peer-reviewed materials like newspaper articles, while others like biology focus more on peer-reviewed sources and data. The current study demonstrates that librarians largely are aware of disciplinary differences and preferred sources, and attempt to address the appropriate materials in their sessions.

Over and over in the open-ended questions, respondents discuss varying content, using examples that are relevant to the course or assignment, and focusing on subject-specific resources. In describing how they vary sessions, the vast majority of respondents are general, stating only that they focus on subject-specific databases. However, a few respondents offer specifics about sources and courses, often echoing the points made by faculty in the original study. For instance, one respondent notes that upper-level

history majors need primary sources, while another contrasts focusing on peer-reviewed articles for educational psychology and practical classroom resources for teacher education. Similarly, one respondent points out that primary sources may mean something different in two different fields, while another suggests that currency of a peer-reviewed article may not be important for a subject like literary criticism, but would be for health sciences.

The question remains, if librarians are tailoring and adapting their instruction in ways that align with faculty expectations, why is integration of information literacy into the curriculum still such a challenge on many campuses? Further, why do librarians continue to experience resistance or a lack of interest on the part of many faculty members when they discuss information literacy or library instruction? Apparently, there are still disconnects between faculty and librarians around the topics of information literacy and library instruction. The results of this survey suggest several explanations for this disconnect, which could be the basis for further study.

To begin with, while librarians might be touching on the kinds of resources and skills that faculty believe to be important to their discipline, they may not be devoting the amount of time or depth to these topics as the faculty think is necessary. For instance, in the original study, differences in preferred sources of information stood out as one of the biggest differences among the disciplines studied. On the surface, this study seems to indicate that librarians are addressing these differences—44.9% of respondents say they spend most of their class time on specific search tools such as discipline-specific databases, and the respondents reiterated this focus in their open-ended responses. However, this coverage appears to be largely of subscription-based aggregate databases. While many of these databases might be subject-specific, they tend to have a heavy focus on peer-reviewed articles and might not include some of the more specialized resources of the discipline. The proportion of respondents who state they ‘regularly’ cover topics such as finding and using non-peer reviewed resources, original research and data, or primary sources, is low and the librarians who do cover those areas consistently remark that they spend the least amount of time on them. Possibly, faculty members feel that these types of resources need more emphasis.

Similarly, when asked to rate their students’ overall abilities in information literacy competency areas such as finding and identifying scholarly materials, finding relevant materials for assignments, searching databases, searching the Web, and citing sources, faculty in the original study consistently rated students as “somewhat strong,” with only web searching being rated as “strong.” In follow-up interviews, faculty emphasized that students need instruction in evaluating materials, commenting that students often do not do a good job distinguishing between scholarly and non-scholarly sources. Faculty in the original survey also noted that the criteria and methods of evaluating resources can vary across the disciplines. However, this study reveals that librarians typically spend much less time on evaluation of sources than they do on the search skills. Only 12% of survey respondents claim to spend most of their instruction time on evaluation. Indeed, on a scale of one to nine, with nine being the most time and one the least, evaluation of information averaged 5.8, as compared to 7.6 for using specific search tools, 6.2 for general search strategies, and 6.1 for finding and using peer-reviewed sources. Further, librarians are less likely to vary evaluation techniques by major than other information literacy topics. According to the survey, 31.9% of librarians cover different evaluation techniques by major, while 96.4% focus on different sources of information, and 73.8% cover different types of documents and literature. As such, these librarians are not necessarily addressing the nuanced differences of evaluating sources from the discipline perspective. Whether focusing on general search strategies, specific search tools, or specific types of resources, librarians seem to spend much more time on finding and accessing information than on the evaluation and use of that information. While faculty acknowledge that students are not necessarily strong searchers and thus need instruction in that area, it may be that they would like to see increased time spent on other information literacy topics that they consider to be equally important.

Finally, while survey respondents are emphatic about varying the focus and content of instruction sessions, they are somewhat less so about varying their approach to direct communications with faculty. According to the survey 87.6% of respondents indicate that they discuss information literacy with their faculty, and 62.5% say their interactions with faculty vary depending on the faculty member’s discipline



or area of specialization. While these percentages are relatively high, they show that there are still librarians who either do not talk to faculty about information literacy at all or, more often, broach the conversation in the same way, regardless of the background and discipline-focus of the faculty member. This finding is significant for two reasons. To begin with, the earlier study of faculty indicated that faculty members who are familiar with any information literacy standards or definitions are more likely to address information literacy in their courses, and to believe information literacy is important for their students. In other words, the more librarians talk about information literacy with faculty, and raise faculty awareness of the subject, the more likely faculty are to consider it important and try to integrate it into their courses. Thus, the onus is on the librarian to familiarize faculty with information literacy topics and standards. Secondly, previous research suggests that a faculty member's identification with their discipline is often one of the strongest cultural markers, and should be taken into account when communicating with them.<sup>28</sup> If librarians are not talking to their faculties, or are taking a "one-size-fits-all" approach to their outreach, they may be missing opportunities to build up faculty support for information literacy and thereby strengthen information literacy programs on their campuses.

## Conclusion

Previous research confirms that once faculty members understand what information literacy is, they tend to agree that it is important for their students and to support its instruction. However, organizational culture plays an important role in faculty life, which suggests that part of faculty awareness and understanding of information literacy is filtered through the lens of their particular field or discipline, and the specific conceptualization of information literacy described by the preferred resources and paradigms of inquiry of that field or discipline. This study reveals the most librarians are aware of these important cultural differences, and attempt to accommodate them in their instruction. However, librarians may need to go further in making these connections to the discipline explicit for faculty and their students by integrating the language of faculty—specifically the language of the discipline—into their regular discourse. Instruction librarians might make headway by further tailoring their courses not just to specific assignments or

subject databases, but also to spend more time on the methods of inquiry and evaluation and the broader sources of information that are most relevant to the discipline. The challenge for librarians, who are often assigned to multiple departments across many fields, is that they have to be fluent in many different languages, and adept at crossing cultures without losing sight of the ultimate goal of developing information literate research consumers.

## Notes

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