



# Scholarly Communication Apprenticeship as a Site of Information Literacy Development for Humanities Undergraduates

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*In the winter of 2014, an English Department faculty member (Dawn) and a librarian faculty member (Kathleen) at a Canadian undergraduate university (6500 FTE) collaborated to design and deliver a semester-long fourth-year English Research Methods course. While the course covered literary research methods and methodologies, it was underpinned by apprenticeship in scholarly communication that introduced models of collaboration, production, peer-review, alt-metrics, online scholarly personas, open access, and knowledge mobilization. We challenged students to explore the question of “what does it mean to be a scholar today?” through instruction, assignments, and course logistics. Using reflection and student feedback, this paper explores how librarians and disciplinary faculty can work together to introduce, encourage, and mentor students in an increasingly complex scholarly communication landscape, grounded in two specific ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education frames: Information Creation as a Process and Scholarship Is a Conversation.<sup>1</sup>*



## Background

Information literacy is undergoing redefinition and reframing. As the first iteration of ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2000) aged, they were critiqued for being too specific and prescriptive.<sup>2</sup> Scholars increasingly talked of “critical information literacy”<sup>3</sup> and proposed new definitions and conceptions of information literacy that went beyond traditional library and research skills.<sup>4</sup> Online, the #critlib Twitter community was born.<sup>5</sup> Recognizing the need for an update, in 2013 a task force was struck and charged with significantly revising the standards. Throughout 2014, the Task Force released three drafts, each a significant departure from the 2000 *Standards*.

The third draft of the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* emphasises six threshold concepts, or ‘frames,’ “those critical gateway or portal concepts through which students must pass in order to develop genuine expertise within a discipline, profession, or knowledge domain.”<sup>6</sup> The new frames permit a broader understanding of information literacy as including social and technical practices and dispositions, in line with what scholars have developed with concepts such as “metaliteracy”<sup>7</sup> and information literacy as a “sociotechnical practice.”<sup>8</sup> The frames also allow teaching and librarian faculty to conceptualize information literacy as a set of skills that is developed over the course of a student’s time at an institution.

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Librarian-disciplinary faculty partnerships in research methods courses are an ideal setting to explore these complex and shifting technical and collaborative information grounds with students, particularly using the vehicle of scholarly communication—how scholars share their thoughts with each other and a wider audience. Only recently have librarians focussed on the connection between information literacy and scholarly communication.<sup>9</sup>

The following is our story of how this fourth-year English research methods course came about, how it is grounded in the draft ACRL framework, an assessment of its success, and what other teaching and librarian faculty members can learn from our experiment.

## Beginnings

Dawn: For years I had avoided teaching the English Research Methods course, although because of my specialization in literary theory, it seemed like a good fit. I was hesitant for two reasons: the first was how methodologies (the theory bit) had traditionally been approached in it, and in similar courses at other institutions, and the second was the fact that I did not really consider myself a very good role model as a researcher: I generally rely a lot, in my own research, on serendipity, and I always feel as if I am playing catch-up with information technology used in research. However, a moment of inspiration on a long walk helped me to get past the first hesitation. And then reading just a little about collaboration in the Digital Humanities made me realize that I should just find an expert to help me with the latter.

Kathleen: When Dawn approached me, I was intrigued. Our institution doesn't have a significant history of partnerships between teaching and librarian faculty related to co-teaching and embedded librarianship. Librarians were looking for opportunities to change this pattern, and Dawn's proposal was a chance to pilot a new model of working with instructional faculty. It seemed perfect; she would teach the English Literature content, and I would cover Digital Humanities, research technology, and scholarly com-

munication. When the course began, the draft ACRL *Framework* wasn't at the forefront of my mind. It was only afterwards, upon reflection on the new document, that I realized how closely aligned the course was with broadening definitions of information literacy. We specifically take up the "Information Creation as Process" and "Scholarship Is a Conversation" frames to contextualize and ground what occurred in our course. It was, and continues to be, an ongoing scholarly and pedagogical conversation.

## The Course in the Context of ACRL Frames

### *Information Creation as a Process*

'Information Creation as a Process' "refers to the understanding that the purpose, message, and delivery of information are intentional acts of creation. Recognizing the nature of information creation, experts look to the underlying processes of creation as well as the final product to critically evaluate the usefulness of the information."<sup>10</sup> In our course, Dawn explored how academics create meaning and messages in the study of literature. Kathleen then followed up by guiding students to an understanding of how scholarship moves from the idea phase to the transmission of an intellectual product.

While there are numerous ways in which English scholarship might view the creation process, the approach that this course took was to look at the multifaceted relationships between literature, literary criticism, and literary theory. Together we studied a canonical text, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, read several critical articles on *Frankenstein*, and then looked at some of the theoretical texts that informed those critical articles. We then followed the same process with a much less well-known text, Canadian author Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic* (1988), which has a strong intertextual relationship with *Frankenstein*. We discussed in detail how one literary text may be informed by another; how literature informs criticism, and vice versa; how literary theory informs both and can be, in turn, informed by both in a literary ecosystem, to use the terms of the *Framework*.

Parallel to this process, we discussed research methods, and students were developing their own research questions about the texts and doing their own research. We encouraged a metacognitive process,<sup>11</sup> where students gained awareness of the influence of literary theory on the development of their research questions. Online discussion groups on the relevant literary theories and specific readings facilitated this, allowing students the time to reflect on their discussion posts in a way that was not always available in face-to-face discussion.

As well, an introduction to Digital Humanities showed students how “humanities scholars are confronting the differences that digital media make in every aspect of humanistic inquiry, including conceptualizing projects, implementing research programs, designing curricula, and educating students.”<sup>12</sup> Exploring Digital Humanities projects expanded ideas of what counts as “scholarship” in the Humanities. Students began to see that scholarly work could be packaged as a website, and that this mode of delivery offers avenues to convey meaning that standard academic papers do not. For example, we explored an eBook that allows readers to comment on the text and respond to each other. Instead of a solitary student or academic reading the book by herself and then publishing a reply months later, this allows for public engagement with the text in real-time.

The course explored increased collaboration at almost every stage in the research process. Another example, the peer-review process, was an excellent place to develop the ‘Information Creation’ framework, as these fourth-year Humanities students were in a position to consider strengths and weaknesses in the traditional system, as well as possible alternatives. One of the alternatives introduced in this course was pre-publication peer review, in which a work is posted for peers to review before it is published in final form. We discussed this model in class, and then gave the students an assignment that simulated this workflow. Once the students had written their research papers, they posted their essays to the course management software (D2L) where they read and critiqued each other’s work online. One week later, students submit-

ted the final version of their papers to the instructors. Aside from discussing the benefits and limitations of traditional review, this assignment led to a conversation about how technology (whether print or the Internet) influences peer-review, making the evaluation process more collaborative, in a sense.

In addition to the pre-publication peer-review assignment, another course exercise that opened space for discussing the importance of understanding how information is created and delivered was a discussion and exercise related to shaping and delivering research findings. After watching several 1-2 minute YouTube videos by scholars talking about their research, we asked students to work with a partner to practice a one-minute elevator pitch that explained their final research paper. Some students went on to present at a research colloquium on how technology is changing the Humanities. The aim of these exercises was for students to experience adapting their message and its packaging depending on audience and purpose.

Kathleen: Often in research methods classes, the focus is on the collection and analysis of research data, and how these analyses enter into scholarly and public discourse isn’t discussed. I really wanted the students to walk away from the course with an understanding that while the dissemination of traditional papers still has value for getting work in front of other academics, there are other models of getting their work out there that they need to consider. It was important that they be able to identify these other channels, whether via blog, Tweet, video, oral presentation, or another way. Whether they go on in academia or not wasn’t important; I stressed that these skills are useful in other jobs.

Dawn: In this, Kathleen also took me to places I had not been before, so I was learning along with the students, just as she had been, at times, when we discussed literature and literary theory. Thus we modelled that the learning process is ongoing. In fact, the course itself was presented as processual. The students were aware that we were teaching it for the first time, we adapted it along the way, and we solicited feedback both formally and informally in order to plan for its second iteration.

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### *Scholarship Is a Conversation*

The second ACRL principle, ‘Scholarship Is a Conversation,’ “refers to the idea of sustained discourse within a community of scholars, researchers, or professionals, with new insights and discoveries occurring over time as a result of competing perspectives and interpretations.”<sup>13</sup> Dawn led the students in an exploration of how various authors, literary critics and literary theorists engage with each other and with texts in order to develop and build scholarship. Kathleen introduced the students to non-traditional forms of conversations via Digital Humanities projects. Together, we built the course to reinforce the idea that scholarship is a conversation, and to build skills in this area.

Both the content of the course and the course structure were designed to model current and emerging forms of scholarly communication. With regard to content, we posited those relationships between literature, criticism, and literary theory precisely as a conversation. Texts in all three categories are “talking” to each other, some about cultural issues that are of concern, such as, in *Frankenstein*, the ethical limits of scientific experimentation, and others are talking about other texts. Structurally, we purposely set up the logistics of the course to emulate how scholars increasingly collaborate with each other (i.e. video-conferencing, online, and in-person), and stressed the importance of developing related skills: being flexible with plans, ideas, and technology and approaching our work with an open, playful, resilient, and critical attitude.

Kathleen: As mentioned above, students took part in a mock pre-publication peer review exercise. In addition to allowing students to experience how academic work comes into being, the assignment allowed students to practice skills required to function in today’s scholarly environment. Students gained experience constructively critiquing a colleague’s work in writing, and receiving, evaluating, and incorporating selected feedback. These soft skills are rarely explicitly taught by professors, yet they are vital to learning to work in a scholarly environment and other workplaces. The feedback we initially received from students is

that they were uncomfortable with their peers seeing their work “before it’s done.” This is unsurprising, seeing that many courses are not set up to allow students to see each other’s work. Our course tried to move students beyond the idea of a “perfected,” fixed piece of scholarship written in isolation, pointing out the ways in which scholars are curating scholarly thoughts that shift and change over time via collaboration, both in person and on social media.

Dawn: By the end of the course we were gratified to see that at least some of the students had certainly developed a metaliterate perspective on the use of technology in scholarly conversations. As mentioned earlier, several students had the opportunity to join us in a presentation on the course at a colloquium on changing technologies in the Arts and Humanities. Two, in particular, took this opportunity to provide feedback on their experience of video-conferencing and peer-review. Both commented on how the technology affected communication in the course and made valuable suggestions as to how to mitigate against problems that arose and/or enhance the use of these technologies.

### **Reflection**

Kathleen: Overall, this course was highly successful from an information literacy perspective. The students hadn’t thought much about scholarly communication before this course. By the end of the term, the group was able to articulate the benefits and drawbacks of traditional and emerging forms of scholarly communication. They left with a better sense of what ‘scholarship as a process’ actually means, and how information is created. The students didn’t just come to this understanding by discussing it; they also lived it through course logistics which greatly helped their learning. The students also witnessed an excellent example of academic collaboration in action between the disciplinary and librarian faculty. All of the students commented on the value of team-teaching by specialists in different disciplines.

Dawn: Perhaps the most important thing that we plan to address next time is the level of complexity

of the course. We leapt in with both feet and deliberately chose to incorporate a good deal of technology—some of which neither of us was particularly familiar with, all in one go. The next iteration of this course will be streamlined somewhat, building on what worked best, for example the peer-editing process, and perhaps leaving out or at least altering what did not work as well, such as video-conferencing in a course with challenging theoretical content.

## Conclusion

The *Framework* highlights the need for teaching and librarian faculty to work together to assist students in deepening their information literacy by issuing a challenge:

Teaching faculty have a greater responsibility in designing curricula and assignments that foster enhanced engagement with the core ideas about information and scholarship within their disciplines. Librarians have a greater responsibility in identifying core ideas within their own knowledge domain that can extend learning for students, in creating a new cohesive curriculum for information literacy, and in collaborating more extensively with faculty.<sup>14</sup>

Collaboration at all stages of this course opened a space for library and disciplinary faculty members to engage students more effectively than either individual could have done alone. Research Methods courses are an ideal site to form these partnerships, as they're a natural site to engage students in a discussion of the complex and constantly changing scholarly communication environment.

## Notes

1. ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards Review Task Force, "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education," Draft 3, November 2014, accessed 28 January 2015, [http://acrl.ala.org/ilstandards/?page\\_id=133](http://acrl.ala.org/ilstandards/?page_id=133).
2. Bill Johnston and Sheila Webber, "Information Literacy in Higher Education: A Review and Case Study," *Studies in Higher Education* 28, no. 3 (2003): 335-352.
3. See James Elmborg, "Critical Information Literacy: Implications for Instructional Practice," *The Journal of Academic*

- Librarianship* 32, no. 2 (2006): 192-199; Troy A. Swanson, "A Radical Step: Implementing a Critical Information Literacy Model," *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4, no. 2 (2004): 259-273.
4. Kimmo Tuominen, Reijo Savolainen, and Sanna Talja, "Information Literacy as a Sociotechnical Practice," *The Library Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (2005): 329-345; Trudi E. Jacobson and Thomas P. Mackey, "Proposing a Metaliteracy Model to Redefine Information Literacy," *Communications in Information Literacy* 7, no. 2 (2013): 84-91; Annemaree Lloyd, *Information Literacy Landscapes: Information Literacy in Education, Workplace and Everyday Contexts* (Oxford: Chandos, 2010).
5. Nicole Pagowsky, "Introducing #critlib Chats!" *Pumped Librarian*. 3 April 2014, accessed 28 January 2015, <http://pumpedlibrarian.blogspot.ca/2014/04/introducing-critlib-chats.html>
6. ACRL, "Framework" Draft 3, lines 584-586.
7. Thomas P. Mackey and Trudi E. Jacobson, "Reframing Information Literacy as a Metaliteracy," *College & Research Libraries* 76, no. 1 (2011).
8. Tuominen, Savolainen, and Talja, "Information Literacy as a Sociotechnical Practice."
9. Stephanie Davis-Kahl and Merinda Kaye Hensley, *Common Ground at the Nexus of Information Literacy and Scholarly Communication* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2013).
10. ACRL, "Framework" Draft 3, lines 206-210.
11. John H. Flavell, "Metacognition and Cognitive Monitoring: A New Area of Cognitive-Developmental Inquiry," *American Psychologist* 34 (1979): 906-911.
12. N. Katherine Hayles. *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012): 1.
13. ACRL, "Framework" Draft 3, lines 352-355.
14. ACRL, "Framework" Draft 3, lines 15-20.

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