Research Agenda for Library Instruction & Information Literacy

Introduction: Landscape of the Agenda

When drafting this latest update of the ACRL Instruction Section Research Agenda for Library Instruction and Information Literacy, the Research & Scholarship Committee took stock of the changing landscape both for higher education and for academic libraries. Overall, we expect to see a greater emphasis on learning, adaptability, and relearning across lifespans, both through formal degree programs and through more iterative certificate programs, to prepare individuals to work in several industries over the course of their careers. The broader landscape is marked by changing educational technologies and continuing increases of hybrid and online teaching methods, how best to ensure accessibility and inclusion for all types of learners, declining enrollments for some institutions, continued concern about student loan debt and college costs, and privacy debates about the use of student data for institutional improvement and tracking student progress. We expect to see continued changes resulting from the Open Access movement and open educational resources, as well as consolidation of scholarly publishers and content providers. We see disruptive and transformative technologies continuing to emerge in the next decade that will impact education, such as virtual/augmented/mixed reality.

Certainly, we expect changes in the higher education and publishing landscape to impact the resources and teaching within libraries. In recent years, the academic library field has largely recognized that information is not neutral. Nor are our roles as facilitators of information neutral; rather, our information literacy and library instruction efforts are layered within our local context as well as issues of race, class, gender, and other aspects of our social realities. Questions of inclusion of all learners and access to all of our content and tools will persist as well, particularly as evolving technologies and platforms raise new questions of access, accessibility, and user privacy. Library instructors have seen the content of library instruction shift in recent decades from tools and skills towards habits, dispositions, and ways of knowing, as we seek to prepare students both for short-term assignments and longer-term information literacy contexts beyond formal classroom learning. A final note: this was written during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the longer-term ramifications of varied transitions to online learning are still unknown.

Materials Gathered

In gathering materials for the revised Agenda, the committee reviewed and synthesized the following materials: meta-analyses of information literacy trends, recent Instruction Section Needs and Interest Group Surveys, and San Jose State's MLIS Skills at Work reports. The committee also distributed a survey to editors of library and information science journals asking

for trends they are seeing or types of research they wished to see. We have compiled this information into the Agenda draft below.

Next Steps for the Draft Agenda

With the rapid pace of change, it is difficult to predict what the information landscape will be like in a decade. This revised Agenda aims to be broad enough to capture issues of continuing importance while avoiding being specific in such a way that the revision will immediately become dated. The Research & Scholarship Committee welcomes feedback from members of ACRL and the Instruction Section as well as stakeholders and academic library partners.

Approaches to Research Methods

From the data the Committee has gathered, we note the following gaps and opportunities related to research methods. For new researchers, the themes below can provide a platform for research that builds on the current body of literature while advancing disciplinary knowledge. Connecting with other practitioners and researchers via in-person and online environments can help build a network to foster innovation and cultivate research.

Range of research methods needed in addition to case studies. While case studies have long been a valued part of LIS practitioners' sharing and best practices, journal editors voiced a desire to see increases in research with empirical methods. Meta-analysis articles on information literacy and instructional research similarly reflect this sentiment. This expanded approach to research methods can help inform library administrators and shape institutional policies on the values and best methods for engaging in information literacy work. LIS researchers are also increasingly engaging in mixed and qualitative methods, all of which yield new insights, present different limitations, and operate through different assumptions.

Stronger emphasis on theory. There is also a continuing need for the profession to deepen its own theoretical frameworks and engage in theory-building and critique of theories originating both within and adjacent to the LIS field. While LIS can learn much from related disciplines such as social science, psychology, and education, the greatest benefit comes from thorough understandings of the theories and context that underpin these theories and their disciplines.

Discussions of epistemologies. There is a need for LIS researchers to understand and question the epistemologies (how we know what we know and what do we consider 'knowledge') that form the foundations of the inquiries in which they engage. Much LIS work has been conducted through a positivist lens and emphasis on perceived 'facts,' without always engaging the assumptions that accompany this view.

Demonstrating assessment/value. Conversations about assessment are including critical assessment and authentic assessment, yet there is still often a need for libraries to justify programs and resources, as well as collect data for growth and improvement.

Questions of research ethics. When librarians conduct research with our populations, conflict of interest or power dynamics in doing classroom-based research can be concerns. These issues extend to users' data privacy.

Areas for Exploration

Ways of Thinking and Knowing

Librarians as Learners

Academic librarianship benefits from pairing a life-long learning perspective with a questioning orientation. This can include exploring new ways to teach, and being aware of new ideas as they emerge. Knowledge practices and dispositions, as they are reflected in the ACRL HYPERLINK "http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework" \h *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, build understanding and habits of mind and attitudes that lead to a curiosity about how best to explore and implement ideas, moving away from skills-based conceptualizations.

There are countless sources of information about information literacy and instruction. Examples include the ACRL *Framework* and other standards; instruction programs at general conferences and subject-specific conferences; journal articles; blogs; social media; and webinars. A technique for navigating and evaluating these many sources is to employ some critical self-reflection and inquire about what is helpful to learn. Use analysis of these sources to build search queries to continue exploring instructional topics. Some sample keywords include metacognition, metaliteracy, critical thinking, media literacy, data literacy, digital scholarship, evidence-based practice, digital divide, and pedagogy.

Directions for Research Include:

1. What do practitioners want to learn about library instruction, information literacy, and types of pedagogy?
2. How can skepticism and critical thinking help test ideas, and then come to an actionable conclusion?
3. What relevant ideas about teaching from other disciplines might strengthen the literature of instructional librarianship?
4. How do librarians see themselves as learners?
5. How are librarians engaging in professional development and training to support their development as educators and their understanding of ways of teaching? What opportunities and barriers do they see for this professional development and training?

Students as Learners

Understandings of information use and information literacy are broadening from focusing solely on textual sources to include a greater range of knowledge sources. Library employees are also considering ways of knowing that the traditional academy has ignored, such as indigenous knowledge, embodied knowledge, and knowledge held in communities and communicated through social practices. As we see a greater diversity of students and their experiences, it has become more important than ever to be cautious of the terms that we use in library instruction and work to avoid jargon in both the library and in information literacy instruction.

Methods of instruction are continually evolving. The growth of online education, which has even become a part of in-person classes, means that students are delving into various types of literacies, including digital, media, visual, data, and metaliteracy. For example, students create digital humanities projects and open access/open education resources. Looking at digital and born-digital resources, the evaluation of information continues to be important, as is the transparency of methods and results used in research so that groups can recreate the findings. As methods of teaching are evolving, so too are methods of learning and so the concept of information literacy and various forms of literacies will continue to grow and change in the coming years.

Directions for Research Include:
1. How do changing understandings of affective learning and cognitive bias impact conceptualizations of information literacy?
2. How does local knowledge and ways of knowing contribute to the research being done in the classroom? How can teaching librarians encourage the use of these options both inside and outside of the classroom?
3. How has the evolution of online instruction changed the way that information literacy instruction is led? What methods of sharing information online are the most efficient and effective for teaching information literacy sessions?
4. What barriers do students face in an information literacy instruction session that can prevent their comprehension and application of the skills being shared in the classroom, whether in-person or virtually?

Ways of Teaching

In recent decades, librarian-led instruction has shifted from a focus on demonstrating databases and teaching specific tools to an emphasis on the concepts and conversations that shape and support lifelong information literacy and contribute to student success. This evolving approach focuses on the *hows* and *whys* of teaching, rather than solely on the *whats*. It also emphasizes meeting learners where they are and identifying opportunities beyond traditional approaches to the "one-shot." Such opportunities can both reflect and contribute to movements in higher education, including an increased focus on problem-based and experiential learning,

gamification, and student-led dialogue. High-impact educational practices, such as first-year experiences, collaborative assignments, capstone projects, and undergraduate research, provide new avenues for librarians to grow as teachers. Contributing to these initiatives entails a focus on creativity and on fostering inclusive environments, both in person and online. Librarians' development as teachers involves ongoing learning, with recent attention paid toward the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), the integration of learning theories from other disciplines, critically inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies, and carving out time for reflection.

Directions for Research Include:
1. What does culturally responsive pedagogy mean to librarian instructors?
   a. How are they integrating this into their teaching practices?
   b. What barriers do they see in doing so?
2. What high impact educational practices are librarians seeing on their campuses? How have or would they like to contribute to these practices?
3. What approaches are librarians taking to foster inclusion in online and hybrid environments?
4. How are librarians integrating reflective teaching and learning into their instruction, particularly in time-limited settings such as one-shots?
5. How do librarians see themselves as educators?

Ways of Growing: Instructional Assessment

Evaluating and reflecting upon instruction is central to creating meaningful and sustainable experiences, for both learners and teachers. Teaching librarians can incorporate assessment in a variety of ways, including pre-assessment to gauge what learners already know or what questions they have; formative assessment during an instructional experience to quickly see at the point of need how learners are doing; and summative assessment after an instructional experience to evaluate the effectiveness of a session, assignment, course, or program. Assessment can be informal and be used to take the pulse of a particular class session through something as simple as a show of hands or quick poll. Assessment can also be formal and undergo human-subjects review with an eye toward publication or presentation.

In designing an assessment, it is important to be culturally responsive, so that the assessment itself does not become a barrier to evaluating learning or leave learners feeling excluded. An example is a survey that requires learners to use particular technology or a mobile device. If learners are not familiar with the technology or do not have a mobile device to respond, they cannot contribute their voices. Designing inclusive assessment also ensures that teaching librarians build in time to reflect on what they most want to learn, how it will be used, and how questions are framed to gather this information with respect to student privacy.

Directions for Research Include:

1. What approaches can librarians take to grow their own teaching practices through formative assessment?
2. How can teaching librarians grow and use evidence from formative assessment to develop effective summative assessment initiatives?
3. What opportunities exist to partner with teaching faculty or campus partners to develop collaborative assessment initiatives?
4. Recent conversations have discussed the challenge of "survey fatigue," while also noticing the efficiency of surveys versus focus groups or interviews. How can teaching librarians design assessment approaches that effectively balance the time invested with the quality and quantity of results?
5. What approaches can teaching librarians take to be culturally responsive in their assessment initiatives? How does this look both in person and online?

Ways of Engaging

Learners

Effectively reaching a wide array of learners continues to be an important theme in library research. While some learners may be traditional-aged college students, some could also be high school students in early matriculation/dual enrollment programs, transfer students, graduate students, adult learners, veterans, first generation students, learners with accessibility concerns or dealing with trauma, and those balancing work/life obligations outside of the academic realm. Learners may hold one or more of these identities simultaneously. In addition, in-person and online learning environments may include any combination of these groups and librarians may not be aware of the individual or group needs during instruction planning or implementation. Finally, different learning environments (face-to-face, hybrid, fully online) may elicit engagement from some students, but discourage others. As a result, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has become increasingly important so that any learner can access information and information literacy support at the point of need.

Directions for Research Include:
1. How can librarians develop inclusive content and delivery of instruction in order to support an array of learners?
2. How can curriculum mapping and institutional data inform the development of instructional materials?
3. What does research on metacognition and learning science offer librarians who are supporting a range of learners?

Learning Contexts

Learning environments are continually evolving, which makes future learning contexts especially difficult to anticipate. Today's learners may connect to information and libraries in person or online; from nearby or across the globe; from home, from work, or from a remote research station. Teaching and other aspects of academic work have moved online as well, and many

libraries have moved instruction online alongside or even replacing support in a traditional classroom environment.

As part of this change, researchers of all abilities may encounter research (and the building blocks of research) on the web as the result of Open Access (OA) efforts and the publication of Open Educational Resources (OER). These initiatives allow both formal and informal learners to discover knowledge, and help lifelong learners to continue their education outside of academia. These efforts are not consistent, however, and having an understanding of disciplinary information practices adds a level of complexity to researchers' quests. At the same time, the ability of those interested in spreading misinformation and disinformation has grown, and it can be a challenge to separate valid sources from sources intended to mislead. Finally, *where* learners encounter information needs has changed: increased emphasis on service learning, internships, and other opportunities mean information needs can arise in different contexts.

Directions for Research Include:
1. How can libraries support learners at all levels in their search for high-quality information—in or across disciplines—that meets their needs?
2. How can librarians design in-person sessions and online learning objects that reach broad ranges of researchers and abilities?
3. Librarians have led the effort to build information literacy skills in a variety of venues, but how does this translate to an increasingly decentralized online environment?

Ways of Collaborating

Information Literacy at the Program Level

Exploring the dynamics of collaborating with faculty to teach how information is produced, discovered, and used to create new knowledge can lead to new insights that benefit the profession as a whole. Integrating instruction into existing programs, teaming up with instructors on assignments, and creating cooperative relationships with faculty are all topics to be explored. Libraries are increasingly offering assignment consultation services to faculty to co-construct meaningful research assignments, in addition to workshops for faculty using the "train the trainer" model. The elements of successful outreach and promotional efforts to departments and faculty are also potential areas of research.

Directions for Research Include:

1. The ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* changed the trajectory of information literacy instruction. How have faculty responded to this change in emphasis?
2. Are different skills required when collaborating with tenured faculty, adjunct faculty, or teaching assistants, who share roles as both teachers and students?

3. Does collaboration look the same across all departments or do different disciplines require different ways of connecting?
4. What are effective methods or models for creating long-term relationships with faculty?

Information Literacy at the Institutional Level

In higher education, campus environments and the role of the library within them vary widely between institutions. Often, the skills taught in information literacy instruction are key to a university's mission. At other times, information literacy awareness and advocacy are needed. Understanding the different layers within an institution and how they interact is important and can provide a rich ground for research. Recognizing that the library is not the sole "owner" of information literacy initiatives and some of the most successful initiatives feature shared buy-in among university leadership, campus partners, and faculty across disciplines. How to keep up with the changes in existing programs is also an area worth exploring.

Directions for Research Include:

1. What are the disciplinary differences in the adoption of information literacy requirements?
2. What methods of scaffolding information literacy instruction within an institution result in the most effective student outcomes?
3. How does the ACRL's *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* intersect with departments' accreditation requirements?
4. What models are effective in integrating information literacy goals across an institution?
5. How can librarians with and without faculty status advocate for the inclusion of information literacy in courses and programs?

Information Literacy at the Policy Level

The widespread rise of misinformation means that advocacy for information literacy instruction now needs to be conducted on a state, national, and global scale. The National Forum on Information Literacy was one advocacy effort in this direction, and collaborations with journalists, such as the News Literacy Project are ongoing. The open access movement, too, has become an international coalition, and academic librarians are an important segment of that alliance. The role librarians play in shaping education policies and legislation is a growing research area.

Directions for Research Include:

1. What political, interpersonal, and communication skills are required for effective advocacy?
2. What are the best practices for building relationships with elected and community leaders?
3. What is an effective advocacy strategy for working beyond the institutional level?

Assessment at the Programmatic or Institutional Level

In addition to assessing information literacy at the level of an individual instructor, as mentioned above, many institutions are able to conduct assessment of information literacy learning at a programmatic level, or institution-wide. Large-scale assessment can contribute to evidence-based practice and decision-making. However, as mentioned in considering assessment of individual classroom learning, it is important to have a clear focus on what the assessment data will be used for, how assessment can form a meaningful learning experience for students, and how student privacy may be protected through ethical assessment.

Challenges around large-scale assessment include heavy reliance on student self-assessment as a measure of effectiveness, lack of explicit instructional objectives for assessment, and lack of systematic reviews in the LIS profession.

Directions for Research Include:
1. What may be learned from collecting longitudinal data on information literacy development?
2. What cross-institutional and inter-institutional partnerships yield fruitful assessment data for program improvement and decision-making?

Conclusion

The ACRL Instruction Section Research & Scholarship Committee shares these areas for continued reflection with the profession, acknowledging the challenge of predicting future trends, and is optimistic that these current and forward-looking recommendations will remain relevant to the growth and change we expect in the coming decade. Recognizing that these questions are not prescriptive, the Committee offers the "Directions for Research" questions included here to provide a springboard for future exploration and dialogue. The Committee hopes that this revised Research Agenda facilitates continued reflection and collaboration to support and strengthen teaching, learning, engagement, and exploration.

Recommended Readings

Julien, Heidi, Melissa Gross, and Don Latham. 2018. "Survey of Information Literacy Instructional Practices in U.S. Academic Libraries." *College & Research Libraries* 79, no. 2 (March): 179-199. https://doi:10.5860/crl.79.2.179.

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Wilcox, Hui Niu. 2009. "Embodied Ways of Knowing, Pedagogies, and Social Justice: Inclusive Science and Beyond." *NWSA Journal* 21, no. 2 (July): 104-120. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20628176.

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