



# Companion Document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education

## Social Work<sup>1</sup>

*Approved by the ACRL Board of Directors, June 24, 2021*

### About this document

#### Aim

In 2018 the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Educational and Behavioral Sciences Section (EBSS) Social Work Committee was charged with developing a companion document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education as it relates to social work education and practice. This document is the result of a two-year process to bring about a usable, accessible companion document.

The overarching goal of creating this companion document is to clearly demonstrate where the ACRL Framework and social work educational competencies and standards, as well as professional ethics and values, intersect.

#### Audience

While it may be obvious that the core audience for this document are academic social work librarians, we also include social work educators, practitioners, social work students, and academic librarians from other disciplines as the key stakeholders of this tool.

For those outside the social work discipline, we encourage you to utilize this document as a tool for reviewing your own disciplinary documents to see where they may align with the ACRL Framework.

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<sup>1</sup> The online version of this document can be found at <https://acrl.libguides.com/sw>

## Document Outline

Each section of this document provides text as the Framework relates to:

- Social work practice
- Social work education
- Corresponding values, ethics, and standards between social work and librarianship
- Sample learning outcomes for information literacy instruction sessions

From the beginning, we determined it was crucial to consult two major resources from the field of social work. We consulted the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) as it sets forth thresholds for professional competence and social work education. Similarly, we utilized the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) Code of Ethics, which outlines the profession's core values informing social work practice. These values include service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence.

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## Authority is Constructed

### Social Work Perspective

### Social Work Practice

In Social Work, Authority is Constructed and Contextual is exemplified in the process of Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) where a social worker formulates a research question, searches for empirical evidence, and integrates their findings with their client's values and culture to inform treatment. The social worker recognizes the authority of empirical research, the information resources it is contained in and contextualizes it according to their expertise and the needs, values, and culture of their client.

### Social Work Education

Social work students are taught that individual clients and communities are the authorities of their lived experience. They learn that this knowledge is a type of authority and must be considered alongside professional guidelines and research in order to provide effective

treatment or advance solutions. Social work librarians introduce students to the process of academic scholarship and how to distinguish it from these other sources of knowledge.

#### Connection to Professional Standards (NASW)

##### **National Association of Social Workers: Code of Ethics**

Note: The following NASW Ethics can apply to any of the six Frames. It is not exclusive to Frame 1.

##### Ethical Standard 1.05(b) -- Cultural Awareness and Social Diversity

“Social workers should have a knowledge base of their clients' cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients' cultures and to differences among people and cultural groups.”

##### Ethical Standard 4.01(c) -- Competence

“Social workers should base practice on recognized knowledge, including empirically based knowledge, relevant to social work and social work ethics.”

#### Connection to Professional Standards (CSWE)

##### **Council of Social Work Education: Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards**

Note: The following CWSE EPAS Competencies and Education Policy can apply to any of the six Frames. It is not exclusive to Frame 1.

The EPAS do not use the term “information literacy.” Rather, it outlines the following competencies and policies:

##### Competency 4: Engage In Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice

“Social workers understand that evidence that informs practice derives from multi-disciplinary sources and multiple ways of knowing.”

#### Examples of Learning Objectives

1. Discuss how we “know” something by comparing personal experience, tradition, authority, popular media, and common sense to the scientific method.
2. Identify examples of authority in the context of credible or trustworthy sources.

#### **Information Creation as a Process**

##### Social Work Perspective

##### Social Work Practice

Social workers are information creators. Whether it is case documentation, court letters, editorials, policy, advocacy briefs or empirical research. These communications represent

the dynamic nature of information creation and dissemination throughout the field of social work. As information creators, social workers take responsibility for what their documentation communicates, protecting the privacy of clients, and acknowledging bias in their research methodology.

### Social Work Education

Social work students learn the processes of engagement, assessment, intervention, and the evaluation of the individuals in their care and how to ethically translate these interactions into information outputs (i.e., research papers, literature reviews, case documentation, and so on) that will benefit them. These iterative processes allow students the space to cultivate information in different formats and varying contexts. Social work librarians help students learn how to distinguish various information outputs and the process in which they were created. With this insight, students reflect, research, and critically evaluate these information outputs before incorporating them into their own documentation and scholarship.

### Connection to Professional Standards (NASW)

#### National Association of Social Workers: Code of Ethics

##### Ethical Standard 3.04(b) & (c) -- Client Records

"Social workers should include sufficient and timely documentation in records to facilitate the delivery of services and to ensure continuity of services provided to clients in the future...[and] protect clients' privacy to the extent that is possible and appropriate and should include only information that is directly relevant to the delivery of services."

##### Ethical Standard 5.01(d) -- Integrity of the Profession

"Social workers should contribute to the knowledge base of social work and share with colleagues their knowledge related to practice, research, and ethics. Social workers should seek to contribute to the profession's literature and to share their knowledge at professional meetings and conferences."

### Connection to Professional Standards (CSWE)

#### Council of Social Work Education: Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards

##### Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

"Social workers demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication."

##### Competency 5: Engage In Policy Practice

"Social workers apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice."

## Examples of Learning Objectives

1. Develop, in their own creation processes, an understanding that their choices impact the purposes for which the information output will be used and the message it conveys.
2. Describe the information creation process for popular and scholarly sources, and evaluate sources in order to choose those that fit the information need.

## Information Has Value

### Social Work Perspective

#### Social Work Practice

Social Workers pursue social change on behalf of and in partnership with some of the most vulnerable and oppressed members of our society. This pursuit requires greater sensitivity and knowledge about oppression as well as cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers' understanding of power wielded by individuals and organizations with access to information affects how they make practice decisions and shape social policy.

Social workers understand their own information privilege and how systems of knowledge creation and dissemination may marginalize some individuals or groups. They leverage their critical understanding of these dynamics to make informed decisions as both information consumers and creators.

### Social Work Education

Social work librarians curate collections of resources in various formats to preserve and provide access to knowledge in the fields of social work, psychology, sociology, and other relevant disciplines. They partner with faculty to find appropriate materials for their courses and provide research guides to facilitate independent learning and knowledge discovery.

As students learn to create, distribute, and utilize information as a means to effect social change, social work librarians teach them how to access knowledge from the library's collection and other proprietary sources. Students learn that access to information is a privilege that affects both social workers and their clients and they come to understand the importance of questioning individuals and organizations that hold power and influence with regards to information.

Lack of access to quality information is an ongoing challenge for social workers as the bulk of scholarly literature exists behind a paywall (Pendell, 2018). It's worth asking "if teaching students to use expensive, licensed databases...is effective for students once they separate from the university" (Pendell, 2018, p.1050). Considering this, it's crucial to teach social work students about open access, fair use, and to ensure proper credit is attributed to

sources (See Also Frame 1: Authority is Constructed and Contextual and Frame5: Scholarship as Conversation).

#### Connection to Professional Standards (NASW)

##### **National Association of Social Workers: Code of Ethics**

Value: Social Justice

"...particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals" and "to ensure access to needed information..."

##### Ethical Standard 4.08(a) & (b) -- Acknowledging Credit

Social workers should take responsibility and credit, including authorship credit, only for work they have actually performed and to which they have contributed...[and] honestly acknowledge the work of and the contributions made by others."

Value: Integrity

"Social workers are continually aware of the profession's mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards and practice in a manner consistent with them."

##### Ethical Standard 5.01(c) & (d) -- Integrity of the Profession

"Social workers should contribute time and professional expertise to activities that promote ...competence of the social work profession...[through] teaching, research...[and] contribute to the knowledge base of social work and share with colleagues their knowledge related to practice, research, and ethics...seek[ing] to contribute to the profession's literature and to share their knowledge at professional meetings and conferences."

##### Ethical Standard 5.02(b) & (c) -- Evaluation and Research

"Social workers should promote and facilitate evaluation and research to contribute to the development of knowledge...[and] critically examine and keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to social work and fully use evaluation and research evidence in their professional practice."

Value: Competence

"Social workers should aspire to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession."

#### Connection to Professional Standards (CSWE)

##### **Council of Social Work Education: Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards**

Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

"Social workers recognize the importance of life-long learning and are committed to continually updating their skills to ensure they are relevant and effective."

#### Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

"Social workers apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice...present themselves as learners and engage clients and constituencies as experts of their own [life] experiences; and apply self-awareness and self-regulation to manage the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse clients..."

#### Competency 4: Engage in Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice

"Social workers know the principles of...culturally informed...approaches go [towards?] building knowledge...[and] understand the evidence that informs practice derives from multi-disciplinary sources and multiple ways of knowing"

#### Examples of Learning Objectives

1. Recognize differences in systems of publishing and dissemination for different source types
2. Recognize how linguistic barriers and differential access to publishing support affect authors in different regions
3. Recognize differences in information access based on organizational affiliation.
4. Demonstrate how differential information access impacts practice.

#### Research as Inquiry

##### Social Work Perspective

##### Social Work Practice

Social workers rely on Evidence-Based Practice to demonstrate the efficacy of the services they provide. Social workers and their agencies incorporate evidence into their practice by identifying and translating research; building relationships between practitioners and researchers; collecting and managing data on the individuals, families, and communities in which they work with integrity. To do this, social workers need to keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to their clients. Social workers who can synthesize information from multiple sources, critically assess new professional literature, and re-evaluate previously held conclusions in light of new information, will be effective evidence-based practitioners.

Social workers also draw on their professional knowledge as well as the expertise and lived experiences of their clients and the wider communities they serve. Expertise is also considered from other professions via a multi-disciplinary, cross-collaborative approach. When academic resources are unavailable, social workers utilize open access resources to inform their practice. Additionally, information is acquired in an ethical, legal manner.

### Social Work Education

Social work librarians promote the value of open-ended questions and the importance of gathering information from multiple outlets and perspectives and gathering information from the perspective of marginalized communities. Social work librarians also emphasize the literature search as an iterative process. Social work librarians guide students in narrowing or broadening initial research questions by helping them ask “increasingly complex or new questions whose answers in turn develop additional questions or lines of inquiry in any field” (Frame 4).

Social work librarians also teach students how to utilize a variety of research methods, including sources that fall outside the academic sphere such as the lived experiences of one’s clients. Further, social work librarians can assist students in developing data curation skills through the use of software applications for bibliographic management, survey design, and quantitative statistical analysis.

### Connection to Professional Standards (NASW)

#### National Association of Social Workers: Code of Ethics

Value: Integrity

“Social workers are continually aware of the profession's mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards and practice in a manner consistent with them. Social workers act honestly and responsibly and promote ethical practices on the part of the organizations with which they are affiliated.”

Value: Competence

"Social workers...develop and enhance their professional expertise [by] continually striving to increase their professional knowledge...should contribute to the knowledge base of the profession."

Ethical Standard 2.03 -- Interdisciplinary Collaboration

“Social workers who are members of an interdisciplinary team should participate in and contribute to decisions...by drawing on the perspectives, values, and experiences of the social work profession.”

Ethical Standard 4.01 -- Competence

“Social workers should critically examine and keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to social work. Social workers should routinely review the



professional literature...should base practice on recognized knowledge, including empirically based knowledge, relevant to social work and social work ethics.”

#### Ethical Standard 4.08 -- Acknowledging Credit

“Social workers should take responsibility and credit, including authorship credit, only for work they have actually performed and to which they have contributed...[and] honestly acknowledge the work of and the contributions made by others.”

#### Ethical Standard 5.01(b) -- Integrity of the Profession

“Social workers should...enhance and improve the integrity of the profession through appropriate study and research, active discussion, and responsible criticism of the profession.”

#### Ethical Standard 5.02(c) -- Evaluation and Research

“Social workers should critically examine and keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to social work and fully use evaluation and research evidence in their professional practice.”

### Connection to Professional Standards (CSWE)

#### Council of Social Work Education: Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards

##### Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

“Social workers: make ethical decisions by applying...ethical conduct of research.”

##### Competency 4: Engage In Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice

“Social workers know the principles of logic, scientific inquiry, and culturally informed and ethical approaches to building knowledge. Social workers understand that evidence that informs practice derives from multi-disciplinary sources and multiple ways of knowing.”

### Examples of Learning Objectives

1. Identify additional questions about the original research topic or interest.
2. Locate a variety of source materials related to your research project.
3. Locate and retrieve a research article that exists in a free, open access database that does not require you to log in to your institutional account.
4. Identify alternative keywords to the original search terms you started with.

## Scholarship as Conversation

### Social Work Perspective

#### Social Work Practice

Social workers use Evidence-Based Practice to identify accepted interventions by searching the research literature and coming to a conclusion based on what they've found. The literature that has coalesced around a given intervention's effectiveness is a direct result of the scholarly conversation.

Social workers who have fluency in the scholarly conversation, and the ability to synthesize a broad range of knowledge, will be empowered to participate in the conversation and apply it to their work. They recognize traditional scholarship may not be the only relevant perspective on an issue, and their valuable first-hand practice experience as well as their clients' lived experiences inform their own contributions to the scholarly conversation in ways that can be enriching.

### Social Work Education

Social work librarians should invite students to consider how they might contribute to the scholarly conversation: How do their own experiences in the field, in the classroom, at work, from life itself speak and respond to the current conversation or the absence thereof? How are different research articles in conversation with one another and with the personal experiences of the affected populations?

It is important to remind social work students that voices beyond the gold-standard of peer review are worth considering as part of the conversation. Librarians should prompt their students to ask about the role of policy papers, government documents, non-profit web sources, investigative magazine articles, and news reports as well as blogs and social media posts. Further consideration should also be given to alternate sources or underfunded news outlets, including those beyond a US-based context. Considering the social justice lens of social work, librarians should prompt students' evaluation of how non-English voices or underrepresented individuals, groups, and communities add to the conversation or are affected by systematic injustice.

Social Work librarians should encourage students to conceptualize scholarship as a conversation and empower them to participate as budding scholars. When students understand "that they can be participants in scholarly conversations [it] encourages them to think of research not as a task of collecting information but instead as a task of constructing meaning" (Simmons, 2005, p.299).

### Connection to Professional Standards (NASW)

#### National Association of Social Workers: Code of Ethics

Value: Social Justice

"These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers ensure access to needed information...resources."

Value: Integrity

"Social workers are continually aware of the profession's mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards and practice in a manner consistent with them. Social workers act honestly and responsibly and promote ethical practices..."

Ethical Standard 5.01(b) (c) & (d) -- Integrity of the Profession

"Social workers should uphold and advance the values, ethics, knowledge, and mission of the profession. Social workers should protect, enhance, and improve the integrity of the profession through appropriate study and research, active discussion, and responsible criticism of the profession."

"Social workers should contribute time and professional expertise to activities that promote respect for the value, integrity, and competence of the social work profession. These activities may include teaching, research, consultation, service, legislative testimony, presentations in the community, and participation in their professional organizations."

"Social workers should contribute to the knowledge base of social work and share with colleagues their knowledge related to practice, research, and ethics. Social workers should seek to contribute to the profession's literature and to share their knowledge at professional meetings and conferences."

Ethical Standard 5.02(b) & (c)-- Evaluation and Research

"Social workers should promote and facilitate evaluation and research to contribute to the development of knowledge...[and]...critically examine and keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to social work and fully use evaluation and research evidence in their professional practice."

Connection to Professional Standards (CSWE)

**Council of Social Work Education: Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards**

Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

"Social workers: make ethical decisions by applying...ethical conduct of research"

Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

"Social workers apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice...present themselves as learners and engage clients...as experts of their own experiences"

#### Competency 4: Engage In Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice

"Social workers use practice experience...to inform scientific inquiry and research"

#### Educational Policy M2.1—Specialized Practice

"The master's program in social work prepares students for specialized practice...[to]synthesize and employ a broad range of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary knowledge and skills based on scientific inquiry..."

#### Examples of Learning Objectives

1. Locate references in an article and describe how they are in conversation with one another.
2. Understand the differences between scholarly and news resources as a part of the information ecosystem.
3. Organize and analyze the differences and similarities of ideas in the scholarly conversation on a given topic.

#### Searching as Strategic Exploration

##### Social Work Perspective

##### Social Work Practice

Evidence-based practice necessitates that social workers know how to locate relevant research in an efficient manner that accounts for quality and currency of scholarship, including relevance to their clients. This requires searching strategically for literature while anticipating new information and learning opportunities. As the bulk of scholarly literature for social work exists behind a paywall, it is imperative that practitioners know how to search for and retrieve open access sources.

Social workers understand and articulate the value of open access. They are empowered to seek avenues beyond restricted resources, such as obtaining access through public and university libraries. They seek assistance to identify access points for themselves and their clients. Where sources are limited, social workers advocate for themselves and on behalf of others to improve access to information and to acquire the skills to understand, interpret, and discern information to make informed decisions. Depending on the practical context and scope of their organization's or client's needs, social workers select from a variety of search strategies with which they are proficient.

Because social workers see themselves as "partners in the helping process" they persistently guide clients in pursuit of their information needs; actively listening to help

identify questions, developing strategies for searching across multiple resources, and empowering clients to explore information sources for themselves.

### Social Work Education

Social work librarians instruct students how to locate and utilize open-access sources beyond traditional, subscription-based databases (Pendell, 2018) such as websites, government documents, policy briefs, statistics, and academic journals. They teach students to recognize that, depending on one's research needs, "information sources vary greatly in content and format and have varying relevance and value."

By encouraging students to "seek guidance from experts, such as librarians, researchers, and professionals" as part of their strategic search strategy, social work librarians help students understand that "first attempts at searching do not always produce adequate results" and to think with "flexibility and creativity" while browsing sources and brainstorming how to craft and refine research questions. In addition, social work librarians help students to "identify interested parties, such as scholars, organizations, governments, and industries, who might produce information about a topic and then determine how to access that information."

### Connection to Professional Standards (NASW)

#### National Association of Social Workers: Code of Ethics

Value: Social Justice

"Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Social workers' social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation in decision making for all people."

### Examples of Learning Objectives

1. Utilize virtual reference service to access social work librarian
2. Evaluate alternative information sources

### Resources

The following resources were utilized and consulted during the process of crafting this companion document. It is not exhaustive, and most are not cited directly in this document, rather this bibliography highlights resources about the current scholarship pertaining to academic librarianship (the Framework in particular) and social work.

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