

INFO LIT 2.0 OR DÉJÀ VU?

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ABSTRACT

In 1999, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) convened a national task force to draft Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. ACRL has recently launched a revision to those standards. The original standards were influential because they helped advance a national need in higher education at the time: a shift to outcomes based learning. Fourteen years later, information literacy stands alongside oral and written communication, critical thinking and ethical reasoning as learning outcomes broadly acknowledged as needing to be integrated, with disciplinary content, into the curriculum. This author believes that, in contrast to the first process, the current recommendations for revision are focused on the wrong question and include the wrong people to address it. The point isn't to further define, redefine and write more, less or different learning outcomes. The challenge now is to move ahead and address the current concerns of education reform: vertical integration with disciplinary knowledge, curriculum mapping, and assessment. There are a host of challenges and libraries and librarians are perfectly poised to help.

I appreciate the invitation from *Communications in Information Literacy (CIL)* to write this essay for this special issue, “Reflecting on the Standards.” Upon reflection, my thoughts on this topic are better expressed by another title, “Info Lit 2.0 or Déjà Vu?”

In June 2012, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy Competency Standards Review Task Force submitted a recommendation that the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (herewith referred to as *Standards*), adopted in 2000 “should not be re-approved as they exist today, and should be extensively revised in the near future” (ACRL, 2012). It is worth noting that of the eight recommendations in the task force report, seven focus on the articulation of the learning outcomes; and the eighth calls for better alignment with the American Association of School Librarians’ *Standards for the 21st Century Learner* (2007).

The original *Standards* proved influential in 2000 because they had the right focus at the right time. Within the broader context of education reform, there was a pressing need for colleges and universities to articulate measurable learning outcomes that extended beyond disciplinary content knowledge. Much has changed in the past 14 years, in some part due to the influence of the work of information literacy advocates. I believe that the new recommendations are focused on the wrong issues and that the process is flawed by excluding a wide range of education professionals who are focused on the reform of the assessment of student learning.

If the challenge before the reviewers was to reword, reframe, and rehash the writing of each learning outcome, then the

recommendations would suffice. However, I see little to gain from continuing the decades-old battle of *the literacies*. That discussion is a red herring, which leads ACRL and advocates of reform down the path of professional naval gazing at a time when academic librarians should expand their focus to the challenges of undergraduate and graduate education.

Fourteen years ago, the first task force became embroiled in the debate over semantics, and advocates on all sides lobbied for their favorite phrases from lofty soapboxes. These advocates jockeyed for their favorite slice of the literacy pie: computer literacy, IT literacy, technology literacy, technoliteracy, digital literacy, visual literacy, media literacy, multimedia literacy, textual literacy, new literacies, multiple literacies, 21st-century literacy, metaliteracy, emotional literacy, civic literacy, health literacy, financial literacy, scientific literacy, ethical literacy, moral literacy, intercultural literacy, multicultural literacy, cultural literacy, international literacy, etc., etc., etc.

Educational literature abounds with authors who are trying to label and make sense of the outcomes associated with the literacy du jour. The 2000 *Standards* provided one of a handful of possible frameworks at a time when campuses struggled mightily with *defining* learning outcomes. The participation of the accreditation associations and the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) helped the original task force to focus on broader learning outcomes that addressed the widespread and enduring consensus of the need to address critical thinking. Ultimately, the task force chose an approach that applied critical thinking in the information environment.

If academic librarians determine that another approach is needed now, that is all well and good; but a new approach should move research librarians forward. I believe librarians are long past the need to define or redefine information literacy. That concept, thanks in part to the tireless work of our professional colleagues, is recognized and linked to broader national frameworks for defining student learning outcomes.

In the late 1990s, accreditation associations shifted their focus from input/output measures to the articulation of student learning outcomes. While many colleges and universities indicated they wanted students who could think critically, write, solve problems, and navigate the technologically complex information environment, few had identified metrics to measure such skills; and fewer knew how these skills and abilities might be integrated and assessed within the disciplines.

Two institutions—Alverno College and Kings College—were frequently cited for their focus on articulated student learning outcomes and developmental assessment plans. These institutions provided one of the first clearly articulated sets of student learning outcomes for skills and abilities to stand alongside content knowledge. Created with the involvement of AAHE and the Middle State Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), the Standards debuted on the national stage at a time when many other campuses sought similar products.

Advocates of information literacy have come a long way. The *Standards* provided a framework for both campuses and associations to develop their own articulation of needed skills and abilities. By reviewing specific outcomes that resonated with those advocating for critical thinking—problem-based learning, inquiry learning,

and oral and written communication, the *Standards* provided a focal point for others to determine their own definitions. In 2013, it is common for institutions to articulate their own sets of learning outcomes, informed by their own unique cultures, disciplinary or otherwise. The Task Force did not create the *Standards* to be adopted by others, and indeed numerous accreditation associations at that time stated that they do not adopt or endorse learning outcomes. These groups expect each campus to develop its own relevant outcomes.

If I have learned anything in working on this issue, it is that the process of developing standards is important for teaching faculty. Educators need to use language that resonates best with their unique campus culture and values. And it is at *this* level that individuals advocating for linkages to other literacies and learning outcomes can step up to demonstrate those connections, be they through global learning, civic engagement, the importance of affect, or the centrality of student research. This enables learning outcomes to be owned at the course and curriculum level. The *Standards* simply serve as a framework for campuses to develop their own measurable outcomes.

Over the years, information literacy learning outcomes evolved and were applied and integrated on campuses and in higher education. Thanks to a host of academics, in libraries and beyond, information literacy learning outcomes are now ubiquitous. As a result of the work of Patricia Breivik and the National Forum on Information Literacy (NFIL), information literacy is broadly recognized as a skill for lifelong learning.

Following the release of the *Standards* in 2000, almost every subsequent education initiative has called for an assessment of

learning outcomes, whether labeled as information literacy or critical thinking or communication skills. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U, 2007a) LEAP report, *College Learning for a New Global Century*, identifies information literacy as one of the essential learning outcomes that prepare students for 21st century challenges. It stands alongside other “Intellectual and Practical Skills,” such as oral and written communication, inquiry, and critical thinking (AAC&U, 2007a) The recent *Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP)* from the Lumina Foundation recommends a specific list of learning outcomes for all graduates of postsecondary institutions. As described in the report, those outcomes serve collectively as a “qualifications framework” that “illustrates clearly what students should be expected to know and be able to do once they earn their degrees—at any level” (Lumina Foundation, 2011). *The DQP* articulates specific learning outcomes “that benchmark the associate, bachelor’s and master’s degrees—which constitute the great majority of postsecondary degrees awarded by U.S. colleges and universities—regardless of a student’s field of specialization” (Lumina Foundation, 2011a).

The learning outcomes in the *DQP* are rife with outcomes that reflect those articulated in the *Information Literacy Standards*, regardless of the fact that the authors use terms such as “analytic inquiry,” “communication fluency,” and “use of information resources” (Lumina Foundation, 2007).

The influence of AAC&U is clear in the *DQP*, and it comes as no surprise when one notes the involvement of AAC&U President Carol Geary Schneider in both efforts. AAC&U was strategically positioned to

help advance this national movement to shift to outcomes-based learning, including information literacy. Fourteen years later, information literacy stands alongside oral and written communication, critical thinking, and ethical reasoning as a learning outcome that needs to be integrated with disciplinary content and embedded into curricula. The *DQP* is a national framework that defines the learning outcomes, a framework in use by institutions of higher education in 45 of 50 states (National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2012).

The *DQP* is gaining traction across different types of institutions. In its 2012 report, *Reclaiming the American Dream*, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) recommended “incorporating incentives for student performance and progress into student financial aid programs at the federal, state, and local levels and implementing the Degree Qualifications Profile to ensure credentials earned represent real knowledge and skills.”

I agree that academic libraries should collaborate with K-12 colleagues, and I co-chaired the inaugural AASL/ACRL Joint Task Force on the Educational Role of Libraries in 1998-2000. I am gratified that the *National Governor’s Association Common Core Standards* now includes information literacy learning outcomes, included in the section on English Language Arts (National Governor’s Association, 2010). The *Common Core* is sweeping the nation’s school districts. Our work with K-12 should:

- Support this specific learning outcome within the context of the Common Core, even though it is not *labeled* as information

literacy;

- Strengthen the recognition for the role of school media specialists/librarians within their schools;
- Prepare future educators to teach to the suite of information literacy learning outcomes through our work with schools of education; and
- Develop strategic programming in partnerships with our local schools to prepare students for the transition to our institutions.

Likewise, higher education has also experienced a tremendous evolution in the undergraduate curricula of research universities. The practice of undergraduate research has evolved, in large part due to the seminal work of the Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University and its publication, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities* (1998). The special one-on-one mentorship model of undergraduate research has expanded to provide broad access to more students and to better prepare all students for research projects. The traditional model of undergraduate research has been a single student mentored by a faculty member outside of the classroom (e.g., in a laboratory or in the field). The concepts of *inquiry learning* or *research-based learning within the curriculum*, as promoted through the Boyer Report, are now common. With or without the use of the phrase *information literacy*, the learning outcomes of undergraduate research and information literacy are intertwined. One need only browse the publications of the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) to see rapid development of research-based opportunities, in and out of the classroom; these opportunities begin in the first year and continue throughout students' academic

careers (CUR, 2013).

In 2010 AAC&U and CUR partnered to advance their mutually supportive agendas in the *2010 Conference on Creativity, Inquiry, and Discovery: Undergraduate Research In and Across the Disciplines*. However, of the 40 conference breakout sessions, 28 posters, and several keynote presentations to hundreds of participants, there was only one session led by librarians from the University of Las Vegas (UNLV) and one poster given by librarians from Ferrum College (AAC&U, 2010a).

As a result of the accomplishments in defining national standards, higher education organizations, accreditation associations, campuses, and disciplinary associations now face a different challenge. That challenge is how to embed learning outcomes such as information literacy, critical thinking, and related oral and written communication in a coherent developmental pathway for student learning so that the outcomes are 1) introduced, reinforced, and applied to the discipline through integration with disciplinary content; and 2) demonstrated through a culminating experience. Institutions are struggling with the need for both formative and summative assessments—ways to diagnose; intervene with authentic learning activities; and provide strategic, timely, experiential experiences for students—while at the same time meeting the need for robust program evaluations and institutional data on student success.

The information literacy *Standards* need not be revised; they should evolve into an even broader framework to guide these challenges. They should be clearly linked to the many frameworks and proposals in higher education that now include information literacy. The *Standards* should

demonstrate how learning outcomes can be developmental, mapped within any curriculum to provide a coherent pathway, and integrated with other intellectual skills. Just as the 2000 *Standards* provided a framework for articulation of learning outcomes for colleges and universities, for disciplinary and regional accreditation associations, and for higher education associations, the new leadership opportunity for the academic library profession is to evolve that framework to offer a new assessment methodology for our institutions.

To provide an example of the current challenge facing higher education, a recent project allowed me to work with the Western Associations of Schools and Colleges (WASC) on its core competencies initiative. The Western Associations Schools and Colleges, together with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), was one of the first regional accreditation associations to embrace and require evidence of information literacy competencies. This progress can be traced to the 1990s and the excellent work of the California State University (CSU) system to develop information competency standards. One of the members of the original *Standards* task force, Donald Farmer (then Vice President for Academic Affairs at Kings College), was also a consultant to WASC. In 2013, the challenge for WASC is to collect evidence to verify that students possess and demonstrate core competencies by the time of their graduation. The WASC recently launched a pilot project with a cluster of its member institutions using the *DQP* (WASC, 2012); it also offers retreats for colleges and universities in their region designed to help institutions embed and assess the core competencies of oral and

written communication, critical thinking, and information literacy (WASC, 2013).

After 15 years of promoting the expectations of critical thinking, information literacy, oral and written communication, and in spite of the integration of statements about information literacy into mission statements and general education requirements, there is little evidence that the graduates of institutions in the WASC region can demonstrate competency. Colleges and universities in the WASC region are no longer challenged to define information literacy and related learning outcomes, but rather to embed the learning outcomes across the curriculum by introducing them early on and reinforcing the objectives throughout the process. Institutions accredited by WASC are challenged to do the following:

1. Integrate core competencies with disciplinary learning outcomes,
2. Encourage faculty to teach in a way that provides authentic formative assessments for their students,
3. Develop assessments that scale, and
4. Collect program and institutional evidence of student success.

Academic librarians need to be facile with and to help advance an assessment agenda best characterized as assessment *for* learning that is ongoing, diagnostic, and formative; assessment *as* learning that actively involves students in their own assessment; and assessment *of* learning that is a summative assessment at the end of a period of time.

Colleges and universities are looking for the silver bullet: namely a standardized test for assessing integrated intellectual and

practical skills. Those who signed up for the joint project from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASC&U) and the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities (APLU) Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) are committed to the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), [Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency \(CAAP\)](#), or the Educational Testing Service ([ETS Proficiency Profile \(formerly MAAP\)](#)). An examination of the questions and/or scoring rubrics used by these tests reveals that this set of standardized tests, broadly used by large public institutions, do not include information literacy. While information literacy overlaps with critical thinking, some definitions of critical thinking—most notably, reasoning and logic—do not necessarily include information literacy. Therefore, some critical thinking instruments exclude the selection, evaluation, and use of information resources. Where were academic librarians when these initiatives evolved? Where are they now that the instruments are in place?

Instruments designed exclusively to assess information literacy competencies face a host of challenges. For example, despite its name and widespread endorsement from the library community, the Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (SAILS) does not assess information literacy. The SAILS instrument is designed to measure only a portion of the learning outcomes in information literacy; it fails to evaluate those that are more cognitively complex and impossible to measure through its multiple choice method (Radcliff, 2007). It is, however, a valid and reliable instrument to measure library skills.

The iSkills instrument from the Educational Testing Service (ETS) is designed to assess information literacy skills. The instrument

was developed in close concert with librarians and mapped to the information literacy standards. iSkills is performance-based, not multiple choice; and it includes interactive tasks that are real time and scenario-based. The instrument is designed to evaluate critical thinking in the digital environment with scores in seven sections: define, access, evaluate, manage, integrate, create, and communicate (ETS, 2013).

Although iSkills is useful in terms of measuring information literacy skills, the instrument is expensive and can be difficult to administer, especially when used with large numbers of students. Colleges and universities looking for an easy solution in the form of a standardized test are more likely to adopt one that is more broadly endorsed and that better integrates critical thinking and communication skills such as CLA, CAAP, and MAAP. For far too long the library community has gone its own way to develop an information literacy test, rather than to work with developers of these broader instruments to integrate information literacy into their products. The same is true with rubric design. While standardized tests may help institutions with accountability demands from accrediting bodies and might also be used to diagnose baseline skills to inform intervention, the true assessment of student learning is through direct assessment of academic work. E-portfolios are gaining in popularity as a preferred method of assessment, although many of the larger institutions struggle with the challenge of scale. Fifteen years ago, the word *rubric* was largely limited to the area of K-12 education. However, in 2007 AAC&U launched its Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) Project and developed a suite of nationally normed VALUE rubrics (AAC&U, 2007b). The AAC&U partnered with AASC&U and

APLU on a demonstration project to apply those rubrics to meet Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) accountability requirements (VSA, 2012); and in May 2013, those rubrics were included along with standardized tests as meeting the requirements for the VSA. In May, the VSA Oversight Board approved an expanded a set of instruments for the Student Learning Outcomes report on the College Portrait from the three pilot tests—CAAP, CLA, and ETS Proficiency Profile—to include the AAC&U VALUE rubrics. Additionally, the reporting options for each for the instruments were expanded to include both values-added and benchmarking (VSA, 2013).

There is not only a VALUE rubric for information literacy, but several of the other rubrics include language that relates to information literacy (e.g., critical thinking, inquiry and analysis, oral communication, written communication) (AAC&U, 2010b). The ACRL could partner with others to advance the use and application of rubrics to assess student learning, including information literacy. And the revision of the *Standards* should most certainly align with rubrics already in place.

Given all that I have said, I believe ACRL should take the following steps:

- Work with higher education associations and groups involved in education reform (i.e., AAC&U, APLU, AACC, POD Network, CUR, CHEA and any of the regional accreditation associations, Lumina and Teagle Foundation, and others involved in program assessment).
- Distance itself from technology associations on this issue. (These associations often have their own

agendas and are challenged to position themselves with faculty on campus).

- Abandon the focus on defining and redefining student learning outcomes but focus instead on existing national frameworks to clarify how information literacy is included within them.
- Assist others to plan for curriculum mapping by creating developmental models.
- Address issues of assessment through leadership on standardized testing (perhaps a joint project with grant funding).
- Partner to promote already developed, normed, and reliable rubrics that integrate information literacy with related skills and abilities.
- Promote research on the relationship between information literacy and student success.

We cannot afford to return to the debate about literacies and the difference between literacy and fluency. Now that information literacy as a phrase and a concept has become widespread in higher education, standing alongside critical thinking and oral and written communication, we should not go backwards and redefine within a technology framework. If ACRL wants to provide a seat at the table for our information technology colleagues who are less embedded than libraries, then by all means the new task force should proceed along its current path. However, if ACRL wants to support our academic institutions and remain vital partners in meeting the challenges of evolving faculty culture and faculty development, curriculum revision, program evaluation, and assessment of student learning, then it needs to rethink its collaborators with this revision. The ACRL

should be working with faculty groups and administrators involved in learning outcomes assessment of critical thinking, oral and written communication, undergraduate research, and, in general, undergraduate education reform. It should be inviting representatives from higher education associations leading education reform.

Our profession should be deeply involved in the national efforts of AAC&U, DQP, AACC, and a host of other higher education initiatives that currently promote information literacy, rather than involving itself with the initiatives coming out of distance education, online learning, and our colleagues in instructional technology. Education technology experts, instructional designers, and other professionals involved in online, distance, blended, and hybrid learning have a lot in common with librarians. We both recognize the need to partner on course and curriculum design, possess technology as well as pedagogical skills, and struggle to partner with faculty who believe the ownership of the course and the curriculum begins and ends with the instructor.

Successful academic libraries have developed the infrastructure necessary to step into this partnership role, and we should certainly include our instructional technology colleagues. To lead in the national arena, we must be seated at the table with those leading educational reform. One of my professional strategies is to either get a seat at the right table or to set my own table and invite others to join me. With the next step ahead for the *Standards*, ACRL is setting an important table right now, and I encourage it to invite the right people to join.

I once heard that the danger of leadership is

that first one builds something and then devotes time and energy to defending what is built.

I do not wish to defend the ACRL information literacy *Standards*.

I have moved on and so should ACRL.

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