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## Exploring the Revision of the ACRL Information Literacy Standards

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## Exploring the Revision of the ACRL Information Literacy Standards

### Abstract

The Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL) information literacy standards are currently under revision. As a result, several new concepts have been introduced that will no doubt impact information literacy across the United States. What do librarians understand about the new *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (2014) that is being developed for application in academia? How will the new *Framework* (2014), the revision to ACRL Standards (2000), impact the way librarians structure and teach their information literacy classes? This paper summarizes the revisions that have been made up until the last ACRL recommendations draft from June 2, 2014 and comments on librarian concerns with the revisions and their probable impact on the information literacy classroom.

### Keywords

information literacy, standards, Association for College and Research Libraries

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**Exploring the Revision of the ACRL Information Literacy Standards**

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**Abstract**

The Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL) information literacy standards are currently under revision. As a result, several new concepts have been introduced that will no doubt impact information literacy across the United States. What do librarians understand about the new *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (2014) that is being developed for application in academia? How will the new *Framework* (2014), the revision to ACRL Standards (2000), impact the way librarians structure and teach their information literacy classes? This paper summarizes the revisions that have been made up until the last ACRL recommendations draft from June 2, 2014 and comments on librarian concerns with the revisions and their probable impact on the information literacy classroom.

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### Understanding the new *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (2014)

“Information Literacy” is a term that was first coined by Paul Zurkowski in 1974, when as president Information Industry Association, he presented a report to the *National Commission on Libraries and Information Science* (1974) stating that “Information Literacy is not knowledge; it is concepts or ideas that enter the person’s field of perception, are evaluated and assimilated reinforcing or changing the individual’s concept of reality and/or the ability to act” (Badke, 2010, para.1). In 2000, the ACRL Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education were created. Since then they have been applied in many information literacy programs designed by librarians and teachers, often with outcomes to prepare students to become “information literate”, meaning that “a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (American College and Research Libraries, 1989, para.3).

### What has changed when viewing the revisions to the ACRL Standards (2000)?

In 2013, *Communications in Information Literacy* published a group of articles by Banks (2013), Cahoy (2013) and Hoffer, Brunetti & Townsend (2013) reflecting on the ACRL Standards(2000) and describing the work that needed to be done to revise them and develop a new theoretical framework. This new theoretical framework would be utilized to lead the charge toward establishing information literacy in academia, as a discipline, and no longer as a weakened, one-shot phenomenon with limited power to transform the undergraduate student and make them information literate.

According to Banks (2013), it was important that the ACRL Standards (2000) be substantially revised to reflect the evolving digital landscape, since over the past thirteen years the Internet had greatly changed the way in which the students researched, analyzed, shared and created information, compared with when the original Standards (2000) were developed. Banks(2013) went on to state that, when teaching information literacy, librarians needed to focus on teaching students to use librarian-vetted tools for the location and evaluation of credible information sources. Thus, they would learn to disseminate the information they gathered and be more apt to find the authentic, valid and reliable information that they needed for their research projects and papers. A theoretical basis for information literacy was also developed that introduced *transliteracy*, which was defined as the ability to critically analyze all forms of information, and *metaliteracy*, which was defined as the ability to step back while reflecting on and evaluating specific pieces of information, as well as *the threshold concepts*, which were defined as “core ideas and processes in any discipline that define the discipline” (ACRL 2014) as enhancements to the ACRL Standards (2000) (Banks, 2013; ACRL, 2014).

Hoffer, Brunetti & Townsend (2013) explained the threshold concepts, originally proposed by British theorists, Meyer & Land (2003) that were made up of five connecting concepts. These concepts were then used in the new information literacy *Framework* (2014) as a “learning and teaching theory”, that specifically informed the standards revision (p. 109). To help instructors reflect on how they taught the content of their information literacy sessions and courses to their students, they added five concepts: transformative (changing the student’s perspective), integrative (unifying concepts that are taught), irreversible (students grasping concepts), bounded (students understanding the boundaries between the disciplines) and troublesome (identifying student stumbling-blocks).

Cahoy (2013) stated that in addition to these new theoretical concepts, the heart of this new approach to information literacy was actually about “the commitment to affective, emotional learning” (p.147) and to the application of “personal information management” (p. 149) in the academic setting. This approach harked back directly to Kulthau’s (1991) information search process (ISP) theories, where the student researcher who experienced certain feelings and emotions during the search process that might hamper it, now had their process managed by the instructor, who through scaffolding, translated instruction strategies into emotionally responsive strategies that supported and enabled students and helped them to be successful with using the library and its resources.

### **What do librarians understand about the ACRL revisions and are there concerns about the new information literacy Framework (2014)?**

Many information literacy instructors are quick to point out that even though the ACRL Standards (2000) which they have used as guidelines for the creation of their information literacy programs and program outcomes are somewhat dated, their instructional practices have already moved forward with their students into the digital age. Even though the ACRL Standards (2000) might not reflect how instructors and students use the Internet, since it still presents Standards that are more effective in the age of print materials, many librarians have already implemented theories like transliteracy and metaliteracy in their information literacy sessions and programs. This is because librarians are sensitive to how their instruction must change in order to keep up with the technological changes that prepare their students for academic and future job success. Just recently, in an investigation of the new trend in academia that involves the creation of information literacy minors, the researcher found that four out of the eight schools that had implemented an information literacy minor had also developed course offerings associated with the metaliteracies e.g. digital literacy, technology/computer literacy, visual literacy and media literacy courses. Incidentally, the eight colleges mentioned above, are most certainly not the only ones that have already implemented some form of metaliteracy in their information literacy session or course, in fact, librarians like Donna Witek (2014) are already blogging about this topic. Guiding students through a range of information literacy projects while teaching the information literacy course at Ottawa University, the researcher exposed students to metaliteracy (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011) even though they might not have been aware of the meaning of this jargon term that was associated with the Library science field. However, by the completion of their final digital portfolio project, they had hands-on practice for example with evaluating the visual content of websites and utilizing the complete range of metaliteracies that are described in detail in the article, *Reframing information literacy as a metaliteracy* (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011).

Many academic librarians the researcher interviewed were not surprised at how the revisions to the ACRL Standards (2000) were being developed. They were steeped in the library science literature and had encountered Badke’s (2010) call to save information literacy from being invisible in academia by developing it in terms of theory and philosophy so that it would emerge as its own discipline and be offered with the same rigor, alongside any other academic discipline. They were not surprise, too, when Mackey & Jacobson’s (2011) metaliteracy theories; were set alongside concepts taken from the British SCONUL Seven Pillars of Information Literacy (2011) and Australian ANCIL (2011) information literacy models that had won esteem and acclaim in the international Library Science literature, and were offered to academic librarians on a theoretical platter in the revision to the ACRL Standards.

Scanning the comments section of the revised ACRL Standards (2000) website, it was clear that some librarians had major concerns about the revisions that were underway by the ACRL Information Literacy Competency for Higher Education Task Force. Librarians were concerned about how the revised Standards could be used when teaching information literacy to students in specific academic disciplines and also when addressing subject-specialist collaboration, specifically in fields like Engineering. Librarians participating in the discussion during the presentation at The Kansas Library Association's 2014 CULS conference were concerned about how the revisions relating to the affective domain would be applied in the information literacy classroom and more specifically how using emotional intelligence testing in the classroom setting might work. They had questions about how emotional intelligence testing would be used alongside or in relation to standardized information literacy tests, such as SAILS or to other in-house tests created by librarians in the classroom, because how else would you be able to enable and support students at the emotional level unless you as a classroom manager had established some baseline from which to work on managing your students' emotional reactions to the search process.

### **How might the revised ACRL Standards (2014) impact teaching information literacy in the future?**

When it comes to the revisions to the ACRL Standards (2000), there is no doubt that they will have a definite impact on how academic librarians revise their current information literacy course offerings and design new information literacy courses in the future, for their students. This is because those librarians who implemented the ACRL Standards (2000) to develop information literacy courses and course outcomes in the past will most definitely peruse these revisions to see how they can be best applied, since they had already chosen to follow the protocol of the ACRL Standards (2000) for their initial course design and will want to keep up with the revision of them. However, not everyone is going to be willing to get onto the new theoretical band-wagon. Librarians must be aware that in adopting these new theories they have to adopt the entire theory-practice package. Thus, they would also have to adapt to the teaching philosophy which is associated with those underpinning theories which inform the new Standards. For some, it would involve accepting the ideology of those involved with creating the Standards at the expense of their own ideas. For others, the philosophy might prove entirely alien.

At present, the members of the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education Taskforce, revising the ACRL Standards (2000) have a charge to:

Update the Information literacy competency standards for higher education so that they reflect the current thinking on such things as the creation and dissemination of knowledge, the changing global higher education and learning environment, the shift from information literacy to information fluency, and the expanding definition of information literacy to include multiple literacies, e.g., transliteracy, media literacy, digital literacy, etc. (ACRL, 2014).

They promised to provide librarians with theory maps and an online sandbox that would be available to those who would then have the opportunity to share and discuss plausible approaches for implementing the proposed information literacy theories in the classroom setting. This makes good sense for some those librarians who seldom think about the library science theories that they apply in practice. For those librarians, this theory would definitely present them with a steep learning curve. The idea of moving from information literacy toward information fluency is also a different and is not fully comprehended by some. It would make more sense to combine them both, rather than moving from one to the other. The reason for this suggestion is clear when examining the differences between information literacy and information fluency that Mackey & Jacobson (2011)

presents. Information literacy is described as being about developing the student's critical thinking skills that are focused on research and also about initiating and sustaining their lifelong learning skills by teaching them how to use technology. In comparison, information fluency is described as "a set of intellectual capabilities, conceptual knowledge, and contemporary skills associated with information technology" that provides students with "a deeper level of comprehension and engagement with ideas than just learning how to use a computer" (pp. 66-67). The researcher firmly believes that students receiving information literacy instruction need to develop both information literacy and fluency if they are to improve their information literacy competencies.

The Task Force recommended that the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (2000) be revised to present librarians with Standards that:

- are simplified, "allowing greater flexibility in tailoring the core competencies" (ACRL, June 2, 2014, p.4)
- limited in the use of jargon
- includes affective and emotional learning outcomes with a cognitive focus
- acknowledges transliteracy and metaliteracy theories
- moves beyond the implicit focus on format
- addresses the role of student content creators and curators
- provides continuity with the American Association of School Libraries' Standards for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learner (ACRL, June 2, 2014, pp.4-5).

However, when perusing the revisions, it appears as if the Task Force has actually disregarded the first two of their own recommendations. This is because the revisions are by no means simplified. Instead they add a theoretical layer, which actually still does include jargon from the field of Librarianship, to the already complex ACRL Standards (2000) which reads more like a legal document than a curriculum guide. However when it comes to core concept flexibility that is also supposed to be simplified, then one has to ask how is that simplification even possible when librarians are faced with a very specific and complex theory set (an inflexibility as it stands) that they have to unravel and apply in the classroom?

### Conclusion

According to the most recent Task Force Recommendations update (ACRL, June 2, 2014) the Task Force plans to make recommendations to the ACRL Board over the next year about keeping, discarding, or revising the Standards written for the next five year cycle. When considering these choices, the researcher believes that since so many academic articles and books relating to the new information literacy theories developed by the Task Force have been released or are otherwise in the process of being released, it is clear that the members on the Task Force's current information literacy agenda will be to continue to emphasize the importance of the theories proposed in the Framework (2014) to the academic community and work to make them an applicable staple to the instructor in the information literacy classroom.

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