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Facing the frames

Using the Framework as a guide for a credit-bearing information literacy course

Many librarians have written about their experiences using the "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education" in one-shot information literacy instruction and in conversations with faculty. In March 2014, Andy Burkhardt wrote on his blog about using the "Research as Inquiry" frame to guide information literacy instruction with sophomore ethnography students.[1]

This column has also provided some excellent examples of collaborative pedagogy with the Framework, such as Kathy Shields and Christine Cugliari's column in the March 2017 issue about using "Scholarship as a Conversation" to guide a sequence of instruction sessions for students in a nonprofit studies course.[2]

In January 2017, Troy Swanson wrote about a professional development course for community college faculty that encouraged them to consider the Framework as a tool for instructional design and assessment in their own courses.[3]

So far, it seems that most librarians have been using the Framework internally: as a guiding document for creating one-shot lesson plans and departmental learning outcomes, with some examples of using the Framework to talk to other stakeholders around campus.

In this column, I will share an example of using the Framework as a guide for instructional design in a credit-bearing course. Furthermore, I propose that the Framework itself can be used as a required text for students in the context of a credit-bearing information literacy course.

Designing a credit-bearing information literacy course using the Framework

From 2012 to 2016, I was a reference and instruction librarian at Pierce College in Washington State, where I taught INFO 101: Research Essentials, a two-credit online information literacy course. The course is offered every semester as a general elective. Although the credits do not apply to specific programs or requirements beyond Pierce College, it is a popular course because it helps students meet the 12-credit threshold for financial aid eligibility, and the online course format provides flexibility for community college students who are juggling jobs, caretaking, and other responsibilities.

The Framework is explicitly nonlinear. As it states in the introduction, the Framework is "based on a cluster of interconnected core concepts, with flexible options for implementation, rather than on a set of standards or learning outcomes, or any prescriptive enumeration of skills."[4] The Framework presents the frames alphabetically, without giving any particular weight to one frame or the other, and without prescribing a certain way to move through the frames.

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In the summer of 2016, I redesigned my INFO 101 course using the Framework as themes for weekly modules. I needed to design a way for students to move through the frames in a linear, time-bound fashion. I retained and modified several of my existing assignments, but reorganized them to fit into the themes of the weekly modules. The course was eight weeks in length, so I assigned a frame to each week, using Searching as Strategic twice (split into two parts), with the eighth-week set aside to complete the course's final assignments. My course outline is provided below, but it is important to stress that this is just one way of arranging the frames—not necessarily the "right" way.

• Week 1: Information Creation as a Process
• Week 2: Authority is Constructed and Contextual
• Week 3: Information Has Value
• Week 4: Research as Inquiry
• Week 5: Searching as Strategic Exploration (Part 1 of 2)
• Week 6: Searching as Strategic Exploration (Part 2 of 2)
• Week 7: Scholarship as Conversation
• Week 8: Final Reflection

Using the Framework as a required text

Students were not required to read the entire Framework document from top to bottom. However, it was valuable to begin each module with the definition of the week's Frame, followed by a mini-lecture (e.g., a few paragraphs of text in my own words or a two-to-three minute video) that explained how the learning activities for the week aligned with the concept presented in the frame.

Learning activities

All of the assignments and activities in INFO 101 related back to the course-level learning outcomes, which have been in place since the course was approved by the Pierce College curriculum committee several years ago (see sidebar on page 356). The librarians who teach INFO 101 use the same outcomes,

but they have autonomy to determine how to meet the outcomes as they see fit, which results in some variation from instructor to instructor.

When I began teaching the course in 2013, I followed the suit of previous instructors and used Scott Lanning's *Concise Guide to Information Literacy* as a required text.[5] It was helpful to use Lanning's text and its accompanying activities as I learned how to navigate credit-bearing instruction. While I appreciated the structure the text provided, I found it limiting. In the midst of campus-wide conversations about adopting open education resources, I also felt uneasy about requiring students to purchase a textbook. For these reasons, I discarded the text after two quarters.

As I began to redesign my course with the Framework in mind, I found it easy to align some of my existing learning activities within each frame-themed module. What changed for me was drawing students' attention explicitly to the theory undergirding the learning activities.

For example, I feel we had a much richer discussion about Aaron Swartz and his life and activism because it was rooted in the context of Information Has Value. Librarians often try to highlight the cost of resources purchased by the library, but using the Framework allowed me to refocus the conversation away from the library's budget and back to the students' own information privilege. Swartz downloaded articles from JSTOR not because he wanted to read them, but because he wanted to bring them out from behind the paywall. I asked students to consider: Why would that matter? What were Swartz's motivations? Was his potential punishment just? What are the implications of "access or lack of access to information sources," as indicated in the knowledge practices of the Information Has Value frame?

In the Authority is Constructed and Contextual module, I provided several sources for students to review and evaluate, including scholarly articles, a news article from NPR, a blog post, and a book review. I asked students to explain which of these sources would be

most or least helpful in a research paper, and to explain why some sources were more helpful than others. As expected, students were quick to label some sources "good" (the scholarly sources), while others were "bad" because they were informally written or biased (the blog post, NPR).

When giving feedback on this assignment, I highlighted the idea that all sources of information have a purpose and a context, and some are more helpful than others, depending on the information need. Book reviews, for example, can be useful in some circumstances,

but they are usually too brief to be helpful for research papers. In my comments, I referred back to the text of the Framework to remind students that "authoritative content may be packaged formally or informally and may include sources of all media types."

In the Searching as Strategic Exploration module, students read an article from *The Washington Post* about Google's algorithm bias that quoted Safiya Noble, a researcher at UCLA who studies library and information science and social justice.

In the article, Noble asks, "If Google is not responsible for its algorithm, who is?"[6] I put this question to students and their responses varied. Some students felt that Google inevitably reflects the racial prejudice of its users (and therefore isn't directly responsible for seemingly racist results), while other students argued that Google needed to be more proactive. Many students commented that this reading made them think about Google in new ways.

Assessment

For their final assignment, students were asked to write a reflective paper self-assessing their learning and growth in the course. The paper had several prompts, including "Which two frames had the biggest impact on your learning?" Students were encouraged to go back through the course modules and review their work to determine which two frames to discuss in their final reflection.

While every frame was mentioned at least once, the most popular frame mentioned in students' papers was Authority is Constructed and Contextual. Overall, students had a lot to say about their work in the course and what it meant to them, and I was impressed with their responses. While self-assessment of learning is not enough to deeply measure all learning outcomes, their comments were indicative of thoughtful engagement with course concepts.

Modifications and possibilities

In INFO 101, students were given opportunities to practice research skills like developing keywords, searching for information

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Learning outcomes

INFO 101 has six course-level learning outcomes. These outcomes are used whenever the course is taught, regardless of how it is taught. By the end of the course, learners will be able to:

1. Identify and focus an academically appropriate topic or research problem. Apply information seeking theory in order to retrieve and synthesize meaningful content

2. Navigate a variety of information systems and structures, including classification systems, catalogs, and databases, in order to access information in a variety of formats.

3. Articulate the theory behind, and demonstrate the application of, a repertoire of creative and flexible information seeking strategies in order to solve a problem in a focused manner.

4. Analyze information in order to evaluate quality, relevance, and perspective.

5. Synthesize new ideas into current thoughts and cite sources in order to use information responsibly and ethically.

6. Identify the ideas and perspectives behind current information issues, such as censorship, intellectual freedom, intellectual property, and evolving information technology in order to recognize the role of information in society.

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using the open web and databases, and citing sources in scholarly formats. Every skill-based activity was contextualized through the Framework (for example, developing search strategies as part of Searching as Strategic Exploration, citing sources as part of Scholarship as Conversation, and so on). However, it was difficult to authentically assess these skills because students did not have to produce a research product (like an annotated bibliography or a research paper).

Future modifications to this course could include additional assignments that require students to synthesize these skills in a more authentic way.

This course only used the definitions of the frames as required texts with students. Students were not required to read or reflect on the knowledge practices or dispositions in the Framework. This made the text of the Framework easier for students to digest, but it also took away some of the context of the document.

Instead of determining the learning outcomes for students ahead of time, the entire document of the Framework could be shared with students, and students could select specific knowledge practices and dispositions that they want to explore within the context of the course. This might be an especially effective modification in an upper-division or discipline-specific information literacy course.

Much of the conversation around the Framework has focused on its implications for curriculum design in one-shot information literacy instruction.

In the future, I hope to see more librarians writing about how the Framework has influenced their instruction in credit-bearing information literacy courses. In my experience, using the Framework in a credit-bearing course took conversations in new directions, grounded practice and theory, and helped students think more deeply about their learning.

Notes

1. Andy Burkhardt, "Threshhold concepts in practice: An example from the classroom," last modified March 4, 2014, http://andyburkhardt.com/2014/03/04/threshold-concepts-in-practice-an-example-from-the-classroom/.

2. Kathy Shields and Christine Cugliari, "'Scholarship as Conversation': Introducing students to research in nonprofit studies," *C&RL News* 78, no. 3 (2017): 137-141.

3. Troy Swanson, "Sharing the ACRL Framework with faculty: Opening campus conversations," *C&RL News* 78, no. 1 (2017): 12–48.

4. "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education," ACRL, accessed March 24, 2017, www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.

5. Scott Lanning, *Concise Guide to Information Literacy* (ABC-CLIO, 2012)

6. Ben Guarino, "Google faulted for racial bias in image search results for black teenagers," *The Washington Post,* last modified June 10, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/06/10/google-faulted-for-racial-bias-in-image-search-results-for-black-teenagers/. *z*

ACRL Framework for Information Literacy Toolkit

The ACRL Framework for Information Literacy Toolkit is a freely available professional development resource that can be used and adapted by both individuals and groups in order to foster understanding and use of the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education. The toolkit is available on the ACRL LibGuides site at http://acrl.libguides.com/framework/toolkit.

The toolkit contains four modules: Finding Time to Engage the Framework, The Framework's Structure, Foundations of the Framework, and Strategies for Using the Framework. A fifth module, Collaboration and Conversations with the Framework, is currently in development. Each module includes essential questions, learning outcomes, and active learning resources, such as guided reading activities, discussion prompts, and lists of key readings.