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What You Need to Know about the New ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education: A Summary

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1. **What is the Framework?**

    It is a philosophical overlay, a more theoretical approach to information literacy leading to information fluency than the ACRL Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education.

2. **Are the Standards now obsolete?**

    The Standards were published by ACRL in 2000 and were meant to be revised cyclically. The Framework revises them in 2015 to reflect current thinking on the:
    - creation and dissemination of knowledge;
    - changing higher education learning environment;
    - shift from information literacy to information fluency; and
    - expanding information literacy to include multiple literacies such as digital and media.

3. **What are the key differences between the Standards and the Framework?**

    The Standards are proscriptive actions with specific learning outcomes for each standard, a model prevalent for accreditation in some social science and science disciplines. The Framework is a series of frames, or threshold concepts, that are conceptual. The learning outcome of the Standards focused on the use of tools in research. The Frames are meant to be more open to critical thinking strategies about concepts and applications to information resources more broadly.

4 Has the Framework changed the definition of information literacy?

The Framework adds a layer of metacognition to the definition that is a critical self-reflection crucial to self-directed learning, called metaliteracy, applied not only to the use of information but also its production, as consumers and creators of information participating collaboratively.

The Standards' definition is: "a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (ACRL, 2000).

The Framework's definition is: "the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning" (ACRL, 2015).

5. Are there new elements in the Framework that were not in the Standards?

There are two: metaliteracy and threshold concepts.

Metaliteracy "offers a renewed vision of information literacy as an overarching set of abilities in which students are consumers and creators of information who can participate successfully in collaborative spaces" (ACRL, 2015).

Threshold concepts are those transformative ideas in any discipline that are portals to understanding the ways of thinking within that discipline. This grasping of the ideas is irreversible and marks a comprehension that is an initiation into any discipline's culture, opening the avenue to acquire expertise in that subject. The Framework calls these threshold concepts "frames."

6. How do the Standards compare to the Frames?

There are five standards with objective learning outcomes that lend themselves to assessment relatively easily. They are:

- determine the nature and extent of information needed;
- access needed information effectively and efficiently;
- evaluate information and sources critically and incorporate into the knowledge base and value system;
- use information effectively to accomplish specific purpose; and
- understand economic, legal and social issues surrounding information and access and use information ethically and legally.

There are six conceptual frames, or threshold concepts, that are more difficult to assess. Each frame lists knowledge practices (proficiencies developed from comprehending threshold concepts) and dispositions (preferences and attitudes allowing capabilities to be realized). Rubrics may be a helpful way to assess the learning of these more challenging and sophisticated concepts. The six frames are:

- authority is constructed and contextual;
- information creation as process;
- information has value;
- research as inquiry;
- scholarship as conversation; and
- searching as strategic exploration.

7. What are the advantages of the Framework?

- Focuses on critical thinking strategies not just prospective actions.
- Considers students as active participants in collaborative knowledge communities.
- Includes multiple literacies (such as digital and media) as part of the information landscape.
- Adapts to different learning styles.
- Includes strategies for evaluation of formal scholarly sources as well as informal information.

8. Will the addition of the Framework change librarians' teaching of information literacy in libraries?

The Framework shifts to libraries the burden of spelling out specific learning outcomes, which may be more dynamic, to which the frames may point. If your library has developed objectives and learning outcomes from the Standards that are clearly linked to a progression of information literacy learning at different levels of higher education and critical thinking incorporated into research you may not anticipate drastic changes. Expect creative ideas to emerge at conferences and in the literature as librarians grapple with the new Framework.

9. Is there anything that librarians should be alert to that is radically different in the Framework from the Standards that preceded it?

From the perspective of critical information literacy the Framework opens new opportunities for skepticism of established authority in scholarship. It encourages students to ask relevant questions about origins and context and suitability of information for current information needs. It considers authority

to be contextual, constructed in various communities, encouraging skepticism of the systems that elevated that authority and the information created by it. It does not uncritically recognize and respect authority without critically questioning it.

10. What is the intention of the more philosophical and theoretical language of the Framework?

This philosophical language aims at developing a more conceptual understanding of the universe of information. The idea of threshold concepts as characteristics of strong teaching and learning environments in the disciplines emerged about a decade ago. It provides a common language for talking to faculty and others in higher education that can transform the conversation about learning and teaching and bring a new synergy to librarians' complimentary roles as educators. ☩

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