# College-Level Information Literacy Framework: teacher librarians can prepare students

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**Abstract**
*U.S. K12 education increasingly emphasizes the need for students to be college and career ready; nevertheless, too many student come unprepared to learn effectively. This paper discusses the roles that teacher librarians can play in facilitating such readiness, especially in light of information and digital literacy. First, the American Association of School Librarians standards for 21st century learners and the Association of College and Research Libraries new Information Literacy Framework are detailed, noting implications for education and librarians. Next, models of effective articulation do exist, and strategies for optimizing articulation should be considered. Teacher librarians should collaborate with their post-secondary librarian counterparts; by articulating curriculum either to identify equivalencies or to build upon prior learning, librarians can promote seamless transfer from one level to another – including to the workplace.*

**Keywords**: information literacy, academic librarians, teacher librarians, curriculum, collaboration

## Introduction

College readiness has become a hot buzz word in education circles as post-secondary institutions decry students' inability to read, analyze, and communicate critically. Post-secondary librarians too often assert that students do not come into the library with these skills. Oakleaf and Owen (2010) examined the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) learning standards, and noted how the standards applied to sources that students use in college: websites, articles, books, reference materials, and data. Therefore, the potential for students to be college ready seems feasible.

Librarians are the logical articulators since they work with all students and all curricular areas, and witness the developmental aspects of learning. They can act as institutional representatives and catalysts, aware of student and faculty needs, practices, and parameters. However, the curriculum for teaching information literacy is seldom articulated, and even few scope-and-sequence information literacy curriculum are systematically implemented in K-12 or higher education settings. Part of that situation is the result of unsystematic library programs due to a lack of school librarians. Nevertheless, models of

effective articulation do exist, and strategies for optimizing articulation should be considered. School librarians and associated stakeholders can point to these endeavours as they seek support from decision makers.

Furthermore, for students to be college ready, it makes sense for school librarians to collaborate with their post-secondary librarian counterparts. By identifying needed knowledge, skills and dispositions for college success, librarians can determine what curriculum should be provided in K-12 settings.  Furthermore, by articulating curriculum either to identify equivalencies or to build upon prior learning, librarians can promote seamless transfer from one level to another. Both types of librarians can work with their respective communities to advance the conversation about learning expectations and the roles that they can play. These conversations can inform standards development and deployment. Furthermore, academic librarians should lobby loudly for school librarians to be present and active at every educational level, insuring that K-12 students have the opportunities needed to meet K-12 American Association of School Librarians (AASL) learning standards, set forth in 2007, and be ready to address higher education information literacy.

## Standards and Frameworks for Information Literacy and Learning

Developing and implementing literacies/learning standards requires deep analysis about the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that one needs in order to be what was traditionally called the "educated" person. What does it mean to be educated? What does it mean to be literate? The definitions for both terms have changed greatly over time. Being educated could mean having the equivalent of a high school diploma and a European tour, to "An educated person is one who has undergone a process of learning that results in enhanced mental capability to function effectively in familiar and novel situations in personal and intellectual life" (Mohanan, 2005). Over the years, being literate has meant being able to decipher a known text (e.g., the Bible) to being able to write original text. Now literacy implies that one can create knowledge communicated through emerging technologies. Since libraries deal with recorded information, they can legitimately ask what knowledge, skills and dispositions are needed to consume and produce recorded information that contributes to society? And furthermore, to what level, how well, should students be able to do this?

In the larger context, today's world is sometimes labelled the information society, or the knowledge society because of the vast amount of available information as well as the need to sort and manage it effectively. Business has increasingly realized the value of intellectual capital; information has an economic value and requires competent professionals capable of managing information. As early as the 1991 SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) report, governmental agencies noted the need for employees who can locate, interpret and organize information, communicate information, create documents, solve problems, work with a variety of technology, and know how to acquire new knowledge.

In sum, for today's students to survive and thrive in society, they need to make informed decisions and act effectively and responsibly. The preconditions for those processes include the ability to determine what information is needed, how to find and evaluate it, and how to comprehend and interpret it. Because today's society raises new issues, memorizing old answers to daily problems does not suffice, and even old responses to recurring issues may

result in negative consequences. In short, individuals need to keep learning – and know how to learn. In the process, individuals are creating new knowledge

*American Association of School Librarians*
The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) 2007 Standards for the 21st Century Learner were predicated on the ideas articulated in the paragraph above. The term "information literacy" occurs in just one paragraph, noting only that it has become more complex: "Multiple literacies, including digital, visual, textual, and technological, have now joined information literacy as crucial skills for this century" (p. 3). Interestingly, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (2011) has adopted the wording of "media and information literacy" to capture the idea of content and format. Even the term "information" can be tricky to define, let alone "data." Is a sunset data or information? The American Association of School Librarians (2007) cleverly sidestepped the problematic term "information literacy" when it used learners as its linchpin; they stated that "learners use skills, resources, & tools to:
- Inquire, think critically, and gain knowledge.
- Draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations, and create new knowledge.
- Share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society.
- Pursue personal and aesthetic growth." (p. 3)
- Each standard is then parsed into specific indicators that demonstrate learner skills, dispositions in action, responsibilities, and self-assessment strategies.

It should be noted that academic librarians also run into the stumbling block of the term "information literacy," particularly since it wasn't in general parlance at the time of many professors' own academic preparation. Academians seem to be more comfortable with the terms "critical thinking" (which usually refers to the ability to comprehend and analyze a given document, but which excludes the ability to locate relevant and worthy documents) and "research skills" (which does not address the ability to respond to unintended information problems).

The AASL standards also cleverly begins the discussion by asserting common beliefs (or described as core values), which serve as preconditions for the learning standards: reading, inquiry-based learning, explicitly taught ethical behavior, technology skills, equitable access, expanding information demands, social context of learning, and the importance of school libraries. In recent years AASL has emphasized inquiry-based learning, which does not always align well with notions of high-stakes testing, although it has great potential since it typically involves students reading novel (as in new to them) informational text. The last belief underscores the contribution of school libraries: convenient equitable access to rich resources, and collaborative instruction and practice in using these resources.

These beliefs or pre-suppositions could well be mapped into higher education's conceptual frameworks. The beliefs also make sense in the academic community as they stand, with the proviso of the academic librarian assuming the role of resource-rich collaborator. Fortunately, university library systems tend to assign subject liaisons to provide a dependable source of information and information literacy processes. The high stakes testing environment does not

exist to the same extent in higher education, except for some national praxis tests. However, even then, few faculty need to coach students in test-taking. Furthermore, programmatic comprehensive examinations are usually locally designed, and should reflect pre-identified student learning outcomes.

*Association of College and Research Libraries*

At the post-secondary level, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) decided to revise its 2000 information literacy standards, re-conceptualizing them in light of emerging technology, educational trends, and workplace needs. The result was a set of "frames" or intellectual "lenses" with threshold concepts that defined essential ideas about information and its use:
- Authority is constructed and contextual
- Information creation as process
- Information has value
- Research as inquiry
- Scholarship is a conversation
- Searching is strategic

Each frame includes a description of the concept, followed by knowledge practices (which can be considered as representative indicators), dispositions, and sample learning activities and assessments. This approach helped to align the AASL standards with these higher education frames. For example, under the frame of searching, one knowledge practice is using different types of searching language appropriate, and one disposition is understanding that first attempts at search do not always produce adequate results. Academic librarians are intended to reflect on these frames, and use them to drive deep conversations with academic communities about the nature of information literacy, and how to help students understand and apply these concepts within and across academic domains from the freshman level to graduation in a developmentally appropriate manner. Building on the typical academic model, some competencies should be expected of all students, as it is with general education requirements. Students with a major should be able to apply those competencies at a deeper level within their area of specialty. For instance, mathematics majors should be able to think and solve intellectual problems as a mathematician; they should be able to identify, access, and use the canon of mathematics information sources.

Standards serve as concrete measures of competencies. Librarians use their informed perspective, taking into account the environments in which they work, to state what students need in order to be prepared for the next rung in life relative to recorded information. Since recorded information is used in all curricula, it makes sense that librarians should collaborate with the rest of their educational community to optimize the likelihood that students can meet those standards. To that end, AASL, ACRL and other library organizations are wisely and pro-actively re-examining the tough questions of learning, literacy, and education, and librarians' roles in addressing these issues.  Librarians can use AASL's learning standards and ACRL's framework as springboard for thought, particularly in terms of articulating learning. The  result is a developmentally appropriate set of standards that reflects lifelong engagement with, and creation of recorded information. The implementation of those standards is another question, needing to identify the resources and services required to provide the conditions for students to meet the standards.

**Articulation**

In the final analysis, learning should truly be lifelong, and it makes sense that K-16 formal education should try to build and articulate (i.e., compare across levels) curriculum either to identify equivalencies or to build upon prior learning. That articulation process tries to avoid too much overlap, and to promote seamless transfer from one level to another. To a degree, the concept of college-readiness assumes that kind of articulation in that high school graduates should possess the skills and knowledge to be able to learn and apply post-secondary curriculum.

Assuming that entering college students gained literacy based on the AASL learning standards, what information literacy competencies should post-secondary librarians expect those students to demonstrate? Many such librarians would probably respond with a sigh, and say, "none." Nevertheless, academic librarians could set baseline expectations, and then identify next-step literacies/learning standards. Then school librarians and other teaching faculty can provide the opportunities for students to meet reasonable learning standards through instruction and practice, and provide timely interventions, so that graduating students are indeed prepared to survive and thrive in college and today's society – and improve it.

To that end, curriculum mapping offers a viable way to build the information digital literacy curriculum. School librarians should lead this effort, with administrative support and participation by the entire faculty. Each grade or department reviews information literacy outcomes, and identifies their own learning activities that address the outcome. This basis then leads to determining delivery details such as space, time, resources, instructors, and assessment.

Because information literacy undergirds lifelong learning, school librarians and other educators should also think about articulating information literacy curriculum between school levels, such as elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to local post-secondary institutions. By providing a seamless information and digital literacy curriculum, educators can build on prior experiences and optimize learning.

Especially as policy makers are pushing career and college readiness, the need for articulated information literacy curriculum becomes even more apparent. Technically, these literacy outcomes should be met, at least at a basic level, by the time that the student finishes sophomore year because junior college courses and technical courses may be educational options for students. In such cases, junior and senior students can focus on applying their literacies in light of specific disciplines such as economics or history. Such articulation demands that librarians build relationship across educational borders. For instance, middle school librarians can work with their feeder elementary school librarians to make sure that students from various sites have a level playing field when they enter middle school. In the process, elementary school librarians can compare their information and digital literacy curriculum, and share beneficial practices that support all students. Librarians can also share student assignment and sample work, which provides authentic evidence of developmentally appropriate learning activities. In some cases, librarians may discover that students in earlier grades have similar assignments at higher grades – and the products may also reflect more advanced knowledge than was assumed.

**Facilitating Articulation**

The AASL/ACRL Interdivisional Committee on Information Literacy focuses on articulation of information literacy between K-12 and higher education, examining both the new ACRL and the AASL standards. At the 2015 ALA conference, held in Las Vegas, the committee sponsored a session on successful articulation efforts.

Rationale: Academic and school librarians serve as liaisons to their respective institutions. They perform parallel functions at their sites: collection management and instruction to support curriculum. They also theoretically serve all their parallel respective constituencies: students, faculty, administrators, and selected community members (e.g., parents, alumni, local agencies, etc.).

Steps:
1. Identify counterpart librarian:
   − feeder schools/ school for graduates
   − library staff contact information

2. Make initial contact
   − schedule meeting
   − find common ground
   − share informal needs and successes

3. Librarians gather data about their respective institutions:
   − library mission, resources, facilities, staffing, instruction (including documents), library usage
   − clientele demographics, information literacy competency, curriculum, typical library-related assignments
   − analysis of data if possible, such as information literacy gaps
   − means to address information literacy gaps

4. Set up follow-up contact meeting:
   − share data
   − share information literacy instruction/learning activities
   − determine juncture of information literacy competencies
   − design method of informing respective faculty of issue (e.g., speak to each other's faculty about information literacy needs and gaps; include IHE students who can talk with their high schools about information literacy needs)

5. (optional) Set up regional librarians meeting:
   - each librarian identifies and contacts peers
   - arrange meeting time/place/PR/supplies
   - agenda: discuss efforts to this point by original librarian pair, set up way to communicate and coordinate efforts regionally

6. Librarians work with their respective faculty
   - share information literacy standards and issues with respective faculty through staff development/meetings

- identify curriculum
- design instruction
- implement instruction and assess process and results

7. Set up follow-up contact (F2F or online)
- share efforts and results
- bring a faculty member (and student) to the meeting to share experiences and broaden support base
- discuss how to involve more faculty and articulate information literacy instruction
- develop a database or repository structure to gather information literacy instructional documents (e.g., assignments, presentations, assessments)

8. Follow-up faculty meeting between sites
- share information literacy efforts by subject domain
- articulate information literacy standards, instruction, and assignments

9. Librarians and teachers work with their respective site personnel
- develop a school wide information literacy initiative: standards, learning outcomes, scope and sequence
- develop a repository of learning activities and assessments

10. Hold regional summit about information literacy
- assess student learning (improvement, hopefully)
- train others in use of repository/database

## Conditions for Learning

It should be noted, however, that these standards, be they at the K-12 or post-secondary level, do need to have the pre-conditions set in place, including high-quality library programs of resources and services -- and professional librarians to plan and implement those programs. To that end, academic librarians should lobby loudly for school librarians to be present and active at every educational level, insuring that K-12 students have the opportunities needed to meet AASL standards. Even though librarians are seldom the top decision-makers, they can yield powerful influence when both school and academic librarians support articulation between educational levels. Strong professional partnerships can provide informed support.

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## Biography

Dr. Lesley Farmer, Professor at California State University Long Beach, coordinates the Librarianship program. She earned her M.S. in Library Science at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, and received her doctorate in Adult Education from Temple University. Dr. Farmer has worked as a teacher-librarian in K-12 school settings, public, special and academic libraries. She edits the International Federation of Library Associations' School Libraries and Literacy/Reading Sections blogs. A frequent presenter and writer for the profession, she won IASL's Research Award, American Library Association's Phi Beta Mu Award for library education, and Library Instruction Round Table's Librarian Recognition Award. She is also a Fulbright scholar. Dr. Farmer's research interests include digital citizenship, information literacy, collaboration, assessment and data analysis. Her recent books are *Introduction to Reference and Information Services in Today's School Libraries* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014) and *Library Services for Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders* (ALA, 2013).