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Review of *Disciplinary Applications of Information Literacy Threshold Concepts*

**Edited by Samantha Godbey, Susan Beth Wainscott,
and Xan Goodman**

Reviewed by Carolyn L. Cunningham, University of Texas

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Book Reviews edited by Jaqulyn Williams

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When the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) published the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* in February 2015, academic librarians began processing what the new paradigm would mean for their library instruction. The book *Disciplinary Applications of Information Literacy Threshold Concepts* builds a bridge from the *Framework* to everyday information literacy practice. As the editors discuss in the introduction, the ACRL *Framework* was the first introduction to the idea of threshold concepts for most librarians. Although we have had the *Framework* for several years now, many publications about implementing the *Framework* are written in the theoretical or conceptual realm. This book plants the reader firmly in the classroom. Readers finish each chapter with new ideas for activities or strategies for working with faculty.

Most chapters briefly introduce threshold concepts and the *Framework*. These introductions can be a bit redundant when reading the book cover-to-cover instead of using it as a reference source in which the reader consults one section at a time. Readers can get help with a specific frame or search the table of contents for a specific discipline, which range from the performing arts to health science to social work. This reviewer appreciated that several chapters have Creative Commons licenses, which simplifies the process of sharing and utilizing them in our professional communities and beyond.

While it may seem like reading about library instruction in disciplines other than one's own could be uninteresting or confusing, the authors do a superb job of describing their challenges and solutions in ways that are applicable to many classrooms. This approachability is also notable because some chapters are co-authored by disciplinary faculty, who may be more accustomed to writing in the arcane parlance of their own fields. While some chapters contain full-blown activities with materials included, others give a narrative walk-through of the librarian's process or experience providing instruction in a discipline or tangling with the *Framework*. Instead of feeling like an overly academic collection of essays, this reviewer was pleasantly surprised at the liveliness of the case studies and activities.

The foreword was written by Ray Land, one of the creators of the threshold concept analytical framework. Land situates *Disciplinary Applications of Information Literacy Threshold Concepts* in the ongoing discourse around how we understand and influence our students' transformation into disciplinary experts. If readers are interested in learning about the conversation outside of librarianship, this foreword is a useful orientation to the ideas of

threshold concepts and troublesome learning as they are discussed by researchers in education and adjacent fields.

The editors' lively writing style in the introduction makes the reader immediately feel at home amidst the complex jargon of information literacy. One need not re-read the *Framework* document before starting this book. Brief introductory statements are made and helpful definitions are given about threshold concepts and the *Framework*. The editors make a point to explain that while the sections are organized around the six frames, the authors of the chapters were encouraged to explore threshold concepts in ways that made sense for their circumstances, rather than strictly align their discussions with the current version of the *Framework* as published by ACRL (p. 6). This approach leaves the door open for the text to remain useful if/when the *Framework* document changes. By organizing around the frames, the editors provided familiar access points for librarians to dip in and explore a single frame. But readers will find that the chapters themselves play with the relationship of the frames and threshold concepts across disciplines. For example, one author wrestles with applying the "Research as Inquiry" frame in visual arts courses that do not assign a written research product. This librarian stresses the importance of knowing the practices of visual artists to apply the frame appropriately. It looks very different from the author working with nursing students to employ "Searching as Strategic Exploration" in the concrete world of evidence-based practice searching.

It is refreshing to read about the *Framework* in a book that attempts to make threshold concepts approachable to all levels of librarian. While some chapters explore frames as threshold concepts themselves, other chapters leave that familiar territory to tackle disciplinary threshold concepts. These discussions appeal to librarians' sense of curiosity and life-long learning, even when it is outside our usual disciplines. Because each section may tackle a breadth of disciplines and use a variety of approaches, it would have been helpful to have a key to what readers could expect in each chapter (e.g., appended activities). The straight-forward presentation, however, is still valuable.

The major sections bring together chapters discussing each frame. For readers seeking guidance on a certain frame, it could be beneficial to read all the chapters in that section, even if they have unfamiliar disciplinary lenses. The "Authority Is Constructed and Contextual" section is a good example of this variety. The chapters present unique discussions of how to introduce students to the work of evaluating authority. The

importance of collaborating with faculty is highlighted, as it is imperative for librarians to design information literacy outcomes to fit the ideas of authority in each discipline. There is no one-size-fits-all idea of authority or expertise, as these chapters demonstrate. This section contains discussions of the roles of social justice and intersectionality in talking about authority, as well as an excellent exploration of “authority” versus “expertise” (p. 28). This section has a natural connection with the chapters discussing the “Scholarship as Conversation” frame. How authority is recognized and how scholarly communication happens in a discipline is an important threshold concept for students to master in their area. Readers are presented with discussions of recognizing others’ contributions, the ways major discoveries and ideologies change over time in the disciplines, and appreciating the diversity of perspectives.

Section two focuses on “Information Creation as a Process.” These chapters are notable for their practicality. The reader explores this frame through the lived experiences of librarians working with students who are required to learn not only how to distinguish between many information types and evaluate them but also to create their own information products for different audiences. These chapters include helpful discussions of how to tackle format, formal versus informal information, and other topics during instruction sessions. This section also presents examples of faculty collaborations that utilize core concepts from the disciplines, instead of centering the ACRL frames. The authors demonstrate how librarians can make faculty and students more comfortable by speaking the language of the discipline. Curriculum mapping and organically unearthing information literacy competencies are presented as useful tools for librarians who want to initiate conversations with faculty.

Section three discusses the “Information Has Value” frame. The chapters are wide ranging but provide an interesting diversity of perspectives. A few of the chapters tackle the important topic of the reality of researching without access to library databases. One author worked with students providing research to community partners who are not affiliated with the university. Through this work, students learn about information privilege and open access resources. Another author works with geoscience students to create personal information access plans to meet their professional information needs after graduation. This section also includes a unique perspective from the UK that includes a gamification activity. This author provides a useful discussion of critical pedagogy through the creation of an information privilege board game.

Section four engages with the “Research as Inquiry” frame. These chapters again underscore the necessity of collaborating with faculty and developing subject expertise. Knowledge of research methods, modes of inquiry, and disciplinary standards are stressed. Several authors also mention the growing practice of interdisciplinary inquiry. One example is a thorough examination of leading information literacy sessions within the practice of feminist pedagogy and critical inquiry. Suggestions for implementing feminist pedagogy during one-shots are provided.

The final section examines the “Searching as Strategic Exploration” frame. These chapters help the reader understand the importance of engaging the whole student, intellectually and affectively, in the classroom as they learn how to search effectively. From guiding students through the process of searching for primary sources using outdated language or delving into empirical research in highly specific databases, these chapters situate librarians at the center of how students evolve beyond the trial-and-error techniques they may typically use in web search engines.

These major sections give the reader a rich overview of *Framework*-oriented library instruction across the disciplines. The variety in the chapters helps the book avoid the one-note tone and style that can make our professional literature feel like a chore to read. As a parting word in the foreword, Land gives us something to consider in future research: assessment. As he explains, the disciplines themselves are ever-transforming. To get a better picture of how our instruction efforts are landing, librarians must be up to date on the state of learning in our disciplines and be responsive in our teaching. This reviewer would be eager to read future publications that include discussions of assessment and take a similar path of highlighting diverse voices and unique approaches.