STUDENT AND LIBRARIAN PERSPECTIVES ON INFORMATION LITERACY: FINDING OPPORTUNITY IN DIVERGENCE

HEIDI JULIEN, SUNY AT BUFFALO

DON LATHAM, FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

MELISSA GROSS, FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY – COMMUNITY COLLEGES

- In the U.S., more than half of post-secondary institutions are community colleges

- Community colleges face unique challenges:
  - mission (education for all)
  - students from a wide variety of backgrounds, with wide range of post-graduation goals, many study part-time, many take breaks or leave without a degree or credential, may be older, employed, responsible for children, have limited financial resources, need remedial education
  - often large numbers of adjunct faculty
    - Dougherty, Lahr, & Morest 2017; Rosenbaum, Ahearn, & Rosenbaum 2016

DEFINITION OF IL

- "Information literacy 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 2016, 3)

- ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education has shifted information literacy (IL) from a skills-based approach to a conceptual one, based on threshold concepts, knowledge practices, and dispositions

FRAMEWORK THRESHOLD CONCEPTS

(1) Authority Is Constructed and Contextual

(2) Information Creation as a Process

(3) Information has Value

(4) Research as Inquiry

(5) Scholarship as Conversation

(6) Searching as Strategic Exploration

- These concepts are further elaborated through an articulated set of knowledge practices and dispositions.

GOALS OF THE STUDY

- Investigate the instructional practices of librarians as they transition to the *Framework*

- Explore student perceptions of their IL instructional needs within the context of their educational goals and ability to be lifelong learners

- Explore potential gap between librarians' and students' perspectives on IL education for community college students

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the perceptions of community college librarians about student IL needs?

2. What are the self-perceptions of students concerning their IL needs?

3. Do student self-perceptions of their IL needs vary based on their educational and career goals (transfer to university, enter the general job force, practice a trade, or join a profession)?

4. Do student self-perceptions of their IL needs vary based on the type of instruction they receive (skill-based vs. threshold concepts)?

5. How do librarian perceptions and student perceptions of student IL needs compare?

METHODS

- In fall 2019, we conducted an online survey of instructional librarians in community colleges in Florida and New York (N=760; n=163, 21.4% response rate)

- Survey focused on IL instructional practices solicited librarians' opinions about students' IL needs

- Survey was based on a national survey of IL practices in academic libraries generally (Julien, Gross, & Latham, 2019)

- In spring 2020, we conducted in-depth online interviews (30-60 minutes) with 34 community college students in both states

- Interviews focused on students' IL abilities, learning, and expectations following graduation

- Interviews digitally recorded and transcribed, analyzed thematically

FINDINGS - SURVEY DATA (LIBRARIANS)

- Librarians ranked "teaching students to find information in various sources" as their most important objective, which they also view as their students' most important objective

- Librarians would prefer to prioritize teaching students how to critically evaluate information, which they view as the most important skill for their students

- Librarians rank **students' awareness of technological innovations** as their greatest strength, and **critical evaluation of information skills** as their greatest weakness

SURVEY – LIBRARIANS' COMMENTS

- "We find that most of the students do not know how to find academic materials and resources that support their academic needs."

- "In my experience, students vastly overestimate their research abilities. They think that because they have experience using Google, they know how to research."

- "Many students come from public schools that no longer provide library services, and if there is a library, there is no media specialist or librarian on staff."

- "Many workforce programs require students to participate in specialized technologies or environments and are given coursework that requires a certain level of IL skills. Those in basic level programs many times are not aware of or exposed to complex IL concepts."

SURVEY DATA - FRAMEWORK

- "Searching as strategic exploration" was ranked as the most relevant frame from the *Framework* for students

- Most respondents (56%) indicated that the *Framework* has had only a minor influence on their IL instruction

- Among respondents who report an influence, this has mostly been to use the frames to conceptually underpin their instruction (46.1%), and to motivate a shift to more active, hands-on learning approaches (38.5%)

INTERVIEW DATA (STUDENTS)

- Students interviewed received **only skills-based ILI**, therefore, it is not possible to compare them with students who may have received more conceptually-based instruction (e.g., based on the *Framework*)

- Students believe they need to know how to search for information and how to evaluate it, skills that the librarians also reported are important for students' success. Librarians reported that students do not have these skills, although **students disagree – they report they have these skills**

11

INTERVIEW DATA

- Students are more aware of the transferability of information skills to workplace contexts than their personal lives (where relying on Google, YouTube, Twitter, and other people are seen as sufficient)

- Students' ideas about their remaining IL needs do not differ according to their goals

- Students cite skills like time management, study skills, IT competence, and perseverance as necessary, rather than "information" skills

INTERVIEW DATA

- Students learned how to search and evaluate information mostly from their college instructors, middle- and high-school teachers and librarians, and college librarians

- Students typically learn through a course-based one-shot session (focusing on how to use databases and find library resources, consistent with survey results) and through one-on-one help

- Students view college librarians as knowledgeable and helpful, and report that tutoring centers also play a role in academic support

- Course instructors were cited as key to learning IL skills, and setting expectations for research quality

INTERVIEWS – STUDENT COMMENT

- "But with a lot of the teachers, most of them, as long as you use a source, they aren't really picky about where the source came from … a lot of the professors, as long as you have a source that isn't like an unreliable source, they're okay with it."

- This quote highlights the important role that course instructors have in setting expectations for research

- Other participants indicated that course instructors were very prescriptive about what sources to use

IMPLICATIONS

- Community college students remain understudied – this study gives voice to this population

- The study provides a snapshot of current instructional practices, the extent to which the *Framework* is being implemented, and the challenges community college librarians face in serving their academic communities

- The study contributes to the literature on student perceptions of IL, the relationship between student goals and instructional experiences, and their view of IL.

- These data can:
  - aid the design of instruction that responds to students' perceived needs
  - inform collaborative relationships between librarians and other stakeholders such as teachers and administrators
  - assist LIS educators in teaching programs at the master's level in how to develop, implement, and evaluate replicable programs that are responsive to student needs

REFERENCES

Association of College and Research Libraries. (2016). *Framework for information literacy for higher education*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association. Retrieved from
http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework

Detlor, B., Julien, H., Serenko, A., Wilson, R., & Lavallee, M. (2011). Learning outcomes of information literacy instruction at business schools. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science &Technology, 62*(3), 572-585.

Dougherty, K. J., Lahr, H., & Morest, V. S. (2017). Reforming the American community college: Promising changes and their challenges. CCRC Working Paper No. 98. *Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University*.

Julien, H., Gross, M., & Latham, D. (2018). Survey of information literacy instructional practices in U.S. academic libraries. *College & Research Libraries, 79*(2), 179-199.

Rosenbaum, J. E., Ahearn, C., & Rosenbaum, J. (2016). The community college option. *Educational Leadership, 73*(6), 48-53.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS