

OVER THE THRESHOLD?

Analyzing Students' Reflections on their Information Literacy Growth through the Lens of the Standards versus the Framework

INTRODUCTION

Library Scholar Award for Information Literacy

We developed the Library Scholar Award for Information Literacy to recognize Muhlenberg College students who have enhanced their information literacy (IL) knowledge and skills. In their applications, students described how their research paths have enhanced their IL. Their applications offer an opportunity to assess students' understanding and growth in their IL attitudes and practices as detailed in their own words.

The Standards and the Framework

From 2011 to 2014, we asked students to reflect on their work through the lens of the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (Standards). We revised our award application in 2015 after ACRL introduced the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (Framework), asking students to consider their processes through the more theoretical language of the Framework. The Framework focuses on "threshold concepts" that are "passageways or portals to enlarged understanding or ways of thinking and practicing" (ACRL, 2015), rather than on standards and learning outcomes.

The shift from the Standards to the Framework has been controversial. Discussion in the library community has centered particularly on the pedagogical utility of the Framework and its comprehensibility and relatability for other stakeholders (Beilin, 2015; Scott, 2017).

Methodology

Of the 42 students from 2011 to 2017 who consented to have their award applications analyzed, 17 were based on the Standards and 25 were based on the Framework.

We coded their applications for themes regarding how they described their engagement with information and their research processes, as well as how they understood, reflected on, and developed information literacy.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How do students describe their engagement with information and their research processes?

How do students interpret and use the language of the Standards and the Framework?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Which concepts did students write about most frequently?

STANDARDS: Students wrote most often about "Evaluating information and information sources critically" and "Accessing needed information effectively and efficiently" and least often about "Understanding the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and accessing and using information ethically and legally."

Standards concept	% applications (n=17)
Evaluating information and information sources critically	88.2%
Accessing needed information effectively and efficiently	84.7%
Incorporating selected information into your knowledge base	41.2%
Using information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose	41.2%
Understanding the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and accessing and using information ethically and legally	23.5%

FRAMEWORK: Students wrote most often about "Searching as strategic exploration," "Research as inquiry," and "Scholarship as conversation," and least often about "Authority is constructed and contextual," "Information creation as a process," and "Information has value."

Framework concept	% applications (n=25)
Searching as strategic exploration	52.0%
Research as inquiry	48.0%
Scholarship as conversation	44.0%
Authority is constructed and contextual	20.0%
Information creation as a process	20.0%
Information has value	16.0%

In what combinations did students write about the concepts?

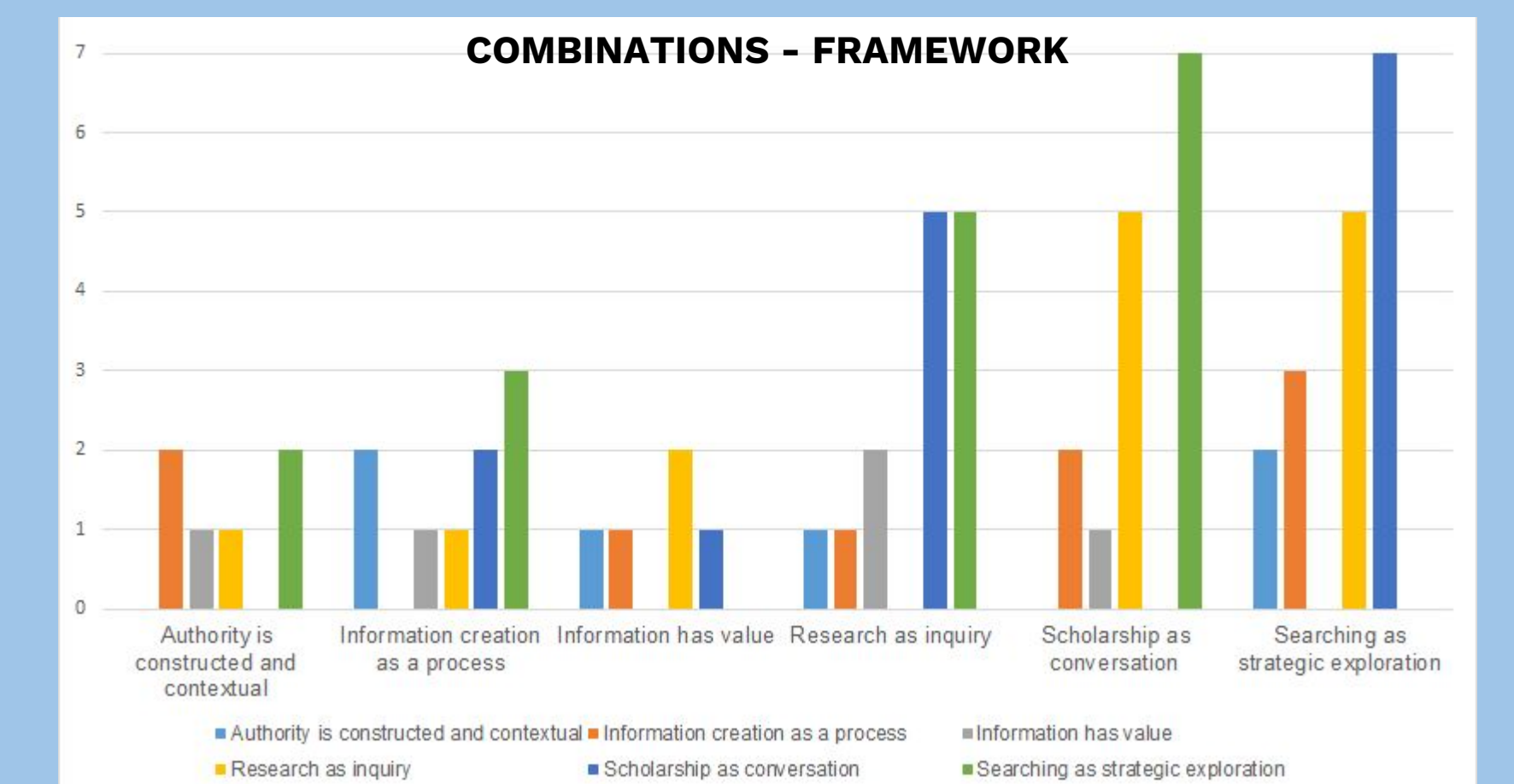
STANDARDS: On average, applicants wrote about 2.6 standards.

The most frequent combination of standards were "Accessing needed information effectively and efficiently" and "Evaluating information and information sources critically" in 66.7% of applications.



FRAMEWORK: On average, applicants wrote about 2.0 frames.

The most frequent combination of frames were "Scholarship as conversation" and "Searching as strategic exploration" in 28.0% of applications.



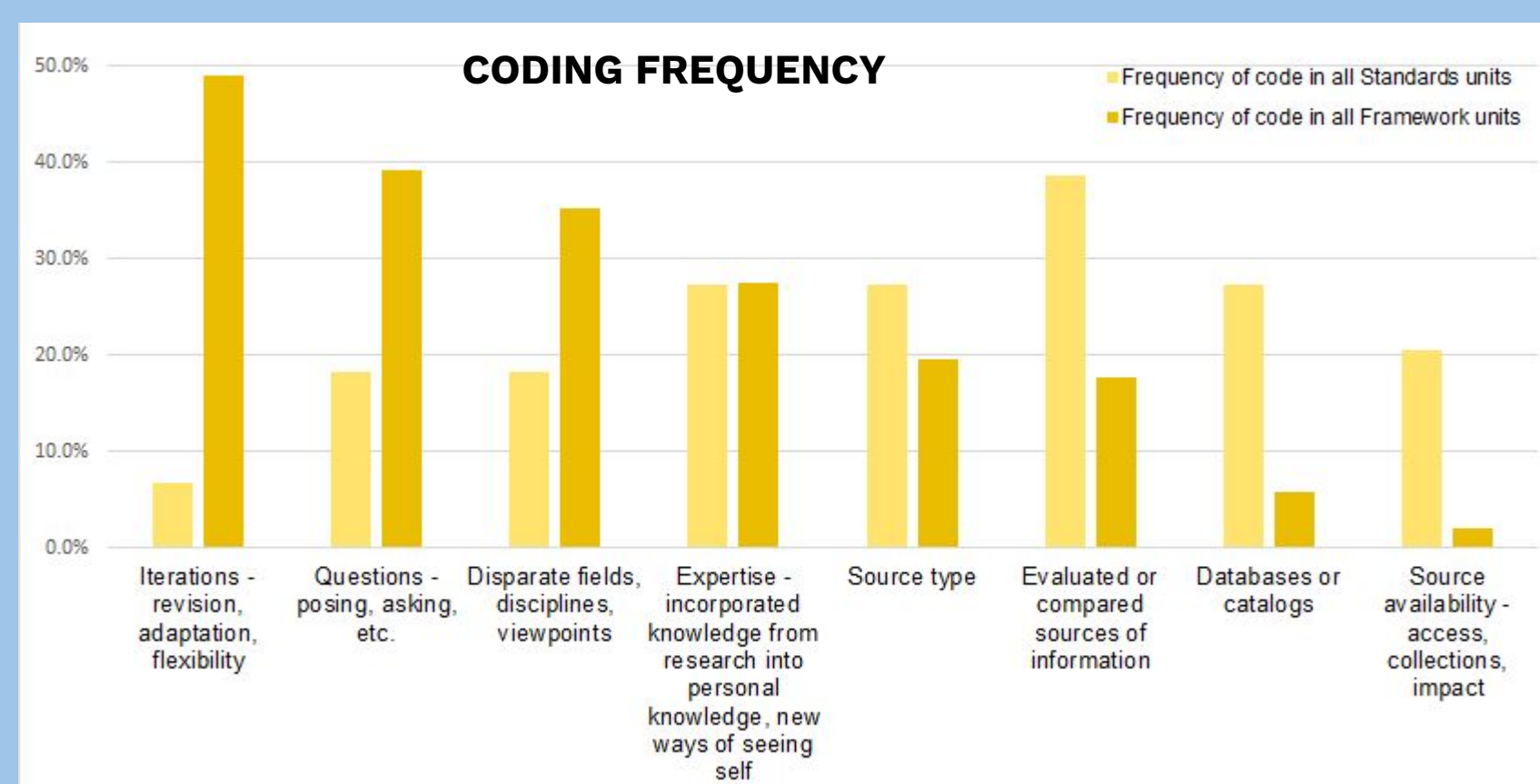
What were the most frequently coded themes in Standards and Framework applications?

Several of the most frequently used themes in the Standards applications were more procedural, with themes such as source type, number of sources, evaluated or compared sources of information, and databases or catalogs occurring most frequently.

Framework-based applicants were most likely to discuss: iterations, revisions, adaptation, flexibility; questions; and disparate fields or viewpoints.

Expertise or understanding of research/incorporated knowledge into personal knowledge was the only theme that was highly discussed in both Frame- and Standards-based applications.

Applicants seemed able to relate their experiences to the language of both the Standards and the Framework.



STANDARDS: "While paring down my searches I also found myself narrowing my research topic and using the narrowed search terms to help organize my paper."

ITERATIONS, REVISIONS

FRAMEWORK: "The process of conducting research always feels collaborative in the sense that we cyclically return to others' previous work, whether it is to begin designing a new study or to support our newest findings."

STANDARDS: "The literature I read helped me to figure out specific questions I wanted to answer through my own primary research."

QUESTIONS

FRAMEWORK: "The results I found in my first study led me to complicate the questions I had initially asked and to use these questions to further my research... Now, having completed this second study, I have found more answers, which have created more questions."

STANDARDS: "My analysis ... provided me an opportunity to critically examine the work of an author who is himself criticized as an apologetic by another scholar within the field; in fact, I concluded otherwise due to my critical analysis of multiple sources."

DISPARATE FIELDS, VIEWPOINTS

FRAMEWORK: "Coming across this article taught me the importance of not only exposing myself to literature that contradicts my existing theoretical understanding but also remaining open to reshaping my beliefs as the research field evolves."

STANDARDS: "Research reviews that selected sources based on the Social Science Citations Guide such as the European Commission's terrorism conference overview were marginally useful as a way of finding credible publications, but such guides could only go so far."

SOURCE TYPE

FRAMEWORK: "In a broad sense, primary literature creates a dialogue within the scientific community and continually enforces inquiry, reflection, and criticism."

STANDARDS: "After reading many articles I refined my independent study focuses and grasped the direction the sports statistics field is moving."

EXPERTISE

FRAMEWORK: "This provided a wide array of interest in and feedback on my research - and being able to present my findings repeatedly to different audiences actually solidified for me what my true perspective was on my own findings."

STANDARDS: "Determining whether my information sources were peer-reviewed, examining who published them, and the possible motivations for doing so, thus enabled me to critically evaluate both the information and information sources."

EVALUATED, COMPARED

FRAMEWORK: "As I became a more strategic researcher, I learned to evaluate the parts of articles I had previously only skimmed, like the abstracts, the key words, the bibliography, and to journal each step of my process."

STANDARDS: "While conducting extensive literature searches for both projects, I became more familiar with the use of WorldCAT and other search databases."

DATABASES, CATALOGS

FRAMEWORK: "For JSTOR, Academic Search Premier and WorldCat, I learned in order to access the information effectively I had to use quotations, "and", and specific words in order to not get such broad results or results that had information that had a different meaning for the research."

STANDARDS: "I have had to request interlibrary loan items including books, archaeological reports, and magazine/newspaper articles. The items located outside of the campus library has increased my understanding of the availability of information through other libraries."

SOURCE AVAILABILITY

FRAMEWORK: N/A

NEXT STEPS

- Examine what students discussed by frame, specifically which part of the frame definition students discussed.
- Investigate differences between the ways students discussed frames versus standards.

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