

Insights into Faculty-Librarian Collaborations around the Framework

Findings from the 2018 Co-design Survey

Michael Stöpel*

*User Services Librarian, American
University of Paris, France*

Livia Piotto*

*Reference and Instruction
Coordinator, Frohring Library,
John Cabot University, Rome, Italy*

Tatev Zargaryan*

*Library Systems and E-services Librarian, American University of
Armenia*

Christine Furno*

*Reference and Instruction
Librarian, American University of
Sharjah, United Arab Emirates*

Krasimir Spasov*

*Information Literacy Librarian,
American University in Bulgaria*

* Authors are AMICAL Information Literacy Committee Members

Introduction

Since the 1980s, assessment has been one of the most frequently investigated topics in library and information science literature,¹ seen by librarians as a valid tool for analyzing the effectiveness and impact of teaching. With this in mind, after the Paris workshop and the rollout of the co-designed pilot courses,² the AMICAL Information Literacy Committee (ILC) wanted to assess whether the courses had been successful with regard to both learning and teaching and to determine new fruits the co-designing had produced. A second, but equally important, motivation was to report back to the AMICAL Consortium, which funded and supported our project from the beginning. The main goal was to collect qualitative feedback to give insight into the projects and to build a “thick description” of the teaching experience.³ In order to effectively assess the course design project, as well as provide essential feedback to our stakeholders, the ILC developed and administered a survey about the co-design experience.

This survey was conducted among twenty-six participants from eleven different liberal arts institutions outside the United States that are all members of the AMICAL Consortium (appendix 2A). The survey participants came from diverse countries: Lebanon, Armenia, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Kuwait, Italy, Switzerland, Kyrgyzstan, Bulgaria, Kosovo, and France. It is interesting to see how the teaching experience and the idea of liberal arts education unfolds within the local contexts of these different cultures as well as different disciplines. For instance, for a better understanding of classroom dynamics, aspects such as attitudes toward female teachers or methods used to teach history in different countries must be taken into account when analyzing responses.

Methodology

To assess the newly designed courses taught in fall 2017 and receive feedback about the overall experience, the ILC developed an eleven-question online survey via SurveyMonkey. Participants answered nine open-ended questions (appendix 2B) designed to gather qualitative feedback on teaching experiences, student learning and assessment, incorporation of the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, course design successes and challenges, areas for improvement, and cultural implications.⁴ Questions ten and eleven supplied demographic data.

The online survey, reviewed by the ILC and the workshop leaders, Samantha Godbey and Xan Goodman, was e-mailed twice in spring 2018 to all twenty-eight participants from the 2017 Paris workshop. A reminder to complete the survey was announced during an online meeting with all co-designers prior to the survey closing deadline. One team of co-designers opted not to participate in the survey because they were not available to teach the pilot course in fall 2017. Out of twenty-six potential respondents, fourteen replied to the survey: seven faculty members and seven librarians.

It should be pointed out that the survey was developed by the ILC members, four of whom attended the workshop and also participated in the survey as respondents. The content analysis of the survey responses was conducted by the five members of the ILC, the authors of this chapter. In order to reduce the risk of subjectivity, each was assigned random questions from the survey to analyze, which they aggregated by themes and patterns revealed by the survey responses before the contributions were reviewed by their peers.

To analyze the results, we used a summative content approach that recognizes themes and patterns in order to explore a deeper meaning, while “identifying and quantifying certain words or content in text with the purpose of understanding the contextual use of the words or content.”⁵ This method of analysis follows the tradition of “thick description” by Geertz and Ryle,⁶ where meaning and credibility of interpretation are achieved by a “thickness of description.”⁷

Survey Results

A first review of the data brought to light mostly positive feedback about the co-design experience. “The library sessions went well!” (Faculty 14) and “Library sessions went perfectly well throughout the entire Fall session 2017” (Librarian 2) summarize the general reaction to the co-designing experience for both faculty and librarians, although not all experiences were a success. One librarian said, “Armed by the knowledge gained from the Paris IL training workshop... we reviewed the entire course syllabus; discussed classroom expectations; and redesigned the class around a new teaching paradigm.... Based on [the ACRL Framework], we redrafted the course syllabus, revamped the library information literacy workshops, and produced a new course syllabus” (Librarian 2). The word *together* was mentioned several times to highlight how the experience was conducive to collaborative practices: “The workshop was a first opportunity to dialog and spend time together

reflecting on the new course” (Librarian 4). Librarians reported being satisfied with the chance to co-teach with faculty and have an impact on a course; faculty were happy to rely on the librarians’ knowledge in guiding and helping students with specific assignments: “The library sessions went smoothly” (Faculty 6) and “The sessions went really well, as students were interested and cooperative” (Librarian 8).

Another faculty member echoed the positive impact of the workshop on the instructional design by linking it to students’ *successful* learning. “The Co-Design workshop revolutionized my planning of the course. It was the first time I was teaching it and it was very successful because the students got a lot out of the project” (Faculty 11). Student learning and improvement of core skills were key to the co-design project. Even a faculty member who had previously taught the same course many times noted, “The students were receptive and many of their assignments reflected skills they learned during the library sessions.... Their research skills improved vastly. It should be said that before the Paris workshop, information literacy was not a major goal of the class. The main success is that [the students’] work improved” (Faculty 10).

Furthermore, students were “engaged” (Librarian 7), “interested” (Librarian 8), and “empowered” (Faculty 1 and 10) by the active and dynamic lessons. One significant quote that encapsulates the students’ responses to newly developed teaching material states, “They thought that the bar was being raised in terms of the research requirements for each assignment, but they responded to the gauntlet and rose to the challenge. I now have some amazingly well-sourced and interdisciplinary essays as a result” (Faculty 3).

Course Redesign with the Framework

The newly co-designed courses represented a variety of disciplines, including comparative literature, gender studies, communications, history, writing, and business. Most of the courses were introductory courses or first-year experiences. Survey respondents saw the disciplinary course content and the ACRL Framework as two pieces of the same puzzle. One faculty member stated, “Now that we have incorporated it into the class, it seems like *a perfect fit*” (Faculty 10), and a librarian echoed almost the same words: “Information literacy components seemed to *perfectly fit* into enhancing the ...learning process” (Librarian 2). Another librarian said that the frame “[Information Creation as a Process] comes along naturally to the ...course” (Librarian 12).

Collaboration brought to each new course a structure that better integrates information literacy concepts, which are addressed in scaffolded sessions and subsequently become “more focused” (Faculty 10). Most respondents provided enthusiastic responses regarding the changes made after the workshop attendance. The various courses “integrated the changes” (Faculty 1) and the “strategies recommended during the workshop” (Librarian 7). They have been “substantially revamped and redesigned” (Librarian 2), with revised learning outcomes based on the six frames.

The frame most often mentioned by the co-designer teams was Scholarship as Conversation, with seven references, followed by Searching as Strategic Exploration and Research as Inquiry, with six references each. Authority Is Constructed and Contextual was mentioned five times, Information Creation as a Process four times, and Information Has Value three times. Overall, all respondents mentioned the application of more than one frame in their co-designed courses. One faculty member also said that they “touched on all Frames” (Faculty 10).

One faculty member, however, noted that assignments from the librarian did not carry much weight for the students. Many times those assignments are not graded, and therefore the students do not take them seriously. This faculty member stated, “Students didn’t pay any special attention to the librarian’s assignments which were ungraded.... Students generally ignore ungraded assignments, but when they found out that they are graded alongside the course assignments, they paid more attention to them” (Faculty 6). A librarian shared this opinion: “The faculty’s comments were even more effective and heard as they do the grading. The role of librarian is not seen as somebody who is grading students’ work” (Librarian 12).

Several respondents agreed on the value of the library instruction, including students’ positive image of the library as a place of research and also the recognition that a librarian can have an important role in course design. One co-designer mentioned that through “end of semester reflections” (Faculty 6) students intimated that they were able to transfer and apply information literacy concepts to other courses.

Assignment Design

A great variety of assignments were used in the co-designed courses. Among them stood out assignments such as book and film reviews, which required the critical

use of library online journals; evaluation of peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed articles; and open-ended papers for research reflection. Faculty also relied on standard assignments such as annotated bibliographies, search logs, and in-class process writing. One respondent added that the graded reference lists made a difference to their teaching as it helped both highlight mistakes and offer suggestions on how to improve. Students were encouraged to be more independent through in-class guidance and independent work on assignments.

During the pilot courses, the librarians worked with different assignments to check student understanding. Undeniably, the purpose of all the implemented learning strategies, exercises, and tasks was to determine if students understood what resources to use and to help students develop their information literacy competencies, or more precisely their research and critical-thinking skills, in the context of the frames. Most of the library sessions made use of active learning exercises, including Background Knowledge Probe, memory matrix, comparative book reviews, Content Form and Function Outlines, and the writing of blog posts.

Assessment

A crucial part of the learning process was assessing and summarizing the effect of the organized training sessions on students' understanding of the concepts discussed. All the survey respondents showed great creativity in the means used for assessing students' knowledge, other than using the popular one-minute paper.

Many of the librarians expressed satisfaction with being involved in defining assessment criteria and evaluation processes, though this remains primarily a faculty area of expertise. The librarians involved in the pilot courses used various types of formative assessment to evaluate student performance during the library sessions. Most of the librarians agreed that the so-called on-the-spot assessment (or instant feedback assessment) seemed to be the most effective tool for assessing students' learning progress during the co-designed courses because it gave real insights into the practical skills acquired by the students.

Cultural Implications of the Frames

Among all participants, only eleven respondents answered the question related to the cultural implications of the ACRL frames. These answers did not provide

clear insight about possible implications of applying the frames in instructional contexts different from the United States. Although the majority of the respondents did not notice any cultural implications resulting from the specific instructional context, we can indicate some connections between the cultural context and the application of the frames.

Recurring survey responses highlighted that differences in educational background between US and international students may affect how students receive and perceive the concepts embedded in the Framework. Some threshold concepts are more challenging both for the instructors to address and for the students to grasp due to explicit cultural differences. One librarian summed up the situation, saying, “Learning styles based on memorization rather than inquiry and critical thinking impacted the pace of the course” (Librarian 6).

One respondent noticed that cultural differences come up when students are free to choose their research topic. In other words, the choice of a topic is often dictated by their own cultural background, but this does not necessarily influence the use of the frames. One more instance in which cultural differences play an important role is when broad issues are discussed. For example, one faculty respondent noticed, “It was clear that depending on country of origin, students have different perceptions of fake news” (Faculty 10). Another respondent clearly indicated that students’ English proficiency level was one of the biggest barriers to applying the frames and a crucial factor in their performance in the courses (Librarian 6).

The survey responses did not clearly indicate whether the cultural background of an institution and its faculty, librarians, and students shapes how the frames are approached. Some comments seemed to go in this direction, but it was not possible to affirm with absolute certainty that cultural background plays a role in student learning within this context.

Future Implications

The librarian-faculty collaborative relationship must strike a delicate balance in order to become established and flourish. Char Booth and colleagues described these faculty-librarian partnerships as key to successful instruction.⁸ For the co-design workshop experience, collaboration was an intentional requirement for participation. All respondents provided interesting feedback about how to further improve their collaboration and presented new ideas and projects that

they are already considering for future iterations of the courses. For example, one faculty member stated, “We take from this to increase library sessions in the future and to have special tutorials for students who are struggling. We will also attempt to better assess their learning in the future” (Faculty 13).

Several respondents, although emphasizing the positive aspects of the experience, pointed out that these collaborations remain a work in progress, and they all described how they were planning to reorganize their way of integrating the library into course assignments.

Other suggestions for future improvement include consistent planning as a means of achieving better results for their students. Similar collaborations require that the faculty member and the librarian spend time together coordinating library instruction with class assignments. As one librarian noted, “I hope we will meet before the course and set up what to do between three of us and not come up ‘on the spot’ with a plan of what to do that day. I want to go back through the notes and include the third professor and work on creating a cohesive group project” (Librarian 5).

Conclusion

The overall results of the survey provide positive feedback on the collaborative experiences that were piloted in fall 2017, signifying that both faculty and librarians saw improvements over the practices to which they were accustomed. Faculty members expressed their approval of the projects, while librarians highlighted the positive impact of in-depth collaboration with faculty on their instruction. One respondent said, “Thinking with the frameworks has given me more confidence on where we need to go with our students, although I am not necessarily teaching all of the frames” (Librarian 4). Another respondent stated, “The idea of research as discovery is now fundamental to my understanding of information literacy, and a concept I have tried to systematically share with my students this semester” (Faculty 3).

Threshold concepts and the frames are seen as effective tools that can definitely help improve information literacy integration in other courses as well, as long as they are made relevant to the students so they understand how these concepts can be applied in everyday life.

Faculty members remain responsible for developing course assignments, and therefore librarians still do not have the opportunity to take part in the

assessment of student progress as much as they would like. The challenge for librarians here is to have an impact on student learning in the absence of grading. It is possible to argue that crossing thresholds motivates and engages students to move beyond short-term goals such as grades, credits, and diplomas into deeper learning, which helps develop the critical-thinking skills that support and enhance lifelong learning. While the majority of survey respondents confirmed that the graded assignment is still perceived as a faculty-only privilege, perhaps this is an inroad toward which librarians can work.

Although the survey aimed to analyze the co-design experience in its entirety, some issues were not addressed by the respondents. Despite the positive reactions to the assessment methods introduced in the workshop, one concern remains: the difficulty of assessing threshold concepts, especially because the internalization of these concepts needs to happen over time and not be limited to a single instruction session.⁹ However, the conceptual teaching of the threshold concepts within these co-designed courses is limited to an introduction to the ACRL Framework, which must be revisited in later reiterations. One faculty member extended this idea by saying that what matters is the transformation of student research habits in the long term.

Another issue that could not be addressed by the survey is whether assessment of the threshold concepts rests solely with the faculty member, the librarian, or both in order to create a joint effort in correlating these complex concepts within the disciplinary learning outcomes. The co-design workshop attempted to unify faculty and librarian expertise so as to join forces for assignment design and assessment for the sake of student learning.

Finally, although some respondents noted students' positive reactions to the faculty-librarian collaboration, the survey results do not reveal student perceptions. An in-depth analysis of student perspectives may be warranted for future study in order to develop a comprehensive picture of how similar collaborative projects might influence student academic performance and retention of the fundamental concepts highlighted by the frames.

Spanning a variety of disciplines, including communications, business, and comparative literature, the majority of the co-designed projects targeted freshmen and involved an extensive writing component. This helped reveal directions in which successful faculty-librarian partnerships may prosper. As Mader suggested, "The ACRL Framework has created a lingua franca for common conversation between librarians and writing instructors."¹⁰ In other words, the

Framework speaks a language that librarians can easily share with faculty,¹¹ introducing common themes and concepts that become natural starting points for possible collaborations. The six frames identify concepts that are already integrated in the teaching, which makes the collaboration with librarians easier to establish. On a deeper collaborative level, faculty-librarian partnership can also involve curriculum development.¹² This can easily happen within general education committees in which librarians already collaborate with faculty. Nevertheless, the co-design experience demonstrates that there can be some misunderstanding about how the Framework should be used and integrated in course development. The case studies in this volume based on the co-design experience show how developing a deeper collaboration between faculty and librarians can improve both faculty-librarian partnerships and student learning.

APPENDIX 2A

List of Participating Institutions

Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco
American University in Bulgaria
American University of Armenia
American University of Beirut, Lebanon
American University of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan
American University of Kosovo
American University of Kuwait
American University of Paris, France
American University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
Franklin University, Switzerland
John Cabot University, Italy

APPENDIX 2B

Survey Questions

1. **Describe:** Describe your co-designed course (taught in Fall 2017). Feel free to email the syllabus to us.
2. **Librarian sessions:** How did the library sessions work out? Which ACRL Frame did you include into your instruction as your learning outcome? How many times did the librarians intervene?
3. **Change:** To what extent did you include changes during the workshop to the initial course that you brought to the Paris workshop? Any change the workshop provoked in your instructional thinking or practice?
4. **Reflect:** Reflect on your teaching experience of the co-designed course. What were challenges and success stories (lessons learned)?
5. **Students:** How did the students do in the co-designed course? How did they respond to the teaching material this semester?
6. **Assignments and assessment:** What assignments and forms of assessment of student learning did you find most effective with regard to the co-designed course?
7. **Learning activities:** What learning activities or approaches did you find particularly effective?
8. **Cultural implications of the ACRL Frames:** Do you have any comments about cultural implications of the Frames as applied in your instructional contexts?
9. **Improvement:** What can be improved for next time? What will you keep or apply to other courses? Did you come up with a new idea or a new project?

Notes

1. Thomas A. Angelo, “Doing Assessment as if Learning Matters Most: Three Steps to Transformative Practice,” *AAHE Bulletin* 51, no. 9 (1999): 3–6.
2. Samantha Godbey and Xan Goodman, “Co-design: Integrating Information Literacy into Your Disciplinary Course” (AMICAL workshop, American University of Paris, March 31–April 1, 2017), <https://www.amicalnet.org/events/co-design-integrating-information-literacy-into-your-disciplinary-course>.

3. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
4. Association of College and Research Libraries, *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016).
5. Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon, "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis," *Qualitative Health Research* 15, no. 9 (2005): 1283, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>.
6. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*; Gilbert Ryle, *Collected Papers* (London: Routledge, 2009).
7. Joseph Ponterotto, "Brief Note on the Origins, Evolution, and Meaning of the Qualitative Research Concept Thick Description," *Qualitative Report* 11, no. 3 (2006): 543.
8. Char Booth et al., "Degrees of Impact: Analyzing the Effects of Progressive Librarian Course Collaborations on Student Performance," *College and Research Libraries* 76, no. 5 (2015): 623–51, <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.76.5.623>.
9. Jan H. F. Meyer and Ray Land, *Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge*, Occasional Report 4 (Edinburgh, UK: Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses Project, 2003), <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/142206.pdf>.
10. Sharon Mader, "Foreword," in *Rewired: Research-Writing Partnerships within the Frameworks*, ed. Randall McClure (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016), v.
11. LuMarie F. Guth et al., "Faculty Voices on the Framework: Implications for Instruction and Dialogue," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 18, no. 4 (2018): 693–718, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2018.0041>.
12. Kacy Lundstrom, Britt Anna Fagerheim, and Elizabeth Benson, "Librarians and Instructors Developing Student Learning Outcomes: Using Frameworks to Lead the Process," *Reference Services Review* 42, no. 3 (2014): 484–98, <https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-04-2014-0007>.

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SECTION II
Case Studies

