

Linden How, Amanda Meeks, Shannon Marie Robinson, and Alyssa Vincent

The art of information literacy

New competencies for art, architecture, and design learners

Art, architecture, and design curriculum in higher education has evolved in many ways over the past decade. While many universities and colleges still ascribe to the Bauhaus model as a core approach to instruction, shifts in technology, modes of making, global perspectives, and the professional landscape have required responsiveness on the part of these institutions.¹ Today's art, architecture, and design learners need to be equipped to navigate, evaluate, and ethically use vast quantities and varieties of information in their practices. As a result of these evolutions and the influence of the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, library pedagogy for these disciplines has accordingly shifted away from traditional bibliographic instruction and towards information literacy-based approaches.

To respond to these pedagogical shifts, the Research and Information Services (RISS) Section of the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA) sought to update their 2006 report that outlined information competencies for undergraduate and graduate learners in these disciplines. RISS is comprised of library workers from academic, public, and museum libraries and archives who support art, architecture, and design learners and other library users with their research and information needs. These needs are often unique, and they include image-based and experiential research that takes place not just in libraries and online, but in studios, galleries, museums, and other cultural and social exchanges with the world around them.

In response to these shifts in art, architecture, and design curriculum and the publication and application of the Framework and the ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, RISS formed a subcommittee to adapt the 2006 ARLIS/NA report. The subcommittee created a living document that reflects current and critical approaches to library instruction to meet the specific needs of these learners. Further, this report functions as an intermediary document, an interpretation of the Framework that applies more precisely to disciplines in art, architecture, and design. This article outlines the history, process, potential applications, and next steps of the updated Art, Architecture, and Design Information Competencies report.

In 2006, the ARLIS/NA published the report Information Competencies for Students in Design Disciplines. A group of ARLIS/NA members outlined competencies for nine disciplines, as well as a skill set relevant to all design learners. The purpose of the report

Linden How is reference and instruction librarian at Pacific Northwest College of Art, email: lhow@pnca.edu, Amanda Meeks is teaching, learning, and research services librarian for College of Arts and Letters at Northern Arizona University, email: amanda.meeks@nau.edu, Shannon Marie Robinson is librarian for media arts and design at Drexel University, email: smr87@drexel.edu, and Alyssa Vincent is digital scholarship librarian at Northeastern Illinois University, email: a-vincent@neiu.edu

© 2019 Linden How, Amanda Meeks, Shannon Marie Robinson, and Alyssa Vincent

was twofold: 1) to provide teaching librarians a foundation for conversation with faculty about design-specific competencies, and 2) to help them teach these skills in information literacy instruction.² At the time this report was created, ACRL's Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education was the core guiding document for instruction librarians. The ARLIS/NA Competencies supplemented the ACRL Standards by demonstrating disciplinary information literacy skills that could easily integrate into scaffolded instruction.³ Art librarians also aligned the Competencies with programmatic curriculum and course learning outcomes.⁴ Because the competencies draw upon professional accreditation standards, they were also useful for library accreditation reviews.

The original document served as one of the first efforts to tie disciplinary knowledge to information competencies and served as a valuable resource for librarians and faculty. We decided that a revision of the report would relate to the latest accreditation standards as well as connect with the Framework, addressing both the business of being an artist, designer, or architect and the lifelong learning skills used in these professional settings.

Many teaching librarians value the Framework as an integral resource for instructional design. In addition, the revision demonstrates ARLIS/NA's commitment to information literacy, a concept that is ever more prevalent and timely in the digital age.

To learn more about how ARLIS/NA members use these ACRL documents, as well as the Competencies, we distributed an informal survey through the ARLIS/NA listserv. Fifty percent of the 20 respondents did not use the 2006 report, one quarter had used it in the past, and one quarter were currently using it. In contrast, most respondents were using the Framework to inform their instruction practices. This confirmed that the Information Competencies needed to be updated to reflect shifts in professional thinking about information literacy and instructional design, as well as align with the Framework.

Most notably, almost all respondents stated

that various forms of digital media are new and growing design fields. Film and animation, arts management and leadership, graphic arts, product and industrial design, and more were all listed by ARLIS/NA members as disciplines for information competency consideration that had not been covered in the original report. Though survey respondents largely did not use the outdated Competencies, they expressed the valuable role that a re-envisioned report might provide.

Based on the survey results, RISS members formed a team to start the revision process, focusing on those disciplines most heavily used from the 2007 Competencies: Architectural History, Architecture, Art History, Fashion Design, and Studio Art. While the 2007 Competencies emphasized learners' ability to use traditional library and academic sources, the 2018 Competencies would focus on critical thought processes, using primary information ethically and effectively, and the social and community-based aspects of the research process.

Designing information literacy curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the context of creative disciplines can and should be a creative process, as well. One of the goals included writing new competencies that were in line with the Framework, which is informed by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe's focus on instructional design practices that develop and deepen understanding of important ideas.⁵ In order to avoid recreating the Framework, we considered it the core guiding document in the revision process, more conceptual than prescriptive in nature, while maintaining a scaffolded approach. We built on the backwards design model outlined by Wiggins and McTighe, intentionally using the Framework for its intended purpose as the first step in the instructional design process for librarians teaching in art, architecture, and design disciplines.

As members of the revision team worked to rewrite the Competencies, they were informed by each discipline's professional standards, accreditation, top program learning outcomes, and various guiding documents from the field of librarianship. The team looked at overlaps between the discipline-specific resources and

the Framework, in particular. As the subject competencies were being developed, we recognized that a set of nondisciplinary Essential Questions could ignite the instructional design process in any creative discipline. These questions are meant to “empower learners to think through and articulate their own creative research processes and practices with the guidance of a librarian and emphasize the choices that learners and practitioners make throughout the creative, research process.”⁶ While the questions are not comprehensive or exhaustive, they serve as a starting point for identifying important concepts that learners will need to answer to thrive in their disciplines. The questions position themes and overarching ideas, such as evolving worldviews, assumptions, personal experiences, and information equity alongside creativity.

The team completed an initial draft for the five initial disciplines—Architectural History, Architecture, Art History, Fashion Design, and Studio Art—prior to the 2018 ARLIS/NA Annual Conference, where the group solicited feedback in a session entitled “Information Competencies for Students in Design Disciplines: Revisions & Critical Updates.” Each primary author briefly presented to the group, followed by break out sessions for the various disciplines, where everyone was invited to provide specific feedback to a discipline of their choice. Much of the feedback pointed to a need for the initial draft to show direct links to the Framework as well as the ACRL Visual Literacy Standards. While the Framework and Visual Literacy Standards were foundational elements to what had already been written, the team worked to revise the Competencies once more in order to draw more distinct connections between the three documents.

The Competencies are not meant to be an instructional checklist for teaching librarians, but rather serve as a jumping off point in planning instruction sessions, guiding research consultations, and informing outreach practices. The Essential Questions portion of the Competencies document introduces librarians to the concept of backwards design, or provides continued, structured guidance for those

already engaged in this pedagogical process. By starting with questions that an instruction session or individual research consultation hopes to answer, librarians are better equipped to identify evidence that will demonstrate learners’ understanding and develop activities to best work towards that understanding.

Consulting accreditation standards for specific art and design programs played an integral role in identifying valuable practices in each discipline and will continue to do so as the document evolves. To support the shifting nature of art and design education and research practices, and to encourage active engagement with the document, the Competencies will grow each year with the addition of new art and design fields and their related research practices. As programs are developed or reimaged at institutions, creating research and curricular support from the library will be crucial, and these continually updating Competencies will guide teaching librarians in that process. Additionally, should new or experienced librarians find themselves with established art and design disciplines that lack strong relationships with the library, these Competencies offer the potential for new conversations within those departments.

Finally, our hope is that teaching librarians who use these new Competencies will engage with the existing community of practice on CORA (Community of Online Research Assignments). If teaching librarians develop an instruction session or activity that incorporates the updated Competencies, we encourage sharing it with colleagues through that valuable resource. As the Competencies are scheduled to be updated on a yearly basis and serve as a living document, we hope that conversations around it can continue through CORA.

We anticipate continued changes to curriculum in art, architecture, and design as more emerging disciplines, fields, considerations, and ideas are incorporated into higher education, as well as continued changes to the way we approach library instruction and understand the various literacies with which today’s art, architecture, and design learners must become adept.

To develop a responsive set of competencies, RISS has begun the process of facilitating the addition of new disciplines each year. At each yearly ARLIS/NA conference, we will hold a workshop for the proposed new disciplines and their competencies. After feedback is discussed during that meeting, we will call for volunteers to develop competencies for new disciplines, which will be presented at the following year's conference meeting. The current moderators of RISS will serve as project leaders for each given year's disciplines. At the moment, competencies are being written for Communication Design, Interior Design, Photography, and Urban and Regional Planning. We hope to see you all at this year's meeting in Salt Lake City.

Notes

1. The Bauhaus model of art and design instruction unifies multiple disciplines through an emphasis on standard concepts, or "common language," of formal qualities of the work, including composition, line, and balance. For more information see James G. Daichendt, "The Bauhaus Artist-Teacher: Walter Gropius's Philosophy of Art Education," *Teaching Artist Journal* 8, no. 3 (2010): 157–64.

2. Jeanne Brown, Jane Carlin, Thomas Caswell, Edith Crowe, Maya Gervits, Susan Lewis, Alan Michelson, Barbara Opar, and Jennifer Parker, "Information Competencies for Students in Design Disciplines," ARLIS/NA, 2007, [https://www.arlisna.org](https://www.arlisna.org/publications/arlis-na-research-reports/148-information-competencies-for-students-in-design-disciplines)

/publications/arlis-na-research-reports/148-information-competencies-for-students-in-design-disciplines.

3. Katie Greer, "Connecting Inspiration with Information: Studio Art Students and Information Literacy Instruction," *Communications in Information Literacy* 9, no. 1 (2015): 83–94.

4. Katie Greer, "Connecting Inspiration with Information;" Sheri Salisbury, "Incorporating Research in the Studio: A Case Study of Faculty/Librarian Collaboration" (poster, 40th Annual Conference of the Art Libraries Society of North America, Toronto, Ontario, March 29–April 2, 2012); Rina Vecchiola, "Using ARLIS/NA Information Competencies for Students in Design Disciplines in Course Integrated Information Literacy Instruction at Washington University in St. Louis," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 74–78.

5. Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2004), cited in ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, January 11, 2016, www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.

6. Jane Carlin, Linden How, Amanda Meeks, Alan Michelson, Shannon Marie Robinson, James Sobczak, and Alyssa Vincent, "Art, Architecture, and Design Information Competencies," ARLIS/NA, June 2018, https://www.arlisna.org/images/researchreports/ARLISNA_artarchdesigninfocomp_2018.pdf. *TC*

("Group interviews . . .," continues from page 164)

of our elevator confession, it was still less stressful to not know from the beginning. It helped us start the interview on even ground."

Lessons learned

Based on our experiences as administrator, search chair, and candidates, we would use group interviews in the future—especially if we can again run multiple searches simultaneously. Our efforts nearly collapsed when trying to find dates that worked for groups

of candidates. Giving ourselves more flexibility in timing for interviews might help, though we've seen scheduling issues derail traditional searches, too.

The aspect of this search that we would most likely change is avoiding a situation where multiple candidates end up as finalists for multiple positions. Overall, though, the group interview experience was positive for everyone involved, and we would happily do it again. *TC*