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Frameworks for Collaboration:

Articulating Information Literacy, and Rhetoric and Writing Goals in the Archives

Amy Lueck and Nadia Nasr

Rhetoric and composition scholars have recently called our attention to the value of archival research in the undergraduate classroom, leading to rich collaborations with archivists and librarians at many institutions. As we engaged our own pedagogical collaboration as a university archivist and English faculty member, we realized that, though we might use slightly different language to articulate them or cite different sources in support of them, many of our learning goals overlapped. As we explored these goals together, we realized that they evidenced a correspondence in our disciplines that we had not explored—one that is reflected in our fields' recent outcomes statements: the 2011 *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* and 2016 *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. In this article, we briefly describe our course and use it as a touch point for comparing these disciplinary statements. We argue that analysis of the overlap between these two documents helps us articulate a new set of reasons for faculty to connect with their allies in libraries and archives to teach undergraduate research and writing.

rhetoric, writing, research, information literacy, archives, undergraduate, learning frameworks, collaboration, general education{AU: **Pedagogy articles include 3–5 keywords. Please indicate which 5 of these you'd like to retain. Please retain rhetoric, writing instruction, research, information literacy, archives**}

In the fall of 2016, the authors of this article—an assistant professor in English and a director of a university archives and special collections department—met to discuss a writing course that would bring undergraduate students into the university archives. Other rhetoric and composition scholars have recently called our attention to the value of archival research in the undergraduate classroom, leading to rich collaborations with archivists and librarians at many institutions. In their work with graduate students, Jessica Enoch and Jordynn Jack in many ways paved the way for this work in their recognition of the value of “exploring with students how they might leverage archival documents as a means to bring women’s rhetorical achievements into the public imagination” (2011: 527). Similarly, Jonathan Buehl and colleagues developed an archival training module for graduate students not only to conduct historical research but also, more broadly, to “think critically about methods, methodology, and scholarly argumentation”

(2012: 279). Drawing on Susan Wells's (2002) **{Au: please add to ref list or delete cite here. Added to ref list}** "gifts of the archives" for rhetoric and composition scholars, which include resistance to closure, loosening of resentment, and the possibility of reconfiguring the discipline, Wendy Hayden (2015) explores the value of archival research to the undergraduate classroom, specifically as a powerful pedagogy for teaching the research paper. **{Au: the *Chicago Manual of Style* discourages the use of scare quotes, except where ideas may otherwise be misconstrued, so most have been removed from your article. Ok}** Pamela VanHaitisma (2015) extends this attention to archives in the undergraduate classroom to include digital archives, outlining a pedagogy that uses digital archives to put traditional/analog archival materials in conversation with materials from students' own lives. In a similar vein, Enoch and VanHaitisma (2015: 217) are interested not in how students can use **{Au: the *Chicago Manual of Style* discourages the use of italics for emphasis, except where ideas may otherwise be misconstrued, so most have been removed from your article. Ok}** archival materials in their research but in how students can learn to read archives "carefully and critically"—to develop an "archival literacy" that could lead ultimately to the creation of archives by students themselves.

Seeking to join this innovative pedagogical movement through our own upper-division undergraduate rhetoric and writing course, we recognized our university archives as the perfect site, as archivist Hugh A. Taylor put it, to "let students loose" to engage authentic historical inquiry and discovery (1972: 319). As we found, it was also the perfect site to engage in close cross-disciplinary collaboration as colleagues, allowing us both to reflect on our own disciplinary frames and learning goals.

As we planned and executed this course, we came to recognize the ways such a course, drawing on our university's own archival materials, helped us (and our university) meet a wide

range of educational and institutional goals. The archives director was able to increase the use of and engagement with materials, which were strategic goals of her unit as part of the university library's overall strategic plan. From her perspective as an archivist, she was interested in students' facility working closely with and thinking critically about primary documents and how proficiency with these materials intersects with broader research, critical thinking, and information literacy skills. The English faculty member shared an interest in developing these skills for her students and was also, of course, committed to the course goals around writing and rhetorical literacies.

More particularly, too, we realized through this collaboration that, though we might use slightly different language to articulate them or cite different sources in support of them, many of our learning goals overlapped. We both wanted students to engage in authentic, hands-on, inquiry-driven research. We wanted them to consider the professional, rhetorical, ethical, and personal stakes of representing such research. We wanted them to experience their research and writing as more than just a lifeless assignment, a task to check off their list for graduation. We wanted them to develop information as well as rhetorical literacies.

As we explored these goals and desires together, we realized that they evidenced an overlap in our disciplines that we had not explored—one that is reflected in our fields' recent outcomes statements: the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*, issued in 2011 by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, and National Writing Project, and the 2016 *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, developed by a task force of librarian practitioners from within the Association of College and Research Libraries (a division of the American Library Association). In this article, we briefly describe our course and use it as a touch point for comparing these disciplinary

statements. We argue that analysis of the overlap between these two documents helps us articulate a new set of reasons for faculty to connect with their allies in libraries and archives to teach undergraduate research and writing.¹

Frameworks for Learning: Articulations and Overlaps

The move to develop learning and assessment frameworks constitutes a tectonic shift in the ways many in higher education are conceiving of teaching and learning in the twenty-first century. A response to the potentially limiting language of outcomes, frameworks for learning tend to emphasize the process of learning.

Take the *Framework for Success*, for example. Because the audience of *Framework for Success* includes stakeholders such as legislators, policy makers, and administrators who are invested in the language of *skills* and *outcomes*, **{Au: words as words appear in italic throughout. Ok}** the authors lead with this language in their executive summary and other introductory material. However, these terms appear nowhere in the body of the text. Instead, the *Framework for Success* emphasizes the process of writing development, which it breaks down to habits of mind and experiences. The habits of mind, or “ways of approaching learning,” include curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition. The *Framework* details five experiences by which students develop these habits of mind: developing rhetorical knowledge; developing critical thinking through writing, reading, and research; developing flexible writing processes; developing knowledge of conventions; and composing in multiple environments.

These habits of mind and experiences build on the previously adopted *WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition* (Council of Writing Program Administrators 2014), which is responsible for articulating the “common knowledge, skills and attitudes” of college-level

writing. The authors of the *Framework for Success* suggest that it differs from the *WPA Outcomes Statement* primarily in terms of the development level addressed by each: the former addresses what students “need to know and be able to do at the beginning of the first-year course,” and the latter “articulates what is expected at the *end* of the first year of college composition” (O’Neill et al. 2012: 522). However, we believe that a more striking feature of the *Framework for Success* is its very adoption of the framework rather than outcomes approach., That is, the focus on process.

Responding to the lack of educator involvement in the formulating of Common Core State Standards {**Au: abbr’s used fewer than 3 times in your article are spelled out. Ok**} in 2009, the *Framework for Success* seeks to forward a disciplinary-supported and research-based conception of college readiness for writing and rhetoric. Though the authors do not take issue with the Common Core writing standards themselves—which include at least nominal attention to issues of purpose, audience, and context of value to writing studies scholars—they do contest that the “narrow band in which these concepts are to be developed does not reflect research-based current practices in postsecondary writing instruction” (2011: 522). In other words, the concern is not with outcomes themselves as much as the impoverished conception of how one might reach those outcomes in the classroom. Again, we see an emphasis on the processes of writing. As the *Framework for Success* emphasizes, “Standardized writing curricula or assessment instruments that emphasize formulaic writing for nonauthentic audiences will not reinforce the habits of mind and the experiences necessary for success as students encounter the writing demands of postsecondary education” and beyond (3).

Those familiar with the *Framework for Success* will note striking similarities in both spirit and content to the *Framework for Information Literacy* (Association of College and

Research Libraries 2016), which replaced the association's Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. The *Framework for Information Literacy* does not use the same language to discuss student research and writing as the *Framework for Success*; for instance, it does not use foundational writing studies terms like *rhetoric*, *writing*, or *audience* (though they do use other terms like *purpose* and *message*). However, we see their goals and approaches as broadly compatible in their focus on process and their move away from an exclusive focus on outcomes.

The *Framework for Information Literacy* explicitly avoids the language of skills or outcomes from the outset (which are the focus of the previous competency standards), using terms like *concepts*, *knowledge practices*, and *dispositions* in their place. The *Framework for Information Literacy*, its authors clarify, is “called a framework intentionally because it is based on a cluster of interconnected core concepts, with flexible options for implementation, rather than on a set of standards or learning outcomes, or any prescriptive enumeration of skills” (2016: 2). The six frames each consist of a central concept (built on the notion of threshold concepts in learning) accompanied by a set of knowledge practices and a set of dispositions:

- Authority is constructed and contextual.
- Information creation as a process.
- Information has value.
- Research as inquiry.
- Scholarship as conversation.
- Searching as strategic exploration.

These concepts and their attendant practices and dispositions interleave richly with the experiences and habits of mind outlined in the *Framework for Success*. Take the first concept as an example: authority is constructed and contextual. This concept is explained as follows:

“Information resources reflect their creators' expertise and credibility, and are evaluated based

on the information need and the context in which the information will be used. Authority is constructed in that various communities may recognize different types of authority. It is contextual in that the information need may help to determine the level of authority required”

(4). The knowledge practices that lead students toward this concept include understanding disciplinary discourses, recognizing the impact of presentation modes and media, acknowledging that they are developing their own authoritative voices as participants in various “communities of practice,” and understanding “the increasingly social nature of the information ecosystem,” among others (4). In relation to this concept alone we hear the resonances of at least four experiences from the *Framework for Success*: developing rhetorical knowledge; developing critical thinking through writing, reading, and research; developing flexible writing processes; and developing knowledge of conventions.

The dispositions that attend this concept in the *Framework for Information Literacy* similarly echo the habits of mind from the *Framework for Success*. To take just a few examples, the expectation that students will “develop awareness of the importance of assessing content with a skeptical stance and with a self-awareness of their own biases and worldview” correlates to the habits of mind of responsibility, engagement, and openness (2016: 4). The expectation that students would be “conscious that maintaining these attitudes and actions requires frequent self-evaluation” (4) is what the *Framework for Success* would categorize as metacognition.

Each framework is premised on the need for a dynamic sense of learners and their contexts. As the *Framework for Information Literacy* explains, “Students have a greater role and responsibility in creating new knowledge, in understanding the contours and the changing dynamics of the world of information, and in using information, data, and scholarship ethically”

(2). The *Framework for Success* posits the same idea in relation to writing: “Writing

development takes place over time as students encounter different contexts, tasks, audiences, and purposes” (2011: 2). The notion of a framework provides educators with a flexible set of guidelines to encompass this dynamic and sometimes messy process. In a class based in the unwieldy experiences of archival research, we found these frameworks particularly useful and meaningful. In what follows, we briefly discuss how these frameworks interfaced with our course, using this exercise to consider how such a course brings the needs and interests of writing and library studies into further alignment.

Framing Our Course

We found that the notion of experiences/knowledge practices and habits of mind/dispositions served us well as a frame for understanding the value of archival research with our undergraduate students. All writing, research, and learning experiences may be messy, recursive, and inquiry driven, but archival research is often particularly unruly, especially when lack or absence of material leads to unexpected detours and dead ends. We think that is what makes it so rife for developing student writers. It is the opposite of stiff, inauthentic writing tasks to which both the *Framework for Information Literacy* and the *Framework for Success* respond.

For instance, there are few more important contexts in which to acknowledge that authority is constructed and contextual than in archival research. As described by the *Framework for Information Literacy*, researchers simply must approach primary materials with an “attitude of informed skepticism and an openness to new perspectives, additional voices, and changes in schools of thought” and ask questions about “origins, context, and suitability” of documents (2016: 4). Thus, the recognition that “unlikely voices can be authoritative” is as foundational to the development of students’ information literacies as it has been to feminist rhetorical recovery efforts in writing studies. In conducting archival research, students practice looking to a range of

sources and considering them both on their own terms and in their rich historical contexts, considering the role of power and authority (including their own authority as authors) in constructing this history. This requires openness as well as skepticism, and especially metacognition and reflective monitoring of their own ideas and assumptions.

Attending to issues of authority and ethical representation also engages students in the idea that information has value. It got our students thinking about underrepresentation and systemic marginalization within information systems, and the politics of the archive itself. Thus, it also helped students consider the partial and selective nature of the archive, productively calibrating their expectations for the institutional holdings with which they would be working.

Their research experiences also exemplified research as inquiry. Following the process of inquiry, students formulated questions, refined their scope, used various research methods, assessed and synthesized sources, and drew conclusions, experiencing from this process that “research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions whose answers in turn develop additional questions or lines of inquiry in any field” (2016: 7).**{Au: correct source (*Framework for Information Literacy*) or 2011 (*Framework for Success*)? Correct source is 2016 Framework for Information Literacy}** Developing the attendant dispositions to do this work—persistence, adaptability, flexibility, acceptance of ambiguity, humility, and a willingness to seek help—were challenging, new concepts, and the open-endedness certainly unnerved them. But in archives “inquiry, discovery and serendipity” come to the fore, and students came to “exhibit mental flexibility and creativity” and “understand that first attempts at searching do not always produce adequate results”—in short, they came to understand searching as strategic exploration (9).**{Au: if this is not the same source as above, please add date. Same as above}**

In engaging the archival research and writing process, students encountered each of the central concepts, habits of mind, and experiences from the frameworks, returning to many of them often in an iterative process as they moved from the perspective of a consumer to producer of information. Concepts such as information creation as a process and attention to delivery method, for instance, speak not only to students' work with the primary materials (i.e., use) but also to the projects students compose (i.e., creation). It is in this shift to composition that the *Framework for Information Literacy* overlaps most richly with the *Framework for Success*.

Thus, throughout the research and writing process, we found that students were not only engaging the knowledge practices and dispositions of the *Framework for Information Literacy* but also clearly practicing the kindred habits from the *Framework for Success*, such as curiosity, openness, creativity, persistence, and flexibility. They were also invited to develop responsibility and metacognition as they reflected on their experiences, values, and decisions. Most notable, perhaps, students demonstrated a sense of engagement, of investment and involvement in the process of research and composing. These habits were cultivated through the research and writing experiences throughout the course and they were built upon in the final assignments of the course as students composed, thus further developing rhetorical knowledge, developing flexible writing processes, and composing in multiple environments in these final projects.

In this way, such courses have the potential to address the needs of students, writing faculty, archivists and instructional librarians, and the general education core curriculum overall. Drawing on the disciplinary frameworks and threshold concepts of metadisciplines like information literacy and writing studies together allows us to reach across disciplinary boundaries and work together with librarians and archivists on our campuses, among others, to identify and address our shared learning goals with our students.

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Notes

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¹ Other connections between and applications of these frameworks are explored at length in the McClure and Purdy 2016 and Purdy and McClure 2014.

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