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# The Rescinding of the ACRL 2000 Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education ... Really??

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Rescinding of ACRL IL Standards

*The Rescinding of the ACRL 2000 Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education...Really??*

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**Abstract.**

This is an opinion piece on the decision by the ACRL Board of Directors to rescind its “Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education” in June 2016.

**Keywords:** information literacy; standards; framework

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### *Information Literacy Advocates...think for a moment...*

Imagine how the original, blue ribbon panel that authored the seminal 1989 American Library Association's "Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report" (ALA 1989) might react to the Association of College and Research Library's (ACRL) recent decision to rescind the 2000 "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education" (ACRL 2000) and replace them with the "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education" (ACRL 2016).

The recommendations of that 1989 presidential report established an aggressive agenda for the promotion of information literacy nationwide that also inspired many around the globe. It set in motion a movement to establish information literacy as a global societal priority. The establishment of the National Forum on Information Literacy, one of the key recommendations of the 1989 Final Report, and its milestones illuminate the critical role the 2000 Standards played throughout its 26-year legacy of information literacy partnerships, collaborations, and policy initiatives. An example is the Alexandria Proclamation (IFLA 2005) which influenced the establishment of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy division.

The primary aims of the 1989 ALA Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report were:

- *To communicate the power of knowledge;*
- *To develop in each citizen a sense of his or her responsibility to acquire knowledge and deepen insight through better use of information and related technologies;*
- *To instill a love of learning, a thrill in searching, and a joy in discovering; and*

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- *To teach young and old alike how to know when they have an information need and how to gather, synthesize, analyze, interpret, and evaluate the information around them (ALA 1989).*

This insightful and timeless perspective led to the development of the 2000 ACRL Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education (ACRL 2000). Those Standards, although culturally complex at the time, were clear, measurable, and resonated with librarians and non-librarians. Anyone, in any profession or any sector of society, who was interested in facilitating the transformation of their constituencies' information and digital literacy skill sets could do so through the benefit of information literacy practice as espoused by the 2000 Standards. The Standards lend themselves to engaging in collaborations and partnerships with those who want to mainstream information literacy practice...**outside of the realm of library and information science and the Academy**. The same, however, cannot be said for the new Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.

Should both documents be promoted? Yes...definitely! Clearly, more work needs to be done in terms of translating today's educational theories into information literacy practice and the new Framework represents one attempt. But to substitute one for the other erodes and disrespects the substantial work that has been based on the Standards. It severely diminishes the future reach of *information literacy practice* within various occupations, professions, and communities.

Since 1989, significant progress in terms of embedding information literacy as a critical 21<sup>st</sup> century skill in the public mindset has been made through the various institutional and organizational activities allied with the ACRL 2000 Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education.

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For example, organizations such as the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU), National League for Nursing (NLN), the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), P21 Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning, and the National Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Network have adopted either policy statements and/or rubrics predicated on the 2000 ACRL Information Literacy Standards. During the last several years, under the auspices of the National Forum on Information Literacy, over 25 states and U.S. territories have issued gubernatorial information literacy proclamations, each extolling its importance to the social and economic welfare of the citizens of their states.

In addition, a 2012 National Research Council report, “Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century,” characterized information literacy as “crystallized intelligence,” an illuminating perspective, no doubt, based on the 2000 ACRL Standards (Pellegrino and Hilton 2012).

The current Framework’s jargon will not resonate with the American public and policy makers who wrestle today with the range of socio/economic/political challenges that could benefit from the inclusion of information literacy goals. It will not resonate with the multitude of cross-sector organizations and agencies that need to understand how information literacy can benefit them and their constituencies. It is not conducive to promoting information literacy practice among diverse, lay populations including students, faculty, and higher education administrators.

The 2000 ACRL Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education should remain as the principal foundation for any future iterations of standards or understandings of information literacy practice. Any new documents need to be developed in close collaboration with important stakeholders in business, education, healthcare, and government to ensure that the

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standards/frameworks focus on what **they** view as essential information literacy preparation during college.

As *educators*, professional librarians have a responsibility to ensure that the public has access to the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and resources needed for personal, professional, and academic goals as well as quality of life. Consequently, individuals, organizations, businesses, government agencies, communities, etc. outside of higher education will have a much easier time embracing and adapting to information literacy practice if a theory (such as the Framework) is well-founded, well-articulated, and linked to *actual practice* (2000 Standards).

“The great enemy of communication, we find, is the illusion of it” (Whyte 1950)... Perhaps the Framework’s architects need to reflect on this as they move forward with their efforts to advance information literacy culture.

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