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Shuyi Liu

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This case study examines the development and implementation of a campus-wide assessment of the Information Literacy (IL) Core Competency at California State University, Fresno, during the 2023-2024 academic year. A cross-disciplinary faculty committee evaluated 153 upper-division General Education student papers using a rubric adapted from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) VALUE rubric and aligned with the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy. Through norming sessions, rubric revision, and collaborative scoring, the project revealed key challenges in evaluating IL across disciplines, particularly in achieving interrater consistency and interpreting student work in the absence of assignment context. The study explores how faculty from different academic fields interpreted IL criteria and how librarians contributed a focused lens on information behaviors. Reflections from the assessment process offer practical recommendations for improving rubric design, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue, and supporting institution-wide assessment practices. The findings underscore how shared assessment efforts can strengthen institutional understanding of IL and inform both instruction and faculty development.

Keywords: information literacy, assessment, rubric, interdisciplinary collaboration, norming, higher education, VALUE rubric, ACRL Framework, library instruction, institutional learning outcomes

INTRODUCTION

During the 2023-2024 academic year, California State University, Fresno conducted a campus-wide assessment of the Information Literacy (IL) Core Competency as part of its rotating evaluation of General Education (GE) learning outcomes. The assessment was led by the University Information Literacy Core Competency Assessment Committee (hereafter referred to as the committee), composed of 14 faculty members representing a wide range of disciplines, including Public Health, Psychology, Media, Communications and Journalism, Engineering, Business, Educational Leadership, and Criminology, along with several librarians. This interdisciplinary composition was intentional, reflecting the institutional recognition that IL is a shared responsibility across the curriculum.

The primary objective of the assessment was to evaluate the IL proficiency of graduating students by analyzing upper-division GE course papers. The assessment aimed to measure students' ability to apply key information literacy skills as defined by both institutional learning outcomes and national standards, such as the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) VALUE rubric.

The assessment design included three components: (1) rubric-based scoring of 153 student papers; (2) a study of students' search strategies; and (3) a citation reference check. This paper focuses on the first component, a rubric-driven evaluation of de-identified student papers from GE ePortfolios, offering a reflective case study on the implementation process. Rather than presenting institutional results or statistical analyses, the paper centers on the lived experience of conducting large-scale IL assessments through collaborative rubric use and norming. It explores the challenges of aligning expectations across disciplines, the benefits of librarian-faculty collaboration, and the broader instructional and professional impacts of participating in this effort.

By examining how scoring teams interpreted and negotiated IL criteria in the absence of assignment context, the study highlights how interdisciplinary assessment initiatives can surface underlying assumptions, foster faculty learning, and strengthen shared approaches to teaching and evaluating information literacy.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Information literacy is widely recognized as a core competency in higher education, and essential to supporting critical thinking, civic engagement, and lifelong learning (ACRL, 2016; Julien et al., 2020). While librarians have traditionally taken the lead in teaching IL, assessing it at scale remains a complex challenge, particularly across disciplines. These include aligning faculty understanding of IL, designing adaptable rubrics, and interpreting student performance within diverse curricular contexts (Saunders, 2012; Delmond et al., 2024).

Rubric-based assessment, particularly those informed by the AAC&U VALUE rubrics, has become a widely adopted strategy for evaluating student learning in IL and other general education outcomes (AAC&U, 2013). However, studies consistently highlight the limitations of such tools, including variation in rater interpretation, difficulty in applying abstract criteria, and challenges in ensuring consistency across disciplinary boundaries (Turbow & Evener, 2016; Burns et al., 2023). Translating conceptual frameworks like the ACRL Framework into practical scoring instruments remains an area of ongoing exploration (Buljung et al., 2023; Burns et al., 2023).

Large-scale IL assessment efforts often uncover differences in disciplinary assumptions about what constitutes appropriate information use, the value of particular source types, and expectations for ethical attribution (Dahlen, 2022; Smyser & Bolognese, 2023). Yet they also create opportunities for shared learning and instructional alignment. When assessment is approached as collaborative inquiry rather than merely a compliance activity, it can foster stronger campus cultures of teaching, reflection, and improvement (Hammons, 2022; Burns et al., 2023).

This case study builds upon that tradition, offering a campus-wide example of how an interdisciplinary committee engaged with these challenges. The process of rubric development,

norming, and scoring became not only a mechanism for assessing IL, but a venue for interdisciplinary learning, professional development, and dialogue about instructional goals. In doing so, it demonstrates how librarians, through their expertise in information behaviors and pedagogy, play a central role in shaping and facilitating assessment in partnership with faculty colleagues.

RUBRIC DESIGN AND MODIFICATION

The rubric used in the assessment was adapted from the AAC&U's Information Literacy VALUE rubric (AAC&U, 2013), which outlines five key dimensions of IL: (1) determining the extent of information needed; (2) accessing the needed information; (3) evaluating information and its sources critically; (4) using information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose; and (5) accessing and using information ethically and legally. These criteria also align closely with the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (ACRL, 2016), which defines information literacy through threshold concepts and emphasizes its application in diverse academic contexts.

Initial norming sessions using sample papers revealed tensions in applying the VALUE rubric's original four-point scale (Capstone, Milestone—High, Milestone—Low, Benchmark). Faculty raters noted that most papers clustered toward the high or low ends of the performance spectrum, with few falling cleanly into intermediate categories. Moreover, significant variation in writing quality, assignment design, and disciplinary expectations made it difficult to distinguish between "proficient" and "advanced" work. In particular, disagreement emerged over whether to rate a paper highly for its source use even if it was poorly written or lacked a strong argument.

In response, the committee collaboratively revised the rubric, simplifying the scale to three performance levels: Advanced, Proficient, and Developing. This change provided more meaningful distinctions and reduced rater uncertainty. Additionally, the criteria within each dimension were re-worded for clarity and reorganized to improve consistency in application across disciplines. The revision process included both qualitative feedback from norming discussions and a quantitative analysis of scoring patterns, facilitated by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE), according to the University Information Literacy Core Competency Assessment Committee (2024).

One of the more complex revisions involved the criteria for ethical use and citation of sources. While the original rubric emphasized general awareness of academic integrity, faculty noted that different disciplines have varying expectations for attribution. For instance, engineering or health sciences papers often rely on data, images, or government reports that are cited differently from traditional scholarly texts. The revised rubric aimed to be flexible enough to accommodate these disciplinary differences while maintaining clarity for raters unfamiliar with specific citation practices.

The result was a streamlined, user-friendly rubric that better matched the types of student work submitted and the committee's goal of assessing IL across disciplines. Importantly, the revision process itself fostered a shared language around information literacy and clarified how performance levels could be interpreted in different contexts. This co-construction of the rubric

proved to be one of the most meaningful aspects of the assessment and laid the groundwork for more coherent scoring and richer instructional reflections.

Table 1

Fresno State IL Core Competency Assessment Rubric (April 2024)

	Advanced	Proficient	Developing
1 Determine the Extent of Information Needed	• Effectively defines the scope of the research question or thesis. • Effectively determines key concepts. • Types of information (sources) selected directly relate to concepts and/or answer the research question.	• Defines the scope of the research question or thesis completely. • Determines key concepts. • Types of information (sources) used relate to concepts and/or answer the research question.	• Has difficulty defining the scope of the research question or thesis. • Has difficulty determining key concepts. • Types of information (sources) selected do not relate to concepts or answer the research question.
2 Access the Needed Information	• Accesses information using effective, well designed search strategies. • Retrieves information from most appropriate information sources. • Demonstrates ability to refine search.	• Accesses information using a variety of search strategies. • Retrieves information from relevant information sources. • Demonstrates ability to refine search.	• Accesses information randomly. • Retrieves information that lacks relevance and quality.
3 Evaluate Information and its Sources Critically	• Selects a variety of information sources appropriate to the scope and discipline of the research question. • Selects sources after considering the importance to the researched topic of **at least two** of the following criteria: relevance to the research question, currency, authority, audience, and bias or point of view.	• Selects a variety of information sources appropriate to the scope and discipline of the research question. • Selects sources using **at least one** of the following criteria: relevance to the research question, currency, authority, audience, and bias or point of view.	• Chooses few information sources. • Selects sources using limited criteria.

4 Use Information Effectively to Accomplish a Specific Purpose	• Communicates, organizes, and synthesizes information from sources to fully achieve a specific purpose with clarity and depth. • Demonstrates knowledge of types of information valued in a discipline.	• Communicates and organizes information from sources. • Synthesizes information from multiple sources to achieve the intended purpose.	• Communicates information from sources. • The information is fragmented and/or used inappropriately (misquoted, taken out of context, or incorrectly paraphrased, etc.), so the intended purpose is not achieved.
5 Access and Use Information Ethically and Legally	**Correctly uses 4+** of the following information use strategies: • use of citations and references; • choice of paraphrasing, summary, or quoting; • using information in ways that are true to original context; • distinguishing between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution; • demonstrating an understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential, and/or proprietary information (e.g., citation practices).	**Correctly uses 2-3** of the following information use strategies: • use of citations and references; • choice of paraphrasing, summary, or quoting; • using information in ways that are true to original context; • distinguishing between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution; • demonstrating an understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential, and/or proprietary information (e.g., citation practices).	**Uses 0-1** of the following information use strategies: • use of citations and references; • choice of paraphrasing, summary, or quoting; • using information in ways that are true to original context; • distinguishing between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution; • demonstrating an understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential, and/or proprietary information (e.g., citation practices).

Note. Developed from AAC&U IL VALUE Rubric, related scholarship, and the Committee discussions.

NORMING AS COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

All participating faculty, librarians, and disciplinary instructors alike engaged in structured norming sessions designed to calibrate scoring practices and build a shared understanding of the rubric. These sessions involved the independent review and scoring of sample student papers, followed by facilitated group discussions to reconcile discrepancies. Each paper in the full dataset

was later scored by two independent faculty raters, with a third added in cases where scores diverged significantly. Final reconciliations were managed by a staff analyst from OIE. This multi-rater process promoted fairness and reliability while offering opportunities for collaborative dialogue.

The norming sessions revealed important differences in disciplinary assumptions and evaluative habits. Librarians tended to focus on discrete IL behaviors, such as citation accuracy, quality of sources, and evidence integration, approaching scoring through the lens of information use. In contrast, faculty from other disciplines often evaluated IL in tandem with writing quality, content clarity, or argumentative structure. A paper with technically sound citations and credible sources but weak organization might be rated lower by disciplinary faculty, who viewed information use as inseparable from rhetorical coherence.

These divergent approaches prompted rich discussion. As participants grew more comfortable articulating their evaluative choices, many acknowledged how discipline-specific habits shaped their interpretation of IL. Through dialogue and continued norming, the group worked toward greater consistency, aided by targeted revisions to rubric language that emphasized specific evidence of IL competencies.

Importantly, the norming process became more than a technical exercise in alignment. It evolved into a form of cross-disciplinary professional development. Faculty reflected not only on how to score effectively, but on their own expectations for student work, the design of assignments, and the role of IL in their respective fields. Some participants acknowledged that their course assignments may not have clearly conveyed expectations related to citation or source evaluation, prompting conversations about how to revise instructions or scaffold IL more intentionally.

For librarians, the norming sessions affirmed both the importance of disciplinary nuance and the value of creating space for faculty to reflect on shared learning goals. As IL concepts were debated and clarified, the sessions fostered mutual understanding and strengthened instructional coherence across departments.

Ultimately, norming proved to be a process of inquiry that allowed faculty to surface implicit expectations, negotiate meaning, and explore how IL manifests in student work. These discussions deepened shared understanding and laid the foundation for more equitable and meaningful assessment practices.

SCORING WITHOUT ASSIGNMENT CONTEXT

Following the norming phase, faculty raters evaluated a total of 153 student papers from upper-division General Education ePortfolios. Each paper was anonymized and stripped of identifying details, including course titles, instructors, and assignment prompts. While this de-identification helped minimize bias, it also introduced significant challenges. Without assignment context, raters had limited insight into the specific goals, required sources, or disciplinary expectations associated with each paper.

This absence of context made it difficult to determine whether a student had met the IL demands of a given task or had misunderstood the expectations. For instance, a paper relying heavily on government reports might be entirely appropriate for a policy analysis course, yet could be perceived as lacking scholarly rigor by raters unfamiliar with that disciplinary norm. Similarly, papers that featured only a few citations raised questions: had students been asked to conduct in-depth research, or was the assignment scope more limited?

These interpretive gaps complicated scoring, particularly in dimensions such as "Use Information Effectively to Accomplish a Specific Purpose." Without knowing what that purpose was (argumentative essay, policy memo, literature review), raters had to infer intent and evaluate effectiveness without guidance. This issue surfaced repeatedly during scoring and was discussed in post-assessment reflections.

The revised rubric, condensed from four performance levels (AAC&U VALUE) into three (Advanced, Proficient, Developing), was intended to simplify scoring and reduce ambiguity. However, the lack of assignment context sometimes undercut that streamlining effect. Raters could generally identify clear cases at the high and low ends, but differentiating between "Proficient" and "Developing" often hinged on knowing what the assignment had required. For example, a student using only a handful of sources might be demonstrating sufficiency if the assignment called for a brief position paper, but the same performance could signal underdevelopment in a research-oriented task. In this way, assignment context would have made the rubric's categories more precise and actionable.

The challenge was further compounded by differing expectations for source types across disciplines. Faculty raters from the humanities, for example, often expected extensive engagement with scholarly literature, while those from technical or applied fields might view government documents, white papers, or trade sources as highly credible. Without context, evaluating source appropriateness became an exercise in disciplinary translation.

Librarians on the committee tended to approach these papers with an emphasis on observable IL behaviors, such as how sources were introduced, cited, and synthesized, rather than the overall writing quality. This created points of alignment and tension with other raters. In some cases, librarian raters assigned higher IL scores to papers with strong citation practices but weak prose, whereas disciplinary faculty hesitated to reward IL in the presence of poor writing. These differences highlighted the complex relationship between information literacy and broader academic performance.

Despite these limitations, the scoring process also reinforced the need for more transparent and consistent assignment design. Our reflections suggest that assignment context and rubric design are interdependent: a rubric can only capture student learning reliably if the assignment itself makes expectations explicit. The lack of assignment context became, in itself, an instructional finding: if students are to be evaluated on their use of information, they must be given clear guidance on expectations. Several committee members expressed interest in revisiting their course assignments to better articulate IL objectives and more explicitly scaffold source use and attribution.

For future assessments, participants recommended collecting brief assignment descriptions or instructional context alongside student papers, even if names and identifiers remain redacted. Doing so would enhance scoring accuracy and allow for fairer interpretation of student learning.

More broadly, the context issue reaffirmed the value of integrating librarians into the assessment process. Their focus on transferable IL behaviors helped anchor evaluations in observable skills, while their facilitation supported discussions around disciplinary expectations. In a scoring environment defined by complexity and variation, the collaborative insights of librarians and faculty alike proved essential.

INSTRUCTIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL IMPACT

Participation in the assessment committee had a notable impact on the instructional practices and professional perspectives of faculty involved, particularly librarians. Reviewing a wide range of student work, often from disciplines outside one's usual teaching area, highlighted the varied ways in which students interpret and apply information literacy skills. It also illuminated common gaps in student understanding, especially in evaluating the credibility of sources, integrating diverse viewpoints, and using citation systems accurately.

These observations influenced how librarians approached their own teaching. For example, some began to spend more time helping students understand the rhetorical purposes of citation, rather than treating citation solely as a technical requirement. Others placed renewed emphasis on distinguishing between types of sources and on explaining what constitutes credible evidence within different disciplinary contexts.

Serving on the committee also provided an important venue for professional collaboration. Librarians had the opportunity to engage with colleagues across campus, share their expertise in IL pedagogy, and contribute to institutional conversations about learning and assessment. Their disciplinary grounding in information literacy, combined with experience teaching research skills across multiple subjects, positioned them as valuable partners in designing and interpreting assessment instruments.

In addition to these instructional benefits, the norming and scoring process supported broader faculty development. Many participants reported increased awareness of how IL competencies manifest in various fields, and a stronger appreciation for the role that intentional assignment design plays in student success. For some, the experience prompted revisions to course materials or inspired new approaches to discussing source use and attribution in class.

Moreover, norming sessions fostered empathy and mutual understanding among faculty. Those from technical fields came to better understand why writing-intensive disciplines emphasized citation conventions, while colleagues from the humanities gained insight into how evidence functions in data-driven or visual formats. These conversations helped to build a more cohesive teaching culture and revealed the value of sustained interdisciplinary dialogue.

Even subtle shifts in teaching practice emerged as a result of the assessment. Faculty began to highlight not only how to cite sources, but why those sources mattered; not just how to find information, but how to evaluate its credibility within a specific field. These outcomes, though

informal, demonstrate the potential for assessment to influence instruction and contribute to more nuanced conversations about student learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This case study suggests several recommendations for institutions undertaking large-scale information literacy assessment. First, rubrics should be treated as living documents, subject to revision, refinement, and testing with real student work. The shift from a four-point to a three-point rubric in this project responded directly to scoring challenges and improved rater consistency without compromising nuance. Institutions should build flexibility into their assessment plans and allow time for iterative development.

Second, norming sessions should be structured as both calibration exercises and professional learning opportunities. Rather than viewing discrepancies in scoring as problems to eliminate, these conversations can surface important disciplinary assumptions and deepen shared understanding. Committees benefit when norming is collaborative, transparent, and informed by the lived experiences of faculty.

Third, providing assignment context, whether through brief descriptions, learning outcomes, or assignment prompts, can enhance rater confidence and improve fairness in evaluation. While anonymity protects student privacy, complete decontextualization risks misrepresenting student achievement. Balancing these needs is key to equitable assessment design.

Fourth, librarians bring essential expertise to interdisciplinary assessment efforts. Their familiarity with IL frameworks, pedagogy, and evaluation methods allows them to serve as both facilitators and content experts. In this project, librarians helped maintain a focus on observable information behaviors, guided rubric revisions, and supported the interpretation of complex scoring patterns. Institutions seeking to strengthen assessment efforts should engage librarians as full collaborators.

Finally, institutions should seek to connect assessment findings back to curriculum development and assignment design. When assessment is used not just to measure outcomes but to inform instruction, it can enhance both teaching practice and student learning. Faculty who participate in meaningful assessment work are more likely to revisit their teaching approaches, integrate IL more deliberately, and design assignments that better reflect institutional learning goals.

The assessment process at Fresno State revealed both the complexities and the value of evaluating information literacy across disciplines. Through thoughtful rubric design, inclusive norming sessions, and collaborative scoring, the committee built a stronger foundation for campus-wide understanding of IL. The project also demonstrated how assessment can be a vehicle for professional growth, instructional insight, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

In moving from rubric to reality, the committee not only assessed what students had learned, but also engaged deeply with how learning is defined, measured, and supported. These insights continue to inform IL instruction across the campus and provide a model for reflective, librarian-engaged assessment practice in higher education.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR LIBRARIANS

This assessment experience underscores several lessons that may be particularly relevant for librarians engaged in large-scale or cross-disciplinary information literacy initiatives. First, the process revealed the importance of developing rubrics that are not only aligned with national frameworks but also flexible enough to accommodate disciplinary differences. Librarians can play a central role in facilitating these adaptations, helping colleagues negotiate shared expectations for student work while respecting disciplinary norms.

Second, the challenges of scoring without assignment context highlighted how much information literacy performance is shaped by assignment design. Librarians are well positioned to collaborate with faculty on clarifying research expectations in syllabi, assignments, and rubrics. Even small interventions, such as encouraging instructors to articulate information literacy outcomes explicitly, can make student learning more visible and evaluable.

Finally, the collaborative structure of the committee demonstrated the value of librarians as both participants and mediators in assessment. Their expertise in transferable research behaviors provided a grounding perspective when disciplinary expectations diverged, while their facilitation skills helped sustain productive dialogue among faculty. For librarians seeking to build stronger campus partnerships, contributing to assessment projects can open opportunities to influence pedagogy, support faculty development, and advance a more coherent vision of student learning.

Taken together, these insights suggest that information literacy assessment is not simply a measurement exercise but also a form of professional practice. By engaging in the work of rubric design, assignment alignment, and cross-disciplinary dialogue, librarians can strengthen their role as educational partners and advocates for student learning.

Acknowledgments

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