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## **Information Inspiration: Creativity Across the Disciplines in Academic Libraries**

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# INFORMATION INSPIRATION: CREATIVITY ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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## INTRODUCTION

Placing new emphasis on makerspaces, digital publishing, and inventive ideation-centered instruction, universities and academic libraries have in recent years turned their attention to inspiring and supporting creativity, perhaps in part because employers value creativity in their hiring processes. While creativity can be defined in a variety of ways (Kaufman & Glăveanu, 2019; Sawyer, 2012), research indicates that creativity is a skill or disposition that can be taught (Miller, 2018; Scott et al., 2004), and that this disposition is useful across a number of domains (Lee & Carpenter, 2015). In this paper, three librarians from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio describe library instruction exercises intended to encourage student creativity, and reflect on some frameworks through which creativity in library contexts can be understood and promoted, including the *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy*, the Maker Competencies developed by Martin Wallace, and others.

The practices we describe here could also be discussed under frameworks such as the *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy* (RBMS-SAA) or *Visual Literacy Competency Standards* (ARLIS), a fact that attests to the importance of creativity across many areas of library instructional practice. While this article provides examples of creative activities developed by art, creating writing, and makerspace librarians, it also invites questions of how our evolving frameworks can more fully take creativity into account, as well as the potential utility of adopting revised metaliteracy or information creativity (Dahlquist, 2019) approaches that seek to coordinate and assess diverse library instructional practices related to creativity.

## CREATIVE DECONSTRUCTION: USING ZINES TO TEACH THE ACRL FRAMEWORK:

STEFANIE HILLES

Zines not only record the narratives of countercultural movements and preserve the voices of marginalized peoples; their creation and history can also be used to address elements of the *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy*. This case study investigates how one-shot zine-making workshops, where students have the opportunity to interact with a zine collection and make their own zines, can support the frame that authority is constructed and contextual by engaging students in creative processes.

In his often-cited book, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, Duncombe (2017) defines zines as, "...noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute themselves" (p. 9). The rest of his book discusses further characteristics: zines are associated with countercultures and marginalized peoples; they are handmade, often with a DIY or collage aesthetic; and they use both text and image to make meaning. Content can either be original, as in created by the author or artist, or appropriated from another source, as with collage.

When I was hired by Miami, I inherited a modest collection of zines and began teaching zine-making workshops for a variety of classes including English, creative writing, women and gender studies, education, and disability studies. Workshops begin with a think-pair-share activity where students interact with and discuss their observations on zines in the collection. A short lecture on zine history and aesthetics follows and the rest of the class is dedicated to

zine-making.

Returning to the characteristics of zines described by Duncombe (2017), we can see why the medium is well suited to implicitly teaching the concept that authority is constructed and contextual. Zines exist outside traditional systems of authority and provide an alternative voice. During the lecture portion of the workshop, three zine eras that specifically challenge authority are discussed: 1970s punk zines, 1990s riot grrrl zines, and contemporary social justice zines.

Although zines existed before the punk movement, the collage, DIY style of punk has largely become associated with zine aesthetics. This style, which uses handwriting, crossed-out words, and cut-out elements placed at haphazard angles, stands in direct contrast to the clarity, order, and logic of the International Typographic Style seen in mainstream graphic design at the time. Jamie Reid's *God Save the Queen* from 1977, an image used both on the Sex Pistols album of the same name and in punk zines, is an excellent example of this. The authority of Queen Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee portrait is challenged by Reid's use of cut-out letters that remind the viewer of ransom notes. By placing these words over the Queen's eyes and mouth, which have been ripped away, Reid furthers this association. The words "God Save the Queen," something that would normally be said in reverence, is now indicative of violence.

Riot grrrl zines, which share a similar aesthetic to punk zines, also deconstruct authority, particularly patriarchal power. They were an important place for women to discuss and dismantle how they are portrayed in popular media. Power narratives are also challenged in contemporary social justice zines, like those produced by the Black Lives Matter movement.

After interacting with the collection and learning about zine history and aesthetics, students make zines. What follows are two example assignments that can be used to reinforce the idea that authority is constructed and contextual. They ask students to think about authority and power as they deconstruct its messages through zine-making.

### **Feminist Remix**

This assignment was for a women and gender studies class. Each student received an old *Vogue* magazine weeded from our collection and was given time to look through them for patriarchal and heteronormative messages. Students then took these messages and challenged them by making a collage-based zine from their *Vogue* that deconstructs these power narratives. For example, one student took the "women need to be in a relationship to have value" trope they found in their *Vogue* and overturned this narrative through their zine.

**Figure 1: Ellie Krug. (2019). *No You Don't Complete Me*. Wertz Art and Architecture Library Zine Archive, Miami, Ohio.**

### **Deconstructing Disability**

This assignment was for a disability in literature course. The class had a one-shot zine workshop and used what they learned to make zines for their final group project, a zine taking the perspective of one of the disabled characters that students read about in the course. For example, one group made a zine based on *El Deafo* (2014) by Cece Bell, a graphic novel that details her experiences growing up deaf.

**Figure 2: Vanessa Rivera, Allie Kist, and Guetan Li (2019). *El Deafo*. Wertz Art and Architecture Library Zine Archive, Miami, Ohio.**

## CREATING IDENTITY: MAKERSPACES AS EXPLORATION OF SELF: SARAH NAGLE

As makerspaces are becoming increasingly popular in higher education, academic librarians work to define and assess the learning outcomes of maker-centered learning. Because academic library instruction puts so much emphasis on information literacy, the question arises of whether maker-centered instruction falls within the goals of information literacy, particularly as defined by the *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy*. Moving away from the idea that information literacy is simply a set of skills, new creative forms of library instruction supported by the *Framework* focus on helping students become independent agents and creators in the world of information. By examining two foundational concepts of the *ACRL Framework*, metaliteracy and liminality, this part of the paper will explore how maker-centered learning can be an excellent tool for helping students develop their own identity and agency in the world of information.

Maker-centered learning is a teaching technique that uses hands-on creation as a pathway to learning. It is an incredibly flexible learning tool that encompasses a wide range of activities. Various frameworks have been developed to explain and measure maker-centered learning. Two prominent frameworks are *Agency by Design* (Clapp et al., 2017), which is largely focused on K-12 education, and the *Maker Literacies Project* (Wallace et al., 2018), which addresses maker competencies for higher education. The overarching goal of most maker-centered learning frameworks is not the acquisition of specific STEM and technology skills, but rather the development of a mindset that affects how students approach their own identity and their role in the world.

In the Fall 2019 semester I worked with instructor Kristan Kanorr to develop a makerspace assignment for her first-year University Studies (UNV 101) course. The class is composed of first-year undecided students, and functions as an exploration of the possibilities for their college studies and future careers. We created two assignments, “Who I Am Not” and “Who I Am.” For “Who I Am Not,” students cut a wooden square carved with the Miami University “M” logo on the Carvey CNC machine. They then chose 3-5 words that represented stereotypes that others believed about them and cut them from vinyl on the Silhouette Cameo 3 machine, finally adhering them to the back of the woodblock. For “Who I Am,” students used the free vector software Inkscape to create personal logos that represented their identity, then cut the logos out using the Silhouette machine. The learning outcomes for these projects focused on creativity, engaging with new creative tools, and introspective thought.

**Figure 3: Example projects - “Who I Am Not,” a wood-block carved with the Miami University “M” logo and the words “Irresponsible, Wild, Uncaring” on the reverse, and “Who I Am,” a vinyl logo depicting mountains and the words “Patient, Loving, Brave.”**

Metaliteracy, a foundational concept of the *ACRL Framework*, puts emphasis on students as active “consumers and creators of information who can participate successfully in collaborative spaces” (American Library Association, 2015, para. 4). Mackey and Jacobson (2011), in proposing metaliteracy as an overarching concept, challenged the skills-based approach of information literacy instruction, and rather envisioned students working actively on projects related to a variety of emerging technologies and tools (p. 70). Through the UNV 101 assignments, students learned hard skills, such as vector drawing, CNC carving, graphic design, etc., but the real outcome of the projects was to help students develop an introspective, creative mindset, a goal that reflects Mackey and Jacobson’s vision for metaliteracy.

Liminality is another important concept in connecting maker-centered learning to the *ACRL Framework*. Barbara Fister spoke of liminality in a 2015 keynote at the LILAC Conference, calling it “the place where we are between understandings...where we are unsettled, where we might turn back because it’s just too uncomfortable—or where

we might feel exhilarated by the challenge” (p. 6). When I approach a makerspace assignment, I strive to not be prescriptive or tell students what to do. For the “Who I Am” project, I taught students the basics of Inkscape, but I stepped back when it was time for them to create their logos, pushing them into the area of liminality. After the initial discomfort, students faced the challenge and developed truly unique and interesting designs.

The lens of metaliteracy and liminality reveals how maker-centered learning can be a creative tool for students to develop a mindset of self-agency, creativity, introspection, and competency to address larger societal issues. This mindset is important for students as they navigate their studies and as they move into their chosen careers. When students understand themselves better, and feel confident in their creative abilities, they have a solid footing to further explore and master the threshold concepts for information literacy in their chosen disciplines.

## **QUERYING THE OUIJA-PAST WITH DIGITAL PRIMARY SOURCES: MARK DAHLQUIST**

As John Glover and Barry Trott (2016) have observed, the relationship between library instruction and creative writing remains one that invites further study, a claim that remains true despite a number of useful reflections on the subject (Arnaud, 2011; Glassman, 2014; Pavelich 2010).

The activity I describe here, in which session participants collaborate to produce a digital college or network map—a “Ouija-web”—during a library instruction session, was developed to supplement more traditional “research for creative writers” sessions I lead, which focus on historical research (often using primary sources), and on navigating the complex information landscape presented by small presses, literary journals, agents, and self-publishing platforms.

After participating in one of these more traditional sessions before this supplemental exercise had been created, an MFA student posed a question: couldn’t this workshop have been somehow more *generative*? This question was both intriguing and unsurprising: creative workshops such as the zine and makerspace projects described by my Miami colleagues in this article are popular at my institution. Why couldn’t a more traditional information literacy session benefit from developing similar generative workshop strategies?

### **The Ouija-past Exercise**

In response to this question, I developed a “Ouija-past” or “Ouija-web” exercise, which takes advantage of the affordances offered by: 1) digital primary sources (which are evocative like print sources, but also cut-and-pasteable like the print materials used in making zines) and 2) online digital canvases (we used one provided through Padlet.com), which allow session participants to collaborate using their laptops or tablets in arranging collected materials on a shared digital canvas.

The Ouija-past session begins with a more traditional overview (15-20 minutes) of a few online primary source archives, such as ProQuest and Chronicling America resources. In acquainting students with these repositories, I also teach them how to digitally select, cut, and paste images to prepare them for the following creative exercise.

The Ouija-past exercise is called this because in it students work together to “summon” a meaning or message from the digital remnants of the past. The message(s) that emerge from the exercise are random, but not entirely so, and are intended as points of departure for further contemplation.

Students begin by writing a historical topic (one at least 25 years old) on each of two note cards. The first topic is one of their choosing (perhaps related to a project they have already planned) and the second one is more random, determined as each student rolls a die, determining whether the second card will describe a person, place, thing, idea, event, or animal. Once each student has produced two cards, one of these two is exchanged with another student.

At this point, each student chooses one note card topic to research in an online database. I ask them to locate, select, and copy an image of a photo and also an image of a paragraph of text related to their topic, giving students at least 15-20 minutes to find some genuinely interesting clippings. Talking and sharing is encouraged during this fun low-pressure exercise.

Students then choose either the image or the paragraph they've selected and paste it onto the shared online canvas. Once these images are in place, I ask students to draw lines connecting the item they have added to the board to at least one other image that has been added to the board, perhaps adding a label to note a thematic relationship. Finally, we discuss the patterns that have emerged, and possible titles for the over-all Ouija-web.

Here is an example of Ouija-web produced using this method (though this example was produced by librarians, rather than students):

**Figure 4: A completed primary source Ouija-web, created on Padlet.com. Miami University Libraries instructional librarians (2019). *Never Forget - The Bizarre Rituals of Traveling Towards Death.***

This exercise provides surprise, serendipity, and wonder to spark creativity, employing a semi-structured information creativity approach to guide participants as they encounter strange, disturbing, or baffling digital archival materials. These are used to produce a web of meaning, and to identify points of entry for novel creative explorations, in addition to introducing students to valuable search tools that can be used for answering more traditional historical research questions.

## CONCLUSION

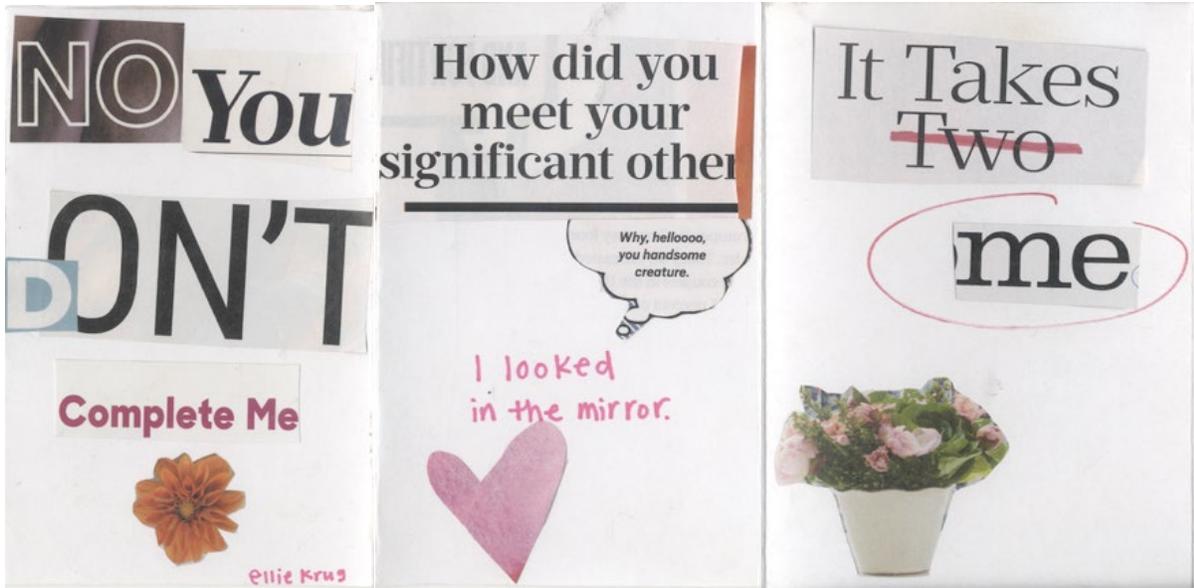
Taken together, the examples we've presented in this paper illustrate a range of methods of incorporating creativity in library instruction. As universities seek to cultivate creativity in and across their curricula, we regard these activities as inquiries toward an expanded field of creative practice in academic libraries.

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Images for Tables and Figures

Figure 1



Ellie Krug. (2019). *No You Don't Complete Me*. Wertz Art and Architecture Library Zine Archive, Miami, Ohio.

Figure 2

5.) Respect their privacy.  
Don't call out their deafness and expect them to explain it to you.

**IN SEARCH OF**  
**PRIVACY** : A series

6.) "Do"s and "Don't"s when interacting with P/deaf or H/hard of hearing individuals:

Don't yell.

Look at them when you speak.

Don't over-annunciate &/or talk slowly.

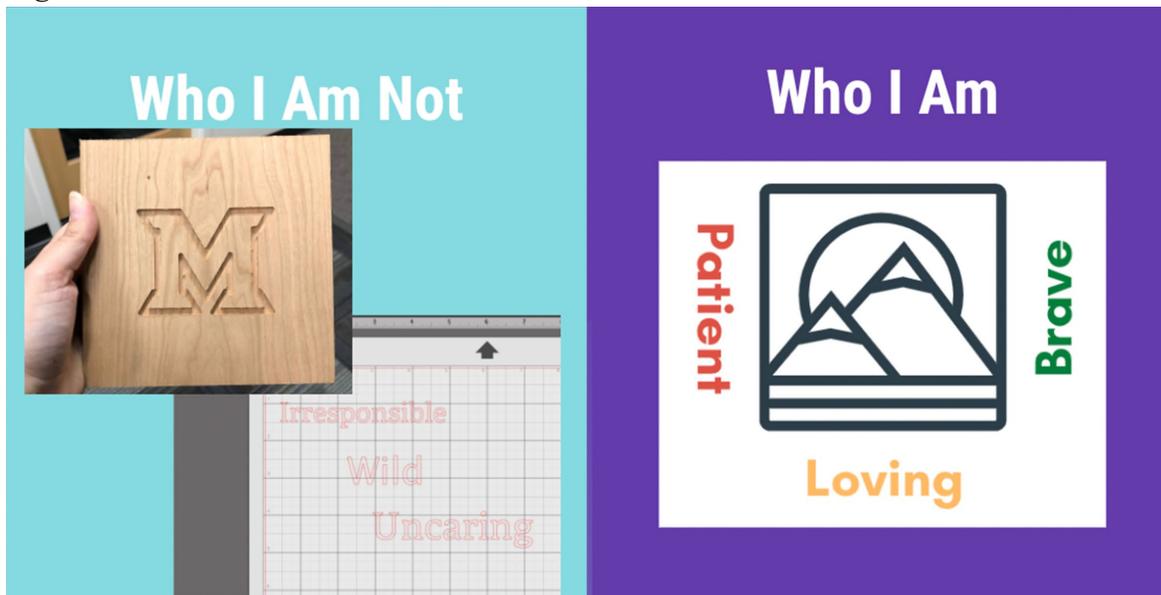
I can't see what anyone is saying...

Make sure your mouth is visible.  
(Don't talk in a dark room :))

Vanessa Rivera, Allie Kist, and Guetan Li (2019). *El Deafo*. Wertz Art and Architecture Library Zine Archive, Miami, Ohio.

LOEX

Figure 3



Example projects - “Who I Am Not”, a wood-block carved with the Miami University “M” logo and the words “Irresponsible, Wild, Uncaring” on the reverse, and “Who I Am,” a vinyl logo depicting mountains and the words “Patient, Loving, Brave.”

