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"INFORMATION LITERACY AS A LIBERAL ART" AND THE CREDIT-BEARING COURSE

In their 1996 article, "Information Literacy as a Liberal Art," Shapiro and Hughes invited educators to carefully consider both the definition of information literacy and what an information literacy curriculum should look like. Is information literacy primarily a skill set that helps people to become "effective information consumers," or does the term also encompass the ability "to think critically about the entire information enterprise and information society" (para. 5)? Shapiro and Hughes argued for the latter, multi-dimensional understanding of information literacy, claiming that it should be conceived of as a liberal art that includes the ability not only to use technology and access information but also to critically reflect "on the nature of information itself, its technical infrastructure, and its social, cultural and even philosophical context and impact" (para. 13). Information literacy, they maintained, is "essential to the mental framework of the educated information-age citizen" (para. 13) and "to the future of democracy, if citizens are to be intelligent shapers of the information society rather than its pawns" (para. 14). They ended the article with a call for "educators and information-systems professionals, humanists, and computer and information scientists" (para. 17) to collaboratively "design a comprehensive, multi-dimensional and thoughtful information literacy curriculum" in an effort to ensure that the information society is "free and humane" (para. 29).

While Shapiro and Hughes' call is exciting for librarians who have long been information literacy advocates, it is also important to note that the article does not position librarians as important contributors to this new curricular framework. In fact, the article explicitly contrasted librarians' understanding of information literacy, which they described as understanding the formats and methods for accessing information, with their own broader view consisting of seven literacy dimensions. The only opportunity for librarian participation mentioned in the article is "bibliographic instruction," a form of instruction that the authors maintain their multi-dimensional conception of information literacy leaves "far behind." Few would argue that the one-shot is an ideal medium through which to teach students how to think critically about information, information and communication technologies, and our information society. However, many libraries' information literacy programs include credit-bearing courses, and these can be ideal spaces for students to think deeply and critically about the social, political, and economic issues and questions revolving around information. These kinds of courses do not by themselves constitute an answer to Shapiro and Hughes' call, since their article pointed to the need for much broader changes across the higher education curriculum, including rethinking "our entire educational curriculum in terms of information." Nevertheless, information literacy courses taught by librarians could well be one facet of "a comprehensive, multi-dimensional and thoughtful information literacy curriculum" in which students learn to think critically about information issues.

It has been twenty years since the publication of "Information Literacy as a Liberal Art," and many consider it to be a foundational text in the information literacy literature. Google Scholar indicates that it has been cited over 560 times, and the article frequently appears on the syllabi of information literacy classes in library schools. However, to what extent has it influenced the curriculum of information literacy credit-bearing courses? Do such courses typically ask students to critically analyze information related issues or are they predominantly skills-based classes focused primarily on what Shapiro and Hughes referred to as "resource literacy"?

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN INFORMATION LITERACY COURSES?

Two studies of credit-bearing information literacy course syllabi shed some light on these questions. Hrycaj (2006) analyzed 100 online syllabi for credit-bearing library skills courses, looking specifically at course topics, assessment techniques, and teaching methods. The study mapped identified topics to the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2000) in order to determine which standards were most heavily emphasized. Results indicated that accessing information (which maps to Standard Two) was the main focus of these courses (p. 533). Moreover, the vast majority of topics covered in the courses were skills (e.g., web searching, writing citations, developing a research strategy, etc.) rather than information themes that students could read, think, discuss, research, and write about. In his discussion of Standard Three (evaluation) related topics, the author explicitly discounted the value of analyzing information themes in information literacy courses, arguing that "analyzing arguments, synthesizing information, and drawing conclusions based on one's understanding of various sources of information…are best done in the context of discipline-based courses" (p. 530). He went on to claim that "it is difficult for students to exercise these skills without completely reading and digesting material presented in periodical articles, monographs, and Web sites, and this would be done more appropriately in the context of a discipline course than in a non–subject-related, general library skills course" (p. 530). Hrycaj also indicated that Standard Four related topics (using information) should not be a priority in information literacy courses and that omitting them was wise because teaching students how to communicate clearly in a research product is "probably best left to writing and discipline instructors, who are in a better position to assign full-blown writing and other information-presentation projects than instructors of library skills courses" (p. 531).

A similar 2012 study by Elrod, Wallace and Sirigos of 100 credit-bearing information literacy syllabi confirmed Hrycaj's findings that the most heavily emphasized standard in information literacy courses is Standard Two (accessing information) and the least emphasized is Standard Four (using information). In contrast with the 2006 study, the 2012 study noted how many credit hours were offered for each course, finding that the majority were one credit hour courses. The study questioned whether the one credit hour designation indicated that "library skills are not taken seriously by academia" (Elrod et al., 2012, p. 10). Another interpretation, however, might be that a one credit hour designation is appropriate for courses that do not include robust reading, thinking, researching, and writing assignments. That being said, while the Hrycaj article only provided a list of textbooks used in the courses, all of which focused on the research process, the Elrod et al. article also included a list of assigned articles. The list revealed that some courses were doing more than focusing solely on skills by asking students to read at least a few articles highlighting controversial information issues, such as censorship, net neutrality, and open access.

Both studies were limited by their focus on syllabi that were available on the web, and as a result, they undoubtedly missed syllabi that were not online or that were only available in password protected learning management systems. Nevertheless, these analyses suggest that credit-bearing information literacy courses focus primarily on what Shapiro and Hughes described as "resource literacy" rather than "critical literacy," which they define as critically evaluating "the intellectual, human and social strengths and weaknesses, potentials and limits, benefits and costs of information technologies" (para. 25) from a variety of perspectives or lenses, including historical, philosophical, sociopolitical, and cultural. A review of articles that focus on the development and/or assessment of specific information literacy courses also indicates that most information literacy courses focus on information literacy as a set of discrete skills, many primarily emphasize resource literacy, and few emphasize critical thinking about information issues (Burkhardt, 2007; Daugherty & Russo, 2011; Hahn, 2012; Manuel, 2001; Lindsay, 2004; Sharma, 2007).

Exceptions include an article by Beilin and Leonard (2013), in which they describe LIB 1201, a three credit hour "critical information literacy" course offered at New York City College of Technology. The course explores "contemporary issues in media and information from social, economic, political, and ethical viewpoints" (p. 4). Students are asked to reflect upon their own experiences as information consumers and producers, and they engage in a series of scaffolded research assignments in which they focus on a topic relevant to the information issues discussed in class. In contrast with the course syllabi that Hrycaj examined, which tended to deemphasize evaluating and using information to produce a research product (2006, p. 531), LIB 1201 students developed research "competencies through reading, blogging, research, and writing assignments" (Beilin & Leonard, 2013, p. 6). Another exception is Pemberton and Radom's discussion of a credit-bearing course at the University of North Carolina Wilmington in which the "final part of the semester is devoted to discussing information issues in the digital age, including scholarly communication, copyright and privacy" (2010, p. 51).

CAL POLY POMONA'S CREDIT-BEARING COURSE

Cal Poly Pomona, located in Southern California, is one of 23 campuses in the California State University system. It has approximately 21,000 FTEs, 95% of whom are undergraduates. The Cal Poly Pomona University Library first offered its four-unit course, LIB 150, The Information Diet: Information Literacy Skills for Academic Success and Healthy Information Habits, during the 2015 winter quarter. It was designed to integrate the various literacies Shapiro and Hughes outlined, with a particular emphasis on critical literacy. The course outcomes also map to the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (2000) and the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (2015).

Table 1: Course Learning Outcomes

Specifically, the course attempts to enhance students' research skills in and through the process of grappling with controversial information and technology questions that are immediately relevant to students' personal lives, and their ability to function as "intelligent shapers of the information society rather than [as] its pawns" (Shapiro & Hughes, 1996). Each week, students read articles and/or watch videos focusing on a specific information theme and then discuss the readings/videos in small groups, as a class, and on the online discussion board. They also engage in hands-on activities that ask them to practice specific information literacy skills. The information themes thus position assignments and activities designed to enhance students' information literacy skills within authentic learning contexts in which real research questions can be asked, meaningful lines of inquiry can be pursued, and ongoing scholarly conversations can be accessed and analyzed. A course without a theme for students to read, think, research, and write about, or that attempts to teach information literacy skills separately rather than as part of a process, not only runs the risk of being viewed as busy work but also is unlikely to produce deep learning that will transfer to research projects assigned in other courses.

Table 2: Information Literacy Skills, Information Themes, and Assignments

In contrast with Hrycaj, who argues that having students produce an information product is unnecessary and that writing and discipline instructors are better positioned to assign research-based writing assignments and presentations than library instructors, the development of LIB 150 was based on the assumption that the research and writing processes are often inextricably linked, that divorcing the two can lead to assignments that seem arbitrary and inauthentic, and that writing assignments and feedback on writing should not be limited to writing courses. Improvement in writing is a slow process that occurs through practice and feedback throughout students' academic careers. Instructors in all disciplines thus have a responsibility to help students improve their writing skills through the provision of writing assignments and feedback, and librarian instructors should not be held to a lesser standard.

LIB 150 contains many writing assignments that help students develop their critical literacy skills. The first major assignment is aligned with the first course reading, Clay Johnson's book *The Information Diet: A Case for Conscious Consumption*, from which we derived the name of the course (with permission). In an effort to get students to turn a critical eye on their own relationship with information, the assignment requires them to keep an information consumption log for a week and then afterward to analyze and reflect upon their information consumption habits. After the first assignment, students engage in a series of scaffolded assignments that frame research as an inquiry-based learning process. In addition to their brief weekly introductions to a variety of information related issues through course readings and videos, the course provides students with a deeper learning experience in which they conduct research on a specific information issue that is particularly interesting to them. The first two assignments in this process focus on topic selection and the development of a research question. Students start by selecting a general information related controversial issue (a list of sample topics is provided to help with this task), and then they conduct background research to start learning about the kinds of questions that are being asked and the positions that are being taken. They then develop a research question that is informed by the types of scholarly conversations revolving around their general topic. Their next assignment asks them to use a variety of search tools and strategies to find texts on their topic and to reflect upon which tools and strategies were most effective. The search tools and strategies assignment is followed by one that asks students to compare a scholarly and a popular article that focuses on their specific research question, identifying the distinguishing features and purposes of these different types of conversations. Evaluation is the focus of the next assignment, which asks students to analyze three high quality texts that focus on their specific research question, summarize the main argument or findings, and explain why they think they are relevant and reputable sources that would be appropriate to use in a college level paper. Over the course of the quarter, students spend the time required to learn about their topics, and the final assignment gives them the opportunity to reflect upon that learning. In writing or through video, students present their research question and outline at least three different positions that are taken on the issue. Next, they reflect upon the research process and the evolution of their thinking on the topic, explaining what their current view on the topic is and leveraging high quality sources to support their perspective.

CONCLUSION

In "Information Literacy as a Liberal Art," Shapiro and Hughes (1996) advocate for an information literacy curriculum that goes beyond resource literacy to include critical literacy, configured as the ability to analyze our information landscape through a variety of lenses. A review of the literature suggests that while Shapiro and Hughes are frequently cited, their broader view of information literacy has not informed the development of many information literacy courses. In contrast, Cal Poly Pomona's LIB 150 emphasizes critical literacy by asking students to grapple with questions revolving around the information and communication technologies that are shaping our cultural, economic, social, and political landscape. As part of a comprehensive information literacy curriculum, courses like LIB 150 work well for first-year students, introducing them to the information literacy skills and information issues that they will continue to explore more deeply in their majors. At universities that lack the kind of comprehensive and integrated information literacy curriculum called for by Shapiro and Hughes, a course like LIB 150 may be one of only a few

opportunities for students to practice information literacy skills while also learning to think critically about the information issues that affect their everyday lives.

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Table 1: Course Learning Outcomes Mapped to Shapiro & Hughes' Literacies, the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, and the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education

LIB 150 Learning Outcome	Shapiro & Hughes' Literacies	Standards	Framework
Discuss research as a nonlinear, iterative, and integrative process of finding and using information to answer questions, solve problems, and develop and support arguments.	• **Resource literacy** • **Research literacy** • **Publishing literacy**	• **Standard Two:** Access • **Standard Four:** Use	• **Research as Inquiry** • **Searching as Strategic Exploration**
Articulate strategies for becoming critical consumers and producers of information.	• **Critical literacy** • **Publishing literacy** • **Emerging technology literacy** • **Social-structural literacy**	• **Standard Three:** Evaluate • **Standard Four:** Use	• **Information Has Value** • **Information Creation as a Process** • **Searching as Strategic Exploration** • **Authority Is Constructed and Contextual**
Analyze social issues revolving around the production, dissemination, consumption, and (mis)uses of information, such as privacy, censorship, citizen reporting, digital activism, etc.	• **Critical literacy** • **Emerging technology literacy**	**Standard Five:** Ethical & Legal Issues	• **Scholarship as Conversation** • **Information Has Value**
Distinguish among information formats and types (e.g., scholarly vs. popular) and the processes underlying their creation.	• **Resource literacy** • **Social-structural literacy**	**Standard One:** Information Need	• **Scholarship as Conversation** • **Authority Is Constructed and Contextual**
Use advanced search strategies in order to effectively find needed information on the free web, in licensed library databases, and in print.	• **Tool literacy** • **Resource literacy** • **Research literacy**	**Standard Two:** Access	**Searching as Strategic Exploration**
Evaluate information in terms of its currency, relevancy, authority, accuracy, and purpose.	**Social-structural literacy**	**Standard Three:** Evaluate	• **Authority Is Constructed and Contextual** • **Information Creation as a Process**
Articulate why, what, and how to properly attribute sources.	• **Social-structural literacy** • **Publishing literacy**	**Standard Five:** Ethical & Legal Issues	• **Information Has Value** • **Scholarship as Conversation**
Discuss legal and ethical issues revolving around copyright and fair use.	• **Social-structural literacy** • **Critical literacy**	**Standard Five:** Ethical & Legal Issues	**Information Has Value**

Table 2: Information Literacy Skills, Information Themes, and Assignments

Week	Information Literacy Skills	Information Themes	Assignments & Readings/Viewings
1	• Exploring social issues revolving around information • Reflecting on information consumption patterns	Conscious Information Consumption	• Read: *The Information Diet*, Introduction through Chapter 6 • Discussion Board (DB) Post: Social Bubbles

2	• Exploring how information is formally and informally produced, organized, and disseminated
	• Reflecting on information consumption patterns
	• Citing sources and avoiding plagiarism
		• Information Cycle
		• Conscious Information Consumption
			• Read:
			  o *The Information Diet*, Chapters 7-9
			  o *The Information Diet*, Chapters 10, 11, and "A Special Note"
			• Watch: The Information Life Cycle
			• Information Consumption Diary Assignment

3	• Selecting a topic
	• Exploring the ways information is formally and informally produced, organized, and disseminated
		Sharing with the Crowd in the Cloud	• Watch:
			  o The Power and the Danger of Online Crowds
			  o How Cognitive Surplus Will Change the World
			  o The Birth of Wikipedia

			• Read: [Free for All? Lifting the Lid on a Wikipedia Crisis](#) • DB Post: Topic Selection Part 1
4	• Conducting background research to learn about the "conversation" • Refining the topic/focus of the research project	Digital & Hashtag Activism	• Watch: o [Research is a Conversation](#) o [How Social Media Can Make History](#) o [How the Net Aids Dictatorships](#) o [Inside the Egyptian Revolution](#) • Read: [#Bringbackourgirls, #Kony2012, and the complete, divisive history of 'hashtag activism'](#)
5	Using advanced search strategies to find needed information on the free web, in licensed library databases, and in print	Big Data	• Watch: o [Big Data Is Better Data](#) o [What Do We Do with All this Big Data?](#) • Read: o [Big Data Can Guess Who You Are Based on Your Zip Code](#) o [A Data Analyst's Blog Is Transforming How New Yorkers See Their City](#) • Search Tools & Strategies Assignment
6	Using advanced search strategies to find needed information on the free web, in licensed library databases, and in print	How beliefs & assumptions shape our responses to information	• Read: o [The Science of Why We Don't Believe in Science](#) o [Accept Defeat: The Neuroscience of Screwing Up](#) • Listen: [Why Do We Create Stereotypes](#)?
7	Distinguishing among and selecting appropriate information types for your research	The Future of the Internet	• Watch: o [What is a Scholarly Article?](#) o [Scholarly vs. Popular Periodicals](#) o [Peer Review in 3 Minutes](#) o [The interspecies internet? An idea in progress](#) o [Welcome to the Age of the Industrial Internet](#) • Read: [In the Programmable World, All Our Objects Will Act as One](#)
8	Evaluating information and authority	Privacy & Security Online	• Watch: o [What will a future without secrets look like?](#) o [Think your email's private? Think again](#) o [What's wrong with your pa$$w0rd?](#) • Read: [6 Reasons We Share Too Much Online, according to Behavioral Scientists](#) • Evaluating Sources Assignment
9	Exploring issues related to privacy and security, and censorship and freedom of speech	Secrets and Surveillance	• Listen: [Why Should We Care about Keeping Secrets?](#) • Watch: o [Here's How We Take Back the Internet](#) o [The NSA responds to Edward Snowden's TED Talk](#) o [Why the World Needs WikiLeaks](#) • Read: ["The Hazards of Nerd Supremacy: The Case of WikiLeaks"](#)
10	Exploring legal and ethical issues revolving around copyright and fair use	• Fair Use • Remixes and Mashups	• Read: o [The Tyranny of Copyright?](#) o [The Impending Death of the YouTube Mashup](#) • Watch: o [Everything is a Remix Part 3](#) o [A Fair(y) Use Tale](#) o [Everything Is a Remix Part 4](#) • DB Post: Remixes/Mashups and Fair Use
11			Final Research Project on selected information related topic.