

# Threshold Concepts as Metaphors for the Creative Process:

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## Adapting the Framework for Information Literacy to Studio Art Classes

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**Abstract**—With the revision of the ACRL information literacy standards into a metaliteracy framework, art librarians now have an opportunity to better adapt information literacy instruction for studio art students. By using the new information literacy threshold concepts as metaphors for the creative process, a Northern Illinois University art faculty member and an art librarian collaborated to help students in an advanced studio photography class recognize the importance of research and information literacy skills in the development of their artistic vision and to improve the quality of their work.

### INTRODUCTION

Beyond the ability to access specific art-related resources, it is often difficult to convince art students that highly developed research and information literacy skills are valuable, not just for their academic work and lifelong learning, but for their own artwork as well. This is particularly true of studio art students for whom it is not always clear how library resources support art production. However, with the revision of the ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries) information literacy standards, art librarians now have an opportunity to better adapt information literacy instruction for studio art students. The new “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education”<sup>1</sup> recognizes that information literacy is a metaliteracy where multiple literacies (visual, news, digital, etc.) intersect. This expands the definition of

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1. “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education,” Association of College and Research Libraries, February 2, 2015, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>.

information literacy to the ability to acquire, produce, and share knowledge in collaborative environments using emerging technologies,<sup>2</sup> which promotes critical thinking, or as Donna Witek and Teresa Grettano state, the “critical awareness of why we do what we do with information.”<sup>3</sup> The Framework also includes threshold concepts, or “gateway understandings,” that represent the transformative, higher-level knowledge needed to become an expert in a given discipline.<sup>4</sup> Both the metaliteracy approach and presence of threshold concepts are features of the Framework that lend themselves well to relating the creative process to the research process. This article describes the collaboration between an assistant professor of photography and the information literacy librarian/art subject specialist at Northern Illinois University (NIU) to integrate information literacy into an advanced studio photography class. By using the new information literacy threshold concepts as metaphors for the creative process, the authors were able to help students recognize the importance of research and information literacy skills in the development of their artistic vision and to improve the quality of their work.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Art students, particularly studio art and design students, have difficulty recognizing the value of libraries, research, and information literacy in relation to their artwork.<sup>5</sup> Hannah Bennett notes that “studies have shown and practice has proven that ‘resources’ for studio students so often imply or are assumed to be items fostering original observation through accidental discovery.”<sup>6</sup> Browsing with little intention is often thought to be the main way artists use libraries. However, in William S. Hemming’s in-depth literature review of the information-seeking behavior of visual artists, he determined that artists need information not only for inspiration and access to specific visual images, but also for technical knowledge, marketing and career guidance, and knowledge of current trends in the art world.<sup>7</sup> In other words, art students do search with purpose and, because they often search for information about topics not related to art, they may not be best served by a traditional art library.<sup>8</sup> Art, particularly contemporary art, is increasingly multidisciplinary; inspiration, technique, and production can draw from many different subjects in a variety of disciplines. Now more than ever, developing a full range of information literacy skills is essential for

2. Thomas P. Mackey and Trudi E. Jacobson, “Reframing Information Literacy as a Metaliteracy,” *College & Research Libraries* 72, no. 1 (2011): 62–78.

3. Donna Witek and Teresa Grettano, “Teaching Metaliteracy: A New Paradigm in Action,” *Reference Services Review* 42, no. 2 (2014): 190.

4. Jan H. F. Meyer, Ray Land, and Caroline Baillie, “Editors’ Preface,” in *Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning*, ed. Jan H. F. Meyer, Ray Land, and Caroline Baillie (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2010), ix–xlii.

5. See, for example, Hannah Bennett, “Bringing the Studio into the Library: Addressing the Research Needs of Studio Art and Architecture Students,” *Art Documentation* 25, no. 1 (2006): 28–42; Alessa Zanin-Yost and Erin Tapley, “Learning the Art Classroom: Making the Connection Between Research and Art,” *Art Documentation* 27, no. 2 (2008): 40–45; and Stacy Brinkman and Sara Young, “Information Literacy Through Site-Specific Installation: The Library Project,” *Art Documentation* 25, no. 1 (2010): 28–42.

6. Bennett, “Bringing the Studio into the Library,” 38.

7. William S. Hemming, “The Information-Seeking Behavior of Visual Artists: A Literature Review,” *Journal of Documentation* 64, no. 3 (2008): 355.

8. *Ibid.*

the aspiring artist and provides an important opportunity for librarians to integrate information literacy into the creative process.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the library instruction present in art programs takes place in art or architecture history classes, art education classes,<sup>10</sup> or writing arts and foundations courses.<sup>11</sup> Library and information literacy instruction for studio art and design classes is not as prevalent. This may be because these students do not often have research paper requirements,<sup>12</sup> and few studio art faculty regularly request instruction sessions for these classes. According to one survey of studio art faculty in the southwestern United States, 47 percent of studio art faculty have never requested a library session from librarians.<sup>13</sup> More recently, there have been interesting collaborations between studio art faculty and librarians to incorporate information literacy instruction into courses that have resulted in exhibitions in the library, using the space as both exhibit site and case study.<sup>14</sup> While this type of collaboration may not be easily replicated in other academic libraries, these examples are notable in their incorporation of studio-based instruction techniques to foster information literacy by engaging students at the conceptual level.

### A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR INFORMATION LITERACY

Part of the challenge in offering information literacy instruction to studio art classes has been the difficulty in relating the “ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education” to the art school. Adopted by the ACRL Board of Directors in 2000, the standards have been useful in guiding the instruction efforts of many academic librarians. However, these skills-based outcomes have not always been easy to translate across disciplines and settings, particularly in the academic art library. As Aniko Halverson observes, “Especially in the context of art schools, where we laud our students for having different needs, dispositions, and habits than the typical college or university student, I have asked myself many times how I can make sense of these standards in a practical sense.”<sup>15</sup>

At the 2015 American Library Association Midwinter meeting in Chicago, the ACRL Board of Directors approved the new “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.” It is significant in its recognition of multiple literacies that intersect with information literacy and its incorporation of threshold concepts. This

9. Heather Gendron, “Don’t Fence Me in! Reconsidering the Role of the Librarian in a Global Age of Art and Design Research,” *Art Libraries Journal* 34, no. 2 (2009): 30.

10. See, for example, Rina Vecchiola, “Using ARLIS/NA Information Competencies for Students in Design Disciplines in Course Integrated Information Literacy Instruction at Washington University in St. Louis,” *Art Documentation* 30, no. 1 (2011): 74–78; Zanin-Yost, “Learning the Art Classroom”; and Heather Gendron and Eva Sclipa, “Where Visual and Information Literacies Meet: Redesigning Research Skills Teaching and Assessment for Large Art History Survey Courses,” *Art Documentation* 33, no. 2 (2014): 327–44.

11. See, for example, Aniko Halverson, “Confronting Information Literacy in an Academic Arts Library,” *Art Documentation* 27, no. 2 (2008): 34–38.

12. Kathryn Wayne, “The Impact of Bibliographic Instruction on the Architecture Curriculum at the University of California Berkeley,” *Art Documentation* 16, no. 1 (1997): 8.

13. Tori R. Gregory, “Under-Served or Under-Surveyed: The Information Needs of Studio Art Faculty in the Southwestern United States,” *Art Documentation* 26, no. 2 (2009): 62.

14. Daniel Payne, “Exhibiting Information Literacy: Site-Specific Art and Design Interventions at the Ontario College of Art & Design,” *Art Libraries Journal* 33, no. 1 (2008): 35–41; Stacy Brinkman and Sara Young, “Information Literacy Through Site-Specific Installation.”

15. Halverson, “Confronting Information Literacy in an Academic Arts Library,” 34.

metaliteracy approach to information literacy, which identifies and unites “associations to relevant literacy types such as visual literacy, digital literacy, mobile literacy, and media literacy,”<sup>16</sup> makes the Framework highly adaptable by art librarians and highly relatable to art school students. In fact, associations between studio art education and information literacy are now much more evident. Studio art students investigate and explore, produce, participate in peer review and critique, and then respond to and incorporate feedback. This process explicitly relates to the newly expanded competencies of information literacy that now not only include locating, accessing, and producing information, but also collaborating, participating, and sharing it.<sup>17</sup>

Instead of the strictly defined standards, performance indicators, and outcomes of the previous Information Literacy Competency Standards,<sup>18</sup> the Framework includes six frames with corresponding threshold concepts, knowledge practices, and dispositions that are intended to be adaptable. As noted in the introduction to the Framework, “Threshold concepts are those ideas in any discipline that are passageways or portals to enlarged understandings or ways of thinking and practicing within that discipline.”<sup>19</sup> The six concepts that serve as the basis for each frame<sup>20</sup> are:

- 1) *Authority is constructed and contextual.* This frame refers to the “different types of authority” recognized by different communities and the importance of understanding the context which will “help determine the level of authority required”;<sup>21</sup>
- 2) *Information creation as a process.* This frame relates to the understanding that the process of creating information and its specific format can impact how the information is evaluated;
- 3) *Information has value.* This frame pertains to the value of information as a commodity and in various environments, such as legal, socioeconomic, and educational;
- 4) *Research as inquiry.* This frame refers to the repetitive process of research that becomes more complex as new questions or answers develop;
- 5) *Scholarship as conversation.* This frame describes scholarship as an ongoing discourse with new insights developing as a result of “varied perspectives and interpretations”;<sup>22</sup> and
- 6) *Search as strategic exploration.* This frame pertains to the understanding that the search process requires “the evaluation of a range of information sources and the mental flexibility to pursue alternate avenues”<sup>23</sup> as we learn new information.

All of these concepts are overlapping and interconnected, allowing the Framework to be flexible in its implementation, with knowledge practices and dispositions that

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16. Thomas P. Mackey and Trudi E. Jacobson, *Metaliteracy: Reinventing Information Literacy to Empower Learners* (Chicago: Neal-Schuman, 2014), 5.

17. *Ibid.*, 1.

18. “Information Literacy Competency Standards of Higher Education,” Association of College and Research Libraries, January 18, 2000, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency#stan>.

19. ACRL, “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.”

20. These are summarized from the ACRL “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.”

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

are more versatile than prescriptive.<sup>24</sup> More importantly, this new approach to information literacy can serve as “inspiration” to help librarians teach larger concepts, depending on the needs of students and faculty, instead of simply “tools and techniques.”<sup>25</sup>

### INTEGRATING INFORMATION LITERACY: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR FACULTY COLLABORATION

The opportunity to collaborate arose when the authors of this article met during the New Faculty Forum hosted by their institution. In addition to both being newly hired tenure-track faculty, the librarian is also the subject specialist for the School of Art and Design where the faculty member’s home department is located. Initial conversations began through a mutual interest in libraries and research and soon progressed into discussions about possible collaborations. The faculty member is a well-respected artist in her own right, whose process for creating photographic art has always included research in other disciplines as an important source of inspiration. Her recent series *Pond Weeds*<sup>26</sup> provides clear examples of the meandering nature of artist inspiration found through varied subjects and non-artistic texts (Figure 1). Although the formal decisions made by the artist were influenced by artistic precedent (specifically cubism, Bauhaus, and color theory), her readings in contemporary philosophy and social psychology about affect and the virtual,<sup>27</sup> in metaphysics about object-oriented ontology,<sup>28</sup> and in physics about quantum electrodynamics and electromagnetism<sup>29</sup> inspired the content for these artistic works.

As the faculty member has become more cognizant of the nuanced ways in which multidisciplinary research influences artistic practice, she has also become more aware of the challenges in teaching her studio art students similarly productive research and information literacy practices. She requires her students to do research in order to convey to them that the contemporary artist embraces a broader framework of influences beyond traditional art resources, but she had never scheduled library instruction sessions for her classes prior to this collaboration. Consequently, the faculty member was often disappointed by her students’ resistance to the library and by their research skills. When asked to bring in research topics and influences, most students would only look for images and search no further than Google or Flickr. Because of this, the librarian and faculty member sought to develop a library session that would engage students and help them incorporate information literacy into their practice.

The faculty member teaches Advanced Photographic Media, an upper-division,

24. Ibid.

25. Megan Oakleaf, “A Roadmap for Assessing Student Learning Using the New Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 40, no. 4 (2014): 511–12.

26. Jessica Labatte, *Pond Weeds*, photographic series, 2015.

27. See, for example, Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002) and Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

28. Timothy Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2013).

29. See, for example, Richard P. Feynman, *QED: The Strange Theory of Light and Matter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) and James Clerk Maxwell, *The Scientific Letters and Papers of James Clerk Maxwell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).



**Figure 1.** Jessica Labatte, *Pond Weeds #34*. 2014. Unique color photograph, frame, 38×30 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Western Exhibitions, Chicago. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

four-credit photography studio class. As with her own creative process, she takes a metaliteracy approach to teaching studio art, in which she emphasizes the intersection of multiple literacies and disciplines, not only as inspiration but also as a way for students to develop a larger theoretical framework in which to discuss their work. The learning objectives for the course that are related to research and information literacy

include demonstrating “good research practices through a thorough investigation into their individualistic artistic interests”<sup>30</sup> and producing photographs within a “‘feed-back loop’ of curiosity, investigation, production, feedback, repeat.”<sup>31</sup> Here, “curiosity” and “investigation” can be seen as related to traditional information literacy notions of determining and locating information, while “production” and “feedback” clearly encompass the ideas of collaboration, participation, and production present in the newly expanded definition of information literacy.<sup>32</sup>

To support the course’s learning objectives and help her students learn the powerful impact research and information literacy can have on the creative process, the faculty member requires her students to submit weekly reading responses and an artist’s statement with bibliography. In the first half of the semester, students write short reaction papers to readings gathered by the instructor from a variety of disciplines. In the latter half of the semester, students are required to respond to different information sources they find themselves. The purpose of the artist’s statement is to provide the content and context of an artist’s work within a larger framework. An additional goal of these research assignments is to help students prepare for the time-honored art school pedagogic tool—studio critiques—in which they are required to explain or defend their work in relation to an established canon of academic discourse.

After conversations with the librarian, the faculty member adjusted her assignment requirements to include a more diverse array of sources that would utilize various information literacy skills and knowledge and emphasize the multidisciplinary nature of inspiration and art production. Specifically, students were required to find work from another photographer, work from a non-photographic artist, a work of nonfiction not related to art, a work of literature or fiction, and a scholarly, academic text. In addition to reinforcing the potential value of different types of information sources from various disciplines, the goal was for students to use various resources and methods for accessing the information (i.e., the online book catalog, library databases, and interlibrary loan services). From here, the faculty member and librarian developed a library session that would not only address the requirements of the assignment but also the objectives of the course.

## USING THRESHOLD CONCEPTS AS METAPHORS FOR THE CREATIVE PROCESS

The use of metaphors is an effective teaching tool in art education because “it fosters creativity, but also because it enhances the relevance of the relationship between language, thought, and aesthetic design decisions.”<sup>33</sup> Now, with the Framework, librarians can use the threshold concepts as metaphors to establish a connection between creativity and knowledge, making information literacy much more relatable and relevant to young artists. For this collaborative library session, the librarian used

30. Jessica Labatte, “ARTD 468: Advanced Photographic Media” (syllabus, Northern Illinois University, Fall 2014).

31. Ibid.

32. Mackey and Jacobson, *Metaliteracy*, 1.

33. Barbara Lasserre, “Speaking the Critique in Graphic Design: The Role of Metaphor,” *Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education* 10, no. 1 (2011): 53.

the artist's statement to relate specifically to the threshold concept of "scholarship as conversation." According to the assignment instructions, the artist's statement "allows an artist to explain, justify, and contextualize their work, while placing it in relation to the context of art history and ideology."<sup>34</sup> This concept was used as an entryway into discussion about the importance of information literacy. By drawing on knowledge practices and dispositions as examples, the librarian explained that, as in any other academic discipline where one must "recognize they are entering into an ongoing scholarly conversation,"<sup>35</sup> aspiring artists must identify their place in art history and ideology. It is therefore necessary for students to explore through research the relevant discourse and gain knowledge that can be used as creative context and inspiration.

Additionally, the threshold concept "searching as strategic exploration" was used as a metaphor for browsing for inspiration. This information literacy frame states that "the act of searching often begins with a question that directs the act of finding needed information. Encompassing inquiry, discovery, and serendipity, searching identifies possible relevant sources and the means to access those sources."<sup>36</sup> Before the session, students brainstormed keywords to describe their work, an exercise assigned by the faculty member to prepare them to write a one-sentence description of their art. The librarian used these words as search terms to locate each type of source required for the bibliography as an example. As results appeared in the online catalog and then library database, the librarian pointed out subject headings related to the keywords or particular sources and the difference between searching keywords and subject terms. Because some of the original, brainstormed keywords were very vague or broad, the controlled vocabulary proved to be a valuable source of inspiration for students. They were introduced to different but related words and phrases that may lead to additional interesting sources—essentially "using different search language types" and "matching information needs and search strategies to search tools," specific knowledge practices for this threshold concept.<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, students learned to remain "flexible and creative" in their search strategies while still recognizing "the value of browsing and other serendipitous methods of information gathering," which are important related dispositions.<sup>38</sup>

### ASSESSMENT AND IMPACT

The faculty member and librarian used an informal formative assessment (weekly written responses), a summative assessment (artist statement bibliographies), and an indirect assessment (student surveys) already built into the course to determine the success of the information literacy instruction session and research component. In the weekly reading responses after the library session, students were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the information sources they found. They were excited to share the sources they had discovered through the research process and were anxious to start in-

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34. Jessica Labatte, "ARTF 468: Artist's Statement" (assignment, Northern Illinois University, Fall 2014).

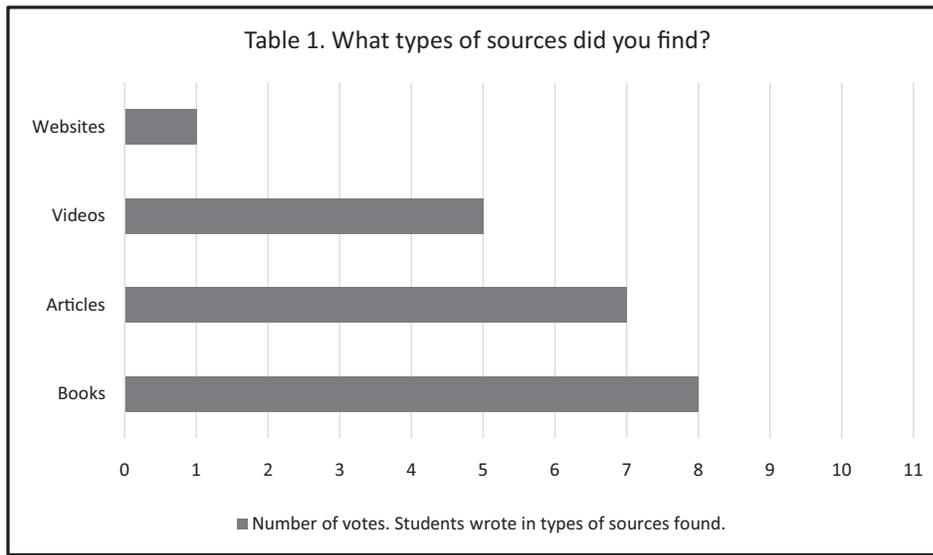
35. ACRL, "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education."

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*

Table 1. Types of Sources Located by Students



corporating these ideas into their work. One student wrote, “I spent most of this first part shouting ‘Yes! This book totally gets me!’ I connected with everything stated.”<sup>39</sup>

The artist statement bibliographies served as the main summative assessment. One of the learning objectives for the library session was for students to be able to locate a variety of multidisciplinary sources using library resources. In this regard, the students were successful; all were able to locate sources using library resources. While all students included photography books by specific artists or books that discussed photography as an art form, students also cited books of poetry, biographies or memoirs, graphic novels, videos, and scholarly works from the fields of psychology and sociology. Most students cited more print books than articles or other types of sources in their bibliographies. This may be due to the assignment source requirements that lean toward those information sources more readily available in monograph form (i.e., books on artists, works of literature or fiction).

In addition to the student bibliographies, surveys were administered at the end of the course to gather student feedback and perceptions about the research requirement (see appendix for survey form). When asked about the types of sources found, most students noted books and/or articles, with some students also mentioning videos (films, documentaries, or interviews) and websites (Table 1). Together with the reading responses and bibliographies, this data suggests that students were able to find different types of information sources through the library.

The student surveys also helped to determine whether students were able to rec-

39. Jessica Labatte, “ARTD 468: Research Survey” (student surveys, Northern Illinois University, Spring 2015).

ognize the multidisciplinary nature of art production. Student responses to the question, “What was the purpose of the research component of this course?” reveal that the majority of students were able to see the connection between multidisciplinary research and the creative process. Two students noted the very specific requirement of research needed to complete the artist statement and weekly reading responses; however, eight students out of the eleven who completed the survey noted the value and impact of research on the creative process. For example, one student answered, “To create better, informed work.”<sup>40</sup> Another student wrote, “The purpose of the research is to utilize all options and paths that your work can take because everything/anything can help your work grow.”<sup>41</sup> Yet another student stated, “To open our minds to aspects outside of art that can apply to us.”<sup>42</sup> Nine of the eleven students said that they would continue to use research in their future photographic projects. These student comments note the relevance of research to art production and support the learning objective for the library session and course.

According to the surveys, the majority of students also felt research improved the quality of their work. Nine of the eleven students who completed the survey answered positively when asked, “How did your research improve your photographic work?” One student wrote, “It helped me get into the mind (in a way) of someone who was dealing with similar topics as I was. This allowed me to expand what I was doing and think of it from another point of view.”<sup>43</sup> Another student stated, “It gave me more visual canon to work with and bounce around in my head in order to come up with my own work.”<sup>44</sup> “It helped expand my ideas past my main project, while still being applicable. I learned that some things that I was interested in separately were connected without my knowledge,”<sup>45</sup> remarked another student. These comments that consider how information can affect one’s own artwork also provide evidence of student understanding of the threshold concept, “scholarship as a conversation.”

In addition, students were asked, through a multiple-answer question, what improved as a result of the research component (Table 2). Nearly all of the students who completed the survey selected “knowledge of the historical context within which their work is situated.” “Ability to articulate thoughts in critique” was a close second with eight votes, and “knowledge of conversations outside of art that your work engages” was third with seven votes. Five students also marked “ability to write an artist statement,” and four students felt the research component expanded their vocabulary.

## STUDIO CRITIQUES AND INFORMATION LITERACY

As suggested in the student surveys, the information literacy session and research requirements also seemed to help students during studio critiques, an additional goal of the requirements. Studio critiques can be challenging for many students since it is often difficult for young artists to articulate verbally what they are doing intuitively

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40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

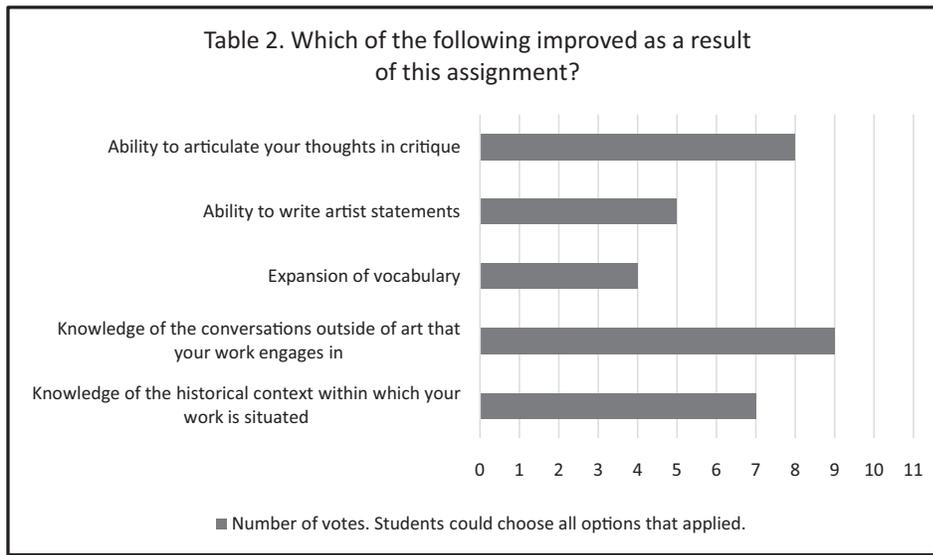
42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

Table 2. Areas of Improvement Resulting from Research Component



through visual media. Students tend to be more comfortable with the material knowledge they gain from working within a specific medium and less comfortable with the theoretical discourse required by the contemporary art world. However, there are inherent similarities between studio critiques as a pedagogic tool and the concept of “scholarship as conversation” that can be identified to help prepare students. Adelheid Mers explains that critiques involve a student who is working on or has completed a piece and is “willing to enter into a conversation” with peers, mentors, or experts “whose task is to act in response to the work at hand.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, during studio critiques, students participate in peer review and often “critically evaluate contributions made by others in participatory information environments”—a knowledge practice for this threshold concept.<sup>47</sup>

Although the authors are not able to prove that the research component and information literacy instruction directly led to the improvement in student performance during studio critiques, the faculty member did observe students as more confident and better equipped to respond to feedback than in her past classes. One student commented, “It [the research component] also helped my critique vocabulary.”<sup>48</sup> The students often referred to specific sources or information they found as a way to introduce and contextualize their new work. This is an important element of the studio critique, where, as Mers notes, “practice and results are situated in relation to

46. Adelheid Mers, “Adapting Techniques of Studio Critique for Arts Management Pedagogy,” *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 43 (2013): 90.

47. ACRL, “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.

48. *Ibid.*

historical and contemporary art world contexts, often in reference to the specific areas of expertise represented by visitors.”<sup>49</sup> Perhaps even more significant, however, is the notion that students must “go through” this process of critique in order to refine their artistic vision and develop their work. It is the ability to view themselves “as contributors to scholarship rather than only consumers of it,”<sup>50</sup> a critical disposition of this threshold concept that is essential to creating art.

### LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

Overall, the authors were pleased with the assessment results and student feedback. Some students commented that they would like more dedicated time in the library to research with the faculty member and librarian present. The next semester this course is offered, the authors plan to include multiple library sessions instead of the extended one-shot presentation.

However, the surveys did reveal that some students were not able to connect the skills needed to find books with those needed to find other types of resources from other disciplines. For example, when asked how the research component could be improved, one student suggested including “even more forms of research. For example, poetry, videos, films, exhibits, specific pieces of art. Books are important but other sources I feel are just as important.”<sup>51</sup> Another student suggested “researching books, films, etc., that aren’t directly related or associated with art. I find random books or movies I watch more insightful to what I am searching more than class assignments sometimes.”<sup>52</sup> These comments seem to reflect the very objectives of the research and information literacy assignments that were not grasped by these particular students. Therefore, some revision of the assignment requirements may be needed to include different types of sources (including multimedia), not just different genres from different disciplines that tend to favor monographs. The plan for multiple library sessions instead of a one-shot session should also help clarify the confusion about the variety of sources. Additional sessions will allow the librarian to break up the content into more digestible units and spend sufficient time to demonstrate, with hands-on instruction, the different resources and discuss the types of information sources. More importantly, there will be increased opportunities for individual consultations with students.

In addition, the authors would like to expand the assessment tools for the collaboration. As noted, the assessments used to determine achievement of the information literacy learning objectives were those already built into the course. While these were useful and directly related to the threshold concepts and overall goals of the course, the authors feel that adding an in-class worksheet or assignment specifically for the library sessions would not only be beneficial to students, but also help to assess specific skill development. Students were able to see the big picture benefits of research and information literacy to their creative process and art production; however, not all students were successful in adapting the skills needed to find and obtain books

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49. Mers, “Adapting Techniques of Studio Critique for Arts Management Pedagogy,” 90.

50. Ibid.

51. Labatte, “ARTD 468: Research Survey.”

52. Ibid.

to locating other types of sources. Some type of formative assessment that corresponds with the skills used during each library session would help clarify the concept of adapting techniques to different resources. This is an important reminder about applying the Framework: threshold concepts are a very useful way to contextualize information literacy, but attention must still be paid to teaching hands-on techniques and resources.

While this collaboration for this specific course was highly successful, the greatest challenge that the authors foresee is to strategically integrate information literacy instruction into the entire photography program. At NIU, the program is quite small and the faculty member, the only full-time instructor for the program, often has the same students in multiple classes during the semester and for multiple semesters. She incorporates research and information literacy into most of her classes and would like to continue the collaboration. However, she does not want to repeat the same type of research assignment and library session for all of her courses. The authors hope to build on the skills and knowledge learned in different photography classes; therefore, the Framework will be an important resource when mapping out how information literacy can be integrated into courses that may or may not be taken in a specific sequence or that are repeated (for example, “special topics in photography” courses).

The authors also would like to adapt information literacy instruction for other art classes. The faculty member was so pleased with the collaboration that she has been promoting it to her colleagues in the art school. She has even made e-mail introductions between the librarian and other art faculty members that have led to new instruction opportunities in the school, most notably for a studio sculpture course. The next step in department outreach is to present the assessment results of this collaboration at faculty meetings for the School of Art and Design.

## **CONCLUSION**

As librarians begin to consider how to use the newly adopted “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education” in their instruction and outreach efforts, art librarians in particular have a wonderful opportunity for more relatable information literacy instruction. In the Framework, one can more easily identify similarities between the process of producing art, particularly studio critiques, and the research process and use the threshold concepts as accessible metaphors that provide meaningful context for library instruction. These metaphors resonate with students and their understanding that art today is no longer about self-expression alone, but about responding to or communicating an idea about the contemporary world. This is, after all, the empowering goal of information literacy.

## **APPENDIX: ARTD 468: RESEARCH SURVEY**

What was the purpose of the research component of this course?

What types of sources did you find? i.e., books, magazines, films, etc.

How did your research improve your photographic work? Explain with examples if possible.

Which of the following improved as a result of this assignment? Circle all that apply.

- a. Ability to write artist statements
- b. Ability to articulate your thoughts in critique
- c. Expansion of vocabulary
- d. Knowledge of the historical context within which your work is situated
- e. Knowledge of the conversations outside of art that your work engaged in

Did you fulfill the required number of research articles assigned?

If not, why not?

Will you continue to use research in your future photographic projects?

What suggestions do you have for improving this assignment?