

# Standards at a Crossroads: Treading Revision Road

BY ALISON S. GREGORY

Ask most any academic librarian about “the Standards” and he or she will likely be able to rattle them off for you: Determine the nature and extent of the information need, access information effectively, evaluate the information for quality and appropriateness, use the information effectively to purpose, and use the information ethically.

These five elements of information literacy have served higher education libraries since their approval by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) in 2000, providing a basis for the information-seeking skills and habits that librarians strive to impart to college and university students as a way to better the students’ lifelong learning opportunities. While the performance indicators and learning outcomes based on these Standards have been significant to higher education, are they still a valid way to conceptualize the thought processes and skills they are intended to foster? The time to reconsider the Standards is nigh, as “information literacy skills now encompass the need to be fluent with a variety of technologies and applications” as well as visual literacies.<sup>1</sup>

In 2011, an Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education Review Task Force was created to study the relevancy of the Standards and to make a recommendation to ACRL – should the Standards be reaffirmed for another five years, be revised, or be removed?

The Review Task Force concluded that it is time to look anew at the applicability of the Standards in light of “emerging models of information literacy, recognizing the development of multiple new literacies and the need to provide a stronger continuum of literacy from K-16.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, the Standards Review Task Force recommended significant changes and that the Standards be “extensively revised.”<sup>3</sup>

The Standards Review Task Force has charged the Standards Committee to

revise the information literacy concepts in such a way as to: simplify the model and eliminate library jargon as ways to encourage use by non-library audiences; include both cognitive and affective learning outcomes; and acknowledge and include multiple literacies, including transliteracy, digital literacy, media literacy, and visual literacy. The Standards – should they continue under that moniker – must also examine the role of the student as both content creator and content curator.<sup>4</sup>

Trudi Jacobson (Head of the Information Literacy Department at the University Libraries of the University at Albany, SUNY) and Craig Gibson (Associate Director for Research and Education, Thompson Library, Ohio State University) serve as co-chairs of the Task Force, which has been charged by the ACRL Board of Directors to consider revision of the Standards in light of current practices related to:

- Creation and dissemination of knowledge
- Changing global higher education and learning environments
- Shift from information literacy to information fluency
- Expanding definition of information literacy to include transliteracy, media literacy, and digital literacy<sup>5</sup>

The Task Force foresees the creation of a “conceptual approach” that addresses “a set of archetypal or core abilities” rather than following the format of the current Standards with its “detailed listing of skills.”<sup>6</sup> Jacobson and Gibson, on behalf of the Task Force, have proposed a more flexible approach to information literacy, one that “might serve as a curriculum planning document, rather than designating it as a set of standards.”<sup>7</sup> This less rigid approach to the concepts of information identification and use may well make them more accessible to a wider range of educators.

The Task Force submitted a prospectus to the ACRL Executive Committee, and the

Committee has approved the proposed plan to expand the association’s definition of information literacy and has asked that the revised Standards “better address the total learning environment of higher education and apply to student experiences outside the classroom, as well as within.”<sup>8</sup>

There was an open forum for the revision of ACRL’s vision for information literacy held at the 2013 ALA Annual Conference. For those librarians working to teach these critical concepts, consider attending a second open forum, slated for the ALA Midwinter 2014 meeting – and visit the PaLA College & Research Division “It’s Academic!” blog at <http://crdpala.org/> to share your thoughts on both the old and new Standards. 

## ENDNOTES

1. ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards Review Task Force. “Task Force Recommendations. June 2, 2012.” [http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/standards/ils\\_recomm.pdf](http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/standards/ils_recomm.pdf) (accessed June 20, 2013), p. 3.
2. Bell, Steven J. “Rethinking ACRL’s Information Literacy Standards: The Process Begins. June 4, 2013.” <http://www.acrl.ala.org/acrlinsider/archives/7329> (accessed June 17, 2013).
3. “Task Force Recommendations. June 2, 2012.” p. 1.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6.
5. Gibson, Craig and Trudi Jacobson, Co-Chairs. “ACRL Board of Directors Action Form – Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education Task Force’s Plan of Work. April 3, 2013.” [http://connect.ala.org/files/Doc%205.0%20ACRL\\_BoardActionForm\\_ILTaskForce.pdf](http://connect.ala.org/files/Doc%205.0%20ACRL_BoardActionForm_ILTaskForce.pdf) (accessed June 18, 2013), p. 1.
6. Jacobson, Trudi and Craig Gibson, Co-Chairs. “ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education Task Force – A Prospectus for Revision.” <http://connect.ala.org/files/Doc%205.0a%20Info%20Lit%20Standards%20Prospectus%20for%20Revision.pdf> (accessed June 17, 2013), p. 1.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
8. Davis, Mary Ellen, ACRL Executive Director. “Feedback on Plan of Work from ACRL Exec Cmte. May 21, 2013.” ALAConnect. <http://connect.ala.org/node/206132> (accessed June 17, 2013).

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