

Review of Critical Approaches to Credit-bearing Information Literacy Courses

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Abstract: Review of Pashia, A., & Critten, J. (Eds.) (2019). *Critical approaches to credit-bearing information literacy courses*. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries.

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Many librarians know the challenges of providing Information Literacy courses in the context of the one-shot instruction session. Some organizations are able to provide credit-bearing information literacy courses where librarians can spend extended time on the theories presented in the Framework for Information Literacy, however, morphing from a one-shot instruction session to a semester long course requires diligence, patience, and a lot of planning. There are few books available that provide guidance on implementing the Framework into a credit-bearing course. Previous explorations on this subject were written prior to 2016 and utilized the ACRL's Information Literacy Standards. There are fewer, still, that provide guidance on implementing Critical Information Literacy strategies into these courses. Angela Pashia and Jessica Critten have done a thorough job developing a much-needed resource on creating a credit-bearing Critical Information Literacy course implementing the ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy.

The authors do well in identifying the benefits of providing a semester-long course, including building relationships with students, providing room for experimentation in teaching, and stressing the utilization of time. They indicate that in a course such as this, much more time can be spent covering and reinforcing content. They also note, however, that class preparation, including sustained lesson planning, and assignment grading takes a lot of time. The authors state that "thinking about information literacy in a cohesive course is a significant shift from teaching in other formats" (Pashia & Critten, 2019, p. 8). This book provides some foundational information about creating a course; but also several case studies that examine student preconceptions of research, cognitive bias, privacy issues, and teaching politically charged topics.

Indeed, it is interesting to see how the various courses described in the chapters of this book can incorporate similar principles and yet be so vastly different. There are several key take-aways from

this book which include the importance of incorporating Critical Information Literacy and the need for students to reflect on what they learn during the course. One chapter that has students reflect on their learning is Susan Wood's chapter entitled "No Room for Argument: Researching Politicized Topics as a Learner." It provides insight into how students approach research. Wood indicates that oftentimes students look for research to justify their preconceived opinions. She created a "research and learning narrative assignment" which has students investigate the UN's Sustainable Development Goals through various information outlets: "freely-available, data-based, statistical reports produced by non-partisan government agencies, primary sources through CQ Researcher Plus Archive, and peer-reviewed, empirical research articles found through the libraries' digital collections" (p. 21-22). Wood indicates that students were uncomfortable moving away from the typical argument assignment and had to learn to reconceptualize their understanding of the research process as a means of investigating topics and not just trying to justify their original assumptions.

Even though the courses mentioned differed in the number of credit hours, subject matter, and length of assignments, they all incorporate the Framework for Information Literacy and specifically address Critical Information Literacy. Pashia and Critten provide an introduction and overview of the book that discusses how they define a critical approach; followed by chapters that focus on how librarians teach these various iterations of credit bearing information literacy classes. Pashia also has an individual chapter where she argues that, despite the view of libraries as champions of the free exchange of ideas, libraries have never been neutral. She discusses the systemic racism in organizational schemas such as the Dewey Decimal System and the Library of Congress Subject Headings (p. 235). This is one of the reasons that she incorporates lessons on racial justice into her courses. Anthony, Miller and Rapchak describe the redesign of their first-year information literacy class

to move from skills-based to engagement-based in much the same way the Standards moved to the Framework. Foasberg's chapter discusses the use of fan culture in her classes and Williams integrates E. M. Forster's "The Machine Stops" as a core text in his classes to understand how students' experiences with information are shaped by "the policies, technologies, and customs of the past and the ways information infrastructures become invisible over time" (p. 217). Haggerty and Scott discuss copyright and teach the students about copyleft. Schlesselman-Tarango uses a Gallery Walk as a way to facilitate discussion and provide the students with an opportunity to "reflect, react, question, interact, and engage with new ideas and with each other" (p. 295). The chapter by Larson and Vaughan and the one by Foster-Kaufman focus on marginalized knowledge and marginalized populations, while Hinnant and Miller discuss digital inequality. Baer stresses news literacy and Brayton and Casey integrate media literacy with the information literacy and look at advertising and propaganda, remixing and reusing information and media, and critically engaging with Wikipedia. This is another interesting shift in the Information Literacy arena, the utilization of Wikipedia. Although previously frowned upon by teaching faculty, several librarians in this book describe how they employ assignments for students creating Wikipedia entries as a way of understanding and combating privilege and bias.

Individually, the chapters in this book provide sound examples of concepts that can be implemented into a credit-bearing course. The various case studies introduce ideas on how to integrate a critical approach into the class overall and into the individual assignments. They highlight the difficulties in librarianship since the 2016 Presidential Election as several chapters highlight the difficulties that have arisen around fake news and privilege. As librarians, it is our job to ensure students critically evaluate and think about how to use their sources and this book provides specific

examples on how this can be accomplished. The chapters also provide a basis for librarians to consider their own views and potential biases. On the whole, this is an excellent resource that is essential for any academic library, especially at those colleges and universities who already have or would like to implement a credit-bearing information literacy course.