

How are Art Librarians Using Information Literacy Instruction to Support Art Studio Students?

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Abstract

This literature review examines how art librarians are using information literacy instruction (ILI) to support student research and information needs in art studio practices. The review contextualizes the topic, and identifies current strategies, gaps, and considerations for areas of future growth for a student population that is often underserved by libraries. The review thematically considers the impact of standards and frameworks on ILI in the arts and current strategies in art information literacy instruction. Findings include a need for growth and literature on the subject, disconnects between literature from the field of art, art history, and librarianship, and that recent competency documents have resulted in significant and beneficial pedagogical shifts, concluding that there are many promising future areas of growth and innovative potential for ILI in studio art contexts.

Keywords: information literacy, library instruction, information literacy instruction, art librarianship, studio pedagogy, art pedagogy, studio arts, studio research

This literature review examines how art librarians are using Information Literacy Instruction (ILI) to support student research and information needs in art studio practices. ILI in creative environments such as art studios is infrequent, but its impact demonstrates the value of enhancing relationships between the library, information literacy (IL), research, and students and instructors in the art studio. Though the literature on this topic is limited, this review seeks to capture current strategies and

identify gaps and considerations for areas of future growth for this student population that is often underserved by libraries.

The review examines a sample of prominent recent literature including research, case studies, literature reviews, conference presentations, and articles. Beginning with definitions of research in art within the art field, literature addressing what is understood of the information seeking-behavior and distinct information needs of studio artists from a librarianship perspective is then reviewed. Within this context, a review is conducted of how competency documents, such as standards and frameworks, have and continue to influence art library ILI approaches. The focus of this section is on the pedagogical shifts supported in the more recent documents. Finally, examples of recent and emerging strategies art librarians are using to conduct ILI in studio courses are reviewed, with consideration for successes and challenges.

Defining Art as Research

Examining how art librarians strive to meet the information and research needs of studio art-based students, particularly through ILI strategies, first requires some understanding of how research is defined in the art field. The wide breadth of literature on art research will not be fully covered here but introduced to provide appropriate context to the role of academic libraries in the experience of studio art students. The literature on art as research, using art as a research methodology, and research-creation, is not well represented in the Library and Information Science (LIS) literature. Rather, it appears predominantly in art education and art history literature.

Art has been understood both as a creative process that requires research, and as a form of research itself. Sullivan (2010), a prominent voice in art research, describes how the art process is a methodology that expands or creates new knowledge, something to be developed in students. Loveless (2019) defines a relatively new, emerging, and regionally specific term, research-creation. While connected to numerous research methodologies that relate to creative processes and inquiry, this is the prominent term used in Canada in regard to arts-based research (Loveless, 2015).

Emerging from interdisciplinary scholarly activity, this term considers the artistic practice to be a research method in itself. It not only draws connections between the creative process as a form of research but is used to advocate for shifts in academia's

pedagogical and assessment approaches to the arts; shifting how art is perceived and recognized as a valid form of research (Loveless, 2019). As contemporary art becomes increasingly recognized as a distinct form of research, it becomes progressively more valuable for library and librarians to meet the research and information needs of studio art students and equip them with the skills necessary to be proficient in their practice beyond their education.

Artist Information-Seeking Behavior and Research Needs

It is well documented that the research needs, information-seeking behavior of studio artists, and creative areas of study have not historically been well understood or studied by libraries and librarians. The literature on the information-seeking behavior of artists is mostly limited to art students, faculty, and librarians. Hemmig (2009) conducted the first study of information-seeking behaviors of practicing visual artists outside of academia, finding that a model may be applied to understand information behavior, but that community context has a significant impact on those behaviors. Hemmig's 2008 literature review of the history of the information-seeking behavior of both students and practicing artists indicates that art libraries traditionally have not met the needs of artist's creative process. Hemmig (2008) asserts that the information needs of visual artists are distinct from those of art historians. He found art libraries have not traditionally been effective in meeting the needs of the artists' creative process, tending to focus on art as a subject. However, this examination of information-seeking behaviors of visual artists is predominantly based on librarianship literature and does not encompass literature authored by artists themselves which may provide valuable insight, language, and concepts.

Though limited, studies over the past several decades reveal common themes of information needs among studio art students (Carter et al., 2018; Hemmig, 2008). These include needing information for numerous distinct purposes, such as inspiration, visual references, technical knowledge, practical guidance in career and marketing topics, and information on trends in the local and global art communities. There is also frequently a need for information on subjects unrelated to art that conceptually inform practice (Greer, 2015; Hemmig, 2008). Garcia and Labette (2015) emphasize the need for broad subject matter, as contemporary art has made the field increasingly

interdisciplinary. Recent literature recognizes a need for art libraries to diversify traditional collections to provide services meeting the broader spectrum of information needs related to the creative process (Carter et al., 2018; Hemmig, 2008).

Literature also suggests that studio art students tend to have different information behaviors than other disciplines (Carter et al., 2018); browsing with little intention being a common strategy (Garcia & Labette, 2015; Hemmig, 2008). Carter et al., (2018) in their literature review, further suggest that artists frequently seek information outside of typical academic library sources; they often conceive information seeking as social behavior conducted through peer networks rather than something that can be sought through the services of a library.

Overall, it is apparent that art students often undervalue the library or do not recognize connections between it and their creative process (Garcia & Labette, 2015). The literature demonstrates that these behaviors and conceptions of the library indicate the value of ILI in studio programs which might build connections and bridge gaps in the relationship between art students and the library. Not only can libraries meet information needs, but ILI can enhance students' understanding of the creative process as a form of research.

Information Literacy Instruction (ILI) in the Arts: Standards and Frameworks

ILI in the studio and creative contexts, though infrequent, has largely been shaped by competency documents such as Standards and Frameworks. Garcia and Labette (2015) examine the challenges that ILI in studio contexts has historically faced. This is mainly due to the reality that Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (2000) and other competency documents are difficult to apply to art since they focus on skill-based outcomes not easily transferable across all disciplines. More recently, the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (2015) differs from traditional standards in that it uses threshold concepts to communicate IL that intersects with multiple literacies (Garcia & Labette, 2015).

Pedagogical Shift from Standards to Framework

Garcia & Labette (2015) also discuss how the ACRL Framework's adaptability allows art librarians to build strong associations between IL and the art studio through the framework's interconnected conceptual threshold concepts. In their literature review, Carter et al. (2018) elaborate on several other disciplinary documents developed to support IL in creative populations in addition to the significant Standards and Framework. Some of these are now considered to be dated as well as having positivist perspectives; whereas the ACRL Framework offers a pedagogical shift in ILI, drawing on constructivist approaches.

Application of Threshold Concepts

Recent literature demonstrates that art librarians are finding success creatively engaging with the Framework's threshold concepts to make IL relatable and relevant in studio contexts. Carter et al.'s (2018) analytical literature review considers the pedagogical approaches academic librarians take when working with studio art students. The review particularly focuses on how librarians adapt current Standards and Frameworks to address the unique information needs of creative populations. They conclude that librarians instructing studio students tend to resist the positivist position of the current Standards documents and are drawn to the flexibility, openness to innovation, and constructivist nature that the more recent Framework supports (Carter et al., 2018).

Art librarians reflecting on the use of studio critiques in IL education conclude that the evolving definition of ILI represented in the Framework has enriched art librarianship (Garcia & Peterson, 2017). Xu and Lafayette (2017) similarly found that customizing the Standards and Frameworks resulted in studio students having an increased understanding and appreciation for the library and librarians. More specifically, in reflecting on the revision of the Standards into a Framework, Garcia and Labette (2015) further describe how art librarians are using the Framework's highly adaptable threshold concepts as metaphors to build connections between creative process, knowledge, and relevance of IL in the studio. They further suggest that these metaphors amplify students' understanding that art not only involves self-expression but responds to and communicates ideas about the contemporary world.

Some librarians have gone so far as to use the Framework to collaboratively build a teaching tool called CREATE (Conversation, Revision, Exploration, Authority, Thoughtful, Experiential); a mnemonic device that draws clear connections between the research and creative process that can be applied in numerous ILI strategies (Meeks et al., 2017). However, it is also suggested that further conversation about the evolving definition of IL and its connections to this Framework and its impact on art librarianship is needed (Garcia & Peterson, 2017). Although librarians have had various successes in adapting the Framework, those successes are influenced by several factors: institutional context, relationships between faculty and the library, as well as time and resources available. Given the extent to which these factors vary between institutions, successful strategies for adapting competency documents in ILI are unique to each institution's context.

Demonstrating the Creative Research Process

Another shared experience noted by multiple authors is the suggestion that the Framework provides librarians with a deeper understanding of studio art students' research and creative process and needs, thus providing insight and improving the library's approach to ILI. Garcia and Peterson (2017) indicate that more conceptual approaches to teaching IL are easier to adapt to a community or institutional contexts.

Conceptual concepts broaden the scope of IL while being open to interdisciplinary approaches, rather than being limited to a narrow set of skills or outcomes. Garcia and Labette (2015) found that using IL threshold concepts as metaphors for the creative process provided them with language that was relatable to students. By using methodologies that relate to studio practice and pedagogy, IL becomes more relevant, and librarians better understand student skills and information needs (Carter et al., 2018).

Carter et al.'s (2018) discussion of ILI in the arts, unlike other authors, goes further in discussing how the approaches based on the Framework help address bias. Carter et al. (2018) indicates that some IL competency documents having bias in that they fail to meet or understand the information needs of studio students. Additionally, librarians may have biases or a misunderstanding of studio students' information needs creating barriers to effective ILI.

Assessment Tools

Librarians have also used varying approaches in utilizing the Framework to build assessment tools. Numerous art librarians report that ILI that draws on the Framework, combined with embedded librarianship through initiatives such as studio visits and participation in critiques, provides the opportunity for developing more effective tools for qualitative assessment of student IL skills (Carter et al., 2018; Garcia & Labatte, 2015; Salisbury, 2018). This approach also provides opportunities for faculty and librarians to reflect on their instruction practices (Petraits, 2017). Salisbury (2018) utilized the framework in conjunction with their library's core values guide to assess students' information-seeking behavior and address studio students' current methods of research and their artistic practice. Petraits (2017) used the Framework to build a Post Research Workshop Assessment Criteria Tool to apply to ILI in studio courses, effectively demonstrating the value of ILI to faculty and administration.

Building Transferable Skills

Garcia and Labette (2015) suggest that the Framework's threshold concepts build transferable skills that extend beyond the academic studio and can be carried into professional practice as they represent the conceptual knowledge needed to become an expert in the discipline. Carter et al. (2018) similarly concluded that librarians could more effectively teach transferable skills by engaging with students' disciplinary practice and entering the studios. They also call for deeper engagement with studio art faculty, students, and their creative practices.

Strategies in Art Information Literacy Instruction

Critiques

Participation in critiques, a standard pedagogical tool in studio classes, emerges as a common strategy for ILI in studio courses. Petraits (2017) argues that critiques are an ideal site for ILI. Garcia and Peterson (2017) further elaborate that critiques not only allow reinforcement of IL but allow librarians to go beyond being resources and become collaborators in student learning. Garcia and Peterson (2017) also note the impact of working with like-minded studio instructors, as methods for conducting critiques vary. Some critiques encourage students to share their research process while others focus more on responding to the artworks.

Studio Visits

Similar to attending critiques, librarians are conducting studio visits; a practice which typically involves guests such as curators, art historians, fellow artists, or scholars visiting an artist's studio to view and discuss their artistic process, ideas, techniques, and work (Salisbury, 2018). Salisbury (2018) reflects that this strategy acts as outreach as well as an assessment of student's information behaviors. Conducting visits throughout the year also provides opportunities to scaffold and embed ILI and relationships with the library (Salisbury, 2018).

Co-teaching, Co-curating, and Scaffolding Activities

Other strategies extend to co-teaching and co-curating with art faculty to design and lead projects and activities in studio classes. Garcia and Labette (2015), in addition to participating in critiques, collaborated with instructors to conduct research projects on artists to inform student artistic practice as well as create artist statement bibliographies. Greer's (2015) use of embedded librarianship involves scaffolding by embedding activities and assignments that introduce research skills and resources focusing on textually communicating artworks and practice. Xu and Gil (2017) similarly use a series of assignments to connect research and art-making through students conducting studies on artists and presenting their findings. Additionally, the librarians participate in critique as well as facilitating and co-curating an exhibit of student work in the library. Payne (2018) takes library-hosted exhibitions further by inviting students to use the library and specific topics or issues within the library, such as bias in cataloging, to explore and respond to through art practice.

These various ILI strategies used by art librarians are informed by the existence, or non-existence, of relationships with faculty, the history of the library's collections on art topics, outreach strategies, available staff time and resources, and other broader institutional contexts.

Highlighting Library and Librarian Research Value

Librarians developing new ILI strategies for studio courses typically observe that collaboration with art faculty demonstrates the relevance and benefits of ILI, resulting in improved relationships between the library, librarians, and art faculty (Garcia & Labette, 2015; Garcia & Peterson, 2017; Xu & Gil, 2017). Garcia and Peterson (2017) found that

their ILI even resulted in faculty collaborators further promoting the library and their services to colleagues. Xu and Gil (2017) report that introducing ILI to studio courses inspired some faculty to shift curriculum and permanently incorporate IL tools. Payne (2018) further indicates that inviting students to conduct projects in and about the library opened a dialogue between faculty, students, and the library while promoting the library as a communal sphere of influence.

Librarians engaging ILI in studios consistently find positive impacts on student work through observation or sometimes measurable assessment (Garcia & Labette, 2015; Garcia & Peterson, 2017; Greer, 2015; Salisbury, 2018; Xu & Gil, 2017). Authors sharing ILI strategies consistently report positive outcomes and impacts on student learning and relationships between studio students, art faculty, and the library. However, limited time and resources are recurring barriers and challenges (Garcia & Peterson, 2017; Greer, 2015; Xu & Gil, 2017).

Conclusion

This literature review indicates that how art librarians are using ILI to address the needs of art studio students is continuing to evolve but is not well represented in literature. Current definitions of art as research from the field of art do not appear in the library literature, suggesting a possible disconnect between art librarianship literature and art history, art education, and art practice literature. Literature about art research authored by artists may provide insightful knowledge for art librarians and inform their ILI practices. Although art libraries have historically better met the needs of art history students than the unique and wide-ranging needs of students with studio practices, recent literature indicates that these gaps are being addressed. The information needs and behaviors of studio art students provide valuable insight. More research around the needs of practicing artists is required to provide important indicators for the competencies students should develop to be successful as they transition to practice beyond their academic experience.

ILI in studio art is largely framed by competency documents. Although they typically have not aligned well with the IL needs of studio contexts, the more recent ACRL Framework has created a significant shift towards constructivist pedagogical approaches that are more relevant to the creative process. Art librarians have been

creatively adapting the conceptual threshold concepts of the Framework to draw connections between the art creation processes and research processes. Themes emerging from the use of this Framework to provide ILI in studio classes include the opportunity to demonstrate to art faculty the relevance of ILI and strengthen relationships between faculty and the library, the librarians themselves developing a deeper understanding of studio-based research which better informs their strategies, opportunity to build more effective tools to assess student needs and student learning, and supporting conceptual IL skills that go beyond how to use the library and build important research skills transferable to professional practice.

In regard to strategies for implementing ILI in studio courses the literature consistently demonstrates that the context of each institution, along with the time and resources available, contribute to whether art librarians conduct one-time sessions or embedded forms of ILI such as co-teaching and co-curating. Fortunately, the literature also suggests that art librarians are often utilizing standard studio pedagogical teaching methods such as critiques, studio visits, and exhibitions as opportunities to embed ILI.

Other common strategies for studio ILI include developing research projects and activities, co-teaching and co-curating, and using the library as a subject of art projects as well as a site for installations and exhibitions. The literature has shown that when librarians enter the studio for ILI, stronger relationships with faculty and students result. There is also an overall observable and measurable positive impact on student work. Successes and ideal strategies remain directly related to each institution's context, although common challenges of limited time and resources remain consistent across literature. The limited literature available on the topic of librarian ILI in studio art courses, as well as the frequency of particular authors, indicates that there is room for the growth of literature on this subject. More original research and research that includes perspectives from practicing artists could contribute to enhancing the practice of ILI to art studio students.

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