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Fostering Information Literacy: A Call for Collaboration Between Academic Librarians and MSW Instructors

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Abstract: *Genuine collaboration between academic librarians and social work faculty in which information literacy is embedded in social work education is lacking. Drawing from the results of the authors' 2016 quantitative study surveying academic social work librarians across the United States, this qualitative follow-up uses data from 27 semi-structured interviews concerning the prevalence and nature of information literacy instruction (ILI) in social work education, how ILI is introduced and sustained in social work curricula, and the alignment between ILI efforts with institutional goals, guidelines from accreditation authorities, and professional social work practice standards. The literature review engages the reader in a robust definition of "information literacy" as applied to social work practice and its connection to social justice and anti-oppressive pedagogy. The findings and subsequent discussion center on current systemic obstacles in ensuring social work graduates enter the profession with sufficient information literacy (IL) skills for an ethical, research-informed, data-driven practice and conclude with recommendations for the evolution of integrated ILI at a local level within social work curricula. Collaborative and sustainable partnerships among academic librarians and social work faculty are essential for educating information literate social work practitioners of tomorrow.*

Keywords: *Information literacy, social work education, academic librarians, social work librarians, social work curricula, social justice, relationships with faculty*

Social workers should strive to become and remain proficient in professional practice and the performance of professional functions. Social workers should critically examine and keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to social work. Social workers should routinely review the professional literature and participate in continuing education relevant to social work practice and social work ethics (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2018, Ethical Standards, 4.01(b)).

Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning (Association of College and Research Libraries Framework [ACRL], 2016, para. 6).

The information universe is fierce and ubiquitous, replete with a 24-hour news cycle, trolls, bots, fake news, predatory publishers, and paywalls. Its exponential growth during these nascent years of the 21st century can be framed as running the gamut from a victory

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Copyright © 2021 Authors, Vol. 21 No. 1 (Spring 2021), 1-25, DOI: 10.18060/24697



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for egalitarianism and promotion of socially equitable access to knowledge to a daunting hotbed for scurrilous information emanating from obfuscated sources. In other words, it requires consumers to possess discerning and supple information literacy (IL) skills to efficiently and effectively navigate an ever-burgeoning wealth of information. If, as the above quotations imply, life-long learning and contribution to the knowledge foundation is an ethical standard for professional social workers and the related pursuant activities are facilitated by information literacy skills, what does this mean for social work education now and in the future?

Among them, the authors of this study have three master's degrees in library and Information Science, two master's of Social Work, a master of Educational Psychology, 20 years of combined social work practice, and 29 years of combined practice in collegiate education. From this unique vantage point, the authors are well-versed in the information literacy needs of social work professionals and the challenges facing schools of social work to meaningfully integrate information literacy instruction (ILI) into an already rigorous course of study.

The present study is the third in a broad examination of the status of and needs for ILI in graduate social work education (Bausman & Ward, 2015, 2016). Drawing on the findings and conclusions of the authors' previous scholarship, this study uses an IRB-approved, qualitative protocol to investigate the location and conduction of ILI and reference services within institutional goals in general and social work curricula in particular, the relational mechanisms that sustain or derail the provision of ILI in social work education, and optimal pedagogic practices specific to ILI for social work students.

While the authors' scholarship and instruction practices are recognized within the discipline of librarianship and by local social work colleagues, to date there has been little cross-over of scholarship about ILI for social work education and practice into the community of social work educators. By offering this scholarship in a social work-specific press, the authors invite their social work colleagues to consider the roles of ILI in social work education and practice, to examine where and how it may fit into their curricula and pedagogic practice, and to join with academic librarians as instructional consultants and collaborators.

Review of the Literature

Defining and Positioning Information Literacy for Social Work Education and Practice

Accepted by the Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL) in 2016, the Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education (*The Framework*) is the guiding document that broadly defines information literacy and sets forth a series of principles, or frames, governing the purpose and practice of ILI by academic librarians. The Framework's predecessor, the Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education (in use from 2000-2015), were found lacking in their usefulness as a pedagogic guide by being overly prescriptive and rigid for universal application across disciplines. The Framework represents an endeavor to capture a range of interrelated precepts regarding research and discovery, with non-linear, flexible, and transdisciplinary applicability.

The Framework is based upon the notion of threshold concepts, a paradigm which posits that once intellectually absorbed, some ideas or pieces of knowledge precipitate an irreversible transformation in the learner's understanding of their discipline. Threshold concepts are often described as one-way portals: once passed through, one cannot return to the previous state of understanding (Land et al., 2010). Evolving from a Delphi study intended to identify threshold concepts relative to information literacy (Townsend et al., 2016), each of the Framework's core precepts, or frames, is supplemented by a set of knowledge practices and dispositions. The six frames for information literacy are:

- Authority is Constructed and Contextual;
- Information Creation as a Process;
- Information has Value;
- Research as Inquiry;
- Scholarship as Conversation;
- Searching as Strategic Exploration.

Like social work, the professional evolution of librarianship in the United States emerged from the transformational societal churn of the Progressive Era (1900-1920) with deep roots as a social justice-oriented profession and a central focus on the well-being of marginalized communities. Just as the settlement house workers of the early 20th century viewed social ills such as poverty as a form of oppression remediated by social justice efforts, librarians sought to ameliorate public strife through a holistic, in-situ practice. Thus, Progressive Era librarians, often alongside their social work counterparts, created a broad array of community-based services far beyond the provision of books including educational, social, and cultural programs, access to kitchens, bathrooms, leisure activities, children's services, and evening and weekend hours (Bausman, 2016; Garrison, 2003).

Also, like social work, despite its noble intent, librarianship struggles with a history replete with elements of institutionalized oppression, social control, heterogeneity, and racism (Bausman, 2016; Chapman & Withers, 2019; Garrison, 2003). Academic social work librarians are deeply invested in promoting the Framework's efforts to redress this legacy through their creation of a companion document which outlines the shared values and ethics of social justice by social work educators and practitioners (ACRL EBSS [Education and Behavioral Sciences Section] Social Work Committee, 2020).

The Framework is, of course, not without controversy, as elegantly laid forth by Saunders (2017) in *Connecting Information Literacy to Social Justice: Why and How*:

Some librarians suggest that by intertwining information literacy and social justice, we are giving up our core value of neutrality and objectivity, while others have argued that we do not go far enough, and that information social justice could be made an even more explicit part of our conceptualization of information literacy. (p. 56)

Saunders extends this discourse by exploring library practices based in heteronormative, patriarchal structures and suggesting that institutions and their members must continue to engage in reflective praxis geared towards the recognition and amelioration of systemic bias and oppression. She concludes by offering a proposal to

amend the Framework with a seventh frame: Information Social Justice. Indeed, this runs parallel to the construct of “critical information literacy,” a praxis approach with significant traction among academic librarians. Mindful of libraries’ social justice roots, Gregory and Higgins (2013) query:

The values of our professional organizations articulate an activist perspective inclined toward social justice. How then has the concept of information literacy and the work of instruction librarians come to be treated as ahistorical, as well as atomistic and mechanistic? (p. 2)

Based upon the core tenets of postmodernism, an anti-oppressive pedagogy as put forth by Paulo Freire, critical information literacy extends traditional definitions of ILI as it “...takes into consideration the social, political, economic, and corporate systems that have power and influence over information production, dissemination, access, and consumption” (Gregory & Higgins, 2013, p. 4).

The authors previously posited that the “information literate social worker possesses the capacity to traverse [the] churn [of the information universe], identify the need for information, discover and evaluate the resources available, and integrate new knowledge into practice” (Bausman & Ward, 2016, p. 112). A subsequent deepening of the notion of the information literate social worker additionally draws from the fluidity of the ACRL Framework with a clear social justice orientation. Thus, the information literate social worker possesses the agency, capacity, and critical thinking to reflectively negotiate the information universe; to ethically discover, evaluate and integrate new knowledge into practice; and to apply an anti-oppressive, social justice foundation to their use and dissemination of information on behalf of their practice, communities of service, and profession.

Information Literacy Instruction in Social Work Education

There is a small but growing body of research concerning information literacy instruction specific to social work education (Bingham et al., 2016; Doney, 2018; Magliaro & Munro, 2018; Pendell & Kimball, 2020). At the heart of these inquiries exists a growing consensus around three recurrent themes: in aggregate, incoming social work students lack the information literacy skills required for graduate level education; the provision of ILI in schools of social work is primarily reliant on individual relationships between librarians and social work instructors; and formal social work education would benefit from a broad inclusion of ILI at critical junctures in the curricula designed and implemented in collaboration with information literacy specialists (librarians) on the local level.

What some might consider a seminal item in this literature is a brief piece published in *Health & Social Work* in 2007. Speaking directly to their colleagues, Wheeler and Goodman (2007), two well-established social work educators, directly address the lack of information literacy in social work education and practice compared to related disciplines. They note the schism between what researchers determine to be best practices and what is actually applicable in health and mental health social work service settings. They posit that information literacy as a foundational skill would serve as a cohesive agent toward a more

unified process of knowledge creation with efficient and effective applicability to social work practice.

While not an ILI-oriented piece of scholarship, Teater's (2017) exploration of the academic understanding of research within the discipline and its impact on social work practice is a noteworthy sidebar. Contrasting the "crisis" in social work research since the 1980's to their findings, Teater (2017) concludes that "...the gap between research and practice continues to be wide and the extent to which social work research has contributed to a knowledge and scientific base for the social work profession remains inadequate" (p. 562).

As noted above, this is the third in a series of studies completed by the authors to examine the landscape of ILI in social work education. The first study used an IRB-approved quantitative online survey, completed annually for three years by social work students at the researchers' home institution, concerning their awareness and use of library resources and services. During that time span, significant development of the ILI program began, moving it from a limited, procedurally-oriented model to a universal, concept-oriented model. The findings included a moderate but statistically significant increase in first-year students' awareness and use of library resources and services, suggesting that sanctioned and embedded ILI correlates to library engagement (Bausman & Ward, 2015).

The second study invited social work librarians to participate in an IRB-approved quantitative online survey investigating their professional experience of providing ILI in graduate level social work education. With a 58% response rate (n=145), several findings point to a need for further study concerning existing curricular and pedagogic approaches to ILI in social work education, the use of curriculum mapping on the local level, and assessment strategies for the student acquisition of information literacy competencies (Bausman & Ward, 2016).

Implications for Social Work Educators

The issue of ILI as a component of anti-oppressive pedagogy holds gravitas for social work educators. Yet the links connecting these seemingly disparate facets are not fully articulated in the literature and nascent attempts to do so are, of necessity, typically focused on one aspect of social work education or practice rather than a holistic overview of its fuller landscape.

One such focus has been the connection between ILI and evidence-based practice (EBP). Observant of the increasing emphasis placed on EBP in the curriculum at Boston College during the mid-2000s, Silfen and Zgoda (2008) studied students' abilities to retrieve peer-reviewed research through citation analysis of references that students used in a literature review required for their social work research course. Their findings suggest that students would benefit from ILI geared towards the development of search skills needed to retrieve evidence-based, peer-reviewed research.

More recently, Bingham and colleagues (2016) describe collaborative efforts between IL professionals and social work instructors at the University of Auckland. Beginning with a discussion about the acknowledged research-practice gap in social work in tandem with

the increasing, albeit at times contentious, emphasis on professional adherence to EBP, Bingham et al. (2016) position ILI as a mechanism that actively threads the needle required to mend the division between research and practice. One key point is advocating for early introduction of ILI so as not to relegate it as a sidebar in research courses but to establish it as a curricular component, integrated into appropriate junctions across coursework and field placement.

From a different direction, Bradley (2013) approaches the question of IL as a professional competency by examining the accreditation standards for nursing, social work, and engineering vis-à-vis the five primary elements of the ACRL (2000) Information Literacy Standards. Among her findings, Bradley concluded the professional competency standards in the US and Canada lack integration of IL as compared to those of the UK and Australia. Similarly, Adams (2014) constructs a crosswalk between the evidence-based paradigm and the ACRL Literacy Standards. Positing that both promote the requisite conceptual skills to locate, select, and integrate research into practice, she identifies corollaries and departures between models providing direction for instructional librarians in the social sciences.

It is noteworthy that since the publication of these studies (2013 and 2014), the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) revised its Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) (CSWE 2015) and the ACRL (2016) Information Literacy Framework supplanted the Standards for Higher Education (ACRL, 2000). One might therefore dismiss Adams' and Bradley's findings as outdated. Alternatively, one might embrace both studies as elements in a living scholarly narrative that deserve revisiting through the lens of the revised EPAS and the ACRL Framework. Moreover, this example serves as testimony for the need of interdisciplinary engagement among higher education information professionals and social work educators to reciprocally adjust instructional efforts, accounting in real time for the ever-evolving knowledge base and practice of both disciplines.

Lastly, there is recent focus on life-long learning and related professional behavior among social work practitioners (Jivanjee et al., 2015; Pendell, 2018; Pendell & Kimball, 2020). In a turn that at the least seems short-sighted and at worst is undermining, the transition from student to professional is frequently accompanied by losing access to scholarly literature necessary to support research-informed practice. Such information sources that are primarily available through subscription resources in an academic library are typically inaccessible in a preponderance of social work practice settings.

Jivanjee et al. (2015) note that "Social work literature addresses aspects of the learning needed for contemporary social work practice but to date, there has been little attention as to how social workers engage as life-long learners throughout their professional life" (p. 261). Using a qualitative protocol, their study's cohort noted obstacles to accessing research literature and applying some research to practice settings, both of which could necessitate input from information sources outside of the research arena. Drilling down further on the issue of access to research, Pendell (2018) reports only 48% of a random sample of articles (n=638) published in the top 25 social work journals are fully available

in the open access environment, an unknown quantity of which are likely vulnerable to copyright violations and take-down notices.

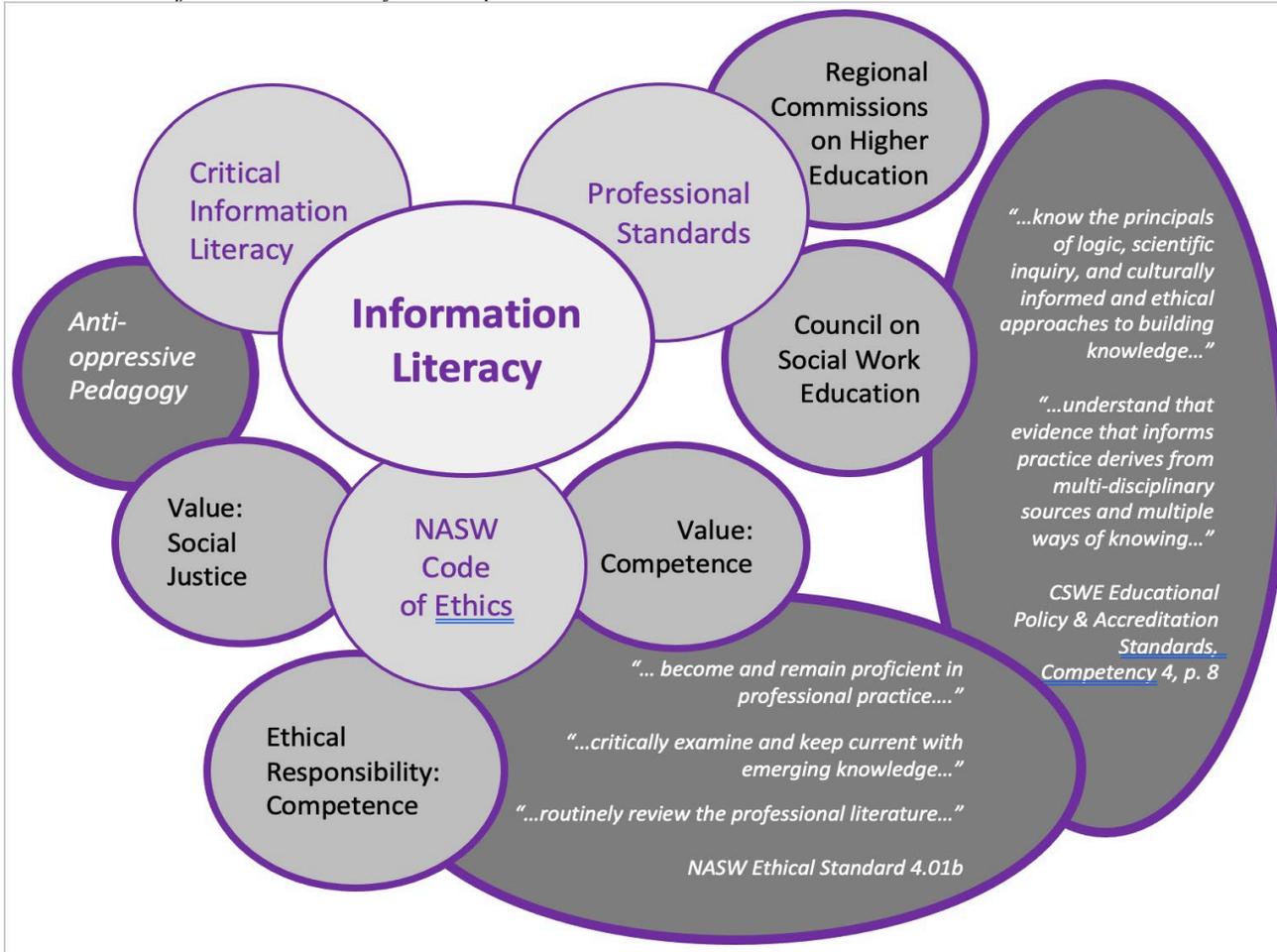
Stemming from their librarian/social work educator collaboration, Pendell and Kimball (2020) report on a national survey of social work professionals assessing their use of EBP models, of research literature as well as other information sources, and their exposure to ILI during their graduate studies. Respondents (n=123) ranked the use of peer-reviewed research a close second (out of nine) of the most important information sources but only 60% of the cohort reported adequate access to it, citing cost as the primary obstacle. A key take-away from this study is the need for social work librarians and educators to address this divergence in access to information between academic and practice settings with both instructional and advocacy implications.

In aggregate, the extant study concerning life-long learning and social work practice suggests the need for more social work research to exist in the open access environment. Moreover, it calls for social work professionals to develop a broad understanding of the information universe as it applies to their practice setting, including a baseline knowledge concerning access issues and resources (subscription versus open access) as well as the discovery, evaluation, and synthesis of grey literature and other information sources created outside the world of academic publishing.

Rather than viewing discrete segments of the information landscape via social work education and practice, it may be useful to visualize these connections through the time-honored social work approach of diagrammatic representations such as the ecomap (Hartman, 1995), the genogram (McGoldrick et al., 2008), and the cultural ecogram (Yasui, 2015; see Figure 1). Using such an approach, the interconnectedness between information literacy, educational and professional standards, and social work values becomes increasingly clear. Without ILI as a component of the curricular foundation, the ability to meet educational and accreditation standards falter. Moreover, absent IL competencies, new social workers may enter professional practice lacking the skills necessary to engage in life-long learning and to maintain an ethical, research-informed practice.

This study targets the aforementioned dearth of research around IL and social work practice, and especially its absence in social work specific literature, in such a way as to draw together seemingly disparate facets of the educational and professional landscapes into a comprehensive and inter-related context.

Figure 1. *Social Work Information Literacy Ecomap*



Methods

Building on the findings of the authors' previous work, the goal of this qualitative study was to gather and analyze information about where and how ILI and reference services fit into institutional goals generally and into the social work curricula specifically. To that end, the authors divided questions about information literacy into two sections pertaining to ILI in the classroom and individual research consultations.

With an interest in "how different people experience particular situations and how issues might affect practices across sites" (Trainor & Graue, 2012, p. 56), the researchers examined the experiences of various librarians in similar positions across the United States. The researchers determined it was important to conduct multiple interviews of social work librarians as experiences may vary greatly depending on the context of their faculty status, university size, and relationship with their respective schools of social work.

Sample

Following approval from the authors' Institutional Review Board, a two-week recruitment period commenced in May 2017. The authors used a method of purposive sampling of over 250 academic librarians in the United States: specifically, university librarians designated as subject liaisons at accredited graduate social work programs in the United States. As mentioned earlier, two of the three researchers hold both MSW and MLIS degrees and work as librarians in the same social work library. Thus, their professional connections and relationships to the social work librarians' community provided the opportunity to generate a purposive sample. Librarians working strictly with bachelors-level students were omitted, as were librarians working with online-only programs.

The authors sent a recruitment email to over 250 social work librarians, including three professional listservs, and within two weeks finalized a list of 27 respondents. Nearly all interviews were conducted over the phone with the exception of one, which was held in person. Prior to each call, respondents completed a written consent form and granted permission to be audio-recorded. Quotes from interviews are cited anonymously with the following naming convention: P1 for "participant one", P2, P3, etc., throughout this paper in order to maintain confidentiality.

Protocol

Two of the three authors interviewed the participants. The researchers followed a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix) with 29 questions about IL as it relates to both classroom instruction and reference consultations with MSW students. Additionally, the interviewers asked seven questions to gather descriptive information about the respondents' education and careers. Both interviewers worked from the same set of questions to ensure consistency in the information they gathered. However, the semi-structured approach allowed the interviewers flexibility to ask probing questions, as well as the possibility to change the order in which the questions were asked to maintain the natural flow of the interviews. The 27 interviews generated nearly 40 hours of recorded audio content. Six interviews did not record properly, so handwritten interviewer notes

were used to document these responses. The researchers obtained a grant in July 2018 to digitally transcribe all audio and handwritten interviews and hire a graduate student to assist with coding.

Analysis

The research team employed an inductive approach (Saldaña, 2014) to analyze the interview transcripts and notes; seeking themes and meaning that emerged from various rounds of coding and discussion. The first pass of open coding generated more than 20 possible themes and categories. The researchers coded a sample of three transcripts, then met to discuss the emergent themes. During that discussion, the team developed a framework for categories that were used for the next round of coding. Through a series of subsequent meetings to discuss and refine the groupings, the researchers arrived at three main categories: relational, programmatic, and characteristics, which are depicted in Figure 2 along with their attendant sub-categories that capture nuances from the interviews.

The Relational category includes any mention of relationships with different groupings of people, both inside and outside of the institution. To further refine this category, the “within institution” relationships are divided to indicate whether they exist inside or outside the library department, and with colleagues or with students. Programmatic groupings include content specific to the institution (i.e., MSW program, Libraries, Assessment, etc.), and the Characteristics category includes respondents’ descriptions of people, typically librarians or students.

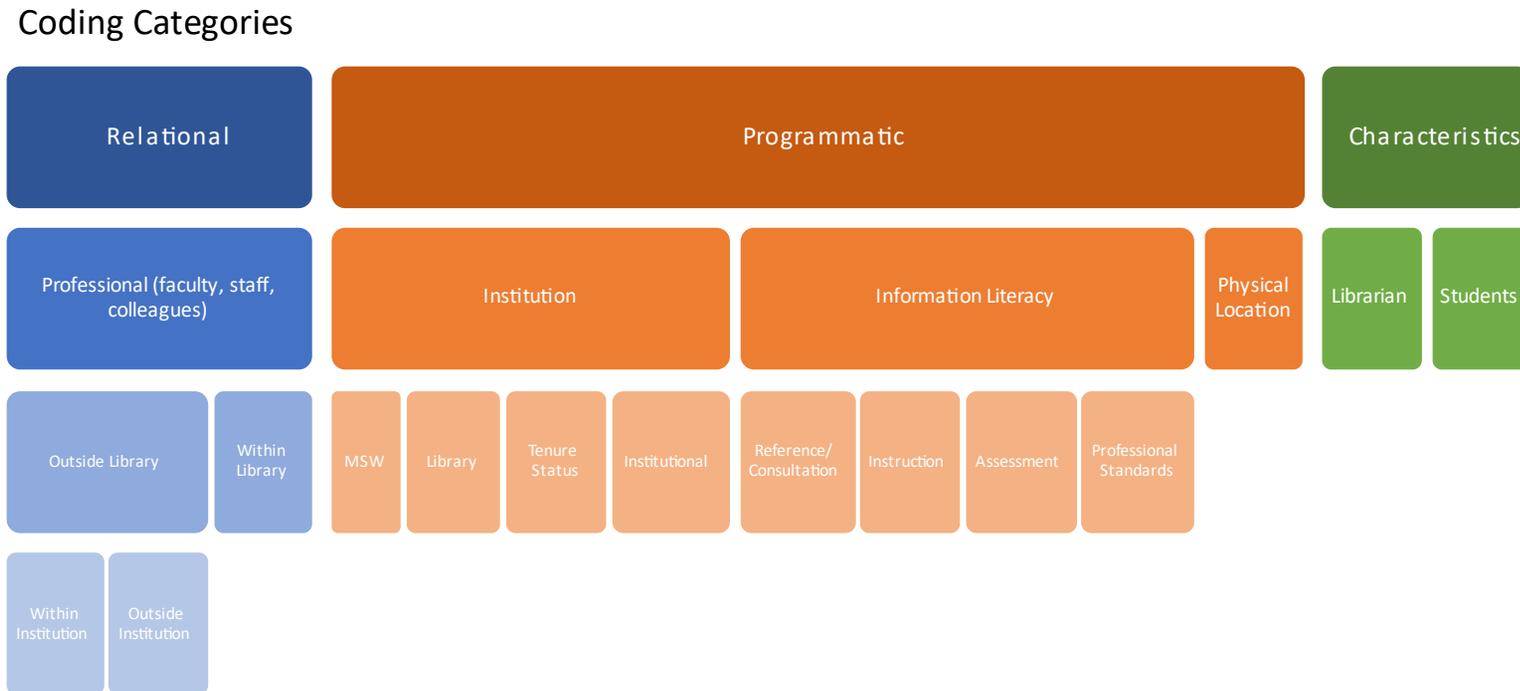
Once the research team solidified this framework for coding, each team member coded interview transcripts independently. The researchers met regularly to discuss thematic findings within each of the categories and sub-categories. For this manuscript the team decided to focus on the ILI component of the protocol (see Appendix, Part 1).

Findings

Demographics of Respondents

Within the participant sample (n=27), respondents had an average of 21 years of experience as an academic librarian, with 10 years involved with Social Work curriculum. Most respondents worked in libraries that employed a liaison model where librarians were attached to various academic departments rather than being designated as a singular, subject specialist. Including social work, respondents liaised with an average of five departments at their respective universities. In addition to their master’s in Library Science degree, 41% (n=11) had an additional graduate degree and two respondents earned a Ph.D. Therefore, most social work librarians (SWLs) in this cohort were highly educated and committed decades of their professional careers to multi-disciplinary academic librarianship.

Figure 2. *Coding Categories and Subcategories*



Relationships With Social Work Faculty

So much of it is tied to the individual professor...I will spend time seeing what courses are being taught in an upcoming semester, seeing who's teaching them, and then reaching out to those professors...with social work, it's usually people I know (P7).

The central theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of quality, working relationships among SWLs and department faculty, as illustrated by the quote above. Regardless of participation in programmatic outreach, most SWLs found alliances with particular social work faculty as the determining factor that influenced the quality of their connections with the school and its MSW students. Most respondents found their successful working relationships with faculty to be largely dependent on individuals and many SWLs faced barriers to connecting due to fluctuations in social work faculty across semesters, especially if the bulk of classes were taught by adjunct instructors (P22).

Informal Networking and Visibility

Beyond the classroom, the study's respondents sought to connect with faculty through formal events such as department meetings, service committees, professional development workshops, and—while rare—curricular planning. The bulk of interactions, however, existed by way of informal social events and incidental meetings. One participant repeatedly emphasized the importance of librarians making their presence known:

The library's participation in providing instruction and, by extension, instilling the concepts of information literacy are always a challenge that should never rest on the notion that you have been accepted and are part of the academic teaching mission of a department...you should always every year go back and knock-on doors and say, 'Hi. Remember me? What can we do together?' (P1).

Library Location and Visibility

Physical proximity between librarians and social work faculty, their offices, and the school itself also influenced the degree to which collaboration occurred. Some respondents claimed their visibility determined the strength of their working relationships with social work professors more than their faculty status. Others agreed with the importance of optics, particularly if the campus library and social work department existed at a significant distance from one another. One participant observed her library's separate location from the school of social work most likely contributed to the department being “a little bit more distant from some [other departments], and I don't think it's a matter of ignoring. It's more a matter of just that we're not there for them to see” (P2).

Service-Provider Versus Collaborator

When asked to discuss their involvement with faculty research, the majority of SWLs found their provision of service-oriented research or “secondary research” occurred far more frequently than equal, partnered collaborations. Service-delivery for faculty generally

entailed locating scholarly materials and ascertaining the quality of journals for publication. For some, engagement with faculty was “incidental and minimal compared to the work I do with the students” (P10). One participant said her formal interactions with social work faculty were “extremely rare...the reality is that if they reach out to me at all, it's because they need something from the library and they can't figure out how to do that” (P2). Another surmised that social work faculty viewed academic librarians as service providers rather than as collaborators. Nonetheless, most respondents continued to make themselves available to faculty and recognized “there's the people that get it and there's people that don't get it... So, [I] just keep trying to connect” (P7).

Faculty Status

Even if I did have faculty status, they'll still just see me as a librarian, not as a peer...they respect me more for my knowledge base...it doesn't matter whether I'm faculty or not, it just mattered that I helped them (P15).

The researchers collected information about SWLs' faculty status and if they thought their rank impacted their ability to connect and collaborate with social work faculty. Responses were split in that 44% (n=12) of respondents had faculty status whereas 48% (n=13) did not. Two respondents (n=2 or 7%) did not answer this question. Some demarcations do not align clearly between faculty/non-faculty status. Other respondents' titles included numeral ranks such as “Librarians I-IV” while others had “academic” but not “faculty status.”

Perceptions of whether one's faculty rank—or lack thereof—affected the quality of their connections with social work professors were also mixed. Some stated their rank matters (P5; P8) while others were unsure (P10). Some believed that while having faculty status helped to collaborate with faculty (P1), they surmised it was their research experience and knowledge base that elevated them rather than their professorial rank (P4). Some SWLs with faculty status noted their rank and subsequent responsibilities generated respect from social work faculty (P1; P16), yet others felt respected by faculty regardless of status (P3). Others conceded while faculty rank did not affect their ability to collaborate with social work faculty “it does affect how we are *perceived*” [emphasis added] (P10). Echoing the central finding in this research, many respondents determined the chief factor to linking with social work professors was through individual connections.

Curriculum Mapping

Though most social work librarians were not formally involved in curriculum planning, nearly all claimed to be “fairly” conversant with social work curricula. SWLs maintained familiarity with curricular content through reviewing syllabi and providing one-shot instructional sessions with specific social work professors or courses. Several respondents mentioned requesting or examining course syllabi to familiarize themselves with assignments. In each instance, the librarian proactively tracked down information about the course and the assignments, attempting to discuss with the instructor the expectations for their students, and to identify how a one-shot library instruction session fit into the

trajectory of the course or the course sequence. This holistic approach is illustrated by a respondent who explained:

I will ask the professor if they'll share the syllabus with me, so I understand what the goals of the entire course are so that I'm not leaving anything out that needs to be addressed...I try to gather as much information as I can to be able to address all of their needs (P15).

This respondent also discussed familiarity with the overall mission and goals of the broader social work program, which allowed them to tailor and focus their work with students to contribute to the larger goals of the program. Librarians' attentiveness to curriculum, course content, and assignments enabled them to act as a bridge between students and faculty when more clarity was needed, or when various students sought help with the same question. This proactive approach, and the attention to both course details and programmatic goals to help students succeed, positioned librarians as advocates for students who may not have felt they had the agency or knowledge to know what questions to ask of their professors. Such an advocacy role, however, required diplomacy and tact on the part of the librarian, and were not always welcomed, as another respondent indicated:

As I was working with a couple of the students, I realized that some of the things they were required to do weren't adequately explained in the syllabus...we're not telling the students what they need to hear the way they need to hear it. So, it's an ongoing effort...it can get in the way of the students being successful (P7).

While a few respondents participated in university-wide curriculum mapping or served on social work curriculum review boards, most noted that, regardless of the quality of the relationships they had with social work faculty, they rarely received an invitation to participate in curricular planning. One respondent noted that even though he reached out to his departmental faculty, "I didn't even get a response" and reasoned that "eventually they'll see a need for it just like they've incorporated 'writing across the curriculum'" (P10). Conversely, one librarian generated buy-in while meeting with the social work curriculum planning committee and "when I provided a map of all the different things that [the library] could cover...they were sort of blown away, like, 'Oh, we had no idea that the library could do all that. We thought library instruction was just come in and show them how to use Social Work Abstracts or whatever'" (P4).

Some respondents determined the perceived resistance from social work faculty to ILI was not to the one-shots per se but attempts to formalize it into the curriculum. One SWL bemoaned the rigidity of the social work curriculum as "trying to get my way into [the curriculum] is basically fighting tooth and nail" (P2). Another concurred she and her fellow SWLs:

...have been trying to implement the process to get ourselves inserted into the curriculum. The reason is, we want there to be consistency as lots of the faculty are new. They come and go as adjuncts, but they'll know that there's a library instruction in there, and the idea being that we then would be able to kind of scaffold learning and information literacy throughout the courses, throughout the curriculum...but the faculty are not having it. I asked, even though I have a good

relationship with people, I asked them informally...I nudged, and then I asked specifically, and then I sent out an email, and I got nothing back. So, the only institutional challenge that I've come up against is the idea of putting us in the curriculum (P10).

No doubt some social work librarians have good relationships with social work faculty, yet the bulk of efforts to initiate collaboration tends to be one-sided, stemming from librarians rather than social work faculty proactively reaching out to them on equal footing. Such instructor-reliant relationships are further discussed below.

Assessment

With the formal [assessment] that I send out...I don't get a lot of response. I would have to look back and see if any of the social work faculty have responded to me. Maybe one or two, but they're generally like, 'Everything's wonderful' (P2).

Assessment of ILI was another major theme emerging from this research. Interviewers asked respondents about what assessment approaches, if any, they used with MSW students. Specifically, the researchers inquired if SWLs assessed skills acquisition through graded or non-credit bearing assignments and if this occurred during or after an ILI session. Findings showed respondents rarely conducted assessments using formal or systematic measurements, either for actual or perceived skills acquisition. Some tried in the past though efforts were generally unsuccessful due to time constraints and lack of support from instructional faculty.

However, there were some exceptions. Three respondents used grading rubrics such as non-credit-bearing quizzes or brief surveys immediately following an information literacy session. One used "three very general questions at the end of each session such as 'can you name three things you learned today?'" (P5). Another provided students with index cards to gauge the usefulness of ILI and to generate follow-up questions but conducted no formal assessment (P25).

Many respondents offered their perceptions on the usefulness of ILI to students. Some highlighted a notable difference between students who sought research help from librarians, while others cited student emails expressing gratitude to librarians. One respondent sensed students "perceive it as helpful because they usually give me positive comments at the end of the ILI session. If I don't hear from them again, to me that's a positive thing" (P23). Thus, when conducted, SWLs assessments of ILI were "more intuitive and informal in planning and evaluation" (P26) and based on librarians' perceptions of its effectiveness. Some participants voiced concerns about assessment in general: they questioned the content of what was being assessed and wonder if SWLs are measuring actual skills attainment or simply librarians' perceptions of students' capabilities (P22).

Discussion

The findings described above offer two clear and intertwined discussion points concerning ILI in social work education: first, the current relational nature of ILI in schools of social work and, second, the need for curricular integration and assessment.

Information Literacy Instruction: Relational Versus Integrated

One of the most prominent themes emerging from interviews with social work librarians concerns the strength of the collegial relationship between social work librarians and instructors. This relationship is often the primary determinant of whether or not ILI is delivered. While social work librarians value their interdisciplinary relationships with instructional faculty for many reasons, their reliance upon these relationships as the primary vehicle for the provision of ILI is fraught with pedagogic and sustainability shortcomings. As a result, many librarians find themselves in a course-related or course-adjacent position with ILI, rather than integrated into the course or curriculum.

The concept of course-related instruction dates back to the 1970s and is described by Kirk (1999) in his review of course-related bibliographic instruction in the 1990s. Drawing upon decades of instruction at Earlham College (Kennedy et al., 1971), Kirk differentiates course-related instruction from library orientation or bibliographic instruction. Rather than teaching the mechanics of using the library in the most general sense, Kirk presents course-related instruction as a discipline-specific approach that engages students through active learning. Further, the creation of instructional content is a collaborative process between librarians and instructors. Instructional librarianship's continued evolution over the last 20 years folds these general tenets into ILI pedagogies that align with institutional goals and are delivered in collaborative and sustainable ways through course, program, and curricula-integrated models.

The respondents in this study, however, relate little success engaging social work colleagues in integrated pedagogical approaches. Indeed, the data suggest a pattern in which ILI in social work education is at times neither course-related nor course-integrated but is instead entirely instructor-reliant. This is consistent with the findings of other researchers. Meulemans and Carr (2012) note "it is the quality of relationships that individual librarians have with their faculty [that] is the major driver of an instruction program's success" (p. 84). Reale (2018) laments this failure of departmental faculty to use academic librarians as genuine partners in education rather than as providers of one-off instructional sessions. Likewise, Pendell and Kimball (2020) note the dearth of discussion specifically in the social work literature concerning ILI.

This instructor-reliant trend presents a number pedagogic obstacles. First, it leaves ILI vulnerable to turnover among librarians and social work instructors, changes in leadership, and loss of institutional knowledge. In turn, this curtails the provision of ILI in sustainable ways and eliminates the opportunity to intentionally and collaboratively provide it at key points in the curriculum when ILI is meaningful to students and absorbed into their academic and professional information-seeking repertoire. In short, it leaves SWLs in an

endless cycle of re-creating the wheel while furthering inconsistencies and inequalities in the type of education students receive within the same program.

Educational Partners: Curriculum and Assessment

There is growing consensus among those engaged in research concerning ILI in social work settings (Doney, 2018; Johnson et al., 2011; Magliaro & Munro, 2018) that it is optimally effective when embedded within the social work curriculum. Particularly for social work education, which frequently stresses the importance of evidence-based practice, Bingham et al. (2016) argue that,

...rather than relegating EBP concepts and practices to research courses, they should be integrated throughout the entire [social work] curriculum both in coursework and field work. This would embed the importance of the research-practice connection across the curriculum more forcefully and facilitate the development of more information literate EBP practitioners. (p. 209)

Likewise, the authors posit that critical ILI that is strategically scaffolded into the curriculum is more effective towards molding research-informed practitioners as compared to piece-meal, one shot ILI sessions incidentally offered to some students but not to others. Further, an intentionally integrated approach would make way for meaningful assessment of IL practices which both the literature and the participants of this study highlight as lacking. This aligns with Bausman and Ward's (2016) study which reports only 11 percent of social work academic librarians use formal assessment tools and acknowledges the limitations of assessment when subjective perceptions of librarians are largely based on students' feedback. A targeted approach to developing an integrated ILI program requires inclusion of academic librarians in curriculum planning committees as educational partners. Bringing librarians into this arena would provide local, curricula-specific opportunities for jointly identifying the critical junctures at which to embed ILI, to discern discreet IL learning objectives, and to flexibly adjust embedded ILI components in response to curricular evolution. Without such institutional support, assessment is meaningless and nearly impossible to conduct.

This assertion is supported by CSWE (2015) which requires assessment of student learning outcomes as one of its accreditation standards. Although the current EPAS does not use the term "information literacy," it clearly outlines an educational competency that students learn how to "engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice" (p. 8). As such, SWLs and social work faculty have an obligation to forge efforts to uphold such educational standards through the active engagement of the CSWE EPAS with the ACRL Framework.

Case Example

The partnership between SWLs and social work faculty at the authors' institution is an example of such an integrated approach. At the time of this writing, students enrolled in the MSW program view a brief pre-orientation welcome video from the library and partake in a first-year workshop with an online, asynchronous component followed by an hour of face-to-face instruction with a faculty librarian. Thereafter, students receive one hour of

instruction from a faculty librarian embedded into core classes in their second through fourth semesters. Each module covers distinct areas of IL required for social work practice, links to a real-time class assignment, and contains content guided by specific learning objectives, EPAS practice behaviors, and the ACRL Framework.

This program is made possible through the collaborative efforts of the SWLs and social work faculty, the social work curriculum committee, and social work student services department contextualized within the sanction of the program leadership. Over the years, the shape and scope of the program has been flexibly adjusted in response to the evolution of the curriculum and the needs of the students (Bausman & Ward, 2016).

Study Limitations

While the researchers are pleased with the number of respondents who participated in this study, it quickly became apparent that coding 27 qualitative interviews averaging 90 minutes each was a massive undertaking. The sheer amount of data collected is a goldmine, yet it considerably slowed the process of generating scholarship, far longer than the researchers intended. In the future, we suggest aiming for a smaller sample size of approximately 10 participants which still has the potential to generate equally valid and worthwhile content. Additionally, as noted earlier, two of the three researchers hold both MSW and MLIS degrees and work as librarians in the same social work library. Therefore, their values and experiences as social workers and librarians play into the interpretation and analysis of the data from this study.

Implications for Social Work Education

As helping professionals with deeply intertwined evolutionary roots and commitment to social justice, the foundation for the partnering of social work educators and academic librarians already exists. Following the lead of our colleagues in public libraries who abide by trauma-informed library practices (Zettervall & Nienow, 2019) and our partners in field education departments who nurture public libraries as venues for social work field placements (Johnson et al., 2019), social work educators and academic librarians should leverage our shared values around social justice as expressed in the ACRL Framework and CSWE EPAS in service of promoting the information literate social worker (ACRL EBSS Social Work Committee, 2020).

In closing, the authors offer two overarching recommendations. The first is to release ILI in social work education from dependence upon individual librarian-instructor relationships in favor of a curriculum integrated approach. Action items toward such an evolution include:

- Including instructional social work librarians on curriculum committees and other departmental entities governing curriculum content and delivery;
- Evaluating existing curricula on a local level to determine: 1. natural junctures in which ILI supports completion of course requirements and development of professional practice skills; and 2. appropriate program-centric delivery

modalities such as flipped classrooms, face-to-face instruction, and online asynchronous and synchronous instruction;

- Identifying opportunities for embedding assessment of IL skills acquisition within local curricula;
- Including SWLs in student orientations and new faculty onboarding processes;
- Reviewing and consulting the Social Work Committee's Companion Document to the ACRL Framework to examine how the values and ethics pertaining to social justice are aligned between both academic librarianship and social work (ACRL EBSS Social Work Committee, 2020).

The second recommendation is for the CSWE to include information literacy, as defined in the above discussion and not in its current iteration provided in their recommended changes for the 2022 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (CSWE, 2020). We strongly encourage CSWE to partner and consult with academic social work librarians and scholars so this critical concept of information literacy is properly defined and understood.

Conclusion

The current study aimed to listen to and learn directly from social work librarians across the United States about their experiences providing ILI in graduate schools of social work. Findings demonstrate that the relational-dependent nature of social work librarians on social work faculty is insufficient to meaningfully integrate ILI into curricula and accurately assess its impact. Highly collaborative, sustainable working partnerships among academic librarians and social work faculty situated within the local mechanisms of curricula evolution are essential for educating information literate social work practitioners of tomorrow.

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Appendix

Social Work Librarian Interview Form Protocol

The goal of this interview is to gather information about where and how information literacy instruction and reference services fit into your institution's goals generally and in the social work curricula specifically.

Demographic Profile

1. How long have you been an academic librarian? How many of these years have you been involved with social work curriculum?
2. How many departments/programs are you responsible for? How is subject specialization handled in your library?
3. Did you train specifically for instructional and/or reference services? How?

PART 1: INFORMATION LITERACY INSTRUCTION

1. Please share with me a general overview of your role as an information literacy instructor in the social work program. How closely aligned are your instructional responsibilities to your job description?
2. Have your responsibilities as an instructor changed over time? How?

Relational Factors

1. How do you connect / collaborate with the social work faculty?
 - a. Formal Opportunities: faculty meeting, service committees, governance bodies, etc.
 - b. Informal Opportunities: professional development activities, social networking activities, incidental meeting, etc.
2. Do you have faculty status?
 - a. How does this impact connecting and collaborating?
3. What is your level of involvement in faculty research?
 - a. Consultation, co-author, systematic review, etc.

Curriculum Mapping

1. How familiar are you with social work curricula?
 - i. Review syllabi?
 - ii. Familiarity with scaffolding of courses in the program? Familiar with the program's pedagogy?
2. How familiar are you with CSWE EPAS, ACRL Standards for Higher Ed, ACRL Framework?
 - i. Do you use any of these benchmarks in designing instruction sessions?
3. Have you engaged in any curriculum mapping activities in service of information literacy instruction?

Assessment

1. What assessment approaches do you use?
 - a. Skills acquisition
 1. Skills assessment during or after session?

2. Graded, credit/no credit, extra credit
3. Specific library assignment
4. Element in a grading rubric
- b. Perception
 - i. Student survey, session feedback
 - ii. Pros
 - iii. Cons

Best Practices

1. Generally, what should information literacy for social work education and practice include?
 - a. Is there a "universal" baseline?
 - b. Or is baseline localized - adaptable from program to program?
 - c. Is baseline static or in flux?
 - d. Impact of student body, methodology, institutional values and goals

PART 2: REFERENCE AND RESEARCH CONSULTATIONS

1. Please share with me a general overview of your role as a reference librarian with social work students. How closely aligned are your reference responsibilities to your job description?
2. Have your responsibilities as a reference librarian changed over time? How?

Effectiveness

1. How do Reference Consultations [RC] benefit social work students?
 - a. Is this / how is this different from other groups of students?
 - b. How can librarians maximize the potential benefits?
2. How do you measure Reference Service?
 - a. Quantity, type of interview, length, etc.?
 - b. How do you measure efficacy?
 - c. Do/how do reference services increase information literacy?
 - d. Do/how do you assess this?
3. How do you promote RC?
 - a. During class, signage, social media, outreach, etc.?
 - b. As part of the curriculum?
 - c. As a professional competency?
4. Does/how does RC dovetail with instruction?
 - a. Equally weighted group vs. individual instruction?
 - b. An opportunity to fill instructional gaps?
5. Do you tailor RC for social work students?
 - a. Social work students vs students in other disciplines?
 - b. Graduate vs undergraduate students?
 - c. Diversity within social work cohort (age, experience, library anxiety, technophobes, etc.)
6. Is RC obsolete?
 - a. Do students use it?

- b. Does it need fixing, transformation?
- c. How and why?

Librarian Role

1. In addition to your MLIS, what other higher education degrees have you obtained?
 - a. Is librarianship a first or second career path?
 - b. Other professional training?
2. With regard to social work students, have you had experiences in the context of RC that called upon a supportive role beyond reference services?
 - a. Student need for other academic services?
 - b. Student need for concrete services (housing, insurance, etc.)?
 - c. Student need for emergency, behavioral, mental, physical health services?
3. How comfortable are you with your capacity to meet non-reference needs if indicated?
 - a. Support of library and/or social work department
 - b. Access to resources to facilitate linkage
 - c. Institutional policies, procedures, training
 - d. Access to institutional public safety and behavioral health teams

Pedagogic Fit

1. How might RC promote evidence-based practice social work?
2. How do you see RC fitting with best practices for IL instruction?
3. How might RC fit into an anti-oppressive pedagogy?
4. How might RC fit with ACRL Framework, CSWE standards, NASW values and ethics?
5. What are the institutional challenges in promoting RC?