Community College Librarian and Student Perceptions of Student Information Literacy Needs

Statement of National Need: Florida State University (lead) and the University at Buffalo seek funding for a National Leadership Grant to investigate community college librarians' and community college students' perceptions of information literacy (IL) instruction and student IL needs and experiences. This one-year project (July 2019 through June 2020) requests $157,942 in support, and is designated as Research in Service to Practice (Funding Category) and Lifelong Learning (Project Category). The project will focus on community college librarians and students in Florida (28 community colleges) and New York (40 community colleges).

Community colleges, and community college libraries, face unique challenges because of their mission (education for all), the students they serve (from a wide variety of backgrounds), and the faculty they employ (often large numbers of adjuncts). In addition, students who attend community colleges have a variety of post-graduation goals: some plan to continue their college education, while others plan to enter the workforce. Also, this is a dynamic time as many academic libraries are making the shift from skill-based learning to information literacy instruction focused on threshold ideas in the new ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy*. Research has shown that community college students greatly overestimate their IL skills and that they are unlikely to gain proficiency on their own.[1] Little is currently known about how librarians in community colleges perceive students' information literacy needs or how these perceptions compare to the self-perceptions of these students. There is evidence of a gap between perceptions of librarians and of students in other contexts; these gaps can have serious consequences for instructional success.[2] This embedded mixed-method study will investigate community college librarians' instructional practices and their perceptions of student IL needs. It will also explore the perceptions of community college students and how their perceptions vary based on the type of instruction they receive (*Standards* vs. *Framework*) and their educational goals. Findings will inform instructional practice in community college libraries as well as pedagogy in MLS programs preparing librarians for instructional work, and will contribute to the research on community college student information literacy needs during a time of transition in which the concept of information literacy has been redefined for academic librarians. This project will complement IMLS's "Community College Librarians and the ACRL *Framework*" grant, which focuses more narrowly on librarians' experiences with the *Framework,* and also IMLS's "Community College Libraries & Academic Support for Student Success" project, which deals more broadly with a wide range of student experiences, not just (or even primarily) information seeking.

This project will address the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the instructional practices of community college librarians responsible for IL instruction?

RQ2. What are the perceptions of community college librarians about student IL needs?

RQ3. What are the self-perceptions of students concerning their IL needs?

RQ4. Do student self-perceptions of their IL needs vary based on their educational goals (transfer to university, enter the general job force, practice a trade, or join a profession)?

RQ5. Do student self-perceptions of their IL needs vary based on the type of instruction they receive (skill-based vs. threshold concepts)?

RQ6. How do librarian perceptions and student perceptions of student IL needs compare?

Project Design: This study will employ an embedded mixed-method design and will consist of the following activities: (1) Develop and conduct a survey of community college librarians in Florida and New York to determine instructional practices and perceptions of student IL needs (Jul.-Nov. 2019). (2) Recruit six community college librarians (three from each state) to serve on an advisory panel to assist with student recruitment (Nov. 2019-Jan. 2020). (3) Analyze survey data (Nov. 2019-Jan. 2020). (4) Recruit students from community colleges, 30 from each state for a total of 60 (Jan.-Feb. 2020). (5) Conduct online interviews of approximately 45 minutes each with students from Florida and New York (Jan.-Apr. 2020). (6) Code and analyze interview transcripts (Apr.-May 2020). (7) Triangulate survey and interview findings (Jun. 2020). (8) Disseminate project results through social media, conference presentations, and journal articles (ongoing).

Don Latham (Professor, FSU) will serve as PI and will administer, coordinate, and participate in all aspects of the project. **Melissa Gross** (Professor, FSU) and **Heidi Julien** (Professor and Department Chair, Buffalo) will serve as co-PIs and participate in all aspects of the project. Julien will oversee developing the survey; Gross will

oversee developing the interview questions. Two graduate student assistants (one at FSU and one at Buffalo) will assist with identifying instructional librarians at community colleges, conducting interviews, and administering the project.

Diversity Plan: Community college students represent a diverse group in terms of race/ethnicity, income, and educational background. Citing various sources, the Community College Research Center at Columbia University provides key demographics in their FAQs[3]: In fall 2014, 56% of Hispanic students and 44% of Black students were enrolled in community college. Forty-four percent of low-income students (family income less than $25,000/year) attend community college as their first college, as compared to only 15% of high-income students. Only 14% of low-income students actually complete an associate's degree within six years of enrollment. Of the students who began community college in 2003-2004, 68% took one or more remedial courses within six years of enrollment; 48% took two or more. This project will recruit community college students, a diverse group from two states that reflect the demographic diversity of the U.S.[4] The librarians who serve on the advisory board will review and provide feedback on the interview questions and will recruit students for the interviews who reflect the diversity of their college and state.

National Impact: Community colleges are the most inclusive institutions of higher learning making postsecondary education available to many people who are not ready for or cannot afford other forms of higher education.[5] The American Association of Community Colleges recognizes that IL is critical to the success of these students.[6] However, community college students remain understudied, even though they are a diverse population whose IL needs are likely to be unique. Findings from this study will provide a much needed, holistic understanding of how these students, and librarians teaching IL, perceive students' attainment of IL. Findings will potentially affect the development of accreditation policy, the mission of community colleges, pedagogy informed by an understanding of students' perceived needs, and data that can be used in the training of pre-service librarians. For researchers, this project allows for the capture of critical data during an historic time of transition from the ACRL *Standards* to the ACRL *Framework* and begins to build our knowledge of the perceptions of community college students concerning their IL needs and how these are being met.

Budget Summary: Total requested: $157,942**.** Includes: salaries & fringe ($44,131), GA tuition ($11,225), advisory board honoraria ($3,000), participant incentives ($1,800), Zoom for meetings & interviews ($180), transcription services ($4,050), travel ($4,260), subaward to Buffalo ($44,788), and indirect costs ($44,508).

References:

1. Gross, M., & Latham, D. (2012). What's skill got to do with it? Information literacy skills and self-views of ability among first-year college students. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science & Technology*, *63*, 574-583; Gross, M., & Latham, D. (2013). Addressing below proficient information literacy skills: Evaluating the efficacy of an evidence-based educational intervention. *Library & Information Science Research*, *35*, 181-190.

2. Detlor, B., Julien, H., Serenko, A., Willson, R., & Lavallee, M. (2011). Learning outcomes of information literacy instruction at business schools. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science & Technology* 62(3), 572-585; Detlor, B., Booker, L., Serenko, A., & Julien, H. (2012). Student perceptions of information literacy instruction: The importance of active learning. *Education for Information* 29(2), 147-161; Julien, H., & Boon, S. (2004). Assessing instructional outcomes in Canadian academic libraries. *Library & Information Science Research* 26, no. 2, 121-139; Julien, H., Detlor, B., Serenko, A., Willson, R., & Lavallee, M. (2011). Preparing tomorrow's decision makers: Learning environments and outcomes of information literacy instruction in business schools. *Journal of Business and Finance Librarianship* 16(4) (October-December), 348-367.

3. Community College Research Center. (2018). Community college FAQs. Available https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Community-College-FAQs.html.

4. Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. (2018). Population distribution by race/ethnicity. Available https://tinyurl.com/yajfheo4.

5. American Association of Community Colleges. (2018). Research. Available https://www.aacc.nche.edu/research-trends/.

6. American Association of Community Colleges. (2017). Position statement on information literacy. Available http://nclr-aacc.org/on-information-literacy/.