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IMLS Sparks Ignite IL Framework Cooperative Project Grant Proposal

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IMLS Sparks! Ignition Grant
IL Framework Cooperative Project for At-Risk Student Success in Smaller Colleges
Narrative

Statement of Need:

We propose to develop best practices for ensuring that information literacy education programs in smaller college libraries support the success and persistence of at-risk¹ students in their critical first-year. We will study how best to accomplish this using the newly adopted Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (Framework) and develop new assessment methodologies and engaging educational experiences for students in their first semester. Since 2000, colleges have worked to create greater focus on instruction and assessment of information literacy using the ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (Standards). However, in 2015, ACRL released the Framework representing a departure from the hierarchical and procedural character of the Standards. The new Framework is a significant change from the rigidity of the older Standards. The Framework approaches information literacy as a holistic set of knowledge practices within six broad areas of information literacy (i.e. frames) with proficiency in the frames evidenced by behavioral dispositions relevant to the knowledge practices of a given frame. The development of information literacy within the Framework's model is more referential and asymmetrical, an aspect that requires much deeper understanding than the prior highly structured and linear Standards. For instance, understanding a frame such as *Authority is Constructed and Contextual* may facilitate and increase understanding of the frame *Information has Value*; however an increase in either or both does not necessarily entail enhanced proficiency with other frames, such as *Scholarship as Conversation*. Given this substantial divergence in the conceptualization of information literacy, the educational practices and assessment of information literacy must be revised and updated.

This significant need to revise our information literacy practices comes at the same time when academic libraries are increasingly expected to justify the value of their activities and initiatives to their institutions, and also when institutions are scrutinizing student retention and analyzing student attainment of various academic competencies. Although many librarians are working towards this end, few have developed a tried and true method, especially one that is focused on the new Framework, which can be efficiently used by others. It is particularly essential that smaller college libraries develop a clear means of assessing and ensuring the effectiveness of their educational missions. Smaller college libraries are especially subject to the budgetary concerns of their parent institutions as cuts or even level budgets curtail their ability to be innovative. The smaller staff size often means there is less in-house expertise to accomplish new initiatives, especially those that require developing new complex skills. The limited resources of the institution can also make it difficult to move projects forward. For example, many colleges have only one institutional research employee to provide necessary data for informed decision making, so many libraries are still learning how institutional data can be used to gain deeper understanding of the issues we are continually working to solve. Therefore, we must develop methods that address the need for detailed and precise data analysis with limited resources, so we

¹ See SupportingDoc1.pdf for more details on our rationale for focusing on "at-risk" students

can better determine which approaches best meet the needs of at-risk students, especially related to college readiness to support the outcomes of the entire institution's mission.

The conceptual differences between the Standards and the Framework mean that the multitude of assessment initiatives gauging the efficacy of information literacy in the context of the Standards no longer offers sufficient analysis to inform our practices. Smaller colleges face the challenge of limited resources to develop new skills and methodologies quickly to react effectively to these changes. Not only do smaller colleges have a limited development budget but they also have significantly fewer professional staff to experiment with new methods while dealing with their existing workload. This puts smaller colleges at a disadvantage in comparison to larger institutions that are able to more quickly adapt due to the number of professionals who can contribute to new endeavors and share knowledge. With this project we will learn and determine how best to use the new Framework at smaller institutions with limited resources to create positive impact for students who need it the most.

This collaborative project involves the libraries at five small liberal arts colleges in Maryland and Pennsylvania: Goucher College, McDaniel College, Ursinus College, Washington College and Washington & Jefferson College.² Accomplishing this project collaboratively with five distinctive colleges will allow us to develop a model that can be utilized by others. Our ultimate goal is to directly affect the success of at-risk students by helping them develop essential college research abilities as efficiently and effectively as possible. In order to do this, each institution must first determine the skill level of each of our incoming students, determine which indicators may correlate to students struggling with college-level academic work, develop learning activities that help students bridge the gap, and develop persistence abilities and attitudes towards their longitudinal success in college and in life. This grant will allow the project collaborators to develop skills to design an effective information literacy program centered around the Framework's dispositions and knowledge practices for first semester students including: a pre-test to determine baseline abilities of incoming students; module based learning activities to help target areas of the greatest need; a post-test assessment methodology to determine to what degree students' abilities improve as a result of our new Framework focused teaching practices; focus groups to determine if attitudes of learners have improved in terms of their information literacy related abilities and how it may affect their college persistence. The findings and products will be shared broadly for the benefit of others, especially those at other small colleges that have limited resources to create robust methods on their own.

Librarians at each of the institutions will gain knowledge and the ability to develop new assessment methods and instruction models. Faculty at each institution will be partners in the project and will gain new insights into the value of incorporating information literacy into their courses. Administrators and other campus partners such as those in academic support services will learn the benefit of studying information literacy as an essential academic competency and how it supports the needs of at-risk students. Other small college libraries will benefit from our experience and be encouraged to use what we develop because it will be replicable for use at other institutions especially those with limited resources. The library profession as a whole will benefit from our

² From 2008 to 2012 these five institutions worked together on a collaborative project funded by the Teagle Foundation to study diversity concerns at the institutional level. This library project builds on that successful relationship and explores a new approach with focus on specific learning outcomes.

findings related to developing programs for diverse populations. Ultimately the students are the greatest beneficiary of this project as we develop new methods to increase their success in college and important information-seeking life skills.

The following research questions will be answered in the course of this project:

- RQ1: Which demographic factors indicate correlation to lower information literacy test scores of incoming students and how do these vary by institution?
- RQ2: To what degree does Framework focused information literacy instruction make a significant positive impact on bridging a student's college readiness gap?
Framework specific research questions related to above:
 - RQ2.A: To what degree does first semester information literacy instruction affect a student's ability to locate a variety of sources relevant to a given topic?
 - RQ2.B: To what degree does first semester information literacy instruction affect a student's ability to articulate the basis of a source's relevance and authority?
 - RQ2.C: To what degree does first semester information literacy instruction affect a student's ability to critically assess information and synthesize information from a variety of sources?
- RQ3: To what degree does information literacy instruction affect a student's attitudes towards research and how it supports their success in college?
- RQ4: How effective was our new Framework focused model for information literacy instruction at increasing the abilities of students within demographics that needed the most development?
- RQ5: How effective were the assessment instruments and methods used at measuring our intended outcomes?

The intended results of our project will ensure that students from all demographic backgrounds, especially those that may indicate difficulty with college-level work in their first year, are more successful with using research for their learning activities. We will bring to light the necessity of colleges to develop new information literacy instruction methods to support their increasingly diverse students with the goal of significantly improving student success and persistence.

All academic institutions are at the beginning stage of learning how to incorporate the new Framework into their long established practices. It is important that smaller colleges are not left behind in this advancement of the core education service we provide to our institutions. We believe that we can help other colleges innovate by doing the detailed work necessary to develop models they can easily incorporate into the complexities of their current situations. By developing this as a collaborative project we will be able to take into consideration the issues presented by each institution's unique context and find solutions that can be applied to meet various needs. We will also develop this as an efficient model to be used by institutions with fewer resources to dedicate to these efforts. This project has the potential for far-reaching impact because it focuses on the needs of diverse at-risk populations and targets essential college readiness skills. We will provide a high impact solution to a difficult problem and the question everyone is trying to answer: how do we prove to our institutions that information literacy is an essential academic competency and do so in a way that provides compelling results, especially for those students with the greatest need? Our plans are to do a concentrated study of the issue to serve the library community as a whole. This is

not possible for any one institution on their own. We will test various methods of teaching and integrating Framework focused information literacy into the curriculum and develop a toolkit of resources that makes a difference in building greater understanding and support for library services within our communities.

Impact:

Throughout our work on this project, librarians at small colleges will gain new opportunities to participate in the dialog designed for the new Framework and practice innovative methods for teaching with increased effectiveness. Due to the flexible nature of the Framework we intend to leave room for creativity within a set of clear practices and outcomes. The opportunities presented by multiple institutions collaborating on this project will allow experimentation with instruction methods such as flipped classroom techniques, online teaching environments and creating engaging classroom activities. This approach will allow us to test a variety of options designed to make the largest impact with student learning differences and determine those that are most effective.

To assess our performance goals, each student will be evaluated prior to exposure to any library instructional activities to establish the baseline of their abilities. We will develop a set of learning activities focused on Framework learning outcomes (as outlined in RQ2.A – C above) which will be delivered in a set of environments (e.g. online and/or in-person) using carefully planned methods. We will then assess if there are statistically significant improvements in the information literacy abilities of the students, which methods proved the most effective, and if they made a difference with students in multiple demographic categories. We will discuss the learning experiences with students in focus groups to determine how it shaped their attitudes about research practices and their persistence to attain a college education. The intended impact is for students to improve their abilities significantly enough to be more successful in their college research work and information discovery process. We will also develop new working relationships with faculty to focus on intentional goals for courses designed to increase information literacy development.

Upon the completion of our project goals and assessment methodology, we will write a white paper summarizing our successes, challenges and results. In addition, we will share and publicize what we learned and developed through conference presentations, articles, and a toolkit of resources posted for others to use. Librarians in small colleges are hungry for clear and easy to use models they can start using immediately to demonstrate their impact on student learning. This grant will allow us the opportunity to partner across multiple institutions while gaining greater insights from experts in the field to develop new methods and practices no one institution would be able to produce on their own. Our institutions offer enough variety in form and function that the successes we produce should be easily adaptable and useful for others. It is our intended goal to share what we learn for the benefit of all, including the refined assessment methods, tools and learning activities. We will ensure that our resulting products are prepared and presented in an easy-to-follow road map for success. We will also provide insights for developing successful partnerships with faculty and other campus partners, such as institutional research, to complete a similar project. As professionals in smaller institutions, we see the necessity for producing results that can be broadly used by institutions with fewer resources. We find that all too often this research is dominated by larger institutions offering little hope of reproduction in a smaller environment. Our results, focused in smaller institutions, will also offer the flexibility to be scaled up for larger institutions with greater resources for customization.

Project Design:

We will conduct at least four collaborative meetings of the partners from each of the five institutions. Two of these meetings will be training and planning events with experts in the field to assist in developing local expertise in assessment methods and creating Framework learning activities. At least two additional collaborative meetings will be held to further develop and refine teaching and assessment methods with the involvement of faculty from each institution. Incoming students will be assessed to determine their baseline for comparison. Results will identify various demographic groups whose scores are weaker in comparison to their peers. Students will receive information literacy instruction utilizing new Framework focused methods. Afterwards, an assessment will be administered to determine if there were improvements in student abilities, which instruction methods were most effective and if they made a difference with students in various demographic categories. The research will conclude with focus groups comprised of student participants to determine how the instruction activities shaped their attitudes towards research practices and influenced their persistence to attain a college education. This will allow us to review our results using both quantitative and qualitative research methods which are necessary to determine attainment of outcomes related to the Framework's disposition concepts. We will use the results to refine our methods to the most effective model and share it with the wider professional community.

Jessame Ferguson, Director of Hoover Library at McDaniel College will be the project lead. She will meet with partners at each institution to ensure the project is well established and meets milestones throughout the year of collaborative work.³ She will also ensure the project is successfully completed and methodology is followed correctly. Each of the library directors at the participating colleges will provide leadership and oversight for their institution to maintain consistency and ensure the goals are fulfilled. At least one librarian and one faculty member from each college will be immersed in the training, planning and implementation of the project. Additional campus partners at each college may be involved, such as staff from institutional research to assist in data collection as necessary. The administrative and financial obligations of the grant will be administered by the appropriate staff at McDaniel College.

The project will begin on January 2, 2017. We will convene two collaborative meetings in January to begin the education and planning process with the assistance of experts. Project teams will be formed and monthly milestones will be identified leading to the completion of work to develop the assessment methods and learning activities. Jessame Ferguson will visit each institution during the spring term to ensure that questions are addressed and each college develops the necessary groundwork for the project's success. A third collaborative meeting will be held in April to share progress and refine our plans. Details will be finalized in July at the fourth collaborative meeting well in advance of the beginning of the Fall semester. Incoming first-year students will take the baseline assessment during their orientation or first few days on campus, at the end of August or beginning of September, depending on the college's academic calendar. The information literacy learning activities will take place throughout the fall semester, with the final assessment and focus groups taking place during November and December. Analysis and discussion of results will take place during December.

³ Based on the results presented in the 2012 final report for Teagle Foundation diversity project the visits to individual campuses were crucial to the success of the collaborative.

Funds are needed to support four training and planning events for approximately ten people, including participant travel costs, possible site costs, food and trainer costs. Trainers will be experts in the field guiding the development of skills and knowledge of librarians and faculty and will consult on the efficacy of project details. Their expenses include fees for services and travel costs to attend the meetings. Funds are also needed to support the development of the first version of the assessment instrument and to conduct a norming and beta testing process. Funds are needed for test taker incentives and consultant costs to ensure the methodology and data analysis is sound. We are also requesting funding for release time for the project lead to manage and organize the work of the collaborative partners, conduct research, develop and update documentation and make site visits. Also travel funds are needed for the project lead for four site visits (once at each institution) to ensure the project's success at each partner location.

Each institution will contribute librarian time to developing and implementing the project, student participation, faculty knowledge and involvement, institutional research expertise, access to existing computer labs to support automated testing and teaching facilities either online, physical, or both. Details about the library structure and resources of each participating institution can be found in the supplemental material.

As outlined, we will use a pre and post-test and focus group assessment methodology to ensure we gain both quantitative and qualitative measurements through direct and indirect methods. We will determine which learning activities were most effective at increasing the abilities of students from diverse groups and how effective our assessment tools were at measuring it. The project will conclude if learning differences, context from cultural or prior experiences or other demographic factors relate to lower information literacy scores and whether or not improved engagement with information literacy education supports college success of at-risk students. We will determine if there are differences in results at each institution, what makes an impact, what doesn't and why.

As this is a collaborative project the library directors are accountable to each other for the success of the project and will help keep each other on track for the benefit of all involved and our professional community. McDaniel College, as the lead institution on the project, will work to ensure that all milestones and deadlines are met.

The project team will share the results broadly with our institutions to ensure more faculty and administrative support is gained for expanding and continuing to support successful information literacy outcomes for students. The findings and products will be publicized at local and national professional organizations through professional conference presentations, articles, and a toolkit of resources posted for others to use. Furthermore, we will share the findings with regional organizations, such as the Maryland Library Consortium, the Maryland State Department of Education's Instructional Technology & School Libraries section and the Pennsylvania Library Association College and Research Libraries Division that are exploring issues of high school readiness for college. We will also share the results with future funders as we hope to continue the project by following a cohort of students throughout their undergraduate years, developing best methods for increasing their information literacy abilities leading to graduation, and entering the workforce as information adept citizens.