METALITERACY IN PRACTICE

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and

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Contents

List of Figures and Tables ix
Foreword, by Alison J. Head xi
Preface xv
Acknowledgments xxv

1 | Revising for Metaliteracy
   Flexible Course Design to Support Social Media Pedagogy 1
   DONNA WITEK and TERESA GRETTANO

2 | The Politics of Information
   Students as Creators in a Metaliteracy Context 23
   LAUREN WALLIS and ANDREW BATTISTA

3 | Metaliteracy Learning of RN to BSN Students
   A Fusion of Disciplinary Values and Discourses 47
   BARBARA J. D’ANGELO and BARRY M. MAID
4 | Where Collections and Metaliteracy Meet
Incorporating Library-Owned Platforms into Open and Collaborative Library Instruction 73
AMANDA SCULL

5 | Empowering Learners to Become Metaliterate in a Digital and Multimodal Age 91
SANDRA K. CIMBRICZ and LOGAN RATH

6 | Metacognition Meets Research-Based Learning in the Undergraduate Renaissance Drama Classroom 113
MICHELE R. SANTAMARIA and KATHRYN M. MONCRIEF

7 | Promoting Empowerment through Metaliteracy
A Case Study of Undergraduate Learning Outcomes 135
KRISTINE N. STEWART and DAVID M. BROUSSARD

8 | Developing Agency in Metaliterate Learners
Empowerment through Digital Identity and Participation 159
IRENE McGARRITY

9 | Metaliteracy, Networks, Agency, and Praxis
An Exploration 183
PAUL PRINSLOO

About the Editors and Contributors 203
Index 209
Figures and Tables

FIGURES
1.1 Course Goals Compared 9
1.2 Assignments Compared 10
1.3 Revised Assignments Mapped to Course Goals and Metaliteracy Learning Objectives 14
4.1 LibGuide Assessment Rubric 84
6.1 Project Levels of Collaboration 114
6.2 Agas Map 118
6.3 Rose Theatre 119
6.4 Team Identification and Characteristics 125
6.5 Survey Statement Analysis 129

TABLES
2.1 Creations 27
3.1 Comparison of TWC361 Outcomes and Competencies with Metaliteracy Learning Objectives 53
### FIGURES AND TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure/Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Average Scores for Reflective Statements</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Metaliteracy Objectives Assessment, Goal 1</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Metaliteracy Objectives Assessment, Goal 2</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Metaliteracy Objectives Assessment, Goal 3</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Metaliteracy Objectives Assessment, Goal 4</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Mapping of Core Metaliteracy Learning Objectives with EDI 728 Learning Objectives</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Contents of Paper Trail Assignment</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Timetable of the Introduction and Deadlines for Sections of the Paper Trail</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Codebook</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Skills-Based Outcomes</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Non-Skills-Based Outcomes</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foreword

The concept of information literacy is not new. For decades, educators—particularly academic and school librarians—have devoted tremendous effort and resources to teaching students how to navigate increasingly complex information systems in the digital age. Their task is to teach students how to be discriminating information seekers and consumers as well as ethical content producers. Their overarching goal is to help students succeed in school and society, so that they remain self-directed, effective, and motivated learners long after graduation.

Despite these widespread efforts, something surprising has not occurred: Few have thought to ask what happens to college students once they graduate. For instance, what are the outcomes of training and curricula aimed at producing more-information-literate adults? What critical thinking and information competencies learned and developed in college are adapted and applied by graduates when they join the workplace and continue on the journey of their lives?

These are the types of challenging research questions that Project Information Literacy (PIL) addresses. Our latest research tackled some of these questions when we conducted a two-year federal study of relatively recent graduates from ten US colleges and universities. Our survey results tell us most young graduates do credit college with teaching them how to sort through large amounts of content and synthesize key points. Many also reported
picking up the finer competencies of evaluation, especially determining bias and establishing the authority and credibility of Web sources.

While these are essential competencies for the digital age, we also found this generation’s information-finding savvy may be masking some deep and troubling shortcomings. In particular, fewer than one in three of the graduates we surveyed believed they had developed the ability to formulate questions during college. As one graduate we interviewed as part of the study recalled, “I don’t even remember being in any classes ever where I saw students asking professors questions in front of the entire class—but wouldn’t that be good if students did? It bugs me every day now—why did I rush to get through college, why didn’t I take the time to develop questions of my own?”

This and related findings underscore a gap between the critical thinking and information literacy competencies colleges may be teaching students and the work skills they may need at their first job and to remain competitive in the workplace. One recent study from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) confirms our suspicions: Critical thinking competencies matter to employers that are hiring today’s graduates. When more than 300 executives in US companies and nonprofits were surveyed, nine out of ten agreed that the ability to “think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems” mattered more than the major of a potential hire right out of college.

Moreover, these findings raise serious questions about the nature of higher education that today’s students may be receiving. Are colleges and universities turning out curious question-askers who are equipped to solve information problems? Or are they churning out an abundance of “strategic learners” among the digital generation? These are the students who chase the highest grade rather than self-reflection and deep learning, according to Ken Bain, acclaimed educator and author of *What the Best College Students Do*.

Regardless of what you may be thinking as you read these words, one thing is certain. As we face the challenges of educating today’s students, we need more class discussions, assignments, and faculty-student and librarian-student interactions that nurture individual discovery and curiosity while fostering students’ ability to formulate and ask their own questions. With this approach, graduates are more likely to become what Ken Bain calls “adaptive experts”—those who can tackle unusual problems and generate new solutions, which, few would disagree, are needed in an increasingly complex world. They are also likely to be lifelong learners, an essential ingredient in a democratic society and for living a full and rich life.

This call for improving higher education curricula and pedagogy is a mandate of the highest order. It applies to librarians as much as it does to faculty. But how do academic and school librarians, often working in close collaboration with faculty, pick up the strands of this inevitable educational shift and participate actively in their daily work with students? What new curricular
ideas exist for helping students think about their own learning styles? What classroom exercises help students understand the information practices they may use every day as collaborative consumers and producers of all kinds of information that enters their lives, whether a book chapter, a Wikipedia entry, or a Pinterest board?

Look no further. If you are in need of up-to-date and thought-provoking information literacy curricula and instructional approaches you can use in your teaching, then keep reading. Trudi Jacobson and Tom Mackey, two respected leaders in distance education and library instruction, have brought readers Metaliteracy in Practice. As a follow-up to their acclaimed book Metaliteracy: Reinventing Information Literacy to Empower Learners, Metaliteracy in Practice delivers a compilation of innovative and practical teaching ideas from some of the leading thinkers in library and information literacy instruction today.

What makes this collection different from other curricular guides is this book’s focus on metaliteracy, which is a powerful reframing of information literacy from its 2000 ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries) standards. According to Trudi and Tom, metaliteracy retrofits the concept of information literacy so it works better in the Web 2.0 era where information can jump its boundaries and become as transient, free-flowing, and participatory as a Facebook post or a tweet. Moreover, their concept of metaliteracy provides an inclusive and self-referential framework that encompasses, rather than excludes, all the “other” newer literacies, such as digital, visual, cyber, and media literacy.

Each chapter in Metaliteracy in Practice takes readers through the process of using the metaliteracy framework in new and exciting ways that easily transfer to the classroom and to work with students. These ideas are grounded in teaching traditional information literacy competencies yet are brought into the twenty-first century with the addition of methods for teaching and learning about metacognition, information creation, and participation in learning communities, too.

Readers will benefit from this collection’s practical ideas for teaching students about the importance of format choice, assessing user feedback, creating information as teachers, evaluating dynamic content critically and effectively, and sharing information in collaborative environments. Plus, the case studies contained in Metaliteracy in Practice detail the hows and whys of curricular design for metaliteracy, fitting for both beginners and seasoned experts.

Taken together, this collection has some of the most innovative teaching ideas for inspiring librarians and faculty to revise lessons on critical thinking and information literacy, so that their students will graduate from college with the ability to formulate and ask their own questions. The great contribution that a book like Metaliteracy in Practice makes is that it gives today’s students a better chance at becoming adaptive experts; Ken Bain’s phrase for describing individuals who, in his words, “understand the conventional routines, but also
have the capacity to recognize and even relish the opportunity and necessity for invention.”

Alison J. Head

Alison Head founded and directs Project Information Literacy, a national study about today’s college students and their research habits.

NOTE


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Preface

This book shares innovative and emerging practices that represent the influence of metaliteracy in teaching and learning. As we completed our coauthored book, Metaliteracy: Reinventing Information Literacy to Empower Learners, we knew that our next project would be a return to editing to engage with faculty and librarians in the field about ways they have started to apply these ideas. The title of this book, Metaliteracy in Practice, initially appeared as a heading in our first article introducing this concept, “Reframing Information Literacy as a Metaliteracy,” reinforcing the ongoing intersection between theory and practice. Our own work has reflected the interrelated nature of both approaches: writing and presenting about these concepts while working with colleagues in the Metaliteracy Learning Collaborative on multiple projects. This expanded team led to the development of comprehensive metaliteracy learning goals and objectives, our Metaliteracy.org blog, three massive open online courses (MOOCs), a metaliteracy digital-badging system, and additional open educational resources (OERs) available at our Metaliteracy Learning Collaborative YouTube channel (see http://metaliteracy.org/youtube-channel).

Metaliteracy applies to all stages and facets of an individual’s life. It is not limited to the academic realm, nor is it something learned once and for all. Indeed, metaliteracy focuses on adaptability as information environments
change and the critical reflection necessary to recognize new and evolving needs in order to remain adept. As we know from the groundbreaking work of Dr. Alison J. Head, Director and Principal Investigator for Project Information Literacy (PIL) and author of this book’s foreword, the relationship between information literacy and lifelong learning is continuously intertwined in both theory and practice. These connections extend from prior learning and knowledge, to undergraduate education and graduate school, to local communities and workplace settings. Alison’s contributions to the field through PIL have been informed by data-driven research, publications, conversations among colleagues, and resources for teachers and learners. The PIL findings and the insights of students who have participated in PIL projects have immeasurably enriched our knowledge and enhanced our effectiveness in advocating for richer, more nuanced opportunities for student learning connected with information literacy. Our own work with metaliteracy is similarly focused on engaging colleagues in the field to think in novel ways about how to involve learners in applying critical thinking across a wide spectrum of scholarly and lifelong learning activities as informed participants in dynamic collaborative spaces. Metaliteracy emphasizes the metacognitive dimension of learning and the active roles we play as producers of original and repurposed information. At times, this takes place through emerging technologies and social media spaces and in the classroom, online, or in community and employment settings. Today’s learning environments are networked and collaborative, requiring an understanding of how to connect with others in meaningful ways and to contribute as critical and independent thinkers. In doing so, our learners are also teachers who are empowered to instruct, partner with, and assess peers, and to teach us in the process.

While working on this book we were engaged in our own version of metaliteracy in practice with colleagues at the University at Albany, Empire State College, and the University of Buffalo, all within the SUNY system. The metaliteracy model and related learning goals and objectives informed the design of several metaliteracy-inspired learning spaces we have created with colleagues. Recently, we developed two MOOCs that integrated our codeveloped, competency-based, digital-badging content in distinct ways. We developed a Coursera MOOC titled Metaliteracy: Empowering Yourself in a Connected World (www.coursera.org/course/metaliteracy) and a Canvas MOOC called Empowering Yourself as a Digital Citizen (https://learn.canvas.net/courses/591). These projects built on our previous work with the Meta-literacy Learning Collaborative to develop our first connectivist Metaliteracy MOOC (http://metaliteracy.cdlprojects.com) and a metaliteracy digital-badging system that applies these concepts in a competency-based environment and maps the learning goals and objectives in a gamified learning space. These collaborative initiatives were supported with two top-tier Innovative Instruction Technology Grants (IITGs) funded by the State University of New York
(SUNY) and continue to impact our own thinking about the role of metaliteracy in learning.

This book expands beyond our application of metaliteracy in several interrelated projects to metaliteracy practices developed by our esteemed colleagues in the field. Based on our conversations with librarians and faculty at keynote presentations, conferences, workshops, and webinars, we know that these chapters represent broader changes that are taking place in how information literacy instruction is envisioned and designed through metaliteracy.

While all of this metaliteracy-related activity has been moving forward, we have seen significant changes in the field through the work of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education Task Force. This group, which completed its work in January 2015, was cochaired by one of this book’s editors, Trudi E. Jacobson. She and Craig Gibson of the Ohio State University worked with a very strong team to develop what became the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework).

The approach taken by the Framework differs significantly from that of the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, which was adopted by ACRL in 2000 (www.ala.org/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency). This is immediately apparent in the new definition of information literacy written for the Framework:

> 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.3

The similarities to metaliteracy are striking: metacognition, information creation, and participation in learning communities all reflect elements espoused by metaliteracy when it was originally developed to significantly broaden the conception of information literacy that was commonly accepted, at least in the United States, due to the definition in the ACRL Information Literacy Standards:

An information literate individual is able to:

- Determine the extent of information needed
- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
- Evaluate information and its sources critically
- Incorporate selected information into one’s knowledge base
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
- Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally4
With this new definition, information literacy has moved much closer to metaliteracy on the spectrum of information-related literacy models.

Metaliteracy’s inclusion of the affective domain has its counterpart in the Framework’s section of dispositions for each frame. This element has long been noted as an important factor in information literacy, particularly in the seminal work of Carol Kuhlthau and also in the more recent AASL (American Association of School Librarians) Standards for the 21st-Century Learner, though it was noticeably absent in the ACRL Information Literacy Standards.

Readers interested in the evolution from the Standards to the Framework might explore a thematic 2013 issue of Communications in Information Literacy (http://comminfolit.org/index.php?journal=cil&page=issue&op=view&path[]=14), Reflecting on the Standards. The issue was released prior to the completion of the Framework, and hence authors were not yet aware of its final form or contents. However, several articles make the connection between metaliteracy and the Framework, either implicitly or explicitly. Foremost among these is our lead article, “Proposing a Metaliteracy Model to Redefine Information Literacy.” However, metaliteracy is also noted in Marcus Banks’s “Time for a Paradigm Shift.” Speaking to the need for affective elements are Carol Kuhlthau and Ellysa Stern Cahoy, as well as the concluding piece, “Moving Forward,” based on the work of an earlier task force considering the fate of the Standards. Lesley Farmer, a member of the Framework Task Force, contributed “How AASL Learning Standards Inform ACRL Information Literacy Standards,” which provides more detail on this impact.

A second strand of inquiry in the field strongly influences the Framework: threshold concepts. Lori Townsend, who, with several colleagues, has researched and written on threshold concepts for information literacy (including one article in the special issue of Communications in Information Literacy), was a member of the Task Force. While the Task Force members, informed by an extraordinary response by members of the profession to several drafts, crafted the contents and direction of the six threshold concepts that inform the Framework, the work of her research team was an important influence. The integration of threshold concepts marked a distinct shift from the skills-based approach found in the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. According to Jan Meyer and Raymond Land, “A threshold concept can be considered as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress.” The threshold concepts underpinning the Framework align very well with metaliteracy, as those who are moving from novice toward expert for each concept will undergo transformations that encompass the same domains as found in metaliteracy: behavioral, cognitive, affective, and metacognitive.
All of the chapters in this volume examine issues relevant to the ACRL Framework in relation to metaliteracy. Both are having a transformative effect on the field of information literacy. The chapter authors show why we needed to reframe and reinvent information literacy as a metaliteracy and why a new definition of information literacy was required at this pivotal time in higher education. They all raise issues that reflect today’s dynamic information environment and exemplify a shared commitment to learner success in these spaces. This work continues to evolve through the metacognitive reflection of our learners and peers, as we all try to mediate collaborative social environments through active and informed participation.

We have appreciated this opportunity to work with the authors of this text because they are at the forefront of applying the metaliteracy framework in their teaching. This process has had significant impact on their learners and has supported the vital connections between theory and practice. During this past year, the enthusiasm of each author to pioneer such engaging and innovative metaliteracy practices has been an inspiration to us. We have been enriched, informed, and challenged by the ideas articulated here to continuously reflect and think in new ways about the framework we first introduced. We are confident that you will be similarly inspired as you read through each chapter and consider all of the insights and innovations presented in this volume.

BOOK ORGANIZATION

This book starts with a scenario most instructors have faced as they prepared for the first day of class. Donna Witek and Teresa Grettano, both from the University of Scranton, provide us with a real-world teaching situation that reflects the iterative nature of curriculum development, especially in today’s dynamic social media world. This first chapter, “Revising for Metaliteracy: Flexible Course Design to Support Social Media Pedagogy,” features a collaboration between an information literacy librarian and a professor of rhetoric and composition to develop and teach a 200-level, writing-intensive course, Rhetoric and Social Media, based on metaliteracy. This collaborative process required revisions over time and thoughtful reflections about teaching and learning with social media. The authors effectively demonstrate how theory and practice are interrelated and that metaliteracy is about more than any particular technology because it encourages adaptation to new environments, flexibility, metacognition, and collaboration.

The second chapter, by Lauren Wallis and Andrew Battista, “The Politics of Information: Students as Creators in a Metaliteracy Context,” describes their experience teaching an information literacy course at the University of
Montevallo in Alabama. The course was structured such that it interrogated many of the accepted constructs of higher education teaching. Weaving metaliteracy throughout the course, an emphasis was placed on empowering students and recognizing their roles as creators of information and as teachers.

Chapter 3, “Metaliteracy Learning of RN to BSN Students: A Fusion of Disciplinary Values and Discourses,” by Barbara J. D’Angelo and Barry M. Maid, documents an undergraduate research and writing course designed for nursing students at Arizona State University. The authors chronicle course development and detail points of alignment with metaliteracy by connecting the learning objectives of both disciplinary writing and metaliteracy. To be effective in their nursing responsibilities, it is critical that these individuals draw upon relevant resources and share information using ePortfolios and digital media. This chapter includes a strong emphasis on the metacognitive dimension of metaliteracy and models how to revise the curriculum in a way that encourages students to reflect on their learning.

Next, in chapter 4, “Where Collections and Metaliteracy Meet: Incorporating Library-Owned Platforms into Open and Collaborative Library Instruction,” Amanda Scull explores metaliteracy in the context of collections and teaching about collections, and she does so specifically related to library-owned content platforms. She delves into the open and collaborative nature of institutional repositories and research guide software that allow students to become content creators and curators. Her chapter illuminates not only the opportunities to engage students to enhance their metaliteracy but also the benefits of enhancing and promoting information owned by the institution.

In chapter 5, “Empowering Learners to Become Metaliterate in a Digital and Multimodal Age,” Sandra K. Cimbricz and Logan Rath describe the process of moving from the use of multiliteracies to metaliteracy as the organizing framework in a graduate education course. The course focused on how to teach students in fifth through twelfth grades to be critical, empowered, metacognitive users of digital texts, but the chapter highlights the increasing resonance of the metaliteracy model with the authors and the graduate students in the course as they worked through newly developed assignments. Two of these assignments are examined in detail, illustrating their role in developing metaliterate learners.

Chapter 6, “Metacognition Meets Research-Based Learning in the Undergraduate Renaissance Drama Classroom,” by librarian Michele R. Santamaria and professor Kathryn M. Moncrief of Washington College, chronicles the experiences of undergraduate students who were invited in a Renaissance Drama course to work collaboratively with their classmates and their instructors. The project was a digital open access endeavor called the Map of Early Modern London (MoEML). The students therefore took on a role of information producer, rather than just information consumer. They each also wrote a research narrative, encouraging metacognition. Between the contribution to the map and review of the research narratives, the chapter authors were able to
gauge their students’ development as metaliterate learners. A particularly interesting observation in this chapter was that students were using subscription-based library resources to find the information that informed their suggested change to this open access resource.

Student empowerment is a key theme in several chapters in this volume, reflecting the importance of this theme in metaliteracy. In chapter 7, Kristine N. Stewart and David M. Broussard describe a major shift in an established credit-bearing course, Information Use and Student Success. The curriculum was originally based on the ACRL Information Literacy Standards, but the authors argue that using material from 2000 is insufficient for a radically altered information environment. “Promoting Empowerment through Metaliteracy: A Case Study of Undergraduate Learning Outcomes” explores changes that focus on understanding the difference between information and knowledge, the integration of multimedia exercises and working in groups, exploring social media sources, and an introduction to online information management.

Chapter 8, “Developing Agency in Metaliterate Learners: Empowerment through Digital Identity and Participation,” features the work of Irene McGarrity, coinstructor of a credit-bearing course, Digital Identity and Participatory Culture, at Keene State College, and details the student-centered, collaborative, metaliterate nature of the course. She provides the background on the instructors’ efforts to have students develop a sense of agency through the enhanced roles they played in the course. Rather than being the recipients of instructor-selected content and assignments, the students themselves created these key components of the course. The chapter provides details about the successes and challenges of developing a learning experience of this type and clearly ties individual course elements with the metaliteracy goals and learning objectives.

Chapter 9, “Metaliteracy, Networks, Agency, and Praxis: An Exploration,” closes the book with an engaging and thoughtful investigation from Paul Prinsloo, who is the research professor in open distance learning (ODL) in the College of Economic and Management Sciences, University of South Africa (Unisa). In this closing chapter, the author situates metaliteracy within a larger theoretical context of literacy itself, while exploring the relationship to praxis, agency, and many distinct theoretical perspectives, including Paulo Freire and Pierre Bourdieu, among others. Prinsloo intentionally opens up the conversation by challenging assumptions and expanding the scope of what we mean by metaliteracy in praxis. He contextualizes metaliteracy as agency in networked social spaces that requires more than the development of discrete skills to include the ability to make choices. By doing so, the author opens the unlimited possibilities for metaliteracy in both theory and practice, as the model continues to evolve.

This volume is a complement to our Metaliteracy book with nine new chapters that apply the metaliteracy framework in creative and inventive ways. We closed our last book with two case studies about metaliteracy in practice based
on our teaching, and now we expand the dialogue with contributions from our colleagues in the field. The chapter authors are from multiple disciplines and explore diverse pedagogical issues within higher education related to the theory and practice of this model. Collectively, the chapters represent the exciting work that is happening in the field and are certain to inspire new innovations among readers.

As always, we welcome your thoughts and insights about these ideas and approaches to teaching and learning at our Metaliteracy.org blog, the central hub for all things metaliteracy.

NOTES


7. Trudi E. Jacobson and Thomas P. Mackey, “Proposing a Metaliteracy Model to Redefine Information Literacy,” *Communications in Information Literacy* 7, no. 2 (January 10, 2013): 84–91, doi:10.7548/cil.v7i2.255. Proposing a Metaliteracy Model to Redefine Information Literacy (Communications in Information Literacy) 7, no. 2 (January 10, 2013).


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Index

A
AAC&U (Association of American Colleges and Universities), xii
AACN (American Association of Colleges of Nursing), 50
academia
   conventions of writing/teaching in, 30–31
   cycle of academic publishing, 32–33
   evaluation of sources of information, 34
Accardi, Maria, 24–25
ACRL
   See Association of College and Research Libraries
action, 97
actor-network theory (ANT), 183
adaptive experts, xii
affect (A), 124
affective domain
   metacognition and, 122
   as metaliteracy learning objective, 116, 169
   research narratives coding, 124
Agas Map, 117, 118
agency
   literacy-as-agency, 186–189
   metaliteracy praxis, 190–191
   metaliteracy-as-agency, 183, 189
agentic, 187–189
American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), 50
analytic memos, 96, 105
Andretta, Susie, 138
annotated bibliography, 58
Anonymous, 171
ANT (actor-network theory), 183
Arizona State University (ASU)
metaliteracy learning objectives
in TWC361 course, 57–60
TC Program at, 47–48
undergraduate nursing metaliteracy
case study, 51–56
assessment
of Critical Multiliteracies
course, 98–104
of II 399 course, 172–175, 176
of information literacy, 137–139
of LibGuide project, 83–85
of MoEML project, 129–130
of Politics of Information
course, 37–38
of teaching through institutional
repository, 79
of Writing for Healthcare
Management course, 60–65
assignments
of Rhetoric and Social Media
course, 10–13
switch to concept-based course
schedule, 13–15
of TWC361 course, 52, 53–60
Association of American Colleges and
Universities (AAC&U), xii
Association of College and Research
Libraries (ACRL)
definition of information
literacy, xvii–xviii
Framework for Information Literacy
for Higher Education, 49, 138
information literacy
assessment and, 137
Information Literacy Competency
Standards for Higher
Education, 48, 77–78
IIUS course based on
Standards, 135, 141
metaliteracy revision in Standards, 28
redefinition of text, 106
on students'/teachers' role, 177
threshold concepts and
Framework, xviii–xix
transition from Standards to
the Framework, 139–140
authority
challenging conceptions of, 29–30
of instructor, 24–25
questioning, 26–28
Authorize This! zine, 26

B
BACEIS model, 122
Bain, Ken
on adaptive experts, xiii–xiv
on strategic learners, xii
Banks, Marcus, xviii
Barr, Robert, 160
Battista, Andrew, xix–xx, 23–39
Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher
(Brookfield), 160–161
behavior, 97
behavioral domain
II 399 course and, 169
as metaliteracy learning objective, 116
Belin, Ian, 140
Bepress's Digital Commons, 75
bibliography, annotated, 58
Bishop, Elizabeth, 190–191
Bizarro Research "Paper," 27, 30
blog
in II 399 course, 168, 170, 173
in Politics of Information
course, 26–27, 31, 32, 33
self-assessment through, 37–38
student content creation with, 79, 80
blogosphere
creation of, 27
Enter a Blogosphere
creation, 35, 36–37
student curation of, 32
Bobish, Greg, 163
Bonner, Ann, 51
Booth, Char, 24, 139
boundary activity, 191
Bourdieu, Pierre
"the field" notion of, 186–187
performing metaliteracy idea, 183
brainstorming, 57
Brookfield, Stephen, 160–161
Broussard, David M., xxi, 135–152
Bruce, Christine, 138
BuzzFeed
- creation in Politics of Information course, 27, 32
- student production of information, 35–36, 37

C
- Cahoy, Ellysa Stern, xviii
- Canvas MOOC, Empowering Yourself as a Digital Citizen, xvi
- capital, 187
- Carncross, Mahrya, 175
- choice, 184
- Cimbricz, Sandra K., xx, 91–108
- citations, 62
- CMS
  - See course management system
codebook, 144–145
coding, 123–124
cognitive domain
  - II 399 course and, 169
  - as metaliteracy learning objective, 116
collaboration
  - in II 399 course, 171
  - with institutional repository, 78
  - IUSS course goal of, 148–149
  - with LibGuides, 82–83
  - meaning through collaborative inquiry, 162
  - metaliteracy promotes, 28
  - for MoEML project, 113–116, 125, 126
  - with Note Take, Make, and Share project, 102
  - research guides as metaliteracy platforms, 79–80
  - for research-based learning, 130
  - student learning outcomes from IUSS course, 150
  - technologies as, 137

collections
- See library collections

Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 138
communication
- nursing disciplinary values regarding, 50–51
- questioning, in Politics of Information course, 26–28
- TWC361 course structure/assignments, 55–56

Communications in Information Literacy (journal), xviii
- conditional knowledge, 121, 124–125
- Conference on College Composition and Communications, 49
- connectivism, 162
- constructivism, 163
- content creation at library, 74–75
- metaliteracy through library content creation, 86
- student creation of LibGuides, 80–83
- See also information production
- conventions, knowledge of, 55
- Core Competencies for Interprofessional Collaboration (AACN), 50
- cost, of library subscriptions/platforms, 75
coteaching, 176

Council of Writing Program Administrators, 49
course management system (CMS)
- assessment of TWC361 course, 60, 61
- brainstorming with, 57
- student presentations posted to, 59
- in TWC361 course, 52

Coursera MOOC, Metaliteracy: Empowering Yourself in a Connected World, xvi
Crafting Digital Writing: Composing Texts across Media and Genres (Hicks), 98
creations, 27–28, 35–37
Creswell, John W., 94
critic, 183–184
critical consciousness, 186, 190
Critical Multiliteracies course
- assessment of, 98–102
- conclusion about, 107–108
- data collection/analysis, 95–97
- goals of, 93
- learning from, 91–92, 104–107
- one-on-one summative assessment, 101–104
Critical Multiliteracies course (cont.)
reason for, 92–93
student feedback/instructor
field notes, 97–98
study design, 93–95
critical thinking
connecting learning/research
strategies with lifelong
learning, 149–150
in Critical Multiliteracies course, 106
development of in II 399
course, 169–170
Internet browsing history and, 148
IUSS course findings, 146
metaliteracy promotes, 28
One-on-One Summative
Assessment and, 103–104
TWC361 course outcomes/
competencies, 53–54
Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing
assessment of TWC361 course, 61, 65
TWC361 course outcomes/
competencies, 53–54

d D
Danaher, Geoff, 126
D’Angelo, Barbara J., xx, 47–67
data collection/analysis, 96–97
database
institutional repository vs., 78
metaliteracy library instruction
and, 74–75
declarative knowledge, 121
"Developing Agency in Metaliterate
Learners: Empowerment through
Digital Identity and Participation"
(McGarrity), xx, 159–178
Digication ePortfolio
assessment of TWC361 course
portfolios, 61, 62–65
for TWC361 course
presentation, 52, 59, 60
digital identity, 170
Digital Identity and Participatory Culture
course
See II 399: Digital Identity and
Participatory Culture course
digital Note Take, Make, and Share
(NTMS) project
analysis of, 97–98
assessment of, 98–102
data collection/analysis, 96
learning from, 105
digital writing, 98–102
Directory of Open Access Journals, 75
Directory of Open Access Repositories, 75
 Ditkoff, Jennifer, 166
drama course
See ENG/DRA 312: Renaissance
Drama

E
EDI 728: Critical Multiliteracies, 5–12
See Critical Multiliteracies course
Elborg, James, 24, 115
electronic resources, 74–75
Eloquentia Perfecta program, 6
Elsevier bundle, 75
e-mail, Hallmarks of Professionalism,
55, 57
Empire State College, xvi
“Empowering Learners to Become
Metaliterate in a Digital and
Multimodal Age” (Cimbricz &
Rath), xx, 91–108
empowerment
chapters in book focused on, xxi
learner-centered pedagogy and, 167
student empowerment through
metaliteracy, 120, 159
of students in II 399 course,
169, 175–176
of students in IUSS course, 149, 150
of students in MoEML project, 126
of students through metaliteracy
instruction, 143
ENG 101, Literature and Composition
course, 116
ENG/DRA 312: Renaissance Drama
assessment of MoEML
project, 129–130
case study/analysis, 123–128
collaboration for MoEML
project, 113–116
www.alastore.ala.org
literature review, 121–123
MoEML research by students, 117–121
Erickson, Frederick, 97
The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice (AACN), 50
ethics
in II 399 course, 169–170, 171
teaching through institutional repository and, 78–79
understanding of, from IUSS course, 148
evidence-based practice, 50
expertise, 29–30

F
Facebook
evaluation of in II 399 course, 169–170
literature connecting information literacy to, 4
Rhetoric and Social Media course and, 6–7, 10–12
faculty
See teachers
feedback
in Critical Multiliteracies course, 96
in digital Note Take, Make, and Share project, 100–101
student feedback in Critical Multiliteracies course, 97–98
feminist pedagogy
societal power/injustice and access to information, 30
student metaliteracy and, 24–25
Flavell, John, 121, 143
Foasberg, Nancy, 140
Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (ACRL)
definition of information literacy, xvii–xviii
on information's value, 141
metaliteracy in, 28, 138
metaliteracy’s influence on, 49
redefinition of text, 106
in Rhetoric and Social Media course, 17
on students’ role/teachers’ role, 177
threshold concepts and, xviii
transition to, 139–140
TWC361 course and, 67
Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing (CWPA, NCTE, & NWP)
on affective domain, 52
eight habits of mind, 49
in Rhetoric and Social Media course, 17
Freire, Paulo
on critical consciousness, 190
on illiteracy, 186
Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 161
on “reading the world,” 192
“From Teaching to Learning—A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education” (Barr & Tagg), 160

G
Gibson, Craig, xvii, xviii
Global Positioning System (GPS), 137, 171
Google Docs, 98, 99, 100, 102
Greenwood Dictionary of Education, 160
Grettano, Teresa
Eloquentia Perfecta program, 6
librarian/professor collaboration, 131
overview of chapter by, xix
“Revising for Metaliteracy: Flexible Course Design to Support Social Media Pedagogy,” 1–17
Groom, Jim, 166

H
habitus, 187
Hallmarks of Professionalism e-mail, 55, 57
Hartman, Hope J., 122
Hartman, Patricia, 164
Head, Alison J., xi–xiv, xvi
Hicks, Troy, 98, 99
humanities, 113

I
Identity Assignment, 13–15
Ignatian pedagogical paradigm, 5–6, 16
II 399: Digital Identity and Participatory Culture course
assessment of instruction endeavor, 172–175
II 399 (cont.)

conclusion about, 177–178
institutional context of, 164–166
lessons learned from, 175–177
metalliteracy case study, 166–169
metalliteracy learning objectives, application of, 169–172
shift from information literacy to metalliteracy, 162–163
student leading of, 159–160
student-centered learning in, 160–162

information
dimensions of value of, 141
metalliteracy and proliferation of, 28
Politics of Information course, metalliteracy case study, 31–37
questioning, in Politics of Information course, 26–28
sharing, IUSS course goal of, 148–149
societal power/injustice and, 30
See also sources of information
information environment, 136–137

information literacy
ACRL Framework’s definition of, xvii
assessment approaches, 137–139
gaps in, xii
goals of, xi
information environment, changes in, 136–137
instruction revisions for social media, 1–2
IUSS course revisions, 135–136
literature on social media and, 3–5
need for new definition of, xix
reframing as metalliteracy, xiii, 3, 48–49
shift to metalliteracy, 162–163

skills-based outcomes from IUSS course, 146–147
students as active creators of information, 23–24
transition to the Framework, 139–140
at University of Montevallo, 25–26
at Washington College, 116–117

Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (ACRL)
criticism of, 48
definition of information literacy, xvii–xviii
focus on skills development, 77–78
information literacy assessment and, 137, 138
IUSS course based on, 135, 141
Mahrya Carncross on, 175
transition to the Framework, 139–140

Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education Task Force, xvii

information production
metalliteracy promotes, 159
in personal, corporate, governmental spheres, 31
sharing of, 136
student learning outcomes from IUSS course, 150
students as information producers, 23–24, 115

Information Search Process, 37

Information Studies minor, 165–166
Information Use and Student Success (IUSS) course
conclusion about, 151–152
context of, 140–141
curriculum of, 141–144
findings from, 146–150
metalliteracy case study, 144–145
related literature, 136–140
revisions for metalliteracy, 135–136
student outcomes from, 150–151

injustice, 30
Inquiry Assignment, 13–15

Instagram, 7

institutional repository
assessment of instruction through, 79
growth of use of, 75–76
for library instruction, 73–74
metalliteracy instruction with, 75
metalliteracy learning objectives, application of, 77–79
teaching through, 76–77

instruction
interrogation of conventions of writing/teaching, 30–31
learner-centered pedagogy, 166–169
metaliteracy instruction, 177–178
See also library instruction
instructor field notes, 97–98
instructors
assessment of II 399 course instruction, 172–175
authority of, 24–25
metacognition in, 27
metaliteracy development in, 3
See also teachers
Integrative Thinking and Writing (ITW) program, 164–165
intellectual property
in II 399 course, 169–170, 171
teaching through institutional repository and, 78–79
understanding of, from IUSS course, 148
Internet
connectivism and, 162
integration of Web 2.0 tools with information literacy, 163
as source of information for research, 32–33, 34
student exploration of law and, 171
ITW (Integrative Thinking and Writing) program, 164–165
IUSS course
See Information Use and Student Success (IUSS) course
J
Jacobson, Trudi E.
on abilities of digital researchers, 82
ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, xvii
on format/context of sources, 147
on information production, 115
on information sharing, 149
on metacognition, 121
on metaliteracy, 189
metaliteracy, use of term, 3
metaliteracy concept, development of, 28
metaliteracy framework of, 4, 24, 136
metaliteracy goals, 29
metaliteracy learning objectives, 116
“Moving Forward: A Discussion on the Revision of the ACRL Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education,” xviii
on privacy, 148
“Proposing a Metaliteracy Model to Redefine Information Literacy,” xviii
on reflection/interactivity, 152
“Reframing Information Literacy as a Metaliteracy,” 159, 163
on search strategy, 127
on shift to metaliteracy, 164
on technology, 137, 143
unifying nature of metaliteracy, 66
Jenkins, Henry, 162
Jenstad, Janelle, 115, 120
K
Keene State College
Digital Identity and Participatory Culture course at, 159–178
institutional repository, teaching through, 73–76
institutional context of, 164–166
shift from information literacy to metaliteracy, 163
Kemmis, Stephen, 94
King, Alison, 161
knowledge
of conventions, 55
students as co-creators of, 161
Kuhlthau, Carol
constructivist paradigm, 124
Information Search Process, 37
on mediators in research process, 128
on need for affective elements, xviii
research narratives and, 122
L
Land, Raymond, xviii
Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice (Weimer), 161
learners
information literacy assessment and, 138
learners (cont.)
IUSS goals related to, 141
student-centered learning, 160–162
student-led content, assessment of, 173–174
student-led content/learner-centered pedagogy, 166–169
learning
lifelong, connecting learning/research strategies with, 149–150
lifelong, student connection to in II 399 course, 171–172
See also metaliteracy learning objectives; research-based learning
Learning Paradigm, 160
Leonard, Anne, 25
LibGuides
assessment of student creation project, 83–85
student creation of, 80–83
librarians
as advocates for metaliteracy, 39
collaboration with professor for MoEML project, 113–114, 130
II 399 course, institutional context of, 164–166
instruction with institutional repositories/research guides, 73–74
LibGuides creation instruction, 80–83
metaliteracy instruction and Framework, 177–178
self-awareness in teaching/reflective practices, 139–140
Library, Information Science and Technology Abstracts (LISTA), 4–5
Library and Information Science (LIS)
literature on, 48–49
Technical Communication Program, 47–48
TWC361 course, LIS/WS coalesce in, 67
library collections
conclusion about, 86
connecting collections/instruction, 75–79
institutional repositories/research guides for instruction, 73–74
metaliteracy context, 74–75
redefinition of library collection, 85–86
research guides as metaliteracy platforms, 79–85
library instruction
conclusion about, 86
context, 74–75
with institutional repositories, 75–79
institutional repositories/research guides for, 73–74
at Keene State College, 164–165
redefinition of library collection, 85–86
research guides as metaliteracy platforms, 79–85
LISTA (Library, Information Science and Technology Abstracts), 4–5
literacies
integration of many literacies with metaliteracy, 107–108
need to make sense of many, 105–106
literacy
literacy-as-agency, 186–189
literacy-as-praxis, 190–191
Paul Prinsloo on, 183–185
See also information literacy; metaliteracy
Literacy Assignment, 13–16
Lloyd, Annemaree, 51
M
Mackey, Thomas P.
on abilities of digital researchers, 82
on format/context of sources, 147
on information production, 115
on information sharing, 149
on metacognition, 121
on metaliteracy, 189
metaliteracy, use of term, 3
metaliteracy concept, development of, 28
metaliteracy framework of, 4, 24, 136
metaliteracy goals, 29
metaliteracy learning objectives, 116
on privacy, 148
“Proposing a Metaliteracy Model to Redefine Information Literacy,” xviii
on reflection/interactivity, 152
“Reframing Information Literacy as a Metaliteracy,” 159, 163
on search strategy, 127
on shift to metaliteracy, 164
on technology, 137, 143
unifying nature of metaliteracy, 66
Maid, Barry M., xx, 47–67
Map of Early Modern London (MoEML) project
Agas Map, 118
assessment of project, 129–130
case study/analysis, 123–128
collaborative research for, 113–116
development of, xx–xxi
institutional/assignment context, 116–121
Rose Theatre, 119
students’ collaborative research for, 117, 120–121
Mason Library at Keene State College
changes in library collection, 74–75
institutional repositories/research guides for instruction, 73–74
institutional repository development at, 76
massive open online courses (MOOCs), xv, xvi
Maton, Karl, 188
McGarrity, Irene, xxi, 159–178
McTaggart, Robin, 94
McTighe, Jay, 107
media literacy, 5
Menchaca, Frank, 148
message, 27
metacognition
assessment of TWC361 course, 61, 62, 65
connecting learning/research strategies with lifelong learning, 149–150
connection with affective domain, 29
II 399 course, metaliteracy learning objectives, 169
IUSS goals related to, 141
lifelong learning, impact on, 143
literature on, 121–123
metacognitive and, 24
as metaliteracy learning objective, 116
MoEML case study/analysis, 123–128
MoEML research-based learning project and, 120–121
One-on-One Summative Assessment and, 103–104
of one’s own literacies, 106–107
in Politics of Information course, 28–31
student empowerment through, 27
in students’ research narratives, 115
in TC Program, 47–48
teaching through institutional repository and, 78, 79
in TWC361 course, 52, 57, 60–61, 66
Metacognition Meets Research-Based Learning in the Undergraduate Renaissance Drama Classroom (Santamaria & Moncrief), xx, 113–131
metacognitive knowledge, 121
metacognitive regulation, 121, 122
metacognitive statement, 56
“meta-literacy,” 3
metaliteracy
acceptance of into established curriculum, 39
assessment of MoEML project, 129–130
in Catholic Jesuit institutional context, 5–6
collaborative research for MoEML project and, 113–116
concept of, xiii, 3
connection with Framework, xvii–xviii
Critical Multiliteracies course and, 91–92, 104–108
engagement/learner-centered production of information with, 159–160
II 399 course, 166–178
IUSS course context, 140–144
IUSS course, metaliteracy case study, 144–145
IUSS course, related literature, 136–140
IUSS course revisions for, 135–136
metaliteracy (cont.)
literature review for research-based learning, 121–123
MoEML case study/analysis, 123–128
MoEML research-based learning project and, 120–121
Note Take, Make, and Share project and, 102
One-on-One Summative Assessment and, 102–104
performing, 183
Politics of Information course, application of learning objectives, 28–31
Politics of Information course, assessment of, 37–38
Politics of Information course, metaliteracy case study, 31–37
Politics of Information course, overview of, 26–28
shift from information literacy to, 48–49, 162–163
student feedback in Critical Multiliteracies course, 97–98
student learning outcomes from IUSS course, 150–152
students as active creators of information, 23–25
TC Program at ASU and, 47–48
transition to the Framework, 139–140
TWC361 course and, 52, 53–55, 66
"Metaliteracy, Networks, Agency, and Praxis: An Exploration" (Prinsloo), xxi, 183–192
metaliteracy, revising for case study, revision of Rhetoric and Social Media course, 7–16
in Catholic Jesuit institutional context, 5–6
information literacy instruction revisions for social media, 1–2
reflection on, 16–17
related literature, 3–5
rhetorical theory/practice, connection to, 6–7

Metaliteracy in Practice (Jacobson & Mackey)
foreword to, xi–xiv
organization of book, xix–xxii
Metaliteracy Learning Collaborative, xv
metaliteracy learning objectives application of in TWC361 course, 57–60
application of with institutional repository, 77–79
assessment of TWC361 course, 60–65
Critical Multiliteracies course, alignment with, 94–95
in II 399 course, 169–172
institutional repository, teaching through, 76–77, 85
IUSS course case study, 144–145
IUSS course curriculum and, 141–144
IUSS course findings, 146–150
learning domains of, 116
LibGuide project and, 82–83, 85
“Metaliteracy Learning of RN to BSN Students: A Fusion of Disciplinary Values and Discourses” (D’Angelo & Maid), xx, 47–67

Metaliteracy: Reinventing Information Literacy to Empower Learners (Mackey & Jacobson)
completion of, xv
on information production, 115
on metacognition, 121
Metaliteracy in Practice as follow-up to, xiii
on metaliteracy learning domains, 4
in Rhetoric and Social Media course, 17
on student empowerment, 120
metaliteracy-as-agency, 189
Metaliteracy.org
“Goals and Learning Objectives” published on, 4
invitation to, xxii
metaliteracy learning objectives on, 169
Meyer, Jan, xviii
mind, eight habits of, 49
Mini-assignments, 13–15
MoEML project

See Map of Early Modern London (MoEML) project

Moncrief, Kathryn M., xx, 113–131

MOOCs (massive open online courses), xv, xvi

“Moving Forward: A Discussion on the Revision of the ACRL Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education” (Cahoy, Gibson, Jacobson), xviii

multiliteracies, 92

See also Critical Multiliteracies course

N

Negretti, Rafaella, 121–123

Newhouse, Renae, 164

news media, 143–144

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, 138

notes, digital, 98–102

NTMS

See digital Note Take, Make, and Share (NTMS) project

nursing

disciplinary perspective on LIS/WS, 50–51

undergraduate nursing metaliteracy case study, 51–56

O

O’Keefe, Emer, 148

One-on-One Summative Assessment analysis of, 97–98

data collection/analysis for Critical Multiliteracies course, 96

learning from, 105

metaliteracy in practice, 103–104

questions for preparation for, 102–103

one-shot instructional sessions, 152

open access

...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Summary</th>
<th>School for International Training (SIT)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content analysis of, 144–145</td>
<td>Graduate Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for Paper Trail assignment, 142–143</td>
<td>institutional repository,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research-based learning</td>
<td>teaching through, 77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of MoEML</td>
<td>LibGuide project, student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project, 129–130</td>
<td>survey for, 83, 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits for learners, 130</td>
<td>LibGuides, student creation of, 81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study/analysis, 123–128</td>
<td>Schraw, Gregory, 121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration for MoEML</td>
<td>Scull, Amanda, xx, 73–86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project, 113–116</td>
<td>Search of institutional repository, 78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature review, 121–123</td>
<td>by students in MoEML project, 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ research for MoEML</td>
<td><strong>See also research</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project, 117–121</td>
<td>Selber, Stuart A., 96–97, 105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Revising for Metaliteracy: Flexible Course Design to Support Social Media Pedagogy” (Witek &amp; Grettano), xix, 1–17</strong></td>
<td>self-archiving, 76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rheingold, Howard, 24</td>
<td>self-awareness, 139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetoric and Social Media course</td>
<td><strong>See reflection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional context, 5–6</td>
<td>self-regulation (SR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection on, 16–17</td>
<td>Research narratives coding, 123–124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related literature, 3–5</td>
<td>of students, tracking, 130–131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision of, 1–2, 7–16</td>
<td><strong>Seven Faces of Information Literacy</strong> (Bruce), 138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical theory/practice, connection to, 6–7</td>
<td>Sharing of information in II 399 course, 171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical knowledge</td>
<td>IUSS course goal of, 148–149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of TWC361 course, 61, 65</td>
<td>Student learning outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWC361 course outcomes/competencies, 53</td>
<td>from IUSS course, 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-playing scenario, 55–60</td>
<td>Siemens, George, 162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose Theatre</td>
<td><strong>SIT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article about, 120</td>
<td><strong>See School for International Training (SIT) Graduate Institute</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical importance of, 117</td>
<td>Skills-based outcomes, 146–147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustration of, 119</td>
<td>Smale, Maura, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowsell, Jennifer, 97</td>
<td>Snowden, Edward, 171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools), 25–26</td>
<td>Social justice, 186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side” (King), 161</td>
<td>Social Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAILS (Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills), 38</td>
<td>Evaluation of content on, 147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santamaria, Michele R., xx, 113–131</td>
<td>Friend analysis in II 399 course, 168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule, 13–15</td>
<td>Information literacy instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schirato, Tony, 126</td>
<td>Revisions and, 1–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schraw, Gregory, 121</td>
<td>Information sharing in IUSS course, 148–149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scull, Amanda, xx, 73–86</td>
<td>IUSS course and, 141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search of institutional repository, 78</td>
<td>Metaliteracy and, xix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by students in MoEML project, 127</td>
<td>Metaliteracy conceptions and, 3–5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>See also research</strong></td>
<td>Privacy and, 148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INDEX

social media (cont.)
Rhetoric and Social Media
course, revision of, 7–16
student evaluation of in II 399 course, 169–170
See also Rhetoric and Social Media course
social practice, 191
societal power, 30
sources of information
assessment of TWC361 course portfolios, 62
classification of as useful or useless, 128
evaluation of, 34
evaluation of, in II 399 course, 169, 170
evaluation of, in IUSS course, 147–148
for LibGuides, 82
nursing and, 50–51
research log in TWC361 course, 57–58
use of non-traditional sources, 32–33
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), 25–26
Spotify playlist, 168
Springshare’s LibGuides
cost of, 75
features of/use of, 80
student creation of LibGuides, 80–81
SR
See self-regulation
Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (SAILS), 38
State University of New York (SUNY), xvi–xvii
Stewart, Kristine N., xxi, 135–152
students
as active creators of information, 23–24
assessment of II 399 course instruction, 172–175
attitudes about assessment, 138
collaborative research for MoEML project, 113–116
empowerment of in IUSS course, 150–151
II 399 course, 166–172
institutional repository, teaching through, 76–77
learning outcomes from IUSS course, 150–152
LibGuides, creation of, 80–83
LibGuides project, assessment of, 83–85
MoEML case study/analysis, 123–128
MoEML project, description of, 117–121
One-on-One Summative Assessment and, 102–104
Politics of Information course, learning objectives, 28–31
Politics of Information course, metaliteracy case study, 31–37
Politics of Information course, overview of, 26–28
self-assessment through reflective blog posts, 37–38
self-reflexive approach to metaliteracy, 24–25
student feedback in Critical Multiliteracies course, 96, 97–98
student-centered learning, 160–162
student-led content/learner-centered pedagogy, 166–169
See also learners; library instruction
SUNY (State University of New York), xvi–xvii
survey, 129–130

T
Tagg, John, 160
task perception (TP)
analysis of in MoEML project, 125–126, 127, 128
research narratives coding, 123 of students, tracking, 130–131
Taylor and Francis journals, 75
teacher training
See Critical Multiliteracies course
teachers
assessment of II 399 course instruction, 172–175
collaboration with librarian for MoEML project, 113–114, 130
cycle of academic publishing and, 32–33
metacognitive awareness of pedagogical practices, 122
metaliteracy learning, acceptance of, 38–39
self-awareness of, 139–140
student-centered learning and, 160–162
See also instructors
teaching
interrogation of conventions of writing/teaching, 30–31
self-awareness in, 139
student-centered learning, 160–162
See also library instruction
Teaching Information Literacy: 50 Standards-Based Exercises for College Students (Burkhardt, Macdonald, & Rademacher), 141
“Teaching Metaliteracy: A New Paradigm in Action” (Witek & Grettano), 3, 5
Technical Communication (TC) Program, ASU
assessment of, 60–65
conclusion about, 67
contribution/innovation, 66
development of, 48–52
metaliteracy learning objectives, application of, 57–60
related literature, 48–51
undergraduate nursing metaliteracy case study, 51–56
technology
in II 399 course, 166–169
information environment, changes in, 136–137
in IUSS course curriculum, 143
shift from information literacy to metaliteracy, 162–163
text
meaning of, 92
redefinition of, 106
“the field” notion, 186–187, 188–189
threshold concept, xviii
“Time for a Paradigm Shift” (Banks), xviii
Townsend, Lori, xviii
TP
See task perception
TWC361: Writing for Healthcare Management course
assessment of, 60–65
conclusion about, 67
contribution/innovation, 66
development of, 48, 52
goals of, 51–52
metaliteracy learning objectives, application of, 57–60
outcomes/competencies, 53–55
structure/assignments of, 55–56
Twitter
evaluation of content on, 147
literature connecting information literacy to, 4
revision of Rhetoric and Social Media course, 7
Tyma, Adam W., 166–167
U
UNESCO Training the Trainers in Information Literacy (TTT) Workshop, 5
University at Albany, xvi
University of Buffalo, xvi
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 76
University of Missouri (MU), 135–152
University of Montevallo, Alabama
information literacy contexts at, 25–26
Politics of Information class at, 23–39
University of Scranton, 5–6
User Log, 12–13
Utah State University, 77
V
Vine, 166
Vine contest, 168, 171
VoiceThread, 59
Vygotsky, Lev, 162
INDEX

W
Wallis, Lauren, xix–xx, 23–39
Washington College, 113–131
Web 2.0 tools, 163
web text, 98–102
Webb, Jen, 126
Weimer, Maryellen
   Learner-Centered Teaching: Five
   Key Changes to Practice, 161
on students’ lack of
confidence, 167, 173
Western Oregon University, 77
“Where Collections and Metaliteracy
   Meet: Incorporating Library-
   Owned Platforms into Open and
   Collaborative Library Instruction”
   (Scull), xx, 73–86
Wiggins, Grant P., 107
Wikipedia
   student editing of, 27, 32
   student production of
   information, 35, 37
wikis, 79, 80
Wikispaces, 80
Witek, Donna
   on collaboration, 131
   Eloquenta Perfecta program, 6
   overview of chapter by, xix
   “Revising for Metaliteracy: Flexible
   Course Design to Support Social
   Media Pedagogy,” 1–17
writing
   critical writing outcome of
   TWC361 course, 53–54
   interrogation of conventions of
   writing/teaching, 30–31
   metacognition in student
   academic writing, 122–123
   MoEML case study/analysis, 123–128
   TWC361 course structure/
   assignments, 55–56
at Washington College, 116
Writing for Healthcare Management
course
See TWC361: Writing for Healthcare
Management course
Writing Studies (WS)
literature on, 48–49
Technical Communication
Program, 47–48
TWC361 course, LIS/
WS coalesce in, 67
WRTG 224
See Rhetoric and Social Media course
Z
Zilberberg, Anna, 138
Zuckerberg, Mark, 11–12
Zurkowski, Paul, 136