

## CHAPTER 15

# The Politics, Policy, and International Relations Section Companion Document to the Framework: Process and Outcomes

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## Introduction

The Politics, Policy, and International Relations (PPIRS) section of ACRL is a forum for librarians to exchange information and ideas relevant to disciplines such as political science, law, international relations, security studies, public policy, and related fields. From 2018-2021, an ad hoc committee of section members worked to develop an addition



to the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* focused on the Framework's applications to PPIRS disciplines, now known as the *Companion Document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education: Politics, Policy, and International Relations* (the PPIRS Companion Document).<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, we provide an overview of the process by which we developed this document, as well as some early outcomes and future opportunities this document provides.

## Scholarship in Political Science and Information Literacy

Historically, there has been substantial agreement within the scholarly literature that the incorporation of information literacy into political science classes improves student success and capacity for critical thinking. Articles have described librarians and political science faculty collaborating to develop library skills, critical thinking, and evaluating politics-related information online.<sup>2</sup> Both librarians and political science scholars generally tied their definition and conceptualization of information literacy to the 2000 ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (Standards), often making use of pre- and post-tests explicitly tied to the Standards.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, authors recognized that students' struggles with information literacy were complicated by their inexperience with substantive political knowledge and academic composition.<sup>4</sup>

Since the adoption of the Framework—and during the time PPIRS was formulating its companion document—scholarship has continued to emphasize the importance of the conversation between information literacy and teaching and learning in political science. Political scientists and librarians working in this area have shifted to the broader conception of information literacy envisioned by the Framework and considered its implications for developing undergraduate students' information literacy skills. Thornton and Atkinson suggest that the Framework's conception of information literacy has made a “more critical, multidimensional concept” that makes information literacy “an attribute essential for performing the most basic of academic tasks.”<sup>5</sup> Multiple authors select particular frames and suggest how to incorporate them into lesson planning,<sup>6</sup> offer examples of information literacy activities instructors could incorporate into specific courses,<sup>7</sup> or use individual frames to develop pre- and post-tests of information literacy skills building.<sup>8</sup> Several authors contemplate what they see as the Framework's expanded possibilities for faculty/librarian collaboration on information literacy and the empowerment of political science faculty. Harden and Harden use the Framework's broader attention to navigating information to advocate for instructors incorporating information literacy into the classroom “without elaborate overhaul of courses or frequent collaboration with librarians” and formally building skills tied to the Framework into political science curricula.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Marfleet notes how the Framework may advance the inclusion of information literacy into methods training, but that information literacy “needs to be embedded within the curriculum and not solely under the purview of librarians.”<sup>10</sup>

## Beginning the Process

In March 2018, the ACRL Information Literacy Frameworks and Standards Committee (ILFSC) contacted PPIRS Vice-Chair Brett Cloyd to gauge interest in updating the *Political Science Research Competency Guidelines* (Guidelines).<sup>11</sup> The Guidelines, which were published in 2008, were long overdue for their mandatory five-year review. Cloyd replied that the section was interested and solicited volunteers for an ad hoc committee to update the Guidelines. The Guidelines were written to accompany the Standards, published in 2000, but the Standards had since been superseded by the Framework in 2016.

At the first meeting of the ad hoc committee (attended by all chapter authors) held in April 2018, the first major decision we faced was what to do with the Guidelines. One option was to completely overhaul the Guidelines to bring them in line with the Framework. Doing so had two major drawbacks. First, as the Standards and Framework have starkly different structures and philosophical underpinnings, the Guidelines would have needed an onerous amount of retrofitting. Secondly, the Guidelines were published by the Law and Political Science Section (LPSS), the predecessor organization to PPIRS. The PPIRS moniker was adopted in 2016 to better reflect the diversity of disciplines in which section members had interest and expertise. We felt that any Framework companion document should reflect this diversity, and we consequently deemed the Guidelines' focus on political science to be too narrow. Given these problems, we decided to create a completely new document.

## Data Collection and Seeking Feedback

The committee sought input from a diverse group of faculty partners and librarian colleagues in putting together the PPIRS Companion Document.

Six committee members, from a variety of institution types and sizes, volunteered to interview faculty members, many of whom were current partners with our libraries. We developed a questionnaire to use for our interviews (see Appendix A). Our work included interviews with fifteen faculty members from academic departments that included government, political science, urban planning, policy studies, and non-profit management.

Responses to the questionnaire were recorded by the interviewing librarian and shared among our group. We considered ways to understand the responses we received. One approach was to use the frames to sort responses. For instance, when we heard from faculty about concepts that reflected Research as Inquiry, we noted their connection to that frame's knowledge practices and dispositions. Other themes we saw focused on areas where students could improve their research skills; research skills that were unique to students in different PPIRS disciplines; differences between graduate and undergraduate students; and skill growth from first-year students to seniors. We also noted areas where faculty hoped students had developed skills prior to seeing them in their classes, such as citing sources and completing a literature review.

Collecting feedback from PPIRS librarians was somewhat easier because we had built up communication with our PPIRS colleagues during the project. Our colleagues were

interested and engaged in this project and had been considering ways to incorporate the Framework since it was adopted by the ACRL Board in January 2016. Many PPIRS colleagues had incorporated the Standards into their work and were looking for professional guidance on their next steps with the Framework. There were four opportunities for PPIRS membership to contribute to this project: two Zoom focus groups, a survey, and a presentation and discussion forum at ALA Annual Meeting in 2019.

## *PPIRS Focus Groups*

Two membership focus groups were held via Zoom in late 2018 to solicit input and feedback from the PPIRS community. There were thirty-three total participants representing a mix of early-career and mid-career librarians, which offered a welcoming space to talk about teaching and building relationships with faculty members. Questions asked during the focus groups can be found in Appendix C of the PPIRS Companion Document.<sup>12</sup> Our colleagues brought the issues they were seeing in the classroom and in consultations with students and considered with us how the Framework might offer insights and strategies for our work.

## *Membership Survey*

We also developed a survey to solicit input from PPIRS members and sent invitations to participate through our listserv. We searched for existent surveys on use of the Framework and chose to use a survey for librarians on the ACRL *Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* as our main template for creating questions.<sup>13</sup> We drafted a sixteen-question survey, which was hosted on Qualtrics and sent to the PPIRS listserv.

The survey included questions about the type of institution participants worked at; familiarity with and subject-specific usefulness of the Framework as a whole, and of each frame individually; factors that would contribute to use of the PPIRS Companion Document; guidance needed for how to apply the Framework to one's work; thoughts on subject-specific application of the Framework; details on whether and how respondents had already applied the Framework in their instruction; and space for additional comments and contact information for those interested in continuing the conversation.

Distributed in April 2019, the survey gathered useful input. The survey had fifty-one respondents, of whom two-thirds worked at doctorate-granting universities, 20 percent worked at master's-degree-granting-institutions, 8 percent worked at baccalaureate colleges, and 6 percent worked at associate's-degree-granting institutions. 84 percent of respondents indicated that they were familiar or extremely familiar with the Framework as a whole, and most respondents indicated that they were extremely familiar with each of the frames, ranging from 52 percent for Information Creation as a Process, to 72 percent for Scholarship as Conversation.

Using the quantitative and qualitative data from the responses, we distilled a summary of views of each of the frames. Respondents indicated that they had found Scholarship as Conversation and Searching as Strategic Exploration to be useful in opening conversations with faculty about the Framework, and that these two frames were incredibly versatile in

a variety of instruction modes. These two frames, as well as Authority Is Constructed and Contextual, were very popular to incorporate in discussions with students. Respondents indicated that they were interested in using Research as Inquiry but needed more guidance. Respondents generally said that they did not incorporate Information Has Value or Information Creation as a Process into their instruction. After creating these distillations and the Qualtrics summary reports on which they were based, we incorporated the survey findings into our work in writing our assigned frames.

## *Discussion Forum with PPIRS at ALA Annual*

The final piece of stakeholder input was a presentation and session for librarians at the 2019 ALA Annual Conference in Washington, DC.<sup>14</sup> We included summaries of what we had learned from the PPIRS questionnaire survey. To facilitate conversation, we had attendees engage in group discussions centered around questions including:

- What is one thing you want students to understand about research in politics, policy, and international relations?
- How have you been using the frames while teaching?
- Is there any particular organization or structure we should consider?
- What frames have you “stuck” (not sure how to use)?
- What support do you need to help integrate frames into discussions with faculty?

The ecosystem or landscape of different information sources was identified as an important concept to include in the PPIRS Companion Document. Our colleagues were interested in including a variety of information sources such as grey literature, scholarly research, government sources, journalism, and data and statistics into their instruction. There was also keen interest in how librarians could use the Framework to create meaningful learning opportunities for our students.

Librarians provided input into how each of the frames could be used in the field and identified areas they hoped our committee would be able to address. For instance, how would the PPIRS Companion Document be different from the Framework document? How can we bring Framework concepts into conversations with faculty? In addition, several heuristics-oriented issues—such as how we talk about “good” or “bad” sources, define “credible” information sources, look at ethical issues from information sources, or address differences between graduate or undergraduate students—were discussed.

A takeaway from our stakeholder sessions included tagging the sample learning outcomes section of our PPIRS Companion Document with parenthetically noted references to the Framework’s knowledge practices and dispositions. We also developed “Summary of Stakeholder Input” sections for each frame to help readers understand the context and intention of creating the document. It was also during these sessions that the idea of an infographic, a one-page document to illustrate and reflect our work, came into view. The conceptual nature of the Framework meant that a lengthy document shared with faculty might not have the desired impact unless there was substantial interest in learning more about our processes.

# Building the PPIRS Companion Document

A document of this size and scope necessitated sections and structure. The committee chose to use the built-in structure of the Framework's six frames when building our PPIRS Companion Document. This approach allowed us to connect our disciplinary lens to a document and structure already familiar to academic librarians.

Each frame is described both in the context of the PPIRS Companion Document and in terms of the issues facing students, faculty, and librarians in these subject areas. We mined knowledge practices and dispositions from the Framework that we believe are most relevant to political science, policy studies, international relations, and related disciplines. These are described as "Evidence of Frame in Action" and "Sample Learning Goals." The Evidence of Frame in Action sections each articulate how the frame could manifest in an academic setting. These examples are drawn from student or faculty research practice, examples of typical information sources or research methods in PPIRS disciplines, or real-world issues that scholars (novice or expert) need to take into consideration when conducting research. They are intended to be specific interpretations of the frames. The committee elected to create learning goals rather than learning outcomes so that librarians might use the goals to then create outcomes specific to the subfields they work with. Our committee also created a LibGuide on the ACRL website to showcase the PPIRS Companion Document more widely, given the platform's general ease of access and the ubiquity of its use across academic libraries.<sup>15</sup> The LibGuide structure allowed us to create a page for each frame, making the document accessible in smaller parts. The "Talking with Faculty & Infographic" page on the LibGuide offers an infographic which connects each frame to discipline-relevant information literacy skills, offering accessible discussion starting points for librarians. A Padlet was embedded in the LibGuide as a way of obtaining PPIRS members' feedback and experiences.

We submitted our first draft of the PPIRS Companion Document to the ILFSC in October 2020. We received feedback from ILFSC and revised and resubmitted the document in February 2021. This version was accepted by ILFSC and the ACRL Standards Committee and sent to the ACRL Board of Directors for final review, voting, and acceptance in June 2021. In July 2021, the PPIRS Companion Document was formally accepted and published by the ACRL Board of Directors.

## Early Outcomes and Future Uses

Considering how librarians and faculty could use the PPIRS Companion Document was part of early discussion within the ad hoc committee. We wanted the document to be something that could stimulate conversations between librarians and teaching faculty, and that would also assist current and future subject librarians no matter their level of expertise and experience. We also recognized that the broad nature of the disciplinary affiliations within PPIRS made it impossible for us to adequately consider the unique needs of each subject area within our companion document.

## *Subject Specific Working Groups*

Early discussions within the committee focused on how to properly represent the diverse needs of librarians within our section. PPIRS members include law librarians, as well as librarians acting as liaisons to government agencies; public policy; international relations, security studies; conflict and peace studies; political science; and a wide array of affiliated subjects. Within each subject area the types of sources used vary, as do the research skill areas of students and faculty, which means how we interpret the Framework is variable. Recognizing it is impossible to include examples for each of the areas PPIRS members come from, we aimed for the middle ground—political science broadly—with the hope that subject-specific working groups might form within our section in the future. This would give even more ownership of our PPIRS Companion Document to our membership and would ensure it meets the unique needs of all the subject areas that fall under PPIRS.

## *Growing our PPIRS Companion Document*

The PPIRS Companion Document provides interpretations of each of the frames and includes learning goals librarians could use to begin drafting lesson plans and guide future conversations with faculty members. As stated, we left out more specific learning outcomes and learning activities. We determined this was beyond the scope of the formal PPIRS Companion Document and, considering the specialization of politics- and law-related subject areas, it would have been impossible to craft meaningful learning outcomes that were generic enough for everyone to use. Our hope was that PPIRS members might contribute to developing a collection of learning outcomes and learning activities. We invited our members to upload their lesson plans and learning activities to the ACRL Sandbox and tag them with PPIRS, developing a repository of learning outcomes and activities that others might draw upon.

## *Promoting the PPIRS Companion Document within the American Political Science Association*

In 2020, after a few years without an official representative, PPIRS and ACRL re-established their external liaison relationship to the American Political Science Association (APSA), appointing Kimberly MacVaugh to the role. She developed a relationship with the editor of APSA's new blog for teaching and learning resources, *APSA Educate*, and facilitated the 2022 publication of Oberlies's article, "Politics, Policy & International Relations Companion Document on Information Literacy."<sup>16</sup> Several members of the original committee contributed to the piece, which summarized and linked out to the full PPIRS Companion Document. It also featured examples from PPIRS members who had used the companion document already for classroom lessons.

Our promotion of the PPIRS Companion Document continued at the 2023 APSA Teaching and Learning Conference, where MacVaugh presented a workshop,

“Incorporating Information Literacy Skills into Your Syllabus,” to twenty-five enthusiastic professors, explaining the Framework and the PPIRS Companion Document, and then facilitating small group discussions on ways to build political science lessons or assignments around each of the six frames.<sup>17</sup> Online metrics indicate that the workshop materials have had an extended reach beyond the conference; we hope that they prove beneficial for both political science professors and academic librarians seeking to incorporate the PPIRS Companion Document into their instruction.

Anecdotally, feedback from APSA members has been positive and many have suggested that they would appreciate even more examples and real-life applications of the frames in action. Several faculty members noted that the forthcoming revision of APSA’s undergraduate curriculum guidelines could provide additional opportunities to crosswalk the Framework and consolidate best practices for teaching information literacy to political science students.

## Further Opportunities for Outreach and Incorporating the Document into Our Liaison Work

While the PPIRS Companion Document is still new, its development has provided opportunities for burgeoning collaborations and outreach to PPIRS disciplinary faculty. We have found that the LibGuide infographic provides an easy entry point to begin a conversation on PPIRS-specific information literacy topics. One of our task force members used this infographic as a starting point for a discussion with a faculty member in urban planning and public affairs on how to help students sort through and make sense of the overabundance of information sources available to them. The conversation led to a plan for the librarian to visit the faculty member’s graduate class and to an enhanced understanding of student information needs both on the part of the liaison and the disciplinary faculty member.

Picking up on the idea that the Framework empowers political science faculty to embed information literacy in their courses, Kalaf-Hughes created an infographic assignment for an introductory-level American government class and tied the assignment’s learning objectives and scaffolding specifically to the Research as Inquiry and Scholarship as Conversation frames and the PPIRS Companion Document’s discipline-specific recommendations for these frames.<sup>18</sup> Finally, Hervieux and Miller used the PPIRS Companion Document to more clearly communicate information literacy goals to faculty in public policy, mapping the Framework’s knowledge practices and dispositions to their learning objectives and designing class activities and content for the session.<sup>19</sup> Overall, we foresee the PPIRS Companion Document as a valuable starting place to begin conversations, as its combination of the theoretical grounding in the Framework and learning theory and its practical applications for PPIRS disciplines speak to many faculty members’ interests.

# Appendix A

## Final List of Faculty Interview Structure and Questions

- Introduce the project, project goals, and reasons for the interview. (*Boilerplate is here: edit for your own purposes at your discretion.*)

“I’m working with a small group of librarians from around the country to update our national standards for student research skills in [your discipline] and related disciplines. Our goal is to create a document that reflects the research and information-related competencies that today’s students in [your discipline] should have. We’re conducting interviews with faculty to get your perspectives on these competencies and what should be included.”

- Explain that we will be using the term “research skills” but that they should feel free to think about their students’ skills as they relate to information in a broader sense, if they feel it is relevant for their discipline.
  1. Tell me about the research skills of your students.
  2. Do you think there are unique research skills needed within [this discipline] that might be less relevant to other fields?
  3. Where do you see gaps in your students’ research skills? Do these gaps change from freshman to senior year?
  4. What research skills do your students have coming in as freshmen versus when they graduate?
  5. What are the differences between the research skills needed for undergraduate students and graduate students in [your discipline]?
  6. Is there a difference between the research skills that will be needed by students going on to become scholars in [your discipline] versus students going on to work in a professional setting related to [your discipline]? Ask them to flesh out what research skills are most useful to each.
  7. What research skills do you wish that students had before they got to your classroom?
  8. What research skills do you think are best taught by you? What research skills do you think are best taught by another expert, such as a librarian?
  9. Where do you see opportunities for collaboration between different types of information experts on developing students’ research skills?

# Notes

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