Critical Visual Literacy through a Built Environment Lens

Stephanie Beene, AASL April 21, 2020

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Humans perceive the world through various senses—the sense of sight in particular—and use this information to understand what is being experienced. The creation of visual images allows us to communicate our feelings and ideas across time and space, develop relationships with one another, and document our everyday experiences. The visual images encountered every day play an important role in how we make sense of the world and how we see ourselves.

- Frank Serafini, "Visual Literacy," Oxford Research Encyclopedia, Education, 2017
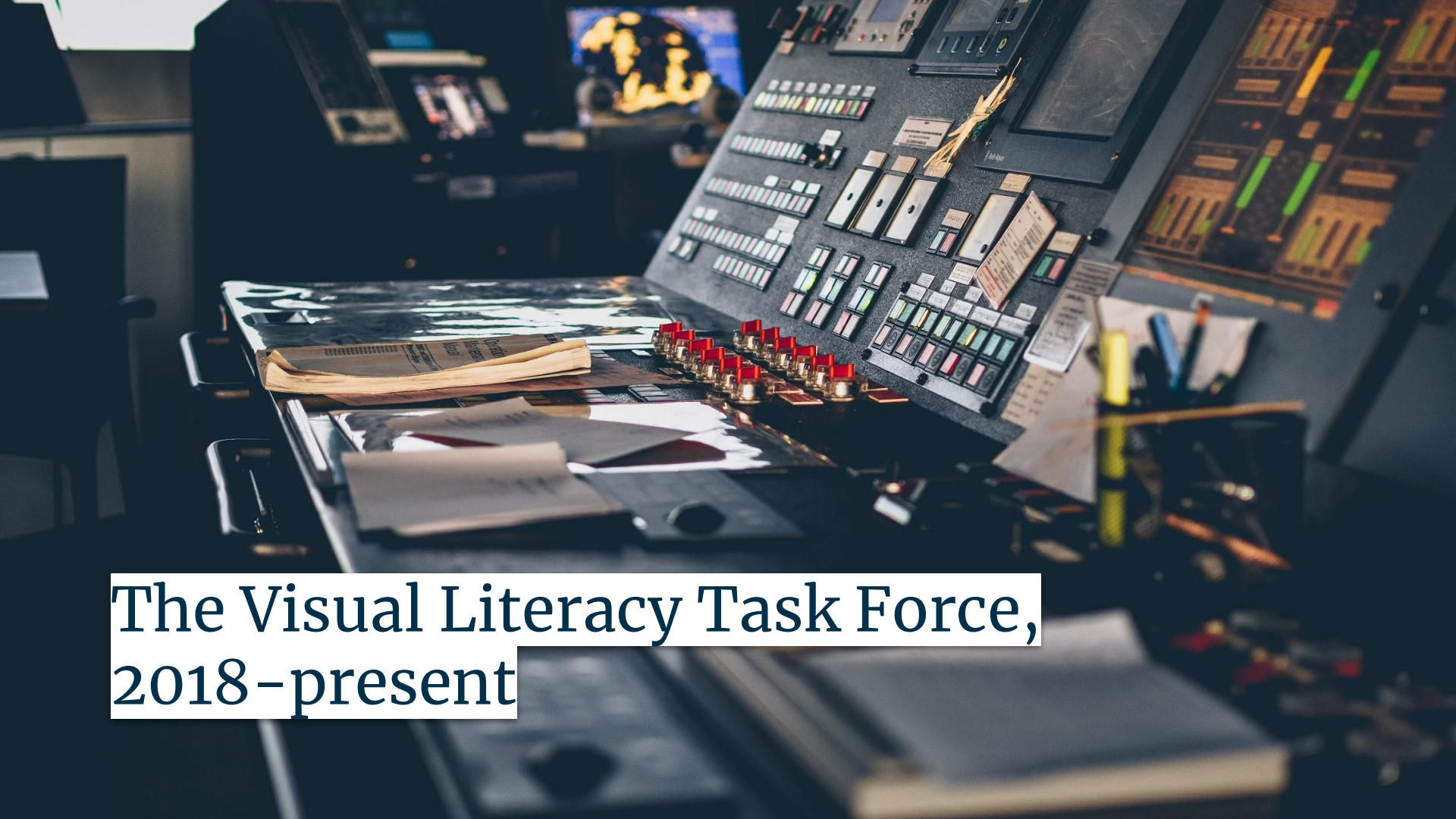
The Visual Literacy Task Force, 2018-present

Task Force Members 2020:

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Recap of Past Progress

- The current ACRL Visual Literacy Task Force convened in 2018 to update the 2011 ACRL *Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* & align them with the 2016 ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*
- Updated bibliography:
  - https://www.zotero.org/groups/2264485/acrl_visual_literacy_taskforce/items
- Two internal drafts complete
- Feedback/input gathering/website
  - https://acrlvisualliteracystandards2018.wordpress.com/feedback/
  - Presentations to stakeholders

Visual Literacy Array
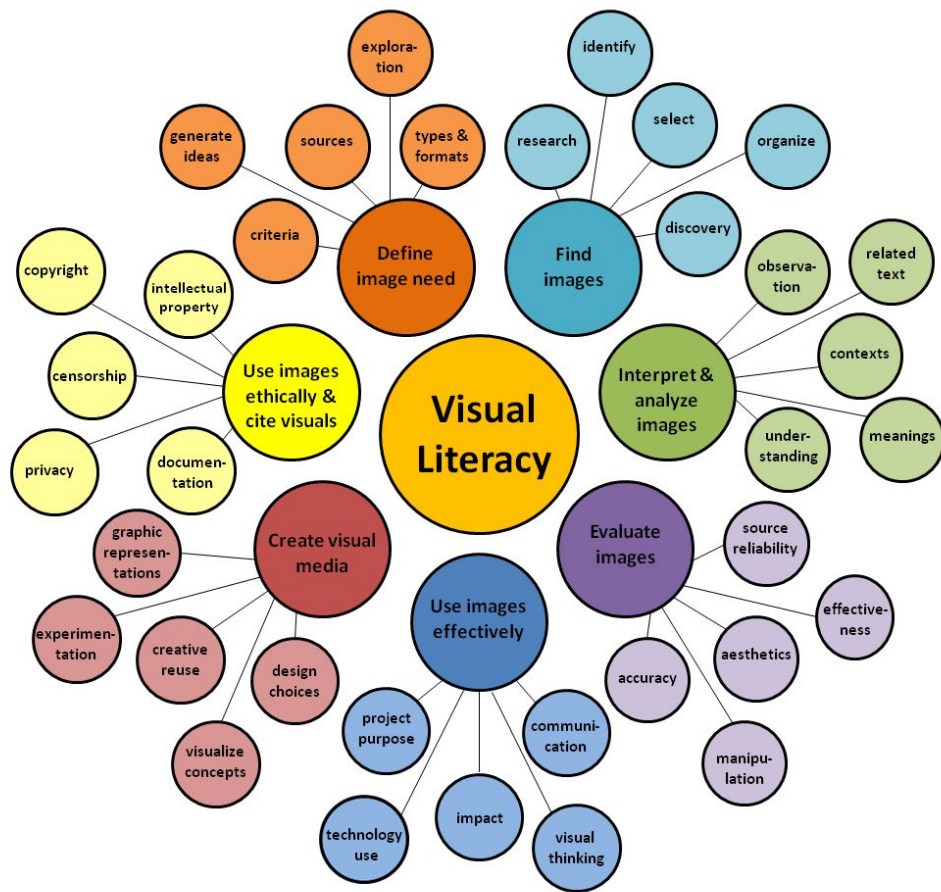
ACRL Framework for Information Literacy
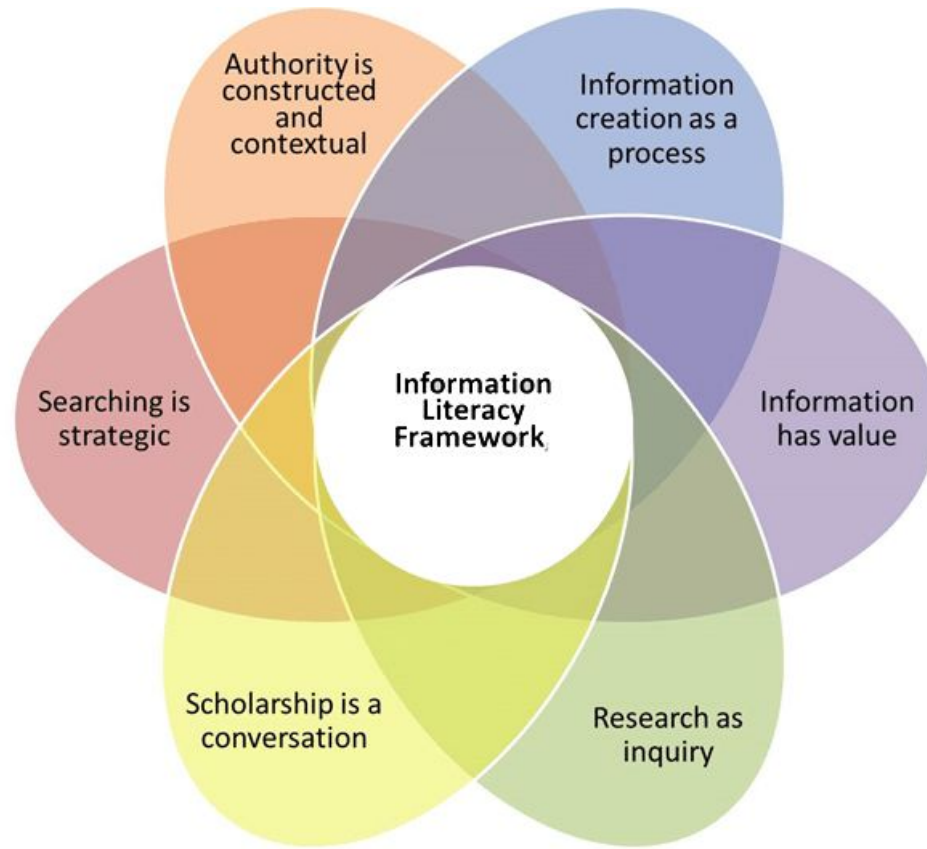
Q 1: How do *you* define visual literacy?

Empirical Research

Broaden perspectives through interviewing a range of experts, because, since 2011:

- **Technological changes**
- **Accessibility**
- **DEISJ**
- **Disinformation campaigns**
- **The definition problem of visual literacy continues**

Who we Identified and Contacted

- Identification:
  - **Bibliography of Visual Literacy (over 400 items) https://www.zotero.org/groups/2264485/acrl_visual_literacy_taskforce/items**
  - **Stakeholder organizations (ACRL sections and Interest groups, VRA, ARLIS/NA, IVLA, AASL, MLA, SLA...)**

- By the Numbers:
  - **127 people contacted**

Where do they live?

United Kingdom	5
Sweden	2
Finland	1
Germany	1
Greece	1
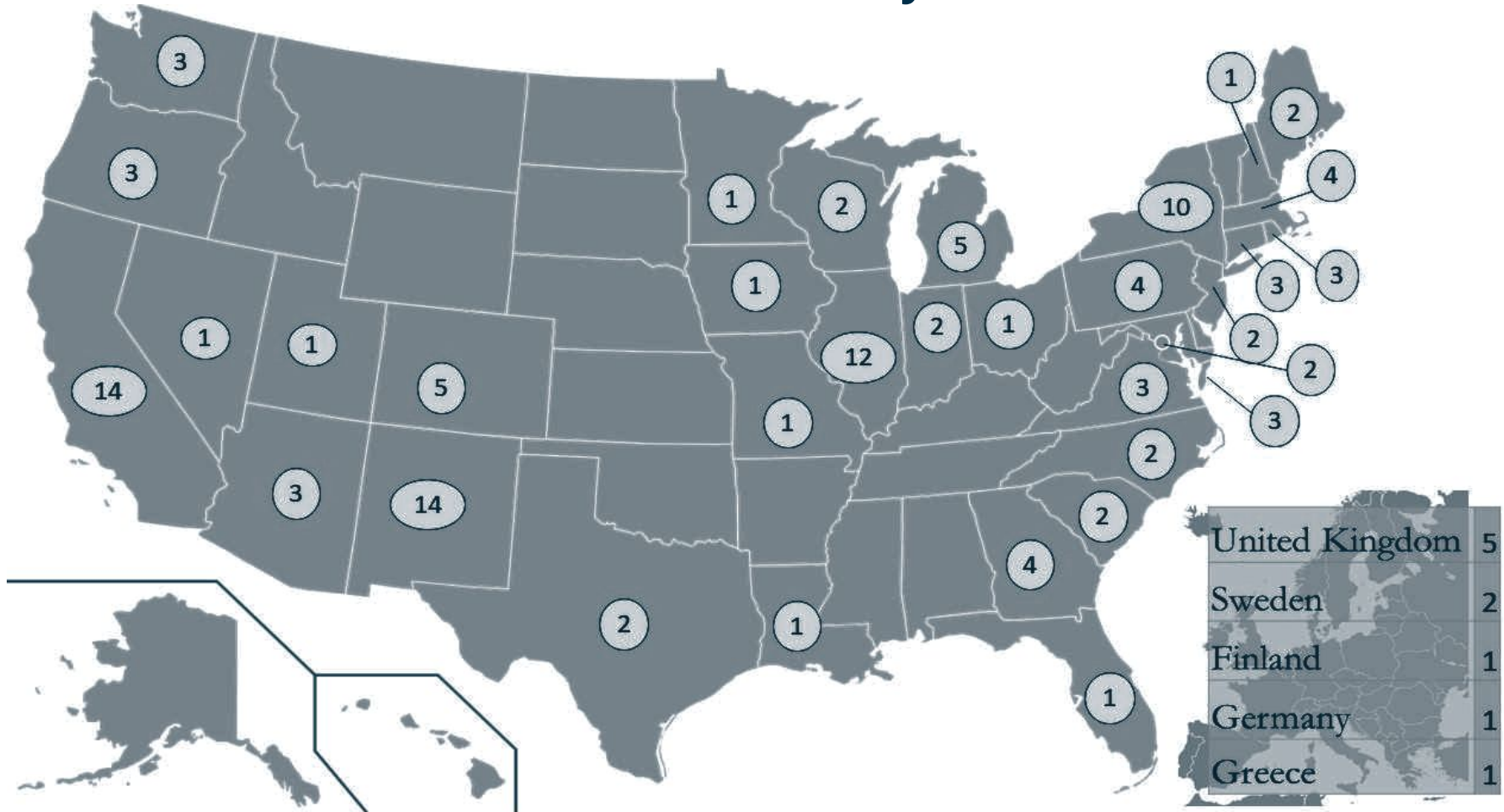
Current Status

		Survey Response Rate
Agreed to participate	65	51%
Answered initial email interview, as well as follow-up questions (subject to qualitative thematic coding)	43	34%
Completed initial email interview only (subject to textual analysis)	19	15%

12.5% of those who responded were librarians with a specialization in Architecture and/or Planning

Timeline

- Qualitative analysis: iterative inductive coding to identify emergent themes

- Textual analysis for those interviews with insufficient data

- Stay tuned for a virtual panel presentation @ ARLIS/NA 2020

- ACRL Instruction Section Teaching Methods Virtual Forum, May 1, 2020

- Summer 2020, complete analysis

- Paper presentation, ACRL 2021, April 14-17, 2021

Q 2: Please give one example describing how you have used visual literacy

ARLIS/NA, Information Competencies, Architecture (June 2018)

Background

Art, Architecture, and Design Information Competencies report published in June 2018 to update the 2007 ARLIS/NA Information Competencies for Students in Design Disciplines: https://www.arlisna.org/images/researchreports/informationcomp.pdf

- Written and compiled by Jeanne Brown, Jane Carlin, Thomas Caswell, Edith Crowe, Maya Gervits, Susan Lewis, Alan Michelson, Barbara Opar, and Jennifer Parker

The 2018 Information Competencies were co-authored and edited by members of the Research and Information Services Section of ARLIS/NA, who revisit and edit the Competencies annually depending on ARLIS/NA member interest: https://www.arlisna.org/images/researchreports/ARLISNA_artarchdesigninfocomp_2018.pdf

- Introduction: Jane Carlin
- Essential Questions: Amanda Meeks
- Architectural History: Alan Michelson
- Architecture: James Sobczak
- Art History & Subcommittee Lead: Shannon Marie Robinson
- Fashion Design: Alyssa Vincent
- Studio Art: Linden How

ARLIS/NA, Information Competencies, Urban & Regional Planning (June 2019)

Background

The 2019 Information Competencies were co-authored and edited by members of the Research and Information Services Section of ARLIS/NA:
https://www.arlisna.org/images/researchreports/ARLISNA_Report_ArtArchDesignInfoComp2019.pdf

- Urban and Regional Planning: Stephanie Beene
- Photography: Larissa Garcia
- Graphic Design: Stefanie Hilles
- Interior Design: Amanda Meeks
- Compiled by: Alyssa Vincent and Linden How, RISS Co-Moderators
- Edited by: Roger Lawson

Reviewed 2018's competencies

Aligned with ACRL *Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* and the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*

Surveyed accreditation standards and stated learning objectives of major U.S. programs and schools

Discussed competencies with discipline-specific instructors

Q 3: Have you used the ARLIS/NA Information Competencies? If yes, how?

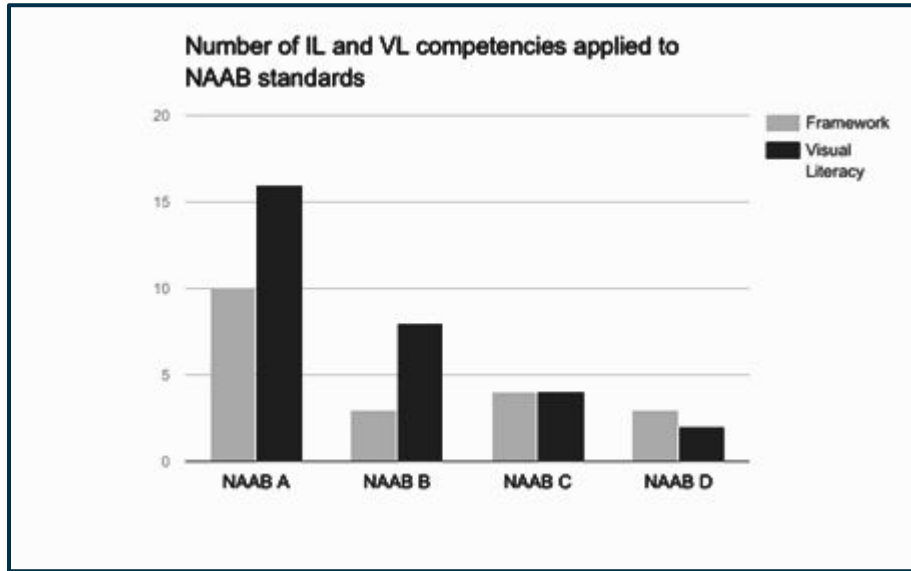National Architecture Accreditation Board, 2020 Student Criteria

	Professional Communication Skills	Design Thinking Skills	Investigative Skills	Architectural Design Skills	Ordering Systems	Use of Precedents	History and Culture	Cultural Diversity and Social Equity	
Searching as Strategic Exploration	x Y	x Y	x Y			x Y	x Y		Determines nature & extent of images needed (1)
Research as Inquiry	Y	x	x Y	x	x	x Y	x Y	x Y	Finds & Accesses images effectively & efficiently (2)
Scholarship as Conversation	x Y	Y	x Y			x Y	x Y	x Y	Interprets & Analyzes meanings of visual media (3)
Authority is Constucted & Contextual	Y	Y	x Y			x Y	x Y	x Y	Evaluates images & their sources (4)
Information Creation as a Process	x Y	x Y	x Y	x Y	x Y	x Y			Designs & creates meaningful visual media (6)
	x Y	x Y	x Y	x Y		x Y			Uses images effectively (5)
Information Has Value	x Y	x	x Y	Y	Y	x Y	x Y	x Y	Ethical, legal, economic issues surrounding images, uses images ethically (7)

Graph illustrating the NAAB *Realm A, Critical Thinking & Representation*, along the top row, mapped to the *Framework*, along the right-hand column, and the *Visual Literacy Standards*, along the left-hand column. x = concepts in the *Framework* and y = standards in the *Visual Literacy Standards* (Stephanie Beene, 2017). The numbers in parentheses at the end of each *Visual Literacy Standard* indicates the number, 1-7, of the Standard. Where I can, I have tried to map it to the threshold concept within the disciplinary lens of architecture, recognizing that it is not a 1:1 mapping, and that the process is always iterative and fluid.

When Research Does Not Start with a Question: Teaching with the *Framework* and *Visual Literacy Standards* within Art and Architecture Librarianship

Stephanie Beene and Shannon Marie Robinson

Number of IL and VL competencies applied to NAAB standards

Mapping the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (light gray) and the *Visual Literacy Competencies Standards for Higher Education* (dark gray) to the NAAB Standards, Realms A, B, C, and D.

When Research Does Not Start with a Question: Teaching with the *Framework* and *Visual Literacy Standards* within Art and Architecture Librarianship

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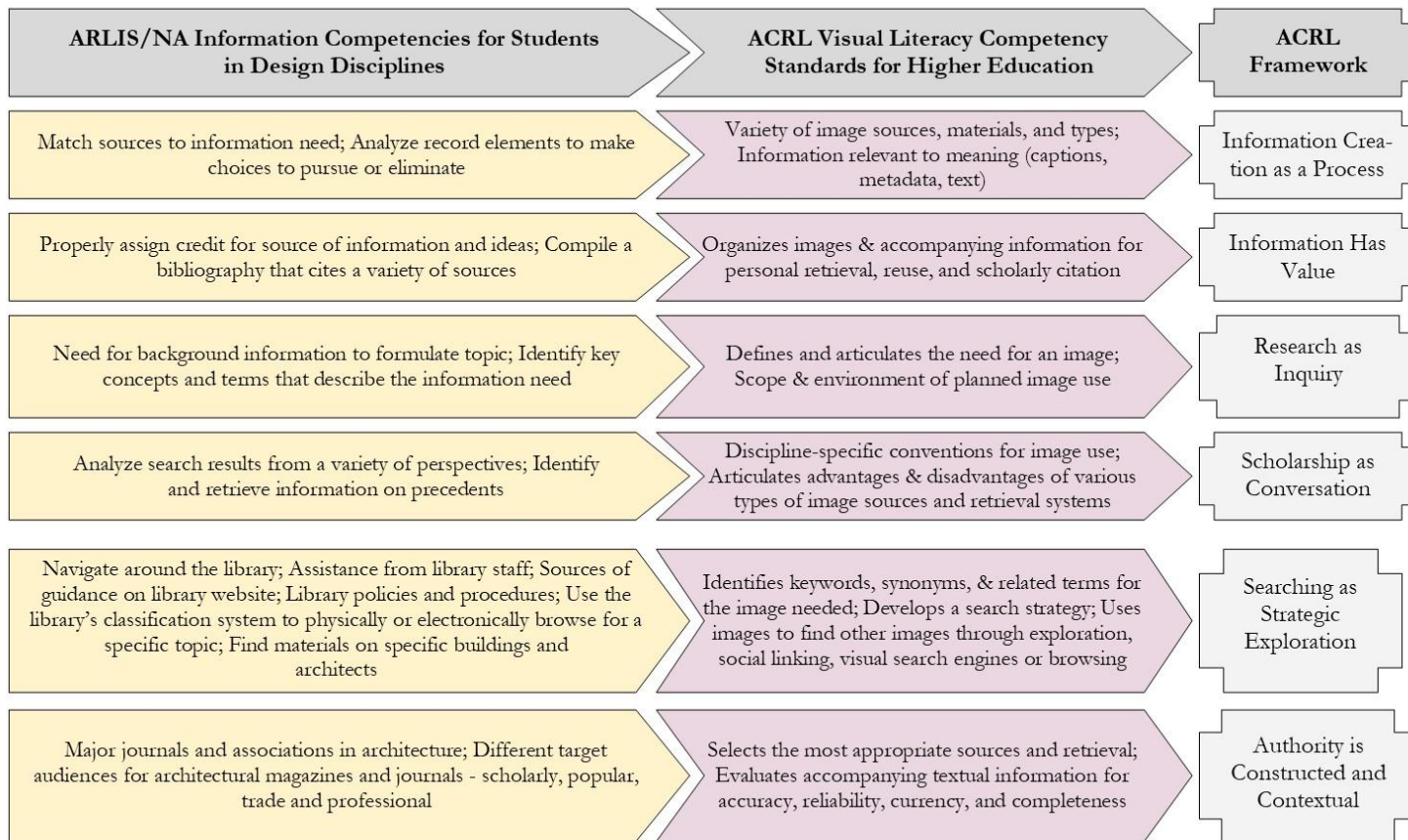*Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 2017 36:2, 254-280, https://doi=10.1086/694243

1st Year: Mapped Competencies and Standards

ARLIS/NA Information Competencies for Students in Design Disciplines	ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education	ACRL Framework
Match sources to information need; Analyze record elements to make choices to pursue or eliminate	Variety of image sources, materials, and types; Information relevant to meaning (captions, metadata, text)	Information Creation as a Process
Properly assign credit for source of information and ideas; Compile a bibliography that cites a variety of sources	Organizes images & accompanying information for personal retrieval, reuse, and scholarly citation	Information Has Value
Need for background information to formulate topic; Identify key concepts and terms that describe the information need	Defines and articulates the need for an image; Scope & environment of planned image use	Research as Inquiry
Analyze search results from a variety of perspectives; Identify and retrieve information on precedents	Discipline-specific conventions for image use; Articulates advantages & disadvantages of various types of image sources and retrieval systems	Scholarship as Conversation
Navigate around the library; Assistance from library staff; Sources of guidance on library website; Library policies and procedures; Use the library's classification system to physically or electronically browse for a specific topic; Find materials on specific buildings and architects	Identifies keywords, synonyms, & related terms for the image needed; Develops a search strategy; Uses images to find other images through exploration, social linking, visual search engines or browsing	Searching as Strategic Exploration
Major journals and associations in architecture; Different target audiences for architectural magazines and journals - scholarly, popular, trade and professional	Selects the most appropriate sources and retrieval; Evaluates accompanying textual information for accuracy, reliability, currency, and completeness	Authority is Constructed and Contextual

*The competencies and standards have been abridged from the original texts.

Placing Research on Their Map: Curriculum Mapping as a Collaboration Tool for an Architecture Branch Library
Bonnie Reed, Hillary B. Veeder, Sara Schumacher, and Brian C. R. Zugay
Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America 2018 37:2, 176-191, https://doi.org/10.1086/700012

2nd Year: Mapped Competencies and Standards

ARLIS/NA Information Competencies for Students in Design Disciplines	ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education	ACRL Framework
Proper types of sources for topic, how format may affect usefulness; Print and electronic resources (books, periodicals, indexes, guides, databases, archival collections, Internet, etc.)	Identifies physical, technical and design components of images; Explores choices made in production to construct meaning or influence interpretation	Information Creation as a Process
Campus policies on computer use and information access; Definition and consequences of plagiarism; Apply copyright guidelines to images; Accurately cite both digital and print sources	Gives attribution to image creators in citations and credit statements	Information Has Value
Select terminology to search Avery Index and other databases for a specific topic; Develop a research plan to investigative method; Review initial information needs to revise/refine the question; Revise topic/search strategy if results are unsatisfactory information needs to revise/refine the question; If information satisfied the research need; Revise topic/search strategy if results unsatisfactory	Defines the scope (reach, audience) and environment (academic, open web) of the planned image use; Develops search strategies appropriate to image need and available resources	Research as Inquiry
Identify the intended audience(s) of an outlet for architectural information; Communicate results of research clearly; Find materials to support analysis of a particular theoretical position in the course of architectural history	Presents images effectively, considering meaning, aesthetic criteria, visual impact, rhetorical impact, and audience	Scholarship as Conversation
Plan, record, and refine search strategies in order to complete a semester-length project; Various search types (keyword, phrase, title, and subject); Find a specific article in print or electronically (Avery Index, online catalog; periodical index); Collect visual and written documentation to provide detailed analysis of a specific historical building or group of buildings using print and web-based resources; Resources at other institutions	Performs image and topical research concurrently in an iterative resource-gathering process; Recognizes images are often organized and accessed differently than text-based information (absence of full-text search, variations in controlled vocabulary, lack of subject terms)	Searching as Strategic Exploration
Identify faculty, librarians, and other persons or agencies who can be approached for advice and information; Differentiate between primary vs. secondary and popular vs. scholarly resources; Select appropriate type of architectural publication for the information need	Uses specialized online or in-person services to select image sources; Validates interpretation and analysis of images through discourse with others	Authority is Constructed and Contextual

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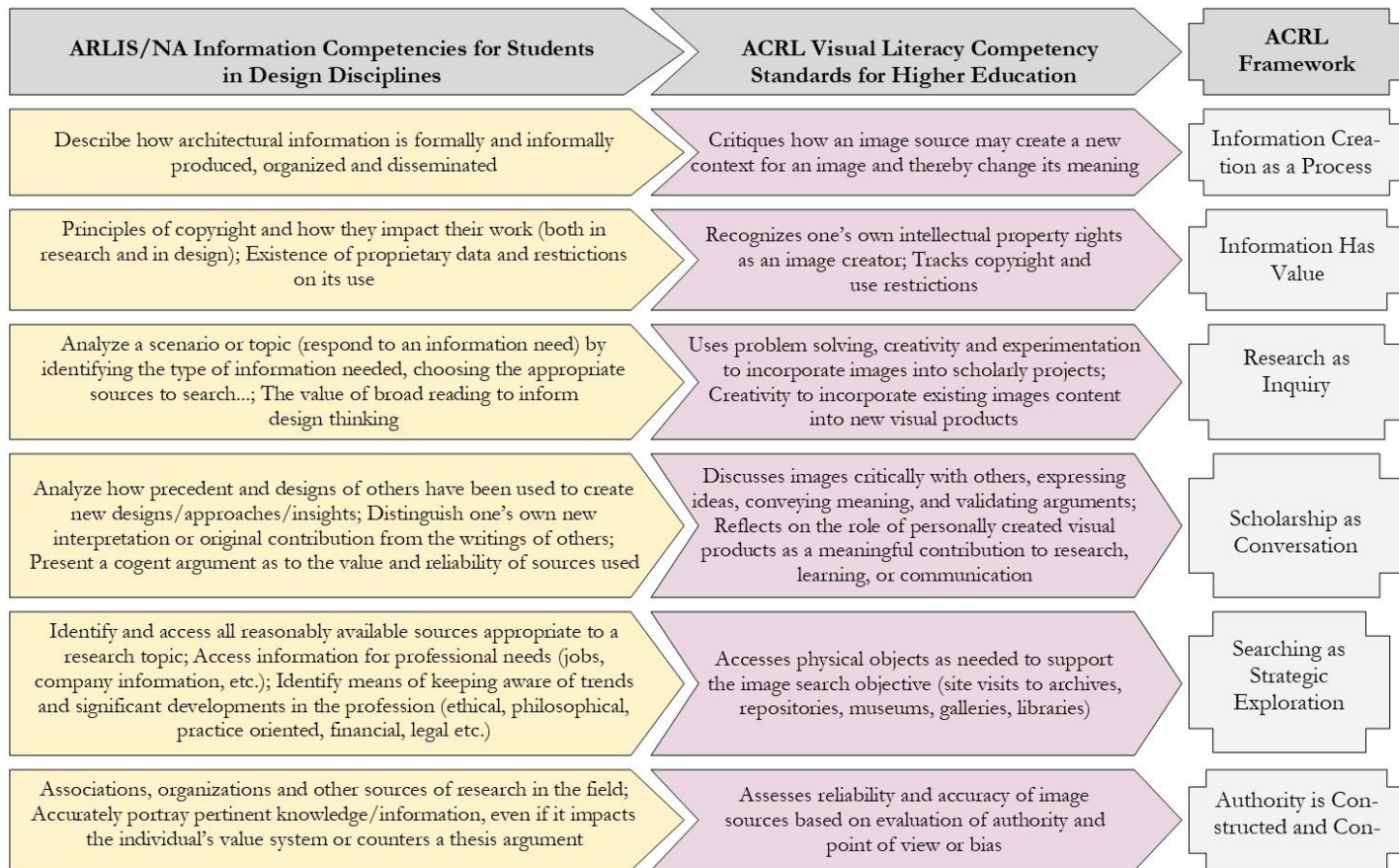
3rd Year: Mapped Competencies and Standards

ARLIS/NA Information Competencies for Students in Design Disciplines	ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education	ACRL Framework
Collect information and data on course-specific or specialized topics; Analyze the context of information and how the context shapes the information and its interpretation	Explores sources for familiarity with available images and generate ideas for relevant content; Recognizes existing images can be modified/reproduced to produce new visual content; Evaluates the effectiveness/reliability of images as communications	Information Creation as a Process
Apply ethical and legal principles to the use of information in all formats and contexts	States rights and attribution information when disseminating personally created images	Information Has Value
Generalize acquired information and research skills to new situations and contexts, Resources in related disciplines	Examines purposes/meanings of images in original contexts; Examines the relationships of images and uses related images to inform interpretation; Recognizes when more information is needed, develops questions, and conducts additional research	Research as Inquiry
Use visual and print information to support one's own point of view; Follow citations and cited references to obtain additional pertinent articles	Role of textual information in access to image content, and identifies typical metadata (captions, descriptions, personal or user-generated tags, creator information, repository names, title keywords)	Scholarship as Conversation
Find multiple sources and multiple types of sources, using appropriate research tools	Recognizes how the image search process is affected by image rights and use restrictions	Searching as Strategic Exploration
Major sources for visual information: site plans, elevations, floor plans, maps; Identify organizations like HUD, ICC, and the Building Officials and Code Administration; Use handbooks on materials and systems, professional organizations' reference manuals and appropriate building and housing codes and standards	Analyzes effect of image editing/manipulation on meaning and reliability; Seeks expert and scholarly opinion about images (reference sources and scholarly publications); Verifies information that accompanies images by consulting multiple sources and conducting research	Authority is Constructed and Contextual

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4th Year & Graduate: Mapped Competencies and Standards

ARLIS/NA Information Competencies for Students in Design Disciplines	ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education	ACRL Framework
Describe how architectural information is formally and informally produced, organized and disseminated	Critiques how an image source may create a new context for an image and thereby change its meaning	Information Creation as a Process
Principles of copyright and how they impact their work (both in research and in design); Existence of proprietary data and restrictions on its use	Recognizes one's own intellectual property rights as an image creator; Tracks copyright and use restrictions	Information Has Value
Analyze a scenario or topic (respond to an information need) by identifying the type of information needed, choosing the appropriate sources to search...; The value of broad reading to inform design thinking	Uses problem solving, creativity and experimentation to incorporate images into scholarly projects; Creativity to incorporate existing images content into new visual products	Research as Inquiry
Analyze how precedent and designs of others have been used to create new designs/approaches/insights; Distinguish one's own new interpretation or original contribution from the writings of others; Present a cogent argument as to the value and reliability of sources used	Discusses images critically with others, expressing ideas, conveying meaning, and validating arguments; Reflects on the role of personally created visual products as a meaningful contribution to research, learning, or communication	Scholarship as Conversation
Identify and access all reasonably available sources appropriate to a research topic; Access information for professional needs (jobs, company information, etc.); Identify means of keeping aware of trends and significant developments in the profession (ethical, philosophical, practice oriented, financial, legal etc.)	Accesses physical objects as needed to support the image search objective (site visits to archives, repositories, museums, galleries, libraries)	Searching as Strategic Exploration
Associations, organizations and other sources of research in the field; Accurately portray pertinent knowledge/information, even if it impacts the individual's value system or counters a thesis argument	Assesses reliability and accuracy of image sources based on evaluation of authority and point of view or bias	Authority is Constructed and Con-

*The competencies and standards have been abridged from the original texts.

Charting a way forward

On the shoulders of giants...

- **Visual Literacy Task Force Bibliography:**
  https://www.zotero.org/groups/2264485/acrl_visual_literacy_taskforce/items

- **This literature was systematically reviewed for an article in production by Dana S. Thompson & Stephanie Beene in the *Journal of Visual Literacy***

- **The International Visual Literacy Association's Recommended Reads in Visual Literacy:**
  https://visualliteracytoday.org/category/recommended-reads/

- **Amanda Meeks' Mapping between IL, VL, and the Framework:**
  https://docs.google.com/document/d/1w3AX1-XRYBla6gxxoTFS0LY9cp3pr4yD85ON0-qlq34/edit

- **Frank Serafini, "Visual Literacy," http://frankserafini.com/publications/serafini-oxford-vis-lit.pdf**

- **An enormous amount of thoughtful work being done on Critical Information Literacy and Critical Visual Literacy**

Comments? Questions? Feedback? Projects? Send them to us!

We want to hear from you!

https://acrlvisualliteracystandards2018.wordpress.com/feedback/

Thanks!

You can reach me at sbeene@unm.edu

Credits

Special thanks to all the people who made and released these awesome resources for free:

- Presentation template by SlidesCarnival
- Photographs by Unsplash

Image Credits

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