Information Literacy Standards for Anthropology and Sociology Students

by the ALA / ACRL / ANSS (Anthropology and Sociology Section) Instruction and Information Literacy Committee Task Force on IL Standards
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Background

The ANSS Instruction and Information Literacy Committee's Task Force on IL Standards (Patti S. Caravello, Triveni Kuchi, and Susan Macicak) completed and submitted a final draft in January 2007, after over two years of work on the standards. This work included reviewing the literature, analyzing the disciplinary issues, sharing drafts with sociology and anthropology faculty, discussions and email communications with members and representatives of the American Sociological Association (ASA) and American Anthropological Association (AAA), and attendance by Task Force members at conferences of these organizations to gather input. The valuable feedback of many faculty members is reflected in the document. A draft was endorsed by the ASA in August 2006 . The ANSS Executive Committee endorsed the revised draft at the ALA Midwinter Conference in January 2007. The ACRL Board approved the document in January 2008. Special thanks go to Carla Howery and Ed Kain of the ASA and Stacey Lathrop of the AAA for their support and publicizing of the standards draft.

Introduction

Information literacy related to specific disciplines involves defining an information need in the context of the discipline, finding and evaluating the kinds of data, materials, and information required to research a subject in that field, and using and synthesizing the information to accomplish assigned and creative tasks, add to knowledge, and participate in the discourse of that discipline. Similar to other social sciences in some respects, anthropology and sociology pose particular challenges for the researcher stemming from their unique attributes as scholarly disciplines. For example, when anthropology students write about people in other culture areas, they need to find and understand the context for ethnographies in addition to other kinds of writings. When sociology students research such topics as immigration or inequality, they need both theoretical works and social science data from appropriate sources, and they need skills to interpret the data. When students in either discipline do field research with human subjects, or when they examine the results of this kind of research, they need certain evaluative approaches to help them understand and accurately describe the context, ethics, and limitations of the end product.

The ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards document http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/standards.pdf defines information literacy in higher education and presents broadly applicable indicators and student learning outcomes. The ANSS Information Literacy Standards for Anthropology and Sociology Students, although based on the ACRL document, has the perspective of the research processes, knowledge base, methodologies, and search tools used in anthropology (including its four fields of cultural, biological, and linguistic anthropology, and archaeology) and sociology (including criminology and demography). The ANSS IL standards describe what students need to do in order to be effective researchers in these fields and the key behaviors for success that information literate students demonstrate.

The main purposes of the ANSS IL standards are to:

- provide a common ground for faculty to work with librarians in helping students become more critical researchers and to offer faculty a basis for integrating the outcomes into their courses
- help librarians design the content of instruction for students and plan information literacy initiatives in anthropology and sociology
- make possible an evaluation of the information literacy skills of anthropology and sociology students by providing standards and competencies to assess

The standards and the key behaviors build from basic to advanced. The ethical components of the research activities described are integrated into each of the four main standards, rather than presented in a separate standard as in the ACRL document. With this approach, ethics emerge in the context of what must be learned and enacted. In investigative methodologies such as participant observation, interviewing, and visual anthropology, for example, the ethical considerations are crucial before the research even begins and continue through the reporting of results. The examples of sources and research situations provided throughout the document are intended to spark ideas and make concrete what the standards mean in the two disciplines.

Standard One – Know what kind of information is needed

What the student needs to do:

1. Define and articulate the information need.

Key behaviors for success :

a.   Identifies and describes a manageable research topic or other information need appropriate to the scope of research questions in anthropology and sociology, using discipline-specific terminology, methods, and contexts.
   b. Reads background sources in anthropology and sociology to increase familiarity with the topic. **Examples:***Encyclopedia of Social Issues*; *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology; Sage Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods.*
   c. Identifies and lists key concepts, terms, social theories, culture groups, places, and names related to the topic in preparation for searching for information on it.   **Examples:** uses the discipline-focused encyclopedias, *Thesaurus of Sociological Indexing Terms*, and *Outline of Cultural Materials* of the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF).
   d. Reevaluates the nature and extent of the information need to clarify, revise, or refine the question after some initial research, reading, interviews, and work with data and/or a population have taken place.

2. Select the most appropriate investigative methods for researching the topic.

Key behaviors for success :

a.   Identifies and evaluates anthropological and sociological qualitative and quantitative research methodologies applicable to the project that will provide the kind of data or information needed. **Examples**: fieldwork, participant observation, data analysis, interviews, survey research, literature review, software for linguistic text analysis, and spatial databases for archaeology.

Ethical, sociocultural, and legal dimensions and behaviors:
   b. Discusses and demonstrates an understanding of institutional policies related to human subjects research, including access to subjects, informed consent, and institutional review board requirements.

c. Identifies and discusses privacy, confidentiality, security, and other ethical issues related to the research methodology employed in accordance with principles in the American Anthropological Association Code of Ethics or the American Sociological Association Code of Ethics.

3. Identify a variety of formats and sources in which anthropological and sociological information may appear.

Key behaviors for success :

a.   Describes how information used in anthropology and sociology is formally and informally produced and disseminated. **Examples:** the U.S. Census, ethnographies, field notes, artifacts, data sets, conference papers, gray or fugitive literature, scholarly Web sites, and peer reviewed scholarly articles.

       b. Recognizes that anthropological and sociological knowledge is organized in certain ways and in various formats which may influence how it is accessed and evaluated. **Examples:** scholarly journals, popular press, conference proceedings, museums, article databases, data archives such as those available via the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), Web sites, and multimedia sources.

       c. Differentiates between primary and secondary sources in anthropology and sociology, recognizing the use and value of each type. **Examples:** (Primary sources) The use of field notes in writing ethnography, the use of site reports in archaeological analysis, and the value of raw data in constructing information and writing a sociological analysis. (Secondary sources) The value of books for an author's viewpoint or synthesis, and the use of reference lists in scholarly articles.

       d. Recognizes that existing information can be combined with original thought, experimentation, and/or analysis to produce new information and insights into society, social phenomena, aspects of culture, and social theories.

4. Consider the costs and benefits of acquiring the needed information.

Key behaviors for success:

a.   Determines the availability of needed information and broadens the search beyond local resources to obtain materials not at one's own library or institution or online. **Examples :** borrows material on interlibrary loan; uses resources at other locations including abroad; and obtains images, videos, text, or sound.

       b. Defines a realistic overall plan and timeline to acquire the needed information, do the field work, analyze data, or learn new skills.

       Ethical, sociocultural, and legal dimensions and behaviors:
       c. Identifies and discusses issues related to free vs. fee-based access to information, including pertinent inequalities of access in the U.S. and abroad.

Standard Two – Access needed information effectively, efficiently, and ethically

What the student needs to do:

1. Select the most appropriate sources and databases for accessing and obtaining the needed information.

Key behaviors for success:

a.	Identifies and selects article databases, library catalogs, data sets, and other sources most appropriate to the information need. **Examples:** discipline-specific databases such as *Anthropology Plus, AnthroSource, eHRAF, Sociological Abstracts, Social Sciences Citation Index, Population Index, Family & Society Studies Worldwide, Annual Review of Anthropology, Annual Review of Sociology, National Criminal Justice Service Abstracts, Ethnic NewsWatch, Bibliography of Data-Related Literature*; local library catalogs; *American Factfinder* for U.S. Census data; the *NORC General Social Survey* and others from the ICPSR; and research guides for anthropology and sociology on academic library Web sites.

   b.	Distinguishes between databases that provide up to date *indexing* of a variety of journals, book chapters, dissertations, and conference proceedings in anthropology and sociology (such as those listed in Two 1.a), databases that provide the *online text* of journals from many disciplines but which are typically limited in date and/or scope for anthropology and sociology (**examples:** *JSTOR, Expanded Academic ASAP, Google Scholar*), and the companies, organizations, or systems that simply *license* the databases or online text of journals (**examples:** CSA, EBSCO, Sage).

   c.	Accesses scholarly materials published in non-traditional ways. **Examples**: peer-reviewed journals freely available on the Web found in the *Directory of Open Access Journals*; preprint and postprint collections on university Web sites (e.g., *eScholarship Repository* of the California Digital Library and other open access sites); reliable data sets and archaeological site reports that are freely available on the Web.

   d.	Understands when it is appropriate to use Web search engines to supplement anthropology, sociology, and other social science databases, and distinguishes between the types of sources one can expect to find with these different tools. Understands when Web search engines are not the appropriate means for finding the type of information needed. **Examples**: Uses *Google UncleSam* to search for government obesity statistics; uses *Google* to locate examples of policies on different social networking sites; uses *Sociological Abstracts* to find scholarly articles and checks *Google Scholar* for additional materials; does not simply collect Web sites on a topic when the need is for scholarly and authoritative information, but searches for articles and books in appropriate databases and catalogs (such as in Two.1.a).

   Ethical, sociocultural, and legal dimensions and behaviors:
   e.	Knows about and complies with laws and university rules on access to information resources, and storage and dissemination of text, data, images, field notes, and visual and audio works.

2.	Construct, implement, and refine well-designed search strategies that use a variety of methods to find information.

Key behaviors for success:

a.	Uses appropriate sociological and anthropological terminology for searching databases, recognizing the different effects of using keywords, synonyms, and vocabulary from the database's own particular list of subject indexing terms.

   b.	Creates and uses effective search strategies in multiple anthropology and sociology databases (examples in Two.1.a) using advanced search features, such as Boolean operators, truncation, and proximity searches; refines searches as needed later in the process to obtain additional or missing information.

   c.	Searches for and finds books, scholarly journals, and sources appropriate to the inquiry, such as surveys, interviews, text from online communities, multimedia sources, and data; and seeks out knowledgeable individuals in the library, academic department, and community as part of the research plan.

3.	Keep track of the information and its sources.

Key behaviors for success:

a.   Produces accurate citations and reference lists using the documentation style of the American Anthropological Association, the American Sociological Association, or the American Psychological Association.

b.   Records systematically all pertinent citation information for future reference. **Examples:** uses a citation management system such as EndNote or RefWorks, a Word file, or note cards.

Ethical, sociocultural, and legal dimensions and behaviors:

c.   Knows when citation of sources is necessary in order to respect authors' intellectual property rights and accurately indicate where the words and ideas of others have been used.

Standard Three – Evaluate information and its sources critically; Incorporate selected information into knowledge base and value system

What the student needs to do:

1. Summarize the main ideas to be extracted from the information gathered and synthesize main ideas to construct new concepts.

Key behaviors for success :

2.

a. Selects the main ideas from texts (books, scholarly articles, interview transcripts, ethnographies, etc.), chooses concepts to restate in his/her own words, and identifies verbatim material that can be appropriately quoted.

b. Recognizes interrelationships among concepts, social theories, field observations, and other data and combines them into potentially useful primary statements with supporting evidence.

c. Utilizes technologies (such as audio or visual equipment, spreadsheets, and statistical and software packages) for studying the interaction of ideas and other phenomena. **Examples:** uses software to analyze migration patterns or census data; uses equipment to record or listen to videos and sound recordings of populations studied.

3. Apply appropriate criteria for evaluating both the information and its source.

Key behaviors for success :

a.   Examines and compares information from various sources in order to ascertain the reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, and point of view or bias of a given source. **Examples**: Compares the information in a*Wikipedia* article to the information from a scholarly encyclopedia that has an authoritative editorial board; describes the relative value of different kinds of Web sites (e.g. corporate, scholarly, personal) or different kinds of articles (popular, news, scholarly) on the same topic, in terms of authority and content.

b. Recognizes that a large quantity of database search results or information signifies nothing about their quality, and that it is necessary to evaluate the suitability of sources for the project. **Example**: Hundreds of news articles from*Ethnic NewsWatch* might be less valuable for a given term paper than a handful of scholarly journal articles from*AnthroSource.*

c. Seeks differing viewpoints in alternative databases, books, Web sites, and articles, always evaluating the source of the information or argument, and determines whether to incorporate or reject viewpoints encountered.

d. Analyzes the structure and logic of supporting arguments or methodology within an anthropology or sociology framework, understands what constitutes valid evidence in the discipline, analyzes the reasonableness of the conclusions, and recognizes prejudice, deception, or manipulation.

e. Recognizes the cultural, physical, or other context within which the information was created and accessed, and understands the impact of context on interpreting the information. **Examples:** questions and understands whether the researcher had full access to pertinent government sources or to the population studied, whether the researcher encountered censorship or culturally imposed limitations in asking questions or gathering information, for whose benefit the research was produced, and which data or viewpoint might be missing from the analysis.

Ethical, sociocultural, and legal dimensions and behaviors:

f. Identifies and discusses issues related to censorship and freedom of speech in the U.S. and in countries/cultures being studied.

g. Identifies and discusses issues related to privacy and security of information. **Examples:** cases in which field notes can be subpoenaed or government funding organizations can demand primary research data.

h. Identifies and discusses the social consequences of new forms of information technology. **Examples**: problems of unequal access to information, the uses and meaning of online communities, and the Internet as a tool for doing ethnography.

3. Compare new knowledge with prior knowledge to determine the value added, contradictions, or other unique characteristics of the information and take steps to reconcile differences.

Key behaviors for success :

a. Maintains a record of the information seeking process in order to explain and evaluate the research conducted.

b. Determines whether the information that was collected satisfies the research need, and selects information that provides evidence for the topic, integrates new information, and draws conclusions based upon information gathered.

c. Seeks expert opinion through interviews, email, etc. with anthropology and sociology faculty and practitioners, and subject-area specialists in the library to validate sufficiency and interpretation of the information.

d. Reformulates initial query if necessary based on findings, and reviews and extends search strategies for additional concepts or broader synthesis. **Examples:** searches databases in related fields such as linguistics, education, political science, ethnomusicology, biology, geography, ethnic or local area studies, and psychology.

Standard Four – Use information effectively and ethically to accomplish a specific purpose

What the student needs to do:

1. Apply new information and research results to the planning, creation, and revision of a particular project, paper, or presentation.

Key behaviors for success:

a. Organizes and integrates content, quotations, and paraphrasing in a manner that supports the purposes and format of the product or presentation. **Examples:** prepares outlines, oral reports, drafts, videos; uses presentation software; and manipulates/transfers digital text, images, and data for the presentation or product.
b. Reflects on past successes, failures, and alternative strategies for integrating new and prior information and creating the presentation. **Example:** rewrites the text of an original presentation on Navaho weaving to make it more accessible to a general audience, adding sound files and images to augment the content.

   Ethical, sociocultural, and legal dimensions and behaviors:
c. Demonstrates an understanding of what constitutes plagiarism and does not represent work attributable to others as one's own.
d. Represents team member contributions in collaborative projects accurately.

2. Communicate the project, paper, or presentation effectively to others.

Key behaviors for success:

a. Chooses a communication medium, format, and style that best supports the purposes of the product or performance and the intended audience. **Example:** integrates maps, photos of artifacts, and texts of field diaries into a PowerPoint package on a specific archaeological site for a class presentation or to mount on the Internet to educate local residents about a salvage project involving a new highway.
b. Uses a range of formats and technologies, incorporating principles of design and communication, in presenting a research project. **Example:** creates a study of Polynesian music integrating sound bites and links to photographic images from HRAF and contemporary performances.

   Ethical, sociocultural, and legal dimensions and behaviors :
c. Demonstrates an understanding of intellectual property, copyright, and fair use of copyrighted material. Obtains and posts necessary permissions from authors and organizations where needed to use copyrighted material in writing or presentations.
d. Shares the product of the research, e.g., the report, data, or ethnography, with groups and sponsors in keeping with ethical principles of the AAA or ASA.

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