

INFORMATION LITERACY

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS!

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INFORMATION LITERACY: CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

The term Information Literacy (IL) was first coined by Paul Zurkowski in 1974 when he introduced this concept in his seminal work, "The Information Service Environment Relationships and Priorities. Related Paper No. 5".¹ This was the start of a new vision that has been transformative for information ecologies over the last 50 years.

In his paper, Zurkowski introduced how to think about information in a new way and presented several visionary ideas related to information, information literacy, and the importance of an information-literate society. He called for an information-literate global citizenry realized and evidenced by how humans interact with technology and information for information content creation, organization, preservation, and the ethical use of information in both private and public sectors.²

Shenton reminds us of Alvin Toffler's text titled "Future Shock," where similar themes are addressed.³ Though Toffler is not as well known within the information science community, Zurkowski and Toffler share big ideas of the essentiality for people to "learn how to learn" (informed learning/metacognition), and that using information in the 21st century requires critical thinking and knowing how to evaluate information. These metacognitive understandings are essential for an information-literate society. Transdisciplinary in nature, IL has been and should continue to be described and identified more explicitly across disciplines and published for a broad readership. This is important for the

continued foregrounding of IL concepts and its disciplinary function.⁴

Zurkowski's legal training situates his lens of understanding with the implicit importance of an information-literate society. This understanding became part of the impetus of his writing and declarations. He aspired for "a major national program to achieve universal IL by 1984."⁵ Though this aspirational challenge has not yet been fully realized, progress toward achieving his vision has been made. Over the last 50 years, a great emergence towards the recognition of the importance of IL in both the private and public sectors, both nationally and internationally, has been achieved. His legacy continues with the work of the [Universal Information Literacies Association \(UiLA\)](#), led by Jeffrey Kelly.

Badke (2010) notes how the articulated concepts by Zurkowski have shaped IL since his seminal work was published.⁶ The concepts presented by Zurkowski include:

- Information is not knowledge until it is manipulated, or "molded."
- Knowing how to handle information so that it can be used effectively to solve problems is the essence of information literacy.
- Information can never be an end in itself but has to be enlisted as a tool to accomplish a purpose.

IL Maturing

From its foundations, IL has progressed and there is evidence that it is now emerging and maturing as a discipline. Aligned with early visions, information

professionals continue to work to create a global information-literate society. IL groups continue to emerge and grow - often associated with larger information professional associations.

Here is a short list of examples:

- International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) - [IL Section](#)
- American Library Association (ALA), [Association of College and Research Libraries \(ACRL\)](#)
- [IL Association \(InLitAs\)](#) - an organization that hosts the [blog](#). The purpose of this international association is to promote IL research.
- [CILIP- the United Kingdom \(UK\) Library and Information Association](#) - an organization in the UK that has a dedicated [IL group](#), which organizes the [Librarians' IL Annual Conference \(LILAC\) Conference](#), publishes the [Journal of Information Literacy](#), and maintains the [CILIP IL website](#).

Since 1974 the growth of IL organizations has provided opportunities for research and practices to be shared within IL communities and expanding to information professions generally. The [LILAC Conference](#) and the [European Conference on IL \(ECIL\)](#) take place every two years, allowing researchers and practitioners to present and share ideas on the progress of information literacy-related topics.

In South Africa, the [International Conference on IL \(ICIL\) - Africa Conference](#) is hosted and is described as a "sister" conference to ECIL. In the United States (US), there

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1st ECIL Conference 2013 - Paul Zurkowski Autographs

are several conferences highlighting IL work including the Lifelong IL Conference in California ([LILI Conference](#)), the [Library Orientation Exchange \(LOEX\) Conference](#), and the [Georgia International Conference on Information Literacy](#). In Canada, the [Workshop for Instruction in Library Use \(WILU\) Conference](#) engages IL professionals to share their work and progress. Conference proceedings and other publications by these organizations and conference committees provide further depth to the scholarship of information literacy.

The IL community has two dedicated journals: the [Journal of Information Literacy](#), and [Communications in Information Literacy](#), for publishing research, practitioner work, and the convergence of research informing practice and practice informing research.

In a less formal environment, blogs can provide outstanding coverage of various IL events, webinars, policy updates, and works in

progress, such as [The IL Weblog](#) hosted by Sheila Webber with contributor Pam McKinney, and [Library Professional Development](#) hosted by Courtney Milnar.

The public policy education and government arenas have also recognized IL as essential for a democratic and informed citizenry. In the US, some states have implemented legislation requiring information literacy/digital literacy instruction in the K-12 sector. New Jersey was the first state to implement this legislation.⁷ This trend continues to grow in the US with 19 state legislatures taking some form of action regarding IL education.⁸ The UK is leading in this policy initiative trend as well with Media and IL as a top agenda item for education.⁹

In the public sphere, an IL website was recently made available by the US federal government: informationliteracy.gov. The goal of this initiative is to coordinate a collective integration and participation of various government departments led by the Institute for

Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to explicate resources and educational tools for the IL community in the US. This initiative intends to provide education, identify support structures, and more seamlessly facilitate shared resources for IL enhancements in communities and educational organizations.

On the international front, one example that provides recognition of the maturing of IL include the important 2005 Alexandria Proclamation, which affirmed the importance of IL and lifelong learning as “the beacons of the Information Society, illuminating the courses to development, prosperity and freedom.”¹⁰

The 2021 IFLA Trends report includes trend #18, “Information Literacy Recognised and Valued,” which states: *Moreover, developing IL can also be a competitive boost, ensuring that people are better able to navigate the digital world in general, and be more effective and productive in their work. Indeed, faced with the abundance of information available today, it could even become a key part of education from a young age, in parallel with efforts to broaden younger people’s horizons and openness to the world. This could imply a place for libraries – school, university, public and beyond.*¹¹

The positive developments for IL policy by governments and support for the education sector point toward the essentiality of this knowledge for our communities and the global impact of information-literate citizens by leaders and governments. These trends give us

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reason to celebrate the vision and progress of the movement towards Zurkowski's vision for IL articulated 50 years ago.

Recognizing the 50th IL Anniversary

Organizations, publishers, educators, researchers, and others in our IL communities are recognizing the 50th IL anniversary! Here is a sampling of IL community celebrations:

The [Universal Information Literacies Association \(UiLA\)](#) is sponsoring a special event in November 2024, to celebrate this 50th anniversary and the landmark work of Paul Zurkowski.

The CILIP has started various conversations on their [blog](#) and [website](#) around the 50th Anniversary of IL and has an image and button commemorating this milestone. The Journal of IL has published a special issue, [JIL at 50: Celebrating IL's milestone anniversary](#). The issue contains seventeen articles that address the history, current scholarship, potential gaps, future trends, and IL and social change.

The Ohio State University Libraries, hosted by Jane Hammons, offered a summer series of webinars highlighting the 50th Anniversary of IL that provided discussions for the IL community to reflect and consider future directions. The videos are posted on [YouTube](#). The topics included in this series include:

- Celebrating 50 Years of Information Literacy

- Preparing Future Librarians for Instruction and Advocacy
- AI Literacy and Information Literacy
- IL and Related Literacies
- Approaches to Teaching Information Literacy
- Exploring the Teach the Teachers Approach
- IL as a Concept and Practice

IL as a Maturing Discipline

As we celebrate the maturation of IL we can also consider its place as a discipline. The Information Literacy is a Discipline (ILIAD) group suggests that IL has matured as a discipline. This recognition is important for the continued work of Zurkowski and many others who have contributed to the body of knowledge that supports and demonstrates the understanding that IL possesses the elements of an established discipline.

Webber & Johnston (2017) identify the essential elements of a discipline that IL possesses.¹² Building on their work, the ILIAD group began discussions in 2021 about how IL has emerged and matured as a discipline. The discussions and insights from those involved determined that a publication that harnesses and outlines the progressive work of the IL community would assist in developing support and understanding of how the characteristics of IL align with the elements of a discipline.

To that end, a book is in progress, with authors worldwide contributing to the collective understanding of the great work of the researchers and practitioners in the IL community. Under contract

with Facet Publishing, the IL Handbook will present entries from authors representing over 20 countries, with an advisory board of over 30 members and an executive advisory board that includes IL scholars Christine Bruce, John Budd, Bill Johnston, and Sheila Webber.

The ILIAD group has been presenting to various audiences over the last two years to introduce the concept of IL as a discipline and to get feedback from IL practitioners, researchers, academics, and educators.



What we learned, primarily through conducting polls using SLIDO polling software, is that after the presentation about disciplinary elements, there is general agreement that IL is a discipline. There is also a recognition that much work remains to understand the changes that may occur for IL educators and educational institutions once it is accepted as a discipline. However, the overarching understanding is that IL does possess the elements of a discipline as outlined by Webber and Johnston (2017) as well as by Beecher and Trowler¹³ and Biglan¹⁴.

ILIAD has upcoming presentations planned for this year. Learn more about ILIAD and their past and future presentations on our website [ILIAD-group.org](#) and consider joining our [ILIAD LinkedIn group](#)

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