

Information Literacy in the Age of Algorithms
A National Report about Preparing Students for the Next Decade

March 1, 2019

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This year, to mark the 10th anniversary of Project Information Literacy (PIL), we are releasing a special report, "Information Literacy in the Age of Algorithms," that will be co-authored by Alison Head, PIL's founding director and principal investigator, and Barbara Fister, PIL's scholar-in-residence and *Inside Higher Ed* columnist. Our 25- to 30- page report explores the challenges librarians and educators must face in preparing students to navigate information in the next decade.

When higher education first adopted information literacy as an essential educational outcome in the early 1990s, algorithm-driven tools that we so often turn to for information - Google, YouTube, Facebook - did not exist. Currently, not enough attention is paid to how profoundly our information landscape has changed. Grounded in knowledge gained from research and work on bringing technology innovation to the civic mission of libraries and, more recently, understanding the interplay of journalism, new platforms, and trust in media, this report strives to challenge educators to embrace the challenge of understanding new forms and channels of information beyond academia.

We will bring together emerging scholarship from multiple disciplines to consider today's information environment and its most defining feature — the algorithm. We will discuss how these hidden filters influence what we see and learn, and shape what we think and who we are. Moreover, we will examine how these data-driven algorithms, if unexamined and unchallenged, can threaten representative democracy and the cultivation of informed and engaged communities. With this report, Project Information Literacy, the most complete and influential source of basic research into how college students interact with information, will raise pressing questions about what students need to know today and where we go from here.

Our report will focus on three areas of inquiry: (1) What does a decade of PIL research tell us about the information skills and strategies students actually use, and what new skills students will need to ascertain the authenticity, credibility, and authority of information that comes in new forms, mediated through new and ever-changing distribution channels? (2) How aware are students of the black-box algorithms that may be dramatically influencing the information they encounter,

impacting their ability to distinguish truth from falsehoods as well as responsible news reporting and analysis from clickbait and propaganda? (3) What must higher education do to prepare students to understand our new media landscape so they will be able to participate in sharing and creating information responsibly as citizens in a changing and challenged world?

We will gather and analyze qualitative data from fall 2019 focus groups with 100+ undergraduates and faculty members at six U.S. campuses to derive deeper insights into their awareness and concerns about the effect algorithms are having on knowledge, and extrapolate what that means for teaching and learning. Our report will make recommendations for how key stakeholders -- educators, technologists, and news and information producers -- can more effectively promote information literacy in the age of algorithms, and better prepare students as information users, sharers, and creators in the coming decade.

As we finalize our sponsorships and plan of work, we will be updating this document with details. At this point, we have a sponsorship and support from Harvard Graduate School of Education. If you would like to discuss our plans further, please let us know. We'd welcome a conversation to talk with you about this exciting pivot we are making to push our communities to imagine possibilities for what information literacy could look like in this new and challenging era. ❖