Chapter 5
Multimodal Information Literacy in Higher Education:
Critical Thinking, Technology, and Technical Skill

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses technology in education, multimodal texts, and information literacy in a STEM research-focused university setting. Students produce multimodal content in first year composition classes, but composition instructors lack the skills required to teach students multimedia technology. Librarians respond to the needs of the faculty and students they support. Library instruction takes place within the composition class (course-integrated or "one-shot" instruction) or in a multimedia classroom at the

library. The librarians bring technical skills as well as a grounding in information literacy, and their instruction increases students' written, sonic, visual and data literacy. As a result, students become more savvy content consumers as well as creators.

INTRODUCTION

Information literacy is a lifelong skill developed through experiencing a range of media formats and learning to think critically about the content these sources provide (Abid, 2004). The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), the higher education association for librarians, establishes standards and practices for academic libraries, including guidelines and outcomes for information literacy instruction. Before the explosion of online information in the late 20th and 21st century, library content was primarily textual, and academic libraries provided bibliographic instruction, that is, teaching students how to use library resources such as indexes, catalogs and finding tools. Even as ACRL developed competency standards for information literacy (2000), these focused on information seeking and an outline of tasks and performance measures to assess student skills. The 2016 ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (ACRL Framework) begins to widen the definition of information literacy, seeking not only to develop skills used in college classes, but also to prepare students to use information beyond their college career. Additionally, it recognizes students' role as information creators The ACRL Framework also seeks to establish greater librarian-faculty collaboration, so that librarians become partners with faculty across disciplines in developing student research and scholarship practices.

At the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech), students begin learning how to communicate within their disciplines in their first year, in English composition courses that emphasize multimodal communication. Most English 1101 and 1102 instructors are postdoctoral fellows engaged through the Marion L. Brittain Postdoctoral Fellowship. The Brittain Fellows build courses around appealing themes, and students complete multimedia assignments and work in a digital environment. The Writing and Communication Program (WCP) emphasizes the importance of students as savvy content creators. Students have many platforms to communicate and share ideas through social media. The increasingly seamless integration of many different media formats into digital content available on a mobile device gives almost endless opportunities for consumption and creation. Any student with a smartphone can post a video of themselves giving an opinion or, as recent events have demonstrated, can broadcast police encounters, protests, meetings, and other events in real-time. However, this capability does not mean that they use rhetorical tools effectively or critically. In collaboration with Georgia Tech teaching faculty, the Georgia Tech Library teaches conceptual and technical skills in multimodal formats.

This chapter will address technology in education, multimodal texts, and information literacy in a STEM research-focused university setting, using the Georgia Tech Writing and Communication Program and the Georgia Tech Library instruction program as a case study. Librarians and composition instructors have a shared set of goals and a history of collaborating; the authors will discuss how librarians respond when composition instruction emphasizes multimodal communication. The authors will discuss how the definition of information literacy changes when the information is audio, visual or data. As librarians who provide expertise in technology, including multimedia software, data visualization, audio and

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