

Report: LPSS Political Science Research Competency Guidelines Survey

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The LPSS Political Science Research Competency Guidelines survey was proposed in spring 2013 to gather section member feedback for a general update of the 2008 Political Science Research Competency Guidelines. However, in light of a major, pending revision of the ACRL Information Literacy Standards, the survey was refocused. Awaiting release of the new ACRL Standards, this survey instead solicited members' views on several significant, developing information literacy areas. These survey results will ultimately serve to inform the updated LPSS Research Competency Guidelines.

Survey Overview

Drawing from current ACRL materials, preliminary reports on the pending ACRL revisions, and general developments in academic librarianship, three areas were selected for attention:

- 1) **Data Literacy** (data and statistics)
- 2) **Visual literacy** (graphics and images)
- 3) **Creative Literacy** (creating original works; e.g. web pages and mashups)

For each of these areas, survey respondents were first asked to indicate the importance of information literacy efforts in that area. Each of these "lead-in" questions was then followed by a set of open- and closed-ended questions designed to more specifically characterize views on the area. Basic demographic information was also collected (the survey instrument is attached to the end of this report).

Survey Administration

The survey was administered through the Qualtrics online survey platform, and solicitations were distributed to LPSS section members via the LPSS-L listserv, ALA Connect, and the LPSS Facebook page. The survey was open for responses between June 26 and July 22, 2013.

Survey Results

A total of thirty-six responses were received. While we did not calculate a precise response rate—since the survey was publicized in several venues, it would be difficult to determine the exact size of the survey population—the number of responses was obviously low. Still, patterns in our findings were consistent enough to suggest some general characteristics and sentiments among librarians and others in LPSS-related fields.

Demographics

Demographic questions received fewer responses than the subject questions, but the results were sufficient to characterize our sample. Most respondents were librarians (23 of 26, or 88.5%), along with one library staff member and two respondents who selected the “Other” occupational category.

Among the librarians, primary work responsibilities were spread across three areas; Reference (27.3 percent), Instruction (9.1 percent), and Collection Management (13.6 percent), with half of the sample (50.0 percent), indicating that they had multiple responsibilities.

All but one respondent was employed at a four-year public or private college or university.

The majority indicated that political science was their primary subject area (54.5 percent), while general social science was next (22.7 percent), followed by government information (13.6 percent), and Law (4.5 percent). “Other” completed the categories (4.5 percent).

Importance of General Areas

Among our respondents, data literacy was clearly perceived as the most important of the three areas that were examined:

Table 1.
(Percent Indicating Importance of Each Area)

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
Data Literacy	4.0	8.0	88.0
Visual Literacy	14.8	59.3	25.9
Creative Literacy	40.0	40.0	20.0

On a 1-3 scale (not important, somewhat important, very important) 88 percent of our survey respondents viewed this area as very important—obviously, far higher than the 25.9 and 20.0 percent figures for the visual literacy and creative literacy areas respectively. Adding in the “somewhat important” category, fully 96 percent of respondents ascribed some degree of importance to data literacy, vs. 85.2 and 60 percent for the other two general areas.

It is also interesting that 40 percent of respondents rated creative literacy as not important. Since we presume there would be some reluctance to label an area as entirely unimportant, we suspect that this relatively high figure may be the clearest declaration of the low emphasis placed on this particular area.

Area Emphases

Data Literacy

Among those respondents who felt that data literacy was important (somewhat or very important), the follow-up questions on this area showed the percentage of respondents who believed that a set of particular skills or abilities should be addressed in the Research Competency Guidelines:

Table 2.
(Percent Indicating a Skill/Ability Should be Addressed in Guidelines)

Locating Data Sets	91.7
Understanding Common Data Formats	79.2
Knowledge of Important Political Science Data Resources	91.7
Using Data Analysis Software	81.8

Data Literacy: Open-Ended Comments

The most frequently occurring themes involved the need for training on data citation, and in particular, training on data visualization techniques.

Visual Literacy

Among those respondents who felt that visual literacy was somewhat or very important, the follow-up questions on this area showed the percentage of respondents who believed that a set of particular skills or abilities should be addressed in the Research Competency Guidelines:

Table 3.
(Percent Indicating a Skill/Ability Should be Addressed in Guidelines)

Finding and Accessing Politically-Oriented Images and Visual Media	73.9
Interpreting and Analyzing the Meanings of Politically-Oriented Images and Visual Media	73.9
Evaluating Politically-Oriented Images and their Sources for Partisan, Ideological or Other Biases	87.0

Visual Literacy: Open-Ended Comments

In this area, the most frequently occurring themes involved the need for training students in the interpretation and evaluation of graphs and charts, and in data visualization techniques.

Creative Literacy

Among those respondents who felt that creative literacy was somewhat or very important, the follow-up questions on this area showed the percentage of respondents who believed that a set of particular skills or abilities should be addressed in the Research Competency Guidelines:

Table 4.
(Percent Indicating a Skill/Ability Should be Addressed in Guidelines)

Creating Web Pages	80.0%
Creating Videos	73.3%
Creating Mashups by Combining a Variety of Text and Visual Elements	73.3%

Creative Literacy: Open-Ended Comments

There were relatively few comments in this section. Other than one comment recommending training in audio podcasts, and another comment listing citation of creative literacy materials, respondents most commonly expressed uncertainty over the definition of this area or the topics it was trying to address.

Discussion and Conclusions

Despite our small sample size, our results did outline several clear patterns. Again, data literacy was seen as the most important area, and a strikingly high percentage of respondents endorsed including it in the updated LPSS Political Science Research Competency Guidelines.

We suspect that this view reflects the rising library interest in data topics, as well as the heavy social science subject focus among survey participants. As previously indicated, 77.2% of respondents held a library position in political science or social science.

Conversely, we suspect that the apparently limited interest in creative literacy indicates, in part, some lack of familiarity with this area. This was seen in the confusion expressed in the open ended comments. Interest in facilitating skills to create materials was high among those respondents who did see this area as important.

More generally, respondents also indicated an interest in integration and synergy, as a number of open-ended responses offered comments supporting more than one type of literacy; e.g. data visualization, which combines data and visual literacies.

Similarly, though this point was not emphasized explicitly, there seemed to be interest in ensuring that LPSS literacy programs are focused on the actual stuff of politics—such as campaigns and other political areas—rather than just content-free guidelines which echo the more general skills described in ACRL Information Literacy Standards. In other words, LPSS Guidelines should be more than “ACRL standards with political adjectives.”

Finally, it is important to note that these results tell us less about law librarianship than we would like. With only 4.5 percent of survey respondents coming from this field, additional work will be needed to learn more about law librarians’ views on advancing information literacy.

2013 LPSS/ACRL Library Instruction Committee Survey

A. Data Literacy

Currently, there are no ACRL standards specifically addressing “data literacy.” However, since political science relies heavily on datasets of various kinds, and since data librarianship is receiving increasing attention, this may be an area that could usefully be addressed.

Q1) Do you feel it is important to include data literacy in the political science guidelines?

Not	Somewhat	Highly	Extremely
Important	Important	Important	Important

Follow up Question—(for Respondents who answered that Data Literacy is “Highly” or “Extremely” Important to Question 1)

Q2) What kinds of data competencies should be addressed in the political science guidelines?
Check all that apply:

- Locating data sets
- Understanding common data formats
- Knowledge of important political science data resources
- Using data analysis software
- Other _____

Q3) Do you have any other suggestions for data literacy approaches, or for data literacy elements or competencies to include in the political science guidelines?

B. Creative Literacy

The ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards Review Task Force has recommended the inclusion of standards that encourage patrons to create and disseminate original digital content. (http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/standards/ils_recomm.pdf). Accordingly, this may be an area that could usefully be addressed.

Q4) Do you feel it is important to include creative literacy elements in the political science guidelines?

Not Important	Somewhat Important	Highly Important	Extremely Important
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Follow up—(for Respondents who answered that creative literacy is “Highly” or “Extremely” Important to Question 4)

Q5) What kinds of creative literacy competencies should be addressed in the political science guidelines? Check all that apply:

- Creating web pages
- Creating videos
- Creating “mash-ups” by combining a variety of text or visual elements
- Other _____

Q6) Do you have any other suggestions for creative literacy approaches, or for creative literacy elements or competencies to include in the political science guidelines?

C. Visual Literacy

In October, 2011 the ACRL approved the inclusion of visual literacy in the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards (<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/visualliteracy>). Accordingly, this may be an area that could usefully be addressed.

Q7) Do you feel it is important to include visual literacy in the political science guidelines?

Not Important	Somewhat Important	Highly Important	Extremely Important
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Follow up—(for Respondents who answered that visual literacy is “Highly” or “Extremely” Important to Question 7)

Q8) What kinds of visual literacy competencies should be addressed in the political science guidelines? Check all that apply:

- Finding and accessing politically-oriented images and visual media
- Interpreting and analyzing the meanings of politically-oriented images and visual media
- Evaluating politically-oriented images and their sources for partisan, ideological or other biases
- Other _____

Q9) Do you have any other suggestions for visual literacy approaches, or for visual literacy elements or competencies to include in political science guidelines?

Q10) Do you have any other general comments, or suggestions for other important areas to cover in the revised *Political Science Research Competency Guidelines*?

II. Demographics

Q11) Which of the following best describes your primary professional position?

- Librarian
- Library Staff
- Other _____

Follow up—(for Respondents who answered “Librarian” or “Library Staff” to Question 11)

Q12) Which of the following best describes your primary area of librarianship?

- Reference
- Instruction
- Collection Management
- Other _____

Follow up—(for Respondents who answered “Librarian” or “Library Staff” to Question 11)

Q13) Which of the following best describes your primary subject area?

- Political Science
- Law
- Government Information
- General Social Science
- Other _____

Q14) Which of the following best describes the nature of your workplace?

- Public Four-Year College or University
- Private Four-Year College or University
- Two-Year Community College
- Other _____