

# Fostering Virtue-Driven Information Literacy

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**ABSTRACT** This conversation group emerged from the discussions of the Roundtable for Virtue-Driven Information Literacy (VIL) formed in 2022. The presenters defined VIL, emphasizing intellectual virtues and the cultivation of virtuous intellectual habits in the pursuit of truth and the potential benefits of VIL as a foundation for information literacy in academic libraries. Participants identified the value of VIL in providing a theoretical framework for information-literacy instruction, motivating students, and connecting library initiatives with faith-based worldviews. Breakout groups also discussed the practical challenges associated with VIL implementation. The presenters concluded with suggestions for resources and an invitation for collaboration among librarians.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2022, six instruction librarians from four Christian institutions formed a virtual roundtable focused on virtue and information literacy. Over six virtual sessions, the librarians discussed several topics centering on two questions: Should information literacy be approached differently in a faith-based institution? If so, what does that look like? *Virtue-driven Information literacy* (VIL) emerged as a unifying approach to instruction. Four of the librarians brought this idea to the hybrid conversation group, aiming to foster a meaningful dialogue among the attendees, gather additional perspectives on the topic of virtue and information literacy, and gain understand-

ing as to what research and resources could be helpful in librarians pursuing VIL.

## DISCUSSION

The session was organized around a series of questions, aiming to first gain an understanding of the audience, and then moving deeper into the topic of VIL. Participants responded on Padlet, offering both virtual and in-person attendees the opportunity to engage.

*What virtues resonate with your IL practice?* There were a wide range of responses, but several themes emerged, including curiosity, integrity, and humility.

*Does your institution currently do anything to integrate virtue and IL?* As expected, responses ranged from no integration to fully integrated programs, with most responses landing somewhere in the middle.

After the ice-breaker questions, the presenters gave context for the discussion by answering these questions:

*What is VIL?* For the Roundtable, VIL is an attempt to bring together faith life and scholarly life by identifying and leaning into familiar values within information literacy.

A virtue is an excellence of character. In the context of VIL, we emphasize intellectual virtues rather than traditional moral virtues as we seek to focus on our thinking habits, including the way we engage in information-seeking, rather than moral actions. According to Jason Baehr, virtuous intellectual character is demonstrated by “a deep and abiding love for truth [and] a desire to understand things as they truly are,” a description that corresponds well with the goals of authentic research (Baehr 2013, 11–12).

Conversely, when teaching students about virtue, we should identify intellectual vices, such as apathy, laziness, and pride. By acknowledging these vices, we can highlight the importance of cultivating virtuous intellectual habits in our pursuit of truth specifically in the context of research.

Our hope for VIL instruction is that it will resonate more deeply with students, beyond acquiring practical skills and even beyond gaining conceptual understanding to instilling meaningful purpose and growth.

*What is the place of virtue in faith-based, academic libraries?* As librarians at distinctly Christian institutions, our understanding of

specific virtues is rooted in the Christian faith. We believe that learning is a means to love God, know Him better, and love our neighbors. Therefore, intellectual virtues such as open-mindedness, curiosity, and humility play a crucial role in how we seek and use information to uncover truth, and they should have a place in our teaching about those behaviors.

But we also feel that a focus on virtue can infuse the work of librarians at any institution. In a recent interview, the theologian Miroslav Volf pointed out that we've lost a "public sense of what the good life is, the question of the good life has very been much privatized" and the good life is even a matter of taste that we can change at will. One of the benefits of a virtue emphasis is that it provides a unifying framework around which we and our students can organize our intellectual endeavors.

This idea was echoed by Ezra Choe in his presentation, "The Possibility of Virtue Ethics in Information Literacy: Intellectual Virtues and the Consideration of Truth" (2023). Virtue offers something of a shared vision across many cultures and religious traditions, or even no religious traditions. The emphasis on virtue presents captivating and inclusive opportunities, countering the growing weariness surrounding alternative attempts at unifying frameworks, whether they are political or of other natures.

After hearing this perspective from the presenters, participants were directed back to Padlet to think about how VIL could benefit their own work.

*What is the value of VIL?* Participants pointed out that VIL could provide better theoretical framework for IL instruction, motivation and relevance for the students, and a clearer connection to faith-based worldviews and institutional missions.

The discussion then moved to practical matters as the presenters discussed the state of VIL at their own institutions. These descriptions showcased both the potential applications and the challenges associated with VIL. Some institutions exhibited a strong integration of virtue and faith within their IL missions but faced a shortage of well-defined IL-related opportunities. On the other hand, another institution demonstrated a clear integration of IL within their curriculum but lack a pronounced emphasis on virtues.

Finally, the group divided into three discussion groups to discuss remaining questions and issues, including two in-person groups and one online:

*What challenges or issues have you encountered or do you foresee with this approach?* Among the responses were common IL issues, such as balancing virtue content with the practical limitations of one-shot sessions or few instructional opportunities. Additionally, some participants highlighted the resistance for students to be open-minded and moving beyond looking for sources with which they already agree.

*What tools or resources would be useful to you in pursuing an integration of virtue and information literacy?* Again, practical concerns emerged, such as time, money, and institutional influence. Additionally, one participant noted the need for a “gameful design” pointing to the need to make content engaging for students. Many participants noted the usefulness of thinking through these topics with other librarians.

## CONCLUSION

VIL is an emerging approach with much potential for libraries at faith-based institutions to better align with institutional missions; additionally, students at all institutions can benefit from the motivation to be virtuous researchers. Yet, these benefits come with distinct challenges, and ongoing collaboration between librarians across institutions can facilitate a role in creating solutions. The presenters closed by sharing links to resources (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MmdPlJSZuOxmPoMWzzkVXB-v4mL5ftc4Fy2RPajGz6A/edit?usp=sharing>) that have been fueled by their own discussions, and they encouraged interested librarians to submit contact information to encourage future connections and collaborations.

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