



Defining AI Literacy

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The rapid spread of generative AI has led to widespread calls for integrating AI literacy into postsecondary education. Libraries and librarians have unique expertise in the information environment and are key providers of instruction, services, and resources in data, digital, and information literacies. Many libraries reasonably see themselves as having a critical role to play in AI literacy as well and are making investments accordingly. Likewise, teaching and learning professionals have deep knowledge about the intersection of pedagogy and technology that can guide faculty as they work to improve their students' AI literacy.

But what, exactly, is AI literacy, and what is its relationship to other forms of information literacy? How might well-established frameworks like the ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education be adapted and revised to ensure that students gain the skills they will need to engage critically in civic life and build successful careers? How can libraries, centers for teaching and learning, and other university units support AI literacy for students and faculty on campus?

Following a year of successful engagement with 58 institutions, Ithaka S+R is organizing a short-term cohort project, starting this summer, for colleges and universities to consider how existing information literacy frameworks can be adapted or revised to reflect AI-driven transformations in the information economy. Each participating institution will work in collaboration with Ithaka S+R and in conversation with other cohort members to understand the changing information practices and needs of students and instructors, and identify how libraries and other university units can weave AI literacy into their existing operations, leveraging programs or initiatives that center on information, digital, or metaliteracy.

How will the project work?

Ithaka S+R will select approximately 15 colleges and universities with deep commitments to promoting AI literacy as a core learning outcome to participate in the cohort. Each participating institution will appoint two to three individuals to serve as the local team. The local teams should include at least one representative from the library but may also include members from other relevant university units such as centers for teaching and learning.

Participants will identify and prioritize core aspects of AI literacy at a series of virtual convenings. Each local team will engage instructors and students through focus groups on their

campuses to gather concerns and needs. All participants will convene to ideate tangible solutions to the challenges and opportunities identified in focus groups. Throughout the project, Ithaka S+R will share emerging themes and examples from the cohort with stakeholders, share insights from our previous AI literacy cohorts, and provide training and support.

Project Timeline

Phase One: Defining AI Literacy (July 2026)

At two virtual workshops, teams will work in partnership to refine their research agendas. The first workshop will focus on defining AI literacy, drawing on frameworks from ACRL, UNESCO, and DEC, as well as other emerging AI literacy frameworks. At the second virtual workshop, we will identify and prioritize areas of emphasis for the research phase of the project. We will also discuss two methodological approaches to data collection, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. *Each team will decide which of those methodologies they will use for data collection.*

Ithaka S+R will create and refine four primary instruments in the form of student and instructor focus groups and interview guides. We will provide opportunities for one-on-one consulting to finalize the instruments to fit specific institutional needs or goals. Ithaka S+R will also provide training for individuals who will conduct the focus groups or interviews.

Phase Two: Qualitative Research (August-October 2026)

Each local team will conduct either of the following: a) two focus groups, of five - eight instructors and the other of five - eight students, or b) semi-structured interviews with either five - eight instructors or five - eight students.

Phase Three: Ideating Services (November 2026)

The cohort will conclude with a virtual design jam, where participants will work collaboratively to ideate on new service offerings or revisions to existing services.

What costs and resources can be anticipated?

We anticipate that the project will require approximately two weeks of FTE to be distributed across team members at their discretion. Team activities include: attending cohort-wide meetings, collaborating to identify research goals and refine research instruments, recruitment and conducting interviews or focus groups, and artifact development across the five-month project. To defray costs, including coordination, consultation, and training support, each institution will make a cost-sharing contribution of \$6,000.

What steps do I need to take?

If your institution is interested in participating, please send an expression of interest to Claire Baytas (claire.baytas@ithaka.org).

About Ithaka S+R

Through research, collaboration, and innovation, Ithaka S+R informs policy, guides strategies, and builds evidence-based tools to broaden access to postsecondary education, improve student and workforce outcomes, and advance scholarship. Ithaka S+R is part of ITHAKA, a nonprofit with a mission to improve access to knowledge and education for people around the world. We have a strong track record of working on strategy and leadership issues for research libraries across North America. Biographical information on project team members is available on our website for [Claire Baytas](#), [Chelsea McCracken](#), and [Dylan Ruediger](#). Our expertise is derived from an unparalleled understanding of the strategic directions of academic libraries and generative AI as situated inside public higher education institutions.