Boston Library Consortium Launches a Research Academy on Information Literacy

Project Information Literacy Will Lead BLC's New Effort

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Boston, Mass.—Boston Library Consortium (BLC) has partnered with Project Information Literacy (PIL), a nonprofit research institute, to develop and lead the innovative new BLC Research Academy on information literacy research and assessment. The nine-month professional development program will enroll 12 Fellows, drawn from the BLC's New England-based public and private universities, liberal arts colleges, state and special research libraries. A virtual Information Session about the new academy will be held Tuesday, May 4, 2021, 11 a.m. ET - noon ET.

“The BLC member libraries have identified a critical need to strengthen assessment and data analysis skills and build capacity for research,” said Charlie Barlow, BLC's Executive Director. “The partnership with Project Information Literacy, a widely recognized leader in information literacy research, will give us what we need for expanding professional development opportunities for library workers across the consortium.”

PIL's Founder and Director, Dr. Alison Head, will head up the virtual research academy and define the academy's programmatic goals, while continuing to run PIL. Beginning in August 2021, incoming Fellows will receive training and practice in research design, content analysis and coding, survey design, computational analysis, information visualization, and information literacy assessment.

The newly formed academy will include a series of webinars and one-to-one consultations will guide participants through refining research questions, selecting methodologies, working with IRBs, and choosing venues for dissemination in and beyond the library literature. A year-end forum in April 2022 will showcase the Fellows' Academy research projects. Dr. Head will conduct these virtual sessions along with members of the PIL team, who will share particular research skills and hands-on experiences with the Fellows.

“The new research academy and its year-end forum will encourage and equip an engaged cohort to share their expertise across the BLC and cultivate cross-institutional research collaborations,” Anne Langley, President of the BLC and Dean of the UConn Library, said of the new program.
Since 2008, PIL has conducted large-scale studies about how college students find and use information as they progress through, and beyond, their higher education years. Dr. Head and her team of PIL researchers have interviewed or surveyed almost 21,000 undergraduates at 93 public and private colleges, universities, and community colleges, as well as 34 high schools located in the U.S. All of PIL's work is open access; its datasets, reports, data collection tools, and essays have been used by librarians, educators and journalists around the world.

In a series of 12 groundbreaking scholarly research studies, Dr. Head and her team of intrepid PIL researcher-librarians have examined how U.S. college students and recent graduates use research skills and strategies for completing course work, engaging with news, and solving information problems in their everyday lives and the workplace. PIL’s 2020 algorithm research report, “Information Literacy in the Age of Algorithms,” co-written by Dr. Head, Barbara Fister, and Margy MacMillan, is the 2021 winner of ACRL's Irene Rockman Instruction Publication of the Year Award.

In 2021, PIL launched a new series of occasional series of long-form essays, The PIL Provocation Series, building on a solid decade of our original research into college students' information practices in the digital age. BLC is a Champion of the new PIL series. Barbara Fister's inaugural essay, “Lizard People in the Library,” was adapted for The Atlantic.

Dr. Head is an information scientist and social science researcher. She directs PIL and is Editor of the PIL Provocation Series, timely long-form essays on literacy in all of its manifestations, and is also a Senior Researcher at the metaLAB at Harvard. Dr. Head was awarded the inaugural S. T. Lee Lecturership in Library Leadership and Innovation from Harvard Library in 2017, and from 2011 through 2015, Alison was a Research Fellow and Faculty Associate at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University.

Founded in 1970, the BLC leads the field in creating transformative 21st century member libraries by leveraging a shared platform of information resources, expertise, and trusted relationships. The consortium sustains strategic, cost-effective partnerships to achieve collaboratively what cannot be achieved singularly. BLC's collaborative resources and services provide a rich and sustainable environment supporting teaching, research, and the creation, dissemination, and preservation of knowledge.

More about BLC is available at blc.org
More about PIL is available at projectinfolit.org

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