Faculty Information Literacy Stipend

Final Report

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Course: ASAG 1310: Word and Image
Semester: Fall 2025 (and January Term 2026)

Introduction

Many first-year and non-art-major students I have taught struggle to cultivate agential, critical, and creative research practices within an academic fine arts context. In ASAG 1310: Word and Image, students often enter with anxiety about practicing Research-creation[1] "correctly," an overreliance on digital tools, and limited experience engaging somatic modes of thinking and navigating physical sites of research, such as libraries. In response, Fine Arts Librarian Kate Alleman and I developed the Library Activation Research Protocol (Library LARP), an updated and refined iteration of the project originally proposed under a different name.

The Library LARP reframes research as an embodied, collaborative activity within a course grounded in word-image relationships, communication technologies, and Research-creation. By treating the library as an analog to networked information systems, the project supports information literacy goals related to authority, citation, and knowledge production as contextual and relational practices.

Description of the information literacy assignment or activities

The Library LARP is a live-action, game-based research protocol. Students work in small research guilds, each with a pre-set archetypal perspective that shapes how they document, interpret, and synthesize library sources, including books, magazines, sheet music, images, ephemera, and reference materials.

The project was implemented in two formats. In Fall 2025, it ran as a four-class, multi-quest sequence. In January 2026, it was redesigned as a single-class, fast-paced version with a smaller cohort and tighter structure. Based on prompts developed with Kate Alleman, and in the extended Fall 2025 version supported by myself and a TA, guilds worked collaboratively to locate sources and interpret them through the lens of their assigned archetype. Students were asked to approach sources creatively and extract meaning through close attention, documenting their findings in a collaged 12-page pitch deck, as well as recording each source in a research log.

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[1] Research-creation is a Canadian academic research framework in which creative practice functions as a primary mode of scholarly inquiry. As articulated by Natalie Loveless in How to Make Art at the End of the World, Research-creation integrates theory, making, and critical reflection as co-constitutive processes rather than separating research from artistic production.

Outside of class, I paginated and printed the pitch decks, then presented them to students as zines during a lesson on the history of zine making and as material evidence that students were capable of Research-creation. This proved to be an effective learning tool for both cohorts, helping students better understand the materiality of zines and how they might approach making them within a digitally dominant culture. This activity scaffolded directly into the course's major final project, the creation of a zine as a work of Research-creaction tied to course content and designated with a CA GE tag. It also supported later lessons that used the activity as a metaphor for the physical infrastructure of the internet and the material realities underlying digital systems.

Method of assessment

In Fall 2025, students were assessed out of five points, with credit awarded for attendance and active participation in each of the four quests, as well as collaboration on the final pitch deck or zine. Assessment emphasized good-faith engagement and collaboration rather than completeness of traditional research artifacts.

In January Term 2026, assessment used a pass, sort-of-pass, no-pass rubric adapted to the short-term format. Evaluation remained qualitative and process-based, with students maintaining a research log, documenting sources, and collaborating on a final pitch deck within a fixed class period.

Across both terms, assessment focused on participation, engagement with library resources, collaborative problem-solving, and the ability to synthesize research in visual and textual form.

Results and impact on student learning

Results varied by format and cohort, which became an important finding of the project.

In Fall 2025, outcomes were mixed but pedagogically productive. While participation and documentation were uneven, the embodied and performative structure helped students understand how research can be approached as an active behavioral process. The collaboratively produced pitch decks, which were printed and bound into zines, later served as effective instructional examples, supporting the final zine project and helping students grasp concepts related to internet infrastructure and information transmission.

In January Term 2026, outcomes were significantly stronger. With a smaller cohort and compressed format, students remained engaged, completed research logs, practiced citation, and produced cohesive pitch decks demonstrating clearer synthesis and stronger engagement with library resources. This improvement was supported by the continued refinement of the project through repeated implementation by Kate and myself.

Across both terms, students expressed enjoyment alongside initial apprehension about "doing it wrong." This tension proved productive, helping students connect course readings on Research-creation to hands-on engagement with physical media and collaborative inquiry. In many ways, the project offered an alternative to more prescriptive pedagogical models, encouraging students to take greater agency in their own learning.

Summary and next steps

This project reinforced the value of embodied, collaborative information literacy instruction integrated directly into course content. Close collaboration with Kate Alleman was central to refining the project's structure and aligning the activity with achievable learning outcomes. Our compatible approaches to thinking, communication, and collaboration have supported an ongoing dialogue around LARP and RPG-based pedagogies, which has become a generative site for both of our teaching practices.

In future iterations, I would prioritize the compressed, single-session format for larger or mixed-major cohorts, or reduce documentation requirements in longer versions. I plan to continue teaching this assignment in its refined form, potentially across courses beyond ASAG 1310: Word and Image, as it has proven to be an effective scaffold for research, zine-based projects, and conceptual discussions of information systems.

Going forward, Kate and I plan to co-author a paper tentatively-titled "LARPing the Library: Embodied Worldbuilding as Information Literacy Pedagogy". We have been accepted as presenters for this work at the 2026 conference of the Art Libraries Society of North America in Montréal.