There are two areas of current concern in the profession that overlap. One is demonstrating the value of the library in terms of student success and another is investigating the preparedness of incoming college students in terms of their attainment of information literacy skills.

Conversations around the first of these concerns typically center around the notion that the library makes an indirect and correlational contribution to student success, as measured by GPA and retention rates, but that this contribution cannot be demonstrated as causal.

In the second conversation there have been assessment efforts to gain insight into what skills students come to us with and how libraries' educational services programs have ‘moved the needle’ with the students we interact with. A lot of effort has gone into making direct evidentiary claims on behalf of library classroom efforts, but more often than not we are forced to fall back on making more indirect claims based on things that do or do not show up in students’ research products – typically a research paper or public speech.

I want to suggest that the decade-and-a-half of experience with the standards reveals that the standards can take us so far but no further. More importantly, their focus on skill attainment misses the mark of contributing to the development of a truly educated person because of their primary focus on cognitive skills and behaviors.

As an example, you have in front of you the frame “Scholarship As Conversation”. For over 25 years I’ve taught students to be able to distinguish a scholarly article from a popular one and to appreciate the value of the peer review process. So for a quarter of a century I’ve trained students to seek out scholarly, peer reviewed journal articles because they’re ‘better’.

But what is that student supposed to make of this sequence of events?

-Lester Holt reports that the New England Journal of Medicine is about to release a study showing that daily consumption of a glass of red wine contributes to a healthy heart.

-six months later Lester Holt, with no reference to the previous study, reports that the Journal of the American Medical Association is about to release a study showing that daily consumption of a glass of red wine leaders to early onset heart attacks.

Two prestigious journals, two scholarly, peer reviewed articles published in the same year. How does my student process that conflict in findings? My first-year student isn’t likely to be able to evaluate
methodologies, but if I am teaching this ‘conversation’ frame my student should use the existence of this conflict as a prompt to dig deeper and to hold off reporting either result as definitive.

There is a lot of literature concerning students’ transitions into higher education and universities have spent buckets of money on better orientation, more advising, the development of co-curricular activities to get students to feel comfortable on campus and to get students to adopt an identity as ‘student’; this is particularly true on commuter campuses where students’ can have multiple identities depending on their circumstances at the moment; student, daughter, girlfriend, employee, caregiver. We know these identities compete for influence over behavior and too often ‘student’ loses out.

How does the framework help address this problem?

As I said, colleges and universities spend a lot of money and effort to welcome students to a new environment physically and emotionally, but I’m prepared to argue that they don’t do an adequate job of preparing students to adopt an intellectual mindset that promotes academic success. We’re so focused on assessing outcomes that we tend to ignore the inputs that lead to those outcomes.

I have found over the years that students have a very narrow idea of what college or university is for and that typically these revolve around teaching and career advancement. There is no discussion of the centrality of research to the mission of a university. There is no discussion of how the workforce of the university is shaped by the triumvirate of research, teaching, and service. There is no deliberate discussion of why tenure exists, or even that there is such a thing.

Other than to eventually make more money for themselves why would students invest in the university’s mission? Particularly when what is being asked of them is to ‘do’ things. Write 10 pages, cite your sources using the professor’s favorite style manual, use scholarly sources, double space.

Why do sources need to be cited? Because you’ll get in trouble if you don’t or because the work of research depends on integrity and, since information has value, you are being careful not to claim credit for value that you did not add, and since scholarship is a conversation, other researchers benefit from knowing whose work you are drawing from?

There is an intellectual richness promoted by the framework that is not accommodated by the standards, and that richness is a direct result from the inclusion of what are called here ‘dispositions’.

I think the framework invites a shift to include qualitative assessment of a student’s ability to adopt the dispositions inherent in each frame. A reflective essay focusing on why certain sources were incorporated into a student’s work might be one example. A reflective essay on how much consensus or lack of consensus on an issue was discovered during the research process might be another. Instead of simply looking to see if sources are cited, and cited properly, we might ask the student to identify which of their sources most influenced their own thinking on the subject at hand and why.

If we can provide evidence that students are engaged in these types of intellectual processes and can link that evidence to what we are trying to get students to engage with I think we can solve our problems about demonstrating the value the library adds to a student’s academic success.