Simmons
UNIVERSITY

Center for Information
Literacy

2025
ANNUAL
REPORT

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Dear Information Literacy Enthusiasts,

In 2025, the Simmons Center for Information Literacy (SCIL) was founded with generous funding from the Mellon Foundation with the goal of helping to create a world where information literacy transcends boundaries of privilege and circumstance, where critical thinking flourishes, and where every person has the tools to transform information into knowledge, opportunity, and positive change. I am excited to share some of the accomplishments of the Center during its inaugural year as we work toward this vision. In this report, we share information on the Center's activities, projects, and partnerships. You will have an opportunity to learn more about the wonderful faculty, students, and staff who received SCIL mini grants to engage in information literacy related projects and professional development as well as events hosted by SCIL to support our mission of supporting an informed and engaged society.

We are so grateful to everyone who supported SCIL throughout this past year, and we look forward to continuing to find ways to empower people with the skills to locate and access trustworthy information, strengthen civic participation, and support an informed and engaged society in the years ahead. If you are interested in learning more about any of the Center's initiatives or opportunities for collaboration, please feel free to contact us at scil@simmons.edu.

Sincerely,

Laura Saunders

Laura Saunders
Director, SCIL
Professor and Associate Dean,
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SCIL Steering Committee

Naresh Agarwal

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Vivienne Piroli

Library Director

Mission Statement

The Simmons Center for Information Literacy (SCIL) champions the fundamental human right to both access and understand information. SCIL is dedicated to empowering individuals with the knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities necessary to navigate an increasingly complex information landscape. Through interdisciplinary research, education, and community engagement, the Center strives to empower people with the skills to locate and access trustworthy information, strengthen civic participation, and support an informed and engaged society. Rooted in Simmons University's long-standing commitment to equity, education, and the public good, the Center serves as a hub for scholars, students, professionals, and the broader public locally and across the world to foster information literacy as a cornerstone of a thriving democracy.

Strategic Goals

Empower Individuals to Identify and Access Trustworthy Information
- Develop and implement accessible, research-based curricula and training programs to strengthen information literacy skills.
- Provide resources and tools to help individuals critically evaluate sources, recognize biases, and engage with reliable information.
- Partner with media organizations, libraries, and educational institutions to extend literacy training and public workshops.

Advance Scholarship and Teaching in Information Literacy
- Support research on information literacy, media literacy, and the social impact of mis/disinformation.
- Develop innovative, cross-disciplinary courses and learning modules that integrate information literacy across multiple fields.
- Offer grants to faculty, students, and researchers focusing on improving information literacy and combatting mis/disinformation.

Support the Next Generation of Journalists, Librarians, and Information Professionals
- Strengthen student-driven media programs and foster a culture of responsible journalism and ethical reporting.
- Establish research and project opportunities for students in library and information sciences, journalism, communications, humanities, and allied fields and professions.
- Expand the SLIS Library Fellows Program to develop diverse leaders in the field of information literacy.

Expand Public Engagement and Community Outreach
- Collaborate with public libraries, community organizations, and policymakers to promote information literacy education.
- Provide accessible workshops, webinars, and public forums on responsibly navigating news, social media, and digital platforms responsibly.
- Develop "train-the-trainer" programs to equip educators, librarians, and journalists with tools to teach information literacy.

Foster Civic Engagement and Strengthen Democracy
- Equip individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to be informed, active participants in democratic processes.
- Promote civic discourse and critical inquiry through events, discussions, and partnerships.
- Conduct assessments and research on the impact of information literacy initiatives on public engagement and democratic participation.

Build a Sustainable and Inclusive Information Literacy Network
- Establish a long-term strategic plan that ensures the Center's growth, impact, and long-term sustainability.
- Develop an inclusive network of scholars, practitioners, and community leaders committed to advancing information literacy.
- Secure funding and strategic partnerships to expand research, teaching, outreach, and programming efforts.

SCIL by the Numbers

2025

Year Founded

20

Mini Grants Awarded

14

Students Leading
Information Literacy
Projects

5

Partnerships

4

Events

12

Workshops

450+

Event
Registrants

50

Focus Group
Participants

SCIL Mini Grant Program

The Simmons Center for Information Literacy awarded twenty mini grants to support faculty, staff, and students pursing information literacy related projects, research, and professional development opportunities throughout 2025. The Center also partnered and led projects and programming with campus and community organizations. The next few pages highlight some of the amazing accomplishments of the SCIL mini grant program.

Currents of Inquiry Learning Community: Embedding Information Literacy Across Disciplines

The STAR Scholars program is a structured professional development opportunity for a cohort of faculty across disciplines focused on improving learning through applying research and best teaching practices related to a specific topic. The Fall 2025 program, led by the Center for Faculty Excellence in partnership with SCIL, focused on information literacy. Faculty explored conceptualizations of information literacy (and related literacies: e.g, health literacy, news/media literacy, civic literacy, etc.); learned about research-based approaches to teaching information literacy skills; and discussed the implications of information literacy for combatting mis/disinformation. Faculty in the program explored learning theory and instructional design principles to enable them to integrate information literacy outcomes effectively into their curricula and developed classroom change projects.

In addition to offering opportunities for learning on campus, SCIL awarded professional development mini grants for faculty and staff to attend conferences and programs including:

- Open Education Conference
- Teaching & Learning with AI Conference
- Institute for Healthcare Advancement (IHA) Health Literacy Specialist Certificate
- American Library Association Conference
- Association for Information Science and Technology Annual Meeting
- Global Investigative Journalism Conference
- Professional and Organizational Development Conference

AI and Information Literacy: Research Re-imagined

For 12 weeks over the course of the Fall 2025 semester, Simmons students, faculty, and staff convened for a weekly workshop series led by Kayla Pringle '26 (B.S. Computer Science/MLIS) and Dr. JoJo Jacobson (Assistant Dean of Academic Support & Special Projects) to discuss AI tools, the growing implications of AI use, and how to engage critically with AI. Pringle explained, "We aren't advocating for or against artificial intelligence, we are just trying to provide an opportunity for education."

Topics covered in a seminar format included navigating how to best use AI tools for educational support, detecting bias in generative AI tools, ethics of generative AI, including implications of the aforementioned biases. These sessions were led by a combination of guest speakers, faculty members, and a new addition to the Simmons community: Information Literacy Consultants. ILCs are graduate students in the Simmons School of Library and Information Science who were hired through an internal grant from SCIL to support the Tutoring Center by offering in-class instruction on information literacy for undergraduate general education courses, as well as 1:1 and group consultations for students.

Other sessions of the AI and Information Literacy Workshops took the form of "AI Research Tool Reviews," during which participants were encouraged to bring computers and experiment with some of the most popular AI platforms in higher education today. Speakers' expertise was balanced with ample room for audience questions and group discussions. Over 130 people registered for the workshops either online or in person, and a regular group of returning participants quickly developed into a small learning community.

134
total individuals registered for at least one session

98%
of attendees reported the workshops met or exceeded expectations

95%
of attendees reported an increase in AI and information literacy

Untangling Truths: A Community Conversation on Mis & Disinformation

Inspired by the event hosted by the Boston Public Library "Unraveling the News," Castel Green, graduate student in SLIS/History, Archives Management hosted a hands-on conversation about mis- and disinformation in collaboration with the Simmons Multicultural Center. This community-based discussion encouraged students to bring their own crafts or use provided art materials to keep hands moving while engaging in conversations about mis- and disinformation.

The first hour of the event included an optional beginner-friendly crochet lesson, while the second hour was a discussion about how to distinguish between fact and fabrication. Participants learned how to categorize different types of mis- and disinformation, shared anecdotes of experiences they had of being duped on the internet, and brainstormed techniques to combat the spread of misinformation. Green shared that the goal of this event was to cultivate an environment where students felt comfortable asking questions, and developing their media literacy skills: "[I want] people to walk away […] feeling more confident in their media literacy and understanding of misinformation so that they can continue building on those skills in their everyday life."

Creating a regular, casual space for conversation about misinformation is especially important today. Sharing resources, destigmatizing not-knowing, and encouraging transparent conversations opens pathways for students to explore their relationship to the content they consume regularly in ways that encourage critical thinking skills. Perhaps even more importantly, events like this one cultivate a sense of community and help participants feel that they are not alone in their uncertainties and can rely on their peers to sit together to untangle the complex web of information that they are faced with every day.

Information Science & Technology Lab

The Information Science & Technology (IS&T) Lab received received a mini grant to hire graduate student assistants to help with several information literacy projects over the Fall 2025 semester. Students and faculty of the lab (pictured above) organized a guest lecture event titled, Complex Perceptions of Social Media Misinformation in China, featuring Dr. Zhicong Lu, an assistant professor at George Mason University. Dr. Lu presented findings from two research studies that explored user perceptions and trust in different media sources.

The IS&T Lab also organized a panel event Fact, Fiction, and the Feed: Strengthening Information Literacy in Divided Times. The panel was moderated by faculty member, Dr. Don Simmons, and included the Dean of the Simmons School of Library and Information Science, the Simmons Assistant Dean of Academic Support and Special Projects, and two Simmons faculty members. The panelists shared both academic perspectives related to information literacy based on research as well as emerging issues related to information literacy and artificial intelligence.
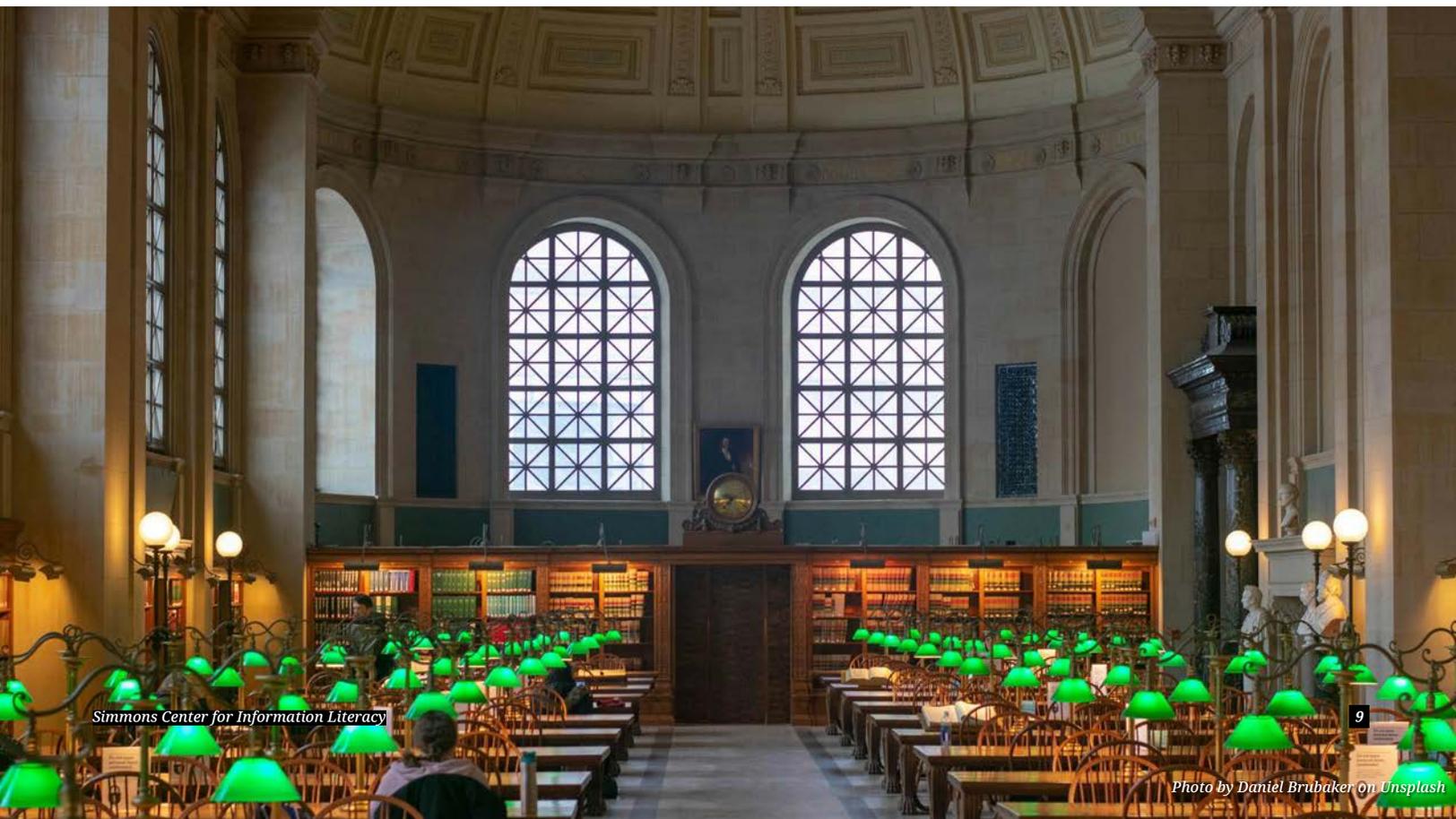
In addition to hosting these events, the IS&T Lab graduate student assistants developed a website for the lab that launched at the end of the Fall 2025 semester. The website includes information about faculty associated with the lab, current research areas, published articles, and upcoming events.

Information Literacy Advocacy Project:
Civic Engagement at the Boston Public Library

A team of four Simmons graduate students formed a project team to support the Boston Public Library as it begins to implement its new strategic plan. The plan includes civic engagement as a central focus, and BPL administrators were interested in engaging staff, community partners, and patrons in generating specific goals and objectives that would respond to community needs and interests.

Over the course of the semester, the students met with BPL administrators and ran focus groups with various BPL staff to learn more about how they define civic engagement and civic literacy, what work they are already doing in this area, and how they would like to move forward. They also met with community partners and library staff from other large, urban public libraries who are doing work in this area to better understand community needs and the potential role the BPL could play. They conducted a literature review, including white papers from the Urban Libraries Council on civic engagement projects. Finally, they did a selective review of current library programs across all 25 BPL branches to produce a catalog of current programming on civic engagement and civic literacy topics.

The students developed and presented a report for BPL staff on their activities that includes findings from the literature review, interviews and focus groups, a proposed definition of civic engagement and civic literacy to guide implementation of the strategic plan, and a set of recommendations for that implementation, including possible goals, programs, and further areas of research.

Information is Power: The First Amendment, Public Records, and the Press

In October, SCIL hosted an interactive mini-conference that explored how participants can use their First Amendment rights and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to uncover the truth and hold power accountable. Justin Silverman, Attorney & Executive Director of The New England First Amendment Coalition (NEFAC), began the conference with an overview of First Amendment rights, sharing his experience as a former journalist with a focus on the importance of press freedom in fostering an informed society. Beryl Lipton, Journalist &

Senior Investigative Researcher at Electronic Frontier Foundation, followed with a session on the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and shared the necessary steps and components of submitting a public records request. Greg Sullivan, Attorney & President of NEFAC closed the mini conference with an interactive Q&A session that provided participants with an opportunity to learn more about the legal side of freedom of expression based on attendees' own experiences while also discussing well-known public cases related to the First Amendment. The mini conference coincided with the United Nations Global Media and Information Literacy Week, an annual event to raise awareness and celebrate the progress achieved towards media and information literacy for all.

> "The First Amendment is a complicated body of law. There is a lot of legal analysis underpinning those laws."
>
> — Justin Silverman, NEFAC

Keynote: How AI Enhances Thinking, How It Hinders It, and How Education Can Respond

Digital information literacy expert Mike Caulfield joined SCIL to deliver its inaugural keynote address, focused on AI, information literacy, and education. Caulfield developed the SIFT method (Stop; Investigate the source; Find better coverage; and Trace claims) which is now used in hundreds of universities and classroom settings as a tool to improve students' information literacy.

While the SIFT method is highly effective to use in any information-seeking endeavor, increased use of AI in classroom settings and daily life has turned Caulfield's attention from digital information literacy in general to AI literacy specifically. Caulfield shared a new technique to discern and leverage artificial intelligence: "*Get it in, track it down, follow it up.*"

Emphasizing evidence and the importance of simply beginning the search, this process prioritizes getting the "claim," or any piece of information we want to verify, into a LLM and asking it to evaluate the claim. The next steps encourage the user to continue to engage the system using "neutral questions," or prompts that ask the system to provide additional information without leading it toward a particular answer. For instance, Caulfield shared a claim about the benefits of chocolate on memory and had participants practice neutral questioning by using this prompt: Evaluate the evidence for the claim that _____ and provide a table that matches evidence to rebuttals and rates the strength of the evidence.

Once users have an overview of the evidence for and against a claim, they can continue to prompt the system with additional queries such as asking for the original sources of data and investigating whether research was industry funded. The more a user is able to practice crafting prompts, the more effective they become.

Finally, Caulfield emphasized the importance of double-checking any information provided by an AI system, noting their tendency to hallucinate or provide made-up information, and the importance of reflecting on the answers, asking yourself what you find convincing and why.

Looking Ahead

The Simmons Center for Information Literacy looks forward to continuing to pursue projects aligned with its mission and goals in the year ahead. Some current projects will be continuing or expanding into the new year while the Center will also be launching new projects, events, and partnerships.

For example, we are looking forward to hosting a webinar series in the spring/summer of 2026 for public libraries featuring faculty members in various disciplines including Information and Library Science, Economics, and Public Health. The webinars will focus on various literacies such as AI Literacy, Environmental Literacy, and Health Literacy with materials developed by faculty for public librarians to support teaching and learning.

We are also excited for the launch of a new partnership with Yonsei University's Research Institute for Academic Libraries Development (RIALD). SCIL is joining Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology's Industry Intelligentization Institute, Konkuk University's New Media Art Lab, and George Mason University's Community Informatics Lab on the collaborative project "Knowledge Platform for All in the AI Era: Libraries as Social Operating Systems for Sustainable Growth," a project that aims to transform the productivity revolution brought by AI technology into a sustainable growth engine for all citizens, while simultaneously addressing the challenges of social polarization and community weakening that arise in the process.

In addition, SCIL Director Laura Saunders will be presenting on information literacy related topics at the 2026 NERCOMP Annual Conference as well as iConference 2026: Information Literacies, Authenticity and Use: The Move Towards a Digitally Enlightened Society.

For additional updates throughout the upcoming year, consider following us on LinkedIn or Instagram. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact us at scil@simmons.edu.