Good Morning, thank you for being here. I am Anna Harper, and I am so happy to have this opportunity to share our research with you. My collaborators, Krystyna Matusiak and Chelsea Heinbach, were unable to make it today. So, I will be introducing our project. However, Professor Matusiak, our lead investigator, has been gracious enough to record a segment on our initial findings, and I will be playing that for you in a few minutes.
While we are all fairly familiar with ACRL visual literacy standards, and we may have our suspicions that those outside of our profession are not, most of us have not had the opportunity to thoroughly investigate the visual literacy competencies of our students. The purpose of our research has been to examine what is happening in academic practice, specifically to look at the way college and university students use images and visual information in their coursework.

Purpose

To examine college and university students’ visual literacy skills and use of images and other visual information resources in the context of academic work.
Prior to beginning our investigation, Professor Matusiak established three research questions based on ACRL competencies and her previous research on digital literacy.

With our current research we are attempting to discover what kind of visual resources students use, what role these resources play in their work and in their learning process; as well as the skills students have in analyzing and evaluating images, and if they are aware of ethical and legal issues in image use; and finally what are students’ practices when they select, create, organize, and process visual material.
Our study design was exploratory and qualitative, and included questionnaires, documentation, and in person interviews. We chose to focus on the latter as what people do in practice is often different than what they think they do, and interviews allow for a more extensive questioning process.

We recruited participants by posting fliers across campus and then we vetted applicants by selecting only those students who could supply documentation of academic work that included image use. We requested this material prior to the interview for review purposes, as well as to contextualize the students’ work in relationship to the interview questions.
Our final recruitment included 15 students who represented the university’s programs and population, and focused only on those students who used images in their coursework. The number of students in the study was sufficient to identify patterns, and uncover similar themes and language.

We found no major difference between undergraduates and graduates, disciplines, gender, or age. I will play you Professor Matusiak’s portion of our presentation here, as she goes more in-depth into our findings.
Findings
After reviewing and discussing the transcripts from our interviews it became very clear that images are generally being used improperly, both out of context and without proper concern for ethical and legal limitations.
Improving Visual Literacy Competencies

Universities and Colleges

- Campus Outreach
- Faculty Training
- Library Workshops
- Library Instruction

In order to improve visual literacy competencies in university and college students we determined the most effective strategy would be to reach out to faculty—to train the trainer. By raising awareness of images as information sources and asking faculty to include expectations on image use in their syllabi, students will be compelled to meet standards of context and copyright as they do to traditional written scholarship. To this end I am collaborating on a workshop for faculty that provides best practices on presenting visual information, and Professor Matusiak will be presenting at a faculty scholarship seminar. The other option for academic librarians is to train students in the processing and use of images. However, our reach is much less extensive using this model. That being said I have implemented voluntary library workshops on image manipulation, presentations, and infographics that address visual literacy.

Before I move forward, I want to direct you to consider the image here. This is a photograph taken by an undergraduate science student and used in a presentation he gave on his experience participating in an East African Healing Retreat. This student almost exclusively uses images that he creates himself. Also important to note is that his photographic practice began prior to his university education.
Overall the students we interviewed showed more respect for the integrity of images if they had prior experience making visual content. The students who were engaged with image making in high school, and worked with images prior to university, were more aware of images as information resources.

This is where museums and archives, as well as anyone working in elementary or secondary education, can have a profound impact on visual literacy. By the time a student gets to college, it may be too late to instill this relationship to art making and images. So, institutions that serve school age children, have a great part to play in the visual literacy competencies of our communities.

The Exquisite Corpse images I have here are from a program I ran this summer for children who had recently immigrated to the United States. Adapted from an exercise used by the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, the children named the creatures and answered questions about them based on the information in the pictures.
I wanted to include a few resources that I have found very useful in a practical sense. I will be relying heavily on Deandra Little’s “Teaching Visual Literacy Across the Curriculum” as I develop workshops for faculty. I also enjoyed Nicole Beatty’s suggestions for student activities in her paper on “Cognitive Visual Literacy,” and believe there are some that can be adapted for interdisciplinary coursework. I also regularly find myself sharing the Visual Literacy website created by the Toledo Art Museum. It is a great place to mine information on visual literacy, and they have fantastic videos and tutorials as well.
Finally, I want to thank you again for participating in this panel. The more that we share strategies for incorporating visual literacy competencies into curriculum, the better we will be at helping our students, and our faculty, become critical information consumers. Please feel invited to contact any of the researchers on our team if you have questions. Thank you!

Questions:

If you were able to expand your research what would you focus on?

We would like to do more, but would need more time and funding. We would likely do away with analyzing PowerPoint presentations because we are not leaning anything new. We run into the same issues in nearly all of them. However, papers would be interesting to look at, to see how students are using images in scholarship, and how images and text work together. If we could extend study, we would go in that direction,

How are you analyzing your research?
This project is still in preliminary stages of analyzation. We have almost completed transcription of the interviews, and once we have those we will formerly code our material. However, our results will rely on the different expertise or our research team members, we will discuss and analyze as a team. While Professor Matusiak and Chelsea are strong researchers, more talented I think than myself, I do offer a point of view as a teaching librarian and am the only one with an art background. Chelsea also teaches at her library, and she began this project while still a student, so her perspective is unique in that way. We also have a third researcher coming on board, who has been delightful enough to do the bulk of our transcribing. He is a current LIS student.