Intellectual Freedom and Alternative Priorities in Library & Information Science Research:

A Longitudinal Study

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Original Article

Abstract

This article presents a bibliometric analysis of the library and information science literature to trace the emphasis that intellectual freedom and neutrality have received relative to an index of alternative and possibly competing topics. Emphasis is captured longitudinally by recording the number of results for various search terms associated with intellectual freedom, neutrality, diversity, equity, and inclusion in Web of Science (WoS) from 1993 through 2020 and Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts (LISTA) from 1970 through 2020. Results show that the number of works mentioning intellectual freedom and neutrality have increased only slightly over the study period in sharp contrast to many entries on the diversity, equity, and inclusion index. Research interests being partially indicative of personal beliefs and professional activity, the impact of this relative change in emphasis on professional practice is discussed. Public controversies regarding library neutrality, intellectual freedom, and freedom of expression in libraries are summarized.

Keywords

Librarianship is a profession that draws upon and requires multiple ethical commitments. These ethical commitments are embodied at their highest level in the profession's organizational codes of ethics, such as the American Library Association's *Code of Ethics*, and formal positional statements, such as the International Federation of Library Associations *Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom*. Intellectual freedom is one such value, dating back to the formation of the ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom in 1967; neutrality has historically been another (Scott and Saunders, 2021; Wenzler, 2019). Yet there are also many alternative priorities referenced in the professional codes of librarianship, these are also longstanding and necessary. Value pluralism is a metaethical theory which asserts that morality encompasses multiple values which are incomparable or incommensurable; by contrast, value monism asserts that there is one ultimate ethical value (Mason, 2018). Librarianship, as a practical endeavor, is fundamentally pluralistic in the sense that our codes of ethics and position statements do not speak of "the good" but rather of multiple specific values which we work towards (e.g. equitable services, user privacy & confidentiality, suitable conditions of employment, etc.). An underappreciated fact of work that draws upon plural ethical commitments is that those commitments can conflict when abstract principles are forced to grapple with concrete reality.[1] This paper studies the fortunes of various topics as priorities as expressed in the library and information science (LIS) literature.

Intellectual freedom is only one of several priorities advocated by librarians and library organizations. The value is best explained in the IFLA *Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom* but also included in the ALA's *Code of Ethics*, where it is placed in opposition to "efforts to censor library resources". Contained within the Code of Ethics are competing value claims which have obvious possibilities of conflicting with each other. Some examples: privacy has the potential to conflict with providing "the highest level of service" as

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[1] The ALA Code of Ethics acknowledges this explicitly in the preamble: "Ethical dilemmas occur when values are in conflict." (American Library Association, 2008)

there are a great many personalized services which libraries might offer but do not because it would require collection and maintenance of data on users; "respect [for] intellectual property rights" often results in libraries maintaining convoluted discovery systems which do not provide "the highest level of service" nor equitable access; so called "balance between the interests of information users and rights holders" results in conservative interpretations of IP case law and legislation rather than proactive pushing of the envelope. Notably, intellectual freedom as a value does not have prima facie conflicts with the other values. This may explain why it has endured as a professional lodestar and secured enduring attention via the Office of Intellectual Freedom (note, however, that not all values get such attention, for example there is no ALA Office for Intellectual Property). Neutrality has also been a professional priority, though unenumerated. It is arguably implicit in ALA *Code of Ethics* principles #1 ("accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests") and #7 ("We … do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access") as well as the fifth principle listed in the IFLA *Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom* ("Libraries shall ensure that the selection and availability of library materials and services is governed by professional considerations and not by political, moral and religious views.")(American Library Association, 2008; International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 1999). Yet our professional value structure is not some crystalline Platonic form but depends on larger societal forces. This paper demonstrates via bibliometrics that larger societal shifts are impacting the library and information science literature. These shifts may alter the relative emphasis that practitioners place on which of our values take precedence. Three episodes involving the American Library Association are discussed in detail below to illustrate the real world effects of the shift manifest in these bibliometric findings.

A Review of the Literature

The literature on the meaning and practice of intellectual freedom and neutrality is vast; because of the bibliometric nature of this study, this review is therefore focused on how these topics manifest in the LIS literature. Recent work by Winberry and Bishop, on the subject of the influence and frequency of conceptions of social justice in the LIS literature, has documented a sharp rise in works using that terminology beginning in 2014 (Winberry and Bishop, 2021). It is also important to note that many of what this study classifies as 'alternative priorities' fly under the flag of 'critical x' approaches. Eamon Tewell recently noted that the critical information literacy literature in particular has blossomed and matured since 2006 when a seminal text of that approach appeared (Tewell, 2018). The impact, measured via citation analysis, of French theorists associated with postmodernism and 'critical' paradigms on the LIS literature was studied by Cronin and Meho over a decade ago. They found that LIS was 24th out of all Web of Science subject categories in the prevalence of French theorist citation and that the overwhelming majority of citations occurred post-1980, with the largest percentage change happening between 1980 and 1989 (Cronin and Meho, 2009). More recently, a convenience sample survey with a large response rate found that two thirds of respondents self-assessed as having very, somewhat, or passing familiarity with critical theory. Sixty-eight percent of those familiar with the concepts learned about them during their higher education, although results indicated their graduate LIS education was not responsible for their familiarity (Schroeder and Hollister, 2014). The change that Cronin and Meho documented appears to not have had an impact on LIS education as of the mid-2010s.

Neutrality is conceptually and operationally distinct from intellectual freedom. Despite seeming nebulous, recent empirical research by Scott and Saunders reveals that neutrality

has a clearly consensus definition: being objective in providing information. However, there are hard cases (e.g. white supremacists using a community room to meet) that fall outside of the consensus (Scott and Saunders, 2021). Neutrality has a different, more important, and legally-binding notion outside of the library in the context of the United States of America. In that context it refers to governmental regulation of speech in various forums where the First Amendment and the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution underlie the judicial analysis (*Encyclopedia of the First Amendment*, 2009c). Although both the librarian and legal definitions of neutrality are not enumerated in the *Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom*, they are arguably implicit in that document's fifth and seventh affirmations: "Libraries shall ensure that the selection and availability of library materials and services is governed by professional considerations and not by political, moral and religious views." and "Libraries shall make materials, facilities and services equally accessible to all users. There shall be no discrimination due to race, creed, gender, age or for any other reason." respectively (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 1999).

Three common critiques of neutrality are that it is apolitical, ahistorical, and impossible. John Wenzler has deftly refuted the first two charges, demonstrating that the governmental neutrality doctrine (of which library neutrality is a subset) is an explicitly political project of liberalism and one with deep roots in the European enlightenment (Wenzler, 2019). Far from being something transcending politics, political liberalism and governmental neutrality act as mutually reinforcing systems, departure from which is justified only for circumstances when parties fail to play by the rules of liberal discourse and liberal democracy. The impossibility critique is true, insofar as libraries are finite collections accumulated with finite budgets. A common rhetorical move (used for example by both Jones and Drabinski in 2018) is to note the impossibility of neutrality and then assume that power analysis should guide librarians as they navigate collection development and space usage policies; this is a non sequitur (*American Libraries*, 2018; Jones, 2018). It is also impossible to square the circle and

express π as a rational number; simply because a project is technically impossible is no strike against it when useful approximations are available.

What this present study classifies as alternative priorities to intellectual freedom and neutrality is a constellation of efforts broadly grouped under both social justice and equity, diversity, and inclusion. Nothing pejorative is intended by the use of alternative, that definition is only adopted as a shorthand to emphasise that the priorities are not random but belong to a family of coherent political and philosophical thought. In assessing alternative priority prevalence, this current study draws upon two recent studies that used similar methodologies with a focus on mainstream newspapers in the United States. First, David Rozado used word frequency analysis in the *New York Times* to chart concepts having to do with negative aspects of human life and behavior such as prejudice and victimization. He found that the phenomenon known as concept creep, wherein concepts originally used to mark harm or pathology have their meanings stretched and diluted as they are used in more colloquial contexts, was clearly at work (Rozado, 2020). This shift coincided with broader cultural events that were symptomatic of increasing identity politics and victimhood culture, wherein personal or group marginalization is emphasised because such marginalization confers stature in some communities. The causal question, i.e. whether journalists at the *New York Times* were echoing changing social attitudes or whether they contributed to driving the changes, was unaddressed.

Later, and independently of Rozado, Zach Goldberg used a similar word frequency analysis to examine the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Wall Street Journal*. The words analyzed by Goldberg were indicative of a sensibility he abbreviated as "wokeness", informally defined as "the sensibilities of highly educated and hyperliberal white professionals with elements of Black nationalism and academic critical race theory" (Goldberg, 2020). There was very little overlap between Goldberg and Rozado among the terms used. Results showed that the terms analyzed exploded across all four publications

around 2014 and beyond. This analysis was supplemented by an analysis of changing media consumption patterns of white liberals, white moderates, and white conservatives. As "wokeness" increased from 2014 through 2019 in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal*, white liberals reported higher percentages of receiving political news from those outlets - a pattern that was not nearly as pronounced for moderates or conservatives (Goldberg, 2020). While the data do not definitely prove any causal relationship, it is clear that the racial attitudes of white liberals very closely follow the narrative and trends present in the aforementioned four newspapers. Lest readers think that the research by Goldberg and Rozado is confounded by the election of Donald J. Trump as President of the U.S.A. in 2016, both articles documented increases in their indicator terms by 2013. To ascribe Goldberg's and Rozado's findings to a nebulous "Trump effect" is to commit the fallacy of reverse causation. The present study employed both Rozado's and Goldberg's term indices to measure the incidence of the concepts they studied in the LIS literature.

Methods

Simply counting the number of results for a given query in a library catalog or database is a longstanding, though crude, bibliometric technique. Far more sophisticated methods exist to measure impact or gauge the sentiment behind usage or citation, but an assessment of term frequency is sufficient to detail mere mentions of topics and their relative frequency to each other. The first step in data collection was in the creation of a query term list. The term chosen to represent intellectual freedom was: "intellectual freedom" (queried always in double quotes to ensure a phrase search). The query chosen to represent neutrality was a Boolean logic query created to remove any mentions of the much-debated Federal Communications Commission (FCC) policy named Net Neutrality: neutrality NOT "net

neutrality". To obtain the data representing the alternative priorities that the profession might have around social justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion, two previously created indices were used.

As noted above, two studies using annual result counts in publications as indicators of social change were published in 2020 (Goldberg, 2020; Rozado, 2020). Rather than create an index from scratch, Goldberg's 15-term Woke Term-Usage Index (hereafter Goldberg's Index) and Rozado's 45-term unnamed index (hereafter Rozado's Index) were used. There was little duplication or overlap between the two. Goldberg's Index contained the following terms: bias OR biases, hierarchies, inclusiveness, marginalized, overrepresented, privileged, "racial disparity" OR "racial disparities", "racial inequality" OR "racial inequalities", stereotypes, stereotyping, "systemic racism", underrepresented, victimhood, vulnerable, "white privilege". Rozado's Index contained the following terms: abused, activism, "anti-semitism" OR antisemitism, bigotry, bullying, "cultural appropriation", discrimination, diversity, equality, feminism, "gender discrimination", hate, hateful, "hate speech", homophobia, hurtful, inclusion, intersectionality, islamophobia, kkk, marginalization, marginalized, misogyny, multiculturalism, offended, oppression, patriarchy, racism, racist, "safe space", sexism, sexist, "social justice", stereotypes, stigmatized, subjugation, tolerance, transphobia, traumatized, traumatizing, triggering, "trigger warning", victimization, "white supremacy", xenophobia.

Each term was queried in Web of Science (WoS) and Information Science & Technology Abstracts (LISTA) and annual result counts recorded; a "blank" query was conducted for each year and the total number of entries indexed also recorded. LISTA was chosen because it has served as the main subject database for library and information science research. Web of Science was included because it is widely used in bibliometric studies and it provided a glimpse at the higher-tier LIS literature; it also increased robustness and confidence in the results by showing that they hold under different indices. WoS coverage

extended back to 1993 and that year through 2020 were queried; LISTA coverage was greater and so to get a longer historical perspective 1970 was chosen as a beginning year because that was the same cutoff point used by both Goldberg and Rozado. WoS is an interdisciplinary database so to narrow down the queries to only those coming from LIS journals, a subject query was performed with each index term (i.e. SU=(Information Science & Library Science).[2] Because LISTA by its nature is confined to LIS topics, no additional subjects or modifications were made to the queries. Annual tallies were recorded directly from Web of Science, which provided an interface for examining sets of results. LISTA data was accessed using the EBSCOhost search interface and results were exported in RIS format to the Zotero citation management software to calculate annual tallies. To capture total relevant entries indexed in LISTA via the EBSCOhost platform, a blank search with the appropriate publication date From: and To: fields for each year was executed. Annual counts of total relevant items indexed by WoS were obtained by performing year queries combined with the subject SU=(Information Science & Library Science) string to identify all LIS literature.   No deduplication correction was done for publications that might display in multiple sets of result lists due to the fact that they may have used more than one of the terms on either Goldberg's Index or Rozado's Index (or have mentioned intellectual freedom or neutrality).

Lastly, Google Scholar was used to get a picture of the prevalence and influence of the *IFLA Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom*. Use of Web of Science or LISTA for this was not possible as the document was not indexed in WoS and returned an insufficient number of results in LISTA. Google Scholar casts a much wider net than WoS or LISTA (via proprietary opaque methods), and therefore provides a broader measure of the document's impact from a wide variety of scholarly sources (Roemer and Borchardt, 2015). The query "statement on libraries and intellectual freedom" was used to locate results and record

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[2] In Web of Science subject metadata categorization is applied at the journal level; there is no article-level topical metadata apart from author-supplied keywords.

annual citation counts. Data on the document were collected from 1999, the date of publication, through 2020.

Analysis of the collected data took the form of charting results and calculation of descriptive statistics required for simple linear regression. Charting all the terms on Goldberg's Index and Rozado's Index simultaneously was unwieldy and confusing. Therefore annual counts of the indices were calculated by summing annual results for all terms on each index and dividing by the number of terms on each index (15 and 45 respectively). Descriptive statistics were calculated for each term's annual results count, which was modeled as a dependent variable, in relation to time, which was modeled as an independent variable. The following statistics were calculated for all terms: covariance, simple linear regression slope, y-intercept, a bivariate correlation coefficient (Pearson's r), p-values for each respective Pearson's r value, standard error of the estimate (SEE) for the regression line, and the coefficient of determination (r^2). Interested readers may consult the raw data and aforementioned calculations at: 10.6084/m9.figshare.14502057.

Results

The variables under analysis were result counts for keywords in WoS and LISTA and time, measured by calendar year. Obviously, the mere passage from one year to the next has no causal bearing upon the number of articles published which use specific terminology. Rather, there are broader cultural trends toward the themes identified by the alternative priority keywords that have positive covariance with time. Analyzing the prevalence of the terms can inform us as to whether the broader cultural trends are competing with or otherwise affecting the amount of attention paid to intellectual freedom or neutrality. The results are presented primarily in visual form with two multiple line graphs, one simple line graph, and eight histograms. One table is included to present context for the figures.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics on annual result counts of queries for intellectual freedom and neutrality drawn from WoS and LISTA, as well as annual citation counts for IFLA Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom drawn from Google Scholar. Included in the table are values for: linear function slope, correlation coefficient (Pearson's *r*) with associated statistical significance, standard error of the estimate, and the coefficient of determination (r^2). These values are presented explicitly and in tabular form as baselines which readers may then use to evaluate the data on the alternative priority keywords. Rather than present lengthy tables detailing slopes, Pearson's *r* and r^2 values for each term in Goldberg's Index and Rozado's Index, graphical summaries in the form of histograms of each measure are presented below. What is ultimately of importance are not the descriptive statistics for any one keyword (other than intellectual freedom or neutrality) but the general trend for the alternative priority terms.

Table 1. Descriptive Simple Linear Regression Statistics for Topics

Term / Document	Source Index	Slope	Pearson's *r*	Standard Error of the Estimate	r^2
IFLA Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom	Google Scholar	0.43	0.59	3.85	0.36
intellectual freedom	Web of Science	0.18	0.38*	3.72	0.14
	LISTA	3.39	0.64**	61.36	0.41
neutrality	Web of Science	0.34	0.74**	2.60	0.51
	LISTA	0.42	0.84**	4.07	0.71

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01

Figure 1 displays annual results counts for intellectual freedom, neutrality, and the computed Goldberg and Rozado indices from WoS. Figure 2 depicts the same information from LISTA. As can be seen in Figures 1 and 2, both the Goldberg Index and Rozado's Index show marked increases in 2015 that alter the trajectory of the charted lines and both indices increased over the 2015 baseline each subsequent year. Both indices have supplanted intellectual freedom and neutrality since 2017 and have held their position relative to those core priorities since.

Results Counts per Year for Topics from Web of Science
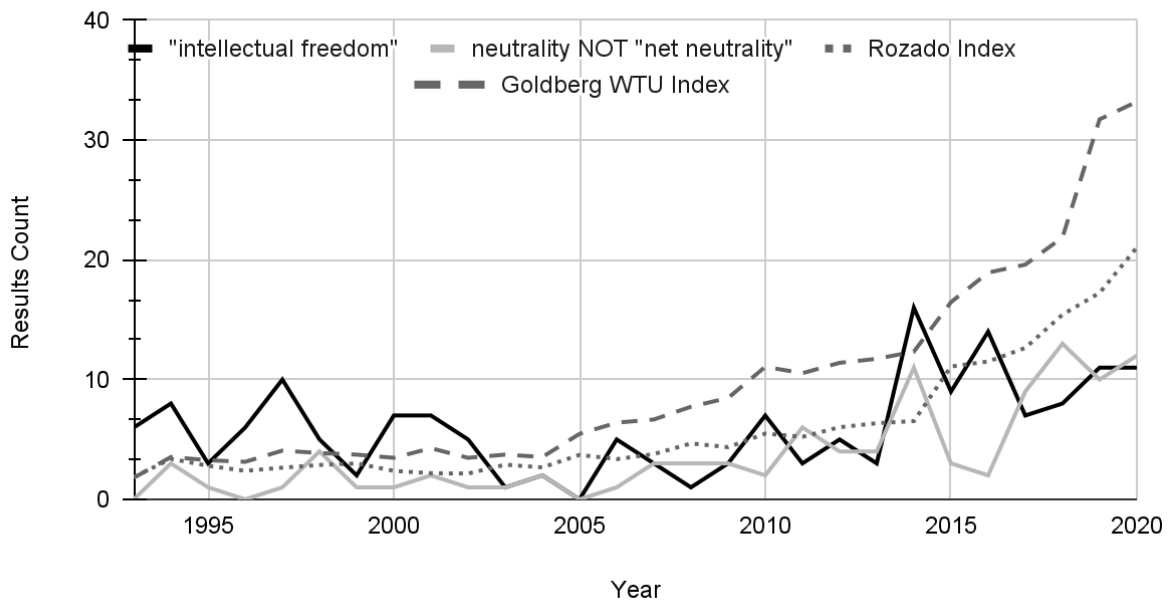
Figure 1. Results Counts per Year for Topics from Web of Science
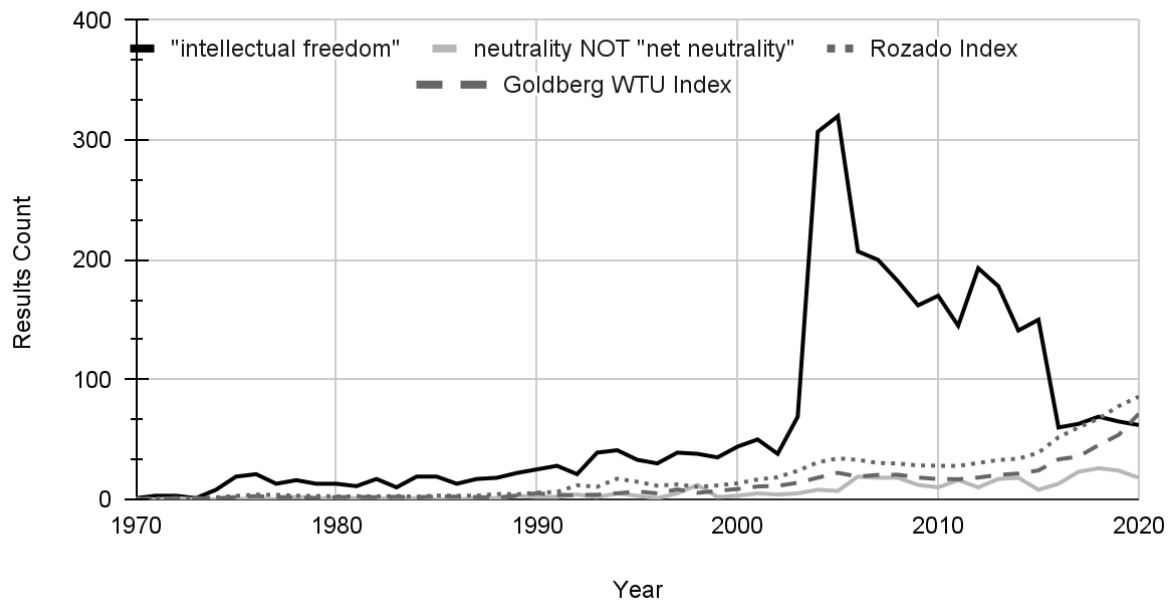
Results Counts per Year for Topics from LISTA

Figure 2. Results Counts per Year for Topics from LISTA

Figure 3 shows annual citation counts for the IFLA Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom as indexed by Google Scholar. This figure should be interpreted in accordance with the values for the IFLA Statement presented in Table 1. The slope of the simple regression line is 0.43; the correlations of coefficient and determination were not statistically significant. Comparing annual document citations to annual results counts in other databases, over different timescales is an analogy too strained. It should suffice to note that by slope alone, the IFLA Statement is similar but slightly higher than many slopes for the alternative priority keywords. To the extent that slopes for a query and citation are proxies for professional interest, few of any of the alternative priorities supplant the IFLA Statement.
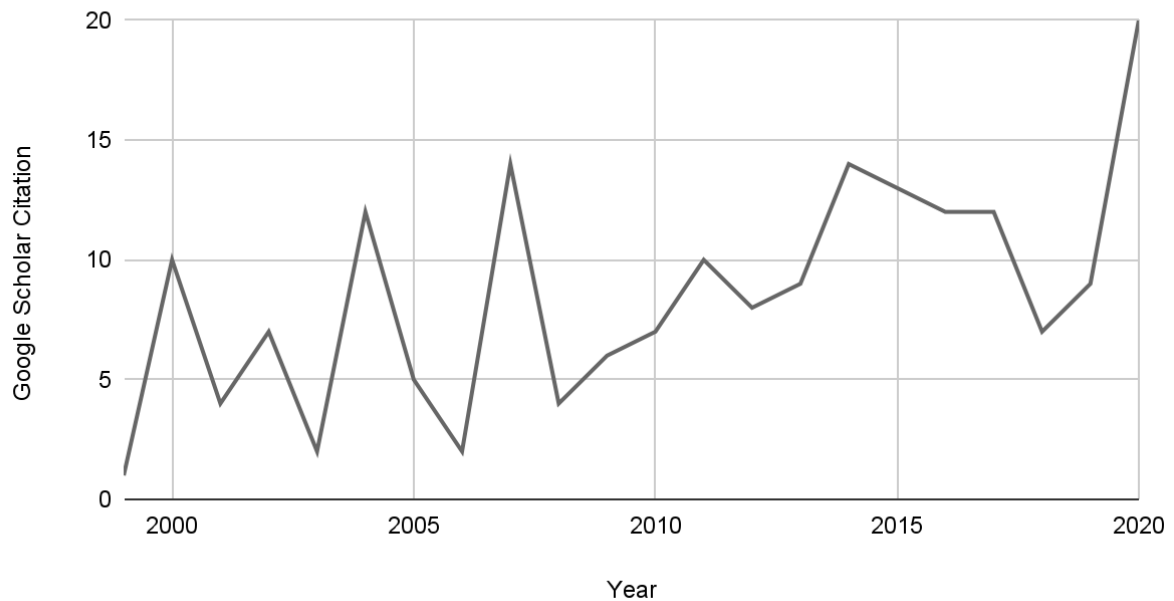
Google Scholar Citations per Year

Figure 3. IFLA Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom Google Scholar Citations per Year

Figures 4 through 11 are histograms. Figures 4 and 5 present simple linear regression slope values for all the alternative priority terms; Figure 4 shows results from WoS and Figure 5 shows results from LISTA. The slope of a simple linear regression line indicates the steepness of the trendline. In this context it indicates how much change in annual results counts coincides with the increase of one year. Results from WoS show that 34 of the alternative priority slope values were less than the slope value for intellectual freedom. A minority, 26, of the alternative priority slope values were greater than the intellectual freedom slope. In LISTA intellectual freedom results counts had much greater variance; 6 of the alternative priority slope values were greater than that for intellectual freedom; 54 were less than. Looking at neutrality, the pattern of a majority of the alternative priority slopes being less steep than the two core priorities held. In WoS, 20 of the alternative priority slopes were greater than neutrality's slope, 40 were less. In LISTA, 28 of the alternative priority slopes were greater than neutrality's slope, 32 were less. The five terms with the highest slopes in

WoS were: diversity, bias(es), inclusion, triggering, and vulnerable. The five highest slopes in LISTA belonged to: diversity, bias(es), inclusion, discrimination, and racism.
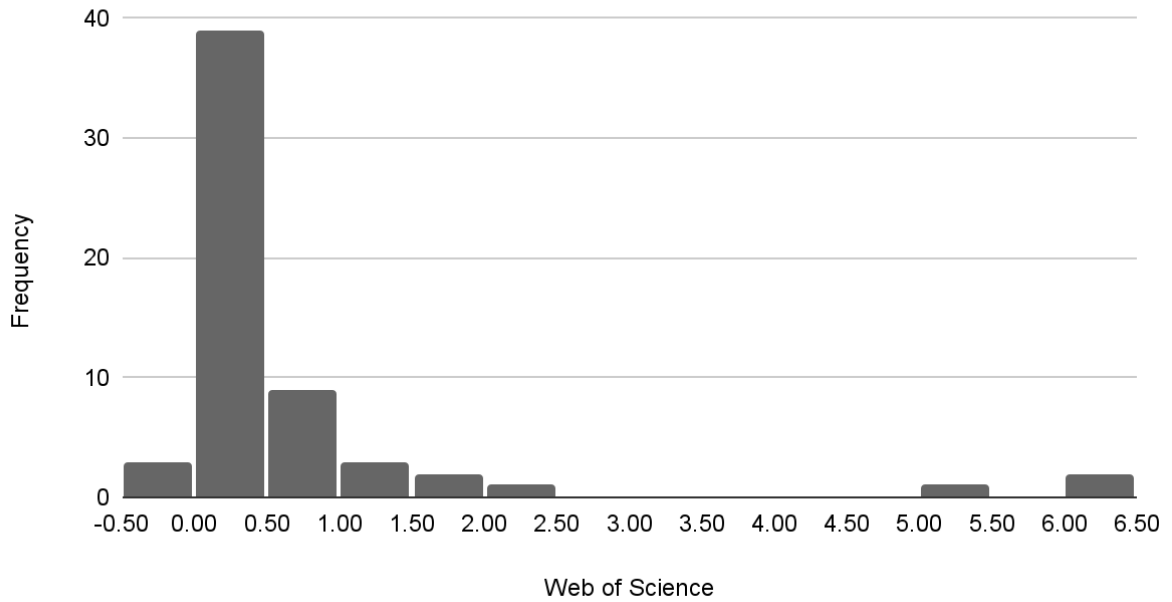

Figure 4. Alternative Priority Term Slope Values from Web of Science

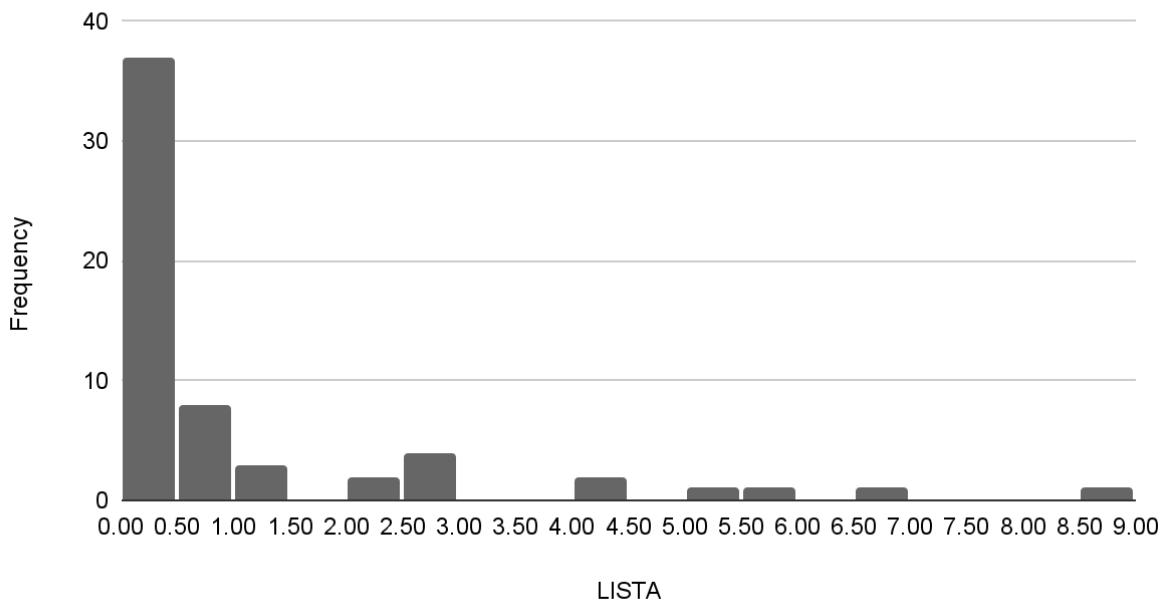## Alternative Priority Term Slope Values from LISTA

Figure 5. Alternative Priority Term Slope Values from LISTA

Figures 6 and 7 present Pearson's *r* bivariate correlation coefficients for all the alternative priority terms; Figure 6 shows results from Web of Science and Figure 7 shows results from Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts. Pearson's *r*, implying a straight line, is an imperfect measure for this study. As can be seen in Figures 1 and 2, the indices capturing the alternative priorities exhibit more of an upward curve since 2015. A nonparametric measure of correlation would be superior but because all the other analyses used simple linear regression, Pearson's *r* is presented here so that all measures can be better understood conceptually and be subject to the same criticism. A higher correlation reveals a stronger amount of covariance between the terms queried and time.

The five terms with the highest correlation coefficients in WoS were: hierarchies, bias(es), inclusion, vulnerable, and diversity. The five strongest linear relationships in LISTA were: diversity, stereotypes, inclusion, feminism, and underrepresented.

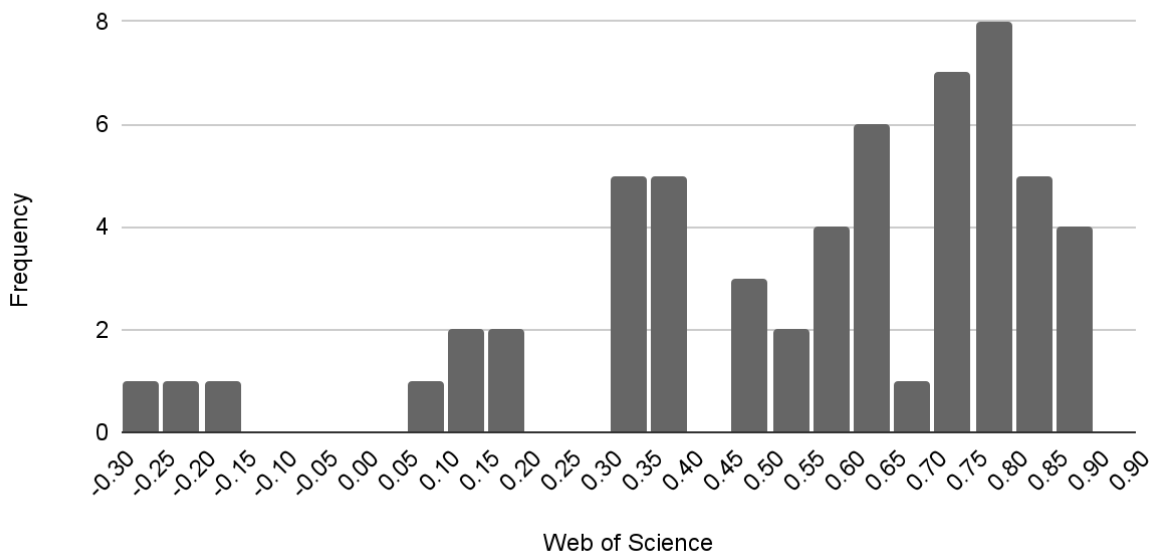## Alternative Priority Term Correlation Values from Web of Science

Figure 6. Alternative Priority Term Correlation Values from Web of Science

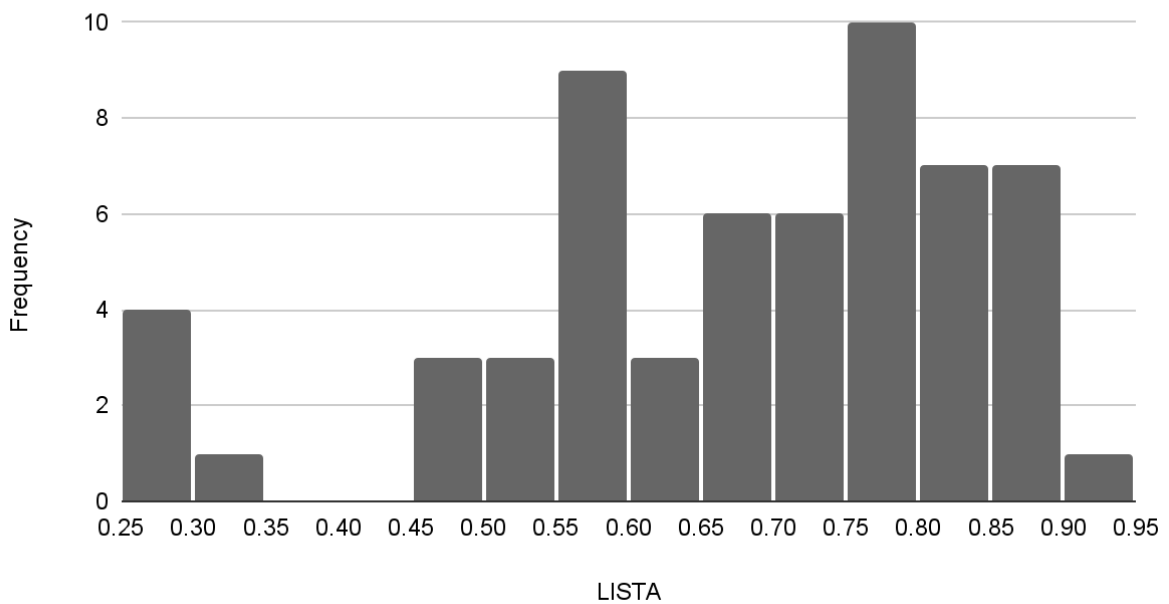## Alternative Priority Term Correlation Values from LISTA

Figure 7. Alternative Priority Term Correlation Values from LISTA

Figures 8 and 9 present p-values of the correlation coefficients for all the alternative priority terms; Figure 8 shows results from Web of Science and Figure 9 shows results from Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts. Plotting the p-values of the correlation coefficients gives an indication of how likely the correlations between time and annual result counts would be obtained by chance. The p-values are occasionally misunderstood in multiple ways; an easy misunderstanding to fall into is the idea that p-values give the probability that the null hypothesis is true given the data. However the correct definition is the probability of getting results at least as extreme as those observed, assuming the null hypothesis were true. Setting aside definitions, a very small p-value indicates that the observed test statistic would be extremely unlikely under the null hypothesis. If the null hypothesis were true, i.e. each alternative priority keyword were not dependent upon the Year variable via some chain of causality (omitted variables having positive covariance with time), p-values would have a uniform distribution (Breheny et al., 2018). Results from WoS show that 42 of the correlation coefficients of alternative priority terms are statistically significant at the conventional p=.05 threshold. The remaining 16 of the correlation coefficients of WoS data were not statistically significant. Results using the LISTA index were more skewed with 59 of the correlation coefficients of alternative priority terms being statistically significant; only 1 insignificant.
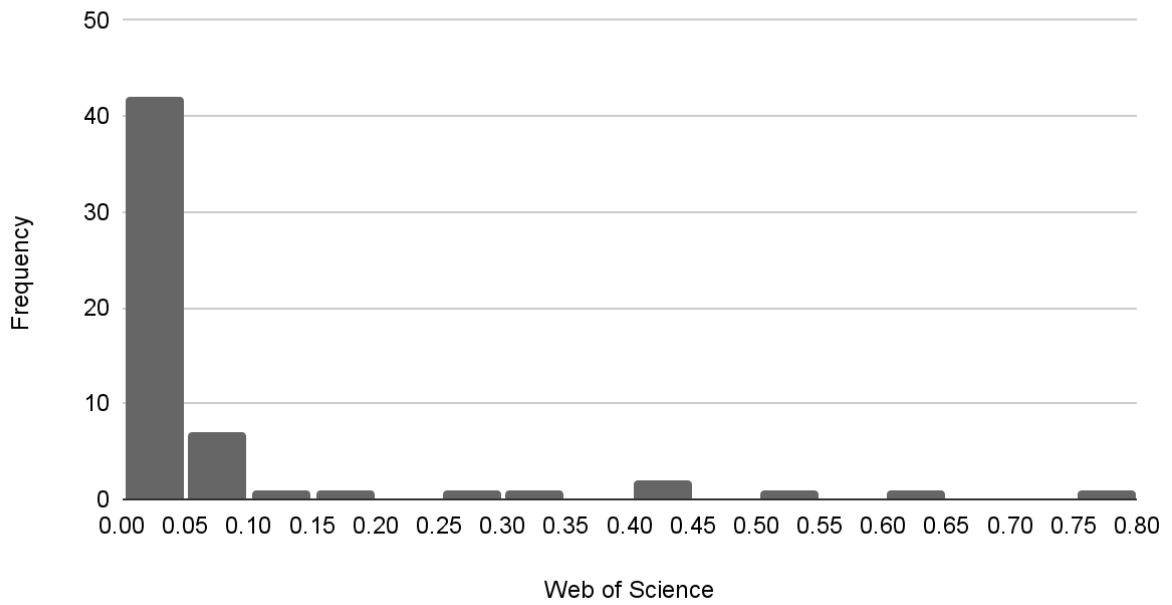
Alternative Priority Term p Values from Web of Science

Figure 8. Alternative Priority Term *p* Values from Web of Science

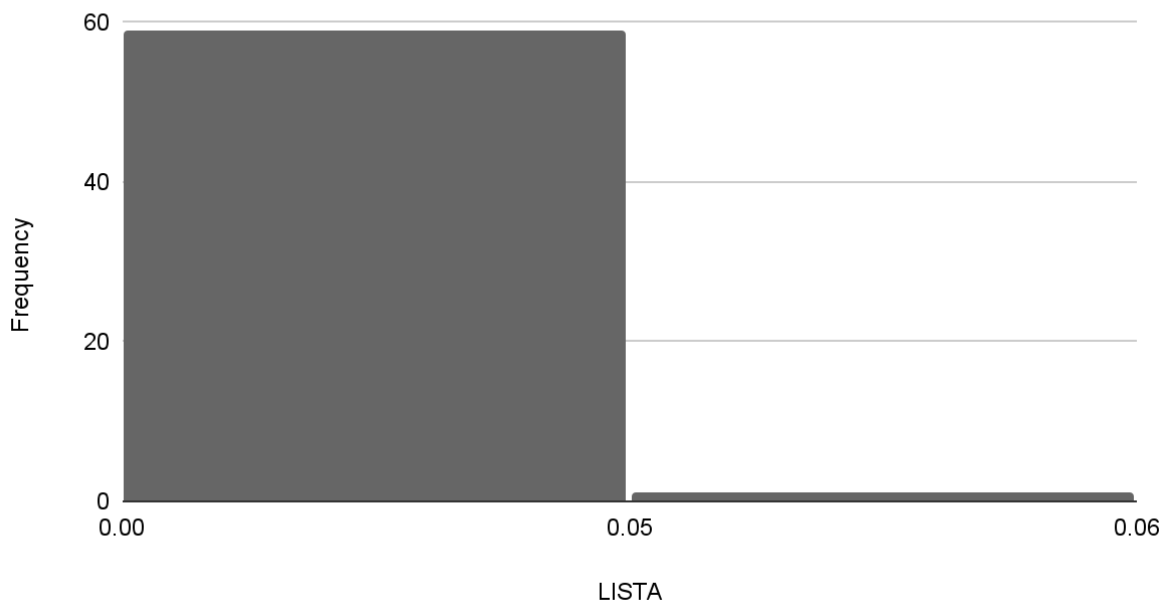## Alternative Priority Term p Values from LISTA

Figure 9. Alternative Priority Term *p* Values from LISTA

Figures 10 and 11 present r^2 values of the coefficients of determination for all the alternative priority terms; Figure 10 shows results from Web of Science and Figure 11 shows results from Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts. As with the slope values above, r^2 values of the alternative priority terms can be compared to the r^2 values of intellectual freedom and neutrality for the respective index. R^2 represents the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable (annual results counts) which is predictable from the independent variable (years, i.e. time). Importantly, r^2 is agnostic regarding causality; r^2 values cannot indicate whether the time is the cause of changes in results counts (obviously impossible), nor do they rule out the possibility of omitted variables biasing annual results counts. Results from WoS show that 16 of the alternative priority r^2 values were less than the r^2 value for intellectual freedom. The majority, 42, of the alternative priority r^2 values were greater than the intellectual freedom r^2. Despite intellectual freedom's boom and bust as visible in Figure 2, results were broadly similar in LISTA where 22 of the alternative priority r^2 values were less than that for intellectual freedom; 38 were greater than.

Neutrality, having much higher initial r^2 values for both WoS and LISTA data, fared differently in comparison. Neutrality was the less-mentioned topic in both literature indices and had smaller standard errors of the estimate compared with intellectual freedom. Therefore it was often more predictable than the alternative priority keywords, the majority of which had r^2 values less than that of it. The terms with the top r^2 values from each index are the same terms having the highest bivariate linear correlation coefficients: from WoS, hierarchies, bias(es), inclusion, vulnerable, and diversity; and from LISTA, diversity, stereotypes, inclusion, feminism, and underrepresented.

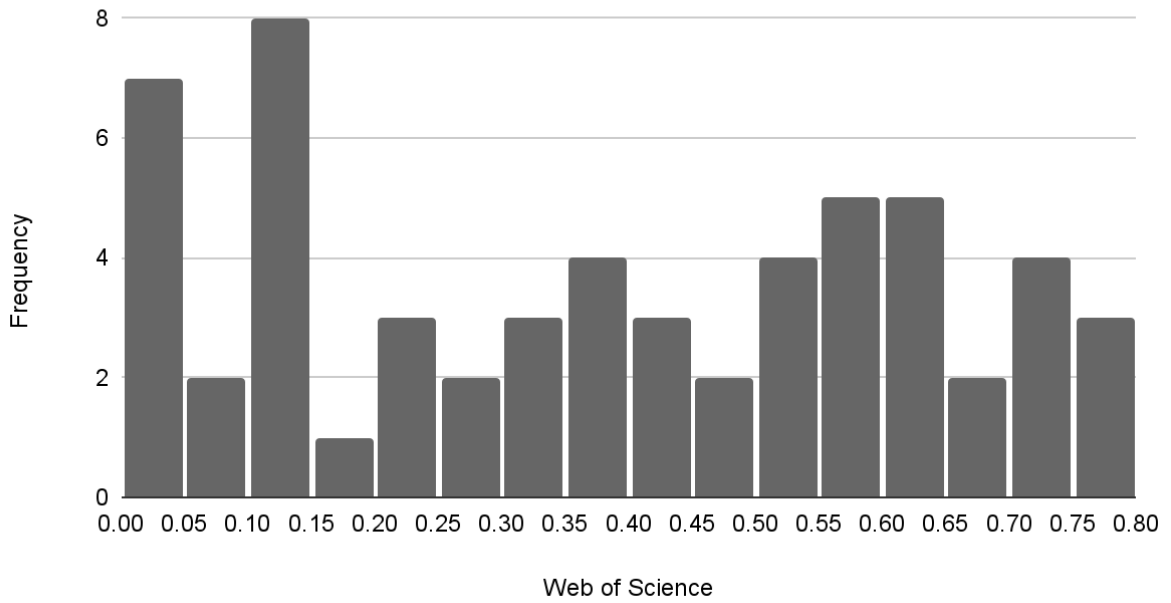Figure 10. Alternative Priority Term r^2 Values from Web of Science
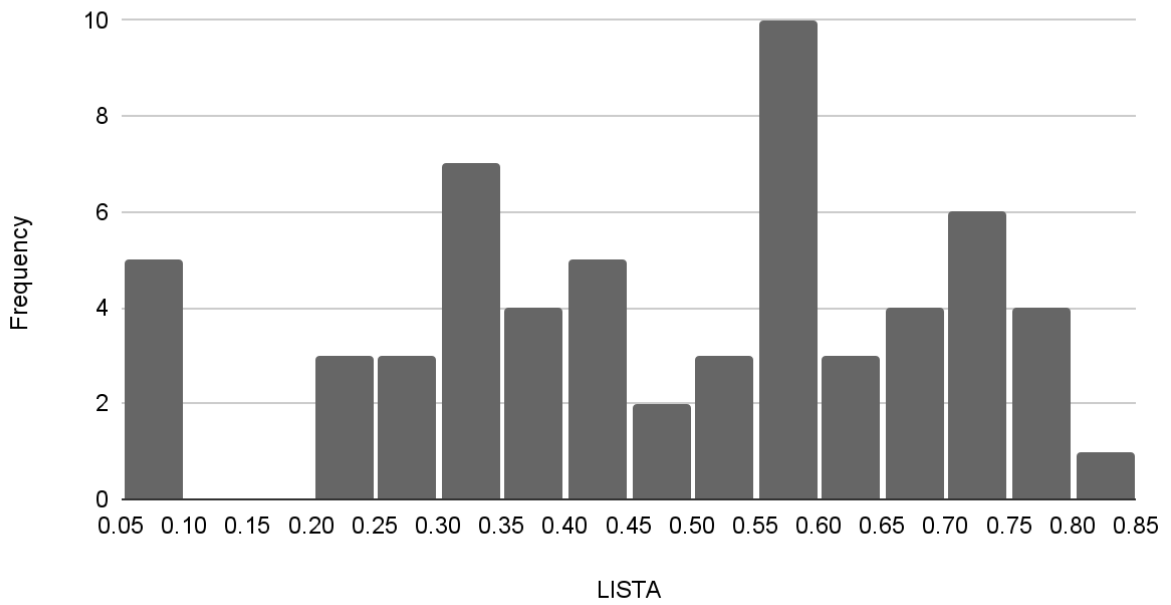

Figure 11. Alternative Priority Term r^2 Values from LISTA

Omitted variable bias crucially comes into play in this investigation, with straightforward causality between time and any number of articles being published being impossible. Time should be regarded as a proxy variable partially reflecting the omitted variable(s) which are the proximate cause(s) of the change in emphasis and rhetoric as captured by the alternative priority keyword indicators. Standard error of the estimate figures are included in Table 1 out of an abundance of caution and transparency. While the results are what they are and are replicable, the result counts as captured in Web of Science and LISTA only provide a partial view of the entire corpus of Library & Information Science research. All statistics reported here, while valid for their respective 'universes' (i.e. WoS or LISTA), are only approximations of the entire (partially-unindexed) literature. The specific limitations of this study are noted below.

Discussion

The results present a seeming paradox. As visible in Figures 1 and 2 the terms on an average of index measure for Goldberg's Index and Rozado's Index have passed intellectual freedom and neutrality in coverage in both WoS and LISTA. Yet comparison of each individual term on each index for the descriptive statistics of their regression line (slope, r, r^2) shows that many are below the values for intellectual freedom and neutrality. How is it possible that the index average can rise over intellectual freedom and neutrality when so many individual terms are below the statistics (e.g. slope) for those core concepts? The answer is that particular terms in particular indices are driving the increase. In other words, Goldberg's and Rozado's indices, when used against the LIS literature, only partly capture the phenomenon that they purport to capture in their original studies which used national newspapers in the United States. To put it differently, some of the terminology deployed in the news media has not (yet) been as widely adopted in the LIS literature. Nevertheless the

bivariate correlation coefficient results in Figures 6 and 7 are clear: the majority of alternative priority terms are moderately (≥ 0.45) or strongly correlated with time, and those correlations are statistically significant. Most terms in both indices are increasing in usage with the passage of time.

The results of this study comport with the recent empirical finding of a slow and steady increase in social justice-themed LIS research through 2013 followed by non-trivial increase in the number of such publications in post-2015 (Winberry and Bishop, 2021). While Winberry and Bishop treated the future of social justice as a subdiscipline within LIS research as an open question, the present study conclusively demonstrates that social justice is thus far an increasing part of a larger societal phenomenon that is affecting trends in LIS research. Rather, the open question appears to be whether the growth in social justice scholarship and various alternative priorities may come at the expense of an emphasis on intellectual freedom and a depoliticized or neutral notion of librarianship. Lack of any consistent decline in either topic shows that the LIS literature has thus far accommodated the growth in alternative priorities. At present there is no crowding out effect of the alternative priorities coinciding with a decrease in the two core priorities. Rather we see tepid increase in intellectual freedom and neutrality usage while the alternative priority terms experienced a boom in usage of late. This shift is indicative of substantial growth of the movements and ideas associated with that type of language.

Ideas have consequences. In this case, the increasing usage of alternative priority terms coupled with the relative stagnation of intellectual freedom and neutrality coincided with a number of public events. As noted above, Goldberg and Rozado noted sharp increases in their term indices beginning around 2013. This study found sharp increases in result counts for both indices beginning in 2015 in Web of Science and a milder but sustained increase beginning 2015 in LISTA. The study by Schroder & Hollister demonstrates that as early as

2014 reference, instruction, subject selectors, and liaisons librarians had some familiarity with critical theory (Schroeder and Hollister, 2014). Given the longer publishing timeline for academic literature it is a reasonable assumption that the effect observed in 2015 preceded the announcement of Donald J. Trump that he was campaigning for the presidency of the United States of America. Basic logic dictates that Trumpism and associated right-wing political and social developments cannot be the cause of the shift in rhetoric as expressed in word usage. Rather, leftist evolution of thought preceded Trumpism and the various events detailed below.

One of the more curious aspects of life in, or tangential to, the education system in the United States is the growth in diversity rhetoric during what is without a doubt the least diverse time to be alive in recorded human history. Russel Jacoby has ably noted how the variety of life: different ways of speaking, thinking, believing, eating, dressing, etc. are crumbling under the weight of the homogenizing force of globalized consumer-focused capitalism (Jacoby, 2020). Diversity is of course multifaceted and this study does not supply any data from which we can learn how the professional literature is treating the broad concept. It is worth noting that 'diversity' was one of the terms with the highest slope values in both LISTA and WoS. That, taken in conjunction with the other high-slope values such as "inclusion", "discrimination", and "underrepresented" give some indication that the literature has tended to focus not on viewpoint diversity or preserving disappearing cultural dress traditions but rather on demographic characteristics. The professional emphasis on alternative priorities has played out in a number of events and manifested itself in actions and statements by the American Library Association, three of which are discussed below.

October of 2020 saw an act of misinterpretation or misrepresentation by the American Library Association in response to President Trump's *Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping*. The organization issued a public statement opposing the order stating

that it was based on a false claim that "diversity training … reflects a 'Marxist doctrine' that is itself racist and sexist."(American Library Association, 2020) Yet the words 'Marx', 'Marxist', nor even 'doctrine' did not appear in the text of the Order (United States, Executive Office of the President [Donald J. Trump], 2020) or in the accompanying OMB memoranda (United States, Executive Office of the President [Donald J. Trump], Office of Management and Budget, 2020). The statement then compared EO 13950 to the McCarthy era, implying active governmental persecution of Marxists was on par with a mere prohibition of funding, not for all diversity and inclusion training but specifically for training that engaged in race or sex stereotyping. Finally, the statement closed by noting ALA's recognition of social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion as core values and explaining that their opposition to the Executive Order was because it resulted in "the curtailment of free expression and social justice" (American Library Association, 2020). The phrase 'social justice' did not appear in EO 13950 nor in the accompanying OMB memoranda (United States, Executive Office of the President [Donald J. Trump], 2020; United States, Executive Office of the President [Donald J. Trump], Office of Management and Budget, 2020). As for 'free expression', the order targeted such ideas as: "one race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex;" "an individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of his or her race or sex;" "an individual's moral character is necessarily determined by his or her race or sex;" (United States, Executive Office of the President [Donald J. Trump], 2020) Surely such ideas, if directed toward the groups explicitly mentioned in the ALA's statement ("Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color … and women") would conflict with the afformentioned core values of diversity and inclusion. This returns us to the familiar territory of an internal tension in the value pluralism of libraries and librarianship. Yet the drafters of the statement for ALA ultimately issued the statement worded as it was, from which we must conclude: 1) the drafters of the statement did not read EO 13950 or if they did read it assumed a definition of social justice that included the ideas

targeted by the order such as "that the United States is an inherently racist or evil country or that any race or ethnicity is inherently racist or evil" (United States, Executive Office of the President [Donald J. Trump], Office of Management and Budget, 2020), or 2) the drafters engaged in deliberate misreading or obfuscation and worded their statement such that readers of it who did not consult the primary source documents would arrive at erroneous conclusions about EO 13950, or 3) the drafters were using the rhetorical cover of 'free expression' to voice their support for governmental funding of equity, diversity, and inclusion training that *relies* on race or sex stereotyping. The three prior conclusions are not mutually exclusive; none of them portends well for the future of intellectual freedom in the American Library Association.

Neutrality is a somewhat amorphous concept both in libraries and in the legal literature. As noted above, there is actually a widely accepted definition of neutrality amongst librarians, having to do with objectivity in information provision and supply (Scott and Saunders, 2021). Yet beyond that interpretation of what neutrality means in librarianship, there is another layer of neutrality that applies to public servants in the United States of America. Libraries which receive governmental funding in this context are theoretically bound to abide by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution as interpreted by the courts governing the jurisdictions in which they are located and the U.S. Supreme Court. Jurisprudence on the issue of neutrality, dealing inherently with practical matters, has devised a variety of ways in which governmental actions can be scrutinized. These include the following ideas: content-neutral regulation (*Encyclopedia of the First Amendment*, 2009b), and content-based regulation which deals with the sub-concepts of subject-matter discrimination and viewpoint discrimination (*Encyclopedia of the First Amendment*, 2009a). Detailed discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of this article; suffice it to say that the current state of jurisprudence regarding these issues is complicated, but there are a few conclusions that are

clear. First, in their own speech, governmental agencies are under no obligation to be neutral among viewpoints (Bloom, 2019). Second, when restrictions are placed on speech, the forum (in the legal sense) matters in determining what types of restrictions are allowed. Third, the type of restriction, i.e. whether the restrictions are content-neutral or content-based, is crucial. Content-neutral restrictions receive intermediate scrutiny if applied to public forums or reasonable balancing review if applied in non-public forums owned by the government. However, if the restrictions are content-based (such as being antifascist, see below) that is considered viewpoint discrimination by the courts and is subject to strict scrutiny regardless of whether the forum is public or not (Kelso, 2019).

A naive observer of leftism's long march through the institutions might think that multiple Supreme Court cases clarifying the nature of and generally siding against viewpoint discrimination would settle the issue, at least in the United States. Yet agitation against the concept of neutrality in libraries has grown. As late as 2013 American Libraries, the magazine of the ALA, ran a piece stressing the importance of library neutrality surrounding the Affordable Care Act. Then ALA President Barbara Stripling was quoted there saying, "As always, libraries do not promote specific programs or points of view, but provide the public with balanced, unbiased access to information" (Goldberg, 2013). By 2017, the intellectual winds at the magazine had shifted with a column by Meredith Farkas entitled "Never Neutral" which critiqued neutrality and noted that social justice can be used as an ethical commitment which justifies equal access; intellectual freedom received no mention (Farkas, 2017). This was followed by a 2018 article by Julie Jones which noted that the University of Washington decided to shut down much of campus, including the libraries, on February 10th, 2018 when a right-wing group invited by UW College Republicans held a rally on campus. The crux of the argument was "that freedom of expression is not coming from a neutral playing field; some expressions actively and effectively silence others" (Jones, 2018). Importantly, 2018

also saw vibrant professional public debate on a panel about neutrality in librarianship at the 2018 Midwinter Meeting & Exhibits of the American Library Association wherein the plurality of opinion was that neutrality was impossible (*American Libraries*, 2018). Two of the eight panel participants argued in favor of maintaining some notion of library neutrality; only two panelists mentioned intellectual freedom and its conceptual relations to neutrality. As noted above, opponents of neutrality typically critique the concept as insufficiently political, not capable of addressing perceived power imbalances or conflicts, and as being impossible to achieve. But these critiques, often framed as what librarians (most of whom are governmental employees) or subsets of library patrons *want*, miss the mark. What is at issue, and has not been addressed by the recent articles in *American Libraries* or at the 2018 Midwinter panel, are what librarians are *required* to do and how they are *required* to act as recipients and stewards of taxpayer funding.

Most recently, at the 2021 ALA Midwinter Meeting, a *Resolution to Condemn White Supremacy and Fascism as Antithetical to Library Work* was adopted. The resolution's whereas clauses note that historically discriminatory practices against non-whites have caused harm and conflict with the ALA *Code of Ethics* and their *Library Bill of Rights*. The eight items formally resolved make a necessary apology for past practices and condemn the supposed role that neutrality played in them, and then go on to detail a process whereby the association will reform their communications, advocacy and events. The mere fact that libraries existed in apartheid South Africa and Falangist Spain, as well as the obversely totalitarian regime of the Soviet Union, is sufficient proof to refute the claim implicit in the resolution's title; but there are more substantive questions to address. Specifically 'white supremacy' and 'fascism' are nowhere defined in the resolution, nor is 'antiracism'. This leaves the meaning and implications of these terms open to interpretation. Recommendations regarding the integration of antifacism and antiracism into the

organization are forthcoming; if the terms are left undefined in those documents, the question of their meaning will be decided by individual librarians. A nod toward a formal definition of at least fascism was made by including Umberto Eco's essay on Ur-Fascism in the resolution's notes; that document lists fourteen common properties that Eco thought were generally applicable to fascism. What is unclear is precisely how many of the fourteen properties must be possessed in order for something to be ruled fascistic.

Though neutrality as a library priority is critiqued in the resolution, the seeds of critique of intellectual freedom are present as well. Notably the fourth "whereas" statement in the preamble states "we must reject practices, movements, and groups that oppose equity, diversity and inclusion;" and Resolved Item 5 contains the phrase "commits to explicitly incorporating existing and developing antiracist and antifascist frameworks." (American Library Association Council, 2021) When an organization commits to rejecting movements and groups, clarity is required as to the precise identification of those movements and groups. Fortunately, at least for equity, diversity, and inclusion, ALA has formal definitions (ALA Council, 2017). These allow for some clarity on the movements and groups, and by implication their ideas, that are now the target of the association's ire. Yet clarification is still required on the two affirmatively "anti" principles that will eventually inform the ALA's "external communications, advocacy, events, and organizational design" (American Library Association Council, 2021). It is quite proper, in a liberal democratic republic (and on grounds of shared common humanity), to be against racism and fascism. Yet, as proven by Rozado, concept creep of terms associated with racism (among other topics) has expanded the boundaries of what that concept previously meant and how it is applied. A similar phenomenon has happened with the term fascism as demonstrated by much commentary from the fourth estate during the presidency of Donald J. Trump. Threat inflation around fascism and lack of conceptual care as to its definition is a longstanding problem (Griffin, 2013). The implications of what this means for intellectual freedom are obvious. Simply

stated: there are no "excluding fascist or racist ideas, as interpreted by librarians" exceptions in either the *Library Bill of Rights* nor the *Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom*. Perhaps the lack of such exceptions has been an oversight that the Midwinter resolution has begun to rectify. Absent clear definitions of terms, intellectual freedom as historically understood and practiced could be threatened by an explicitly antifacist and antiracist American Library Association. Value pluralism shows that there is the possibility of conflict between the various alternative priorities and intellectual freedom. A comparison of the relative benefits that intellectual freedom and (say for example) equity bring to our library services is a fundamentally flawed project. The alternative is a ranking, and professional deliberation would be required to determine their position and which values are subordinate under what circumstances.

This study has shown that, relative to the longstanding core value of intellectual freedom and practice of neutrality, alternative priorities associated with social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion are ascendant in the LIS literature. The events discussed above show that this shift in the literature corresponds to behavior in the real word and comes a few years prior to the American Library Association's tendentious statement regarding Executive Order 13950, their condemnation of neutrality rhetoric, and their explicit adoption of antiracist and antifascist frameworks. This does not imply that there is unanimity among librarians on these issues however. At least one librarian saw fit to argue in print that systemic racism is best combated by avoiding the use of critical race theory and the assumption that racism is the primary cause of disparities between racial groups (Erb, 2021). Another has argued that diversity should be broadly defined so as to include viewpoint diversity, while noting the reductive nature of placing too much emphasis on race (McClung, 2019). Similarly, there is recent empirical support showing that there is no bias against soi-disant "free market" donations to university libraries in the United States (Rhoads, 2019). Though the current

study shows that alternative priorities are rapidly growing in the LIS literature, viewpoint diversity within the profession persists.

Limitations

Linear regression analysis in an activity fraught with explanatory peril. The descriptive statistics presented in this paper should not be regarded as establishing any theoretical principle, nor should they be used to predict future publication trends in the LIS literature. Rather, they are index-dependent historico-mathematical facts which simply describe the data for each queried term noted above. As noted above, time modeled as the single independent variable with no covariates is impossibly unrealistic; the omitted variables, which are assumed to have positive covariance with time, are the explanatory factors behind the increases observed in the alternative priority terms. Furthermore it must be said that what Figures 1 and 2 reveal is that the alternative priorities departed from a rectilinear pattern in 2015 and curve upward since. This departure from historical performance is precisely the topic of this paper but the descriptive statistical work above implied straight lines which again should result in cautious interpretation of those figures.

Simply counting occurrences of words only indicates discussion, not whether treatment was positive or negative. Future research might use sentiment analysis or other textual analytic methods, including close reading, in order to trace the treatment of intellectual freedom and library neutrality in the literature. Relatedly, word meaning of some of the terms in the indices can vary depending upon context; e.g. while Rozado included 'triggering' in his index as an indicator of increasing victimization themes, the word is typically used for other reasons in LIS research.

The above bibliometric analysis, using only descriptive statistics and graphical analysis, is insufficient to demonstrate any causal relationship between mentions of intellectual freedom,

neutrality, and any of the alternative priorities or time. It is intended, however, that discussion of, and quotations from, various American Library Association publications provide justification for a claim about omitted variables that have increased with the passage of time. Whether the burden of proof to demonstrate that such a relationship has been met is left up to the reader. As to the question of what the specific omitted variables are, much future research would be required to answer it.

Conclusion

This study has documented a sharp increase since 2015 in the usage of terms broadly grouped under a rubric of social justice or diversity, equity, and inclusion in the library and information science literature as captured in the Web of Science and Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts databases. Such concepts have already received affirmation from professional organizations such as the American Library Association. Rhetoric and publication on these priorities has historically been subordinate to the priority of intellectual freedom. Neutrality, as an unenumerated professional value, has not received nearly as much treatment in the literature compared with intellectual freedom; or, for that matter, the alternative priorities as represented by the indices devised by Zach Goldberg and David Rozado. Furthermore, neutrality has recently been subject to high-profile criticism in *American Libraries* and in a 2021 resolution from the American Library Association. It may have already fallen decisively out of favor amongst the elite influencing the ALA; though if the sample in Scott & Saunders is representative, a majority of librarians and directors consider neutrality 'Often' or 'All the time' when performing their duties (Scott and Saunders, 2021). This change at ALA coincides with the increase in alternative priority keywords.

Value pluralism provides an analytical framework that parsimoniously explains the fact that librarianship rests on multiple ethical commitments and allows for the possibility of conflict

between our priorities. Publications such as the *IFLA Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom* elevate intellectual freedom, while still professing respect for society's plurality. Perhaps the pendulum has swung too long in favor of intellectual freedom and neutrality and the rise in social justice and equity, diversity, and inclusion is a necessary correction. Or, perhaps when these priorities conflict and contend for heightened professional attention, we are bearing witness to a question of "which is to be master - that's all". In the perennial balancing act between our priorities, which will rank higher?

Numerous recent events attest to the fact that the increase in alternative priority term usage in the literature coincides with activity in the real world. A broader cultural shift, not captured by the variables used in this study, is affecting the LIS literature, our professional priorities, and the activities of the American Library Association. Whether this change is merely one of relative emphasis among the many ethical commitments required for modern librarianship or whether we are living through a rhetorical and procedural downgrading of intellectual freedom and a removal of neutrality remains to be seen.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

None.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available in the Figshare repository, https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.14502057.

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