

"I was pretty appalled by this": Teaching
students about the exclusive and
exclusionary scholarly publishing ecosystem

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What OUR ecosystem looks like

- Fairfield University is a primarily undergrad institution with a growing grad student population, ~5500 FTE this past year
- Jesuit institution whose goal is to produce students “for and with others,” meaning working for and walking with
- Not a very diverse school, which hinders Jesuit goals
 - 76% white faculty, 81% white students
 - Other minoritized populations are not officially numbered but other diversities are very underrepresented
- In addition to the current social justice situation in the country, there have been some incidents on campus that have prompted faculty and staff to focus more on DEIB and creating a more inclusive culture

The undergrad system in which this lesson exists

- We are unusual in that we have specifically rhetoric and composition classes (and specifically rhet/comp professors) for the first-year undergrad intro writing course, ENGL 1001
- The Library works closely with the rhet/comp professors responsible for the ENGL 1001 curriculum, the Core Writing Team
- In collaboration with Core Writing, we created the ENGL 1001 Library Session Menu, a list of modular information literacy lessons the individual faculty can choose based on what would best fit their overall theme
 - Primary Research/Research Methods
 - Generating Key Terms from Existing Sources
 - Locating Technical Documents/Trade Journals
 - And now, Inclusive Research

What the Inclusive Research lesson is

- Originally conceived as a DEIB-centric lesson option for the ENGL 1001 menu
 - What could I do to make our university more inclusive while also staying in my lane?
- A discussion of language, identities, and how your assumptions and/or biases can affect the research you do
- It also includes the basics of working within the scholarly publishing ecosystem, including some transparent facts about how much we as a Library spend to keep students and faculty in current information, as well as how certain populations are excluded from full participation in the scholarly conversation

So let's look at the lesson.

Students' reactions were mixed, but surprising...

- We happened to be doing an instruction assessment at the time
 - "What do you think is the most useful information you learned during the instruction session?"
 - Very helpful particularly for a new and more theoretical lesson like this, highly recommended
- Most students wrote about the usual: Knowing where to get help, knowing where to go for databases, just having a face to a name for a librarian
- Many of them focused specifically on the research question activity, which is great (although those comments were not usually super in-depth)
- A few didn't quite get it and thought if you wanted to research a minoritized population you needed to know ALL POSSIBLE TERMINOLOGY
- Some had just wanted to know how to use a database and didn't want to get bogged down in other stuff
- But many had really thoughtful and thought-provoking answers

For example:

Thoughtful:

- “I learned different information regarding identities and how there are things that may not impact or worry me, but can be more important to other people and vice versa.”
- “I liked learning about how professors do their work, especially when they write about their research because there was a lot I didn't know about the whole process.”
- “I think the most significant thing I learned during library day is that it's important to diversify research and take into consideration how unconscious [sic] biases that we have based on our own personal background and experiences may play a role in inaccuracies in our research.”

Thought-Provoking:

- “The most useful information I learned was about the politics behind research and how some people do not succeed academically in their fields because of who they are or their status”
- “I think the idea that there can be research from a biased point of view was one of the most important things I learned. We use sources a lot as students and forget to see if they are even credible because typically we are under a time crunch.”

“Scholars are not paid at all for their work, and are expected to do all their research for free. I was pretty appalled by this, especially considering some don't get compensation from their university, yet are still expected to stay up to date.”

What can we glean from this?

- Students aren't stupid! (But we should already know this)
- Students also care about the same things we care about
- Many responses had to do with the social aspect—students, especially first-years, are very social creatures
 - So a lot of what they picked up on was the identity aspect and how they related to others and how others related to them
- Much of this also had to do with the faculty
 - We all know what a difference the professor can make
 - Many of the best and most thoughtful responses came from the students whose professor was most open with them, and who was most involved in social justice and who also talked most about how language affects the world
 - “When you make a rhetorical choice, you're also making an ethical choice”

Where do we go from here?

- I will be revising the lesson
 - It's too wordy, I should have used a font that was more scannable, the open access discussion was too much... etc.
- I will still show the identity wheel and tell them where to find one if they want to fill it out, but there were just too many privacy concerns to continue doing it in the classroom
 - Removing it also paves the way for a better activity more in tune with other things they do in the rest of the course, which is a writing activity
 - I'm thinking something like "write down everything you can about who you are as a person"
- The lesson can be easily adapted to other disciplines simply by providing more discipline-specific examples
 - For instance, a Biology class could talk about how much of the medical research out there doesn't study diverse enough populations, which is why we're now discovering that medications can affect people differently depending on their race, for example

What have I gained from this? (Besides a presentation)

- The identity wheel works!
 - It's a great self-reflective tool
- I had already known we're underestimating students, but this really underscored it for me
- I gained a newfound appreciation for more theoretical teaching (this goes along with "don't underestimate students")
- And teaching in general!
 - I was TIRED, y'all... this is a breath of fresh air from the usual "go here, click here"
- Faculty have been very appreciative of the lesson
 - And to be honest, it's just nice to show faculty that we have thoughts/opinions/beliefs/EXPERTISE about what students should know that are outside the scope of their courses/assignments

How could you do something similar? (Eek, DEIB!)

I luckily didn't feel I needed to ask anyone for "permission" for any content, but if that's not the case in your Library:

- Have at least a basic outline ready first, a full artifact (slides, etc.) would be great too
- Have some ideas as to how it relates to current curriculum as well as any specific lessons or assignments faculty are doing
- Additionally, if your Library, institution, or other larger governing body has a strategic plan, mission statement, vision statement, goals, etc. that are relevant, definitely tie the lesson into that
 - My Library has a strategic plan with a DEIB goal, and I and another librarian co-chair the Library DEIB committee, so it's nice to have those things as backup
- If you think people will have an issue with more DEIB-oriented content, you could gear it more toward language and students' use of language, and just have a bunch of DEIB-centric examples
- Cite everything, so if you DO have anyone make a ruckus, you have proof
- Many faculty (at least in this area of the country) are currently happy to have more DEIB-related options in their repertoire, and they can be allies

How could you do something similar? (More practically)

In terms of just the practical aspect of putting a similar lesson together:

- You can feel free to gain inspiration from my lesson/slides, or even just use them
 - Attribution would be nice!
 - I would also love to know what you do with it!
- Learn from my mistakes (aka check out my new slides as I improve the lesson using the link on the next slide)
- More theoretical teaching benefits from having an artifact (slides, handouts, whatever)
- Although students aren't stupid, you should still keep it simple
- Group activities help



Questions?

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