Addressing Barriers to Research-Informed Practice: A Library and Social Work Collaboration to Empower Future Practitioners

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Abstract

Social work education prioritizes the use of research to inform practice. As university students, prospective social workers have a wealth of research available to them as well as librarians to help them find, evaluate, and use that information. However, access to much of this research ends once the student graduates—at a time when it is most needed to inform their professional practice. To address this challenge, a librarian and a social work faculty member worked with one class of students in their final semester of a bachelor's degree in social work program to promote awareness of information privilege and barriers to access, to expand their understanding of authority to include marginalized voices, and to utilize an open pedagogy assignment as a means of proactively addressing these challenges. This article describes what was learned from this effort, including the results of surveys conducted with students before and after instruction.

Keywords: authority, collaboration, critical information literacy, information privilege, lifelong learning, open access, open pedagogy, scholarly publishing, social work

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Social work programs across the United States, at both the undergraduate and graduate level, prioritize the role of research in the curriculum and professional practice. This focus on the ability to interpret, evaluate, and apply research findings provides a clear role for librarians to support students as they progress through their degree programs, as well as opportunities for partnering with social work faculty. However, post-graduation, social workers are often ill-equipped to confront barriers to accessing the research needed to inform their practice. While many social work students have access to peer-reviewed, scholarly literature while they are enrolled in university, this access ends once the student graduates. Subscription-based academic publishing makes accessing research articles expensive and impractical for most practicing social workers. In addition, these resources often do not reflect the voices of marginalized communities and reproduce and reinforce systemic issues of privilege and racism.

Librarians and social workers share a common purpose: connecting people with information and services. Our fields are also concerned with social justice and improving the human condition by challenging systemic barriers and promoting equitable access to services and resources. Given the fact that much new knowledge is shared via scholarly journals, and that social workers need this knowledge to support their work, there are opportunities for librarians and social work faculty to collaborate on efforts to empower future social workers with the skills they will need to locate these sources after graduation via open access alternatives. In addition, there is an opportunity to educate and advocate for an awareness of the problematic nature of traditional scholarly publishing and the movement toward open access in the hopes that social work students, faculty, and the profession as a whole will prioritize making their own research accessible via open access. Librarians and social workers can work together to develop innovative instructional approaches that promote a culture of knowledge sharing that bridges the gap between research and practice.

This article describes one such collaboration between an academic librarian and a social work faculty member at a public university in California. It shares an innovative approach to instruction which included a series of interactive workshops and the creation of the *Humboldt Social Work Knowledge Commons* using open pedagogy. The project was conducted

with students in their final semester of their Bachelor of Arts in Social Work (BASW) program who were enrolled in Social Work 456: Field Experience Seminar. The class met weekly for two hours and all students were placed in an internship in a social work setting for 15 hours a week. The workshops, co-taught by the librarian and social work faculty member, were informed by critical information literacy and focused on scholarly publishing, open access, and information privilege. Students were also asked to consider the idea, put forth in the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, 2015) *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, that authority is constructed and contextual and to question the preeminence of scholarly articles as the best source of knowledge in all circumstances.

Background

Social Work Education & Libraries

In the United States, baccalaureate and master's social work programs are accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and follow CSWE's *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (EPAS). The competencies were recently updated in 2022 to include an emphasis on anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices. This update means all accredited social work programs will now require students to engage in critical thinking and ethical practices related to challenging systemic racism and oppression and addressing equity. EPAS Competency 4, entitled "Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice," describes the expectations for students and future practitioners in terms of both utilizing and conducting research. The full text of the competency can be found on the Council of Social Work Education website. In summary, social workers:

a. apply research findings to inform and improve practice, policy, and programs; and
b. identify ethical, culturally informed, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive strategies that address inherent biases for use in quantitative and qualitative research methods to advance the purposes of social work. (CSWE, 2022, p. 10)

The values and skills outlined in Competency 4 are aligned with several of the ACRL frames and provide librarians with an opportunity to collaborate with social work faculty to integrate information literacy into the curriculum, as demonstrated in the companion document developed by the Social Work committee of the Education and Behavioral Studies Section (ACRL, 2021). These partnerships have taken many forms and vary in degree of frequency and engagement with the social work faculty, students, and curriculum.

A national survey of social work librarians indicated that library instruction, especially one-shot sessions, are common across most master's level social work programs (Bausman & Laleman Ward, 2016). However, these efforts are primarily tailored to the resources students have access to *as students* but may fall short in teaching them the skills they will need to conduct research as practitioners. As Pendell and Kimball (2017) pointed out in their national survey of 123 practicing social workers, "when social work students graduate and move into their professional practice, they also move into an information landscape vastly different from the academic environment" (p. 2). Further, focusing only on the resources students have access to, without addressing the barriers they will encounter upon entering practice, can reinforce the "gap between the community of research (producers) and the community of practice (users)" that has long existed in the field of social work (Denvall & Skillmark, 2021, p. 2723).

Pendell and Kimball's (2017) survey explored the barriers that social workers encounter with accessing information, particularly research articles, that support evidence-based practice once they leave the university. Pendell and Kimball recommend that librarians and social work educators work together to advocate for improved access to research through open access publication and to bridge the gap between what social work students have access to through their universities and the information they will need to support evidence-based practice. Additionally, social workers and librarians should engage in conversations about the limitations of scholarly research and the reliance on peer-reviewed literature to inform practice. While Competency 4 does not explicitly address this issue, it does prompt a more nuanced discussion of authority and the value of different types of information sources, including those "derived from interprofessional and diverse research methods, approaches, and sources" (CSWE, 2022, p. 10). Additionally, it asks social workers to "use ethical, culturally informed, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive approaches in conducting research and building knowledge" (CSWE, 2022, p. 10) which can provide an avenue for educators to engage students in discussions of critical race theory, critical information literacy, and other concepts that question and challenge existing structures and systems.

Traditional Scholarly Publishing as a Barrier to Research-Informed Practice

While most librarians are familiar with the high costs of traditional scholarly publishing, and the barriers inherent in subscription-based access to information, the larger academic community is often not aware of these issues. This is understandable given the fact that libraries strive to provide faculty and students with seamless access to subscription databases

and interlibrary loan services, resulting in a form of information privilege that distances students from the restrictions they will encounter upon graduation. Acknowledging this information privilege, and recognizing the effect it has on practitioners as well as the communities they serve, is a powerful teaching approach that can bring to light many of the injustices inherent in traditional scholarly publishing and academia in general (Booth, 2014). It can also open up ways for students to challenge information privilege and advocate for open access, which "allows everyone—regardless of institutional affiliation, geographic location, or financial means—to access the research relevant to their lives and communities" (DeCarlo & Pendell, n.d., para. 1).

Pendell (2018) noted that there is a disconnect between what is expected of the social work practitioner in terms of research-informed or evidence-based practice (EBP) and what is possible in terms of access. Pendell stated, "open access publishing or the use of disciplinary or institutional repositories are almost never mentioned in the context of EBP or other literature regarding research dissemination, even though both open access scholarly publishing and repositories have been firmly established for at least a decade" (Pendell, 2018, p. 7). Without these alternatives to traditional publishing, social work researchers who want to share their work with the profession and potentially influence practice often find their publications read only by students and fellow faculty who have access to subscription databases—reinforcing, again, the divide between communities of research and communities of practice.

Of course, one of the biggest challenges with open access is the amount of content available. Pendell (2018) called attention to the fact that there are no high impact social work journals that are completely open access, but many journals do allow authors to post versions of their articles to institutional or disciplinary repositories. In an attempt to quantify the amount of content freely available online, Pendell looked at the top 25 social work journals and determined that 52% of the articles from these journals were unavailable without a subscription. Of the remaining 48%, 30% had been uploaded to social networking platforms (e.g., ResearchGate) in potential violation of the publisher's copyright and were subject to take down notice. Only a small percentage had been uploaded to institutional or disciplinary repositories. As Pendell summarized, "within the parameters of this study, very few articles would be available to users not affiliated with an institution or some other form of subscription access without the popularity of ResearchGate" (Pendell, 2018, p. 1049). The unreliable and, arguably, unethical nature of sites like ResearchGate make them unsatisfactory solutions to the larger issue of a lack of adoption of open access by the social

work profession. Pendell argued that the solution lies in the hands of researchers who can either choose to publish in open access journals or self-archive their publications or pre-prints in institutional or disciplinary repositories. This is also an opportunity for librarians to become open access advocates within the departments they serve, educating faculty about the avenues for publishing open access and encouraging them to upload their articles to repositories.

Dunleavy (2021) also made the case that open access is "a necessity for the field of social work to function and thrive" and that "greater access will arguably aid in solving society's most pressing problems" (para. 1). To support this point, Dunleavy provided examples of the ways in which research is used by social workers to inform decision making. These include searching the literature to better understand societal problems, identifying effective interventions or services, and evaluating evidence that may or may not support the implementation or adoption of new programs or policies. Additionally, lack of access to research "means that clients and communities are at risk of receiving suboptimal and/or non-evidence-based services—which raises various ethical concerns" (Dunleavy, 2021, para. 6).

Dunleavy challenged his profession to fully adopt open access as a social justice issue and as a necessary component of an effective and thriving profession. This included specific recommendations for authors on self-archiving pre-prints and published work, for social work journal publishers to move toward open access, and for professional social work organizations like the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) to make their publications open access and help shape standards of practice. Although a movement in this direction can also be seen in the EPAS Competency 4 statement that social workers should "articulate and share research findings in ways that are usable to a variety of clients and constituencies," (CSWE, 2022, p. 10) the Council of Social Work Education's own scholarly journal, a prominent journal in the field of social work education, is not open access.

Finally, Dunleavy (2021) asked schools of social work to adopt open educational resources (OER) and for social work educators to "ensure that students (as future practitioners and researchers) not only know how to perform literature searches, but how to effectively access the literature, before graduation from university" (para. 13). While not explicitly stated, academic librarians can also play a role in promoting the values of "open" within the field by partnering with social work faculty to find and create OER and by educating students about

traditional scholarly publishing, open alternatives, and strategies for finding the information they need to make informed practice decisions.

Traditional Scholarly Publishing and Social Justice

As a profession that is dedicated to social justice, it is also important for social work students to be aware of the systemic issues within academia and academic publishing that have supported and enabled racism and injustice. The full text of EPAS Competency 4 addresses this when it states that social workers "use ethical, culturally informed, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive approaches in conducting research and building knowledge" and "understand the inherent bias in research and evaluate design, analysis, and interpretation using an anti-racist and anti-oppressive perspective" (CSWE, 2022, p. 10). This is clearly aligned with the ACRL frame "Scholarship as Conversation" which states that learners should "recognize that systems privilege authorities and that not having a fluency in the language and process of a discipline disempowers their ability to participate and engage" (ACRL, 2015, p. 21). These connections provide opportunities for librarians and social work educators to collaborate on efforts to make students aware of the problematic structures that exist in the creation and dissemination of the research literature with which they are expected to inform their practice.

A critical aspect of this problematic structure is the lack of diversity in full-time higher education faculty, the group most likely, and most incentivized, to pursue research and publication in scholarly journals and whose labor is relied upon in the peer-review process. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023), in fall 2021, nearly three-quarters of full-time faculty in the United States were White. Further, less than 30% of researchers worldwide are women (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019). Additionally, the majority of scholarly research articles are published in English, and the pressure to publish in English can contribute to the loss of local knowledge and a lack of knowledge-sharing amongst the population under study since most research cannot be published in more than one venue (Curry & Lillis, 2018). As Bahji et al. (2023) noted in reference to the literature on addiction, since only 17% of the world's population speaks English, the nearly exclusive use of English in the scientific literature excludes over 80% of the world's population from accessing research that might support their communities.

Critical race theory (CRT) can be used to examine these issues of racism in higher education and academic publishing. Initially conceptualized in a 1995 article by Ladson-Billings and Tate which focused on acknowledging the role of racism and white supremacy in K–12

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education, Patton (2016) extended CRT's application by examining the ways in which white supremacy has shaped higher education in the United States. She described how higher education is enmeshed with capitalistic entities that allow it to "both facilitate and reproduce inequality" and asked that we work to envision higher education as "a space for transformative knowledge production that challenges dominant discourses and ways of operating in and beyond the academy" (Patton, 2016, pp. 323, 335). While racism and white supremacy cannot be overcome solely through higher education, educators can play a significant role in teaching students how to acknowledge and disrupt the systems that perpetuate it. One way that we can do this is by rethinking who has authority and what information sources are considered valid.

Critical Information Literacy and Reconceptualizing Authority

Critical information literacy (CIL), informed by Paolo Freire and others' work in critical pedagogy, emerged from academic library scholarship as a theory and practice that "considers the sociopolitical dimensions of information and production of knowledge, and critiques the ways in which systems of power shape the creation, distribution, and reception of information" (Drabinski & Tewell, 2019, p. 1). Critical information literacy has come to shape innovative teaching and learning in academic libraries, as well as cross-disciplinary partnerships between librarians and teaching faculty. Some of the ideas included in the CIL literature have also been incorporated into one of the profession's most essential documents, the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.*

One of the six frames, "Authority Is Constructed and Contextual," clearly illustrates critical information literacy by emphasizing the importance of context in determining authority, rather than simply relying on the credentials of the author or publication in a peer-reviewed journal (Drabinski & Tewell, 2019). It also states that we should approach the idea of authority "with an attitude of informed skepticism and an openness to new perspectives, additional voices, and changes in schools of thought" (ACRL, 2015, p. 12). It expands on this by stating that we should "understand the need to determine the validity of the information created by different authorities and to acknowledge biases that privilege some sources of authority over others, especially in terms of others' worldviews, gender, sexual orientation, and cultural orientations" (ACRL, 2015, p. 12).

Many disciplines, including social work, have emphasized the need for research-based evidence in practice, often in the form of scholarly journal articles. As noted previously, there are considerable systemic issues that make relying on these types of sources problematic. While these articles are still the primary mode of conveying new research findings to practitioners and fellow researchers, and practitioners must know how to find and use them, it is important for us to also re-think what we consider to be "valid knowledge" (Wood & Orzech, 2022, p. 112) as well as how we bestow authority on knowledge creators. This is where librarians, in partnership with faculty across the disciplines, can incorporate critical information literacy into the curriculum.

Critical information literacy "acknowledges that libraries are not and cannot be neutral actors, and embraces the potential of libraries as catalysts for social change" (Drabinski & Tewell, 2019, p. 1). Utilizing the "Authority Is Constructed and Contextual" frame enables us to teach students how to critically evaluate many different types of information sources, including those created by non-academics and members of marginalized communities. By intentionally seeking out information that provides diverse viewpoints and perspectives outside of White-dominated academic systems, we can find authority in lived experience and alternative perspectives that are unlikely to be conveyed in the scholarly literature. Essentially, this frame can enable researchers to "respect the expertise that authority represents while remaining skeptical of the systems that have elevated that authority and the information created by it" (ACRL, 2015, p. 12).

Instructional Approach

In the fall of 2022, the authors (new faculty in the library and in the department of social work) met and began discussing some of these issues at a workshop series for new faculty hosted by their university. The social work faculty member served on the editorial board of an open access journal and was concerned that social work majors in her senior classes would soon be entering the profession without access to much of the scholarship they were using in their classes. Likewise, as the librarian became familiar with CSWE EPAS Competency 4, it became clear that there were opportunities for librarian engagement beyond the one-shot instruction session. In their discussions, a collaborative project began to take shape that would empower graduating social work majors with the skills they needed to access and utilize research in their future practice.

During the spring 2023 semester, the librarian and social work faculty member co-taught a series of three workshops at monthly intervals with students enrolled in one section of Social Work 456: Field Experience Seminar. The first workshop focused on introducing students to scholarly publishing, information privilege, and open access. The second looked at discrimination and lack of representation in scholarly publishing, the concept of authority, and the benefits of using non-scholarly sources to inform practice. The third and final workshop focused on the open pedagogy assignment, which included the creation of the *Humboldt Social Work Knowledge Commons.*

The learning outcomes for the first workshop were for students to:

- reflect on the challenges of engaging in research-informed practice and practice-informed research after graduation

- understand what information privilege is and how it impacts social work practice

- understand efforts to address information privilege through open access

- apply what was learned to locate open access research related to students' field experience or professional interests

Prior to the workshop, students watched the documentary *Paywall: The Business of Scholarship.* In class, the librarian provided an overview of the peer review process and how journal subscriptions are purchased and provided by university libraries. Students were then given a set of questions to prompt a class discussion, which included: If current research is locked behind paywalls after graduation, how do you remain committed to research-informed practice and practice-informed research? If social work research is only accessible to other researchers, how does this move the field forward and improve practice?

The librarian and professor then introduced the concept of information privilege, illustrating it with concrete examples of how the lack of access to research has negatively affected human welfare (e.g., the Ebola pandemic). Students considered the potential effects that this lack of access has on the communities they serve. The instructors then introduced open access as a potential solution, including both publishing in open access journals and the use of repositories. They offered a basic overview of these processes, as well as guidance on finding open access resources. Additionally, students were directed to a research guide, created by the librarian, that included links to specific open access social work journals and discovery tools. Students were tasked with utilizing these resources to locate one open

access journal article relevant to their internship or professional interests and completing a worksheet that guided them in writing an annotation.

The second workshop focused on expanding ideas of what is considered valid knowledge and encouraged students to discover authentic voices in the form of oral histories and podcasts, videos of cultural traditions, and other sources that are directly related to the communities they serve, as addressed in the following learning outcomes:

- understand how information privilege is embedded in scholarly publishing, recognize its structural issues, and acknowledge the ways in which these issues may hinder diverse ideas and perspectives

- consider the idea that authority is constructed and contextual and challenge the preeminence of scholarly articles as the best source of knowledge in all circumstances

- apply what was learned to identify missing voices and information sources and locate non-scholarly information sources related to students' field experience or professional interests

The instructors began the class by providing statistics on the lack of diversity in academia, followed by a discussion prompted by the questions: How do we balance these concerns about discrimination, lack of representation, and structural issues within scholarly publishing with the knowledge that scholarly articles are also the standard way in which new research is communicated? How can you challenge these systems? How can you contribute new knowledge, solve problems, and establish your own authority?

The librarian then introduced the "Authority Is Constructed and Contextual" frame from the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* and presented some of the ideas that this frame asks researchers to consider when determining the authority of a source. Students considered what questions should be asked when evaluating information sources and then applied these questions to examples of non-scholarly sources. Finally, students located a non-scholarly source created by, or supportive of, the communities they worked with and completed an annotation for it in much the same way as they had for the open access scholarly article.

Throughout the workshops, the instructors encouraged students to see themselves as knowledge creators and potential contributors to their field and asked them to consider if

their own work for the class (the annotations they were writing) could be made open and freely accessible to others. The students were enthusiastic about this approach and completed worksheets for each type of source that guided them in creating an annotation that would be useful to social work practitioners, providing the information a busy professional would need to quickly determine if the resource was worth reading in full.

Conversations about the ways in which the closed systems of academia and academic publishing have created barriers to research-informed practice served as inspiration to utilize open pedagogy for this assignment. Open pedagogy is part of an ecosystem of movements and approaches that prioritize collaboration, accessibility, and free engagement with, and creation of, knowledge and ideas. While open educational resources like textbooks can be a product of open pedagogy, the focus of open pedagogy is on the *process* of content creation rather than the product itself (Koseoglu & Bozkurt, 2018). Bali et al. (2020) stated that open educational practices, including open pedagogy, tend to be more process-centric, learner-centric, and social justice-focused.

With this in mind, students put what they learned in the workshops into practice during the third workshop by creating the *Humboldt Social Work Knowledge Commons*, a website where students uploaded the annotations for the sources they had found. This workshop included discussing what platform should be used, creating an organizational structure, and adding the annotations they had written as well as an image and stable link for the resources they found. The *Humboldt Social Work Knowledge Commons* is now freely available at https://sites.google.com/humboldt.edu/humboldt-social-work-knowledge and all contributions are clearly attributed to the students. It is also linked from the home page of the Cal Poly Humboldt Department of Social Work website. It will continue to evolve and change as future classes edit and add to the site, serving as a resource of freely accessible content, curated by social work students, which can be used after graduation. This assignment enabled students to proactively address some of the barriers to research-informed practice they will face upon graduation by creating a repository of resources, unrestricted by paywalls or dependent on their affiliation with a university, that can inform their future work and the work of their colleagues.

Assessment

The instructors administered a pre-survey at the beginning of the semester to understand students' prior knowledge. After the workshops and assignment, students were asked to

complete a post-survey. These surveys were essential to our efforts to understand both what students knew beforehand about the topics being discussed and what they learned as a result of the workshops and open pedagogy assignment.

The campus institutional review board deemed the surveys exempt, participation was entirely voluntary, and students completed them anonymously online. The post-survey included the same twelve questions plus three additional questions asking students to reflect on what they had learned in the class. The surveys were created using Qualtrics software and shared via the campus learning management system. The instructors also talked to the students about how the data from the surveys would be used, and the potential of it being included in a scholarly article or presentation. Of the 19 students enrolled in the class, 15 students completed the pre-survey and 10 completed the post-survey. Results were coded to observe themes in the responses.

The survey results revealed that a majority of the students, even prior to the workshops, valued research and considered it to be an important aspect of ethical practice. The results also showed that paywalls were already a major barrier to finding and accessing information, even before graduation. Several students also pointed to the challenge of finding research on specific populations like Native Americans, single fathers, and older populations.

Most students also felt that their social work education program had prepared them to critically evaluate and apply research findings to their future practice. However, two responses in the pre-survey demonstrated a disconnect between research and practice. As one respondent stated, "in my research class, we focused on this more, but in other classes I sometimes feel like we aren't taught how to apply articles in our real life social work practice." Another student said, "just because I read them doesn't mean I can grasp the information that is provided." In the post-survey, two responses specifically mentioned accessing open access content, including one student's statement that "Yes, I think critical thinking skills have been centered in this program. I feel the information I've learned in this open access study about the machinery behind scholarly publication has added a whole new lens through which I analyze research."

The post-survey questions that asked students to reflect on what they had learned in the course were especially useful in assessing student learning. When asked if their thinking about access to information post-graduation had changed, all respondents mentioned

concern and frustration about no longer being able to access paywalled articles. One student stated:

> I am concerned about the lack of access. I knew it was going to be challenging, but class has really driven the point home that outside of academia and lacking a fat stack of cash, it is really hard to have access to research that may be essential in doing effective macro and micro social work.

Additionally, when asked how prepared they felt they were to engage in research-informed practice after graduation, most said that they were at least somewhat prepared. One student stated, "Even though access is limited, I feel well equipped to navigate the available resources to better the lives of the communities I hope to serve." When asked if they thought they would use what they'd learned in the class in their practice, all respondents indicated that they would.

In addition to cost of access, one of the barriers which also came up in several pre- and post-survey responses was a lack of time. It was clear that nearly all survey respondents, in both iterations of the survey, felt that having a single, well-organized, and easy-to-navigate website that allowed them to more efficiently find the research and other resources they needed would be highly beneficial to their practice and would save them time. As one student stated:

> This would definitely lift some stress. Even finding an article containing the information you need can take up to an hour or more, especially if you need to search on multiple sites that offer scholarly articles. Saving time on this would be beneficial when dealing with an urgent situation with a client.

The creation of the *Humboldt Social Work Knowledge Commons* allowed students to begin the work of making this type of website a reality. In addition to student-curated articles and other content, it also includes an extensive list of open access journals and finding tools that will be maintained by the librarian. While it is a long way from what students may have envisioned, or what they truly need, it is a solid step in the right direction and can provide a foundation that can be built upon in future classes and broader efforts toward this goal.

Lessons Learned

The survey results and our workshop discussions made it clear that students had very little prior understanding of the business of scholarly publishing or how restricted their access to

research would be post-graduation. Our first and second workshops prompted in-depth discussions about the lack of fairness inherent in traditional publishing and academia in general. While we also discussed the open access movement and the progress that has been made in this area, as well as how to access scholarly research post-graduation, limited access to this content was, justifiably, a continued and considerable point of frustration. We quickly realized that it was important to strike a balance between educating students about these injustices and empowering them with the knowledge and tools to challenge the systemic barriers limiting information access. Future iterations of this workshop series will include even more of a focus on proactive solutions and opportunities for advocacy.

Additionally, we could have paid more attention to teaching students how to find non-scholarly sources of information. We assumed that students would be most familiar with these types of sources and that they would be easy to locate. This assignment proved to be more challenging than anticipated, but it presented an opportunity to discuss the reasons behind the scarcity of information by or about certain populations and what practitioners can do to advocate for increased scholarship and representation for these groups.

Conclusion

As social work programs across the country begin to adapt to the updated 2022 EPAS competencies with an anti-racist and anti-oppressive emphasis, academic librarians can play an important role in partnering with social work faculty to incorporate critical information literacy into the curriculum. An important part of this work is developing instruction that helps students acknowledge the power structures and systems that inhibit research-informed practice and learning strategies to overcome those barriers. Focusing on the information needs of future professionals, rather than limiting our instruction to the needs of current students, is an innovative practice that librarians can support across the disciplines.

The workshops and open pedagogy assignment were a successful first step in advocating for awareness amongst future social work practitioners and empowering them with the tools needed to overcome barriers to finding and accessing information to inform their practice. As one student eloquently stated:

> I will take the tools I learned to help others find resources and build networks of professionals. I will be better equipped to act as advocate, ally and accomplice when necessary to improve the lives of my clients and the communities as a whole.

> Recognizing the value of access to research and filling one's quiver with arrows of truth can affect powerful systemic changes as well as have immediate impact on individuals, families and groups.

This project is an example of how social work faculty and academic librarians can work together toward empowering future social workers. When students have an awareness of the issues of information privilege and inequitable access, as well as tools they can use to find the research needed to inform their practice, then the standards outlined in EPAS Competency 4 will be attainable. Furthermore, promoting awareness of these issues amongst students, practitioners, and social work faculty will help prioritize open access publishing within the profession as a whole. This, in addition to learning how to look critically at *all* sources of information, including perspectives that are missing from the scholarly conversation, will promote the democratization of knowledge within the field and enable more inclusive solutions to societal issues.

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