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Authority is constructed and contextual

Empowering students to navigate privilege in academic publishing

For all the ways in which it has made our teaching better, the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education has also presented challenges for instruction librarians like myself. In particular, my colleagues and I have been discussing for a while how we have struggled to integrate the Authority is Constructed and Contextual frame into our information literacy one-shots.

In many of the classes we support, students are given guidance to seek out only established authorities and peer-reviewed journal articles for their research. These requirements meet the frame's expectations for novice learners that they "may need to rely on basic indicators of authority, such as type of publication or author credentials" in evaluating their sources.[1] But these limitations do not challenge students to cross the threshold, thinking more critically about the privileges and biases inherent in certain forms of publishing and exploring other voices from varying sources that may still meet their research needs. I questioned how I might begin to tackle this, and an answer would start to come in 2018.

Background

In November 2018, Dawn Stahura published "ACT UP for evaluating sources: Pushing against privilege."[2] The methods I had been using for evaluation, such as the CRAAP Test,[3] predate the Framework and were missing some of the nuance I had been looking for since its adoption. The social justice lens Stahura applied to source analysis inspired me. My colleagues and I discussed the article with excitement in the months after it was published, but had not yet found a way to incorporate it into our teaching.

For the fall semester of 2019, an instructor invited me to deliver a one-shot session in a section of an Introduction to Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) course. In our conversation, they emphasized that they wanted support in teaching students how to find and evaluate sources, as they had been dissatisfied with their students' source selection in previous semesters. This opportunity seemed to be the most natural fit to start sharing the ACT UP method with students.

That instruction session went like many introductory-level classes often do: I introduced students to some general databases and other resources for their research and then started a discussion about how to evaluate the information they find. I briefly introduced them to ACT UP as a tool for evaluating information. ACT UP stands for:

A – author
C – currency
T – truth
U – unbiased
P – privilege[4]

In explaining privilege in publishing, I mentioned the value of finding information from underrepresented groups, but I unfortunately did not have time to go into great depth about how one would accomplish that.

At the end of the semester, the instructor graciously shared the reflection essays their students had

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completed about guest lectures in their course, which included my session. As expected, many students reported feeling more prepared to find sources and identify authoritative information after my session, but what stood out were the handful of students who latched on to my brief mention of finding underrepresented voices in the literature. One student shared that they had a better understanding of the value of information and that they kept the need to find underrepresented authors in mind as they researched for their final project, great signs of knowledge practices effectively employed from the Framework. Another student remarked that finding sources from authors with personal experience on the topic, such as finding women authors for topics about women's issues, was the most important thing they learned from my visit. I was delighted to hear this, and even more so to hear that the instructor also found this to be a highlight of the session, wanting to hone in on this in my one-shot the following semester.

However, they brought up a valid concern: How do you teach students to find authors from underrepresented groups without asking them to make assumptions about identity? For example, we would not want students to assume the gender of an author based on their perceptions of the gender an author's name might signal. And what of an author's race or sexuality? We agreed that it felt difficult and invasive to ask students to dig for that information.

One example of a potential solution came to mind: Women Also Know Stuff (WAKS). WAKS was created to help promote and elevate the work of women in political science. [5] Because WAKS and other similar databases like Cite Black Authors[6] and People of Color Also Know Stuff[7] operate on submissions by the authors themselves, those authors disclose their relevant identities. Self-identified information helps students avoid making potentially biased or inaccurate judgment calls about identity when they seek out experts' research.

The activities

To work around time constraints, the instructor and I worked together to flip the class so I could focus more deeply on the "A" and "P" (Authority and Privilege) of ACT UP in my next in-class visit. To facilitate the instructor's learning outcome requests, I created a tutorial using LibWizard that concentrated on identifying and evaluating sources. This included modules on choosing a database, building effective search strategies, understanding the difference between different types of sources, and understanding the peer review process. I also created a short overview of ACT UP, similar to what I shared in the previous semester, as well as a quiz to evaluate a relevant government report—a report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics on the gender pay gap—using ACT UP as their rubric. This was embedded in the class's Moodle course. This tutorial allowed the students to grasp the theory of identifying and evaluating information so we could focus on the practical application in my in-person session.

In class, I showed students how to apply their previously acquired skills for developing a search strategy to Academic Search Complete, using its filters for elements such as date and format. I then went back over ACT UP, this time tying the concepts to the Authority is Constructed and Contextual frame. While I did not overtly teach them the frame, I applied those concepts as I designed my lesson plan. In particular, relevant objectives for this lesson from that frame included the ability to "acknowledge biases that privilege some sources of authority over others" and "respect the expertise that authority represents while remaining skeptical of the systems that have elevated that authority and the information created by it."

In this discussion, we focused on the idea of privilege in scholarship by illuminating statistics on diversity in academia and discrepancies in representation of certain groups in publishing and citation counts, such as women being underrepresented on editorial boards for journals.[9] Following Stahura's example, I emphasized the importance of the students' citations as a form of activism, to elevate those voices and "break the cycle." With a better understanding of the problem, we began an activity to address it.

For the activity, I broke the class into small groups, making sure each group had at least one member with a laptop or other device. The students had already been introduced to WAKS in their previous tutorial, but I assumed few, if any, actually took time to explore it, so I walked them through the website and explained how it could be used. I then had the groups follow a link to a LibWizard form that included two exercises: the first asked them to use Academic Search Complete to find a recent, peer-reviewed article on LGBTQ+ people in prison and submit a citation for what they found. This gave the students experience developing

and applying effective search strategies, narrowing down their results, and citing their sources.

To address finding a different voice on a similar topic, the second task asked them to use WAKS to find a woman who was an expert on the topic of prisons and enter her name and affiliation. I gave the students around 15 minutes to complete the activity.

After the students had finished, I pulled up their results on the back end of LibWizard (having requested no identifying information in the form, their responses were all anonymous). There were a couple of examples from the first exercise of sources that were not peer-reviewed or were too outdated, but this enabled a conversation for how to spot that and review how to use the filters effectively in future searches. Most students were able to successfully find a woman expert, and while many chose the first name from their search results, several clearly delved deeper and identified a local expert. Having found those experts, I asked them how they might find what that expert had published. Examples students provided included the author's website, their faculty page on their institution's website, or searching for their name or the articles they listed in a database like Academic Search Complete.

To wrap up, we discussed how they felt this activity went. Many students said it was easier than expected to locate other voices and was worth the payoff to do this in their future research. They were motivated to find those voices through alternative means and recognized the value of doing so, dispositions the Framework encourages.

Conclusion

I have since employed this exercise in other courses outside WGSS, but during the switch to remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not continue with the activity. That said, I feel this activity would work well in an online environment under normal circumstances. The WGSS course is now offered online on a regular basis, so I hope to work with the instructor to incorporate this activity into the existing LibWizard tutorial, which they have continued to use in subsequent semesters.

In the future, I hope to expand this activity to give students experience using more resources beyond WAKS, and offering something more akin to a lab, where students can have assistance finding relevant voices that would be valuable to include for their specific research topics.

I feel this lesson plan was a successful way to not only inform students about privilege in publishing and the constructed and contextual nature of authority, but to also empower them with the resources to enact change through their own citation practices.

Notes

1. ACRL Framework for Information Literacy https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.

2. Dawn Stahura, "Act up for Evaluating Sources: Pushing against Privilege," *College & Research Libraries News* 79, no. 10 (November 2018): 551–52, https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.79.10.551.

3. Sarah Blakeslee, "The CRAAP test," LOEX Quarterly 31, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 6-7, https://commons.emich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=loexquarterly.

4. Stahura, "Act up for Evaluating Sources."

5. Women Also Know Stuff, accessed August 13, 2021, https://www.womenalsoknowstuff.com/.

6. Cite Black Authors, accessed August 13, 2021, https://citeblackauthors.com.

7. People of Color Also Know Stuff, accessed August 13, 2021, https://sites.google.com/view/pocexperts/home.

8. "Highlights of Women's Earnings in 2018," BLS Reports. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, November 1, 2019, https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-earnings/2018/home.htm.

9. Examples used in class included: Paula Chakravartty, Rachel Kuo, Victoria Grubbs, and Charlton McIlwain, "#CommunicationSoWhite," *Journal of Communication* 68, no. 2 (2018): 254–66, https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqy003; Charles W. Fox, Meghan A. Duffy, Daphne J. Fairbairn, and Jennifer A. Meyer, "Gender Diver-

Faculty feedback

Feedback from faculty members on the assignment repository has been overwhelmingly positive. When new faculty members and FYS instructors learned about the repository at their orientations and summer workshops, they commented that the repository helps them gain a sense of the types of assignments colleagues use in their courses. Other faculty members, through emails and informal conversations, also remarked that they find the assignments posted inspirational and that the repository is a great resource for them and the campus community. In addition, they appreciated the opportunity to share their own assignments. Moving forward, we plan to use a data analytics tool to examine the usage of the repository and share it with the faculty, in order to understand how often the repository is accessed and to further promote it on campus. As we deliberate on how to make the repository as beneficial as it can be for faculty members, we intend to use additional venues, such as focus groups, to seek feedback from those who visit the site.

Lessons learned

Creating an assignment repository requires time, patience, and close collaboration across different units. It is important to choose a platform that has technology support on campus and to test it with a small group of faculty members. Piloting the repository with FYS instructors allowed us to work out any technical issues and streamline the submission process before the full implementation. Acquiring assignments and promoting the use of the repository necessitates resourcefulness and persistence. The multiple venues we use—such as formal communications to the campus and outreach to individual faculty members—as well as the involvement of CITLS, CWP, the FYS program, and the library, help us reach more faculty members and reinforce that the repository is an important resource. Such a collaborative approach is key to building a robust and sustainable assignment repository.

Notes

1. John C. Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom,* Second edition, The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 52.

2. Lijuan Xu, "Lafayette College: A Non-Liaison-Based Information Literacy Program," in *Hidden Architectures of Information Literacy Programs,* ed. Rebecca Halpern, Carolyn Caffrey Gardner, and Elizabeth Galoozis (Chicago, IL: ACRL, 2020), 41–51.

3. "First Year Seminar Library Instruction," accessed February 23, 2021, https://library.lafayette.edu/services-help/services/instruction-and-information-literacy/first-year-seminar-library-instruction/.

4. Susan Wenze, "FYS 122 Psychology and the Media: How Does Internet Use Change Us?" (assignment, Lafayette College, Fall 2020).

5. Brett Hendrickson, "FYS 088 Communicating with the Dead: Follow the Footnotes" (assignment, Lafayette College, Fall 2020).

6. Han Luo, "FLL / PSYC 210 Second Language Acquisition: Literature Review and Research Proposal" (assignment, Lafayette College, Fall 2020).

7. David Sunderlin, "GEOL 130 An Introduction to Geology: Geology of Lafayette's Building Stones" (assignment, Lafayette College, Spring 2020).

8. Eric Hupe, "ART 102 Introduction to Art History: COVID Re-Creation" (assignment, Lafayette College, Spring 2020). ⚋

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sity of Editorial Boards and Gender Differences in the Peer Review Process at Six Journals of Ecology and Evolution," *Ecology and Evolution* 9, no. 24 (2019): 13636–49, https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.5794; Molly M. King, Carl T. Bergstrom, Shelley J. Correll, Jennifer Jacquet, and Jevin D. West, "Men Set Their Own Cites High: Gender and Self-Citation across Fields and over Time," *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 3 (2017): 1–22, https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023117738903; "The Condition of Education 2020 (NCES 2020-144), Characteristics of Postsecondary Faculty," NCES Annual Reports, National Center for Education Statistics, May 2020, https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=61. ⚋