

Sharing, Elevating, and Decolonizing: Centering Underrepresented Student Voices

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ABSTRACT

Your Voices: Learning, Listening, and Sharing (Your Voices) was a 2022-2023 project designed to create student-centered spaces where underrepresented students in library and information science (LIS) and applied data science could share their stories, support one another, and learn from professionals with similar experiences in navigating equity, diversity, and inclusion. Grounded in decolonizing pedagogies, the project sought to disrupt traditional hierarchies in LIS education by centering student voices, valuing lived experiences as legitimate knowledge, and fostering reciprocal learning. By creating spaces where students could collectively reflect, engage in peer mentoring, and challenge dominant knowledge structures, *Your Voices* was a catalyst for inclusive learning, fostering equitable knowledge-sharing and empowering underrepresented students to assert their voices in LIS and data science spaces. The initiative consisted of three core elements—community learning spaces, e-newsletters, and webinars—each implemented four times throughout the project’s lifecycle.

While *Your Voices* successfully created spaces for students to connect and exchange ideas, there remained a need for more student-driven, technology-enhanced, and asynchronous platforms to accommodate diverse learning preferences and time constraints. This led to the development of the next iteration: *Students: Amplifying Your Voices (SAYV)* for 2024-2025. *SAYV* builds on the foundational goals of *Your Voices* while expanding its reach through digital tools and interactive platforms that promote ongoing engagement. The initiative prioritizes:

1. Community-driven learning spaces: These serve as virtual environments where students can freely exchange ideas and experiences, fostering collective knowledge production beyond traditional classroom structures.
2. A dedicated Discord server channel: This space allows students to engage in discussions, share resources, and build peer networks outside of institutional settings, reflecting decolonizing pedagogical values of accessibility and collaboration.
3. A student-led podcast series: By centering student voices through storytelling, the podcast format offers a powerful way to challenge dominant LIS narratives, elevate

underrepresented perspectives, and provide educators with valuable content to integrate into their teaching.

By creating these digital and asynchronous opportunities, *SAYV* enables students to not only share and document their own experiences but also contribute to a growing body of alternative knowledge sources within LIS. The use of podcasts, for example, provides an avenue for students to engage with course material on their own terms, reinforcing the idea that meaningful learning occurs outside of the traditional academic setting.

Decolonizing pedagogies push back against the historical dominance of knowledge systems in LIS education, advocating instead for inclusive, student-centered learning environments. The shift toward participatory and student-driven learning spaces aligns with the broader goals of decolonization, which emphasize the recognition of multiple ways of knowing, the redistribution of power in learning environments, and community engagement and reciprocity. Traditional LIS curricula often privilege Western frameworks and perspectives. *Your Voices* and *SAYV* actively disrupt this by incorporating diverse student perspectives and narratives as valid forms of knowledge. By prioritizing student-led storytelling, mentorship, and peer engagement, these initiatives challenge hierarchical structures where knowledge is traditionally transmitted from faculty to students. Decolonizing pedagogies emphasize learning that is not just for academic enrichment but also for community benefit. Both *Your Voices* and *SAYV* aim to equip students with the resources, skills, and confidence to contribute meaningfully to the LIS field and advocate for equity.

The core objectives of *SAYV* include:

- Creating student-centered spaces that encourage dialogue and knowledge-sharing among underrepresented students.
- Providing storytelling opportunities through podcasts and digital media that educators and the LIS community can integrate into their teaching and professional development.
- Fostering knowledge exchange by sharing relevant news, research, and experiences, encouraging students to become active participants in shaping the profession.

By acknowledging and uplifting student contributions, sharing their stories, asking critical questions, and normalizing the presence of underrepresented voices, these projects help build authentic relationships and trust among historically marginalized identities. Importantly, *SAYV* also emphasizes the celebration of student achievements, recognizing that joy and success should be as central to LIS education as discussions of systemic barriers. This approach encourages educators to incorporate affirmative storytelling, community-building exercises, and reflective learning practices into their pedagogy. For LIS educators, the principles underlying *Your Voices* and *SAYV* offer tangible strategies for integrating decolonizing pedagogies into their curricula. For example, we can leverage storytelling as a teaching tool. Encouraging students to share their lived experiences—through podcasts, reflective writing, or oral history projects—can provide richer, more diverse perspectives in LIS education. In addition, adopting student-led and participatory learning models can enhance engagement and knowledge retention. Tools like Discord or asynchronous media allow students to engage at their own pace, creating more inclusive learning environments.

This session will highlight the Best Practices Guide developed through *Your Voices*, discuss the current *SAYV* project, and invite participants to explore the following questions:

- What student-centered spaces exist for underrepresented students to engage in open dialogue and knowledge-sharing?
- How can storytelling—through podcasts or other asynchronous formats—be leveraged to make voices feel more natural, personable, and impactful?
- In what ways can LIS educators incorporate such student-centered projects in their teaching practices to help decolonize pedagogies?
- How can LIS programs encourage students to build meaningful networks and disrupt exclusionary practices within the profession?

We will invite attendees—including students, educators, and others—to contribute experiences and best practices for initiating similar efforts in their own institutions and organizations. By engaging with these questions, we aim to collectively reimagine LIS education as an inclusive, participatory, and socially just learning environment. Through projects like *Your Voices* and *SAYV*, LIS educators gain concrete strategies to challenge knowledge hierarchies, integrate student-led learning, and foster culturally responsive teaching. By embracing student agency, digital tools, and alternative knowledge-sharing methods, we can transform LIS education into a field that truly values and amplifies the diverse voices of all students.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Curriculum; Pedagogy; Students; Social justice; Sociology of information.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Student-centered learning; Equity; Inclusion; Storytelling; Knowledge-sharing.

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