

Framing Our Work: Towards Understanding Social Justice in Librarianship

Diana Moronta, New York Institute of Technology and Alyssa Brissett, University of Southern California

Our Project

More frequently, librarians are creating resources centered on “anti-oppression” or “social justice”. These resources, in general, aim to provide information and a starting point to learn about key social issues that affect the communities they serve.

The tools and resources we share send a message of protest to the current political climate and its impact on the communities we serve. Is this how librarians protest? Are we doing enough? How are these librarian created resources impacting the intended audiences?

Our goal for this project is to identify, analyze and articulate how librarians use these resources to frame their work, and drive social change in their communities.

What does the literature say?

“The library as an institution has historically been implicated in the reproduction of social exclusion by reflecting the needs of the dominant culture”. (Campbell, Sweeney, 2015).

The Yvonne Pappenheim Library on Racism is an example of a library that has social justice as its core mission and is constantly creating strategies and ways to disseminate its collection to its members (Morales, Knowles, Bourg, 2014).

Librarianship needs to examine its standards as neutral places (Brooke, Ellenwood, Lazzaro, 2015).

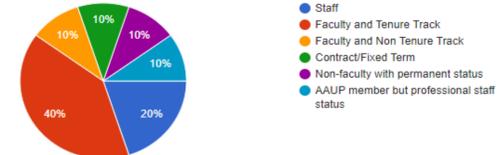
“Cultural competency needs to be rooted in critiques of structural power in order to connect individual experiences to social justice work in librarianship” (Campbell, Sweeney, 2015).

Survey Results and What Have We Learned?

We surveyed a variety of librarians from public, academic, and cultural institutions.

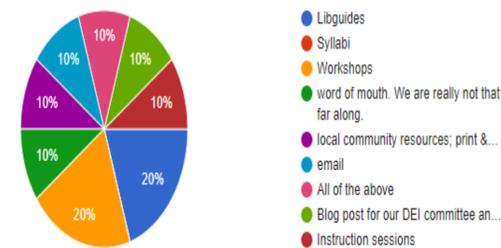
What is your status?

10 responses



What tools do you use to share information and resources relevant to social justice issues to your community?

10 responses



In what ways do communities utilize these tools and resources?

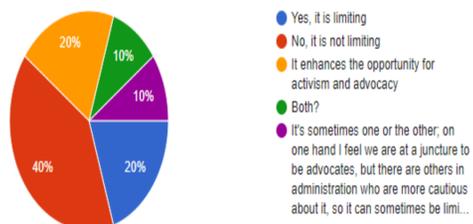
- As a supplement to their events, workshops, and trainings addressing current events on campus.
- Faculty and students use for research and to adapt their syllabi and teaching strategies.
- To learn more about various community resources and how they can contribute and participate.

How do participants contribute to social justice work in their institutions?

- Working on consensus in the diversity and inclusion committees they serve.
- Creating events, exhibits, and book displays about current issues.
- Creating relationships with students services and the “multicultural affairs office”.
- Host group discussions and share presentations about social justice topics.
- Teaching from a critical and anti-racist pedagogy lens.
- Training their community on implicit bias and microaggression.
- Outreach efforts for students of color interested in STEM education.
- Special programs and workshops on how to use data to support social justice causes.

Do you find that your position as a librarian is limiting for activism or does it enhance your activism and advocacy?

10 responses



Do participants feel vulnerable as an advocate and/or social justice minded librarian?

- Lots of pushback and not enough assistance from allies.
- Library leaders foster a culture of fear which might prevent some from joining and continuing the momentum that has been built.
- Librarians of color may struggle between being vocal and seen as a “troublemaker” and overstepping what others feel our roles as librarians should and should not be.

What's Next?

Anti-oppression and anti-racism need to be better understood and defined.

Administrators and deans need to be more supportive and actions need to follow the “diversity and inclusion” initiatives and plans put in place.

Communities (students, faculty, staff, etc) should be aware of the history of these issues and how it impacts them. Don't ignore or hide inequities.

Create learning opportunities whenever possible. Highlight injustices to accessing information and materials that reflect diverse communities.

References

Brooke, F., Ellenwood, D., Lazzaro, A. (2015). In Pursuit of Antiracist Social Justice Denaturalizing Whiteness in the Academic Library. *Library Trends*, 64(2), 246-284.

Campbell Naidoo, J., Sweeney, M., (2015). Educating for Social Justice: Perspectives from Library and Information Science and Collaboration with K-12 Social Studies Educators. *Journal of International Social Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2015, 196-207.

Morales, M., Knowles, E.C., & Bourg, C. (2014). Diversity, Social Justice, and the Future of Libraries. *Portal : Libraries and the Academy*; Baltimore, 14(3), 439-451.