

A Curricular Model in a “Social Justice and Inclusion Advocacy” Doctoral Concentration: Global Implications for LIS

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ABSTRACT

The paper presentation introduces a doctoral curricular model of social justice scholarship in library and information science (LIS). The case-study highlights global implications of a “Social Justice and Inclusion Advocacy” concentration in the communication-and-information college-wide doctoral program in the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alabama. Actualities and potentialities of this unique progressive collaboration are elaborated to mobilize LIS worldwide in expanding its traditional definition, scope, representation, and relevance in the 21st century. It represents global possibilities of influencing newly emerging LIS educators, practitioners, administrators, and others to integrate a spirit/ethics of social justice in their work/practice/scholarship.

TOPICS

curriculum, pedagogy, social justice.

CONTEXT OF NEED

Today’s globally connected information society and the emerging social, cultural, political, and economic climate of the 21st century present an urgency for library and information science (LIS) educators and scholars to develop critical skills and competences in the how-to’s of conducting community-engaged, impact-driven scholarship that further principles (and actions) of social justice and inclusion advocacy (Castells, 2015; Elmborg, 2008; Jaeger, Shilton, and Koepfler, 2016; Mehra, 2015). LIS programs worldwide are still struggling with integrating social justice, social equity, inclusion advocacy, critical information literacies, and engaged scholarship while partnering with minority and underserved populations to make meaningful changes in the lives of their community stakeholders via the education and practice of information-related work, and their intersections thereof (Elmborg, 2006; Mehra, Rioux, and

Albright, 2009; Naidoo and Sweeney, 2015; Phillips and Anderson, 2018). Developing intentional, deliberate, systematic, and rigorous models, frameworks, theories, methods, and approaches in LIS education to further social justice and inclusion advocacy continue to pose serious challenges and draw resistance to its adoption and implementation (Bernier, 2019; Jaeger, Gorham, Taylor, and Kettlich, 2014; Mehra et al., 2014). Other problematic concerns in LIS education that have served as hindrances to social justice adoption worldwide relate to (Cooke and Sweeney, 2017; Mehra and Rioux, 2016; Roberts and Noble, 2016; Winston, 2005): poor understanding in applying appropriate theory and methods to extend existing entrenched canons of knowledge domains in LIS scholarship; availability of limited repertoire of poorly conducted or documented social justice research; random ad hoc instances of social justice in teaching without necessarily articulating values to scholarship; limited consideration to ethical leadership; amongst others.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The paper presentation provides select insights to address these issues that have prevented the LIS professions (including LIS education) in moving forward to adopt a more fuller and matured integration of social justice and inclusion advocacy scholarship than what is currently practiced which is still much in its infancy (Rioux, 2010; Jaeger, Taylor, and Gorham, 2015). It presents a potentially applicable global model built on a case study and ongoing curricular developments in a recently approved “Social Justice and Inclusion Advocacy” concentration in the communication-and-information college-wide doctoral program in the School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS) at the University of Alabama (UA).

Important discussion includes:

- Historical and contextual background of the doctoral studies concentration in social justice/inclusion advocacy;
- Curricular development and current evolution for interdisciplinary and intercultural connections;
- Existing challenges and emerging opportunities;
- Issues in future operationalization/implementation.

The curricular model is presented for LIS professionals around the world to adopt in their own geographical and cultural settings to extend the impact of their LIS-related activities and initiatives. Additional actualities and potentialities of this unique progressive collaborative initiative are elaborated in mobilizing the LIS and communication professions worldwide in engaged social justice and inclusion advocacy scholarship to help expand their traditional definition, scope, extent, representation, and relevance in the 21st century (Cooke, Sweeney, and Noble, 2016; Gibson et al., 2017).

IMPLICATIONS

Ultimately, the “Social Justice and Inclusion Advocacy” doctoral concentration in the SLIS@UA represents global possibilities of influencing newly emerging LIS educators, practitioners, administrators, and others to integrate a spirit/ethics of social justice in their work, behaviors, practices, scholarship, and relationship with each other, and with the local, regional, national, and international communities in which we are connected. This vision is novel and innovative in its potentialities of worldwide impact in shaping future generations of LIS educators, scholars, researchers, and practitioners. Having said that, in addition to an expectation of a philosophical push along the lines of “build it and they will come”, there is an urgent need for identifying a “how-to” operationalize and implement a curriculum of social justice in LIS, “a fix or resolution” of sorts (paraphrasing an anonymous reviewer). This paper presentation provides the bridge as one concrete strategy to move us forward in that direction.

The paper presentation reflects a strong connection to the conference theme of “Exploring Learning in a Global Information Context” since a need for integrating social justice and inclusion advocacy in LIS education is a world-wide issue of concern. Future publications will share detailed dimensions of the curriculum and ongoing phases in the development of the “Social Justice and Inclusion Advocacy” concentration. Relevance to current and emerging issues in LIS education are highlighted in the discussion of the opportunities and challenges in operationalizing a potentially relevant model of curriculum development that is globally viable. The forward-thinking strategic curricular directions provide a direct course of action to overcome limitations of our historical and contemporary existence towards meaningful future growth of the LIS professions that is liberating in its self-efficacy, empowerment, and impact in community building and community development.

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