

Social Justice in Library and Information Science

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Abstract

While pursuing graduate degrees in library and information science (LIS), it is hoped that students will learn the basics necessary for competent, inclusive, and caring professional practice. This panel will explore how social justice topics and techniques can be integrated in LIS through a variety of contexts including curricular, extra-curricular professional development, and research. Social justice integration creates opportunities for students to gain a more holistic and inclusive perspective on the relationships between people, information, and technology, with the ultimate potential of shaping a more just society. The panel topics approach social justice in LIS from a range of professional experiences, drawing on concrete examples, interventions, and historical cases.

Keywords: social justice, inclusion, diversity, LIS education

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While pursuing graduate degrees in library and information science (LIS), it is hoped that students will learn the basics necessary for competent, inclusive, and caring professional practice. This requires a blended educational approach that emphasizes culture, context, and critical thinking that extends across curricula, professional practice, and research. Components of this blended approach include developing the ability to critically reflect on the role of information technologies and institutions in society, as well as their own positionality and privilege that shapes their practice. Honing these reflection skills is particularly important in the current information environment that is shaped by widening wealth gaps, decreased funding for social services and education, and increased data surveillance initiatives. Information professionals are involved at every level of information provision and technology design and, thus, are uniquely poised to impact the communities they serve, as well as broader society.

This panel will explore how social justice topics and techniques can be integrated in LIS through a variety of contexts including curricular, extra-curricular professional development, and research. Social justice integration creates opportunities for students to gain a more holistic and inclusive perspective on the relationships between people, information, and technology, with the ultimate potential of shaping a more just society. The panel topics approach social justice in LIS from a range of professional experiences, drawing on concrete examples, interventions, and historical cases:

- Social Justice as Topic and Tool in the LIS Classroom
- Nicole A. Cooke encourages the teaching of social justice in the curriculum as a way to begin addressing the holistic development of future information professionals.
- Teaching Trayvon: The Value of Teaching and Talking about Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Information Professions
- Safiya U. Noble discusses the positive aspects and pitfalls of injecting a course focused on race and gender into the curriculum as a diversity intervention.

- Inclusions and Exclusions: Reflections on a Reading Group
- Miriam E. Sweeney reflects on the history and formation of an extracurricular reading group about race and diversity that extends social justice initiatives outside of the formal learning environment to the broader campus community.
- Description is a Drag, and Vice Versa: Classification of Queer Identities
- KR Roberto offers a historical overview of the ways in which authorized vocabularies have differed from vernacular language commonly used by community members and LGBTQ scholars to describe their own lives. The talk also explores the potential ramifications of these disconnects for queer and gender-nonconforming users.
- Latina/o Librarians in the Digital Age: An Historical Reflection of Social Justice in Librarianship
- Melissa Villa-Nicholas offers a historical reflection on the ways in which REFORMA navigated the digital age and encourages present day organizing tactics surrounding technological equitability.

Each panelist will give a brief presentation that focuses on a particular case or context where they have integrated or applied social justice topics or techniques. After the presentations, the floor will be opened for questions, shared experiences, and discussion that probe the broader topic of using social justice to train culturally competent information professionals and strive for greater equality and justice in society.

This panel will be organized as a 90 minutes session with the following agenda:

- Presentations (60 minutes, 12 minutes each)
- Group Discussion (30 minutes)

The goals for this session are to:

- Reflect on the experience of introducing social justice topics and techniques into LIS curricula
- Explore how extracurricular learning spaces may be used to facilitate broader social justice outcomes in our institutional communities
- Locate historical research as an intervention that introduces justice-oriented counter-narratives in support of curricular goals

This panel emphasizes the culture and context part of the equation in “Breaking Down Walls: Culture-Context-Computing.” The organizers extend the meaning of context and culture to ask broader questions about the responsibility LIS educators, professionals, and researchers may have for fostering social justice values in the profession. The intended audience for this panel includes LIS educators, practitioners, and researchers who are interested in the many ways social justice techniques and topics may be integrated into LIS. The panel format uses the experiences and examples brought forth in the formal presentations to foster a rich group dialog where participants will be encouraged to bring in their own experiences and questions.

Length: 90 minutes

Preferred number of participants: 20-30

Special requests/equipment needs: This presentation requires standard technology needs (a projector, laptop, screen), as well as flip charts and markers for group brainstorming.