

Information Literacy, Social Justice & Community Engagement

Author: Gr Keer, Senior Assistant Librarian

LIBY1210: Introduction to Information Literacy

Information literacy is the ability to identify and articulate an information need, and to find, evaluate, and use information ethically to satisfy that need. In order to develop their information literacy proficiency, incoming freshmen at CSU East Bay are required to take a two unit course, LIBY1210: Introduction to Information Literacy. Because of its reach and its content, this course is an important locus for culturally inclusive, responsive and accessible teaching and learning.

The learning outcomes for LIBY1210 are based on the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (<http://goo.gl/fmjU1>). Standard 5 is particularly relevant to culturally inclusive content: “The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.” In my class, we explore these economic, legal, and social issues through a specially-designed module on Research Justice & Knowledge Production, and through the final Advocacy Letter project.

Module on Research Justice & Knowledge Production

The Research Justice & Knowledge Production module is meant to expand students’ understanding of themselves as knowledge creators, as well as providing a space for them to critically examine the sociopolitical and economic context of academic knowledge production.

This module was developed by Jeffra Bussmann and myself after our participation in the Community Engagement & Social Responsibility Faculty Learning Community in 2013. We crafted it based on our understanding of community engagement strategies, social justice philosophies, and critical pedagogy. We co-teach the module in Week 8 or 9 of our sections of LIBY1210.

At the beginning of class, we talk briefly and generally about the kinds of research scholars do in different disciplines (social sciences, sciences, etc.). We define qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods, and discuss the purposes, benefits and drawbacks of each approach. We also define ethnographic research and community-based participatory research, in order to give students enough background to thoughtfully examine the differences between them.

Students read an example of ethnographic research before class to prepare. In class, they read an article describing a community based participatory research (CPBR) study on the

same topic. They then fill out a worksheet comparing the roles of the researcher(s) and community members, and the stated goals of the research projects. This gets them thinking about how different methodologies can be used for different purposes, and how some methodologies engage with and are accessible to the community more than others.

Next, we watch and discuss the video, “Polling for Justice” (<https://vimeo.com/22363812>). The Polling for Justice Project, an on-going youth-oriented survey coming out of the Public Science Project in New York City, is an example of participatory action research. We ask students to think about the purpose and intended audience of this video, and to brainstorm in groups different ways of sharing the results of this study in a way that would be accessible to other teenagers.

Finally, students write a reflection describing what they learned about the research process and what their experience has been as the subject of a research project (eg. taking a survey, being interviewed, etc.).

Final Project

This final project is a culmination of what students have learned about seeking, finding, and using information. The assignment is to use the research process to identify, research, and take action on one issue that affects a community each student is a part of. The idea is that students will use their research skills and their insider knowledge to make a difference.

Students choose a community and a topic at the beginning of the quarter and do research on that topic. Then they write an advocacy letter, an annotated bibliography, and a reflective essay describing their research process and how their work relates to the course learning outcomes.

The purpose of this final project assignment is to provide students with an opportunity to apply what they learn in LIBY1210: Introduction to Information Literacy to an issue that matters to them. It combines concepts of information literacy, community engagement, and social justice.

Advocacy Letter

This assignment asks students to write a two page letter to the community leader they choose in Week 2. They must clearly identify a problem facing that community, research that problem and, based on what they learn from their research, suggest a solution. In the letter, they use the evidence they found through their research process to convince the community leader of the solution to the problem they identified. The most vital piece of this part of the final project is that the student has direct personal experience with the community and the issue they choose.

Annotated Bibliography

For the annotated bibliography, I require students to find, cite and annotate 6 sources of evidence on their topic. At least 3 of the sources must be scholarly articles, but the other sources can be anything they deem relevant to their topic. Each annotation should briefly (in 3-5 sentences) describe the content/conclusion of the source, the expertise of the author(s), and why the student chose the source. In particular, I'm interested in what the student has learned from the source and what kind of evidence it provides to support their argument.

Reflective Essay

Finally, students are required to write a three page essay describing their research process. I ask them to address the following:

What did you learn about research? Go into detail about how you formed your topic, how you identified and used keywords, what databases or search engines you used and why, what limiters you used and why, etc. Reflect on how your research process evolved over the course of the quarter. Go back and look at your weekly journal entries for detail about the research you did. Please write in the first person (using "I"). DO NOT write a research paper about your topic.

I also expect them to write one paragraph about each of the learning outcomes for our class:

1. Formulate a research question
2. Develop and apply appropriate search strategies
3. Evaluate strategies and results—revise as needed
4. Communicate results
5. Understand and apply principles of information ethics