Faculty Information Literacy Stipend
Final Report

Name: Katharine Boswell
Course: WGST 2322 (Gender: Images & Perspectives)
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Introduction

I created this assignment to support several learning goals in the course. This class is an introduction to gender studies and feminist theory. I was interested in getting students to think about what kind of sources are considered useful, helpful, or valid for the information they need. Because many of our class topics (and interdisciplinary feminist discourse generally) focus on current events, pop culture, and life experience, just turning to peer reviewed academic sources isn't always a useful answer. I wanted students to feel capable of evaluating information out of the classroom/library setting on their own. I also wanted students to think about who was an authority for a given piece of information and in what context they could be considered an authority. As I said in my initial application for the stipend, "Much of feminist analysis (especially intersectional analysis) asks us to think about who is an authority and why, and to also examine how social systems and institutions contribute to our ideas of authority."

I created the project in conversation with Julia Anderson. She helped me narrow down the specific information literacy goals we wanted to focus on for the project, and we talked about how we would scale the project over the semester to be less intimidating for students.

Description of the information literacy assignment or activities

The assignment for the course was for students to create a syllabus, accessible online to the general public, which could be used for self-guided learning. This kind of syllabus (often called an "open syllabus") has become popular in online communities and are often crowdsourced through Twitter hashtags. We looked at several examples of different syllabi that people had constructed, ranging from an analysis of Beyonce's *Lemonade* through a feminist lens to a history of queer Americans.

The students were given free choice of their topic as long as it related to the subject of the course. The project was broken up into a series of small assignments that culminated in the finished website.

Julia Anderson came to our class three times and also hosted two drop-in help session with me. For the class sessions, Julia initially gave a lesson on "information creation as a process" and then offered another on "authority is constructed and contextual." She had creative activities that included having students reconstruct a timeline of sources about an event. Students left both these sessions able to understand how to evaluate the usefulness of information for their particular project. We frequently referred back to them in class and used the framework she gave to evaluate sources. Her final session was about finding sources and using library resources. Several students had very specific needs and she was able to help them use the web and library materials to find the needed sources. At the end of the semester, we also hosted two sessions in

the Fondren Starbucks area where students could drop in and get help with using Wordpress to put their syllabus online.

Method of assessment

Students were assessed on the finished project—the syllabus hosted on Wordpress or another website. The syllabi are hosted here: https://smufeministsyllabi.wordpress.com/
They were evaluated with a rubric [attached in a separate doc] on the following categories:

- Information in Context
- Authority is Constructed and Contextual
- Attribution
- Tailoring Information to Audiences
- User Experience: Visual
- User Experience: Written
- Feminist Analysis: Gender
- Feminist Analysis: Intersectionality

The rubric grades for the majority of the students indicated mastery of all the categories. The course evaluations were very strong and many students indicated to me verbally that they were proud of their finished product.

Results and impact on student learning

The students exceeded my expectations for the project. I expected that I might have some grumbling or pushback throughout the semester since this is a more complicated project than just writing an essay in response to a prompt. However, I was surprised and pleased at the level of student buy-in. Many students were very enthusiastic about the project. I had several tell me that they were sending the website to their family, roommates, and other friends so they could learn about the chosen topic. Things students seemed to especially like were the ability to choose their own topic, the interactive nature of the finished project, and the variety of sources they were able to use.

Summary and next steps

I was very pleased with this assignment overall and plan to continue using it in the course. One thing Julia and I realized in doing the project was that, in the future, we will need to discuss copyright and public domain with students as they choose images or files for the syllabi. I will also probably tailor the timeline of the project a little differently and have students begin building the web version earlier. Wordpress is very easy to use and mostly involves copy and pasting over from a Word doc into the web page, but this was still one of the aspects of the assignment that was most intimidating to students.

Appendix

All student projects:

A sample of some excellent ones:

Assignment sheet:

Research Project: Open Syllabus

For your final project in this course, you will produce an open syllabus on a topic of your choosing.

What is an open syllabus? An open syllabus is a document (usually hosted on a website) designed to offer individuals a self-directed education in a specific topic. These kinds of syllabi became popular in the last five years when academics and other experts used Twitter hashtags to crowdsource educational materials, such as the #FergusonSyllabus and #StandingRockSyllabus. Scholars such as Marcia Chatelain championed this idea of creating an accessible, practical form of education that could be used by traditional students and people outside of the academy or university system. Open syllabi have been created to educate people about feminist theory, racial disparities in the US, and even to examine artifacts of pop culture (see scholar Candice Benbow's open syllabus on Beyonce's album *Lemonade* and Black Feminism). You can see an example cluster, all on reproductive justice, hosted here.

What kind of open syllabus should I make? There are many topics you could choose. The only requirements are that it relate to the course material in some way. You might explore a debate in feminism (Is sex work ever feminist?), a problem or issue (the high rate of maternal death in the US), or offer us a reading of a text/object that sheds light on some feminist issues (e.g. Benbow's syllabus above).

Why are we doing this? We have a few goals in creating these projects. One is for you to become an authority—a kind of expert—on your chosen topic. To do so, you will have to research your topic deeply to understand the kinds of conversations and debates that are occurring already. The other is for you to think about why and how we create information. You will need to teach someone about this topic through your syllabus. You will have to plan, test, and revise your syllabus and modules in order to make it useful and accessible to a general audience member. In doing so, you will become one of many scholars participating in this kind of conversation about feminism and gender both within and outside of the academic classroom.

Syllabus requirements:
- Your syllabus must have a title. What does the title mean? Why is it important?
- An introduction of 300-500 words, where you explain key concepts and the rationale behind your course. Why is this course necessary and important?
- Course goals: what will your students learn when they finish this course?
- It must be clearly structured into modules (at least 4) that build on one another. Each module should have a paragraph introducing the module.
- 10-20 high quality sources. Each source should have a paragraph accompanying it explaining what you want students to learn from this source. You might also include questions to prompt thought or discussion.
- Visually pleasing and user-friendly. The syllabus should be easy to navigate and aesthetically pleasing. You will want to include images (with credit). Julia will help us host these on a website so they are accessible to the public.

Other info:
- This is a semester-long project. We will have small due dates throughout the semester that will allow you to finish this project in small chunks. This is a marathon, not a sprint!
- We will have several sessions with our subject librarian, Julia Anderson. She is an expert on research and information literacy and will be guiding us through the initial research process as well as helping us farther down the road when we have more specific questions.

Assignment Due Dates:
- Project Assignment #1 (Topic)   Feb 2
- Project Assignment #2 (Sources 1)   Feb 16
- Project Assignment #3 (Sources 2)   March 9
- Project Assignment #4 (Intro draft)   March 21
- Revision 1 (Intro draft)   March 28
- Project Assignment #5 (Module draft) April 6
- Revision 2 (Module draft)   April 14
- Entire completed project   April 28