Partnering on Justice: Critical Information Literacy, Social Justice & Embedded Research Instruction
@ Metropolitan College of New York

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Founded by Audrey Cohen in 1964, Metropolitan College of New York (MCNY) was born of both the turbulence and idealism of the 1960s, and the direct efforts of the War on Poverty. MCNY – first as the Women’s Talent Corps, then as the College of Human Services – sought to connect unemployed, low income, women of color to work opportunities in social service agencies & schools. In the process, a college was built, along with a unique pedagogy: Purpose Centered Education, rooted in blending theory with practice, with the intent of helping students become agents for Social Justice in their workplace and in the world.

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Undergraduates in the archives: are we who we archive? a critical archival pedagogy?
Social Justice & the First Year Experience: An Embedded Instructional Project

Part 1: 1 hour, MCNY Bronx Extension Center
Discussion & demonstration. Students are asked to think about the role that the library has played in their lives, and the potential social roles of libraries and access to information. The research process is introduced. Different types of resources are framed as “conversations”, in accordance with the ACRL Information Literacy Framework. Students are encouraged to think about the privileges that are embedded in the notion of “expertise”, and different types of “expertise”. This is followed by an overview of the library’s resources. Students are given homework in preparation for part two: Search Google, Credo Reference & ProQuest Social Science, using the same search terms.

Part 2: 3 Hours, MCNY Manhattan Campus Library
A research topic is developed with the instructor. Topics have included PTSD and Poverty; “The Unseen Faces of Domestic Violence”; and “Restorative Justice”. Terms like Social Justice are unpacked collectively as a class. The class thinks not only about the meaning of the term itself, but uses the process to illustrate the brainstorming aspect of research. Through this process, students formulate a research question as a group, looking words up along the way. For example, one question may involve expanding the research collection with finding words in the DSM-V.

And now this is where the social justice students may arrive at a question about the politics of food in low income neighborhoods. The students form a new research question, and search the library databases for scholarly sources on the topics. Next, they think more specifically about how different types of sources can illuminate different aspects of their question. What are the statistics? How are personal stories about domestic violence – for example – look different than scholarly analysis of these social issues? The research results are a short paper for class and the librarian provides feedback on the paper with regard to the use of resources. It provides the pilot for faculty partnerships, embedded instruction and for using social justice to explore research topics.
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