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# Empowered to Name, Inspired to Act: Social Responsibility and Diversity as Calls to Action in the LIS Context

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TITLE: Empowered to Name, Inspired to Act: Social Responsibility and Diversity as Calls to Action in the LIS Context

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## ABSTRACT

Social responsibility and diversity are two principle tenets of the field of library and information science (LIS), as defined by the American Library Association's *Core Values of Librarianship* document, yet often remain on the margins of LIS education, leading to limited student engagement with these concepts and to limited faculty modeling of socially responsible interventions. In this paper, we take up the need to increase the role of both in articulating the values of diversity and social responsibility in LIS education, and argue the field should broaden to put LIS students and faculty in dialog with contemporary social issues of social inequality and injustice whenever possible. We also examine two specific cases of socially responsible activism spearheaded by LIS faculty and how these experiences shape, and are shaped by, curricular commitments to addressing the values of social responsibility and diversity in LIS in the classroom and through research. The development of a social responsibility orientation and skillset, along with literacies of diversity, we argue, leads to better-prepared practitioners and an LIS community that is more actively engaged with its environment. The impetus for students to act can be empowered by faculty modeling a commitment to social responsibility and diversity in their own professional lives.

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we focus on two of the *Core Values of Librarianship* (American Library Association [ALA], 2004) that should underline all aspects of librarianship practice, instruction, and research: Social Responsibility and Diversity. As longtime colleagues who have come to the field by way of very different paths and life experiences, we began the co-constitutive and iterative process of learning about, enacting and teaching these values as early as the first term of our doctoral studies. Since that time, we have carried the values of social responsibility and diversity through our work as embedded, foundational principles upon which our co-teaching of courses such as "LIS Foundations" and "Race, Gender and Sexuality in LIS" have been based. We foreground these concerns in our research, teaching, conferences, public lectures, and through our own shared commitments to political action for the betterment of the field, our communities, and society at large. Key to this process has been an open and ongoing dialog with each other and our peers, and the creation of collaborative learning environments predicated on sharing experiences, resources and knowledge with each other and our students. Our teaching commitments have primarily been focused on those who intend to enter the library and information science (LIS) field as practitioners and researchers.

On a larger scale, we believe that these practices and processes are not just theoretical, but also actionable. There is a need for professors to develop a conscious practice of and a commitment to naming and modeling engagement in social responsibility and diversity, two key and interrelated values named by the American Library Association (ALA) as essential to guiding libraries and librarianship into the future:

The contribution that librarianship can make in ameliorating or solving the critical problems of society; support for efforts to help inform and educate the people of the United States on these problems and to encourage them to examine the many views on and the facts regarding each problem; and the willingness of ALA to take a position on current critical issues with the relationship to libraries and library service set forth in the position statement. (ALA, 2004)

Within this framework, we recognize that the ALA has also dedicated significant time and resources toward a commitment to diversity, which is expressed as a Key Action Area for the organization:

Diversity is a fundamental value of the association and its members, and is reflected in its commitment to recruiting people of color and people with disabilities to the profession and to the promotion and development of library collections and services for all people. (ALA, 2007)

We believe social justice and diversity are directly linked to liberation from systemic, oppressive racism and gender disparity, which are critical, intersectional, social problems in the U.S. and beyond, and that the ALA Core Values and Key Action Areas are an important foundation for LIS educators. Our primary mechanism through which we manifest this commitment to the field is through our articulation of “social justice,” or: praxis, action and advocacy, by and for both individuals and institutions in LIS.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, we consider social *justice* to be a core manifestation of both social *responsibility* and diversity, and argue that it is through social justice (praxis, action and advocacy) that both of these values can be enacted professionally. In other words, to be socially responsible is to advocate for social justice and to act for a diverse field.

Over the past ten years or more, values of both social responsibility and diversity within the culture at large have been highly contested, shifting in meaning due to dilution by neoliberal discourses. In the context of LIS, race remains just one of several “intellectual blindspots” (Weigand, 1999) related to these principles. In this shift, we argue, the concept of social justice that is at the core of these values has often been softened, or even replaced wholesale, with concepts that are less threatening to the status quo and that do not mandate praxis and action. Indeed, the result of this dilution of concepts has meant that social responsibility has frequently been reframed as an *individual* responsibility, rather than *institutional*, or collective, commitment.

For example, “diversity,” in the context of the so-called “post-racial” era, has also begun to be deployed in calls for the “inclusion of everyone,” in ways that directly undermine and erase the specific naming of social injustices that are intersectionally and inextricably racialized, gendered or based in class (Pawley, 2006). Without a direct intervention in LIS curriculum that anchors these core values in a call for social justice, and that explicitly unpacks “diversity” as an intervention upon racialized inequality and injustice (2006), we argue that the likelihood of co-optation of meanings and positive intent embedded within the notions of social responsibility and diversity are at risk. What we need are engaged academics who can articulate and enact visible commitments to social justice on campuses, in the academy and in the culture, coupled with greater inclusion of courses and research on race (which includes studies of whiteness), gender, sexuality and oppression in LIS.

In this paper, we examine two specific cases of recent collective activism within the LIS community and how these experiences shape, and are shaped by, research and curricular commitments that address the values of social responsibility and diversity in the LIS classroom and field. In one case we discuss the controversial firing of Professor Steven Salaita from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the LIS petition that circulated in support of him as an act of social responsibility. In another case, we discuss the development and circulation of a statement in support of social justice in the field of LIS as a specific call to action that “Black Lives Matter,” in response to the spate of killings of unarmed African Americans in the U.S. by law enforcement. Both cases reflect efforts by LIS faculty to connect professional relevance, praxis and action to the values discussed in the classroom. In the field of LIS, making sense of the theoretical commitments to diversity and social responsibility in society is directly connected to curricular preparation, and further underscored by modeling by faculty. The development of social responsibility competencies and literacies at the curriculum level leads to better-prepared practitioners and an LIS community that is more actively engaged with its environment.

Schools of Library and Information Studies are crucial sites for teaching the core values of the profession, and faculty serve as important models in the professional education of librarians, archivists, and information workers. As such, faculty have a responsibility to provide a strong foundation for students, which includes promoting the core values of the field both within the classroom and in professional leadership outside it.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Recently, library and information scholars have taken up the importance of social justice, social responsibility and diversity in LIS education and practice (Caswell, Broman, Kirmer, Martin, & Sowry, 2012; Cooke, Sweeney, & Noble, in press; Dunbar, 2006; Gilliland, 2011; Kurz, 2012; Mehra, Rioux, & Albright, 2009; Noble, Austin, Sweeney, McKeever, & Sullivan, 2014; Pawley, 2006). Cooke, Sweeney, and Noble (in press), Noble (2014), Caswell, Broman, Kirmer, Martin, and Sowry (2012), and Mehra, Rioux, and Albright (2009) specifically address the ways that social responsibility can be implemented into syllabi in the study of the core values of the field for librarians and archivists. Using social responsibility and diversity as core organizing curricular principles, LIS faculty and instructors can both teach the traditional canons while also providing critiques and power analyses that are necessary for preparing students and professionals to work in complex, shifting, and increasingly global communities. Within the context of “professionalism” and “the field,” a socially responsible perspective mandates that students and scholars think about the ways that deep entrenchments to narratives of neutrality, objectivity and in many cases, silence, on social issues by LIS researchers and professionals have consequences. Indeed, we consider it a fundamental necessity of LIS education to provide a thorough examination of these contexts of social, economic and political power, and often oppression, in which our students will practice, in order to consider them prepared.

Evidence of a professional commitment by academic faculty researchers to talking about social responsibility and diversity as part of a commitment to social justice in LIS education has resulted in several panels in 2014 and 2015 at LIS professional conferences.<sup>2</sup> Recent attempts are being made to foreground issues of power, privilege, diversity, marginalization, and social responsibility as central to the work of faculty in the context of both their teaching and research.

Many of these sessions focused on teaching social responsibility and diversity as core values to LIS, panelists discussed the breadth of definitions of social responsibility, the importance of cultural competency, and how silence on these issues undermines the potency of LIS faculty to impact historical and contemporary issues of marginalization and oppression—all topics that can and should be bolstered by classroom curriculum.

#### EMPOWERED TO NAME: DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE LIS CLASSROOM

In 2001, feminist LIS scholar Hope Olson demonstrated the mechanisms and functions of what she described as “the power to name” various types of information representations and organizational schemata, typically to the detriment of people of color, particular ethnic groups, women, and non-Christians, among others (Olson, 2001). In her work, Olson explicitly interrogates whether the library catalog can be a “neutral” space, and provides evidence of the detrimental consequences of categorizing (or naming) information resources in aberrant opposition from a White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant-male-centric norm.

Furner (2007) extends this critique by examining the Dewey Decimal system using critical race theory (CRT), and documents the hegemonic ways that Library of Congress classification systems are explicitly racist and reinforce oppressive and socially unjust relations. Both of these writings have been essential to discussing power and social responsibility in LIS courses that we have taught. We also foreground the work of critical LIS scholars who are interrogating a host of professional practices in the field, including how social justice is central to archival studies (Caswell et al., 2012; Dunbar, 2006; Gilliland, 2011; Jimerson, 2006), how hegemony operates within the field (Wiegand, 1999), how classification systems reinforce systematic oppression (Berman, 2006; Olson, 2001), and the importance of diversifying the field of LIS as practice of social justice (Honma, 2005).

Courses should also include evidence-based research on social inequality. For example, the use of a canon of interdisciplinary socially responsible scholarship drawing from LIS, as well as economics, African American studies, gender and women’s studies, and sociology, has emerged from our experience team-teaching a course entitled “Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Information Professions,” in rotation with other instructors, all part of a small core of critical information scholars at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, who taught the class over the course of more than a decade. For example we often call upon the literature that includes discussion of class (Pawley, 1998), the racial wealth-gap (Shapiro, Meschede, & Osoro, 2013), a history of racialization in the U.S. (Omi & Winant, 1994), and the effects of neoliberal economic policy on the privatization of information and the erosion of the public sphere (Harvey, 2007; D. Schiller, 2007; H. Schiller, 1996), as libraries, archives, museums and other information organizations are working through the attendant consequences of these public and economic policy decisions. The exposure to this work and the subsequent conversations serve as an entry point for students in Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) and PhD programs that help contextualize the contemporary role of information professionals and their relationship to working in the service of, or in opposition to, multiple and intersecting axes of power (Collins, 1991). In so doing, Olson’s power in naming is echoed. It is the commitment to social responsibility as social justice that therefore empowers us to name the sites and institutions that demand intervention—not just in

the catalog, but in all areas of practice, literature, historical contexts, and in broader socio-economic and political contexts in which LIS practice is embedded.

The curricular integration of social justice into LIS has been captured in the published literature. For example, the experience of teaching the “Race, Gender, and Sexuality” course has been written about by Noble, Austin, Sweeney, McKeever, and Sullivan (2014), including a discussion of the risks and rewards of trying to foreground issues of power and social inequality and oppression in relation to topics of information access, diverse users of information, privacy and surveillance in information environments. Caswell et al. (2012) also discuss specific techniques used for integrating social justice, or social responsibility in praxis and action, as an epistemological frame for teaching archival studies. Cooke et al. (in press) carefully document the challenges facing LIS programs in integrating greater commitments to diversity and call attention to LIS scholarship that stresses the importance of transforming the field. There has also been a series of articles published among archivists, for example, that call for an expansion of the discussion about diversifying the field racially and culturally, to include the very paradigms that buttress archival practice (Caswell et al., 2012). In each of these papers, the authors document techniques used to teach about the value and importance of critical theory, diversity and social justice as social responsibility within the information professions and in LIS programs. We read these research publications in the tradition of Olson’s call to name and foreground a wide set of concerns that people who work in the field of LIS are engaging, or will need to engage, in order to be fully engaged with the ALA Core Values of Social Responsibility and Diversity.

Central to both student and instructor accounts of teaching about social responsibility and diversity in the classroom is the principle that doing so is not simply an option; rather, it is an imperative. We similarly argue that it is insufficient to deploy the notion of diversity simply at the level of underrepresentation of people of color or LGTBQI people (e.g., in LIS programs) although we consider the remedying of such underrepresentation to be of great importance and encourage this kind of expansion of the demographics of the field. In this way, we press beyond the ALA Key Action Areas definition of diversity. But such efforts should not stand alone, or be the purview or concern of only a few. We also reject tendencies to view diversity and underrepresentation as a strict biological construction, such that simply hiring diverse faculty based on biological, rather than epistemological and action-oriented, commitments to diversity, would be viewed as having “done enough.”

Instead, we argue, developing student ability in talking about, recognizing and practicing diversity and social responsibility, as they pertain both specifically to LIS contexts and institutions, as well as to larger socio-political, cultural, historical and economic contexts, prepares students for the complex and nuanced environments in which they will undoubtedly practice. This means that greater attention to epistemological commitments to diversity in research and teaching, as well as lived experience, should be re-centered. It is simply not enough to declare that because one is a member of an underrepresented community that a commitment to diversity and social responsibility can be taken for granted. Neither can one assume that lack of membership in an underrepresented group precludes a commitment to social responsibility and diversity in teaching and research.

To this end, courses dedicated to examining the role of libraries, archives, museums and other information and memory institutions specifically through the epistemological lens of social justice as social responsibility provide LIS students with the tools (e.g., vocabularies), knowledge and the facility to actively discuss and analyze the practices and positionality of those

institutions, and the extent to which those institutions and practices do or do not foster pluralism, human rights, justice, and shifts in the local and global distribution of resources. It is, in essence, a literacy developed through practice. In this sense, our view of social responsibility and diversity is less about strict adherence to increased representation across myriad unequal power relations, but rather, calls for social, economic and political relations and practices that are just, non-violent and offer equitable life chances and quality of life across the globe.

Such courses serve as an ideal site for discussions about the organization and commodification of knowledge and information, the consequences and affordances of our professional practices, the beneficiaries of access to information and those who lack it, and so on. But rather than discuss these phenomena in isolation, they are linked together with scholarship, examples from the practice and other documentary evidence that provide students with a clear understanding of the structural, legal and cultural regimes and norms that create and sustain them. It has been our experience, as both LIS learners and instructors, that courses that include topics of equity and diversity without a clear and direct focus on the aforementioned as foundational to the course, or that discuss such issues without the linkages we described above, are likely to miss the critical connections that illustrate how systems of structural inequities function over time and in institutions. To treat issues of equity and diversity without their structural and historical contexts of institutional inequities runs the risk of creating blind spots for students in terms of how they may both be implicated within them and, by the same token, have agency to intervene upon them. A lack of context about power and its uneven distribution through under- and over-development, conquest and colonization also leads students, often underexposed in their previous academic preparation to concepts of structural inequality and oppression, to over-rely upon uncritical cultural explanations and pathologizing frameworks for making sense of disparity.

We would be remiss if we did not address a key organizing principle we have encountered in our experiences as students and now faculty in LIS programs, which is the sequestering of diversity and social justice away from the mainstream orientations and unique specializations of the field. LIS education's focus on data, big data, information retrieval, data curation and traditionally explicit notions of information and computer science are often lauded as objective, neutral or apolitical, and therefore are interpreted as being exempt from the social responsibility and diversity frameworks that we discuss in this paper. We point to the scholarship on the politics of data, computing, and digital technologies (Andrejevic, 2007; Blanchette, 2011; Blanchette & Johnson, 2002; Brock, 2011; Chun, 2006; Couldry & Powell, 2014; Daniels, 2009; Diaz, 2008; Eglash, 2007; Fuchs, 2008; Galloway, 2008; Gandy, 2011; Goldsmith & Wu, 2006; Halavais, 2009; Hindman, 2009; Noble, 2013; Pacey, 1983; Roberts, in press; Sweeney, in press; Wajeman, 1991; Winner, 1986) that provide ample evidence of the ways in which technology is a social construction, laden with social values and significant social and political implications, as it is indeed a product of human material culture. We go so far as to argue that there are no courses within LIS that would not benefit from the introduction of social responsibility and diversity as values worthy of examination in the context of practice.

Indeed, we harken back to Olson's (2001) invoking of the power to name and Pawley's (2006) call for action to expand the LIS curriculum to specifically include conversations and education that explicitly address issues of race, racism and other structural oppressions and inequities, rather than the more common gestures at nebulous concepts such as "multiculturalism," a term Pawley aptly critiques.

Instead of making issues of social responsibility and social justice obscure, general, universal and, in many ways, meaningless, we believe that faculty can serve as professional examples, as role models, as mentors, and as practitioners alongside their students in taking up social justice concerns relevant to LIS. Rather than remaining entrenched in notions that faculty are “apolitical” or divested from social responsibility, we believe critical engagement in contemporary issues is a fundamental function for educators and researchers. Without such commitment, much is missed in bringing about a greater investment in socially responsible praxis.

We believe, and have witnessed, the strength of faculty taking up issues of social responsibility as it intersects with topics directly relevant to the field of LIS, or to higher education more broadly. The following two cases are reflective of recent faculty work that allows for greater interrogation of what socially-just practices in the field might look like, how they might be taken up collectively. Ultimately, in the tradition of Olson, faculty have the power and responsibility to name the breadth and depth of issues facing students who will work in multi-faceted, complex environments that include social, political and economic challenges. Directly working to address issues of diversity and social responsibility is but one means of modeling by faculty to both name and participate in solving the myriad issues facing all of us who live, work and engage in the complicated contexts in the U.S.

#### SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND DIVERSITY AS SOCIAL JUSTICE PRACTICE: “LIS PRACTITIONERS AND SCHOLARS SUPPORT STEVEN SALAITA”

In the summer of 2014, the case of Professor Steven Salaita, hired to teach at the Associate level (i.e., with tenure) in the American Indian Studies Program at the University of Illinois, made international headlines when Salaita was dismissed from his position just days before it was to begin (Jaschik, 2014). Ostensibly fired for a series of tweets that were critical of Israeli policies and the latest violent assault on Palestinians in Gaza, which were issued from his personal account and publicly deemed by Chancellor Phyllis Wise to have been “uncivil” in tone (Palumbo-Liu, 2014), Salaita and many others instead suspected that his firing, a decision made by Wise in consultation with various executive-level administrators and the University’s Board of Trustees, was actually much more politically motivated than it was based on issues of decorum and comportment.

While Salaita is neither a librarian nor a scholar of LIS, the case nevertheless resonated for many in the LIS community in a number of dimensions. Many LIS practitioners, students and scholars felt that the University of Illinois had violated the tenet of academic freedom, a principle upheld within academe and directly related to the Core Value of Intellectual Freedom found among the *Core Values of Librarianship* (ALA, 2004).

Further, many LIS scholars, students and practitioners alike connected the action taken against Salaita to larger issues afoot on their campuses, including the erosion of free speech protections and of space for dissent, the role of the corporatization in the university in those phenomena, the fact that faculty labor organizing was underway at the University of Illinois at the time of the firing, and, perhaps most disturbing of all, the fact that senior administrators had wrested the decision-making control of a faculty hire from the American Indian Studies Program, suggesting that the Program, made up of indigenous scholars and scholars of color, was not capable of adequately soliciting and vetting appropriate faculty of its own accord. It appeared to many on campus and in the wider community that Salaita, a Palestinian-American, outspoken

supporter of Palestinian liberation and expert on comparative indigeneity, was in fact being barred from taking his new post because of his overt and frank political positions and statements.

In response, and despite the tense political climate, LIS faculty members, students (current and former) and practitioners with relationships to the University of Illinois began to publicly speak out against the firing, in the form of letters to the Chancellor, messages on social media and petitions. These activities occurred alongside a number of other groups of academics responding to the Salaita affair with their disciplinary colleagues. On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, a petition created by one of this article's authors (Roberts) in support of Steven Salaita for LIS practitioners, students and scholars went live and can be read in full in this article's appendix.

In comparison with the responses from other scholarly disciplines, the LIS petition was unique in several regards. First, it recognized the LIS community as having an important voice in the Salaita situation, given the field's tenets and profession's core values. Second, it was the only Salaita-related petition to unite scholars, students and practitioners of a given academic field together, building on the strong relationship that exists among the three types of LIS community members. It also put LIS practitioners alongside faculty professional organizations and groups as professionals who have a significant stake in the business and principles of the university.

Importantly, the LIS petition in support of Salaita was an example of praxis (Freire, 2000), in which the LIS community had an opportunity to directly engage theory and dialog in a real-world situation of inequity. The concept of praxis—the use of theory to inform and drive action—has been central to our teaching of social responsibility and diversity issues in our LIS courses, and the petition was an excellent opportunity to model it to students, practitioners and peer academics, and to encourage their active participation, as well. They responded to the call, soliciting through their own networks of politically engaged, social justice oriented LIS people.

Indeed, a discussion focusing on the situation as it pertained to LIS practice was hosted on Twitter under the hashtag #critlib (or critical librarianship<sup>3</sup>) in late September, with a focus on the petition as well as other related issues. Many of the participants of the #critlib chat had previously signed on, and many more were moved to do so after participating in the event. As of this writing, 237 individuals from across the LIS community have signed on. In this way, the action of creating the petition and the signing on of individuals from around the world helped to construct a community of LIS practitioners, students and scholars who manifested a public and shared commitment to a socially responsible position. Though some may critique the use of petitions and boycotts, these engagements are an effective means of education and link the context of practice to the field, thereby uniting LIS practitioners, students and faculty in action; whereas other petitions around similar issues are often discipline-specific and relegated to faculty only (without the addition of people in the practice). That having been said, petitions have great limits and are intended to only be one means, among many, to effect change. They are nevertheless powerful and visible and provide an important moment of reflection for us about our values. They are also powerful and visible tools, particularly at the beginning of organized resistance or advocacy work.

#### SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND DIVERSITY AS SOCIAL JUSTICE PRACTICE: “STATEMENT FROM INFORMATION STUDIES ACADEMICS AND PROFESSIONALS ON DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE”

In the summer of 2012, the authors were co-teaching the aforementioned course on race, sexuality, and gender in LIS. An elective, students self-selected into the class, which was offered

during the summer. Coincidentally, this was during the trial of George Zimmerman, who was accused of murdering a young, unarmed, African American teenager in Florida. For several weeks, we had been mapping the normative landscape of U.S. culture and definitions of race as a social construct, including how to identify social, political and economic factors that normalize “othering” as an entrenched practice in U.S. culture and in the field of LIS. Some of the learning objectives from the course included development of language and knowledge that helps contextualize racism at an institutional level, including recognition of the historical continuum of privilege and disadvantage that extends beyond the individual. Students were tasked with developing a project that demonstrated their ability to feel more confident about discussing privilege, such that they could analyze issues of race, gender and power embedded in social practices. Within these projects, we asked them to explain critical perspectives and tangibly trace power, or ask who benefits, who loses, and what values are at play in an LIS practice of import to them. Given this context, we felt it our imperative as instructors to immediately address the news events in the social responsibility-oriented class, as an example of engaging social responsibility and racial justice.

National and international protests erupted when George Zimmerman, a self-appointed security guard, was found not guilty of murdering Trayvon Martin during the summer of 2013. Students in our class were offered an opportunity to respond to their concerns about the verdict, and particularly the increasing racial tension and divide among African Americans and White Americans over the verdict (Cohen, 2013), and the role that LIS professionals might be playing in providing coherent and timely information for communities and individuals in need. We worked with our students to develop an online resource of information to better understand and contextualize racial violence in the U.S. at <http://teachingtrayvon.org> (Noble, 2014).

Since then, the extra-judicial killings and lack of indictments of the members of law enforcement who have killed dozens more unarmed African American men, women and children have continued to spark international protests and subsequent media attention (Goldhammer, 2014). Family members of the victims of racial violence, such as Michael Brown’s<sup>4</sup> parents, have petitioned the United Nations for intervention (Levs, 2014), and renewed calls for investigations of human rights abuses of African Americans in the U.S. are being pursued by Amnesty International (“Amnesty International Releases New Ferguson Report Documenting Human Rights Abuses,” 2014). News stories of a reported 400 killings per year of African Americans by White police officers have circulated in the media (McCauley, 2014), and race relations continue to be an important conversation on college campuses—conversations that many faculty may not be prepared to have. The lack of indictment for White police officers in the killings of an unarmed African American teenager, Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri, and in the choking murder of Eric Garner,<sup>5</sup> an unarmed African American man selling loose cigarettes on the street in New York, among many others, has created new imperatives for how we talk about key aspects of the LIS profession, such as documentary evidence and the role of both the official and unofficial record, as well as the ways that communities can speak back to the record in an effort to find justice.

These concerns have been articulated in LIS classrooms and among some faculty and students in the UCLA Department of Information Studies, an LIS program with an overt commitment to social justice written into its mission statement and supported by the Department Chair (“Chair’s Message,” n.d.; “Mission, Values, and Vision,” n.d.). As part of a set of multiple commitments and concerns for some members of the department, the majority of faculty, led in

part by one of the authors of this paper (Noble), co-crafted a statement that stands in dialog with the international and national protests calling for increased attention and recognition that “Black Lives Matter.” Certainly, efforts to take up a dialogue on the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag on Twitter, and the subsequent movement started by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi reflect concerns of many information professionals about the role of information in social justice movements. The most notable community archive project, Documenting Ferguson<sup>6</sup>, is an example of the work of archivists in making community media surrounding the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO accessible to the public. Ultimately, projects of this nature, including the faculty statement at UCLA, are a matter of individuals who come together collectively to take up these concerns as part of their own ethical and professional commitments.

During the development of the “Statement from Information Studies Academics and Professionals on Documentary Evidence and Social Justice,” a host of new considerations were brought to the fore about whether or not LIS faculty have a responsibility to speak publicly on contemporary and historical issues of social inequality and social responsibility as justice. Even at UCLA Department of Information Studies, where social justice was a clear part of the departmental mission, there was not a consensus by all members of the department to engage in public, collective activity in the name of the department toward the development and distribution of the Statement. The overwhelming majority of faculty did contribute or sign on to the Statement; however, the results of these conversations led to multiple considerations about whether LIS departments, or any department in the modern university, is able to speak to concerns that affect the profession through official university channels.

Ultimately, the Statement was put on an external non-university hosted website and members of the profession at large were invited through various communication channels, mostly via social media, to sign on to petition, a copy of which can be found in the appendix (Statement from Information Studies Academics, 2014). Within the first eight weeks of circulation, nearly 350 academics, students, and information professionals from the U.S. and abroad signed their names to affirm a commitment to the values of social justice and diversity in the information fields, led by most of the UCLA Department of Information Studies faculty. In many ways, the impetus for the Statement was a call for praxis—for academics to merge theory and practice into action.

This action stood as a specific demonstration of how LIS researchers and professionals can articulate and name a specific commitment to bringing expertise and knowledge to the crises of increased incidences of racism toward African Americans, and stands as an opportunity to speak truth to concerns about police brutality and racialized social inequality. Ultimately, the action on the part of these LIS faculty and practitioners can be read as an effort to model ethics in times of social crisis, which is often theorized about, but less obvious to students in classroom settings.

## MODELING AND SUSTAINING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND DIVERSITY IN LIS

We recognize the limits and affordances of petitions as a means of having social impact, as previously mentioned, but we contend that the two cases above serve as examples of a holistic and multipartite engagements with what it means to take up issues of diversity and social responsibility within LIS, beginning at the level of MLIS curriculum, and including the activities of students, practitioners and instructors united in support of equity and justice. We argue that this holistic commitment is aligned with decades of scholarship within the field, as well as with

fundamental principles and tenets at the core of the practice. This commitment also serves to unite individuals from across the field of practice and within academe with each other in unified and collective action.

In today's contemporary corporatized and depoliticized university environment, commitments to social responsibility and diversity are unlikely to occur organically or from the top down, particularly in terms of curriculum. Rather, the addition of such courses requires the direct action—praxis—and advocacy of faculty committed to developing and delivering them, often with the backing of students who demand them. Both are potent ingredients to demonstrating to administrators, curriculum committees and other gatekeepers that such courses are necessary and must be developed, supported and regularly placed on the books. The inclusion of courses with a focus on social responsibility and diversity can be attended to and supported by curriculum committees that are serious about preparing professional students for an increasingly diverse and complex series of engagements throughout the information professions.

Social responsibility-focused research can be, in itself, a commitment to diversity, and should be incorporated into the curriculum, as one aspect of a larger holistic commitment expression of praxis. This includes faculty being visible, active political actors towards social responsibility causes, which invariably means addressing a commitment to diversity and equity *on their own campuses*. In particular, tenured faculty are in a strong position to further support students and student initiatives around these issues, and can support untenured faculty, rather than discourage such intellectual and political engagements. Faculty, students and staff who are committed to issues of equity, diversity and justice can find ample sites of encroachment in their own local campus environments and wider communities, such as silencing mechanisms and measures, often in the guise of budgetary cuts and restrictions, encroachment on political speech, attempts to hinder labor organization or improvements in working conditions, tuition hikes for students, and so forth.

To be sure, such activities introduce vulnerability, particularly for junior faculty, adjunct or limited-term faculty, and/or faculty who may already find themselves marginalized or underrepresented in their departments, campuses and/or communities based on their identities. Yet, we counter, this is already the case for individuals in these categories in the contemporary campus environment, and the notion of avoiding the call to praxis out of a sense of seeking relative safety presupposes a climate and context that upholds and values equity, diversity, and social justice unequivocally and for all. We suspect this climate is unlikely to exist and can only come about via active pressure from faculty, where commitment to theory and tenets meets action, in praxis.

There is a need to refocus on the cloudy notion of “neutrality,” and how it is often incorrectly deployed within the context of LIS education and practice. To uphold a *socially responsible* principle of neutrality, we argue, does not mean that one must become apolitical, shirking away from action or any overt personal ethics, values and tenets. In fact, “neutrality” itself may be highly contested and political, in climates in which certain people's right to speak or act is being curtailed, or where social responsibility engagements are interpreted as a disservice to the department. Such was the argument in the case of LIS practitioners and scholars for Salaita, who argued that upholding neutrality actually meant actively supporting and asserting Salaita's right, and all people's right, to express an opinion, no matter its civility or incivility as measured by others. In this sense, maintaining the LIS tenet of “neutrality” can be a highly controversial and highly political act, in the context of the broader world. Yet this is what

these tenets call on us to do. Equally, in the case of supporting a statement that “Black Lives Matter,” notions that there are “two sides to a story” or that “we can’t know because we weren’t there,” or that we have a professional responsibility to uphold oppressors as equally as we support the oppressed is a tenuous argument that can only make sense in the absence of a social responsibility framework.

We would like to call upon our colleagues in LIS to reject the notion that because our profession can, and does engage in commitments to diversity, equity and social justice, that these professional and ethical commitments are expressly named as “political,” while we concurrently engage in the depoliticizing of big data projects, data curation, and information or computer science research and development. Indeed, as has already been carefully documented by LIS, science and technology studies scholars, and social scientists, all aspects of scholarship are laden with values and politics. Yet, the scholars who are committed to bringing about insights and contributions to social responsibility and diversity are often marginalized as expressly political so as to push them to the margin, with the veil of neutrality, objectivity or more canonical strains of inquiry maintaining the status quo at the center of the field.

#### CONCLUSION: EMPOWERED TO NAME; INSPIRED TO ACT

Olson’s work, among many others, serves as a powerful basis upon which to both name the moments where we can critically engage the values of social responsibility and diversity in the field and also find inspiration to act. Based on these two action-based case studies and the interrelated discussions of curriculum and research, we propose that LIS faculty and practitioners must focus on modeling social responsibility, diversity and equity issues as a core part of all aspects of LIS: research, curriculum and practice. We see the identification of real-world problems and empathic engagement in our field (rather than a posture of disengagement of alleged neutrality) as opportunities to take action and reflect upon the core values of our field, of which diversity and social responsibility are but just two. There are multiple, ongoing problems that give us an opportunity to talk openly about the value, and values, that the introduction of social responsibility and diversity-based action can add to the LIS curriculum for our students, for the practice, and for the field. To be sure, that these issues may go unexamined does not render them non-factors. Instead, when these topics are ignored or marginalized in relation to LIS practice and are absent from LIS curriculum, students are not adequately equipped for the contexts and environments in which they will practice, nor are they appropriately prepared to recognize and, if necessary, resist the mechanisms that constrain access to information and shrink the public sphere. Students must be given the opportunity to develop their historical understanding of social justice issues, to foster their vocabularies and abilities to talk about complex issues of race, gender, sexuality and class, and to recognize the ways in which issues of power play out in the communities in which they will live and practice. Faculty can play a critical role in this process by developing and advocating for the inclusion of courses with a social responsibility focus into their own curriculum, and by being active and visible in their own praxis around these same issues. This holistic approach, we believe, stays true to the core values of the profession, creates engaged and socially responsible, diversity- and equity-literate students who will go on to model and advocate for these issues as practitioners and people in the world. As their instructors, we owe them nothing less.

## APPENDIX A: TEXT FROM THE PETITIONS REFERENCED IN THIS ARTICLE

### LIS PRACTITIONERS AND SCHOLARS SUPPORT STEVEN SALAITA

*As Library and Information Science (LIS) practitioners, students and scholars, we are committed to the principles of our field: to the free access to and flow of information and to the intellectual freedom of all. We are shocked and dismayed by the unilateral decision on the part of Chancellor Phyllis Wise and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Board of Trustees to rescind the employment of Dr. Steven Salaita based on his speech in social media.*

*We reject what we view as specious reasoning by both the Chancellor and the Board of Trustees for what we recognize as a politically motivated act. We denounce claims to civility that cover for silencing of political speech by members of the campus community. As people dedicated personally and professionally to the free exchange of ideas – particularly those considered challenging or controversial – we call on Chancellor Wise to restore Dr. Salaita’s employment, to respect the faculty governance process by which he was chosen as the most qualified candidate, and to restore the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign campus to a site where dissenting ideas may find a home.*

*Until the above conditions are met, we, the undersigned, will honor the global call to boycott the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. We will not engage with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, including visiting the campus, providing workshops, attending conferences, delivering talks or lectures, offering services, or co-sponsoring events of any kind.*

*We look forward to such time as we can return, in good conscience, to our partnerships and relationships with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Until that time, we will honor this boycott; our professional and long-standing commitment to the academic and intellectual freedom of all demands no less. (Roberts, 2014)*

### STATEMENT FROM INFORMATION STUDIES ACADEMICS AND PROFESSIONALS ON DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

*December 2014*

*We, the undersigned, are academic scholars and professional practitioners in the field of Information Studies and Library and Information Science. We support the role of information institutions such as libraries, archives, museums and academic institutions in fostering social justice and specifically affirm the importance of evidence and documentation in making sense of, and resolving, racial and social disparities, and injustice.*

*We are dedicated to inquiry and the advancement of knowledge. We develop future generations of scholars, teachers, information professionals, and institutional leaders. Our work is guided by the principles of individual responsibility and social justice, an ethic of caring, and commitment to the communities and public we serve. Moreover, we*

*are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion of all members of society, and recognize our responsibility in contributing knowledge, research, and expertise to help foster social, economic, cultural, and racial equity and justice. Thus, for example, we stand in solidarity with members of multiple communities in their recent calls on all Americans to recognize that “Black Lives Matter.”*

*We affirm our long-standing commitment to the pursuit of social justice through the study of the production, management, authentication and use of documentary evidence, and the transformative role of education, as ways to promote better understanding of complex social issues, identify injustices and inequities, and formulate solutions to these problems. We believe that cultural and information institutions such as libraries and archives play a central role in advancing social justice and equity by offering spaces and resources for community-based dialog and reflection, providing access to information in all its forms, and designing and building systems of information classification, retrieval and access that expose and resist, rather than perpetuate, pervasive and unjust economic, class, racial, and gender disparities.*

*Furthermore, we recognize the vital importance of all forms of documentation, and especially records, in mediating contemporary conflicts and disputes rooted in longstanding historical patterns of injustice, such as the recent spate of killings of African-American men, women, and children at the rate of one person every 28 hours in the United States by law enforcement or security officers, as reported in the media. In these and other crises, publicly-created documentary evidence (such as photographs, cellphone-generated video, and oral testimony) has emerged as an indispensable resource for helping victims’ advocates, community members, and legal authorities alike to determine the facts of these cases, including claims of state violence against citizens. These records are necessary to assist victims’ families and advocates to pursue claims of wrongful prosecution or injury.*

*We believe that greater transparency of government agencies and actions through documentation and the public release of documents is essential. We call for national debate and professional engagement on why racism and state-sanctioned violence persists and is systemically embedded in our culture. We also see a disturbing connection between the local events and global instances of human rights abuses, including those chronicled in the most recent investigatory report on CIA torture processes. At the same time, we are doubtful that the growing, technologized “culture of surveillance,” in which both citizens and the state engage in a constantly-escalating spiral of hypervigilance, data capture, and retaliatory exposure of sensitive information, in any sense constitutes a sustainable solution to social injustice or state violence, nor does it address the root causes and consequences of an increasingly violent and painfully divided society.*

*The core ethics and values of the information disciplines and professions require that we steward, validate, protect, and also liberate the cultural and documentary record; that we insure that documentation is transparent and accountable; and that we provide equitable and ready access to information for all. Our teaching, research and practice must manifest these values. We call on our academic and professional colleagues across*

*the nation and around the world to join our efforts to build archives, collections, and repositories of documents in all media forms, and systems of access to and use of these resources, in the service of helping people experiencing injustice to talk back to the record, and to power.*

*We encourage all educators to stand with us, and encourage signatures to this Statement in affirmation of our professional and personal commitments to social justice. (Statement from Information Studies Academics, 2014)*

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> We are indebted to many definitions of social justice that more generally apply across other fields and contexts for our own articulation of social justice as it pertains to LIS. In particular, we call on the following definition as fundamental to the development of our own: “Educating ourselves and others, and taking action to change the status quo. Social justice is about giving voice to communities who have been forced into silence; social justice is about equity and access” (Rodriguez, L.A. & Cummings, T., 2007, p. 12).

<sup>2</sup> These conference panels include, “Teaching Social Justice as an Assistant Professor: Rewards and Risks” at the 2015 Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) conference, Chicago, IL; “Power, Privilege, and Positionality: Applying a Critical Lens to LIS Education” at the 2014 American Libraries Association (ALA) conference, Las Vegas, NV; “Social Justice in Library and Information Science” at the 2014 I-Schools Conference, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany; and “Power, Privilege & Positionality: Applying a Critical Lens to LIS Education” at the 2014 Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) conference, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>3</sup> A transcript of the #critlib conversation has been archived here: <https://storify.com/oksveta/the-impact-of-the-salaita-case-on-lis-practice-1>

<sup>4</sup> A detailed accounting of the death of Michael Brown, an unarmed African American teenager killed by a White police officer, Darren Wilson in Ferguson, MO has been written by many major news outlets in the U.S., including the New York Times at [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/08/13/us/ferguson-missouri-town-under-siege-after-police-shooting.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/08/13/us/ferguson-missouri-town-under-siege-after-police-shooting.html?_r=0)

<sup>5</sup> A detailed accounting of the death of Eric Garner, an unarmed African American man killed by several police officers in New York has been documented in many major news outlets, including the New York Times at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/19/nyregion/staten-island-man-dies-after-he-is-put-in-chokehold-during-arrest.html>

<sup>6</sup> Documenting Ferguson website can be accessed at <http://digital.wustl.edu/ferguson/>