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More than Style Guides:

Incorporating Citation Justice within Citation Instruction

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Introduction

Citations are a fundamental component of academic reading and writing. They demonstrate that academics and learners have engaged with, analyzed, and connected their work to existing scholarship. These research skills are essential at all levels of academia. However, students often struggle with citation practices.¹ Many students are required to use various citation styles throughout their academic programs and may have trouble differentiating between resource types.² Furthermore, due to concerns about plagiarism and the need for proper citation formatting, students often focus exclusively on technical accuracy rather than understanding the broader significance of citations in the real-world.³

Given the importance of citations in higher education, they are often taught by multiple professionals at an academic institution, such as faculty, instructors, writing center staff, or librarians.⁴ Librarians are well suited to teaching citations because of their unique ability to teach research skills to students in subject-based courses, library workshops, and one-on-one consultations.

According to the *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, citations fall into two frames: Information has Value and Scholarship as Conversation,⁵ whereby it is essential to give credit to authors for their work and to include citations to contribute to the scholarly conversation.

At the University of Manitoba (UM), librarians, faculty, and writing instructors and tutors teach citations to undergraduate and graduate students. In 2021, two public service librarians who liaised with different faculties (first year students and health sciences), discovered that we both provided one-shot citation instruction to undergraduate students. In further discussions comparing our instructional sessions, we identified a lot of commonalities. Often, the content focused on the importance of formatting citations, rather than the theory behind citing resources and it was challenging to maintain engagement in the session. From these conversations, we opted to explore how other academic librarians provided citation instruction by completing a literature review. During this process, we came across the concept of citation justice.

Citation justice is the intentional attempt to cite more authors who identify as BIPOC, female, and 2SLGBTQIA+ to address the citation gap of minority researchers due to systemic

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failures.⁶ According to Mott and Cockayne, “the choices we make about whom to cite—and who is then left out of the conversation—directly impact the cultivation of a rich and diverse discipline.”⁷ Therefore, citation justice offers students an opportunity to establish positive change by highlighting scholars in their own work that have traditionally been excluded.

Building on this foundation, our exploration of citation justice in library instruction revealed that integrating these principles into workshops and library citation guides not only addresses a significant gap in the literature but also encourages students to engage more critically with citation practices. In this paper, we describe how we have incorporated citation justice into our guides and citation workshops, and present the findings of a survey completed by workshop attendees.

Literature Review

In 1993, Margaret W. Rossiter coined the term, the Matilda Effect, to highlight the lack of recognition female academics received for their work.⁸ This was a play on the term, the Matthew effect, coined by Robert K. Merton that highlighted the snowballing effect of citations.⁹ Merton argued that heavily cited works are likely to attract additional citations due to their familiarity, creating a cycle where the accumulation of citations increases the likelihood of further citations.¹⁰ Blell takes this argument further, describing how in her pursuit for a PhD, she was often asked to remove citations from lesser known academics in favor of the ‘giants’ in the field, saying “... the measure of how valuable and interesting my work was lay in the famous names I cited.”¹¹

The politics of citation is not a new phenomenon. High citation counts are integral to academic promotion, tenure, attaining grants, and to demonstrate the overall reach of an academics’ work. Because of this, they are susceptible to the systemic inequities of academia. Over the last 10 years, several peer reviewed studies have highlighted the citation gap between white males, and those from systematically disadvantaged and marginalized groups.¹² Studies from disciplines ranging from science and health science to social science and humanities have demonstrated that white male academics are more likely to benefit from the Matthew effect than their female and BIPOC colleagues.¹³

Recent research highlights the trend of incorporating citation justice into post-secondary information literacy instruction. Librarians are developing programs to educate students about equitable citation practices, recognizing citations as a form of power in academia and emphasizing the inclusion of historically marginalized voices.¹⁴ The librarian, Jodi H. Coalter, asserts that librarians are uniquely positioned to facilitate the inclusion of this topic due to their expertise in information literacy and reference management.¹⁵ She suggests that librarians should integrate citation justice into instruction through workshops and in-class instruction. Chenevey expands on this by discussing a workshop model that encourages students to reflect on the value of citations and their role in reinforcing or challenging scholarly authority.¹⁶ Weiss documents efforts at the University of Maryland, where librarians collaborated with faculty to integrate citation equity into graduate research requirements.¹⁷ This initiative included developing citation audits and research guides to support students in finding under-represented scholars. All three authors emphasize the importance of embedding citation justice instruction into existing citation instruction.

This approach challenges traditional synchronous citation instruction done by librarians, which often focuses on formatting and avoiding plagiarism rather than engaging students in the broader implications of citation practice.¹⁸ Historically, librarians at post-secondary institutions have instructed citations synchronously as part of information literacy or academic integrity workshops.¹⁹ Whether librarians are working independently, or collaborating with other departments, the focus of citation instruction is to ensure compliance and reduce plagiarism. As Coalter, Chenevey, and Weiss assert,²⁰ incorporating citation justice into library workshops presents a novel approach to citation instruction. It encourages critical thinking while also providing a broader context to the importance of citations.

While synchronous instruction is integral to teaching citations, asynchronous approaches, primarily through library guides and online videos, have also played an important role. Academic libraries have long used online citation guides, such as LibGuides, to support students in learning citation practices. Dawe et al. highlight that many academic libraries provide online citation support through FAQs and instructional guides, yet students often struggle to grasp citation beyond a rule-based approach. Their study found that while students appreciated their citation guide, many continued to perceive citation as a rigid, mechanical task.²¹ This finding suggests that while library citation guides are valuable, there is a need to integrate more learning-centered, critical approaches to asynchronous citation instruction.

Creating Content for Library Guides

Citation LibGuide Evaluation

In 2024, we completed a review of library webpages focused on citation instruction from institutions that are part of the U15; a group comprised of Canada's top research universities.²² The focus of our evaluation was the primary citation LibGuide for each library, found via a Google search. This method helped us identify institutions that were most similar to our own in terms of student population and course offerings. Limiting our focus to one main LibGuide for each U15 school also made this project manageable within a short time frame. We chose to locate all instructional resources using a Google search in an effort to replicate the type of search behavior that post-secondary students would use when attempting to locate the exact same information.

Although only one U15 institution (0.07%) provided citation justice content on their main citation guide at the time of our evaluation,²³ a much broader search revealed that this topic is addressed by several North American academic libraries and is often included in its own unique LibGuide, rather than part of an existing citation resource. However, we recognize that it is nearly impossible to identify all the work being done on this topic, given the countless number of institutions that may be creating citation justice content for their LibGuides or other webpages, and the various terms that describe related concepts. While we are using "citation justice," in our research and instructional content, similar information can also be found using terms such as citational justice, citation(al) politics, inclusive citation, or critical citation, among other phrases.

Common features within the LibGuides and webpages we explored included written definitions of key terms,²⁴ videos,²⁵ diverse scholar databases,²⁶ resources for further reading,²⁷ tutorials and quizzes,²⁸ FAQ sections,²⁹ and other ways to determine diverse scholarship such as gender and race balancing tools or those used for citation auditing.³⁰

Our Rationale

We decided to add the citation justice information to the central citation webpage (*Citing & References*) at our own institution.³¹ This page already included information about using various citation styles and formats, as well as reference management tools; components that are often mentioned during our citation justice workshops.

Citing & References is part of the UM Libraries' *Learn at the Libraries* guide; a resource that was initially developed for newer students and focuses on introductory content regarding academic writing, searching, evaluating information, and citing.³² In the last year, the *Citing & References* page received over 7000 views; this was 3-4 times higher than all other pages on *Learn at the Libraries*. Therefore, we hoped that putting new information in this area would also provide the best chance for it to be found, even if students were not specifically searching for citation justice.

Implementing the Citation Justice Information

The new citation justice section includes key information about what citation justice is, how to locate diverse authors and sources, and the steps involved in citation auditing. While we realize that there is much more we could add based on the findings we've gathered from reviewing other LibGuides and webpages, we wanted to

design content that would be accessible to the widest possible audience, including both new and established researchers. However, we may choose to update and add to this content over time based on feedback we receive anecdotally, or through future research endeavors.

Creating the Citation Workshops

Background

At the University of Manitoba, subject librarians have been engaged in citation instruction for many years. Common citation support includes the development of handouts, videos, LibGuide content, course-based instruction, and responding to students' questions via email or appointments. The UM Libraries have also provided citation workshops on a regular basis, most of which have focused on the use of citation managers such as Zotero, Mendeley or EndNote.

Although these offerings are still available, our review of citation instruction guides combined with a broader literature review of citation instruction practices revealed existing gaps in our own instructional practices that we hadn't considered previously. We realized, for example, that our citation resources and services focused solely on relaying technical instructions, rather than addressing the importance of why citations matter and encouraging students to reflect on why and how information is disseminated. How can we expect students to care about following the rules of a specific style guide when we as facilitators are not explaining why this process is valuable?

In addition, our research introduced us to the idea of citation justice; a concept that promoted the critical thinking component our citation work was missing. After learning about citation justice, we felt it was important to educate students about the inequity of current citation practices and share information and tools that encouraged them to intentionally include minority authors when citing. We wanted to assist students in developing the skills to make thoughtful decisions about which citations they use, and how to be aware of and apply citation justice within their own writing.

In reflecting on these discoveries and through further discussion, we decided that we wanted to change our existing practices to help students better engage with the sources they encountered and learn to be critical, curious and informed about what they cite. Although our search for citation justice workshop materials did not yield many results, we came across two presentations that were particularly helpful. The first from the University of Victoria Libraries,³³ and a second from the James Madison University, developed by Liz Chenevey.³⁴

Citation Justice Workshop Development

After reviewing these materials and giving some thought to the best way to move forward, we decided to develop two new library workshops incorporating citation justice. Each session would be offered via Zoom in the Fall 2024 and Winter 2025 terms. An online format was selected in the hopes that it would make it easier for more students to attend. Both sessions were scheduled to be held for one hour and were created using the online presentation platform, Mentimeter. Although the content of each session was suited to a specific audience, either undergraduate or graduate students, both included a discussion about what citation justice involves and why it matters. We also provided examples of ways that students could actively participate in this process and demonstrated different citation justice tools as part of this conversation. At the end of each session, participants were given time to ask questions and, if interested, to complete a brief survey about their experiences in attending the workshop. All documents related to both workshops can be accessed online (<https://osf.io/5wd87/>).

Undergraduate Workshop Content

The first new session was called *All About Citing and Referencing* and was designed with undergraduate students in mind. Using Mentimeter's polling features, we created preliminary questions to help us assess students' prior

learning experiences, as well as some multiple-choice trivia questions about different citation styles and sources at the end of the presentation to reinforce some of the prominent themes we discussed. This workshop was offered two times in each term and focused on the basic elements of citing, such as understanding when information needs to be cited, applying appropriate citation formats (e.g. citing direct quotes, paraphrasing or final references), and navigating different citation styles.

In addition, we felt it was important to encourage participants to consider why we cite, and who we cite. We even gave examples of appropriate and inappropriate attribution using pop culture references so that students could understand that citing is valuable beyond an academic setting. Although this session still incorporated many elements of a traditional citation workshop, we added a section that introduced citation justice, including an overview of databases that can be used to discover marginalized scholars and sources, such as the iPortal,³⁵ and Cite Black Authors.³⁶ We also talked about the process of completing a manual citation audit and went through a couple examples together using different authors and source materials.

Graduate Workshop Content

Our second new session, *Equity in Attribution*, was developed for graduate students and offered once in both the Fall and Winter terms. In this session, participants were not only introduced to citation justice itself, but related content such as how it affects the peer-review process, publishing, and citation diversity statements. Mentimeter polls were embedded throughout the session to encourage participants to reflect on the content being shared. The polling questions asked about the key messages participants received when first learning about citations, how they decided which sources to cite, and what their next steps would be after the workshop had concluded.

Our presentation also included short YouTube and TikTok videos from Utah State University Libraries,³⁷ and Indigenous librarian, Jessie Loyer,³⁸ to incorporate different formats and perspectives. The workshop created an ideal opportunity to introduce a more substantial list of citation justice resources, given that graduate students are often heavily engaged in academic activities such as research endeavors, coursework and occasionally course instruction. We encouraged participants to not only use the information from the databases in their scholarship, assignments and teaching, but to add themselves as authors and experts to existing repositories if they met the criteria.

In addition to providing an overview of several diverse scholar databases, we also spoke about citation auditing tools, specifically highlighting the template created by the University of Washington's Stereotypes, Identity, and Belonging Lab.³⁹ A couple of gender and race balancing tools were also part of this presentation: Citation Transparency,⁴⁰ a browser extension that can help predict genders of first and last authors of citations found in PubMed and Google Scholar, and the Gender Balance Assessment Tool developed by Jane L. Sumner from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.⁴¹ While our own use of gender and race balancing tools has shown that they are not perfect, we felt it was important to include them so that participants were aware of the greatest number of options to assist them in the process of performing a citation audit. Workshop attendees also received a handout we developed that listed even more resources, as there was not enough time to cover everything in the duration of our workshop.

Workshop Attendees

Over two terms, the six sessions had 134 registrants and 55 attendees. The workshop *All About Citing & Referencing* had 46 registrations over 4 sessions, an average of 11.5 per session. Twelve individuals attended the 4 sessions, an average of 3 attendees per session. The workshop, *Equity in Attribution* had 88 registrations over 2 sessions, an average of 44 per session. The total number of attendees for both *Equity* sessions was 43, an average of 21.5 attendees per session (see Table 1).

TABLE 1			
Registrations & Attendees at Workshops			
Workshops	Number of Total Registrations	Number of Total Attendees	Percentage of registrants that attended
All about Citing & Referencing (4 sessions)	46	12	26%
Equity in Attribution (2 sessions)	88	43	49%

Methods

To evaluate the workshops, we administered a survey to attendees at the end of each session. Time was allotted for survey completion during the workshop in the hopes that it may lead to higher response rates. In addition, it also made it easier for any potential questions about the survey to be addressed in real time. The survey built on an existing library workshop evaluation by adding two new Likert-scale questions: (1) “I was already familiar with the concept of citation justice before attending this workshop”, and (2) “Where possible, I plan to search for and/or select more diverse authors for future citations in my work” (see Appendix for the survey questions).

We obtained REB approval from the University of Manitoba Ethics Review Board in October 2024. Surveys were conducted in three of the four *All about Citing & Referencing* sessions and both *Equity in Attribution* sessions. Due to a delayed REB approval, we were unable to survey participants in the first *All About Citing & Referencing* session.

The survey was offered to 51 attendees, and we received 22 responses for a response rate of 43%. Five of the survey responses were from *All about Citing & Referencing* attendees and 17 responses from the *Equity in Attribution* session. All the survey participants attended at least one of the two workshops.

As an incentive, survey participants were eligible to receive a \$15 Starbucks gift card when they filled out of the survey. Five survey respondents were selected from each workshop to receive the gift card. The money for the gift cards was attained from an internal library grant.

Survey Results

The majority of respondents were Master’s students (n=13), followed by PhD students (n=5), undergraduate (no=3), and staff members (n=1). Thirteen respondents were from health sciences or science faculties, four were from social science or arts and humanities, and five identified as general (i.e. Faculty of Graduate Studies). When asked about their familiarity with citation justice prior to attending the workshops, 59.1% indicated they were unfamiliar (disagreed or strongly disagreed), 22.7% were neutral, and 18.1% reported prior familiarity (agreed or strongly agreed). Regarding future citation practices, 95.5% stated they intended to search and/or cite more diverse authors (agreed or strongly agreed), while 4.5% were neutral. Finally, when asked whether they would recommend this session to others, 68.2% strongly agreed, and 31.8% agreed.

When asked what was the most valuable thing that the attendees learned in the session, there were a wide range of answers. Some attendees found it valuable to learn more about the concept of citation justice, “Honestly, just what citation justice was! I was completely unaware of the concept before this workshop, so learning about it was quite enlightening.” The most common response was learning about the resources to find diverse sources. One attendee stated, “Awesome resources (and some new ones that I hadn’t heard of before)—I am excited to share these and test them out.”

When attendees were asked to provide additional feedback, it was all positive. One attendee recommended incorporating positionality activities or worksheets, as it may be a new concept for some students. Others recommended that this workshop be tailored to different audiences, “I think every student (especially graduate

students) should take this workshop—it was amazing!” Another saying, “I think it was fantastic, I can see opportunities to adapt this presentation for many audiences.”

Discussion

Incorporating citation justice concepts into library workshops and our library citation guide presented undergraduate and graduate students with the opportunity to enhance critical engagement with citation practices. Traditional citation instruction often emphasized formatting and avoiding plagiarism, which, while important, can diminish the discussion on the broader implications of citation choices. By framing citation as an act of scholarly communication that influences knowledge production and representation, we are encouraging students to assess whose voices they include in their research. The survey results from workshop attendees confirmed this approach, as most attendees were unfamiliar with the concept of citation justice prior to attending these sessions.

In the workshops, we provided concrete examples of why citation is important—beyond academic integrity—demonstrating to students their potential impact of citation choices on scholarly visibility and equity. Many participants expressed appreciation for the practical tools and resources introduced during the sessions, which will hopefully facilitate the integration of citation justice principles into their own research. An important strength of these workshops was the inclusion of actionable strategies that students could readily adopt. By equipping students with easily accessible tools and databases, we provided a clear pathway for students to make intentional and informed choices. This approach empowers students to actively contribute to diversifying scholarly conversation and fostering greater inclusive practices. What was also interesting was the fact that all surveyed attendees either strongly agreed or agreed that they would recommend the workshop to other students, indicating that everyone felt value in attending these workshops.

Despite these successes, several challenges emerged throughout the project. A significant limitation was the delay in receiving Research Ethics Board (REB) approval, which prevented us from surveying attendees in the first *All About Citing & Referencing* workshop. Additionally, attendance at the sessions was lower than anticipated compared to registration numbers. In one *All About Citing & Referencing* workshop there was one attendee. Anecdotally, UM Libraries has noticed a significant drop-off between registrants and attendees at undergraduate library workshops, and so this low attendance is not unique. This has been a longstanding issue with library workshops at our institution, as this demographic has been particularly difficult to engage. Therefore, based on similar trends with other workshops we’ve offered, attendance was about average.

An institutional challenge also emerged in the form of administration expectations regarding workshop offerings. Despite evidence that graduate students were more engaged with the citation justice workshops, we were asked to provide additional sessions for undergraduate students. Attendance patterns did not support this approach, highlighting the need for data-driven decision-making when expanding instructional offerings.

Overall, these workshops successfully introduced citation justice into library instruction, providing students with the knowledge and tools to make more intentional citation choices. We are planning further iterations of these workshops and are hoping to include more discussion about the ethics of AI and its role in promoting bias in academic research, as well as updates based on direct student feedback, such as helping attendees navigate the process of creating their own positionality statement by providing additional information and resources.

Conclusion

The new workshops we developed and delivered this past school year have helped to address the gap of citation instruction at the University of Manitoba Libraries. By encouraging students to focus on the ‘why’ of citations, rather than the performative, functionality of citations, we encouraged a greater understanding about why citations are important. With the inclusion of citation justice, students were better able to understand how citations

can reflect the systemic inequities in academia. Furthermore, by providing resources such as those highlighted in the workshops as well as the new content on our *Learn at the Libraries* LibGuide, we made it easier for students to find and incorporate diverse citations in their own research.

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Data Availability

All data associated with the workshops can be accessed online at <https://osf.io/5wd87/>.

Appendix. Survey Questions

Survey

1. Which library workshop did you attend?
 - All about citing and referencing
 - Equity in attribution: How to incorporate citation justice principles into your research and writing
 - Neither [take to end of survey]
2. What best describes you?
 - Undergraduate student
 - Masters student
 - PhD student
 - Faculty
 - Staff
 - Instructor
 - Other
3. My faculty, college or school is...

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences <input type="radio"/> Faculty of Architecture <input type="radio"/> School of Art <input type="radio"/> Faculty of Arts <input type="radio"/> I.H. Asper School of Business <input type="radio"/> Faculty of Education <input type="radio"/> Price Faculty of Engineering <input type="radio"/> Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of Environment, Earth and Resources <input type="radio"/> Faculty of Graduate Studies <input type="radio"/> Rady Faculty of Health Sciences <input type="radio"/> School of Dental Hygiene <input type="radio"/> Dr. Gerald Niznick College of Dentistry <input type="radio"/> Max Rady College of Medicine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> College of Nursing <input type="radio"/> College of Pharmacy <input type="radio"/> College of Rehabilitation Sciences <input type="radio"/> Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management <input type="radio"/> Faculty of Law <input type="radio"/> Desautels Faculty of Music <input type="radio"/> Faculty of Science <input type="radio"/> Faculty of Social Work <input type="radio"/> University 1 <input type="radio"/> St. Andrew's College <input type="radio"/> St. John's College <input type="radio"/> St. Paul's College <input type="radio"/> Other
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4. How did you hear about this session?
 - Email
 - Word of mouth
 - Social media
 - Other

5. Please rate the following after attending the library workshop

	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Neutral
Session content matched the topic as advertised					
The workshop was well organized					
The instructors helped make this session engaging and/or interactive					

	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Neutral
I would recommend this session to others					
I was already familiar with the concept of citation justice before attending this workshop					
Where possible, I plan to search for and/or select more diverse authors for future citations in my work					

6. In this session, what is the most valuable thing you learned?
7. Do you have any additional feedback about this workshop?

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