

Faculty Information Literacy Stipend Final Report

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Course: WGST 2322 (Gender: Images & Perspectives)

Semester: Spring 2023

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

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:

<https://smufeministsyllabi.wordpress.com/>

A sample of some excellent ones:

<https://xenaelshamy.wixsite.com/the-green-wave>

<https://smufemsyll1.wordpress.com/2023/04/18/the-glamorization-of-housewives-on-tiktok-and-the-unrealistic-message-it-sends-to-women/>

<https://smufemsyll1.wordpress.com/2023/04/30/fatphobia-on-social-media/>

<https://thefinalgirlcritique.wordpress.com/2023/04/30/the-final-girl-complexities-of-feminism-in-horror-films/>

<https://smufemsyll1.wordpress.com/2023/04/30/social-perspectives-of-transgender-people-from-then-to-now/>

<https://sheidenreich4.wixsite.com/rapindustry>

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:

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