5 Things: Learning about Information Privilege

THE SERIES
The resources recommended in this series are intended to be eclectic and thought-provoking. They may be journal articles, blog posts, podcasts, interviews, reports, or just about anything else that we think is important to read, watch, or hear about this topic. For the general concept, this series is deeply indebted to the EDUCAUSE “7 Things You Should Know About...” reports.

INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC
Information privilege, a term coined by Char Booth in their 2014 blog post, is described as “situat[ing] information literacy in a sociocultural context of justice and access”. Although an interdisciplinary concept, much, if not all, of the literature about information privilege lives within an LIS context. An understudied topic, research on information privilege offers a way to more critically examine our own instruction, as well as offer a unique perspective to the larger higher education landscape by sharing pedagogical practices informed by information privilege research with teachers outside of libraries.

Given its position in the information sciences field, much of the work on information privilege focuses on access (Hare and Evason 2018; Powell 2020; Ubels et al. 2020; Harrington and Scott 2023). While an important piece of information privilege, critiques of existing research on the topic (further explored in Dai and Powell’s 2024 webinar) point out that centering discussions around access deprioritize intersections with critical frameworks, including critical race theory and critical information literacy. Some works have expanded the conversation beyond access: Ellenwood (2020) uses the term information capitalism to explore how political economy affects information literacy; Bergstrom-Lynch, Mahoney, and Thomas (2022) examine the intersections of information privilege, critical information literacy, and OER-enabled pedagogy; Sewell (2023) provides a framework that breaks information privilege down into three domains (access, experience, awareness) to encourage more holistic study of the concept; Thorngate (2021) provides a critique of information literacy as a form of information privilege itself through lenses of race and power.

Librarians can find many ways that information privilege intersects with various facets of our work; as an evolving field of study, information privilege is ripe for future exploration, particularly through a more critical lens.


This book chapter from Bergstrom-Lynch et al. explores the intersections of critical information literacy, information privilege, and OER-enabled pedagogy. The authors situate information privilege as a form of critical pedagogy, arguing that it is a lens through which students can
interrogate power structures and build critical consciousness. The strength of this chapter is in its practical solutions to the “curricular black box”. Building upon the work of Char Booth, the authors describe three types of library outreach on information privilege, using the critical pedagogical strategies of dialog, reflection, and problem-based learning in a one-shot session, a Wikipedia edit-a-thon, and a podcasting workshop.

Approximate reading time: 45 minutes


This seminal work calls on library workers to recognize and challenge information privilege in opposition to the divide between those who do and do not have access to information. Booth situates information privilege within feminist and critical pedagogy and provides practical examples for teaching information privilege in the library classroom, including information literacy workshops and Wikipedia editing projects. The closing questions encourage library workers to examine their own privilege and how they work within their own information contexts.

Approximate reading time: 15 minutes


This article focuses on the possibilities of applying the concepts of Open Access (OA) to information literacy instruction. Bruce notes the various ways that OA principles and practices can be used beyond scholarly publishing. Instead, Bruce highlights the ways they can be used to show students how all sorts of information is created and shared, and how this will affect them once they leave school. Highlighting previous works of Char Booth and Hare & Evanson, Bruce argues that this application not only teaches students how to understand information creation and access, but understand the information privilege they have and will lose.

Approximate reading time: 15 minutes


This presentation builds on existing work on information privilege by exploring how a collective and justice-oriented framework can be applied to the concept to address several thoughtful critiques of the current work and discourse around information privilege. Accessible to newcomers to the topic, this webinar is most helpful for those already somewhat familiar with information privilege. Presenters give a brief overview of information privilege before diving into their own work with the concept. This practical application leads nicely into a discussion
about potential future directions for work with information privilege, including critiques based on the focus on access and historically centered individuals, as well the failure of information privilege to explicitly tie in intersectionality or epistemic injustice. Presenters concluded by presenting methods of creating a more inclusive and critical framing of information privilege for future research.

**Approximate viewing time: 58 minutes**


Duke’s Library 101 Toolkit for Information Privilege is a great resource for librarians and instructors who would like to incorporate the topic into their classes. It opens with both key student takeaways for them to understand the privilege they might currently have and the barriers that others encounter when seeking information. Before diving into the tools themselves, there is an instructor reminder to frame this sort of topic carefully, as it can be a touchy subject. The toolkit has quick mentions (telling students they’ll lose database access upon graduation), discussion questions (should scholarly information be free?), visuals and media resources (including memes!), more in-depth activities (such as an information privilege walk), and readings, this has something for everyone looking to teach about information privilege.

**Approximate reading time: 5 minutes**

**Bibliography**


Ellenwood, Dave. “‘Information Has Value’: The Political Economy of Information Capitalism”. *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (August 19, 2020).


This publication was compiled and created in Spring 2024 by members of the 2023-2024 ACRL Instruction Section Research and Scholarship Committee: Natalia Estrada, Samantha Kannegiser, Amber Sewell, Jessica Szempruch, and Emily Zerrenner.

If you have comments or questions about the “5 Things” publications, please contact the current IS Research and Scholarship Committee Chair: http://www.ala.org/acrl/is/acr-insressch.