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Using the “Scholarship as Conversation” Frame to Explain the Importance of Inclusive Citation

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Using the “Scholarship as Conversation” Frame to Explain the Importance of Inclusive Citation

Posted on [March 29, 2022](#) by [Olivia Smith Schlinck](#)

It's been [nearly two years since the largest civil rights movement](#) – the protests stemming from the murder of George Floyd by a police officer – swept the United States. That means it has also been nearly two years since [law schools across the country released statements and created taskforces and enacted initiatives to inject principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion \(DEI\) into the school halls.](#)

Academic law libraries have taken up the DEI call by expanding their collections and incorporating new techniques in their legal research classrooms. Lately, I've been thinking about how to bring DEI to the one-off classroom. After seeing [Jin X. Goh's tweet about including photos of the scholars whose work informed a lecture in slides](#), I decided to change my normal approach to one-off instruction a bit to directly encourage students to practice inclusive citation.

Law has a “citation gap”; [in 2021, only two of the top-cited legal scholars of all time were women](#) and [in the general context of academia, authors are less likely to cite to scholars of color](#). [Priya Baskaran's recent article in the Rutgers Law Review](#) highlights the causes and consequences of this citation gap for women of color in the legal academy and suggests incorporating “radical citation practice” into legal scholarship both for law professors and for research assistants. Law librarians, then, can play a role in closing this gap in their one-off instruction by explaining to students the importance of citing diverse voices and then helping them find diverse scholars to cite.

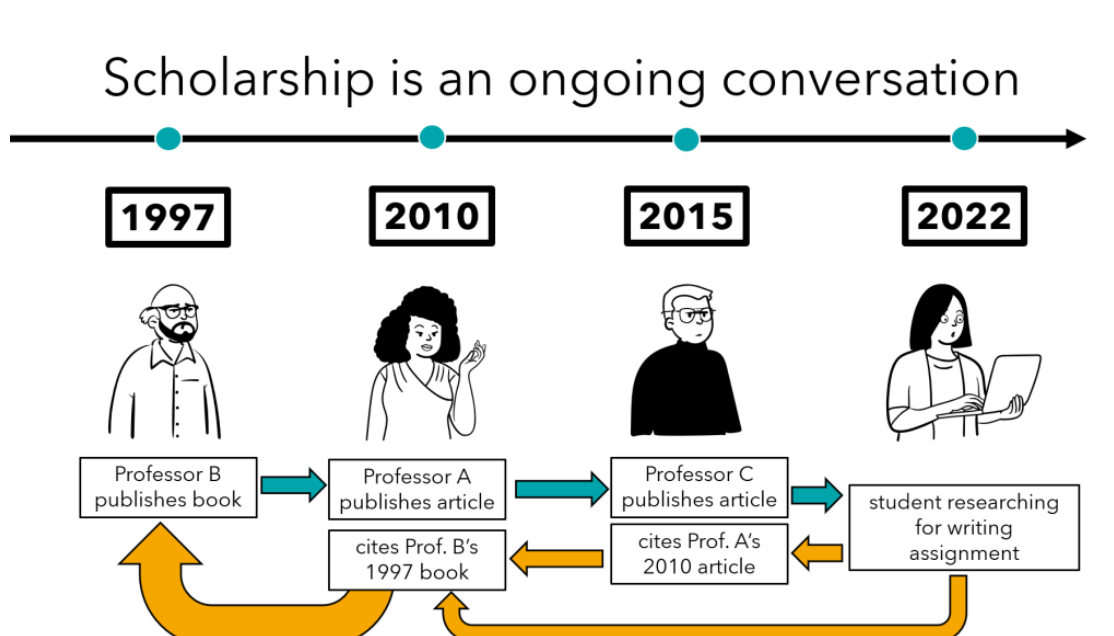
The first step is to **help students recognize the myriad of reasons why it is important for them to read and cite to diverse scholars**: you will find different perspectives and ideas when looking to scholarship from outside of the “typical” legal academic circles; your research will be at best underdeveloped and at worst incomplete by omitting the work of diverse scholars; you are perpetuating the existing citation gap by failing to cite more widely; you are contributing to a societal knowledge gap by failing to include the perspectives and experiences of non-white, non-male scholars, and so on.

Next, **show the students how to find diverse scholars**, first by looking at their own list of resources to determine [“how many of the people you are citing are people like you, how many people different from you? How many dominant \(white, male, straight, you name it\) and how many are marginal in some way?”](#). Suggest students use Goh's model of creating a slide of photos of the scholars cited to get a visual picture of whose work they are relying on. Then, help students identify the work of a female scholar, or a Black scholar, or a queer scholar, and show them how to use that work to find more scholarship outside of the “norm.”

Last spring, my colleague Christine George spoke at the [Virtual Symposium on Citation and the Law](#) about reforming legal citation practices. Specifically, [George advocates for Fair Citation Rule](#), which eliminates the use of et al. in place of naming all authors as Rule 15.1(b) of the Bluebook allows. George also advocates for law

journals requiring diverse citation, like citing to women scholars, to address the citation gap. Because of our roles – George as the Assistant Director for Faculty and Scholarly Services, me as the Instructional & Legal Technologies Librarian – we tag-team annual library and research trainings for law journal members. Last year, we devoted time to discussing both the fair citation rule and the importance of citing diverse authors with journal students.

This semester reminded me that it is not only journal trainings that provide this opportunity for teaching inclusive citation. For me, one-off instruction is usually an hour or two with students in a writing seminar looking to gather scholarly sources for an academic paper. In a recent training, I decided it was time to depart from my usual one-off structure to better cover inclusive citation practices. I began by discussing the [fifth frame from the Association of College & Research Libraries \(ACRL\)'s Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education: "scholarship as conversation," wherein research is a "discursive practice in which ideas are formulated, debated, and weighed against one another over extended periods of time."](#) (The image below is a slide I created to explain the frame).



I find that law students doing academic research are sometimes confused about the general purpose and process of scholarly research, and the frame helps them to contextualize their work. With this frame as a starting point, we then discussed what happens when certain voices are *excluded* from the conversation. Using this frame to help students understand the purpose of research – engaging in discourse with scholars past and present – and their role in that conversation – including insights and work from scholars with diverse perspectives and backgrounds, not just those reproducing hegemonic power structures – became the jumping-off point for demonstrating *how* to actually research. I was able to discuss using a citator to find additional research while emphasizing the importance of looking for contributions from scholars of color and women researchers. It is my hope that discussing inclusive citation practices *before* modeling any research strategy students will keep the issue front-of-mind during their own research.

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