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The Librarian's Guide to Zines for Classroom and Community

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Abstract

Zines continue to benefit from a resurgent interest from their 1990s heyday, including in libraries. A zine can serve as a pedagogical tool and are a low-cost addition to collections and programming in libraries. Over the course of the last three semesters, UNO librarians have collaborated with faculty on zine creation as a creative alternative to a typical research paper project for a course. Creating zines as assignments presents students with the opportunity to demonstrate research skills, exercise creativity, express compassion and empathy, and other outcomes. These outcomes have been illustrated by the classes that have created zines and presented their research on topics such as the environment, self-care, and social justice from the disciplines of Sociology, Psychology, Women's and Gender Studies, and others. The zine projects have also provided opportunities to establish and strengthen relationships with undergraduate students and faculty to discuss research topics relating to other classes. Librarians created new collaborations with faculty who had previously not used library instruction in their courses, allowing students to gain familiarity with databases and secondary source research. Outside of the classroom, practicum students, interns, and fellows in UNO Libraries' Archives and Special Collections department have participated in experiential learning projects that used zines to promote library collections and services. The UNO Libraries also collects and supports the creation of zines, as part of our efforts to democratize the archives as well as support local makers and artists from the community. This presentation will introduce an overview of zines, the pedagogical uses of students authoring zines, avenues for outreach and advocacy, and outcomes.

Introduction

Zines are self-published, do-it yourself (DIY) publications that come in many formats. Originating from the term "fanzine" (Radway, 2011) and pronounced like "magazine", zines have proven to be more than simple DIY magazines. Zines hold great informational, social, and personal value and can present endless opportunities in a variety of spaces and communities. Due to ease of access, zines have historically offered a platform to marginalized voices. Zines can be

highly individualized and cover diverse subjects, typically broaching topics that are of interest to the author and many times including illustrations or images that reflect the creator's aesthetic. Zines continue to benefit from a resurgent interest from their 1990s heyday. Zines have rightfully found a place among collections and programming in libraries due to their significance as low-cost, unique, social documents and as pedagogical tools (Wee, 2017).

Review of the Literature

Why We Zine

One of the most obvious pedagogical uses for zines in higher education classrooms is as a tool to demonstrate research proficiency. Due to the accessible nature of zines, topics and physical format vary greatly. This positions zines to be successful pedagogical tools in any subject area and for any research topic found across campus. Although zines are traditionally presented in a paper format, digital zines can be used in remote learning courses. The ability to customize nearly every aspect of a zine in order to ensure students meet their learning outcomes renders zines a valuable learning instrument that can be as applicable to any course as a typical research paper. Faculty and instructors will find that many aspects are similar to a traditional research paper when creating a grading rubric for zines, such as word count, source appropriateness, critical thinking, reference count, and appropriate citation style use.

Beyond being proficient in researching a specific subject, zines also encourage students to further develop information literacy skills, and to be critical of every piece of information they consume during their coursework, as well as outside of it (Tewell, 2016). This provides students the space to question the authority and conclusions of a resource and hone skills in identifying trustworthy sources. Library workers speaking about zines as an information source introduce important discussions about privilege, accessibility, and how certain voices have access to higher visibility and more platforms than others (Thomas, 2018).

A third element of this pedagogical framework is an ability to provide a concise summation of the information gathered. Zines by their very nature take complex ideas and relay that information through graphics and a few sentences. Presenting topics such as positive psychology, biodiversity, prison reform, and LGBTQ+ rights in a zine format requires students to read, analyze, and succinctly summarize articles. These skills work in tandem with research proficiency and critical literacy skills as students have to navigate the claims of the author, their own preconceived notions about the topic, (Phillips & Norris, 2003), and articulate their thesis clearly for an audience (Tomas & Ritchie, 2015). Understanding how students locate, evaluate, comprehend, synthesize, and relay ideas from multiple sources is an important area of research, particularly when examining the prolific and unreliable nature of internet resources (Wiley et al., 2009).

The authors collaborated with six classes from the social sciences. This presented its own set of challenges as science and social science research articles can be difficult for undergraduates to read because of jargon and the persuasive authority placed on academic literature (Van Lacum et al., 2014). Similarly, the preponderance of online formats (blogs, news articles, and videos) can be difficult for students to verify the accuracy of and integrate ideas with academic articles. The zine format allowed the authors and instructors to work with students on primary and secondary source research through database searching and information comprehension.

The zine format and class sessions used with courses had similar approaches to other research conducted on article literacy and comprehension. Some of these studies included summation through “true-to-text synthesis” and “efficiency of summarization” (Garner, 1982), “hybridized narratives” which use the short story format to weave in scientific knowledge (Tomas & Ritchie, 2015), and the C.R.E.A.T.E. Approach (Hoskins et al., 2011). One UNO instructor emphasized content analysis through article annotations. Students read their articles and created annotations which were evaluated by the instructor for article comprehension and the students’ understanding of how to annotate. The annotations and synthesis of arguments found in the articles ultimately become the outline for the student’s zine.

Through the application of these assignments used in varied courses, students engaged with a different type of research format while learning key skills in information seeking, literacy, and analysis. Additionally, this assignment validates the idea of creative research projects as viable course outcomes because their work is grounded in academic research, yet had the potential to be more widely accessible to those outside the university. Zines often express the voices of the marginalized and there are an increasing number of libraries and archives that are collecting these materials (Barton & Olsen, 2019) in order to make institutional and community holdings more diverse and equitable (Fox et al, 2018; Miller, 2018). Zines can serve as a focal point for community building and activism, where topics can be shared with compassion and empathy. Collections can be centered on a particular group, a social issue, or personal/ traumatic experiences. Gathering these lived experiences is an important way to make organizational holdings more inclusive and equitable. This practice has become so popular that since 2003 zine librarianship is an increasingly recognized subfield of librarianship (Fox et al., 2018). At UNO Libraries’ Archives and Special Collections, librarians participate in Omaha Zine Fest and activities such as displays to highlight the significance of zines as vehicles for community voices and activism. The relationships fostered by librarians, instructors, and students through these zine projects have strengthened the idea that creative and non-traditional final projects can serve a dual social justice and pedagogical purpose.

Mini-Case Studies: Zining with Librarians

While the authors’ collaboration with each instructor adopting zines for their course is unique based on the desired learning objectives, there are commonalities across all relationships and semesters. The authors first meet with the course’s instructor before the semester to discuss course outcomes, introduce zines in general, and more specifically review relevant titles from

amongst the over 600 zines available in UNO Libraries' Archives and Special Collections. This meeting also allows time to discuss a library instruction session and potential zine assignments for the course. The final zine assignment reflects the specific research and artistic requirements of the course, such as the amount of text, total number of pages, number of images or visuals, number of references, and any required questions or themes that should be address through research and analysis.

The authors require that students are provided an instruction session on database usage and secondary sources research by the Subject Librarian, one of the authors, along with an introduction to zines and their course's zine assignment by the Archivist. In the class session the Subject Librarian reviews databases, like CQResearcher and ProQuest Social Science Premium Collection, explaining the different database purposes, article styles, and basic information literacy. During this session, students were also introduced to zines, including the physical structures and breadth of topics. After the first semester of zine collaborations, at least one library lab was also required. The library lab session includes time for students to seek research assistance, browse example zines from the library, and work on their zine. The librarians and instructor are present during library labs. By mutual agreement, most instructors opt for multiple library labs. A zine cart containing standard office and colored paper, magazines, scissors, markers, colored pencils, double-sided tape, glue sticks, bone folders, and other supplies is available at each library lab and for use by students between classes in Archives and Special Collections.

The authors require that students contribute one copy of their zine to the library collection. This requirement is included in the assignment distributed to students along with guidance that students may attribute the authorship of their zine to a pseudonym to protect their privacy. Students are provided copying and printing at no charge by the library, so the students have enough copies of their zine to keep for themselves, hand-in for their assignment, donate a copy to the library, and offer free copies for distribution by the authors at Omaha Zine Fest. Students are not required to distribute copies of their work at the zine fest and the authors request consent from students for their work to be distributed in this way to the public. All zines are cataloged and available to users in Archives and Special Collections. After the semester, student zines are displayed in the library promoting the zine collection, the library's participation in Omaha Zine Fest, or topical displays such as promoting voter registration in an election year. The case studies are presented in chronological order. "Social Justice and Social Change" and "Introduction to LGBT+" were the first iteration of zine creation; they were exploratory instances of collaboration and while there have been no return sessions, the option for future projects remain available.

Social Justice & Social Change

The authors launched the library's zine instruction activity by inviting several faculty to add a zine assignment to their courses for the Fall 2018 semester. The faculty were a mix of instructors the authors had previously worked with on courses, those they were acquainted with

professionally, and new contacts. One of the first faculty members to express an interest was from the Sociology department and was open to a zine assignment in part because it offered an opportunity to include community engagement for a new social justice and social change course. The faculty member did not have any previous knowledge of zines and how they could be integrated as an assignment. The authors shared a couple articles about using zine creation in the classroom including Kimberly Creasap's "Zine-Making as Feminist Pedagogy" and "Zine-Making as a Pedagogical Tool for Transformative Learning in Social Work Education" by Moshoula Capous Desyllas and Allison Sinclair.

The professor initially agreed to three class sessions: a class period to provide a library instruction session and introduce zines to the students, a library lab, and a student presentation session at the end of the semester. As the semester progressed, the students and professor requested two additional library labs to continue their research, drafting, and discussion as they prepared their zines. The request for these additional sessions was a mutual decision of the faculty member and her students with the agreement of the authors and included large-group brainstorming, collaboration, and individual research and zine assistance.

Ultimately, the faculty member adopted an assignment that allowed students the opportunity to conduct research, demonstrate knowledge and compassion for a social justice topic, and creatively present a compelling argument related to their chosen topic (Anderson & Schindler, 2019). Students selected a range of topics that included diverse local (public greenspaces), national (contemporary voter disenfranchisement), and international social justice issues (the Rohingya refugee crisis). At the end of the semester, the authors and faculty member publicized the students' presentation of their zines and invited all Library workers and other members of campus to the event. This was a useful outreach tool for the authors as it allowed other Library workers to learn more about students and zines, showcased a course that collaborated closely with library workers, and allowed faculty who were considering a zine assignment for future semesters to attend the students' presentation as a way to learn more.

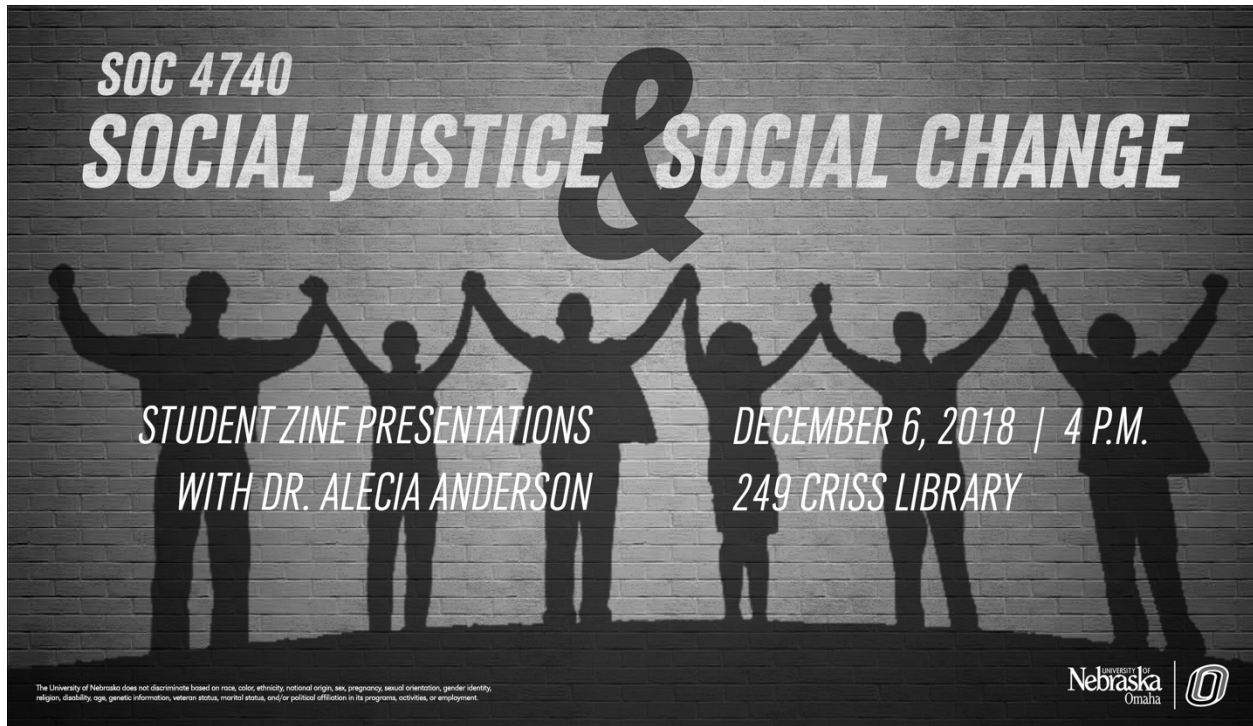


Figure 1: The promotional graphic for the student presentations in UNO Libraries' first zine class.

Introduction to LGBT Studies

The second course in Fall 2018 to agree to add a zine assignment was the Women's and Gender Studies and Sociology course Introduction to LGBT Studies. As the instructor's colleague had earlier in the summer drafted a zine assignment for her course, the authors received permission to share the assignment with the instructor. The assignment was repurposed with minor modifications. The instructor gave students the option to either write a traditional research paper or create a zine for their final project. None of the students had previous experience with zines, yet almost one-half of the class elected to create their first zine. Due to the topic of the course, and the strength of the library's LGBTQIA2S+ collections, all students in the course, whether writing a paper or creating a zine, were required to use at least one primary or secondary source from Archives and Special Collections' Queer Omaha Archives in their final project.

To introduce students to the Queer Omaha Archives, the class visited Archives and Special Collections for a mini-lecture from the Archivist on the history of the LGBTQIA2S+ communities in the city told through documents, photo albums, and other material in the archives. National historical events were illustrated with and connected to local primary sources and the stories of LGBTQIA2S+ folks. The Subject Librarian also provided an abbreviated library instruction overview. The class did not return to the library for a library lab, so it was left to the students to individually return to the Library to find their required source.

As this was one of two zine assignments collaborating with the authors the first semester, there was much to be learned by the authors and faculty. Comparing the anecdotal evidence provided by the students in these two classes, the authors would for future semesters always encourage faculty to schedule at least one library lab during class time later in the semester. Nearly all of the students from this course agreed to have their zines distributed by the authors at the next Omaha Zine Fest, which may be attributed to the additional time they spent with the Archivist using relevant sources from the Queer Omaha Archives in the department's reading room and copying their final zines.

Positive Psychology

For a new special topic in Psychology course that focused on positive psychology and wellbeing, the faculty member met with her Library liaison and mentioned that she was looking for an alternative to traditional research papers for the course's final project. In this course, student learning outcomes include researching and trying different techniques to manage their own stress and discovering psychological aspects of self-care. Due to the nature of the course, the faculty member wanted to utilize creative teaching approaches throughout the semester. After meeting and discussing her needs with the authors, it was decided that zines would be a suitable and creative option for the course's final project.

Over the course of two semesters, students created zines about various aspects of stress management, positive psychology, and wellbeing practices. During the first semester that students completed this project, in Spring 2019, students created visually appealing zines, however, the faculty member noticed that some students drew too heavily from their personal experiences of stress and trauma when discussing management and wellbeing techniques, instead of relying on scholarly sources. To remedy this, meetings were held before the Spring 2020 semester in order to address the assignment's wording and rubric to make the need for research more explicit. During these meetings, the faculty member and the authors also discussed specific databases that could be demonstrated during the first session of class in order to illustrate how to use the library's resources to fulfill the project's research needs, such as PsycInfo and ProQuest Social Science Premium Collection.

When the university shifted to remote learning due to COVID-19, the faculty member chose to have students complete their zines in an online format, using Microsoft Word booklet templates or Google Slides to create their final projects. While the authors of this paper were not able to spend as much time building relationships with the students through discussing zines and research face-to-face in the library, the faculty member was happy with the students' use of research-based sources and the outcomes of the digital zines.

Introduction to Sociology

Librarians worked with sections of Introduction to Sociology in Fall 2019 and Spring 2020. The collaboration was initiated by the course instructor who met one of the authors at the 2019 Omaha Zine Fest. There was also already an existing relationship between the Library and Sociology department stemming from a prior zine project, so the collaboration for this class was an easy fit. Both the Fall 2019 and the Spring 2020 course focused on understanding environmental issues through the sociological lens. The instructor, herself a zine-maker, was familiar with zine fests and required that students present their research at the end of the semester at a mini zine fest held in the library. Students shared physical copies of their zines as well as offering verbal summaries and analysis of their chosen topic. The instructor wanted students to integrate traditional research and information literacy with a creative format that was popular, accessible, and could be distributed at a future Omaha Zine Fest by the authors if the students elected to participate.

In addition to meeting before the semester, the authors and instructor also communicated throughout the course of the Fall 2019 semester and met after the semester to discuss outcomes, student progress, and adjustment needed for the Spring 2020 class. In addition to the initial class sessions, students met in the library for multiple library labs where they could organize, outline, and create their zines.

In Spring 2020, students had the additional step of creating a mini-zine for one of the articles they annotated. This was an in-class project conducted during a library lab so students could have a prototype of the final project. This allowed students to practice time management, article summation, and get a sense of the creative nature of the project. This mini-zine assignment was created in response to the students' difficulties creating a succinct synthesis of their articles in the Fall 2019 course. In addition to the mini-zine, the outline of the final project zine was made more central to the overall final grade of the project. This was, again, in response to students in Fall 2019 struggling to present clear and concise arguments in their zines. In general, students had difficulties with the concept of annotations and focused more on highlighting key ideas in articles rather than engaging with the arguments. At the post-2019 semester meeting between the instructor and authors, we discussed ways in which to guide students to better understand annotation and analysis.

The students in the Fall 2019 class were able to present their zines at a mini-zine fest held in the Library. Students were asked to articulate their thesis and make a compelling argument to their audience. The instructor, authors of this paper, and two additional members of the Sociology department were asked to grade the presentations and the zines during this time. All library workers were invited to attend the mini-zine fest and there was a successful audience turnout.

Students in the Spring 2020 semester were provided the same introduction session and two library labs before the university shifted to remote learning in the wake of COVID-19. Students were given the option of continuing with the zine in a digital format or switching to a different type of assignment. A number of students continued with the zine project but it is unclear, at the

time of this writing, how many selected the zine option and the success of the digital format. Despite this unforeseen change in class structure and the unknown outcomes, the collaboration remains a positive experience between the librarians and the instructor.

Creating Zines About the Library

Beginning in Spring 2019, Archives and Special Collections offered zine authoring as one of the project options available to library science students completing a practicum in the department. Archivists suggested zine topics related to the department's holdings as well as inviting the students' ideas related to Library or department services and collections. The first zine created by a practicum student was intended to inspire readers with historical photos and quotations from local LGBTQIA2S+ community members and promote the Queer Omaha Archives. The authors retained the master copy of this zine and were able to reprint copies for multiple community events. The Omaha Music Collection zine produced next also used historical images and album cover art to promote this new collecting initiative in Archives and Special Collections. Old music and data CDs were repurposed for the covers of this zine making it a limited run available only at Omaha Zine Fest 2019. Zines created in 2020 by interns and fellows promoted the KANEKO-UNO Library, a creativity branch library, and the over 50 oral history interviews collected for the Queer Omaha Archives. The practicum students' projects fulfill the outreach and public services portions of their library science internships as well as providing them with a meaningful research project and creative outlet. These zines created for the Library's use were featured in Library zine displays, given away at Omaha Zine Fest, and distributed at other community events in which the Library participated, such as the annual Heartland Pride Festival.



Figure 2: Archives and Special Collections' practicum student, who chose the moniker "KJ," creating a zine about UNO Libraries' Queer Omaha Archives.

Collecting for the Archives

UNO Libraries' Archives and Special Collections began collecting zines in a conscious and purposeful manner in 2017 as part of an ongoing effort to democratize and diversify the voices and material selected for addition to the university's unique and specialized research collection. Some of the intentionality behind the collecting was to further build the repository's holdings that document the local community, support local artists and creators, as well as document local topics already part of the department's collecting scope such as music, LGBTQIA2S+ communities, as well as local history, artists, and writers. The department fortunately has a modest acquisitions budget and is able to purchase zines rather than asking creators to make donations to the Library.

Omaha Zine Fest was founded in 2016 and presented the Library with an ideal venue for acquisitions and outreach. In 2017, about 100 zines were selected by the Archivist and added to the collection. In 2018, purchases were focused on creators from the region with individual Midwestern and national zines also acquired. At the most recent Omaha Zine Fest in 2019, the Archivist attempting to purchase most zines from the 100 vendors in attendance. This enlarged

collecting scope further expanded the diversity of topics and geographic coverage of the zines in the Library and put the collection on the path to expanding to national in scope and being a notable regional collection. While Omaha Zine Fest purchases form the bulk of acquisitions, these are supplemented with purchases from local stores and individual makers, zines created by students as part of class assignments described here, as well as zines created by library practicum students and interns.

Conclusion

Through the use of zines as a final project in undergraduate classes, students have a supportive framework to explore creative options for academic work. The zine format becomes a vehicle that integrates key skills such as research techniques, critical information literacy, and concise argument synthesis with course-specific learning outcomes. Significantly, zines are an important component for groups articulating social justice movements and for building communities around specific experiences. Since 2003, librarians and archivists have increasingly viewed zines as an important collecting area. The push to gather diverse and underrepresented voices has brought institutional zine collecting and zine librarianship to a place of increasing academic prominence, as well as community archiving initiatives.

The class collaborations between UNO faculty and librarians highlight the rich area of growth for creative student work as part of increasingly inclusive collecting practices. Relationships fostered in the classroom are supported by community programs, and vice versa. Omaha Zine Fest provides one venue for artists' work, students can see how powerful the zine format can be, and librarians can support community creators through purchase and accession. Students who create zines for class projects and donate their work to a special collections repository or bring them to public venues like zine fests are participating in a larger conversation about varied methods for accessing information, community building, and social justice in and outside established academic institutions.

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