

CITATION AS PATHWAY: REORIENTING PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

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If you were to ask an undergraduate student to suggest a symbol that could represent the concept of academic citation, how do you think they would respond? We imagine that for many students, the first image to come to mind might be a warning sign: something like the bright yellow squares that alert drivers to danger ahead or tell pedestrians to watch their step. In most U.S. contexts, students are typically taught citation as a set of tools for avoiding plagiarism, a tendency that freights the idea of citational practice with hazardous and punitive connotations. But what if we cultivated a different way of thinking about citation? What if, instead of a warning, our students saw citation as an opportunity—not a closed path, but an open one?

In *Living a Feminist Life*, cultural theorist Sara Ahmed activates the metaphor of the pathway to think about citation: “Citation is feminist memory. Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow” (15). Extending Ahmed’s line of thought, the second volume of *Teaching Citational Practice* explores citation as pathway: as both a record of and a roadmap for where, how, and with whom our knowledge is produced. In the collection of instructional resources that follows this introduction, students and instructors are invited to retrace, reroute, and open up citational pathways both within and especially beyond the more familiar networks of travel laid down by standardized research structures and practices.

“Citation as Pathway: Reorienting Pedagogical Approaches” features the original work of four contributing authors: Ashley B. Heim (Cornell University), Kelsey J. Utne (Arkansas Tech), Katherine Wilson (Cornell University), and Claudia Irene Calderón (University of Wisconsin-Madison). The diverse set of teaching strategies that make up this collection is unified by an investment in prompting both students and instructors to think critically and self-reflexively about the intellectual and material paths we travel in our academic work. Through thinking in this way, we better position ourselves and our students not only to enact “feminist memory” by naming and honoring the places where our learning happens, but also to notice when chosen pathways lead us

to certain privileged sites while bypassing others. Attending to existing citational traffic patterns—whether in our own work, the work of our students, or the work of our academic fields and disciplines—paves the way for innovative research practices that are more equitable, inclusive, and empowering.

Situating this volume

The four contributors to this volume participated in an October 2021 workshop series that Cat and Diana held through the Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL).¹ A national undergraduate education network that particularly caters to faculty in STEM, CIRTL offers a range of workshops and other resources emphasizing [“evidence-based teaching practices for diverse learners.”](#) Cat and Diana’s two-part workshop, “Teaching Citational Practice: A Critical Feminist Approach,” invited participants to discuss and develop practical, innovative, and progressive strategies for teaching research and citation. As part of this work, we asked participants to consider how, as educators, we can meaningfully legitimize overlooked or non-traditional sources of scholarship while breaking down biased norms of who belongs in labs, at the front of the lecture hall, and in our syllabi.

A number of themes emerged from these workshops, which brought together forty-five faculty members, postdocs, and graduate students from across the country. Participants discussed opportunities for being more deliberate about whom and what we cite in our teaching and our scholarship. They collectively envisioned intentional citational practices that can work to expand traditional definitions of what is or isn’t worthy of citation. They imagined citing with attention to the socioeconomic factors that structure knowledge production—including the varying levels of institutional access with which different scholars are privileged—in order to intervene in normative ideas about the “legitimate” author, archive, or peer review process. And they talked about ways that instructors can make their own citational labor and production of knowledge transparent to students, such as annotating their syllabi or initiating open conversation with students about a syllabus’s citational practices.

Throughout these conversations, Cat and Diana noticed that workshop participants regularly pointed to libraries as examples of significant and often overlooked sites where knowledge is alternately distributed and withheld. At one level, we discussed the importance of citing the labor of academic

librarians and involving them in teaching students about citational practices. At another level, our conversation ran along structural lines. As workshop participants pointed out, institutional wealth determines the resources that an academic library can or can't acquire, which in turn delimits the bank of sources that students can find and cite. The issue of institutional affiliation in turn informs dynamics of scholarly production and publication, as scholars affiliated with wealthy institutions enjoy much easier access to library resources than do independent scholars or scholars at comparatively disadvantaged institutions.

As we concluded the CIRTl workshop series and invited participants to pitch instructional resources for this volume, Cat and Diana continued to dwell with the idea of the library as at once a portal to and a gatekeeper of knowledge. The library, that is, is not a monolithic entity, but a physical and digital space that will look very different depending on who and where you are. It is a pathway: one that might be wide and inviting or narrow and overgrown; smoothly paved or crowded with obstacles; open to all travelers or closed to just a select few.

Thinking about the library in this way prompted Cat, Diana, and the contributors to this volume to critically reflect on other pathways that scholars travel—or don't travel—when they conduct academic research. And in turn, we reflected on how we teach our students to travel these pathways themselves. What roads are clearly mapped for students as they undertake academic research? What assumptions do instructors make about the paths our students will take? How might we be more intentional in sign-posting research avenues for our students, and in helping our students practice greater intentionality themselves as travelers on these roads?

Citational pathways

In its focus on "Citation as Pathway," this volume builds on the work of Shanelle E. Kim, a contributor to "Progressive Pedagogies for Humanities Research and Citation," the first volume of *Teaching Citational Practice*. Kim's teaching resource prompts students to ask "what 'paths' a bibliography may follow, whether they reinscribe certain forms of knowledge or deviate from them" (33). Likewise, the contributors to our second volume have developed instructional resources that challenge students to think more critically about not only the pathways traveled or ignored by existing scholarship, but also the routes that students themselves take as developing researchers.

Ashley Heim opens the collection with a prompt for students to retrace and reflect on the citational pathways they followed when assembling sources for a literature review. Kelsey Utne encourages students to excavate and speculate about the political, cultural, and editorial pathways that shape how an author's name and biographical information appear to readers in an academic book. Katherine Wilson invites students to deviate from the limited path paved by a course textbook and standardized curriculum as they search digital pathways for outside sources that can help them better understand and relate to the course material.

Finally, Claudia Calderón reminds us that citational “pathways” are not just a metaphor: they are a living part of the material landscape. Citation, she writes, must be understood as a “place-based practice, because the information provided and the knowledge-holder are tightly linked to that space, to their communities, and to a particular political and historical time” (47). The materiality of the citational pathway, in other words, is connected to the materiality of the author—to the embodied experience of maintaining and cultivating (or “holding”) knowledge in a particular place and time.

The task for instructors, as each of these contributors demonstrates, thus becomes one of highlighting these dual forms of materiality for students. It's a task of teaching students to think of citation not as an abstract exercise but as a concrete, embodied process of naming and honoring both the places where knowledge is formed and the people who participate in its formation. Part of this task, as Wilson emphasizes, requires “facilitat[ing] a greater sense of student belonging and active participation” in the space and the process of knowledge formation (31). The teaching resources gathered in this collection position instructors to cultivate classroom environments in which students learn to recognize their own agency as what Calderón calls “knowledge-holders,” at the same time that they learn to appreciate the community of knowledge creation out of which students' own scholarship can emerge.

An overview of the collection

To teach citational practice in such critical and self-reflexive ways is to move beyond the limited curricular structures that are often prescribed by academic disciplines. This collection's first article, Heim's “Reflecting on Citational Practice in Biology Writing Assessments,” offers a crucial (re)orientation for instructors navigating those limitations. In typical biology curricula, Heim writes, discussions of citational practice are limited to brief overviews of

standard citational style and injunctions against plagiarism. Beyond that, students and instructors of biology “are rarely challenged to critique our citational search practices” (13) or “to reflect on why we select certain sources to support our own ideas and research findings” (13). Such failures of self-reflexivity, according to Heim, contribute to a disciplinary culture in which “white supremacy is still upheld in the biology classroom” through an uninterrogated “bias toward the knowledge and discoveries of white scientists” (13).

Heim’s resource intervenes in that disciplinary culture by teaching students how to critically consider where, how, and why they have identified specific sources for use in an assigned literature review. Through both individual and group reflection, students work backwards from the first draft of their literature review, retracing their steps to the data repositories they explored and the search terms they used. In addition to accounting for why they chose certain venues and terms, students are also asked to expand their search into new directions with the aid of [Project Biodiversify](#), a teaching repository that centers work by biologists with underrepresented identities. This exercise can be easily adapted to any classroom, biology or otherwise, in which instructors want to treat the literature review or similar assignments as an opportunity to teach students about how citational practice can alternately reinforce or resist the kinds of institutional hierarchies that disciplinary canons help to produce.

The complicitness of citational practice in institutional hierarchies is also a major focus of the second resource in this collection, Utne’s “Gender in the Footnotes.” In the overview accompanying her resource, Utne identifies a cluster of problems that arise out of what she describes as “the relationship between unconscious bias and citational mechanics” (23). She discusses how citational styles that require initials in the place of first names—including the standard citational style in history, Utne’s home discipline—can have the “dual effect” of “masking” an author’s gender and, in the case of women-authored texts, “obscuring recognition of women’s labor” (24). Utne links this dynamic of erasure with a tendency of scholars across disciplines to more frequently cite authors who are men than “authors who are either known or inferred to be women based on gendered names” (24).

As an exercise in confronting these issues of marginalization and bias, Utne’s resource presents students with a text of “ambiguous authorship” and asks them to produce a citation for the text using one or more citational styles (23). Students are then prompted to compare their citations with one another and

to account for the steps they followed in producing these citations. They are then tasked with reflecting on what the similarities and differences reveal about the choices, assumptions, and priorities that informed how students constructed their citations. This activity also creates an opportunity to discuss the choices, assumptions, and priorities implicit in different citational styles. It will appeal to any instructor hoping to engage students in critical thinking about what kinds of information and context a citation can productively capture, and what kinds of information and context a citation might harmfully elide or misrepresent.

Where Utne urges us to consider how citational norms limit what a citation might tell us about a given author, Wilson addresses how standardized curricula limit the types of sources to which students are exposed. In “Activating Student-Centered Learning and Belonging in the Engineering Classroom,” Wilson discusses the tendency for STEM disciplines such as engineering to heavily rely on rigid curricular structures that prescribe specific textbooks and requisite learning objectives. Such structures, Wilson points out, “reinforce dominant voices and ways of knowing” (31) at the same time that they “pose barriers” to students’ “sense of belonging” by restricting the range of ideas and examples that students are permitted to explore (32).

Designed specifically for instructors working within a strict standard curriculum of this kind, Wilson’s resource invites students to go beyond the course textbook in order to locate a source (e.g., a meme, social media post, demonstration video) that helps them clarify and relate to a difficult topic. Additionally, by considering what authors or contributors are (or are not) credited in the source they’ve found, students reflect on how this source relates to broader issues of labor erasure and canon formation in the given discipline. Along these latter lines, instructors of all stripes may find Wilson’s appendix useful: this table provides a visual illustration of how the labor of authors and contributors is acknowledged differently between a course textbook, a peer-reviewed journal, and a Creative Commons-licensed website.

One theme that emerges in Wilson’s resource is the importance of finding citational pathways that acknowledge the collective and often underrecognized networks of researchers and students who collaboratively produce knowledge. Calderón expands on this theme in “Reimagining Our Citational Practices: Centering Indigenous and *Campesino* Ways of Knowing,” which closes out the volume with an incisive critique of citation’s place in a settler-colonial model of academic work. Calderón lays bare the ongoing harm

of Western modes of research and citation that emphasize individualistic over collective knowledge production, and that maintain an extractive relationship particularly to Indigenous and *campesino* (peasant) scholarship.

In resistance to these harmful dynamics, Calderón’s teaching resource emphasizes instead how students and instructors might “work toward the co-creation of ethical and respectful citations with the local collaborators and knowledge-holders who inform the body of our work” (47). In her resource overview, Calderón models this collaborative praxis for readers by sharing some of her Zapotec, Mam, Kaqchikel, and Guna colleagues’ reflections about how to embody communal “ownership” of knowledge in a citation (44). While specifically geared toward instructors in biological and social sciences, and especially those who work with Indigenous and *campesino* communities, Calderón’s resource is critical reading for all instructors hoping to learn more about how traditional modes of practicing and teaching citation are not politically neutral and may perpetuate neo-colonial and extractive ways of knowing.

About our own citational practices

On the whole, “Citation as Pathway” widens both the institutional and disciplinary scope of our first volume. As co-editors, Cat and Diana were grateful for the opportunity to stretch our thinking about citational practice beyond our home disciplines in the humanities by working with scholars and educators primarily from STEM disciplines and the social sciences. These circumstances have enabled our second volume to build upon—and diverge from—our first volume in exciting ways.

One marked difference obtains in the citational style of this new collection. Whereas in our first volume, we asked all of our contributors to use APA (American Psychological Association) for the sake of consistency, here we have permitted each contributor to use the citational style of her own choosing, resulting in a range of represented styles: not only APA, but also CMS (Chicago Manual of Style), IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers), and the style we eventually decided to use for our introduction, MLA (Modern Language Association). This citational variety materializes one of the volume’s thematic threads: the value of teaching students how to account for the limits, challenges, and opportunities that different citational styles present for honoring both the individual and the communal labor that make knowledge possible. We hope that our unorthodox choice to encourage multiplicity over

uniformity of citational style provides a productive model for instructors to defamiliarize and break out of existing citational norms in their own research and teaching.

This volume further departs from its predecessor in the way we chose to help contributors engage with one another's work during the drafting process. During production of the first volume, each contributor was invited to annotate another contributor's completed resource and overview as the final step before publication. For "Citation as Pathway," each contributor was given the opportunity to trade and workshop resource drafts with another contributor. Traces of these exchanges are visible in the final products where authors cite one another's labor and influence: an important enactment of the citational politics that this collection theorizes.

The limits of citation

Even as it outlines different pathways for teaching citational practice, "Citation as Pathway" also reflects on the limitations of citation as a site for transformative work. In Utne's resource, for example, students are invited to reflect on the limits of what the citation of a name can actually tell us about a given author's embodied identity, labor, and experience. And where Utne is concerned about how citational practices shape and delimit how we interpret the past, Calderón highlights how the stakes of such epistemological limitations extend into the present. As Calderón narrates, standard citational practices and formats tend to operate according to neo-colonial methods of extracting knowledge in a distanced manner, reproducing hegemonic hierarchies both intellectually and materially.

Citation, in other words, can be and often is practiced as a method of staking a proprietary, individualistic claim to "new" knowledge. Citation may constitute "feminist memory" (to use Ahmed's phrase again), but it may also help enact a colonialist, masculinist, white supremacist fantasy. For example, in "Citational Desires: On Black Feminism's Institutional Longings," Jennifer C. Nash asks whether "scholars' mobilization of Black feminist theory is genuine or predatory, embedded in political commitment or rooted in gaming a hyper-competitive academic marketplace" (78). Building on Ahmed's characterization of citational practice as "how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before," Nash proposes that "[c]iting 'correctly'—and describing citation as something political and intentional—is imagined as a form of debt acknowledgement, and also a way of aligning oneself with the role of

preservationist and ‘steward’ rather than with that of the interloper or even colonizer” (79).

Returning once more to the image of the pathway, which we have been invoking as a symbol of inclusive knowledge formation(s), we note that this image is also intimately bound up with settler-colonial logics of spatial expansion and exploration-as-possession. It is necessary to acknowledge the tensions endemic to the image we’ve chosen in order to close the gap between principle and praxis—in order to avoid, that is, a practice of citation that slips into a reproduction of the very problems that *TCP* seeks to redress. Thinking with and alongside Black feminist theorists such as Nash, we aspire to a form of citational path-seeking as stewardship:ⁱⁱ a practice of care and responsibility for the living material of others’ intellectual resources; a habit of future- and community-oriented work with and for the knowledge-holders who can show us the way.

NOTES

[i] We are grateful to POD Network for awarding us a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Mini-Grant that helped support our work on the CIRTl workshop series as well as this volume of *TCP*.

[ii] Nash’s use of the concept of “stewardship” draws on the work of Ange-Marie Hancock, political scientist and theorist of intersectionality, who invokes stewardship to distinguish an ethical and preservationist engagement with the Black feminist analytic of intersectionality from strategic and careerist deployments of the term.

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