

Where It's At: Social Justice in the Canadian MLIS Landscape

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ABSTRACT: With libraries facing issues such as a boom in book challenges, controversial library event bookings prompting protests and counter-protests, decolonization and Indigenization, increasing securitization and policing in libraries, budget cuts, data surveillance, politicized library boards, serving as shelters, helping with overdose prevention, and on and on, questions around social justice issues are unavoidable in libraries these days. Are students being taught what they need to know to work in the complex arena of libraries, which function as community hubs, political battlegrounds, educational centres, colonial institutions, social spaces, and bastions of liberal democracy? This exploration gives a snapshot of social justice issues in current Canadian MLIS curricula by examining program information and course materials using content analysis methods to answer a number of questions about whether, where, what, and to what extent students are learning about social justice topics in the eight ALA-accredited Canadian MLIS programs. How do the graduate programs approach these topics? What kinds of social justice topics are taught in MLIS courses? Are there courses explicitly focused on topics of social justice? What other courses look at these kinds of issues? Are these topics being addressed widely across the curricula? Are students required to engage with these topics? The article then considers relevant literature to discuss the importance of social justice in MLIS education, as it is essential to prepare students to think critically about and take action on social justice issues in their future library work.

Keywords: social justice, MLIS curriculum, critical librarianship, Canada, higher education



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Journal of Radical Librarianship, Vol. 11 (2025) pp.180-206. Published 29 September 2025.

Introduction

Were you taught about social justice in your Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) program? As I recently worked on developing an MLIS course about examining library neutrality—which turned out to actually be about social justice—I wondered what students are being taught currently about these issues in current Canadian MLIS curricula.¹ According to Cho et al., the curricula “traditional in many LIS schools are still reflective of previous dominant social order in a bygone era and are not reflective of current world views.”² With libraries currently facing issues such as a boom in book challenges, controversial library event bookings prompting protests and counter-protests, decolonization and Indigenization, increasing securitization and policing in libraries, budget cuts, data surveillance, politicized library boards, serving as shelters, helping with overdose prevention, and on and on, questions around social justice issues are unavoidable in libraries these days. Are students being taught what they need to know to work in the complex arena of libraries, which function—depending on who you ask—as community hubs, political battlegrounds, educational centres, colonial institutions, social spaces, and bastions of liberal democracy? This exploration will give us a snapshot of social justice issues in current Canadian MLIS curricula.

There have been elements of social justice content in librarianship and MLIS education for some time, though as Mehra and Singh note, “direct and explicit reference to using the term ‘social justice’ was often missing.”³ They connect this to “the pressures of the majority and mainstream conservative voices” who have argued against library workers taking truly progressive positions and promoting social justice agendas in favour of “a passive role and neutral stance.”⁴ From a critical librarianship approach, a so-called neutral approach ignores the structures, operations, and impacts of power within libraries and within the communities they serve, and it functions as a mechanism for masking and maintaining the status quo of social hierarchies. When MLIS education does not challenge those pressures, it reifies the neutral approach, making neutrality the default, especially if it does so without explicitly naming neutrality. Such silence, whether about social justice or neutrality, can raise questions about the null curriculum, or what is not being taught.⁵ Eisner argues that what is not taught “has important effects on the kinds of options one is able to consider, the alternatives that one can examine, and the perspectives from which one can view a solution or problems.”⁶ So I want to know what students are being taught about

¹ Some of the programs discussed have different designations, such as Master of Information (MI) or Master of Library Science (MLS), but I have chosen to use MLIS as the catch-all, as it is common terminology in the professional literature.

² Allan Cho et al., “Designing the Diversity of Canadian Libraries: Excerpts from the CARL Inclusion Perspectives Webinar by Racialized Library Colleagues,” *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research* 17, no. 2 (2022): 10.

³ Bharat Mehra and Vandana Singh, “Library Leadership-in-Training as Embedded Change Agents to Further Social Justice in Rural Communities: Teaching of Library Management Subjects in the ITRL and ITRL2,” in *Teaching for Justice: Implementing Social Justice in the LIS Classroom*, eds. Nicole A. Cooke and Miriam E. Sweeney (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2017), 256.

⁴ Mehra and Singh, “Library Leadership,” 253.

⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of The Oppressed* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970).

⁶ Elliot Eisner, *The Educational Imagination* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 97. Thanks to Nicole A. Cooke for sharing these ideas in her work, Nicole A. Cooke, “Creating Mirrors and Doors in the Curriculum: Diversifying and

social justice in Canadian MLIS programs, which can give insights into what else they may need to be taught.

In this exploration, I seek to answer a number of questions about whether, where, what, and to what extent students are currently being taught about social justice topics to prepare them to deal with these issues in their library work. How do graduate programs approach these topics? What kinds of social justice topics are taught in MLIS courses? Are there courses explicitly focused on topics of social justice? What other courses look at these kinds of issues? Are these topics being addressed widely across the curricula? Are students required to engage with these topics? My analysis then considers relevant literature to discuss the importance of social justice in MLIS education, as it is essential to prepare students to think critically about and take action on social justice issues in their future library work. As Mehra argues, “it is no longer acceptable for LIS professionals to posit a neutral stance to community dynamics and remain passive bystanders to the unfolding of social, cultural, political, and economic realities in the 21st century.”⁷

What Do We Mean When We Talk About Social Justice in Libraries?

Social justice is not a simple or unified concept. To most of the general public and people within library work, the library is seen as a public good through the values and ethics of providing services and promoting equal access to information for all, as laid out by the professional associations. Looking at the Canadian historical context, the Canadian Library Association (CLA), which was founded in 1946 and incorporated in 1947, then dissolved in 2016, championed the values of intellectual freedom and universal access to library services, among others.⁸ According to the Canadian Librarianship social media account, at the CLA’s founding conference in 1946, McGill University librarian Gerhard Lomer said, “Let this day be the V-Day of our profession in Canada in its war against apathy, ignorance, narrow-mindedness, and regionalism of any kind.”⁹ Although that optimistic declaration has not yet come to pass, the CLA did some interesting work related to social justice issues, including but not limited to the 1974 Task Force on Prison Libraries and the Committee on Library and Information Needs of Native People in 1978-79.¹⁰

Currently, the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA), which formed after the dissolution of the CLA and adopted many of its positions, holds the International Federation of Library Association’s (IFLA) Code of Ethics as its own, which outlines a number of ways that

Re-envisioning the MLS,” in *Re-envisioning the MLS: Perspectives on the Future of Library and Information Science Education*, eds. Percell et al. (Bingley, England: Emerald Publishing, 2018), 32.

⁷ Bharat Mehra, ed., *Social Justice Design and Implementation in Library and Information Science* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 3.

⁸ Canadian Library Association, “CLA at Work.” n.d. <https://cla.ca/cla-at-work/>.

⁹ Librarianship.ca, “Today in Canadian Library History.” June 14, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/librarianship.ca/posts/4093161904253018/>.

¹⁰ Marie DeYoung, “From the Canadian Library Association to the Canadian Federation of Library Associations: A Confluence of Evolution and Circumstance,” *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research* 15, no. 1 (2020): 2, 3.

libraries and library workers ensure access to information and equitable services for all.¹¹ We must also consider what the American Library Association (ALA) has to say because it is the accrediting body for Canadian MLIS programs, and it has significant influence over the profession in Canada. ALA's Code of Ethics includes commitments to protecting rights and promoting racial and social justice,¹² its Core Values include equity, sustainability, and improving society as a public good,¹³ and the ALA's Library Bill of Rights echoes those ideals.¹⁴

In these ways, libraries can affect positive social outcomes, but they are predominantly doing so without fundamentally challenging internal or external systems of power, which is not necessarily the same as social justice as described from a critical librarianship perspective. Colón-Aguirre and Cooke assert that these professional statements and commitments often “remain at an abstract level without the corresponding practical application or strategic management elements which are necessary to enact them in day-to-day professional practice. Enaction is required to achieve social justice, not just talk.”¹⁵ And they go on to note that these professional statements use purposefully broad and vague language “so as not to disrupt the status quo,” and thus, “they rarely lead to actionable, tangible change.”¹⁶ Yousefi points out that in libraries “there are significant disparities between what we say and what we do,” but our belief in our institutional and professional commitments to socially good values can lead to dissociation from action and responsibility.¹⁷ Roberts and Noble argue that within library values the concept of social justice “has often been softened, or even replaced wholesale, with concepts that are less threatening to the status quo and that do not mandate praxis and action.”¹⁸

Another related critique comes from Leung and López-McKnight in their discussion of LIS' racial power problems, as they describe the profession's liberal approach to race: “rather than using words like *racism* and *antiracism*, safer, diluted terms like *diversity* and *inclusion* became the normalized rhetoric, and demographic representation and cultural difference became the problem being framed rather than racial justice.” (emphasis in original)¹⁹ They argue that this

¹¹ Canadian Federation of Library Associations, “CFLA-FCAB Code of Ethics.” August 27, 2018, <http://cfla-fcab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Code-of-ethics.pdf>. International Federation of Library Associations, “IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and other Information Workers.” August 2012, https://www.ifla.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/assets/faife/publications/IFLA%20Code%20of%20Ethics%20-%20Long_0.pdf.

¹² American Library Association, “ALA Code of Ethics.” June 29, 2021, <https://www.ala.org/tools/ethics>

¹³ American Library Association, “Core Values of Librarianship.” January 2024, <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/advocacy/intfreedom/corevalues>

¹⁴ American Library Association, “Library Bill of Rights.” January 29, 2019, <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>.

¹⁵ Mónica Colón-Aguirre and Nicole A. Cooke, “LibCrit: Moving Toward an Ethical and Equitable Critical Race Theory Approach to Social Justice in Library and Information Science,” *Journal of Information Ethics* 31, no. 2 (2022): 58.

¹⁶ Colón-Aguirre and Cooke, “LibCrit,” 62.

¹⁷ Baharak Yousefi, “On the Disparity Between What We Say and What We Do in Libraries,” in *Feminists Among Us: Resistance and Advocacy in Library Leadership*, eds. Shirley Lew and Baharak Yousefi (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2017): 94, 95.

¹⁸ Sarah T. Roberts and Safiya Umoja Noble, “Empowered to Name, Inspired to Act: Social Responsibility and Diversity as Calls to Action in the LIS Context,” *Library Trends* 64, no. 3 (2016): 514.

¹⁹ Sofia Y. Leung and Jorge R. López-McKnight, eds., *Knowledge Justice: Disrupting Library and Information Studies through Critical Race Theory*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2021), 2.

framing allows the profession to virtue signal its interests in diversity and social responsibility while only focusing on “superficial solutions that maintain the racial hierarchy where whiteness is dominant.”²⁰ Similarly, Hudson critiques “the centrality of a liberal anti-racism within LIS,” arguing that “to limit LIS anti-racism to a politics of inclusion and diversification leaves little room for asking deeper questions about the ways in which more fundamental assumptions and structures within the library world operate as sites for the perpetuation of white supremacy.”²¹ And Matthews offers that “current approaches in LIS are misaligned with anti-racist measures and cannot account for race and discrimination in the field” because of the profession’s entanglement with neutrality.²² These critiques can aptly be broadened from issues of race to other social justice issues in LIS.

Mehra, Rioux, and Albright’s discussion of social justice in the LIS context is a helpful overview discussing theoretical conceptions and practical implications.²³ They note, as above, that libraries have only brought moderately progressive social changes, and suggest that reorienting libraries toward social justice means “expanding efforts to equalize power differentials in society and partner with underserved populations as equals.”²⁴ Elsewhere, Mehra frames social justice in LIS as “a proactive and action-oriented agenda that is impact-driven, outcome-based, and community-engaged, while making a difference to challenge and change imbalanced power differentials between the haves and have-nots.”²⁵ And as Birdi asserts, “social justice work necessarily involves not only discussion, but also critique, self-reflection and action.”²⁶

Recently the ALA made a change to include social justice in its Core Competences of Librarianship, describing it as involving “work to repair past and current inequities within libraries, and to address issues of oppression, privilege, and power within our libraries and between the library and its community.”²⁷ This addition represents a progressive professional shift in response to the advocacy and activism of many in the critical librarianship community, but it remains to be seen the real impacts it might have in moving the profession to challenge and dismantle existing systems of oppression, or if it will also become institutionalized, diluted, and stripped of its liberatory potential.²⁸ It could also encourage more social justice in MLIS

²⁰ Leung and López-McKnight, *Knowledge Justice*, 3. I will engage with the problems of the whiteness of librarianship more in the Discussion section.

²¹ David James Hudson, “On ‘Diversity’ as Anti-Racism in Library and Information Studies: A Critique,” *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 1 (2017): 15, 13-14.

²² Amber Matthews, “Diversity Is Not the Answer: Towards Anti-Racist Praxis in LIS,” *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of CAIS*, November 8, 2020, 3.

²³ Bharat Mehra, Kevin S. Rioux, and Kendra S. Albright, “Social Justice in Library and Information Science,” in *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences*, eds. John D. McDonald and Michael Levine-Clark (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2017): 4218-4234.

²⁴ Mehra, Rioux, and Albright, “Social Justice in Library and Information Science,” 4222.

²⁵ Mehra, *Social Justice Design and Implementation*, 13-14.

²⁶ Briony Birdi, “Nice to Have, a Distraction from the Core Curriculum, or a Disruptive Element? A Teaching Journey through Three Common Perceptions of Social Justice in LIS Education,” in *Inglorious Pedagogy: Difficult, Unpopular, and Uncommon Topics in Library and Information Science Education*, eds. Keren Dali and Kim M. Thompson (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023): 24.

²⁷ American Library Association, “ALA’s Core Competences of Librarianship.” January 28, 2023, <https://www.ala.org/educationcareers/2022-update-alas-core-competences-librarianship>.

²⁸ Yoonhee Lee, “Being Taught to be Professionals vs. Workers: Critical Consciousness and LIS Education”

curricula to teach to this new core competence.

In the current context of the neoliberalization of higher education, there are a number of reasons that explicit social justice language might not be used in MLIS program and course descriptions. There may be external political and financial pressures on institutions, internal governance processes and approvals may affect framing and wording, and faculty who are precariously employed and/or come from marginalized social groups may feel pressure to temper or avoid certain language.²⁹ These reasons demonstrate why teaching about social justice is so important. With awareness of this context, and in light of the discussion about what social justice is and is not in libraries, when I am looking for social justice in Canadian MLIS curricula, I am looking at ideas related to libraries as a public good, including “diluted” terminology and concepts, but I am most interested in finding social justice content that is oriented toward shifting power and challenging the unjust status quo to achieve equitable outcomes.

Methods

This project is part of an ongoing conversation within the profession to examine if and how topics such as social justice, diversity, and race are taught in MLIS curricula, including a number of relatively recent studies with a variety of focuses and methods. In 2010 Subramaniam and Jaeger examined syllabi of diversity-related courses from iSchools in the US to find that they were a small proportion of courses offered in these programs, almost all of them were elective courses, and they covered only a small number of diversity-related topics.³⁰ Bonnici, et al. specifically looked for courses under the diversity umbrella that address services to people with information access barriers based on physiological challenges in their 2012 study of American MLIS curricula, and found this content to be minimal.³¹ In their 2013 study, Al-Qallaf and Mika analyzed MLIS curricula to see the state of diversity and multiculturalism content and how it related to the knowledge and skills in those areas that were being sought on the library job market. They found that 47 out of 58 (81%) North American MLIS programs offered at least one course on multiculturalism and diversity, for a total of 146 courses, all of which were electives.³² Kumasi and Manlove’s 2015 work looked at core courses in 36 MLIS curricula and identified opportunities for diversity and social justice to be meaningfully integrated.³³ Ndumu and Betts-Green examined the online course listings of 48 North American MLIS programs in 2018 and found that they offered 132 courses related to diversity topics.³⁴ Also in 2018 Gibson, Hughes-

(presentation, Critical Librarianship and Pedagogy Symposium, University of Arizona Libraries, Online, November 2, 2022). <https://youtu.be/KptBLEiq96I?feature=shared>. It also remains to be seen how the ALA will handle the new wave of attacks on social justice from America’s powerful right.

²⁹ Birdi, “Nice to Have” has a good discussion of negotiating language on page 28-29.

³⁰ Mega M. Subramaniam and Paul T. Jaeger, “Weaving Diversity into LIS: An Examination of Diversity Course Offerings in iSchool Programs,” *Education for Information* 28, no. 1 (2010): 1-19.

³¹ Laurie J. Bonnici et al., “Physiological Access as a Social Justice Type in LIS Curricula,” *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 53, no. 2 (2012): 115–29.

³² Charlene L. Al-Qallaf and Joseph J. Mika, “The Role of Multiculturalism and Diversity in Library and Information Science: LIS Education and the Job Market,” *Libri* 63, no. 1 (2013): 1–20.

³³ Kafi D. Kumasi and Nichole L. Manlove, “Finding ‘Diversity Levers’ in the Core Library and Information Science Curriculum: A Social Justice Imperative,” *Library Trends* 64, no. 2 (2015): 415–43.

³⁴ Ana Ndumu and Crystal Betts-Green, “First Impressions: A Review of Diversity-Related Content on North American LIS Program Websites,” *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion* 2, no. 3 (2018):

Hassell, and Threats examined the reading lists of required courses at the top 20 ALA-accredited MLIS programs in North America, all of which were in the US, to ascertain the extent to which critical race theory and other critical theories were being taught, and found there was little to no exposure to this content across the programs.³⁵ More recently, Villagran and Hawamdeh investigated the extent to which cultural competence was integrated into the curricula of 45 US MLIS programs in 2020, to find that all but five programs offered at least 1 course with diversity and multicultural terms in their titles and/or descriptions, for a total of 102 courses offered.³⁶ Also in 2020, Jones looked for social justice concepts in the program and course materials available online of five Canadian and five US MLIS programs and found their presence was minimal.³⁷

My current work connects with but does not exactly replicate those previous studies. It is an exploration of whether, where, what, and to what extent social justice issues in libraries are being taught currently at MLIS programs, focusing specifically on the Canadian context and concentrating only on libraries, as opposed to the whole spectrum of information professions. The research was conducted in summer and fall of 2024, and the methods used are: content analysis of program information, course descriptions, and course materials such as syllabi and reading lists,³⁸ as well as consideration of relevant secondary literature.³⁹ The goal is present a current snapshot of social justice content in library courses in Canadian MLIS curricula.⁴⁰

For the eight ALA-accredited MLIS programs in Canada, I looked first at program information available on the program websites to see if social justice-related issues were mentioned in program descriptions, values, or in program goals and learning outcomes.⁴¹ These are significant sources to consider, as Jones notes, they are major institutional tools used to communicate with prospective and current students, faculty, academic colleagues, and anyone else who might be interested in what the MLIS programs are about.⁴² While informal networks and platforms, such as Reddit, are also useful tools to get information about university programs and courses, the

91–113.

³⁵ Amelia Gibson, Sandra Hughes-Hassell, and Megan Threats, “Critical Race Theory in the LIS Curriculum,” in *Re-envisioning the MLS: Perspectives on the Future of Library and Information Science Education*, eds. Percell et al. (Bingley, England: Emerald Publishing, 2018), 49–70.

³⁶ Michele A. L. Villagran and Suliman Hawamdeh, “Cultural Competence in LIS Education: Case Study of United States Ranked Schools,” *Multicultural Education Review* 12, no. 2 (2020): 136–55.

³⁷ Rhiannon Jones, “Social Justice in Library Science Programs: A Content Analysis Approach,” *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 52, no. 4 (2020): 1102–9.

³⁸ I intended to analyze course assignments for social justice-related content, but I found that assignment information was sparse in many syllabi, as instructors are likely providing more assignment details in class and/or in online course management systems, and many assignments left the choice of topic open to students, so there was not enough data for me to analyze.

³⁹ I also intended to also include interviews with instructors who teach specifically about social justice issues, but did not get enough participants from across the programs within my short timeline.

⁴⁰ In this exploration I am focusing on content and not looking at the pedagogical approaches used. Looking specifically at critical pedagogy in MLIS programs would be a great idea for another project that I look forward to reading!

⁴¹ I will henceforth be grouping goals, objectives, learning outcomes, and competencies together under the umbrella term of goals for brevity’s sake.

⁴² Jones, “Social Justice in Library Science Programs,” 1105.

focus of this exploration is on what the programs and faculty themselves are saying about their programs and courses via institutional channels.⁴³

To examine the courses within the programs, I first looked at course titles to find any that use the term social justice in their titles, as well as to identify those with titles referring to issues related to social justice. And because my focus is on how these topics are being taught in relation to libraries, rather than all information professions, I limited my scope to courses focused on libraries but did include some broader courses if they explicitly include libraries. After examining course titles, I read through online course descriptions to find other courses that might contain social justice topics.

In these examinations of course titles and descriptions I was looking for terms—some of which were predetermined, while others revealed themselves in the data—related to social justice topics, such as social justice, neutrality, social responsibility, ethics, values, freedoms, censorship, race, equity, diversity, inclusion, bias, identities, marginalized peoples, community, decolonization, Indigeneity, Truth and Reconciliation, accessibility, 2SLGBTQIA+, or critical theory—basically anything that might consider power, politics, and social dynamics in libraries or focus on equity-deserving groups. Different program websites had different levels of detail in the course descriptions available, which affected my ability to discern course topics and content, but I used the information available to determine which courses were likely engaging with social justice issues.

Once I identified the relevant courses in each program, I sought to collect the syllabi. Some programs had links to current or recent syllabi on their websites, but many did not; and some listed the names of instructors with the courses, but many did not. Emailing program administrators had mixed success, so I did a lot of detective work to figure out who teaches the courses I was interested in and sent cold-call emails to faculty to ask if they would share their syllabi for my research purposes. Many replied, but some did not, which is to be expected, as I understand that folks are busy, and some may not have wanted to share their syllabi, which I also understand. This meant that I was unable to access and examine some of the syllabi that I wanted to, so for those courses I proceeded based on the information available online if it was sufficient for analysis, otherwise I removed them from consideration. (For a full list of the courses that I considered, including those without sufficient information for analysis, please see [Appendix A.](#))

Most of the syllabi that I did look at were from 2023 or later, with only a few from 2022. I did not consider any earlier syllabi because these topics are quite vibrant and evolve quickly, so anything older than two years ago could be outdated; and if a course had not been taught in over two years I did not consider it to be part of the current curriculum. Given the realities of neoliberal pressures on universities,⁴⁴ including tightening budgets, enrollment pressures, increasing focus on employability, etc., not all courses that are listed in a program are offered regularly. I also excluded special topics courses for the most part, since their frequency and currency is often particularly uncertain, unless I found information online or through

⁴³ Examining discussions of university programs or courses on Reddit or other platforms could be a large and interesting project of its own.

⁴⁴ For a succinct discussion about why to talk about neoliberalism or not, see: Simon Springer, “Fuck Neoliberalism,” *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 15, no. 2 (2016): 285-292.

correspondence to indicate their content relevance and that they were currently offered regularly.⁴⁵

A final note about the course information is that I was also looking to see if any required or core courses were covering these topics. In my findings and discussion, I will mention it when they come up, but different programs have different rules and configurations for these courses: some are mandatory for all, while some are in groupings with a certain number of courses required to choose from. I will not be parsing out those details here, but I think it is important to note when a social justice-related topic is included in a core/required course, as it increases the likelihood of more students being exposed to such content.

Analysis

In my content analysis, I first worked to determine how many programs and courses are engaging with which social justice issues across the different programs, as well as how many of those courses are required, how many are special topics, and which kinds of courses include these topics. And for courses dealing explicitly with the concept of social justice, I looked closer at the syllabi to try to learn more about what they are teaching about social justice in libraries to see if they are oriented toward action and change, in alignment with the critical librarianship approaches to social justice discussed above.

For the courses where the term social justice was used, I found it interesting to see where social justice appeared in the courses, whether it be in the course title, the course description, the course goals, or as a topic within the course content. In my findings, I grouped the courses in this way, with some courses appearing in multiple groups. However, if a course has social justice in its title, description, and/or goals, I did not list it under course content, based on the assumption that social justice would be included in the content if it is in the title, description and/or goals. The intention is that organizing the courses in this way that shows where social justice appears in the curricula will allow readers to think about the weight or extent of focus it might have. You will see in my findings that I also took this approach with Indigenous-related topics, which I had not planned to do, but in my analysis I found a large number of courses that included them, so I wanted to show more detail about engagement with these topics in Canadian MLIS curricula (although those findings are presented slightly differently than the social justice courses due to the large numbers).

Limits

As previously noted, I am primarily concerned with social justice topics taught in relation to libraries, rather than all information professions, so my scope is limited to courses focused on libraries, but I did include some broader courses if they explicitly include libraries. Thus, there are undoubtedly more courses in the Canadian MLIS curricula engaging with social justice issues outside the arena of libraries, in areas such as archives, information systems, museum studies, etc. There may also be library-related courses that cover social justice-related issues that I did not include in my analysis because the level of detail available in online course descriptions

⁴⁵ There was a special topics course offered at Western University in 2022 and 2023, LIS 9160 Antiracism in Library and Information Science, that was taught by a PhD student who has since completed their degree and been hired elsewhere as a professor. Since the course is no longer offered I was unable to include it in my findings.

varied and may not have indicated such coverage. As mentioned earlier, there are a number of reasons that social justice issues might not be named explicitly in course descriptions. However, since online course descriptions are a key institutional tool for communicating to students and others what a course is about, some readers might assume that courses not providing any indication of this kind of content would not be engaging with it. And I chose what to include or not in my exploration based on the information available.

There were also a small number of courses that I was unable to obtain syllabi for, so I relied on information available online or removed them from consideration if online information was insufficient for analysis. And there were some syllabi that did not include information about the readings, so there may have been more relevant topics covered that I was unable to consider. Furthermore, syllabi can be vague to leave room for flexibility, which can limit analysis, and they cannot always anticipate where students will take class discussions, thus they often do not tell the whole story of what a course covers. Student interests and perspectives can significantly contribute to the content of courses, adding or steering in new and interesting directions that can change each time a course is offered. In consideration of these limitations to my exploration, as well as the constraints and critical perspectives outlined earlier, my findings are likely a slight underestimate of library-related courses dealing with social justice issues, and they do not reflect engagement with social justice across the full scope of MLIS curricula beyond library-focused courses.

Findings

Programs

In looking at the program information provided on the program websites of the eight programs, including program descriptions, values, and program goals and outcomes, I found that only one of the programs mentions social justice explicitly, but all 8 of the programs have language about some combination of the following: equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI);⁴⁶ community; culture; access for all; ethics; and political, economic, and social contexts. It is unsurprising that these kinds of terms are shared across the programs, as they speak to commonly held ideals and values in librarianship specifically, and broadly in Canada's liberal democracy. University of Toronto (UofT) and Western University both use the phrase "social responsibility," a term that is often associated with the ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table,⁴⁷ which could be considered a precursor to social justice, and Western also affirms "practices of progressive information services for the public good" in its program goals.⁴⁸ There are two programs that go further toward social justice, without using that phrase, by incorporating ideas that can challenge the liberal status quo. University of Alberta's (UofA) program values state that they honour

⁴⁶ With recognition for how these concepts have been diluted and institutionalized, as discussed above, I am using EDI as a category because it is ubiquitous in higher education.

⁴⁷ American Library Association, "Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT)," October 20, 2015, <https://www.ala.org/srrt>.

⁴⁸ Western University Faculty of Information & Media Studies, "Program Goals & Learning Outcomes," n.d., https://www.fims.uwo.ca/programs/graduate_programs/master_of_library_and_information_science/goals_and_learning_outcomes.html.

“Indigenous worldviews and bringing truth and reconciliation to our education,”⁴⁹ and University of British Columbia (UBC) states that its graduates will be able to “reflect in an informed and critical manner on information infrastructures and practices, acknowledging the role of power and privilege, the ongoing influence of colonization, and the value of diverse worldviews.”⁵⁰ And then Dalhousie University includes in its competencies “decolonization for participating in an inclusive and socially just society.”⁵¹

These findings show that, for the most part, Canadian MLIS programs employ widely accepted, diluted language, rather than explicitly declaring commitments to social justice or including it as a goal or competency for its students. It will be interesting to see if, when, and how this may change moving forward, now that ALA has added social justice to its core competencies.

Courses

After examining the course information across the 8 programs, I found a total of 89 courses focused on libraries (or including library topics) that mentioned social justice explicitly, or related topics and issues, as described above. The breakdown by program is shown in Table 1, followed by more detailed dissection of those 89 courses.

MLIS Programs	# of relevant courses	# of required courses	# of special topics courses
University of Alberta	10	2	
University of British Columbia	19	1	
Dalhousie University	9	2	
McGill University	4	2	
Universite de Montreal	9	2	
University of Ottawa	6	2	
University of Toronto	13	2	1 in 2024, 2025
Western University	19	4	1 in 2023-25
Total	89	17	

Table 1. Canadian MLIS programs with number of courses related to social justice topics, including required and special topics courses.

Looking specifically for the term social justice, I found that it appears in library-related courses for six of the eight programs, excepting Universite de Montreal (UdeM) and University of

⁴⁹ University of Alberta Faculty of Education, School of Library and Information Studies, “Vision, Mission, and Values Statement,” n.d., <https://www.ualberta.ca/en/school-of-library-and-information-studies/about/mission-statement.html>. The UofA MLIS program also has a page on its website outlining its [Indigenous Activities](#), but it is unclear when it was last updated.

⁵⁰ University of British Columbia School of Information, “MLIS Student Learning Outcomes,” n.d., <https://ischool.ubc.ca/graduate/masters-programs/master-of-library-and-information-studies/>.

⁵¹ Dalhousie University, Master of Information, “MI Competencies,” May 2022, <https://www.dal.ca/study/program-sites/mi/about/mlis-competencies.html>.

Ottawa, for a total of 20 courses (see Table 2). UofA has one course with social justice in its goals, and one course, which is required, with social justice content. UBC has one course with social justice in both description and goals, and three courses with social justice content. Dalhousie has one course with social justice in both description and goals, and three courses with social justice content. McGill has one course, which is required, with social justice content. UofT has one course, which is required, with social justice in its description, and one courses with social justice content, one of which is an ongoing special topics course.⁵² Western has six courses related to social justice: one course with social justice in both title and description; one with social justice in its description; one course with social justice in its goals; and three courses, one of which is required, with social justice content.

⁵² Full disclosure: the special topics course with social justice content at UofT is a course developed and taught by me for the past two years.

	Course	MLIS Program	Notes
Social Justice in Title	LIS 9136 Information Equity: Social Justice in a Network Society	Western	
Social Justice in Description	LIBR 565 Progressive and Radical Information Work	UBC	
	INFO 6820 Antiracism & Diversity in the Information Professions	Dalhousie	
	INF1322 Communities and Values	UofT	Required
	LIS 9136 Information Equity: Social Justice in a Network Society	Western	
	LIS 9170 Critical Librarianship	Western	
Social Justice in Goals	LIS 541 Library and Information Services in Culturally Diverse Society	UofA	
	LIBR 565 Progressive and Radical Information Work	UBC	
	INFO 6820 Antiracism & Diversity in the Information Professions	Dalhousie	
	LIS 9376 Scholarly Communications and Open Access	Western	
Social Justice Only in Content	LIS 503 Reference and Information Services	UofA	Required
	LIBR 523 Canadian Literature and Other Materials for Children	UBC	
	LIBR 569J Foundations of Intellectual Freedom in Librarianship	UBC	
	LIBR 579J Community-Led Libraries	UBC	
	INFO 6330 Cataloguing and Classification	Dalhousie	
	INFO 6500 Community-Led Services	Dalhousie	
	INFO 6070 Reading and Reading Practices	Dalhousie	
	INFS 601 Foundations of Info Studies	McGill	Required
	INF1005/1006 - Examining Library Neutrality	UofT	Special Topic
	INF2155 The Public Library in the Community: Developing a Critical Practice	UofT	
	LIS 9001 Perspectives on Library and Information Science	Western	Required
	FIMS 9137 Information Ethics	Western	
	FIMS 9340 Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums: Issues in GLAM	Western	

Table 2. Courses with social justice in title, description, goals, and content, noting MLIS program and if a course is required.

When I looked more closely at the syllabi dealing explicitly with social justice, I found that five

of the seven courses that have social justice in the title, description, and/or goals are heavily focused on critical analysis and they are very action-oriented.⁵³ These syllabi include terms such as advocacy, activism, leadership, action, participation, strategies, skills, and practices in relation to social issues of libraries, which align with the emphasis on action and impact described in the critical librarianship approach to social justice. My analysis is that these courses are talking about practical issues of advocacy, activism, resistance, and commitments integrated with critical perspectives to try to teach students about how libraries and library workers can be agents of change, and to help students develop informed, social justice-oriented library praxis. The remaining 13 courses with social justice in their content have broader scopes so are less focused on that specific topic, and I found that they are less explicitly action-oriented toward social change. However, the majority of these courses—nine out of 13—do incorporate critical theory and/or perspectives, such as feminist theory, Indigenous ways of knowing, critical disability studies, and more, to inform students in their development of critical analysis skills to apply to library issues, which is necessary in working toward social justice.

In my examination of the 89 courses focused on libraries with social justice-related content, I also noticed that there were many covering Indigenous-related issues, using terms like Indigeneity, colonialism, decolonization, and Truth and Reconciliation.⁵⁴ I will detail these findings here because I think it is important to see the coverage of these kinds of topics in Canadian MLIS programs, and promoting Indigenous rights and decolonization are crucial elements of social justice. In light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action in 2015,⁵⁵ Canadian universities were quick to adopt the language of decolonization and add related programming and content, and libraries definitely have work to do to improve services and change systems that harm Indigenous peoples, so I was not surprised to see courses with these topics in the curricula, but I was surprised by the numbers. In 2019, Edwards found only two MLIS programs with an elective course focused on Indigenous librarianship,⁵⁶ which might be two of the three courses I found with titles focused on Indigenous issues, showing that there has not been much change on specifically-Indigenous course offerings in the past five years, but we can see the content showing up in other courses and spreading throughout the curricula. Of course, it would take more thorough analysis than I have done here to determine if or the extent to which this Indigenous course content is moving the needle toward dismantling barriers and redressing harms, but this gives us a snapshot of the current course offerings (see Table 3). I found that all eight programs include at least one course that covers Indigenous-related topics, for a total of 45 courses: five at UofA; eight at UBC; eight at Dalhousie; two at McGill; one at UdeM; two at Ottawa; ten at UofT; and nine at Western.

⁵³ The two outlier courses had the shortest syllabi with less detail than the others.

⁵⁴ In this section, I will consider all of these Indigenous-related terms within the umbrella descriptor of Indigenous.

⁵⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*, 2015, https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf.

⁵⁶ Ashley Edwards, "Unsettling the Future by Uncovering the Past: Decolonizing Academic Libraries and Librarianship," *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research* 14, no. 1 (2019): 6.

	Course	MLIS Program	Notes
Indigenous in Title	LIS 540 Indigenous Library and Information Studies in a Canadian Context	UofA	
	LIBR 564 Information Practice and Protocol in Support of Indigenous Initiatives	UBC	
	LIS 9370 Introduction to Indigenizing and Decolonizing LIS	Western	Special Topic
Indigenous in Description	LIS 540 Indigenous Library and Information Studies in a Canadian Context	UofA	
	LIBR 564 Information Practice and Protocol in Support of Indigenous Initiatives	UBC	
	LIBR 569S The Information Worlds of Climate Justice	UBC	
	INFO 6820 Antiracism & Diversity in the Information Professions	Dalhousie	
	FIMS 9340 Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums: Issues in the GLAM Sector	Western	
	LIS 9370 Introduction to Indigenizing and Decolonizing LIS	Western	Special Topic
Indigenous in Goals	LIS 540 Indigenous Library and Information Studies in a Canadian Context	UofA	
	LIS 541 Library and Information Services in Culturally Diverse Society	UofA	
	LIBR 564 Information Practice and Protocol in Support of Indigenous Initiatives	UBC	
	LIBR 569S The Information Worlds of Climate Justice	UBC	
	INFO 6330 Cataloguing and Classification	Dalhousie	
	INFO 6410 Knowledge Justice	Dalhousie	
	INFO 6820 Antiracism & Diversity in the Information Professions	Dalhousie	
	INF2232 Knowledge Equity in Information Organizations	UofT	
	LIS 9370 Introduction to Indigenizing and Decolonizing LIS	Western	Special Topic
Indigenous Only in Content	LIS 501,* LIS 503,* LIS 530	UofA	*Required
	LIBR 506,* LIBR 520, LIBR 523, LIBR 534, LIBR 559A, LIBR 565, LIBR 579J	UBC	*Required
	INFO 5515,* INFO 5530,* INFO 6250, INFO 6450, INFO 6500	Dalhousie	*Required
	INFS 601,* INFS 619*	McGill	*Required
	SCI 6122	UdeM	
	ISI 5301,* ISI 5310	Ottawa	*Required
	INF 1321,* INF 1322,* INF 2126, INF 2127, INF 2141, INF 2143, INF 2155, INF 2226, INF 2228	UofT	*Required
	LIS 9001,* LIS9002,* LIS 9136, LIS 9170, LIS 9361, LIS 9362, LIS 9704	Western	*Required

Table 3. Courses with Indigenous topics in title, description, goals, and content, noting MLIS program and if a course is required.

I grouped the remaining topics related to social justice that I found in my exploration of the 89 courses into 11 categories. You can see an overview of the totals in Table 4, as well as a

breakdown of the course numbers in those categories by program in Table 5.

Topic	Total # of Courses	# Required Courses	# of Special Topics Courses
EDI	60	12	2
Ethics	39	16	1
Community	39	7	2
Censorship/IF	35	6	1
Crit Lib	30	5	1
Gender/Sexuality	28	4	
Economics/Class	27	6	1
Accessibility	26	4	
Race/Racism	20	4	1
Neutrality	9	3	1
Bias/Discrimination	7	3	

Table 4. Social Justice topics with number of courses, required courses, and special topics courses.

MLIS Program	Social Justice Related Topic	Total # of courses	# of Required Courses	# of Special Topics Courses
UofA	EDI	7	1	
	Community	6	1	
	Ethics	4	2	
	Censorship/IF	3		
	Crit Lib	4	1	
	Gender/Sexuality	5	2	
	Economics/Class	5	2	
	Accessibility	2		
	Race/Racism	2	1	
	Neutrality	3	2	
	Bias/Discrimination			
UBC	EDI	11	1	
	Community	9	1	

MLIS Program	Social Justice Related Topic	Total # of courses	# of Required Courses	# of Special Topics Courses
	Ethics	6	1	
	Censorship/IF	7		
	Crit Lib	8	1	
	Gender/Sexuality	3		
	Economics/Class	7		
	Accessibility	2		
	Race/Racism	3		
	Neutrality	1		
	Bias/Discrimination	3		
Dalhousie	EDI	7	1	
	Community	6	1	
	Ethics	5	2	
	Censorship/IF	3		
	Crit Lib	3		
	Gender/Sexuality	5	1	
	Economics/Class	2		
	Accessibility	5	1	
	Race/Racism	6	1	
	Neutrality	1		
	Bias/Discrimination	1		
McGill	EDI	2		
	Community	2		
	Ethics	4	2	
	Censorship/IF	3	2	
	Crit Lib			
	Gender/Sexuality			
	Economics/Class			
	Accessibility			
	Race/Racism			
	Neutrality	1	1	

MLIS Program	Social Justice Related Topic	Total # of courses	# of Required Courses	# of Special Topics Courses
	Bias/Discrimination			
UdeMontreal	EDI	7	2	
	Community	4	2	
	Ethics	4	2	
	Censorship/IF	5	1	
	Crit Lib	3	1	
	Gender/Sexuality	2		
	Economics/Class			
	Accessibility	2	1	
	Race/Racism			
	Neutrality			
	Bias/Discrimination	1	1	
Ottawa	EDI	5	2	
	Community	1		
	Ethics	4	2	
	Censorship/IF	2	1	
	Crit Lib	3	1	
	Gender/Sexuality	1		
	Economics/Class	3	1	
	Accessibility	3	1	
	Race/Racism	1		
	Neutrality	1		
	Bias/Discrimination	1	1	
UofT	EDI	10	2	1
	Community	6	1	1
	Ethics	5	2	
	Censorship/IF	4	1	1
	Crit Lib	5	1	1
	Gender/Sexuality	7	1	

MLIS Program	Social Justice Related Topic	Total # of courses	# of Required Courses	# of Special Topics Courses
	Economics/Class	6	1	1
	Accessibility	8	1	
	Race/Racism	7	1	1
	Neutrality	1		1
	Bias/Discrimination	1	1	
Western	EDI	11	3	1
	Community	5	1	1
	Ethics	7	3	1
	Censorship/IF	8	1	
	Crit Lib	4		
	Gender/Sexuality	2		
	Economics/Class	4	2	
	Accessibility	4		
	Race/Racism	1	1	
	Neutrality	1		
	Bias/Discrimination			

Table 5. Social Justice topics with number of courses, required courses, and special topics courses, by program.

In my analysis I also noticed some trends in which kinds of courses are considering issues related to social justice. I found that 17 of the 89 courses are focused explicitly on library services and resources for children and youth, and these courses are at six of the eight programs (one at UofA, six at UBC, two at Dalhousie, two at UdeM, two at UofT, and four at Western, but none at McGill and Ottawa). This is unsurprising given the push to make children's collections more diverse and inclusive, and the resulting backlash from a conservative vocal minority. Another trend was courses on public librarianship including this kind of content, with one course each at five of the programs and two at UofT, for a total of seven courses, but none at Dalhousie or Ottawa. And I found that six courses with some social justice-related content are dedicated to collection development or management, with one course each at six programs, excepting Dalhousie or McGill. All of these courses were regular electives, none were required or special topics courses.

Discussion and Future Directions

Calls for more content in MLIS curricula focusing on social justice issues have been growing over the past decade or so, due to the deficiencies identified in the studies discussed above. As I mentioned earlier, social justice-related content is not new to Canadian MLIS curricula. The current work in this area connects with a history that I cannot fully represent here, but I will note

a selection of some contributors. Hope Olson injected feminism and critical approaches to cataloguing into her teaching at the UofA in the late 1990s.⁵⁷ Early in the 2000s, Ann Curry at UBC and Toni Samek at UofA introduced the first courses in Canadian MLIS programs specifically on the topic of intellectual freedom.⁵⁸ Vivian Howard at Dalhousie and Lynne McKechnie at Western both brought issues of equity and diversity into their courses on children and youth library services starting in the 1990s.⁵⁹

However, as neoliberal and evermore right-reaching forces of power have eroded social services, intensified wealth inequalities, and polarized peoples along race and gender lines, many argue that libraries and their workers need more education around these issues to properly prepare for handling them in their library work. Caidi, Ghaddar, and Allard echo the call of others “in calling on LIS professionals to move beyond neutrality and a liberal diversity model in their library education and practice, to increase their involvement with policy making and community work, and to develop more critical approaches in our educational and training programs.”⁶⁰ Cooke, Sweeney, and Noble assert that “teaching social justice as a topic in the curriculum is one way to begin addressing the holistic development of future information professionals. It allows students to become more engaged and results in personal growth and hopefully a transformation of thinking. Such students will be better prepared and more successful in their roles as information professionals.”⁶¹ And they conclude that “social justice integration creates opportunities for students to gain a more holistic and inclusive perspective on the relationships between people, information, and technology, with the ultimate potential of shaping a more just society.”⁶² Similarly, Roberts and Noble “consider it a fundamental necessity of LIS education to provide a thorough examination of th[e] contexts of social, economic, and political power, and often oppression, in which our students will practice in order to consider them prepared.”⁶³ According to Cooke, in 2014 there were 68 courses related to social justice and diversity across the 58 ALA-accredited MLIS programs in the US and Canada,⁶⁴ and ten years later I have found 89 courses focused on libraries (or including library topics) that are related to social justice issues in the eight ALA-accredited MLIS programs in Canada. Although our methods and focal points

⁵⁷ Hope A. Olson, “Education for Cataloging Is/As Women’s Studies,” *The Serials Librarian* 35, no. 1–2 (1998): 153–66.

⁵⁸ Toni Samek, “Introducing Intellectual Freedom Courses into the Canadian LIS Curriculum,” *Felicitier* 47, no. 1 (2001): 40.

⁵⁹ Dalhousie News, “Expanding the Classroom beyond the Lecture,” November 14, 2017. <https://www.dal.ca/news/2017/11/14/inspiring-teaching--meet-vivian-howard--recipient-of-dal-s-top-t.html>; Western University Faculty of Information & Media Studies, FIMS News. “Congratulations and Fond Farewells to Our Friends and Colleagues Lynne McKechnie, Liwen Vaughan, and Ella Young.” 2021. http://www.fims.uwo.ca/news/2021/congratulations_and_fond_farewells_to_our_friends_and_colleagues_lynne_mc_kechnie_liwen_vaughan_and_ella_young.html.

⁶⁰ Nadia Caidi, J. J. Ghaddar, and Danielle Allard, “Negotiating Borders: Librarianship and Twenty-First-Century Politics,” *The Library Quarterly* 87, no. 4 (2017): 405.

⁶¹ Nicole A. Cooke, Miriam E. Sweeney, and Safiya Umoja Noble, “Social Justice as Topic and Tool: An Attempt to Transform an LIS Curriculum and Culture,” *The Library Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (2016): 108.

⁶² Cooke, Sweeney, and Noble, “Social Justice as Topic and Tool,” 121.

⁶³ Roberts and Noble, “Empowered to Name,” 515.

⁶⁴ Nicole A. Cooke, “Counter-Storytelling in the LIS Curriculum,” in *Perspectives on Libraries as Institutions of Human Rights and Social Justice*, eds. Ursula Gorham, Natalie Greene Taylor, and Paul T. Jaeger (Bingley, England: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2016), 334.

varied to some extent, it is safe to conclude that there has been a significant increase in this kind of content within the Canadian MLIS landscape, but there remains much work to be done.

In light of Roberts' and Noble's argument that all courses in LIS education could benefit from social responsibility and EDI content and frameworks,⁶⁵ another important consideration is to what extent this content is integrated across the curricula: how many distinct courses are covering it; how much of it is taught in required courses versus electives; and are there dedicated courses focused on these topics, or is it included in more general courses? Of the 89 courses I looked at across the eight programs, there were six library courses (three at Western, one of which is required, two at UBC, and one at UdeM) that only included 1 category from my findings, and 82 courses that included two or more of these topic categories. This means that a significant majority of the courses with content related to social justice issues cover more than one of those issues, which I interpret as a positive trend that multiple of these topics are covered to some extent across many courses, although it could result in some topics not getting covered in great depth. And the problem identified by previous studies remains, which is that most of the courses with this content are electives (72) rather than required (17). A group of Canadian MLIS students have called for social justice content to be required in MLIS programs, instead of covered sporadically, in order to reach all students, while adding that it should be incorporated with appropriate and meaningful depth and breadth to avoid treating it as an "add-on."⁶⁶ Similarly, Dali and Caidi had a class in which a group of students called for courses on diversity to be included in the required curriculum.⁶⁷ Cooke also asserts that diversity content should be required in MLIS education and "should be embedded naturally across the curriculum," in a way that does not tokenize it, but instead "readings and materials by scholars of color, guest speakers of color, a focus on diverse populations, etc., should be included throughout course syllabi no matter the course content."⁶⁸

These points also relate to questions about courses dedicated specifically to these kinds of topics. Patin et al. have raised concerns about siloing equity-related topics into their own courses, especially if they are only elective courses,⁶⁹ but Cooke also sees value in having courses dedicated to such topics, as they can "allow students to dig deeper into issues of diversity and provide an opportunity to form opinions and ideas over an extended period of time."⁷⁰ In the Canadian MLIS landscape I found that, of the 89 library courses, these topics were represented by 25 dedicated courses across six of the eight programs: three at UofA; four at UBC; three at Dalhousie; two at Ottawa; six at UofT (including one required course and one special topics course); and six at Western (including one special topics course). That means there are 64 courses that include this kind of content and/or perspective in more general topics, and there are

⁶⁵ Roberts and Noble, "Empowered to Name," 519.

⁶⁶ Davin Helkenberg et al., "Education for the Common Good: A Student Perspective on Including Social Justice in LIS Education," *Journal of Education for Library & Information Science* 59, no. 4 (2018): 267.

⁶⁷ Keren Dali and Nadia Caidi, "Diversity by Design," in *Humanizing LIS Education and Practice*, eds. Keren Dali and Nadia Caidi (London: Routledge, 2020), 14-15.

⁶⁸ Cooke, "Creating Mirrors and Doors," 38.

⁶⁹ Beth Patin et al., "The Mis-Education of the Librarian: Addressing Curricular Injustice in the LIS Classroom through Social Justice Pedagogy," in *Social Justice Design and Implementation in Library and Information Science*, ed. Bharat Mehra (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 183.

⁷⁰ Cooke, "Creating Mirrors and Doors," 39.

25 course opportunities for more focused engagement with issues related to social justice, although only one that is offered as part of the required or core offerings, and apparently none at McGill or UdeM. It is good to see that only two of the 25 dedicated courses are offered as special topics, so that the majority are part of the regular curricula. Overall, these findings align with Cooke's recommendation that both approaches of general integration and dedicated courses be implemented,⁷¹ but it does not go as far as the group of Canadian MLIS students would like to see, which is either approach being required content for all MLIS students.⁷²

An important factor that I did not explore but is inextricably connected to the breadth and depth of coverage of social justice topics in MLIS curricula, is faculty capacity. The programs need faculty who have the knowledge and skills to teach this content in effective and responsible ways, but according to Noble et al., work related to social justice is often under-valued in LIS and done by members of marginalized social groups.⁷³ Cooke suggests that these kinds of courses are often taught by sessional/adjunct instructors or doctoral students, and notes that "it is hard work teaching about racism, social justice, etc., especially in LIS which is characteristically known as a white and female field, and it's even harder to teach these topics when *I* am typically the only person of color in the classroom." (emphasis in original)⁷⁴ Librarianship in North America has always been a white-dominated profession, and the same is true for LIS education.⁷⁵ There have been a variety of calls and efforts made in recent years to diversify MLIS faculty and student bodies to work toward a social justice goal of diversifying the LIS professions. Patin et al. offer that "to stop curriculum injustice and also the prevailing whiteness of the space, we need the recruitment of diverse faculty and the inclusion of diverse faculty on curriculum committees, who can bring the invisible and unconscious whiteness of our education system to the surface."⁷⁶ While that is true, and it is important to apply an equity lens in recruitment, retention, and curriculum development in order to interrogate and avoid perpetuating white supremacy, Roberts and Noble also raise an important rejection of "tendencies to view diversity and underrepresentation as a strict biological construction, such that simply hiring diverse faculty based on biological rather than epistemological and action-oriented commitments to diversity

⁷¹ Cooke, "Creating Mirrors and Doors," 39.

⁷² Helkenberg et al., "Education for the Common Good," 267.

⁷³ Safiya Umoja Noble, et al., "Changing Course: Collaborative Reflections of Teaching/Taking 'Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Information Professions,'" *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 55 no. 3 (2014), 213.

⁷⁴ Cooke, "Counter-Storytelling," 335, 332.

⁷⁵ There has been a lot of excellent scholarship done on the problems of whiteness and racism within libraries, of which here is a small selection: Todd Honma, "Trippin' Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in Library and Information Studies," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2005); Angela Galvan, "Soliciting Performance, Hiding Bias: Whiteness and Librarianship," *In the Library With The Lead Pipe*, June 3, 2015; April Hathcock, "White Librarianship in Blackface: Diversity Initiatives in LIS," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, October 7, 2015; Gina Schlesselman-Tarango, ed. *Topographies of Whiteness: Mapping Whiteness in Library and Information Science*, (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2017); David James Hudson, "On 'Diversity' as Anti-Racism in Library and Information Studies: A Critique," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 1(2017). For more references, please see: Karla J. Strand, "Disrupting Whiteness in Libraries and Librarianship: A Reading List," The Office of the Gender and Women's Studies Librarian, 2019, <https://www.library.wisc.edu/gwslibrarian/bibliographies/disrupting-whiteness-in-libraries/>.

⁷⁶ Patin et al., "The Mis-Education of the Librarian," 183.

would be viewed as having ‘done enough.’”⁷⁷ Similarly, Cooke, Sweeney, and Noble emphasize the need to “take care not to isolate a particular group, and shift the responsibility of confronting/talking about racism from people of color to the entire community,” and they add that integrating social justice and EDI “into the fabric of LIS culture” will reduce the burdens on racialized faculty and students, thereby helping diversification efforts in recruitment and retention.⁷⁸ Thus, it is crucial for more—and more tenured—faculty in MLIS programs to do the work necessary to meaningfully develop their competencies and commitments in teaching about social justice issues in LIS to enhance the diversification of the field and to better help students cultivate critical approaches and social justice orientations in their future library work.

If Canadian MLIS programs can shift toward greater integration of social justice into their curricula, with more faculty teaching more social justice issues in more—hopefully required—courses, they must do so explicitly and unequivocally in order to challenge diluted and institutionalized diversity, as well as passivity and neutrality in LIS. As Cooke et al. assert, social justice in LIS should “focus on the broader social, historical, and economic contexts in which experiences ranging from oppression to marginalization occur and that are tantamount to understanding racial, gender, class, and power formations in both the local and global contexts. These are often the conditions and contexts in which many librarians and information professionals find themselves living and working.”⁷⁹ This kind of education requires that students engage with critical theoretical frameworks to establish a foundation that informs their practical work, thereby developing “personal praxes grounded in a solid understanding of power and social structures.”⁸⁰ Of course, practical learning experiences are also necessary for students to understand their roles and impacts as workers within libraries and communities, as well as the institutional functions and how to work with and against them toward theory- and community-informed social justice goals. If, as Cooke argues, “the goal is to encourage inclusive and caring information professionals who engage in critical reflection and practice,”⁸¹ Canadian MLIS education needs to focus on social justice education for the future of library workers.

Appendix A. Course Information

[This spreadsheet](#) shows the full list of the course titles (and instructor names) that I considered, including those without sufficient information for analysis.

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⁷⁷ Roberts and Noble, “Empowered to Name,” 517-518.

⁷⁸ Cooke, Sweeney, and Noble, “Social Justice as Topic and Tool,” 110, 107.

⁷⁹ Cooke, Sweeney, and Noble, “Social Justice as Topic and Tool,” 116.

⁸⁰ Gibson, Hughes-Hassell, and Threats, “Critical Race Theory in the LIS Curriculum,” 64.

⁸¹ Cooke, “Creating Mirrors and Doors,” 43-44.

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