Walk It Like We Talk It:

Library Programming for Black Student Engagement

Angel Truesdale, Adreonna Bennett, Randi Beem, Christin Lampkowski, Natalie Ornat, and Oliva Patterson[*]

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC) is an urban research university located in Charlotte, North Carolina. The J. Murrey Atkins Library is a mid-sized academic library on the campus of UNCC with one satellite library, Charles C. Hight Library, which is housed in the College of Arts & Architecture. The library is divided into five units: Public Services, Special Collections & University Archives, Collection Services, Digital Scholarship and Innovation, and Administration. UNC Charlotte has approximately 26,000 students, with about 20,000 undergraduates and 6,000 graduate students. As an urban research university, UNCC has one of the most diverse student populations in the University of North Carolina system, despite being a predominantly white institution. In 2022, UNC Charlotte was ranked by *Issues in Higher Education* as number one in North Carolina and number 21 in the nation for graduating African American students with bachelor's degrees.[1]

---

[*] Positionality statement: The first and second authors of the piece identify as Black and have dedicated their careers at UNC Charlotte to uplift and address concerns of BIPOC students. As Black librarians primarily living, working, and attending predominantly white institutions (PWIs) in the South, we have a unique perspective on what BIPOC students need and should expect from their institutions. All six authors have served on the library's Student Engagement Committee, which aspires to create inclusive programming, and most of the authors have also served on the library's Diversity and Inclusion Committee. We acknowledge that the majority of the authors are white women whose implicit biases and privilege can lead to erroneous assumptions and blind spots.

Atkins Library employees have dedicated time and effort to creating an inclusive environment for students and, more recently, Black students through targeted initiatives. These experiences are largely student-led, facilitating collaborative learning and engagement opportunities. While these events are primarily organized by the library's Student Engagement Committee, this student-driven programming philosophy allows for impactful events that center student voices.

Our Commitment: Diversity and Inclusion Committee

In 2017, Atkins Library created a Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Committee with members from all library units. This committee supports diversity and inclusion efforts via internal and external programming and soon looked at library recruitment, hiring, and retention practices. In 2020, to solidify the library's intention to be a welcoming environment for the multitude of identities on UNC Charlotte's campus and to challenge Atkins employees to acknowledge and support those identities, the D&I Committee created the following diversity statement:

> Atkins Library is committed to cultivating an inclusive environment where everyone feels welcome and differences are valued and respected. We embrace and support the spectrum of human and social identities and strive to create and maintain equity for all employees and users.[2]

The D&I Committee also works to create initiatives, training, and programming on diverse topics for all library employees, including student workers. Past topics have included invisible disabilities, neurodivergence, issues affecting BIPOC communities, classism, etc. While there have been numerous kinds of programming and training, the two key programs are "The More You Know," a short presentation at monthly all-employee meetings, and "Conversations that Matter," which is a longer group discussion. These programs help library employees increase their awareness of and become more comfortable talking about inclusivity, especially when working with students of various identities.

Dedication in Action: Student Engagement Committee

Content warning: The second paragraph of the following section briefly recounts a tragic shooting that occurred on the authors' campus.

In the evergreen effort to support student success, many academic libraries are build-ing programs to engage students in fun and innovative ways. Beyond addressing an array of academic needs, library employees are increasingly working to support broader student wellness, especially in the areas of community building and stress relief. Formed in the fall of 2019, Atkins Library developed a Student Engagement Committee dedicated to planning, coordinating, and promoting student-centered activities and events in the library.

While the advent of this committee follows a trend of academic libraries hosting study breaks and leisure programs, we would be ignoring a foundational, albeit painful, part of the committee's story if we did not share the role that a tragic campus event had in shaping this initiative. On April 30, 2019, UNC Charlotte was the site of a mass shooting, joining an ever-growing list of schools terrorized by gun violence in this country. In an academic building next to the campus library, a former student opened fire on a classroom of students giving their final presentations for the semester, murdering two students and injuring four others. When the shooting occurred, the world briefly turned upside down for those on campus. An ensuing lockdown and miscommunication on the shooter's loca-tion led to moments of panic, flight, and hiding. For the hundreds of students studying in the library at the time, inaccurate reports of the shooter entering the library caused students to abandon their belongings and immediately seek shelter in whatever hiding spot they could find. As authorities entered the library to end the lockdown, students and employees who were sheltering in the building were confronted by armed SWAT teams and cleared of the space. In the wake of the panic and uncertainty, students left behind backpacks, shoes, half-eaten bagels, and cell phones. All final exams were canceled, and a semester abruptly ended with students leaving for the summer.

As library employees grieved and processed the trauma of that day, we spent that summer reckoning with how to reorient ourselves to the library—a space that, for many, was now a site connected with feelings of fear and pain. As we all worked through this process of healing and making the library our own again, many of us began to wonder how we would be able to support students through this same process. With the shoot-ing occurring on the last day of classes and finals subsequently canceled, most students simply left campus. For many students, their last experience with the library was hearing false rumors that the library was the site of a shooting, seeing news coverage that showed a front library door shattered by a police team, or retrieving their abandoned belongings on the morning after the shooting. We were confronted with two questions: How do we redefine the library as a place of safety when it was so recently a site of panic? How do we welcome students back to campus when their last memories of it are tied to violence?

Wrestling with these questions, a small group of librarians met to develop a set of programming for the beginning of the academic year that would aim to rebuild feelings of safety and positivity within the library space. We pulled out large whiteboards for students to answer silly questions about their summer vacations, built a wall of positive

vibes for students to contribute to, planned study breaks in our Makerspace, and brought back our therapy dogs. This program planning led to the development of an ongoing Student Engagement Committee to continue building these feelings of belonging and fun in the library.

Committee members from all corners of the library work each semester to build free programming, such as study breaks, reading challenges, and trivia nights. Two of our most popular programs bookend the semester: Gold Rush and De-Stress for Success. At the start of each semester, we host informational tabling sessions, a program we call Gold Rush, to engage with new students. Not only do students receive valuable information about our library space and services, but they can also grab a quick snack, pet one of our therapy dogs, and get to know faces from around the library. As the semester winds down and finals begin, we offer a set of programs aimed at giving students a fun study break and opportunities for relaxation called De-Stress for Success. For the de-stress event, we transform our Visualization Lab into a Recharge Room, where students can zone out with some relaxing music and snacks, work on a puzzle, or mindlessly color. This week has expanded to include meditation sessions, a late night of donuts and coffee party, and frequent visits by our library therapy dogs.

Since its inception, this committee has sought to take a holistic approach to student programming, not only in the types of programs offered but also in the co-development of events with students, campus, and community partners. With guidance from the library's new diversity statement, the Student Engagement Committee took an active role in co-developing student programming that would not just cultivate an inclusive environment but also actively create spaces and opportunities for Black students to connect and learn about the legacy of Black achievement at UNC Charlotte.

Literature Review

Higher education has a particular history of exclusion and oppression, and academic libraries are no exception. The vast majority of higher education operates on a banking model of education, a term coined by Paulo Freire in his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing."[3] Freire points to a more fluid, reciprocal relationship, where everyone is both student and teacher—embracing the idea that there is not a fixed amount of knowledge to impart, but rather infinite knowledge to share.[4]

Counter models of education, such as critical pedagogy, funds of knowledge, asset-based pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy, have existed for decades and are often practiced by educators who hold minoritized identities. In acknowledging the inherent power imbalance, hegemony, and oppression in the banking model, these alternative

models utilize concepts such as critical race theory to relocate the classroom as a site of liberation. Indeed, writing about her childhood education experience in *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks stated, "That shift from beloved, all-black schools to white schools where black students were always seen as interlopers, as not really belonging, taught me the difference between education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination."[5] Then reflecting on her college experience at a PWI (predominantly white institution), hooks wrote, "The university and the classroom began to feel more like a prison, a place of punishment and confinement rather than a place of promise and possibility."[6] In this writing, hooks demonstrates that the banking model of education is dehumanizing, constrictive, and ultimately punishing for students, particularly those who do not fit the hegemonic standard.

Within the context of higher education, the banking model is predicated on an assumed deficit in students' knowledge, particularly BIPOC, low-income, and/or first-generation college students.[7] Although these marginalized students are the targets of deficit thinking, the perpetrating instructors are often unwilling to locate the systemic and institutional oppression that shapes this injustice. Victim to neoliberal ideals of meritocracy, such instructors insist that any student can succeed, dependent on their grit and presence of a growth mindset.[8] As noted by Dudley-Maring, "No sophisticated analysis is required to explain the powerful appeal of a deficit model that blames *them*, and not *us*, over a complex, institutional analysis in which we all share some responsibility."[9] In stark contrast to the banking model and deficit thinking, funds of knowledge offers an alternative approach to pedagogical praxis in which students are co-creators of knowledge rather than proverbial empty piggy banks ready to be filled with instructors' knowledge. Building off this capitalistic metaphor, Rodriguez explains, "…the use-value of *funds* of knowledge (i.e., community developed/transmitted knowledge) challenges the selective and dominant power of exchange-value knowledge (i.e., cultural capital, which reflects and reproduces capitalistic principles and power structures)."[10]

A core tenet of funds of knowledge is to value students' lived experiences and to provide space and opportunities to share and validate that knowledge. One method of praxis is the use of counter-storytelling or counter-narratives, in which marginalized students are able to tell their own stories, which are often at odds with the hegemonic canon of higher education.[11] As outlined in the Association for College & Research Libraries' *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, authority is constructed and contextual, and educators must acknowledge students' lived experiences and expertise.[12] González writes, "However, the ultimate border—the border between knowledge and power—can be crossed only when educational institutions no longer reify culture, when lived experiences become validated as a source of knowledge, and when the process of how knowledge is constructed and translated between groups located within nonsymmetrical relations of power is questioned."[13] By encouraging students to share their inherent knowledge via counter-storytelling, counter-narratives, or a variety of other means, educators

cede some of the power that is culturally bestowed upon them and create space for a more balanced classroom environment.

Community engagement is another aspect of praxis that must be interrogated and implemented intentionally. Not dissimilar to the banking model of education discussed above, a common model of student engagement in academic libraries frames students as a separate, outside group to occasionally consult or react to. Instead, Blake, Aston, and Grayson propose a shift to understanding students as an integral part of the library, to "place the Library within the community, instead of framing the community as an outside group or other with which to engage."[14] Referring to a consultation model in which "students 'giv[e]' ideas or opinions for the staff to receive and, later, assess and prioritise," Blake et al. assert that this establishes a one-way relationship, "separat[ing] students out as stakeholders/others, as a community the library must seek out, instead of one based on a reciprocal relationship."[15]

The Public Involvement Continuum graphic, developed as part of the Community-Led Libraries Toolkit, which was created by the Canadian government-funded Working Together Project, provides an excellent overview of the levels of engagement libraries can have with their communities.[16] Ranging from giving information to partnering or collaborating, it demonstrates that truly meaningful engagement is, in fact, collaboration. Events, programs, and resources should enable students to be co-creators, just as in the classroom.

While Critical Librarianship seeks to challenge the power and privilege inherent in libraries,[17] many have pointed out the shortfalls of critical librarianship, which puts the burden of educating those in power (the oppressor) onto the oppressed.[18] Critical Librarianship falls short on countering system issues like anti-Black racism, which "stems from anti-Blackness, a two part concept involving dehumanizing—or stripping Blackness of value—and systematically marginalizing Black bodied people."[19] One way to counter anti-Blackness is to foster the sense of belonging that Black students often lack in higher education institutions. In their study, McDougal et al. found that a majority (51 percent) of Black students found a kind of community in spaces with other Black students that they did not find with non-Black students. Respondents appreciated "organizations and spaces that allow them to meet more Black students."[20] Rather than being the only student in a mostly white class to speak to the Black experience, Black spaces allowed for more welcoming engagement with peers. Not only is it important to have physical and social spaces for Black students, it is equally important and impactful to have collections—particularly archival collections—that document Black students and scholars. Gosselar emphasizes how university archivists have a key role to play in creating a sense of belonging and countering institutional racism by preserving the collections of Black alumni and making them accessible.[21]

There is a culture and history of anti-Blackness in the library profession that we hope to counter. "Libraries remain almost 90% white and riddled with power imbalances."[22] Further, libraries and LIS programs often repudiate more ethnically marginalized

communities that uphold a system of oppression.[23] This renders the profession immobilized by whiteness.[24] When libraries were segregated, underfunded Black libraries and communities created their own programs that built literacy and information systems.[25] Ossom-Williamson et al. outline that libraries often create performative statements, utilize digital tools (LibGuides, reading lists, etc.), and create diversity committees with little to no measures to show their commitment in action.[26] By collaborating in the library to build collectives, open spaces for belonging and agency, and measures to make collections/services more accessible, our engagement opportunities described below will hopefully subvert institutional norms that disenfranchise Black students.

The Programs

Engaging Black Students: The Black Read

In 2020, Atkins Library hosted a program for Black History Month entitled "The Black Read: Reading and Discussion Group." The goal of the event was to engage with Black-led student groups to coordinate a program by them and for them while also incorporating library resources. Those resources included Special Collections, space to research the history of Black activism on campus, and further readings on the Black experience. A member of the Student Engagement Committee reached out to several Black-identified student groups through a campus directory. The initial outreach email listed ways that the library could partner with the groups to host a program, further explaining that they would be able to make major decisions, while a Black librarian would offer suggestions on what the library could do in return. After the initial emails, two student groups accepted the invitation and worked to formulate some ideas. This was a true collaboration where library materials were suggested and the students devised a plan to read from different texts. The main organizer and the Student Engagement Committee came up with the event title and description while the students started to think about what passages they wanted to read. Our only requirement was that the pieces had to be authored by a Black individual. The Special Collections archivists developed a list of rare books and University Archives materials that would be provided for students to read during the program.

The event occurred in the Special Collections Reading Room and was catered to decrease barriers to attendance. It was refreshing to hear that both student groups had overlapping members and that the respective leadership was really excited to host the program. The two groups mutually decided to hold the event in the evening to allow for more students to attend and to make it an informal gathering. The program started with some simple introductions and an open invitation to grab refreshments. After some mingling and conversation, everyone started to come back together to talk about the different items that were pulled from the University Archives and Rare Book collections and any selections that the students made on their own. It was made clear throughout the

event that there was room for discussion after every piece and that there was no expec-tation for everyone to speak or participate. Students were also reminded that librarians were available to share library materials, but they could shape how the event transpired.

One of the Black Student Union leaders was astounded that the library had an orig-inal copy of the "10 Demands to the College Administration" brought forth by the Black Caucus of UNC Charlotte (the precursor to our current Black Student Union). As he began to read the text out loud, everyone seemed empowered by the words. The discus-sion afterward centered on how we have simultaneously come so far yet still fallen short of addressing Black culture in higher education since the 1960s. After looking further at Black Student Union materials, the discussion shifted to how the library can assist the student organization by archiving their experiences and how the library could help them organize and support their community archive. Other pieces from the archive that the program explored included a speech made on the UNCC campus by Kwame Ture in 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from the Birmingham City Jail*, and excerpts from Phillis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*.

As the Student Engagement Committee began to plan for Black History Month for 2022, the stimulating discussion from the 2020 event resonated with previous organizers. A small group met to update outreach efforts and several student groups were contacted to see if they would be interested in participating. The program format was well-established, but the flexibility to accommodate student or library personnel ideas were available. Orig-inally planned as a hybrid event and then transitioned to virtual, the 2022 iteration of The Black Read included a faculty facilitator. Additional changes included targeted outreach to Black Greek letter organizations, inviting Black alumni, encouraging participants to read from their own material, and giving away gift cards to two local Black-owned bookstores to student participants.

The students for this session read a selection of original poetry as well as more well-known works, such as *The People Have to Have the Power* by Fred Hampton, *I Am Not Your Negro* by James Baldwin, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf: A Choreopoem* by Ntozake Shange, and "I Look at the World" by Langston Hughes. The faculty facilitator framed introductions and discussions after each piece was recited and assisted with sharing reflections on the works. One of the Black bookstore owners shared her enthusiasm for the opportunity to connect with students, the impor-tance of highlighting Black voices at a time such as this, and how building community is restorative and can increase resilience.

These events seek to break down the barriers of power that typically exist within a library or an archive. Using the format of open readings allows students to take the lead with these programs and for us to see culturally sustaining pedagogy in action. Through this format, we provided students with the opportunity to steer the conversation and bring their own knowledge to the classroom and encourage them to create space for their own lived experiences. While primary sources and space were provided for The Black Read, the

students were responsible for building momentum for conversation between each other to reflect on their experience at a predominantly white institution, question the power dynamics that past students have disrupted, and see ways in which they too can take on the power dynamics they experience today.

The first The Black Read event was about connecting students to Black history and Black campus activism through the archives and other library resources; the second event elevated those themes by concentrating on building collectives and utilizing spaces and places, such as the library, to accomplish that goal. The Black Read can be a model that can be applied to other student-centric programs, especially those that are culturally and ethically focused. There are other programs highlighted next that speak to Atkins Library's commitment to diverse academic library programming.

Activism and Civic Engagement: 49ers Make Good Trouble

Another program that stemmed from efforts to support the library's ongoing diversity and inclusion efforts and provide opportunities for students to critically engage with their campus community occurred in the lead-up to the 2020 general election. UNCC is a campus with a rich history of social and political activism aimed at pushing for change on both a local and national level. From civil rights protesters of the 1960s, anti-war proponents of the 1970s, LGBTQ activists of the 1980s, and Black Lives Matter organizers of 2020, UNC Charlotte students and faculty have a rich tradition of taking on injustice and making what congressman and civil rights activist John Lewis would call "good trouble." The 49ers Make Good Trouble event was developed in collaboration with the local public library system to engage UNCC students in the political process and celebrate diverse voices in civic literacy and community activism. This event featured a panel of campus activists and local leaders, led by Charlotte City Council member Braxton Winston, to discuss how they pushed for positive change in their communities and ways that energy could be harnessed for the 2020 election.

The program began with our Instruction Archivist telling the story of the Black Student Union protests in the late 1960s. These protests occurred as a result of the Black Student Caucus of UNC Charlotte seeking official recognition from the University and the Student Government Association. These protests served as a way to build strength for the Black students on campus, a small group of only twelve students that was mobilized due to their denial of holding a vigil. The group also built the momentum of "good trouble" on campus and created a variety of materials that communicated their message from a newsletter called *The Utter Truth* to the "10 Demands." During this presentation, the archivist spoke about the protests as a starting point for campus activism and reminded present-day students that our campus has always been one that is politically active. After this presentation, local City Council member Braxton Winston began the panel that focused on civil engagement. This panel featured multiple students, including the student body president, and politically active professors. The panel was moderated by the then-current

president of the Black Student Union who elevated them to a position of authority in the event. The panel was held in the week leading up to the North Carolina voter registration deadline, giving us a valuable opportunity to remind students to register to vote and build their excitement to participate in the upcoming election.

The panel was incredibly successful at opening the dialogue about activism around gun control, voting, and civic engagement. The panel was also well-attended and the answers by the panelists encouraged civic engagement as the best way to push for change. Many of our panel members began their political activism decades ago, allowing students to see how the fight for justice is lifelong and that being politically engaged is one effective way to usher in change. We sought to use this event as a way to engage students in civic discussion, voting, and how the changes they want to see happen in the future can start at the ballot box.

A History of Violence: Wilmington on Fire

Also in the fall of 2020, Atkins Library participated in an ongoing series of campus-wide programs where deans of each college and academic unit hosted a film screening and discussion. The library selected *Wilmington on Fire*, a documentary on the 1898 Wilmington Massacre, which was a brutal attack by a politically backed white militia on the thriving Black community in Wilmington, North Carolina. This racial terror event is considered to be one of the few examples of a coup against a local government. While this program was campus-wide and meant to engage every member of the community, we saw this as a way to engage with students about the history of violence against Black people in North Carolina. A small planning committee was formed that included individuals from the D&I Committee, Student Engagement Committee, and Outreach and Events Committee. Organizers of the event identified the film, acquired the licensing rights, paid an honorarium to the Black filmmaker, and organized a panel for the moderated discussion. The event asked participants to watch the film individually and attend a live Zoom program that was recorded and shared later.[27] The program included a presentation with materials from our Special Collections, a discussion between the Black director and a Black Film Studies professor, and ended with a panel made up of a community archivist/activist and Black faculty members. The panel reinforced a commitment to antiracist pedagogy and emphasized liberation through education. The film connected the audience to local history and a local Black filmmaker, showed how Black people archive and practice documentary, and highlighted Black faculty in Film Studies along with other humanities disciplines.

Asynchronous Engagement: Guess Who Activity

Another program that sought to engage Black students was our very own version of the game Guess Who? This classic board game forces players to ask questions and receive clues in order to guess the identity of the other player's selected individual. Reimagined as a

Black History Month program, this game highlighted notable Black figures from history such as Maya Angelou, Ruby Bridges, and Elijah McCoy. Set up at a table near the library's front entrance, students could take turns hearing the accomplishments of specific individuals and then guess their identity. Whether a student answered the questions correctly or not, they were encouraged to grab a snack to celebrate their participation.

Our next iteration of this game was presented virtually and featured local Black Charlotteans whose legacy helped to shape Charlotte and North Carolina. We developed social media posts to highlight each figure, with each post sharing an image of the individual pulled from university or local archives and a short summary of their impact on the local community. Social media followers were encouraged to make their guesses in the comment section and then check out our Guess Who? Black History Month Edition Resource Guide to see the correct answers and learn more about each person.[28] Our goal was to engage beyond normal avenues, allowing students to learn through gamification. Both iterations of this program were inspired by a Black teacher who originally created a Black History Month: Guess the Hero game on a teaching resources website.[29]

Asynchronous Engagement: Special Collections Social Media

Another opportunity for asynchronous engagement occurred on the Special Collections social media account, @cltspeccoll. To better spread awareness of our collections by and about local African Americans, a month-long campaign was initiated in February to celebrate Black History Month. This engagement not only included posts about our digitized photographs, manuscript documents, and videos of our rare books but also Trivia Tuesdays, where students could answer questions about local Black history figures such as Vi Lyles, Fred Alexander, and Bertha Maxwell Roddey. The posts with the most interaction were from our university archives. One highlighted the Black Student Union's history and activities over the years. The other brought attention to a rather unique part of our collection: video yearbooks. During the 1990s, UNCC opted for video yearbooks instead of print, and in one of these videos was a compilation of National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) fraternities and sororities participating in a step show. Students and alumni responded to the content and shared it on their own social media platforms. It was also through this interaction that an alumni pointed out that the first Greek letter organization founded on campus was an NPHC chapter, emphasizing the shared nature of knowledge and how although the archive preserves this history, it truly belongs to those who lived it. This and other programs show the iterative approach taken when planning events to engage with students. Just as equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice work require reflection and adjustment in approaches, we strived to evaluate and modify our engagement activities while knowing there is always more work to do.

Summary of Impact

Assessing Impact

Many of our events reached a significant number of participants: 49ers Make Good Trouble had thirty live attendees, Wilmington on Fire had eighty-five live participants as well as 102 views on YouTube, and The Guess Who active LibGuide has garnered 112 views. The Black Read had lower participation with six attendees in 2020 and nine in 2022; while these numbers are small, they do not fully reflect the impact of the program, which can be measured in multiple ways.

Traditional forms of assessment, such as quantitative analysis of attendance or formalized feedback forms, are in direct opposition to the goals of these programs. Assessing DEI in academic libraries and other LIS environments is notoriously difficult, and anything that has come close lacks the necessary nuance.[30] Fostering a sense of belonging goes beyond simply capturing participation numbers. Belonging can be built with two or 200 people present. Similarly, requesting or requiring formalized feedback via surveys or evaluations can devalue the whole personhood of students by causing them to feel assessed or used as data points.[31] Additionally, we assert that traditional forms of assessment can be at odds with antiracist work, which is continuous and ongoing rather than one-and-done. With programs created to provide a space for students to be present and feel seen, academic libraries can be more critical and approach students with care and belonging.

Responses to traditional qualitative assessment tools, such as exit surveys, are not individualized and are therefore insignificant when using an equity lens because lived experiences are deeply personal and success should not only be measured by those forms of qualitative assessment.[32] Rather than gauging impact via participant number or formalized feedback, an observational approach that noted verbal and non-verbal feedback from students at these events was taken. It was discovered that witnessing participant conversations or unprompted sharing of impact in the moment is more valuable than a written evaluation because the live engagement is more authentic and substantive. While there are many approaches to evaluating programs, our philosophy is to take an informal qualitative analysis approach through observable impact gathered from participant and employee reflections.

The Black Read: Impact on Students and Participants

Our principal event, The Black Read, sought to garner deeper engagement with students during both in-person and virtual versions. The event invited students to share their stories and engage in a dialogue rather than only absorbing information presented to them. The event lends itself to require participation and is student-centered at its core. The impact is immediately observed through the conversations between participants on the material and how it relates to them and their lived experiences.

Students who won gift cards from locally owned Black bookstores in 2022's The Black Read felt such appreciation for the inclusion of these businesses in our program and the chance to purchase material from them. When students were notified that they had been randomly selected as gift card recipients, they immediately responded with acceptance and excitement. One of the owners was able to speak for a short time during the event and offered ways to connect with Black literature out in the community. One student was even moved to aspire to open their own business that spoke to their creative endeavors. Additionally, in the second version of The Black Read, we made an intentional decision to include a Black faculty member with a focus on Black literature. This brought expertise into the room and a way to connect student's own creative works with both the literature they read and accompanying stories of the Black creators. The faculty member deconstructed their role in the session by communicating that they would only be there to facilitate and inspire discussion and reflection. Both the faculty member and bookstore owner, our very own Black literature advocates, allowed students to connect with both campus and community resources in ways that were collaborative and informal.

As we started to collaborate more with Black student groups, we were able to make connections about the importance of collecting Black student group materials. Part of the university archives' mission is to include students in the stewardship of their organizational records. During a meeting with leadership of the Black Student Union (BSU), materials related to the creation of the student groups within the records of the then-Chancellor Colvard and university founder Bonnie Cone live within the university archives. Through this experience, BSU leadership was able to see their history unfold throughout the decades and archivists were able to advise them on future archiving of their current records.

Future Engagement and Further Discussion

We fully acknowledge that our programs need improvement and can sometimes be performative rather than transformative. Through this work of developing programming for Black students and highlighting stories, accomplishments, and legacies of our local Black community, we hope to chip away at the pervasive whiteness of our own academic library and de-center white perspectives in our practice. The lived experience of the two Black authors of the piece, shared below, has also guided this work.

> Adreonna Bennett — As a Black early career librarian/archivist being involved in and creating programs specifically for Black students gives me immense joy. The Akan term "Sankofa" has served as a guiding principle in the work that I do. During my time as an undergrad at a predominantly white institution, I remember how much it meant having people that looked like me and could relate to me invested in my success. A sense of belonging is an integral component in student

success, so hopefully continuing to engage Black students with targeted programming and providing them with spaces to connect with each other will cultivate an environment for growth.

Angel Truesdale — As a Black librarian who has transitioned from a public library to an academic library, programs that address and engage Black audiences aren't novel to my professional experience. When I first started at Atkins Library, I encountered an incredulous student who was surprised to see a Black librarian at the research help desk, and this inspired me to look deeper at our library and the environment we have created for our diverse student population. We are surrounded by whiteness at work (knowledge workers, collections, decor, etc.) and very little physical/visible commitments to serving our BIPOC students. I came in with extensive public library programming experience and wanted to capitalize on programs to engage and uplift BIPOC students. Through our programs, I hope students feel more agency, connect with BIPOC faculty, and build collaborative spaces; our team hopes to be just ONE place on campus where they can "see and feel" that they are seen and heard. This in turn enriches my work as a librarian and as someone that has several intersecting marginalized identities.

This knowledge also informs our work going forward. Beyond designing programming to center Black experiences, the library is working to investigate how our various spaces, collections, and services are impacting Black students. The invisible normativity of whiteness in libraries bleeds into the design, acquisition, and development of the three aforementioned pillars of libraries, creating the potential for a hostile library experience for Black students.

In the fall of 2021, Atkins Library launched a study to better understand the needs and experiences of Black students to inform improvements to our library services. Investigators used focus groups and Photovoice to uncover these experiences, paying particular attention to whether Black students viewed the library as safe, welcoming, and inclusive. Participants, all of whom identified as Black or African American students, shared that they greatly valued many things that the library provides, but they sometimes felt that the library did not value them in the same way. They pointed to characteristics that reinforce white dominance, including art that valorizes colonialism, the invisibility of historical figures of color, book displays that stereotype the "Black experience," and other library users making them feel unwelcome by staring. While these things may be unnoticed by some, they otherize Black students, creating unjust barriers between them and library services. This study follows the important work that library workers are doing at other predominantly white institutions, such as Duke University[33] and Ohio State University,[34] to listen to the experiences of Black students and redress white dominance in their libraries.

Conversations within the library about study findings, recommendations, and further research are still forthcoming.

We hope that information from our Black student experience study as well as the models created through events like The Black Read can inform our activities going forward. Connections have been made with a faculty member interested in holding Hispanic Heritage Month programs in the library. Following our Black Read model, we shared ways the library could support the faculty member's program ideas, but they have been the guiding force in determining what these programs will look like. We continue to ask, "What does deep engagement look like for the students we serve?" One answer is empowering students to design and lead their own events.

While the library can serve as a physical and digital space for events and support efforts by providing resources, we want groups to self-determine what their event will look like to create experiences that feel restorative. As bell hooks stated, "Education can only be liberatory when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labor."[35] Beyond providing a platform and connecting students to resources, we want to intentionally strip authority away from the library and shift power to the students, so they own and have agency in the systems at institutions. White supremacy is maintained and intentional by design, and we as library workers should disrupt by intention. We want to BE about it and not just talk about it. So, the path we are on, and we hope others join, will be to walk it like we talk it.

Appendix A. Guess Who? Black History Month Edition LibGuide

GUESS WHO? BLACK HISTORY MONTH EDITION

Home

Guess Who? Black History Month Edition

Dr. Alma Adams

Julius L. Chambers

Dorothy Counts-Scoggins

Harvey B. Gantt

T.J. Reddy

Allegra Westbrooks

Past Black History Month Book Displays

Check out our past book displays from 2020 and 2017 that highlight Black authors and stories.

A Special Thank You

We would like to thank the Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room with Charlotte Mecklenburg Library for sharing images and information on these individuals.

Guess Who? Black History Month Edition

This Black History Month, Atkins Library is highlighting several notable Black Charlotteans. Learn more about these six figures below.

Dr. Alma Adams

Dr. Alma Adams serves as the representative for North Carolina's 12th district in the United States House of Representatives. Dr. Adams serves on several House committees and has supported legislation that improves funding for Historically Black Colleges & Universities, increases teacher pay, and provides nutritious breakfasts for public school students. More recently, Adams has worked with Vice President Kamala Harris on a bill to address Black maternal health.

Photo credit: Alma Adams' Congressional Office

Julius L. Chambers

Julius L. Chambers was the first Black lawyer to integrate a North Carolina law firm in Charlotte. He litigated several civil rights cases with the Supreme Court, including the landmark Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education.

Learn more about Julius Chambers through Atkins Library's archival collection of his papers spanning from 1964-1979.

Photo credit: Judy Chambers

Dorothy Counts-Scoggins

Dorothy Counts-Scoggins was one of the first Black students to enroll in Charlotte's Harding University High School. She was at the vanguard of the city's efforts to integrate Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in 1957, despite facing racial harassment and abuse from her fellow classmates. Dorothy currently resides in Charlotte, NC.

Learn more about Dorothy Counts-Scoggins through Atkins Library's oral history from 2006.

Photo credit: NCR-CML

Harvey B. Gantt

Harvey Gantt was the first Black mayor of Charlotte, serving two terms from 1983 to 1987. As an active Democratic politician in North Carolina, Gantt also ran twice for the United States Senate against Jesse Helms in the 1990s. Harvey was an accomplished architect and was the first Black student to attend Clemson University.

Learn more about Harvey Gantt through Atkins Library's archival collection of Gantt's papers, including speeches, political advertisements, and oral histories.

Photo credit: Atkins Library's Special Collections and University Archives

Notes

1. Phillip Brown, "Charlotte Ranks among Nation's Top 100 Minority Degree Producers: Inside UNC Charlotte: UNC Charlotte," Inside UNC Charlotte, November 10, 2022, https://inside.charlotte.edu/news-features/2022-10-25/charlotte-ranks-among-nations-top-100-minority-degree-producers.
2. "Diversity and Inclusion," Atkins Library Diversity & Inclusion Committee, J. Murrey Atkins Library, accessed January 13, 2023, https://library.charlotte.edu/about/our-organization/diversity-inclusion.
3. Paulo Freire, Myra Bergman Ramos, and Donald Macedo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 72.
4. Freire, Ramos, and Macedo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 80–81.
5. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 1994), 4.
6. hooks. *Teaching to Transgress*, 4.
7. Gloria M. Rodriguez, "Power and Agency in Education: Exploring the Pedagogical Dimensions of Funds of Knowledge," *Review of Research in Education* 37, no. 1 (2013): 90, https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X12462686.
8. Eamon Tewell, "The Problem with Grit: Dismantling Deficit Thinking in Library Instruction," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 20, no. 1 (January 2020): 138, https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2020.0007.
9. Curt Dudley-Maring, "The Resilience of Deficit Thinking," *Journal of Teaching and Learning* 10, no. 1 (2015): 4, https://doi.org/10.22329/jtl.v10i1.4171.
10. Rodriguez, "Power and Agency in Education," 100–01.
11. Ibid., 113.
12. "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education," ACRL, last modified January 11, 2016, https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework#authority.
13. Norma González, "Beyond Culture: The Hybridity of Funds of Knowledge," in *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms*, ed. Norma González, Luis C. Moll, and Cathy Amanti (Mahwah, NJ: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 42, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncc-ebooks/reader.action?docID=255629&ppg=42.
14. Jennifer R. S. Blake, Sam Aston, and Nicola Grayson, "From the Outside in: Bringing Student Engagement to the Centre," *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 26, no. 2-4 (2020), 419, https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2020.1777172.
15. Blake, Aston, and Grayson, "From the Outside In," 420.
16. Community-Led Libraries Toolkit, Working Together (Vancouver, BC: March 2008), 16, https://vpl.bibliocommons.com/v2/record/S38C1633634.
17. Kenny Garcia, "Keeping Up With… Critical Librarianship," Association of College and Research Libraries, June 19, 2015, par. 1, https://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/keeping_up_with/critlib.
18. Jennifer A. Ferretti, "Building a Critical Culture: How Critical Librarianship Falls Short in the Workplace," *Communications in Information Literacy* 14, no. 1 (2020): 136, https://doi.org/10.15760/comminfolit.2020.14.1.10.
19. Peace Ossom-Williamson et al., "Starting with I: Combating Anti-Blackness in Libraries," *Medical Reference Services Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2021): 139.
20. Serie McDougal, III et al., "Black Student Engagement: Resilience & Success Under Duress," *The Journal of Pan African Studies (Online)* 12, no. 7 (December 2018): 202.
21. Ashley Gosselar, "'We Out Here and We've Been Here': The Role of University Archives in Student-Led Campus History Initiatives to Remember and Reassert Black Presence in American Higher Education," *Comma* 2018, no. 1–2 (January 2020): 94, https://doi.org/10.3828/comma.2018.8.
22. Ossom-Williamson et al., "Starting with I," 140.
23. Latesha Velez et al., "Mapping the Residency Program Landscape," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 47, no. 5 (2021): 2–3, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2021.102389.
24. Ossom-Williamson et al., "Starting with I," 144.
25. Ibid., 140.
26. Ibid.
27. Christopher Everett, "Wilmington on Fire," UNC Charlotte, Emerging Media Communication, streamed live on April 28, 2021, YouTube video, 1:54:03, https://youtu.be/hQ_gTGU2Sas.
28. "Guess Who? Black History Month Edition," J. Murrey Atkins Library, last modified February 16, 2021, https://guides.library.charlotte.edu/c.php?g=1123890.
29. "Black History Month: Guess The Hero Game," Teachers Resource Force, accessed January 23, 2023, https://www.teachersresourceforce.com/store/p119/Black_History_Month%3A_Guess_The_Hero_Game.html.
30. Kawanna Bright, "Assessing DEI Efforts in Academic Libraries" in *Implementing Excellence in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*, ed. Corliss Lee and Brian Lym (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2022), 414–15.

31. Carolyn Caffrey Gardner and Rebecca Halpern, "At Odds with Assessment: Being a Critical Educator in the Academy," in *Critical Library Pedagogy Handbook* (vol. 1), ed. Kelly McElroy and Nicole Pagowsky (Chicago: Association of College & Research Libraries, 2016), 41–42. http://eprints.rclis.org/30062/.
32. Bright, "Assessing DEI Efforts," 421.
33. Joyce Chapman, Emily Daly, Anastasia Forte, Ira King, Brenda W. Yang, and Pamela Zabala, *Understanding the Experiences and Needs of Black Students at Duke* (Durham, NC: Duke University Libraries, April 2020).
34. Amanda L. Folk and Tracey Overbey, "Narratives of (Dis)Engagement: Exploring Black/African-American Undergraduate Students' Experiences with Libraries" (paper presented at ACRL, Cleveland, OH, April 10-13, 2019).
35. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 14

Bibliography

Association of College & Research Libraries. *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. 2015. Accessed January 23, 2023. https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework#authority.

Atkins Library Diversity & Inclusion Committee. "Diversity and Inclusion." J. Murrey Atkins Library. Accessed January 13, 2023. https://library.charlotte.edu/about/our-organization/diversity-inclusion.

Blake, Jennifer R. S., Sam Aston, and Nicola Grayson. "From the Outside in: Bringing Student Engagement to the Centre." *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 26, no. 2-4 (2020). 419–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2020.1777172.

Bright, Kawanna. "Assessing DEI Efforts in Academic Libraries." In *Implementing Excellence in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*, edited by Corliss Lee and Brian Lym, 413–38. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2022.

Brown, Phillip. "Charlotte Ranks among Nation's Top 100 Minority Degree Producers: Inside UNC Charlotte: UNC Charlotte." Inside UNC Charlotte. November 10, 2022. https://inside.charlotte.edu/news-features/2022-10-25/charlotte-ranks-among-nations-top-100-minority-degree-producers.

Chapman, Joyce, Emily Daly, Anastasia Forte, Ira King, Brenda W. Yang, and Pamela Zabala. *Understanding the Experiences and Needs of Black Students at Duke*. Durham, NC: Duke University Libraries, April 2020.

Dudley-Maring, Curt. "The Resilience of Deficit Thinking," *Journal of Teaching and Learning* 10, no. 1 (2015): 1–12. https://doi.org/10.22329/jtl.v10i1.4171.

Everett, Christopher. "Wilmington on Fire." UNC Charlotte, Emerging Media Communication. Streamed live on April 28, 2021. YouTube video. 1:54:03. https://youtu.be/hQ_gTGU2Sas.

Ferretti, Jennifer A. "Building a Critical Culture: How Critical Librarianship Falls Short in the Workplace." *Communications in Information Literacy* 14, no. 1 (2020): 134–52. https://doi.org/10.15760/comminfolit.2020.14.1.10.

Folk, Amanda L., and Tracey Overbey. "Narratives of (Dis)Engagement: Exploring Black/African-American Undergraduate Students' Experiences with Libraries." Paper presented at ACRL, Cleveland, OH, April 10-13, 2019. http://hdl.handle.net/11213/17661.

Freire, Paulo, Myra Bergman Ramos, and Donald Macedo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. 30th Anniversary Ed. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014.

Garcia, Kenny. "Keeping Up With… Critical Librarianship." Association of College and Research Libraries. June 19, 2015. https://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/keeping_up_with/critlib.

Gardner, Carolyn Caffrey, and Halpern, Rebecca. "At Odds with Assessment: Being a Critical Educator in the Academy," in *Critical Library Pedagogy Handbook* (vol. 1), edited by Kelly McElroy and Nicole Pagowsky, 41–51. Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016. http://eprints.rclis.org/30062/.

González, Norma. "Beyond Culture: The Hybridity of Funds of Knowledge." In *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms,* edited by Norma González, Luis C. Moll, and Cathy Amanti, 29–46. Mahwah, NJ: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncc-ebooks/reader.action?docID=255629&ppg=42.

Gosselar, Ashley. "'We Out Here and We've Been Here': The Role of University Archives in Student-Led Campus History Initiatives to Remember and Reassert Black Presence in American Higher Education." *Comma* 2018, no. 1–2 (January 2020): 87–98. https://doi.org/10.3828/comma.2018.8.

hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress*. Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 1994.

McDougal, Serie I., II, Wesley Cox, Tiana Dorley, and Hanna Wodaje. "Black Student Engagement: Resilience & Success Under Duress." *The Journal of Pan African Studies (Online)* 12, no. 7 (December 2018): 192–215. https://www.jpanafrican.org/docs/vol12no7/12.7-11-Serie-final.pdf.

Ossom-Williamson, Peace, Jamia Williams, Xan Goodman, Christian I. J. Minter, and Ayaba Logan. "Starting with I: Combating Anti-Blackness in Libraries." *Medical Reference Services Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2021): 139–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/02763869.2021.1903276.

Rodriguez, Gloria M. "Power and Agency in Education: Exploring the Pedagogical Dimensions of Funds of Knowledge." *Review of Research in Education* 37, no. 1 (2013): 87–120. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X12462686.

Teachers Resource Force. "Black History Month: Guess The Hero Game." Accessed January 23, 2023. https://www.teachersresourceforce.com/store/p119/Black_History_Month%3A_Guess_The_Hero_Game.html.

Tewell, Eamon. "The Problem with Grit: Dismantling Deficit Thinking in Library Instruction." *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 20, no. 1 (January 2020): 137–59. https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2020.0007.

Velez, LaTesha, Jason Alston, Nataly Blas, Kathy Bradshaw, Orolando Duffus, Denelle Eads, Gerald Holmes, and Olivia Patterson. "Mapping the Residency Program Landscape." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 47, no. 5 (2021): 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2021.102389.

Working Together. *Community-Led Libraries Toolkit*. Vancouver, BC: March 2008. https://vpl.bibliocommons.com/v2/record/S38C1633634.

X. "Guess Who? Black History Month Edition," Last modified February 16, 2021. https://guides.library.charlotte.edu/c.php?g=1123890.