



Taking it to the Streets

**Teaching Public Scholarship
Strategies for Community
Impact and Student Success**

Robyn Hall | WILU | May 2023



Today

- Community-Based Research
- Useful Concepts
- Research Findings
- Public Scholarship Strategies



Community-Based Research

“Research that is conducted *with* and *for*, **not on**, members of a community.”

- Strand et.al., 2003, p. xx (emphasis added)

Community-based research is “research that is conducted with and for, not on, members of a community” (Strand et.al., 2003, p. xx). Similar terms include *community engaged scholarship* and *community engaged research*. This approach typically involves community members directly in a research project. Community partners may, for instance, sit on an advisory board, and they may direct what research questions are pursued. They may also be involved in every stage of research, from completing ethics applications, to recruiting participants, to collecting and analyzing data and disseminating findings, which usually take the form of non-traditional research outputs (e.g., reports, presentations, infographics, policy briefs, digital exhibits).

Students are also often engaged in these research projects. In addition to community-based research, this involvement is sometimes referred to as *community-engaged learning* or *experiential learning*. Across Canada, universities have established centres and offices to facilitate these opportunities.

Pedagogical literature on community-based research focuses on ways that these experiences can enhance students’ research interests and civic participation (for instance, Beckman & Long, 2016; Cook, 2008; Downey, 2018; Mayer, et al., 2019; Ryser, et al., 2013). There is, however, little to no discussion of faculty-librarian collaboration or information literacy instruction.



Useful Concepts

- Disposable Assignments
- Public Scholarship
- Knowledge Equity

Three concepts that are helpful when exploring students' role in community-based research and connections to information literacy include the following...

David Wiley (2013), open education leader, coined the phrase “**disposable assignments**” ten years ago. This describes assignments that often add no real, tangible value to the world, where students do them because they must, instructors grade them because they must, and the work ends there. Similar to involving students in the creation of open education resources, Wiley's focus, community-based research takes student research beyond the walls of the classroom and can lead to outputs that can directly benefit the broader community involved in guiding that work.

To this end, this work often involves students in the creation of **public scholarship** (Kezar, Drivalas, & Kitchen, 2018; Ketchum, 2022), which focuses on accessible, public-facing work, and work that often has a direct impact on practice and policy, often done in service to marginalized populations.

The concept of **knowledge equity** is useful to consider in the development of public scholarship, encouraging us to think about ways to teach students to consider whose voices are valued and included or excluded in the works they create, as well as who does and does not have access to information informing and resulting from this work.

Metaliterate Learners



Metaliteracy is an additional useful concept when considering students' role in this work and is a term that has informed much of the Association of College and Research Libraries' "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education" (2015). It ties in with students' ability to be self-aware and self-reflective in their use and creation of information. Mackey and Jacobson have written extensively about this concept. Drawing from their work (2022), metaliterate learners self-identify with each of the roles shown in the graphic above. They are informed, collaborative, participatory, reflective, civic minded, adaptable, open, and productive.

Each of these roles align directly with the skills and dispositions necessary to do community-based work and help inform why librarians who do information literacy instruction and faculty who train students to do community-based research potentially make for a very strong collaboration to benefit student success and community impact.



Research Findings

Interviews:

- Faculty Researchers (n=17)
- University Administrators (n=6)

Before we get into instructional strategies that can come from collaborations between librarians and faculty who are training students to do community-based research, I want to share some findings from my research.

This research involved interviewing 17 tenured or tenure-track faculty members from across Canada who self-identify as community-based researchers (or similar terms) who have actively disseminated public scholarship arising from this work in the last five years. These participants were mostly women of European descent/ancestry working in areas of social sciences and community health and represented a nice balance of early and more senior career researchers. I also interviewed six administrators who oversee offices and centres that focus on supporting community-based research and related areas (four women, two men). With each participant, I discussed ways that they and their institutions support students to do community-based research, and I asked them for their thoughts on ways academic libraries and librarians could be more active in this area.

*I also sent a survey out to scholarly communications librarians from across the country. 16 responded. I asked for their thoughts on ways that libraries could do more to support faculty, community *and* students working in this area and no responses addressed students specifically, so I won't be drawing on these findings for this presentation.



Student Involvement

- Research Assistants
- Course Assignments
- Research Projects

When I asked how students are most involved in community-based research, several respondents told me that they rely heavily on them at both the graduate and undergraduate level as research assistants assisting with literature reviews, data collection, analysis and dissemination. It was noted that students bring a lot to these projects including skills tied to social media, accessibility, and graphic design. As well, some program assessments carried out by students have helped non-profit organizations maintain funding and sustain services.

Several respondents also discussed having community partners pose questions to undergraduate students in their classes as part of course assignments. The students then conduct secondary research to answer these questions in teams and produce things like presentations and reports to benefit the partner.

Students also take on these projects themselves as part of graduate thesis work and undergraduate thesis/capstone projects and practicums, though these are less common since they rely on finding the right supervisor and community partner and having enough time to carry out this work.

Notably, most of the university administrators I spoke with highlighted how engaging students in community-based research, and experiential learning more broadly, is an increasing focus at their institutions partly driven by governments wanting students to gain practical, employable skills to meet the needs of the labour market as part of their higher

education experience.



Librarian Involvement

- Not applicable
- Finding information
- Literature reviews

When I asked about how librarians had been involved to support their students engaged in community-based research, several faculty researchers told me that they do not have much to do with the library.

Others only connected their students with librarians to help with more traditional research assignments, like essays, to teach students how to find reliable information and conduct literature reviews.

Notable Quotes

"It's hard for me to imagine that because so much of it is actually about the relationship with the community beyond what they might need from the library."

-Daisy [pseudonym], researcher

"I used to bring librarians in to do classes, but they're just like many people at the university, they're just overburdened with work. And so, they don't have time to come in."

- Hannah [pseudonym], researcher

"As you can tell by my conversation, I'm not really involved in the library at all."

- Stacey [pseudonym], researcher

Above are a few of the responses I received when I asked about faculty researchers' experiences engaging with librarians to support their students.



Researcher Suggestions

- Outreach
- Grey Literature
- Citation
- Attribution
- Knowledge Mobilization

When I asked about ways that academic librarians could do more to support students conducting community-based research, I heard many useful insights from the faculty researchers and administrators that I spoke with.

Several stated that we need to do more outreach and promote ways that we can help. One administrator noticed that librarians at their institution no longer work on the reference desk and felt that this lack of visibility was problematic and limiting our ability to reach and connect with students. Throughout all my interviews, the importance of outreach and relationship-building by librarians was underlined as very important and, in many cases, lacking.

Others said it would be helpful to provide more support with finding grey literature (so, information that is reliable but falls outside of commercial publishing systems, like government reports). Students also need help citing this information, along with attributing media sources they use in their own public scholarship. Lastly, a few of my research participants noted that it would be helpful to teach students about knowledge mobilization strategies whereby information is packaged in different ways to reach specific audiences and be useful to their needs. The following quotes illustrate these suggestions in more detail.

Grey Literature

"... because responding to community research asks in real time often involves kind of newish problems, or really current events, there is a need to incorporate grey literature into the reports. And students are often very confused about that. It's tricky to talk about more rigorous and less rigorous forms of grey literature and where you might find grey literature. So, talking about... grey literature and not-for-profit reports, think tank reports, things like that. Having some support in terms of helping students negotiate that I think would be great."

– Rachel [pseudonym], researcher

Several participants talked about how different literature reviews are when doing community-based research, signaling an important role for librarians as part of student training, particularly with undergraduate students.

Grey Literature (continued...)

“The university often thinks there's a huge gap in the community and people don't know something. And I think students early on, and new researchers, are often surprised, at how much information is already out there, and so really trying to educate students and early researchers about that... as information specialists letting them know there's already a ton of that being done.” - Jane [pseudonym], administrator

Comments like the one above connect with the idea of strategic exploration when searching (ACRL, 2015), requiring the ability to search through and evaluate different types of information sources, and not just academic literature.

It also highlights how sometimes in community-based research, work ends up being unnecessarily duplicated since students/researchers do not always take the time to explore what has already been done outside of academic literature (bearing in mind it isn't always shared online and easily accessible, of course).

Citation

“The community engaged work is especially hard to cite. And I think that even faculty members have problems trying to figure out how to do it. And I think it's important to actually do that work properly because you are citing the community's work, you're basically acknowledging them. So, especially in Indigenous research, there's a lot of stealing of ideas and knowledge going around and not enough citing. So yeah, I think that's something that the libraries can help with.”

- Naomi [pseudonym], researcher

A few participants noted how librarians could do more to help students learn to cite non-traditional research outputs used in, and arising from, community engaged work. The ACRL information literacy framework (2015) specifies that “authority is constructed and contextual” (p. 12). The quote above does a great job of reminding us what this means in practice, giving authority and value to the ideas and knowledge of diverse voices in research and ensuring that these voices are acknowledged. It’s a good example of the importance of knowledge equity discussed earlier.

Attribution

“I realized that we needed to have a conversation about using images... Because there is that component of designing a visually appealing and easy to navigate report, I think there's a potential there for students to pull in stuff that they just find on a website without realizing that there's actually a process here. And so, I think if there was library support around that, that also would be helpful.”

– Rachel [pseudonym], researcher

Similarly, a few participants noted how challenging it can be to ensure students properly attribute media sources used in projects, signaling another role for librarians in student training.

Knowledge Mobilization

“I think sometimes students have really great questions, but they don't have as good a sense of how to share the information afterwards. So that's a great way that the library could be supporting the way that the information gets out to relevant stakeholders...”

- Marie [pseudonym], researcher

Going back to the ACRL (2015) framework several participants acknowledged the role for librarians to assist with knowledge mobilization planning and seeing “information creation as a process” (p. 14) that can result in various types of outputs depending on the information needs being met.

One researcher also noted that we’re potentially more plugged into different knowledge mobilization strategies and what options are available to students.

An administrator I spoke with talked at length about the importance of teaching students all the skills I have touched on, from finding, citing, attributing, and disseminating information in different modalities, alongside learning to work productively with community partners, because so many of these skills are transferable to many different careers, which is particularly important when so few of the students we work with will end up in academic jobs that require the more traditional research skills tied to academic sources that we tend to focus on and privilege.



Public Scholarship Strategies

- In-class activities
- Online Materials

The concluding section of this presentation is focused on ways that librarians might enhance students' understanding of things like accessibility, open access, copyright, knowledge mobilization, knowledge equity and what is considered "valuable" information in different contexts when creating public scholarship as part of community-based research.

Discussion

How have you supported students engaged in community-based research?

In-class Activities

What types of information do I need?

- Academic journal articles
- Demographics/statistics
- First-hand accounts
- Podcasts
- Documentaries
- Government policies/legislation
 - Municipal
 - Provincial
 - Federal
 - International
- News articles
- Industry reports
- Company profiles
- NGO/foundation research

Is the information reliable and relevant?

Authors

- Do they have expertise on the topic? Yes No

Reliability & Accuracy

- Is information based on facts and evidence? Yes No
- Are sources cited? Can information be verified elsewhere?

Relevance

- Does the source help you understand your topic? Yes No
- Does the source help you make meaningful connections and provide clear explanations?

Timeliness

- Is this information current enough for your topic? Yes No

From [Map the System Worksheet](#) by K. Ash, adapted by R. Hall

The above screenshots come from a worksheet for a systems mapping competition (Map the System) that can also be useful for a community-based research project. It asks students to select the type of information they need, where it might be found (not shown), and asks questions about authority, accuracy, relevance and timeliness to assist with evaluating sources. This worksheet, originally created by former colleague Kymberly Ash, is available to use and modify under a creative commons attribution non-commercial license (CC BY-NC) from oercommons.org.

In-class Activities (continued)

Knowledge Equity:

- Discuss whether it's OK to share journal articles available through the library (\$\$) with community partners when developing and sharing a literature review with them.
- Discuss pros and cons of citing first-hand accounts of an individual's lived experience shared on social media.

Above are some suggested discussions when engaging with students doing community-based research around knowledge equity.

Students often do not realize how restrictive it can be to access academic literature. Getting them talking about who does and does not have access to this work can open up important discussions about knowledge equity, open access, copyright, and the importance of being able to verify and further explore cited information. Aside: A few institutions in BC have secured external funding to run a Community Scholars Program (<https://www.lib.sfu.ca/about/overview/services-you/community-scholars>) to provide community partners with access to library resources and library services.

Another topic for discussion is whether it's OK to cite people's lived experience shared on social media. Storytelling and sharing lived realities is an incredibly important and powerful tool when trying to influence decision-makers. And social media, especially TikTok, is filled with posts where people tell their stories, give their opinions, and speak their truths. But is it ethical to use this content in the creation of public scholarship? Should permission be requested? Is this information authentic and reliable? Will it remain available after it has been referenced? Are there alternatives, like working with a community partner to generate their own content with members of their communities? How might this information be shared in effective ways that respect and honour those who contribute?

In-class Activities (continued...)

Knowledge Mobilization:

- Brainstorm accessibility requirements for different types of research outputs and discuss why they matter.
- Discuss who should *own* works created with and for community.
- Discuss ways to track and communicate research impact when producing non-traditional research outputs.

Brainstorming accessibility requirements for various types of non-traditional research outputs is a good opportunity to help students think about creating effective and useful information for various audiences. An additional activity could be to have them evaluate existing non-traditional, community-based outputs for accessibility. Unfortunately, a lot of these outputs lack basic accessibility elements including closed captioning and alt tags describing images signaling room for improvement in future research dissemination. Another important discussion topic is who should own works created with and for communities. If a formal agreement document is not in place, it is especially important for students and their advisors to have these discussions early on with community partners. And it's important for students to think through who should be able to decide how, where and when research outputs are shared. It can be beneficial to students to have their works shared widely as evidence of their accomplishments and examples of exemplary work (including in their university's institutional repository where possible) but at the same time the rights of the community need to be respected and prioritized. These discussions are a great opportunity to introduce related topics like copyright, creative commons, digital preservation, persistent identifiers, open data sharing, and Indigenous data governance including First Nations OCAP (<https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/>) and CARE Principles (<https://www.gida-global.org/care>).

A further discussion topic includes getting students to consider how they will track and communicate whether their community-based research has been successful and impactful.

This can inform discussions about effective and ineffective dissemination strategies, quantitative and qualitative research metrics and altmetrics and the strengths and limitations of each, and ways to effectively prove that non-traditional community-based work has had an impact and achieved its goals in future grant applications, graduate school applications, and job interviews.

Online Materials

- Finding (reliable) grey literature ([Seneca example](#))
- Citing grey literature ([MacEwan example](#))
 - Visual and verbal citation ([MRU example](#))
- Finding Copyright-Friendly Sources ([MacEwan example](#))
 - Creative Commons basics ([MacEwan example](#))
- Accessibility checklists ([MacEwan example](#))
- Knowledge Mobilization Templates ([Waterloo example](#))



The above sources provide examples of online guides created to help support researchers, including but not limited to students, with finding, evaluating, citing, attributing and creating information when engaged in public scholarship and community-based research activities. Aside: The first six examples on the slide are all under creative commons licenses and can be reused and adapted.

Discussion

How might you support students engaged in community-based research (or public scholarship more generally) in the future?

Learn More

Community-Based Resources

- [Community-Based Research Canada](#)
- [Community-Based Research Modules](#) (Community Research Centre, Trent University)
- [Resources for Community-Engaged Research](#) (Community-Engaged Research Initiative, Simon Fraser University)

Stay Connected

- Email: hallr27@macewan.ca
- Twitter: [@roboteca](https://twitter.com/roboteca)
- Slides posted to: roam.macewan.ca
- Project site: <https://osf.io/zj76p/>



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