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Position Statement on Citation Justice in Rhetoric, Composition, and Writing Studies

Conference on College Composition and Communication

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This statement is a response to several recent and historical exigencies that have demonstrated a need for a broader conversation about citation justice in rhetoric, composition, and writing studies. Scholars in the discipline and beyond have documented how the works of minoritized scholars are all too frequently excluded, invisibilized, or even co-opted in dominant normative citation practices (Chakravarty et al.; Kynard; Pritchard; Walton, Moore, & Jones; Peña), and professional whisper networks have long told stories of graduate students—oftentimes BIPOC graduate students—having their work plagiarized by tenure-track professors.

With these issues in mind, this statement aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to redress long-standing inequities in the field of rhetoric, composition, and writing studies, which has systemically devalued and overlooked the knowledges of minoritized scholars (Kynard; Parks et al.; Pritchard; Royster). One location where these inequities are often reproduced is in our citation practices, which can alternately legitimate and denigrate various epistemologies, and contribute to the continued minoritization of BIPOC and other multiply marginalized scholars. Citation, then, is political, and can be a tool both for maintaining white supremacy and for advancing racial justice.

Citation is an act of “disciplinary landscaping,” to echo Jacqueline Jones Royster’s language. Royster teaches us to consider how citation practices contribute to our disciplinary landscape, how citations are arguments about whose knowledges are credible and worth learning from. Royster explains, “Highlighting landscaping as an interpretive process underscores the extent to which interpretive enterprises are contingent more generally on perception and more specifically on the limitations of perception” (148). These limits of perception also affect our citation practices, which go on to impact field perceptions of expertise, and relatedly, how minoritized scholars are promoted and tenured (or not), alongside other material outcomes, described further below. Thus, instead of engaging in what Eric Darnell Pritchard has theorized as “literacy normativity,” we must be open to learning from “restorative literacies” that are rooted in the diverse methods of Black LGBTQ people.

This position statement aims to encourage scholars to engage in citation justice in all areas of scholarly production, with the specific goals of:

- redressing citational erasures and exclusions in the literatures of our discipline,
- considering the material impacts of citation for minoritized communities and knowledges, and
- working toward a more just and inclusive disciplinary body of knowledge and academic community.

To do so, we discuss the role of citation in our work as rhetoric, composition, and writing studies teacher-scholars before going on to frame citation as an equity issue. We then discuss systematic and cultural factors of academic workplaces that contribute to citation inequity and thus require redress. This statement closes with a heuristic for practicing citation justice and resources for further engaging this important issue.

Citation is critical to our work as teacher-scholars in rhetoric, composition, and writing studies.

Scholars in rhetoric and composition have theorized the rhetorics and political consequences of citation for some time now (see, for instance, Pritchard, Kynard, Connors, Robillard), and several have offered valuable insights for how to think through such issues. For instance, in *Fashioning Lives*, Pritchard argues for the need to commit and recommit ourselves “to an ethics of intellectual community that requires epistemological empathy, accountability, humility, and intersectionality”—values that can and should be reflected in our citation practices (247). We cite sources not only in the scholarship that we write for publication, but also in our syllabi, in the development of comprehensive exam and independent study reading lists, and in our calls for proposals, teacher training materials, online resources, social media recommendations, as well as in other contexts. We also frequently teach writing students about appropriate and ethical citation practices. As a result, this statement may be relevant to several audiences and contexts of scholarly production, including but not limited to:

- **writers** who are making decisions about citation in our writing practices, or who are working to justify our citation practices to reviewers and editors;
- **instructors** who are developing course materials and syllabi that engage with a diverse, inclusive range of material;
- **graduate students** who are developing their independent study or exam reading lists, writing their dissertation/thesis, or doing an academic job search and need to justify their citation practices to their advisors, committee members, graduate faculty, hiring committees, and others;
- **writing program administrators** who are developing teacher training materials;
- **reviewers** who want to explain citation-related recommendations for writers;
- **editors** of journals, books, and book series, who want to explain citation-related recommendations for writers or who are developing guidelines for reviewers; and
- **guest editors and conference organizers** who are developing CFPs.

Citation is an equity issue.

Citation is not only a way we build ethos and credibility for making arguments, but, perhaps more importantly, a decision to amplify some voices over others, and an argument about whose voices and perspectives are valid, credible, and worth drawing from as we build knowledge in the discipline. Citation practices affect our material realities, how people are sustained and promoted, what knowledge is honored in the discipline, and who we see as knowledge producers. For instance, Parks et al.’s 2022 CCCC Convention panel highlighted how citations are powerful metrics with material import for our work as they affect raises, compensation, grant funding, international scholars’ visa applications, and more. They also affect the ability of minoritized scholars to publish with presses that are concerned with marketability and readership for a broader, predominantly white audience (Firestone).

Citation is about giving credit to those whose thinking has informed and preceded our own. It is also how disciplines determine epistemological legitimacy. It is thus crucial that we attend to the politics and social justice implications of citation. As a field, it is important to consider how an intersectional analysis of the politics of power and citation inequality disrupts discriminatory practices by rethinking what is considered scholarship, what are considered scholarly means of sharing knowledge, and by consciously addressing the ways in which value is assigned through the politics of citation practices. When we make choices about who we may deem “foundational” or “influential” to our work, we are making decisions about who and what we value disciplinarily. These decisions have power, and as such need to be examined in terms of how this power is understood and forwarded. Selectively choosing who to acknowledge is not only an ethical consideration, but also a way of limiting and/or expanding the range and scope of what it means to make and share knowledge within and across the field of rhetoric, composition, and writing studies.

Dominant, normative academic cultures and values contribute to citation inequity.

Citation justice requires that we consider issues of intersectionality (Crenshaw) and equity. It takes time and requires a more thoughtful and comprehensive view that questions established citation conventions and accounts for power, privilege, and history. Yet BIPOC

scholars often face additional scrutiny when they do the work of thoughtfully attending to citation politics, where their work is dismissed as “overly narrow,” “irrelevant,” or inadequately citing canonical sources in ways that are legible to scholars trained according to dominant conventions (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al.; Monberg et al.). To engage in citation justice we must resist neoliberal imperatives that demand higher expectations for scholarly production and fast scholarship, especially during a global pandemic that has made this even more difficult for many to do.

In addition, many undergraduate and graduate programs continue to train students with exclusionary Eurowestern reading lists and knowledges. This tendency means that BIPOC students in particular who are interested in gaining a more diverse view of the field are required to engage in additional reading and research that centers BIPOC voices. It also means that those who do not or cannot do this additional work feel underprepared to engage in justice-oriented scholarship and teaching.

Moreover, long-standing and persistent normative perceptions within the humanities that place greater value on individual scholarly contributions than on collaborative efforts, or that encourage graduate students to find a “gap”—an absence—that their research might fill may further encourage hegemonic citation practices that maintain the status quo. Such expectations and frameworks contribute to folks engaging in what Carmen Kynard has referred to as “white settler logic in suggesting new arrival, new beginnings, and/or new possibilities on already hallowed grounds” (187). That is, folks may be resistant to cite others when the goal is to set out and claim a “new” area of study. Yet, we can and should resist and make academic empire building visible when we see it.

We also acknowledge that all of this is taking place in a time when tenure-track positions are becoming rarer and demanding more. Yet if we are truly concerned about equity and justice in rhetoric, composition, and writing studies, it is imperative that we attend to each of these systemic aspects of the discipline that contribute to citation inequity. We also need to keep these issues in mind when we assess and evaluate job candidates and faculty up for tenure and promotion.

Practicing Citation Justice

With these broad contexts and implications in mind, we offer the following heuristic for practicing citation justice in the various kinds of scholarly work that we do:

- Citation justice is intersectional.
- Citation justice reflects the full scope of multiply marginalized people's intellectual contributions.
- Citation justice resists and rejects intellectual empire building.
- Citation justice is accountable.

Citation justice is intersectional. Because, as Kimberlé Crenshaw has explained, multiple, intersecting oppressions shape the experiences of multiply marginalized people, it is important to not limit our inclusion efforts to existing demographic categories such as race, gender, and class separately. Instead, taking context and subject matter into account, we should ask ourselves if we are citing only non-Black scholars of color to stand in for the perspective of “people of color,” or only cis Black men to stand in for Black perspectives and rhetorics. Just as it would be inappropriate to cite only white scholars to make generalizations about people in general, it is likewise inaccurate to cite only cisgender men of color as a stand-in for people of color more generally. Given the degree of exclusion they've faced on multiple levels, especially in proportion to the contributions they've made, it is important to make an effort to cite Black women in particular (Williams & Collier; Smith).

It is also important to be aware of the tendency to come up with excuses to not cite multiply marginalized scholars, whether it's that their work is not directly related at first glance, because they aren't using the exact same terminology, because their work is not in an academic journal or published by a well-reputed university press according to dominant normative standards, because they aren't affiliated with certain kinds of institutions (e.g., a research-intensive university), or because it's a dissertation or master's thesis and not peer reviewed in the strictest sense of the term. This is not to say that we shouldn't pay attention to publication venue; rather, the point is to catch oneself when rationalizing why one should not cite a multiply marginalized scholar. We should also be open to a wide range of thinkers,

regardless of their academic affiliation, as well as a wide range of genres and venues, both scholarly and otherwise.

Finally, citation justice demands confronting whiteness, heteronormativity, and able-bodiedness, not treating these frameworks as neutral and universal, but making them visible by naming them. For instance, if you identify the ways in which BIPOC scholars are racialized, you should also name whiteness. If one is citing only or mostly scholars of European ancestry, that should be reflected in how the work is framed and contextualized (e.g., European American perspectives on X). Likewise, if you identify queerness and disability, it would similarly make sense to also name heteronormativity and able-bodiedness or neurotypicality.

Citation justice reflects the full scope of multiply marginalized people's intellectual contributions. To do so, citation justice requires making an effort to see and make visible the fullness of BIPOC and other multiply marginalized scholars' contributions to various areas of scholarly inquiry. In other words, there is an important difference between providing a passing string citation and engaging with the fullness of a scholar's ideas (Pritchard). We should also be careful not to minimize the work of BIPOC scholars to mattering only to others of their own racialized community (Itchuaqiyaq et al.). Instead, citation justice means being open to the possibility that sources written by multiply marginalized scholars should be used to not only support one's existing argument, but to contextualize and transform that argument.

In addition, when citing theories and ideas developed by BIPOC scholars, it is important to attend to the contexts and communities from which those theories and ideas were developed, further demonstrating how members of multiply marginalized communities have important things to teach all members of the discipline.

Citation justice resists and rejects intellectual empire building. At times, folks are quicker to address the need to cite marginalized scholars by citing folks outside of our discipline, to the exclusion of marginalized folks doing relevant work within our own discipline. This is white settlerism as Kynard describes it. Usually these multiply marginalized scholars outside the discipline are established and widely regarded and thus those who have been accepted by normative academic structures. Although it is important to not be constrained by disciplinary boundaries, we should be careful not to send the message that there are no multiply marginalized scholars in the discipline doing the work and who have been doing the work for some time. Usually this is not the case and is an erasure of history. It is important to think about the kind of epistemological authority your citations are (re)producing, both for your piece specifically as well as the discipline more broadly.

Citation justice is accountable. It considers the material impacts of citation, not only for minoritized communities and knowledges, but also for our disciplinary knowledge more broadly. For instance, we must be aware of how citation functions as academic capital in ways that acknowledging a person by name or mentioning their name in the text of your publication does not. In other words, don't just mention a multiply marginalized person's name when you could cite their work as a way to actually credit them for their contribution to your own thinking. There are also symbolic implications when it comes to publication venue and citation location, and we should ask ourselves if we could have cited something that might "count" more for the scholar being cited (e.g., a peer-reviewed work), as well as whose works are thoroughly engaged and centered versus whose works are buried within a string citation or relegated to the footnotes.

Citation justice, like all efforts toward racial justice, is challenging and demands time, reflexivity, an openness to learning from one another, and patience with ourselves. We must hold each other responsible for striving toward citation justice: *this work must not be undertaken solely by multiply marginalized scholars* but instead should be the shared responsibility of all members of the broad field of rhetoric, composition, and writing studies. And when we are called to be accountable for our citation practices, we can and should respond with humility and generosity, acknowledging that such feedback is a gift that the person did not have to take the time to give, that it required intellectual and emotional labor as well as vulnerability on their part and trust in us that we can do better. We can be patient with ourselves, remembering that the work of equity and justice is difficult and is an ongoing, discipline-wide effort that will demand reimagining all aspects of the work that we do.

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Additional Resources

On Citation Justice

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- "How to Cite Like a Badass Tech Feminist Scholar of Color: A Citation Zine by Rigoberto Lara Guzmán and Sareeta Amrute," 2019.
- Citation Practices Challenge
 - Organized by Eve Tuck, K. Wayne Yang, and Rubén Gatzambide-Fernández, this blog curates resources that challenge scholars to "interrogate the techniques of selection" they employ in citation.
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BIPOC and Multiply Marginalized and Underrepresented Scholars Bibliographies

- Itchuaqiyaq, Cana Uluak. [MMU Scholar List](#)
 - An ever-growing list of self-identified multiply marginalized and underrepresented scholars in technical communication and beyond.
- [Bibliography of BIPOC Scholars in TPC](#)
 - A themed, frequently updated bibliography listing research by BIPOC in technical and professional communication.
- [CCCC Asian/Asian American Caucus Bibliography](#)
- [CCCC Queer Caucus Bibliography](#)
 - A bibliography of queer studies research in rhetoric, composition, writing studies, and related fields, organized chronologically.
- [Contributions of Black Scholars in TPC](#)
- Cox, Matthew B., and Michael J. Faris. [An Annotated Bibliography of LGBTQ Rhetorics](#).
 - A robust, thematically-organized, and tagged annotated bibliography of work in LGBTQ rhetorics, with detailed introduction.
- Hollinger, Andrew. [Alternative Texts and Critical Citations for Antiracist Pedagogies](#).
 - A collaborative list of readings and sources for teaching that highlights the work of BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and emerging scholars.
- [NCTE CCCC Latinx Caucus Bibliography](#)
- McIntyre, Megan. [Antiracist Teaching Resources/Readings](#)
- Melfi, Anne, Nicole Khoury, and Tarez Samra Graban. [An Annotated Bibliography of Global and Non-Western Rhetorics: Sources for Comparative Rhetorical Studies](#).
 - An annotated bibliography of non-western rhetorics, with thorough introduction and thematic organization.

Other Relevant Resources

- Cagle, Lauren E., Michelle F. Eble, Laura Gonzales, Meredith A. Johnson, Nathan R. Johnson, Natasha N. Jones, Liz Lane, Temptaous Mckoy, Kristen R. Moore, Ricky Reynoso, Emma J. Rose, GPat Patterson, Fernando Sánchez, Ann Shivers-McNair, Michele Simmons, Erica M. Stone, Jason Tham, Rebecca Walton, and Miriam F. Williams. *Anti-Racist Scholarly Reviewing Practices: A Heuristic for Editors, Reviewers, and Authors*. (2021).
 - A document outlining how editors, reviewers, and authors might employ antiracist reviewing practices.
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 - A compilation of scholars in Writing Studies pronouncing their names.

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