Critlib Unconference   Critlib 2015

Mar 25th, 9:00 AM

Lightning Talk: The Salaita Case at the University of Illinois and LIS Practice

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Stoytcheva, Sveta, "Lightning Talk: The Salaita Case at the University of Illinois and LIS Practice" (2015). *Critlib Unconference*. 15.
https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/critlib/2015/Conference/15

The Salaita Case at the University of Illinois and LIS Practice

Sveta Stoytcheva

@oksveta

quick timeline

- *October 2013* Prof. Salaita offered a tenured position at the University of Illinois American Indian Studies program, resigns prior post at UVa
- *June–July 2014* Prof. Salaita tweets controversial statements about conflict in Gaza
- *August 2014* University of Illinois Chancellor Wise notifies Prof. Salaita that his appointment will not be forwarded to the BoT for a vote
- *September 2014* Board of Trustees votes not to appoint Prof. Salaita
- *January 2015* Prof. Salaita files suit against the University

as a result...

on campus –

- 16 departments issued 'no confidence' votes
- several others issued statements
- although there have been vocal individuals, no official statement or vote from either GSLIS or the University Library

beyond –

- considerable press, including ACRLog post by Sarah Crissinger
- statements by several organizations, including MLA Executive Council, AAUP
- LIS Practitioners and Scholars Support Steven Salaita, drafted by Sarah Roberts, signed by 234 individuals

some student-led efforts

- UIUC GSLIS Students Stand in Solidarity with AIS [open letter]
- 'Salaita and the Information Professions' campus event [handout | notes]
- *#critlib chat on September 30, 2014 [storify]*

Q1. How have the Salaita case or related academic/intellectual freedom issues come up in your practice? #critlib

- The recent FSU president search also demonstrates a breakdown in higher ed & shared governance #critlib – @kevinseeber

- A1 Sounds like we can draw some comparisons to #TeamHarpy, fearing job reprisals or litigation for speaking out. #critlib #salaita – @barnlib

- In wake of the Salaita situation, I've seen a lot of professional colleagues lock down social media. More protected Twitter feeds. #critlib – @JeffGinMEM

- Q1: It's hard to encourage graduate students to work online and in public given the apparent risks to their future careers. #critlib – @RoxanneShirazi

- #critlib A1 - I haven't heard people talking about it. I'm new, but I think the silence is telling. The principle of this is crucial –@rawdeal85

Q2. How can librarians foreground intellectual freedom issues and the make them relevant to various publics across disciplines? #critlib

- A2 My first thought is to be responsive to issues like this. But then I wonder if it depends on whether the librarian has tenure! #critlib – @ACRL_RIG
- Q2: I think LIS teaches past IF frequently (red scare etc), but we have to think about applying to present day issues #critlib – @MelissaJVilla1
- A2 I'd like to connect w/my faculty & work on some collab, low stakes discussions (e.g. brown bags, etc.) on campus. #critlib – @meganjwatson
- #critlib How often is discussion of academic freedom part of a lib orientation or instruction session? It needs to be central to mission. – @JeffGinMEM
- Whenever "scholarship is a conversation" is taught, would be a great time to discuss academic freedom @JeffGinMEM #critlib – @foureyedsoul

Q3. How can we mobilize critical information literacy skills to engage students in responding to events like this? #critlib

- #critlib A3- Discuss all formats/sources subjectively. Everything and everyone has a bias, the key is to identify it (which can be hard). – @kevinseeber

- Q3 This is a perfect moment for crit info lit. ex: topic in class today was how power shapes (warps?) the production of knowledge. #critlib – @ibeilin

- A3: We need to foreground power in talking about scholarship as a conversation! Who has the power to participate? #critlib – @oksveta

- A3: something that feels powerful abt staging these convos in LIS context is: the field is abt asking ?s; thats a good doorway #critlib – @captain_maybe

A3: It goes back to examining the idea of "neutrality" - think of the Evanston Public Library fiasco with Ali Abunimah's book talk #critlib – @RoxanneShirazi

Q4. What obstacles do we face in having these discussions? #critlib

- A4 fear it might be difficult to discuss openly w/adjunct fac. Precarity/overwork are often, understandably, no.1 on their minds #critlib – @meganjwatson

- Info as commodity/info has value/power...so much there, yet I feel silenced by the one-shot #critlib – @LaurenMWallis

- A4: Obstacles? Fear. Material conditions. No support network. I try to remember that speaking out sets the stage for others too #critlib – @RoxanneShirazi

- @RoxanneShirazi 'just' a student & already feeling the repercussions #critlib – @chrsm

- A4: fear, loss of employment chances and income. The obstacles in speaking up work well with neoliberal conditions of labor #critlib – @MelissaJVilla1

Q5. And what are some strategies to overcome these obstacles? #critlib

- join the @Librarians2Pal network! there is power in collective action! #critlib – @captain_maybe
- A5: One approach is to give voice to those who haven't been permitted to speak; insist, again and again - the voices will be heard #critlib – @ibeilin
- #critlib A5- Empower learners to question everything. Authority, credibility, reliability, authenticity. – @kevinseeber
- A5 Agree with solidarity. 2 of my colleagues signed the #salaita petition, and it meant a lot to see their names there. #critlib – @InfAgit
- A5 I feel shy about reaching out to faculty because of 2nd class citizen issues, but maybe organizing with them is the thing to do. #critlib –@barnlib
- I'll add that #teamharpy stuff shows need in LIS community to talk more about "punching up" vs "punching down" @InfAgit @micdow #critlib – @foureyedsoul

some more questions

- How have issues related to this case continued to impact our practice?
- What responsibilities might we have as practitioners to foreground these debates?
- *In what ways is intellectual freedom an imperfect frame for these discussions?*

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