Equity, Diversity, Inclusion: Reimagining the Subject Guide

By Julie Carmen Lefebvre and Kimberly White

Abstract

This paper describes the creation of new and revised subject guides on diversity in music at the Marvin Duchow Music Library at McGill University, focusing on the objectives, selection criteria, and pedagogical vision that guided the process. We present our rationale for developing a taxonomy of resources organized according to use and how it responds to our primary objective of creating a guide that meets the teaching, performance, and research needs of the Schulich School of Music. While guided by a set of evaluation criteria for our selection of resources, we chose to include a wider range (from blogs to vendor websites) to acknowledge the prevalence of resources developed by various stakeholders, from professional associations to community groups. The guides, with their high percentage of externally available resources, reflect the network logic of facilitated collections as articulated by Lorcan Dempsey (2016). Finally, the guides function as a pedagogical tool for outreach and information literacy initiatives, helping the Music Library forge a stronger connection with the community it serves.

Context

2020 was a watershed year as McGill University and the Schulich School of Music began to produce action plans for addressing issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion. One particularly important objective in the Schulich School of Music's Diversity Action Plan is to enhance the diversity of curriculum, repertoire, and teaching modalities.[1] These action plans also follow in the wake of the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Committee Report and the call for libraries of all kinds to

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[1] For information about McGill University's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion initiatives, consult their website: https://www.mcgill.ca/equity/. For information about Schulich School of Music's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion vision and strategic plan, visit their website: https://www.mcgill.ca/music/about-us/equity-diversity-and-inclusion.

promote initiatives that advance and implement meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous communities.[2]

With the increased sensitivity to issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion, students and faculty from the Schulich School of Music expressed strong interest in discovering and locating repertoire by underrepresented composers and musicians. Music Library staff received several reference questions on themes of diversity as well as requests for repertoire lists: for example, for music written by women composers from Québec or symphonic music by Black composers. In our research on these questions, we found that in addition to useful print and electronic resources held at McGill, there were also many interesting free web resources, search tools, and institutional websites. With these developments, the Marvin Duchow Music Library felt that the entire community would be better served and supported with access to robust guides on these topics.

The authors were assigned the task of creating new subject guides on Women composers and Black, Indigenous, people of colour (BIPOC) musicians as well as revising the existing LGBTQ+ music guide.[3] The guides permitted us to explore these subject areas in more depth and to create an efficient structure that adequately responded to the information needs of our patrons. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Music Library was closed physically to the public from March 13, 2020, until September 1, 2021. For this reason, we had to find means other than in-person services to reach our patrons. Creating these online guides was one of several ways we sought to emphasize our capacity to provide and adapt our services to our community's current needs.

Our subject guides have typically contained resources selected from the Library's physical and electronic collection and subscription services, in addition to a limited number of external institutional resources and free web resources (such as IMSLP or Archive.org). We sought to expand these external resources even further, partly because our community had limited access to print materials and struggled to find appropriate resources online. While guided by a set of evaluation criteria, we elected to include a wider range of resources developed by various stakeholders, from professional associations to community groups. This resulted in a decisive shift in the ratio of local versus external resources. Houman Behzadi, Head Librarian at Marvin Duchow Music Library, noted that the guides, with their high percentage of externally available resources,

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[2] Canadian Federation of Library Associations, *CFLA-FCAB Truth and Reconciliation Committee Report*, accessed November 15, 2021, https://cfla-fcab.ca/en/indigenous/trc_report/; National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, "Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports," accessed November 15, 2021, https://nctr.ca/records/reports/.

[3] To access the subject guides discussed in this paper, visit Marvin Duchow Music Library's resource page: "Music," McGill Library, accessed November 15, 2021, https://www.mcgill.ca/library/find/subjects/music; Music Library Staff. Individual guides can be found at: "Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) Musicians," last modified August 31, 2021, https://libraryguides.mcgill.ca/BIPOCmusicians/; "LGBTQ+ Music Guide," last modified August 23, 2021, https://libraryguides.mcgill.ca/lgbtqmusic/; "Women Composers," last modified September 22, 2021, https://libraryguides.mcgill.ca/womencomposers/.

reflected the network logic of the facilitated collection as articulated by Lorcan Dempsey.[4] Behzadi encouraged us to explore Dempsey's concept of the facilitated collection as the ideological foundation of the subject guides, and, specifically, to provide a rationale for the wide range of external web resources.

Subject guides as facilitated collections

Lorcan Dempsey is widely recognized for his leadership and writings on libraries and networked information, and he has introduced many new concepts into the library community, including the concept of the facilitated collection. He points to a significant shift in how the library has historically served its community. Library collections focus predominately on a locally owned print collection, which is typically enhanced with an extensive licensed electronic collection. By contrast, the facilitated collection "...is organized according to a network logic, where a coordinated mix of local, external and collaborative services are assembled around user needs. This aims to meet research and learning needs in the best ways available, and not just by assembling material locally."[5] Thus, the facilitated collection is a creative blend of local resources with external and collaborative services, and it seeks to support users in the best possible way. Dempsey describes the facilitated collection as a service that places the user at the heart of these resources, whether they be local or external.[6] He observes that subject guides are good examples of the facilitated collection's philosophy, as they are organized and built according to the needs of the users for whom they are created.[7] Subject guides can provide entry points to resources that a library already offers, as well as the discovery of carefully selected external resources. Dempsey's concept of the facilitated collection has therefore guided the creation and organization of these new and revised subject guides.

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[4] Lorcan Dempsey, "The Facilitated Collection," *LorcanDempsey.net* (blog), January 31, 2016, https://www.lorcandempsey.net/orweblog/towards-the-facilitated-collection/; Lorcan Dempsey, "The Facilitated Collection Redux: A Note on Collections as a Service, the University of California, and Elsevier," *LorcanDempsey.net* (blog), April 1, 2019, https://www.lorcandempsey.net/orweblog/the-facilitated-collection-redux-a-note-on-collections-as-a-service-the-university-of-california-and-elsevier/; Lorcan Dempsey, "Collection Directions Accelerated? Pandemic Effects," *LorcanDempsey.net* (blog), May 20, 2020, https://www.lorcandempsey.net/collection-directions-accelerated/; Lorcan Dempsey, "Library Collections in the Life of the User: Two Directions," *LIBER Quarterly: The Journal of the Association of European Research Libraries* 26, no. 4 (2017): 338–59, https://doi.org/10.18352/lq.10170.

[5] Lorcan Dempsey, "The Facilitated Collection."

[6] Lorcan Dempsey.

[7] Lorcan Dempsey.

Overview of the subject guides

The first challenge we faced was the overall structure of the guides: how might we create a taxonomy that reflected at once the resources we had gathered and the needs of the users? Subject guides usually tend to be organized by resource type or format. Given the high percentage of free web resources in these guides, this organization no longer made sense. We also considered the diversity of our community and their information needs. Like many music faculties in Canada, our school comprises students and faculty in research, theory, performance, composition, education, and technology, and who specialize in various musical genres from Early Music to Jazz. The taxonomy for our subject guides is therefore organized according to information use. To create the taxonomy, we asked ourselves the following questions: What kind of information are the users looking for? How might they want to use this information? We divided the resources into several categories that responded to three primary information needs for our music community: research (e.g., Music literature resources), performance (e.g., General resources for discovering repertoire), and professional (e.g., Professional associations and directories). Certainly, these uses may overlap. The objective in constructing the taxonomy in this way was to provide our diverse community with clear categories to assist them in navigating the guide and in locating appropriate resources for their information needs (see Figure 1).[8]

These guides strive towards diversity not only in their content, but also in the selection of resources. Particularly for the BIPOC and LGBTQ+ guides, we discovered that many interesting search tools and information resources are community initiatives. In many ways, they are evidence of grassroots efforts to redress the lack of diversity in the field. Like Wikipedia articles, these crowd-sourced or community-based resources are not *a priori* less accurate than more traditional academic sources, such as the New Grove Encyclopedia of Music and Musicians. It simply means that each resource requires careful curation. We therefore established a set of questions that guided our evaluation of each resource (Table 1). These include considerations about who produces the information and for which audience, the objective or mission of the resource, the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the content, and whether the content is current and regularly updated.

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[8] We consulted the following literature during the curation of the subject guides: Martin P. Courtois, Martha E. Higgins, and Aditya Kapur, "Was This Guide Helpful? Users' Perceptions of Subject Guides," *Reference Services Review* 33, no. 2 (January 1, 2005): 188–96, https://doi.org/10.1108/00907320510597381; Darlene Fichter, "Designing a Better Subject Page to Make Users' Searches More Successful," *Computers in Libraries* 25, no. 9 (October 2005): 6–9; Kimberley Hintz et al., "Letting Students Take the Lead: A User-Centred Approach to Evaluating Subject Guides," *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* 5, no. 4 (December 2010), 39–52, https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0077948; Brenda Reeb and Susan Gibbons, "Students, Librarians, and Subject Guides: Improving a Poor Rate of Return," *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4, no. 1 (2004): 123–30; Nedelina Tchangalova and Amanda Feigley, "Subject Guides: Putting a New Spin on an Old Concept," *Electronic Journal of Academic and Special Librarianship* 9, no. 3 (2008), https://drum.lib.umd.edu/handle/1903/14751.

FIGURE 1. SCREENSHOT OF THE HOMEPAGE OF THE BLACK, INDIGENOUS, PEOPLE OF COLOUR (BIPOC) MUSICIANS SUBJECT GUIDE THAT DISPLAYS ITS ORGANIZATION, WITH THE MAIN TABS ON THE LEFT COLUMN, CONTENT IN THE MIDDLE COLUMN, AND CONTACT INFORMATION AND THE RESOURCE KEY IN THE RIGHT COLUMN.

Our decision to include many web resources, search tools, and crowd-sourced databases was also informed by the literature about the information-seeking behaviour of university music students.[9] When faced with an open-ended research question, many students often begin the process with Google or free web resources such as Wikipedia, YouTube, or IMSLP. Students tend to use the

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[9] See: Kirstin Dougan, "Information Seeking Behaviors of Music Students," *Reference Services Review* 40, no. 4 (January 1, 2012): 558–73, https://doi.org/10.1108/00907321211277369; Joe C. Clark and Jennifer Johnstone, "Exploring the Research Mindset and Information-Seeking Behaviors of Undergraduate Music Students," *College and Research Libraries (Online)* 79, no. 4 (May 2, 2018), https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.79.4.499.

information from these resources as a springboard to other platforms, including the library's catalogue or collection. The wide range of resources offered in these subject guides, which include Wikipedia articles, Google spreadsheets, online magazines, podcasts, and blogs, might therefore feel more familiar to our users. To acknowledge the diversity of our community accessing this guide, we also strove to include resources about music and musicians from a wide range of time periods, places, and genres.

TABLE 1. GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR RESOURCE SELECTION

Who is the author? What are their credentials and point of view?
Is this site sponsored by or associated with an organization? What is its purpose?
Who is the intended audience?
What is the purpose of the information?
Is the content presented clearly? Is the site easy to navigate?
Is the content provided in sufficient depth?
Is the content current?

Keeping in mind the context of the subject guides' creation when students and faculty were scrambling for access to materials, particularly to online scores, we decided to include vendors and publisher websites. Although the Library has subscription access to online scores, these services do not include search filters for gender, sexuality, race, or ethnic origins, neither do they offer a comprehensive collection of music from diverse composers. By contrast, several vendors and publisher sites provide access to online perusal scores (for example, Boosey & Hawkes), and others provide extensive catalogues listing music by diverse composers (for example, Theodore Front Music Literature). They are therefore interesting resources for patrons wishing to identify and locate more diverse repertoire.[10]

Information literacy initiatives

The subject guides contribute to the Music Library's broader information literacy initiatives, which seek to turn the Library's website and guides into pedagogical tools. The objective is to ensure that every resource listed on the Library's website or in a subject guide is accompanied by a description that clearly outlines the function, purpose, and particularities of the resource. With this guidance,

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[10] Boosey & Hawkes offers online perusal scores once the user signs up for a free account (https://www.boosey.com/pages/focus/?url=/focus/WomenComposers.htm); and Theodore Front Musical Literature offers several catalogues for underrepresented composers (https://www.tfront.com/).

users should feel more comfortable selecting and using the resources and can therefore become more autonomous in their research. Each tab in the new and revised subject guides includes a short text that informs the user about the content in that section, and each individual resource is accompanied by a bulleted description (see Figure 2). Our descriptions were guided by the following questions: What is this resource? How would I use this resource? What are some special features of this resource? Are there any considerations that we should communicate to the users?

FIGURE 2. SCREENSHOT OF THE WOMEN COMPOSERS SUBJECT GUIDE THAT SHOWS THE BULLETED DESCRIPTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL RESOURCES.

We built several supplementary teaching tools into the subject guides. For example, the tab "Searching the McGill catalogue" includes an introduction to researching the topic using the Library's catalogue in addition to hyperlinked subject headings for easy browsing. Video is another powerful instructional tool that we sought to harness. The tab prominently displays a video tutorial

about searching for music materials in the catalogue. Our objective is to create a safe learning environment for all our users, whether they be first-year undergraduates, faculty members, or individuals from the general public. In this way, there is no discrimination about information literacy levels in the subject guides: all users have access to the tools, and those familiar with these research strategies can simply skip to other tabs.

Perhaps it goes without saying, but creating the subject guides is an incredibly effective pedagogical exercise for staff. During the curation process, we learn about every resource included in the guide. Writing the descriptions requires us to carefully consider the words we use when we introduce these resources to our users: we try to simplify the language, cut out technical jargon, and point the users to the most pertinent features. Before unveiling the guides to the public, we solicited feedback from other members of the Music Library team about their organization and content. These guides have therefore influenced our reference services at the Library as the staff use the guides to recommend particular resources to patrons searching for more diverse repertoire and music literature.

Outreach

Sharing these new tools with our users was very important. We had the opportunity to present the guides at departmental meetings at the Schulich School of Music that evoked welcoming and positive reactions from our faculty. Some instructors immediately included these guides as a tool to support projects and assignments developed in their course outline. We also received invitations to present the guides in several different courses. Participating in the classroom was a fantastic opportunity to generate, integrate, and deepen the students' information literacy skills. We collaborated with the instructors to properly target their needs and selected resources specifically dedicated for their course. These workshops allowed us to work very closely with the students and to observe how they interacted with the guides and the resources. These were insightful interactions: they provided knowledge and understanding of our users and their needs so that we can better adapt our services and develop future workshops and classroom interventions.

To reach the broader music community, we use our social media platforms to promote the guides and to disseminate information about specific resources, often in relation to events such as Black History Month, Pride Month, or International Women's Day. Social media allows us to connect with users beyond Schulich School of Music, as individuals and student associations share these resources within their own communities. These subject guides have been consulted widely since their publication in January 2021. The BIPOC guide is the most popular music guide: as of November 2021, the guide has been accessed 4,551 times. The Women Composers guide is the fifth most popular music guide: as of November 2021, the guide has been viewed 1,857 times.

Challenges and ongoing management plans

The new and revised subject guides contain many free web resources that demonstrate a range of consistency and authority. Although we apply evaluation criteria in our curation strategy, many of the resources are community based or use crowdsourcing and are therefore bound to change in unforeseeable ways. The crowdsourced project may get abandoned, or the association could dissolve; on the other hand, a small initiative might expand with institutional support and digital collections may grow larger. Lorcan Dempsey raises an important question in his discussion of the facilitated collection: what responsibility does the library have for managing external resources?[11] How often should we be reviewing these external resources that we point to in the guides?

Consistent revision and review of these guides is also important to ensure that we remain engaged with new developments in these subject areas. Students have enquired about the Library's plans for maintaining the guides; that is, they want reassurance that this work is not simply tokenism, and that the Library is committed to a longer-term investment in these guides. As a pledge of our dedication to the mission of these subject guides, and to ensure long-term manageability and sustainability, we have developed an annual review process. This includes curating new content, reviewing existent content, reviewing, and incorporating user feedback and suggestions, checking links, and editing descriptions as necessary. The annual review also ensures that we remain updated with ongoing diversity initiatives and developments in vocabulary and approach. We are conscious of the challenges of responding to systemic discrimination and racism through equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives, and we found it challenging to make certain decisions, particularly regarding vocabulary. We wish to remain sensitive to the impact of the terms we use to describe people and their experiences and be prepared to adapt our language accordingly.

Conclusion

What have we achieved with these subject guides? The synergy around these new guides have led to revitalization efforts of older subject guides through the application of Lorcan Dempsey's concept of the facilitated collection. Music Library staff have developed an expanded Jazz guide and will be engaging in an extensive revision of the Canadian music guide. We had a unique opportunity during the pandemic shutdown to explore subject guides in depth, and therefore to address the equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives and priorities put forth by the Schulich School of Music and McGill University. These guides have allowed us to connect directly with faculty and students through our interventions in individual courses and to create solid connections between the Library and the School of Music. Curating these guides has been an incredible journey for us – often emotional and always stimulating – and we are excited to see them through until the day when a separate guide

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[11] Lorcan Dempsey, "The Facilitated Collection."

on diversity in music is no longer necessary, but instead fully integrated into all our collections and resources.

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