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Title: Music Information Literacy Advocacy at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

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"Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction. The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically."

—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
American Civil Rights Leader

Introduction

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States have a rich history of educating many leaders, including the Vice President of Kamala Harris, Nikki Giovanni, Toni Morrison, Oprah Winfrey, Martin Luther King, and many more. Today, there are approximately a hundred HBCUs in the nation, and they play an essential part in educating the upcoming young generation of people.

The historical perspective of HBCUs offers a unique lens into today's music information literacy advocacy needs. The HBCU marching band has been cited as one of the main factors in the decisions to attend or work there, by over fifty percent of incoming, current, and former students and faculty.¹ HBCU bands have focused on performing popular music, R&B, and hip hop music compared to traditional marching band music that has its roots in marching military

¹ Frierson, Henry Taylor. *Black American Males in Higher Education: Research, Programs and Academe* (Emerald Group Publishing, 2009), 14–18.

style. This chapter will touch on several factors of the importance of music information literacy advocacy from the perspective of a music librarian and music professor at an HBCU. Our positions offer unique insights into the experiences and challenges of bringing music information literacy to a young generation of HBCU students.

HBCUs have worked hard to confront the traditional canon's white supremacist roots. To that end, instructors must advocate for students to have the option to study various world music genres as well as today's popular music genres, such as hip hop, blues, rap, and rhythm and blues. Alongside that, it is essential to highlight various African American classical music composers and performers along with today's many diverse composers. We make efforts to challenge the historic anti-Blackness of the classical music canon. We propose several strategies to help improve music information literacy advocacy efforts at HBCUs..

From a Music Professor & Band Director's Perspective

As a professor at an HBCU, I notice that our students have abundant opportunities to engage deeply with diverse Black history. During the 19th century, the purpose of HBCUs was to provide an education for Black students because many colleges and universities refused to admit Black applicants. HBCUs offer them an opportunity to get a higher education and low tuition.² With this knowledge, every aspect of a music program, especially at an HBCU, should be connected to the rich heritage of African American musical life.

Selecting marching band repertoire for the marching band is a crucial factor in gaining the interest and engagement of the present students or the future students. The choice of music must be compelling, challenging, and relevant to the students' interests and backgrounds. If the music is too simple or too difficult it may not capture their attention. However, if the music is not

² "Musical life at HBCUS," National Museum of African American History and Culture, Accessed April 28, 2023, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/music-hbcus>.

reflective of their cultural and musical tastes, it may fail to inspire their enthusiasm and participation. Selecting music that is both musically engaging and relevant to the students, allows the students to foster a sense of pride and belonging, while also promoting growth and development in their musical skills and abilities.

Musicians access and use a wide range of materials with music information literacy, which makes it different from other disciplines. To be successful in their studies, music students must be familiar not only with general library resources, but also with music-specific formats. Whether students are primarily performers rather than researchers, they need access to audio materials, scores, articles, and books.

To build this knowledge, at the beginning of each semester, our music librarian informs our students about our library's resources. Various times are arranged for her to come to the classrooms or for our students to connect with her. As well as the visits, the music librarian created a platform for virtual consultations and library guides accessible twenty-four hours a day on the library's main page. One of the most incredible things about the music library is that it is not just open to music majors. Music appreciation classes also benefit from a wide range of resources, including dictionaries and performance analyses.

Using the music library efficiently is essential for musicians of all types. Searching for sheet music can be challenging even when it seems like a simple task. This is because certain pieces can only be found in anthologies and would be extremely difficult to locate based solely on the title. Specific training in music information literacy is therefore essential to preparing our students for their futures as musicians, whether they are specifically music majors or not. While online resources helps reduce the challenges of finding music, our students are only as successful as they are thanks to the training they receive.

As a professor, it's hard to over appreciate library instructors who take the time to educate our students to enhance their research. Our music librarian is a regular member of our music department, which is a unique structure of our college, and their opinion regarding the music curriculum is respected like any other professor. As a result of this setup, professors and students can feel more comfortable coming to the library to access audio materials, scores, articles, and books.

"Library anxiety" is a large problem facing music information literacy. It is common for students and faculty to avoid libraries unless they are studying or forced to go there. During the 2012-2013 academic year, McPhearson surveyed 1050 first-year undergraduate students in the faculty of humanities and education course. She concluded her research by stating:

"Although personal and institutional factors contributed to library anxiety, the former seemed to have contributed to a greater extent to the problem. *The absence of information literacy skills among the students* appeared to be a key factor contributing to library anxiety which may be related to the failure of some to participate in 5 orientation and information literacy training sessions."³

Offering music information literacy courses to our first-year students enhances our department for future music educators and could be a remedy for the library anxiety phenomenon. Students who are comfortable using the library and its resources are well set up to be musicians and successful library patrons for life. For more reading on HBCU Libraries, consult the following.⁴

³ M. A. McPherson, "Library Anxiety Among University Students: A Survey," *IFLA Journal* (2015): 322.

⁴ Renee Franklin Hill, "Still Digitally Divided? an Assessment of Historically Black College and University Library Web Sites," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 38, no. 1 (2012): 6-12.

J. Gravois, "Comparing Libraries of Public Historically Black Colleges and Universities with their White Counterparts," *College & Research Libraries* 56, no. 6 (1995): 519-530.

Band Music as a Pedagogical Springboard

HBCU marching bands have been an integral part of African American culture for decades. These bands have a proud tradition of providing not only entertainment but also serving as a symbol of unity, pride, and excellence for the community. HBCU marching bands have been recognized for their unique style, intricate formations, and powerful sound, and they have played an important role in shaping the music industry and influencing other genres of music such as jazz, blues, and hip hop. According to Mark Anthony Neal, a professor of African and African American Studies at Duke University, HBCU marching bands "have produced some of the most creative and innovative music to emerge from African American communities."⁵ These bands are an embodiment of the rich cultural heritage of African Americans, and their performances are always highly anticipated events that bring together people from all walks of life to experience the magic of their music.

Marching band music can also be used as a pedagogical springboard for developing music information literacy skills. Here are some ways to incorporate band music into teaching music information literacy:

1. Research the composer and historical context: Start by researching the composer of the band music and the historical context in which it was composed. This can include the composer's background, their musical influences, and the cultural or social context in

Elaina Norlin and Patricia Morris, "Historically Black College and University Libraries in the 21st Century: Accomplishments, Challenges, and Recommendations," *Journal of Library Administration* 33, no. 3-4 (2001): 183-197.

S. Phoenix and M. Henderson, "Expanding library support for faculty research in Historically Black Colleges and Universities," *Journal of Library Administration* 56, no. 5 (2016): 572-594.

⁵ Neal, M. A. "The Show Goes On: Marching Bands and HBCUs in the New South," *Journal of African American Studies*, 21(1) (2017): 1-2.

which the music was created. Use this information to contextualize the music and help students understand its significance.

2. Analyze the musical score: Band music scores can be used as a tool for teaching students how to read and analyze musical notation. Encourage students to analyze the score and identify different musical elements, such as melody, harmony, and rhythm.
3. This can also include identifying the different instruments used in the band and how they are used to create the overall sound.
4. Identify musical genres: Band music can be used to explore different musical genres, such as jazz, classical, rock, and pop. Encourage students to identify the musical characteristics of each genre and how they are used in the band music. This can also include exploring how different genres have evolved over time and how they have influenced each other.
5. Explore music history: Band music can be used as a springboard for exploring music history. Use different pieces of band music to teach students about different musical periods, such as the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic eras, and how music has evolved over time.
6. Critically evaluate the music: Finally, encourage students to critically evaluate the band music and form their own opinions about its quality and significance. This can include considering factors such as the musical elements used, the historical context, and the impact of the music on society.

Overall, using band music as a pedagogical springboard for music information literacy can help students develop a deeper understanding of music and its place in history and society.

From a Music Librarian's Perspective

The primary goal of a music librarian is to have a collection that reflects and supplements what is taught in the music classes. However, it is not possible to do this if you don't put yourself in the shoes of the faculty and try to see the picture from their perspectives. I often reach out to faculty to promote these materials by creating tools such as monthly book exhibits and library guides. Getting feedback from faculty and students is crucial to ensure the library is up to date in its collection. Many of our students are African American, and I look for ways to learn about their musical preferences and, for those who don't know world music or classical music, to share those kinds of music with them.

I wear a couple of hats as a music librarian and an instructor. Apart from my librarian duties, such as music cataloging and managing the library's collection, I also started teaching *Introduction to Music Literature* classes that helps me to connect the library collection and services with student learning while seeing the picture from a faculty eye. Still, I mostly look at the picture with a librarian's eye as my primary goal is to create ways to encourage students to utilize the music library.

Exposing students to diverse topics was a great way to initiate connections with students I wouldn't have had previously. Students started making more engaged conversations when I brought up music subjects connected to their identity either in one-shot library instruction sessions, or in casual conversations during their library visitations.

With this knowledge of their interests, I started to acquire and promote more diverse items from today's contemporary classical musicians, as well as women composers, African American composers, and LGBTQ+ composers. In the classroom as well as during the one-on-

one library instructions, I started to connect everyday topics such as hip hop music or popular music with scholarly literature.

Learner-Centered Pedagogy

According to Kevin Michael Klipfel and Dani Brecher Cook's book titled *Learner-Centered Pedagogy: Principles and Practice*, the learning centered approach emphasizes active learning where the students learn through applications and practice. They define the librarians and the teachers as facilitators or coaches for education.⁶ Students learn better when they have hands-on activities and connect better with the content they know if they can actively seek information when they check out books from the music library or delve into the music library databases while exploring subjects.

To work in this method, I usually ask students to review books and articles as their primary written assignments. Students check out music books on their favorite music topics from the music library. Some of these books were about hip-hop music, African American music, blues, gospel music, world music, etc. I leave them totally free to choose a subject they like to create a review on. With this assignment, most students are able to discover and utilize the music library and check out a book for the first time in their lives!

When I give them article summary assignments where they are left free to choose their topics, many students find popular subjects such as hip hop music in today's hot topics from *the Opposing Viewpoints* and other library databases. They have to blend their critical thinking while summarizing these articles and creating book reviews. I wanted to create a critical thinking

⁶ Kevin Michael Klipfel and Dani Brecher Cook, *Learner-Centered Pedagogy: Principles and Practice* (Chicago, ALA Editions, an imprint of the American Library Association, 2017): 15.

learning approach where I pushed students to work their original perspectives and have found it deeply successful to teach music information literacy guided by the students themselves.

Hip Hop Music as a Pedagogical Springboard

I realized I could still talk about the elements of music, such as rhythm, harmony, and melody, based on a hip hop song for instance. It was a gateway to talk about more musical elements later. As an emerging generation music librarian, I started reading about the Critical Pedagogy Handbook from American Library Association publication. There is a chapter written by Danielle Rowland about hip hop music⁷ which talks about how librarians can implement hip hop music in library instruction classes to engage students with scholarly resources. Rowland says:

“There are many great reasons for using hip hop in the classroom: it can validate and engage non-dominant cultures, worldviews, and identities, promoting social justice in the classroom; it engages students’ established cultural knowledge honoring their lived experience: and it is a great way to introduce critical perspectives into your teaching.”⁸

I agree with Rowland when she indicates hip hop is a great way to engage students in other world views and encourage them to apply critical thinking strategies. This is a great way to promote social justice in the classroom as students start questioning the meaning of art and its function in society. It is also one way to center those who have been traditionally marginalized through the teaching of the western canon.

⁷ Danielle Rowland, *Fresh Techniques: Getting Ready to Use Hip Hop in the Classroom*, In N. Pagowsky & K. McElroy (Eds.), *Critical Library Pedagogy Handbook* (Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016): 233-237.

⁸ Rowland, 233.

I used to tell them to get out of their comfort zone and be open to other types of music that they don't usually listen to daily. When we explored composers from world music and especially classical music, that was my motto. I repeatedly told students that they should be open to listening to music that they are less familiar with.

I wanted to show them that I could also get out of my comfort zone and make myself an example. I decided to open the topic of hip hop and popular music. As a classically trained musician and music librarian who is not deeply engaged with hip hop culture, this was a new genre of music for me. I started to listen to hip hop as well as other types of popular music that my students listen to before I decided to apply it to conversations in the library instruction classes. This step paved the way to engaging with my students beyond European traditional Western Classical Art Music culture. The result was very engaging, and I could see students had increased interest and engagement with the sessions. Also, it enabled me to create a unifying atmosphere, as ninety-nine percent of our students love to listen to hip hop and other popular music genres.

Talking about a type of music that they listen to on an everyday basis helped me to have conversations about other topics and terminologies, such as music copyrights, music sampling, breaking, emceeing, back spinning, etc. The strong terminology of hip hop music can also be connected to interdisciplinary subjects such as poetry, dance, and art, to encourage students to think from multi-disciplinary perspectives.

In class, I mentioned to students a TEDx talk by a DJ artist Ian Lawrence, "Why Hip Hop is World Culture." It asks questions about the meaning of art and how it connects people around

the world.⁹ This was a very eye-opening moment when I realized music is universal no matter what genre it is and where it originated. It eventually connects people around the world. Having such conversations with students was very rewarding as it was a gateway to talk about other academic subjects and disciplines, such as art and music's aesthetic and cultural aspects.

Selecting Composers and Performers

Giving examples from today's artists and musicians (especially performers of color) was also eye-opening for the students as it helped them to be more engaged in the class material. For example, when we were talking about the Romantic period and composer Frederic Chopin, I started talking about classically trained concert pianist Awadain Pratt who became the first African American pianist to win the Naumburg Piano Competition. Another example was when I spoke about chamber music and a Czech composer Antonín Dvořák when I introduced them to the Marian Anderson String Quartet, the first African American music ensemble in history to win a classical competition. They were playing Dvořák's *String Quartet in F major*, op. 96, nicknamed the *American Quartet*.

When I decided to implement conversations on the students' favorite music (or the music they are accustomed and know the best) in my library instructions and in the *Introduction to Music Literature* classes as well as one-shot library instructions that I teach, I had one crucial question: how should I connect these conversations with the library utilization, get students through the doors of the library, and make the library more inviting?

⁹ Ian, Lawrence. "Why Hip Hop is World Culture?" TEDx Talks. Youtube video, 13.57, posted July 27, 2018, <https://youtu.be/Noh7ptT0Rcc>.

The second volume of the *Critical Pedagogy Handbook*, published by the Association of College and Research Libraries, has a chapter written by Dave Ellenwood and Alyss Berger.¹⁰ In this chapter, the authors talk about how it can be beneficial to use hip hop music and connect with scholarly resources, as it helps students begin exploring their scholarly interests and encourages them to bring their expertise into the classroom.¹¹ I agree with the authors. When I started doing this, students became confident, and even the shyest student started to talk about familiar topics. Hence this was my goal to make sure the students were engaged in the classroom and not me merely just lecturing. In both volumes of the *Critical Pedagogy Handbook*, these chapters included classroom exercises for librarians or professors to use, which I found practical to apply and helped me create exercises to engage students with the music library.

Using Hip Hop Music to teach Music Copyright

It also gave me the idea to talk about other academic subjects. For example, when we had conversations about the complications of hip hop music sampling, I talked about the music copyrights library guide that I created. This library guide includes selected music books from the music library about music copyrights. When we explored some copyright cases from hip hop artists while delving into the types of music copyrights, such as performing rights and composer rights, I tied this conversation with academic writing and how giving credit to scholars and citing resources could help them to create an original work by blending their ideas. We also talked

¹⁰ Dave Ellenwood and Alyss Berger, “Fresh Techniques: Hip Hop and Library Research,” in *Critical Library Pedagogy Handbook*, ed. N. Pagowsky & K. McElroy (Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016), 9-15.

¹¹ Ellenwood and Berger, 197.

about fair use and why they still need to give credit for the content they fairly use in their academic work.

Using Hip-hop music to teach music copyright and copyright issues by looking at some case studies is a good conversation opener among students and let us have group discussions. The discussion revolves around how artists can create original works by sampling other artists' work without violating copyrights. The steps that they follow to protect their own intellectual property and give credit to others' work is actually very similar to academic scholarship. Having students accustomed to the idea of giving credit to others' work while they create their own original content is the core element in music information literacy and using hip-hop music or any other popular music is a good idea to make that link as it allows them to understand the copyright issues better.

Advocating for music information literacy is essential to building future musicians and scholars. Working in classes to connect students with the music library while pushing them to look into their own interests to create ways to learn actively. None of this is possible however without getting the support of music professors. It is essential to build a good relationship with music professors who appreciate the music librarian's value and implement strategies to utilize the music library in their curriculum.

Working together, the music professor and librarian can start with emphasizing critical thinking to students, and broadening the canon of repertoire covered. Education in the art music tradition has a deeply ingrained anti-Blackness. In broadening the musical examples used in class to mirror what is so beloved about the HBCU marching band experience, the students can more easily see themselves in the course content while dismantling racism in the traditional canon.

Then, the next step is encouraging students to check out library resources. It is essential to let them connect with their librarian to receive more guidance about other types of information that might not be available in the library. After all, the library is about more than just music books within the four walls physically available. What makes the library strong is that the librarian who guides and directs students to the information available outside the library's four walls and this is possible by creating conversations on everyday topics.

Creating strong critical thinking minds traditionally starts by teaching students how to seek, evaluate and utilize information, which is the true meaning of the information literacy concept. We suggest the first step is actually to connect students with their interests, and let them lead the process through non-traditional resources. If this is matched by a librarian and music professor willing to continue improving their own knowledge, the connections between students and the music library will develop naturally and build music information literacy that supports our future HBCU musicians and scholars.

Sample Discussion Questions

- How have your personal music experiences helped you to connect with students in the classroom?
- How do you connect the music library collection and services with the music classes?
- How can you shift your musical examples used in an instruction session work towards dismantling racism and sexism in your information literacy sessions?
- How do you advocate for music information literacy and get the support of the music faculty?

Sample Reading Guide

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