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Teaching Communities
An Autoethnographic Exploration of Engaging with Students in Extracurricular Programs

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Article abstract

While instruction librarians seek the most meaningful experiences for our students, sometimes we have to look beyond tradition to meet students where they are and where they feel a sense of belonging on campus. Through autoethnography we explore what it means to teach and learn with students in extracurricular communities, such as those in support programs for first-generation students and student-athletes. We reflect on how working with these communities has shaped us as teacher librarians, including our perceptions of belonging. While not always clear-cut, we argue that working with extracurricular communities brings benefits not addressed by traditional subject librarianship.

Teaching Communities: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Engaging with Students in Extracurricular Programs

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ABSTRACT

While instruction librarians seek the most meaningful experiences for our students, sometimes we have to look beyond tradition to meet students where they are and where they feel a sense of belonging on campus. Through autoethnography we explore what it means to teach and learn with students in extracurricular communities, such as those in support programs for first-generation students and student-athletes. We reflect on how working with these communities has shaped us as teacher librarians, including our perceptions of belonging. While not always clear-cut, we argue that working with extracurricular communities brings benefits not addressed by traditional subject librarianship.

Keywords: *extracurricular communities · information literacy · teacher librarian · teaching identity*

RÉSUMÉ

Alors que les bibliothécaires d'enseignement cherchent à offrir les expériences les plus enrichissantes à leurs étudiant.e.s, nous devons parfois aller au-delà de la tradition pour aller à la rencontre des étudiant.e.s, et ceci là où ielles ont un sentiment d'appartenance au campus. Par le biais de l'auto-ethnographie, nous explorons ce que cela signifie d'enseigner et d'apprendre avec des étudiant.e.s dans des communautés extrascolaires, telles que celles des programmes de soutien aux étudiant.e.s de première génération et aux étudiant.e.s-athlètes. Nous réfléchissons à la manière dont le travail avec ces communautés nous a façonné.e.s en tant que bibliothécaires enseignant.e.s , y compris nos

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perceptions de l'appartenance. Bien que cela ne soit pas toujours évident, nous soutenons que le travail avec les communautés extrascolaires apporte des avantages qui ne sont pas pris en compte par la bibliothéconomie traditionnelle.

Mots-clés : *bibliothécaire enseignant.e · communautés extrascolaires · identité pédagogique · maîtrise de l'information*

As academic librarians who teach, we have opportunities to connect with students by working directly with extracurricular communities with which they identify, rather than limiting instruction to subject-specific contexts. We define extracurricular communities as the university-supported organizations that students self-select into, are invited into, or otherwise personally identify with and that they pursue in addition to coursework. Working with extracurricular communities—such as athletics and first-generation support programs in our case—affords us opportunities to get to know our students as full human beings, not just students in a discipline. Teaching with these communities also helps us better understand ourselves as teacher librarians.

We chose autoethnography as our methodology so that we could examine our experiences in a reflexive way. Autoethnography allows us to centre ourselves and our embodied experiences as teacher librarians working with extracurricular communities, while still contributing to ongoing professional conversations through critical reflection and discussion (Deitering 2017; Harris 2017; Hughes and Pennington 2017). While this was a new methodology for us, we were excited by the possibility that we could make sense of specific situations and circumstances central to job satisfaction, especially because our institutions generally regard this work as peripheral. We were inspired by reading the work of Janna Mattson et al. (2017). We connected with their autoethnographic approach to exploring complex concepts, such as a teaching identity and what it means to belong, through reflection and constructive conversation.

Through this autoethnographic exploration, we aim to answer the research question, "What are our experiences teaching extracurricular communities?" The process began in late 2021 with brainstorming of potential research questions. Since we came up with so many, the first author coded them into three categories. They became the foundation for a series of reflection prompts (see Appendix A), which we responded to individually over a few weeks in August 2022. After meeting to discuss and read each other's reflections, we decided to collect additional reflective data through a synchronous Zoom conversation, which took place in October 2022. Excerpts here are labeled "reflection" or "discussion comment" to indicate their origin. After collecting the data, we then inductively coded the written reflections

and spoken discussion transcript to find similarities and differences among our experiences, each author contributing salient points to a shared table. Though we knew we could hold additional discussions that might surface nuance, we felt we had enough data to analyze. Mid-way through, we considered the main themes to be traits of the communities and how our work with these communities shapes our own teaching identities.

Though presented here as a linear process, in practice our methods were recursive. The autoethnography process facilitated reflexive analysis, exposing our assumptions. As we examined these assumptions, we realized we had to interrogate the concept of belonging, what it is, how we know when we have it, and who influences our feelings of belonging. The concept of belonging is intricately connected to identity, so we explored our experiences of identity and belonging, both in relation to the students and staff in these communities, and among ourselves as researchers and teacher librarians.

To better understand the concept of belonging, we turned to psychology. The conceptualization of belonging by Gregory M. Walton and Shannon T. Brady (2017) has been particularly useful in shaping how we think about it:

> Belonging is therefore not a simple summation of the number of friends one has in a space. It is a more general inference, drawn from cues, events, experiences, and relationships about the quality of fit or potential fit between oneself and a setting. It is experienced as a feeling of being accepted, included, respected in, and contributing to a setting, or anticipating the likelihood of developing this feeling. (272)

Notably, the feelings they discuss list four factors that must be present, or anticipated to be present, for one to feel belonging. We take the first three—being accepted, included, and respected in a setting—to be widely understood. The last factor, "contributing to a setting," we understand to be the agency that allows one to contribute to the setting of the information literacy (IL) classroom, extracurricular program, or higher education more broadly.

Because belonging is personal and nuanced, differences in our experiences are evident here. However, the essential human need for belonging allows us to work from a shared humanity, internally within ourselves, amongst each other, and with the members of the extracurricular communities discussed here.

Approaching Our Extracurricular Communities

To begin to understand our experiences, we first described the communities themselves and our work with them.

Darren's reflection: Since 2017 I have worked as a liaison librarian with Student Support Services (SSS), a program that supports students as they complete their bachelor's degrees. Locally, this program is branded the Center for Human Enrichment (CHE). All participants are first-generation students, and a minimum of 70% of participants are also low-income. I teach a session introducing CHE students to the library during their orientation before fall classes start, a one-shot session on finding and using peer-reviewed research articles in their first-year seminar in the fall, and a one-credit information literacy course tied to their English composition course in the spring.

Adrienne's reflection: My work with the McNair/ROP program began in late 2019. It supports first-generation college students or those that are part of an underrepresented group and are aiming for graduate studies programs. The ROP part of the title, Research Opportunity Program, is the state-funded corollary. This means that students who are not entitled to federal aid, such as those who are undocumented and DACAmented[1] in the United States, are still eligible to apply for the program. I provide two three-hour workshops each year that discuss research questions and literature reviews.

Rachel's reflection: The community that I serve are the student-athletes broadly, although my efforts are largely targeted on those student-athletes engaged with the Student-Athlete Academic Support Center (SAASC). I teach a one-credit information literacy course for incoming first-year student-athletes enrolled in a summer bridge program. I began teaching this course in 2018 and have continued to teach it every summer since. The classroom experiences I discuss in my reflections refer to these summer cohorts.

Our work with extracurricular programs aligns with the small number of library and information science (LIS) studies that examine this topic. Arguments for collaborating with campus partners outside of traditional discipline-specific liaison roles point to multiple advantages, including greater awareness of library resources and services, improved relationships, and increased opportunities for library promotion (Wainwright and Davidson 2017). In 2007, Candice Dahl made the case for liaison roles to expand to non-academic campus units, arguing that "Those with whom libraries typically form formal liaison relationships represent only a portion of campus networks and user needs" (6). LIS research also indicates that instruction and outreach to non-academic units helps reach underserved or marginalized students on our campuses (Aguilar and Keating 2009; Beene et al. 2019; Parker 2017).

1. "DACAmented" is a portmanteau of the acronym DACA, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, a U.S. immigration policy, and "documented" which refers in this case to the assigned identity of a person who possesses approved, legal immigration documents. For someone who is DACAmented, they are allowed to be in the U.S., but do not have full or a path to full legal citizenship, as of this writing.

Characteristics of These Communities

First-Generation Students

The label of first-generation student is generally attributed to those whose parents do not hold a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education 1998). First-generation students "are more likely to come from a low socioeconomic background, to be people of color, to be older, to be female, and to have dependents" (Arch and Gilman 2020, 3). However, first-generation students represent a variety of identities and experiences that cannot be generalized. Due to this diversity and lack of consensus on whom the label includes or excludes (Nguyen and Nguyen 2018), we discuss only a few characteristics of first-generation students that relate to our experiences.

A misconception about first-generation students is that they are less engaged than their continuing-generation peers, a view that our experience with students does not support. A critical review of the LIS literature identified the trend of first-generation students being labeled as reluctant users of library resources and services (Ilett 2019). The perception of first-generation students' hesitancy to use library services and resources should not be associated with a lack of motivation to learn (Parker 2017; Yee 2016). Instead, recent research urges librarians to consider how our institutions create barriers to use instead of viewing first-generation students as lacking in some way (Hodge 2022). Indeed, researchers have called for a shift away from deficit perspectives toward more asset-based approaches when working with first-generation students (Arch and Gilman 2020; Ilett 2019). Teacher librarians and researchers have found that pedagogical approaches that help identify and validate students' strengths and connect their lived experiences with information literacy—such as funds of knowledge, counter-storytelling, and validation theory—increase students' motivation and self-image as members of the academic community (Folk 2018; Morrison 2017; Quiñonez and Olivas 2020). Further, research has demonstrated the benefit of cross-campus collaborations for first-generation students' learning (Deng 2022). In our work, we have also found that an asset-based approach and collaborations with extracurricular programs have positive impacts on first-generation students' learning and affect:

> **Darren's reflection:** It's important to listen to what students say and to adjust course content, activities, policies, etc., to foster their learning and success in ways that take who they are and what they've experienced into account. My work with CHE has also taught me that the content I'm teaching is secondary to the people I'm working with and the connection we have. If they know I care about them as full people, they are more likely to learn.

Student-Athletes

Though there is less LIS research on student-athletes, some characteristics of this group have emerged. Time constraint is a common theme in the literature on student-athletes (Caniano 2015; Checchio and Deuink 2023). William T. Caniano (2015) argued that because of increased demands on their time, it is crucial to meet student-athletes where they are and to create learning opportunities that are specific to them. Rachel addressed the issues of time and providing unique ways to connect with student-athletes:

> **Rachel's reflection:** I would say that one trait that I have really honed while working with student-athletes is my ability to be as flexible as possible. That's not to say that I don't set boundaries for myself (or at least try to)—rather that I know they tend to have many constraints on their time, their location, etc., so I do my best to meet them where they are. [...] For me, this means helping students with citations after normal work hours, having students share their working documents with me so that we can look at their work collaboratively while they are traveling [...] I guess I've learned that if I truly want to help students, then I can't be so rigid in the ways that I make myself accessible.

Other LIS researchers have documented the steps they have taken to connect with student-athlete communities on their campuses. Lorena O'English and Sarah McCord (2006) note that a small gesture, such as hanging in the library a poster that supports campus athletics, can help to make student-athletes feel welcomed in library spaces. Library orientation or information literacy sessions designed for student-athletes can help to build beneficial partnerships between the library and athletics (O'English and McCord 2006; Sapp and Vaughn 2017) or even strengthen the relationship between librarians and student-athletes (Erdmann and Clark 2016), both of which could positively contribute to student-athletes' academic success.

Researchers in other fields have documented harmful stereotypes about student-athletes, including those perpetuated by faculty members (Comeaux 2011) and their peers (Fuller et al. 2019). Whitney Griffin (2017) indicated that student-athletes, specifically Black male football players at predominately white institutions, are acutely aware of the negative perceptions the campus community holds against them. Many of the students Rachel works with fit this specific demographic and face such prejudice. Misconceptions about students' seriousness or commitment to their academic roles create damaging and pervasive stereotypes, something we work to combat in our instruction and outreach to both student-athletes and first-generation students.

In the Classroom

The classroom can be a site for enhancing a sense of belonging and fostering community (Morrison 2017; Quiñonez and Olivas 2020). Our pedagogical and

practical approaches take into account that many of our students have intersecting, minoritized identities that shape their experiences in our classrooms. When students' identities are recognized, learning can be more impactful (Strayhorn 2006) as well as more relevant and useful (Morrison 2017). Awareness of students' intersecting identities help us foster a more supportive, community-focused classroom.

> **Adrienne's reflection:** It is not typical for me to be privy to the citizenship status of students in my instruction sessions, and that information should remain highly confidential because of the risk associated with its disclosure. I now go into every session with the knowledge that I will likely be working with students with precarious political designations.

> **Darren's reflection:** It's crucial to create a welcoming environment where students come to feel that who they are outside the classroom and what they bring with them are important foundations for further learning in higher education, not obstacles to that learning.

In addition to creating a supportive environment for students in our classrooms, thoughtful engagement between instructors and students in extracurricular communities can lead to better understanding and more meaningful connections (Comeaux 2011; Parker 2017; Strayhorn 2006). This includes developing specialized IL workshops with content focused on the students in the community (Caniano 2015; Erdmann and Clark 2016; Sapp and Vaughn 2017) or employing culturally-sustaining pedagogies in the IL classroom (Morrison 2017; Quiñonez and Olivas 2020). Rachel outlines one of her approaches to fostering connection:

> **Rachel's reflection:** In the Bridge classroom, I really try to lean into the community aspect of these groups. I encourage working in groups and helping each other when problems arise. This can sometimes lead to a louder (or even rowdier) classroom than normal, but I think the benefits of them working collaboratively outweigh the negatives of the noise.

On Campus and Beyond

Our pedagogical awareness extends beyond the classroom. Despite some negative perceptions and deficit-minded thinking, research indicates that both first-generation students and student-athletes tend to feel optimistic about being academically prepared for college (Brinkman, Gibson, and Presnell 2013; Comeaux et al. 2011). Darren and Rachel share this optimism:

> **Darren's reflection:** I believe that students' funds of knowledge—the skills and knowledge they bring with them to college from their homes, communities, workplaces, and previous education—are valuable assets that should form the basis of further learning. This is in contrast to deficit thinking that frames students as unprepared for college coursework.

Rachel's reflection: I feel student-athletes are often misunderstood by other students/faculty/staff on campus. It is true that they are a special population with special privileges, but they are also a population with diverse backgrounds, varying responsibilities, and significant demands on their time.

The programs we collaborate with actively support holistic student development, going beyond cognitive development to support social and emotional development of their students as well. These programs foster a sense of belonging by building on shared assets, identities, and goals and working to help students see themselves as part of the campus environment.

Darren's discussion comment: This is anecdotal, but we've heard it from students, and we feel it when we are with students. They tend to feel that they share something with the other students and possibly the staff of the programs, right? It's not just their pursuit of a degree. I think for students it's a different experience that they're having in these communities.

Through interviews with college students, Annemarie Vaccaro and Barbara M. Newman (2016) found that in addition to fitting in and feeling comfortable, minoritized students identified the need to feel safe, respected, and that they could be their authentic selves in order to feel a sense of belonging in campus communities. Several researchers have concluded that the stakes are higher for minoritized students when they are uncertain of their belonging (Strayhorn, Hurtado, and Harris 2012; Walton and Brady 2017; Walton and Cohen 2007). This makes it all the more necessary that these students receive consistent messaging around their appropriate fit in higher education. We are a part of this effort. This sense of belonging is exemplified in Darren's reflection, in which he noted that sharing the first-generation identity helped him connect with and understand students' experiences and feelings:

Darren's reflection: Community is integral to the CHE program and to my role in it. The program is designed to foster a community of first-generation students who can support each other as they navigate the new world of higher education. The staff and faculty who work with the program form what they call a "CHE Net," a network of support. Students often call CHE their home away from home, where they feel welcome, safe, and supported. For my part in this, I draw from my own experiences and feelings as a first-generation student: overwhelmed, intimidated, out of place, and lost. As I've heard many first-generation students say, I didn't even know what I didn't know, so it can be difficult to know what to ask, where to ask it, and have the courage to ask a question of an authority figure. I therefore share with CHE students my own stories of struggle, disappointment, and persistence. I explain how and why I sought help and whom I went to. My hope is that normalizing struggle and help-seeking will encourage them to reach out when they need guidance, support, and understanding.

We also noted a common theme of wanting to make a difference both on and beyond campus, supporting students to change the academic landscape. Adrienne mentioned wanting to instill confidence in her students, even if only realized down the line, while Rachel and Darren noted the lasting effects of belonging.

> **Adrienne's discussion comment:** Maybe I can help them a little for their graduate studies, and maybe they don't know how this is going to be helpful yet, but maybe when they are doing the work, later in grad school, the library or their undergraduate experience will float forward in their consciousness or in their own sense of community, that they do belong in grad school, and look, they have some of this knowledge already.
>
> **Rachel's discussion comment:** Yeah, I think it's about community building for me and wanting them to feel comfortable on this campus, not just as a football player or a basketball player, but as, you know, a student on this campus.
>
> **Darren's discussion comment:** And because of their first-gen status and all their other identities…because of them, they get told that they don't belong in academia. I want the students to know that they belong not in spite of, but because of who they are.

We attempt to cultivate learning environments for students to be their authentic selves and to nurture a sense of belonging within an academic community. In turn these experiences have helped shape who we are as librarians.

Impact on Our Identities

As we reflect on the identities of our students and how integral they are to connection and belonging within their extracurricular communities, we must also reflect on our own identities and how they shape our sense of belonging with these groups and beyond. Our identity as librarians who teach is worth unpacking in the context of higher education. Recent research has noted tensions caused by teacher librarians' multiple roles and the ambiguous status of our work in higher education (Becksford 2022; Heinbach and Wainscott 2020). Further, teacher librarians tend to adjust their approach or teaching persona based on the context and group they are working with (Azadbakht 2021). In analyzing our reflections and conversation, we also concluded that the context and nature of the programs with which we work contribute to our evolving understanding of ourselves as teacher librarians and people. Salient factors that emerged in our own understanding of this and related identities include the characteristics of students typically involved in the programs, their status apart from degree-granting programs, and their strong sense of community and belonging.

Student Engagement and Motivation

We noted several distinguishing traits of students who join these communities, namely their motivation, engagement, and honesty, traits that resonate with other studies (Adeyemo 2022; Couture et al. 2021; Dommermuth and Roberts 2022).

Darren's discussion comment: I think that the group itself is special, and I think it's probably true for all of our groups. It's a self-selected…self-selecting group, so they are motivated.

Adrienne's discussion comment: They're engaged and they're bringing their best. It's such a rigorous environment that the students push me to be better, and they ask these questions that I've never thought about, and it pushes me to find out more, and then, in turn, I feel it makes me a better librarian in the next year that I work with the next cohort. So, I feel like their motivation, just to learn and to get into grad school and do the best they can and to break all these barriers, is really motivating to me in a way that is so fulfilling. It's the most fulfilling, I think, group that I work with.

Rachel's reflection: Sometimes this class is frustrating, but most of the time, they are a fun, engaged bunch of students who are honest with their feedback. If something doesn't work, they generally aren't shy about telling me why it wasn't helpful. I've grown so much as an instructor teaching these students. I found I have to be patient, empathetic, and adaptable—all traits that help with other students too!

These students push us to be better teachers. While highly motivated and engaged students exist in all areas of higher education, including in subject liaison classrooms, there is something different when these traits come from students who are in self-selected cohorts organized, in part, based on identities. In contrast to deficit-minded approaches to first-generation students and student-athletes in previous literature, we find that students are engaged and motivated to succeed.

Independence from Disciplines

These extracurricular programs are independent from degree-granting, subject-specific departments. The students therefore come together in the library classroom from a range of disciplines and learn about how research differs across those disciplines, something they might not otherwise have the opportunity to do.

Adrienne's discussion comment: [McNair/ROP students] get to watch each other learn, almost, about their disciplines, and I feel like that's really important.

As librarians working with interdisciplinary programs, we also learn along with the students.

Adrienne's discussion comment: I think one of the challenges that pushes me to be better for other students and other sessions, too, is it makes me become aware of all these different disciplines. These students are coming from engineering and education and English literature. When I teach how to form a research question, or how to start your lit review research, I need to learn about those different disciplines and figure out what is common to all or most of those disciplines. So, then I can take that thread to other extracurricular groups and pass along what I've learned through the McNair sessions.

Thus, working with extracurricular programs expands our own knowledge of research practices across fields and the pedagogical approaches appropriate for each field. Darren noted that our own independence from an academic department impacts the affective dimension of our work with students:

> **Darren's reflection:** I think because I'm not a faculty member in their major departments, students feel they can be more open and trusting with me. Except for the credit course in the spring of their first year, I'm not assigning them a grade.

The interpersonal connection therefore often benefits from our position apart from disciplinary faculty.

In addition, from our vantage point removed from disciplines, we may be better positioned to see the connections between and across them. Michelle Holschuh Simmons (2005) reports on the benefits of academic librarians taking an "anthropologic" stance to disciplines, observing their differing conventions, and then translating them for students at a helpful remove (297). This can be hard for us to internalize, though, as we often feel a sense of lack or "less than" when we think about working outside of disciplines, even as we believe in the value of this work. The interdisciplinarity then impacts both how colleagues and how we ourselves view and value our expertise, as Adrienne and Rachel discussed:

> **Adrienne's discussion comment:** I'm a generalist. I am trying to learn about a bunch of disciplines to help everyone in those disciplines at the same time. Often specificity is valued, right? But if you're a generalist, bringing general skills or general research skills or general library skills to the team, I think it's a little harder to… for me, A) to pitch what I'm doing succinctly and B) to have it feel like I'm being valued in that role.
>
> **Rachel's discussion comment:** I think you bring up a really interesting point: this idea of not knowing how to market yourself in terms of being a generalist. I was hired as a generalist but took on subject liaison duties. And actually, we are moving towards more of a generalist model [at our library], so that is making me feel a little better about my work.

Our discussion echoes findings of previous studies that note an ambivalence in librarianship regarding subject expertise, the standing of generalist librarians, and shifting models of liaison librarianship (Johnson 2018; Smith and Oliva 2010). As reference, liaison, and instruction librarians experience shifts in the scope of their duties toward broader student success initiatives, we must strive to remain or become visible campus partners (Johnson 2018). Making visible the work that we do with extracurricular communities is something that we also struggle with, even among our library colleagues. We share more about our experiences with visibility in a later section of this paper.

Extracurricular Communities and Belonging

The extracurricular programs are characterized by a strong sense of community and belonging beyond their identity as students, which impacts our work with them as well. Darren noted how he was able to forge meaningful connections through a shared identity of being a first-generation college student. By being part of the community in this way, Darren expressed how he could sometimes transcend his role as teacher.

> **Darren's reflection:** A major feature of this work is connecting as more than our roles as students and librarian. The students and I share the experience of being first-gen students and can all commiserate about the frustrations and barriers and celebrate the joys and accomplishments that go along with that identity. When students recognize that I care about them as whole human beings with complex lives, it's easier for them to trust me and, consequently, also to learn about information literacy. It helps them view the library as a welcoming space as well. Further, I can tap into the community that they're making as participants in CHE. The trust the CHE staff have in me signals to students that I'm on their side and that I'm part of the "CHE Net" of support they can count on when they encounter obstacles.

The CHE staff outwardly reinforce Darren's membership in the community by including him in the support network. As a result of the shared lived experiences of overcoming the hardships many first-generation students face, Darren and the CHE students can more easily get to know each other as people. The importance of this relationship-building has been documented in the literature. Adriana Parker (2017) argued for the importance of developing relationships with students in such programs and of showing up "as a whole person, rather than an unknown authority figure" (28).

For Adrienne and Rachel, relationship-building has to emphasize commonalities outside of the identities that define the extracurricular groups. Neither of us is part of a racially minoritized group, Adrienne is not a first-generation student, and Rachel is not an athlete. Their sense of belonging with these communities is therefore less straightforward. As librarians trying to connect with these communities, feelings of being an outsider to the community can be a challenge to sustained engagement with students. Adrienne discussed feeling like a removed part of the community, and Rachel mentioned feeling like an outsider trying to get in.

> **Adrienne's discussion comment:** If the McNair/ROP community is a circle, I think I belong to it in a somewhat removed way, perhaps as the next or outer ring on a concentric circle. I am a small part of their experience in the program, but I hope it is an important part.

> **Rachel's discussion comment:** I will say, I don't feel like I am part of the community. I know for me it makes me feel like I'm always kind of knocking at the door, like, "Hey!

> Remember, I'm here for you!" There's always a kind of threshold that I have to cross to get in contact with this group of students, particularly after they leave my classroom.

As with any teaching experience, we can feel moments of rejection, exclusion, disrespect, and inability to contribute to a setting (Walton and Brady 2017). These moments are not unique to teaching with extracurricular communities, but they do still arise within them.

It is important to note that the implications of belonging or not belonging have different levels of threat depending on social identities. As white, middle-class professionals who are extended a high degree of institutional power and authority, the risk associated with moments of feeling like we do not belong with an extracurricular community does not threaten our positions to a great degree. Though we are reflecting on belonging here, we also realize we do not have to contend with belonging so frequently that we feel we cannot cope with it. We have advantages that make this so. As Walton and Brady (2017) contend, "One of the hidden advantages of being a member of a privileged group [...] is that questions about the standing of one's group, or oneself as a member of a marginalized group, rarely come to mind" (274). Researchers who study belonging uncertainty show it disproportionately affects students who belong to social identity groups like members of the extracurricular communities with whom we work (Janke et al. 2023; Spencer, Logel, and Davies 2016; Walton and Brady 2017). As teachers, we do not expect our students to tend to our feelings of belonging. When we experience disconnections with students in these extracurricular communities, zooming out to contextualize these moments and centre students' identities and lived experiences helps us maintain our commitment to teaching and learning with them.

Even as we work to make sense of the cues, events, experiences, and relationships we encounter in these extracurricular programs, we wonder about whether sharing the same identities is unquestionably useful. Rachel noted that not sharing the defining group identity with students may also present an advantage when working with student-athletes:

> **Rachel's discussion comment:** In some ways I feel kind of, like, sad that I'm not more part of the community, but also, I'm okay with it because sometimes it's good for the students to have someone outside of the community that they can rely on, right? And I feel this is true for student-athletes because they'll have coaches or the athletic support staff telling them… There's a certain type of messaging they get in athletics. And I don't know this for sure, but I think I have a different message. And so, I think that they come to me sometimes just to hear something different. I think being outside of the community is maybe beneficial for me in some ways.

Many of the students in the extracurricular communities share intersecting identities, such as first-generation, BIPOC, and low-income. As white, middle-class librarians, working with students in these programs is an opportunity to examine ways in which we may inadvertently cause harm, as Darren mentioned: to name the systems of oppression that they face, examine our implicit biases, and acknowledge our roles in those systems.

> **Darren's discussion comment:** Most of my identities are privileged ones, but most of the identities of the students are not. And so, I've learned from them. So, it's a motivation, I think, to have…make a more inclusive and equitable classroom, which I thought I was doing before, but I've learned from CHE students that there were times when I caused harm because they've actually shared that with me occasionally. And so, it's given me a lot to think about and given me lots of opportunities for trying new things. And so, like Adrienne, I think that what I learn from the CHE students helps me be a better librarian and just, like, person on campus who can advocate for change. Now it's so much more about community building and learning about other people's experiences, and just going beyond myself.

Similarly, Rachel discusses with student-athletes, particularly Black student-athletes, the stereotypes they may face on campus, stereotypes which have been discussed in previous research as well (Comeaux 2011).

> **Rachel's discussion comment:** We do talk about the stereotypes that exist, particularly against student-athletes and things that they may encounter in the classroom. So that is a motivator for me, challenging the narrative around stereotypes with student-athletes. These stereotypes are compounded by racism as well, right? Black student-athletes tend to have more negative perceptions from professors than white student-athletes. So, talking about being a student on this campus and belonging on this campus is a huge motivator for me with this group.

Along the same lines, there is a growing trend in IL instruction to use race-conscious, asset-based pedagogies to work toward inclusivity and equity for first-generation, BIPOC, and low-income students (Folk 2018; Morrison 2017; Quiñonez and Olivas 2020). In line with this trend in LIS research, in our instruction sessions we encourage students to pursue research on topics related to their lived experiences and lead activities that help students recognize their own expertise. Further, we express to students that their voices are needed in the scholarship in their field specifically and in higher education generally.

Staff and Belonging

Our reflection and discussion revealed to us that program staff play a big part in helping us feel a sense of belonging with this work. Treated as respected professionals who have agency in how we contribute to the educational setting, the coordinators of these programs have extended a consistent message to us across programs:

Rachel's reflection: I have a great relationship with the SAASC staff, and I feel like they see how my engagement can be beneficial to the student-athletes.

Adrienne's reflection: The coordinators of [the McNair/ROP] program have extended to me a level of respect that has fostered a mutual trust in shared goals and as professionals. They trust me to deliver sessions their students will find useful.

Darren's reflection: The [CHE] staff have said that having a dedicated librarian made the library more welcoming for students who might not feel that way otherwise.

This affirmation of our work by program staff makes sense when viewed through the lens of collaboration. Collaborators value each others' work and are working toward a common goal, which in this case is to help students in extracurricular programs achieve their scholastic and personal objectives. Program staff and we, as librarians, agree that we positively impact students. Beth Hoag (2016) examines these mutually beneficial alliances, concluding that "Librarians provide a bridge to faculty that may validate the student affairs mission on campus and pave the way for increased learning partnerships campus-wide," and, conversely, that "student affairs professionals act as a bridge to the student body, which may enforce and enhance the relevance of libraries for today's student" (iii-iv).

Library Administration, Colleagues, and Belonging

In addition to exploring how the students and staff participating in these programs have influenced our teaching identities and senses of belonging, a third major player surfaced in the cast of belonging influencers—the organization of the library. For the most part, our organizations have allowed us to continue with this work at our request, even if as a secondary duty. For Adrienne, this work has always existed at the edge of her stated liaison duties. Rachel has been teaching the athletes in the summer bridge course four years longer than precedent dictated. Of the group, Darren is the only one who was assigned extracurricular communities, the two TRIO programs serving first-generation students, as his official liaison duties when he was hired. That a position was created for this work is a hopeful sign that library and campus administrators recognize its value. Adrienne noted, however, how this work is frequently treated as peripheral:

Adrienne's reflection: Right now, it has a sort of tacked-on feel, like an extra topping on an ice cream sundae, when really, it's the ice cream. Just because this work is not part of the departmental liaison model, does not mean it should exist in the realm of "other." An articulation of the importance of this work with co-curricular cohorts at a higher level would be welcome.

Amy Wainwright and Chris Davidson (2017) express the desire to centre extracurricular teaching collaborations in a coordinated fashion: "Given the

advantages, library administrators should consider formalizing these roles in their strategic efforts to raise the library's profile on campus and reach users that they are not reaching through traditional means" (128). Rachel articulated a similar wish to have the profile of her teaching with the athletic community elevated. She related colleagues' lack of understanding of her work to challenges in communication about the students she serves:

> **Rachel's reflection:** I'm not entirely sure that some of my colleagues in the libraries are aware that I teach student-athletes, let alone why this teaching is so important. Part of this is definitely on me. I could certainly do a better job of making my efforts visible to my colleagues throughout the year and in my evaluation reports.

Although we have proposed here that library administrators acknowledge the importance of this work by designating the extracurricular collaborations as official liaison duties or through job titles, other means of recognition would help us feel this work is more respected and included in library priorities. Examples of this recognition could be compensation for work beyond expected workloads, reduction of other duties while engaged with extracurricular work, or advocacy for extracurricular teaching and support among other campus administrators. If library departments are considered another kind of setting to which we are constantly evaluating our fit, such recognition would contribute to our sense of belonging.

Conclusion

Our conversations uncovered several shared experiences and understandings about IL instruction and outreach for extracurricular programs. We found that this work enables us to move toward equity and inclusion by reaching minoritized students, challenging us to examine our privileged identities and unintended impacts, and building partnerships across campus. We reflected on our work through the lens of belonging, exploring the concepts of acceptance, inclusion, and respect within the extracurricular communities we serve, our campus partners, and library administration and colleagues. We found that feeling a sense of belonging, or not, impacts not only our approach to our work with these communities, but our own perceptions of ourselves as teacher librarians. Despite sometimes feeling a sense of precarity in this work, we believe that it should continue and, further, that it should be fully integrated and recognized in our organizational structure, procedures, and culture.

All of us indeed wish to continue this work, and we discussed what the future may hold. It may entail adjustments to the way we deliver instruction due to changes both in the extracurricular programs and in our libraries, changes that could bring both advantages and disadvantages.

> **Darren's reflection:** There are two main factors that are shaping how I can collaborate with the CHE program. The program recently received a new grant, which has caused multiple changes. Another factor is that our University Libraries is launching a reimagined liaison model. Rather than being oriented around subject areas, it will be structured around functions and teams of librarians. Given both of these changes, there is the possibility of ending the credit course I teach for CHE and replacing it with a series of IL workshops. The advantage would be the potential of reaching more students than my credit course does alone. The disadvantage is that creating substantial connections with students would be more difficult in a series of workshops than it is in a credit course.

Or it may mean continuing to provide IL instruction as we have been doing and instead focusing on increased advocacy for this work because we believe strongly in the value of teaching students in extracurricular programs.

> **Adrienne's reflection:** I think the best that I can hope for with my work in this community is that it can continue as is. I will advocate for the students and for myself to continue being their liaison.

> **Rachel's discussion comment:** Despite what is happening with the libraries, I'm gonna do my damnedest just to keep doing what I'm doing, because I think it's important, and I will try to advocate for the importance of this, the work that I'm doing with student-athletes.

Doing such advocacy work may lead to organizational changes that embrace IL instruction and outreach for extracurricular groups as core to what we do.

While our autoethnographic approach allowed us to better understand ourselves and our teaching identities, we acknowledge that there are limitations to this research. This paper depicts our examinations of our own experiences, perceptions, and biases. We endeavored to be critically reflective and open to vulnerability. We have shared honestly, but recognize that given our identities and circumstances, our experiences may significantly differ from those of other teacher librarians. Furthermore, our work represents a mere scratching of the surface of the impact of belonging on ourselves and our work as teacher librarians. There are multiple areas in which belonging could be explored further, including how a sense of belonging impacts our curricular and pedagogical choices, our work with campus communities, our perceptions of inclusion and respect in higher education in general, and how we connect with others, including our students.

We feel that centring IL instruction and outreach around extracurricular programs is a valid strategy that can complement liaison work with academic departments. It encourages both students and us as librarians to think interdisciplinarily to identify similarities and differences in research across fields. Teaching and doing outreach in extracurricular contexts meets students where they already spend much of their time and where they feel a sense of community and

belonging based on shared identities and lived experiences, unlike in their major disciplines. It allows us and students to work together as full human beings.

The conclusion of this research in no way represents an end to critical examination of our work with extracurricular communities. We are committed to reflection and personal growth. We will continue to work with student-athlete and first-generation student communities because we value the impact that the work has on students and on us as teacher librarians.

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Appendix A

Reflection Questions and Prompts

Review and reflect on the following questions. Be sure to read all the questions before starting your answers. Some of the content of your answers may overlap, and that's ok. If necessary, we can discuss/flesh out any nuances within our text once we start to analyze and synthesize our experiences. The point of this exercise is reflection, so please write freely, even if you feel like what you are writing is tangential to our focus. Try to write in a narrative style, although don't feel like you need to connect one answer to the next.

Setting the Stage

1. Discuss your professional role (include information about your institution—demographics, etc.) and your personal identity/positionality.
2. In order for us to contextualize our outreach/instruction efforts, I think it will be important for us to describe the nature of our work with our identified communities. Please discuss the campus community you serve and the work you do to support it.
3. Why do you serve this community? (Discuss how you got started with this type of work, if it is part of your official duties, etc.)

Getting Specific

1. What are the benefits/opportunities of working with this specific campus community? What is gained?
2. What are the challenges?
3. What do you perceive is the significance or value of this work? (Think about for the students/communities, but also for yourself)
4. How do you think others perceive the significance or value of this work? (We may not know—however, we may feel that this work is highly praised by our collaborators within the community but undervalued by our library colleagues. Think about your experiences with sharing your work with colleagues. What are their reactions?)
5. Is there anything that you would like to do/try with this campus community but haven't yet been able to? Discuss what has prevented you from attempting this initiative/idea.

Thinking Broadly

1. What informs your work with this specific campus community? (Think about your approach—is it informed by your own experiences, educational/learning theories, info lit/librarianship best practices, etc.)
2. How does your work with this campus community inform your instruction or outreach practices to other campus groups?
3. What is the role of community in this work? (Consider who makes up this community and what makes it a community—shared identities, goals, experiences, etc.)

Next Steps

1. What do you see for the future of your work with this community? Have there been institutional/departmental changes that will impact your future work? What do you wish to continue? Is there anything you want to stop doing?