WE ALL SCREAM FOR ZINES!

By Dawn Stahura

June 9, 2015 - Library Showcase
In the beginning there as a blank sheet of paper...

My partnership with Sociology faculty member, Saher Selod, started with a dream. I wanted to see if students would connect with their research topics more intimately if they were given the opportunity to explore it in-depth in a personal way. Zines are not only creative they are unique primary sources, a gateway into the lives of the marginalized, the silenced, and the overlooked. My hope was that Saher’s SOC 249 students would not only learn about the sociology of inequality in the classroom setting but explore their own perceptions and misconceptions with their peers through the creation of a group zine. Each zine group consisted of 4-5 students, each group focusing on a different aspect of inequality. Some themes were homelessness, body politics, racism, and gender.

First, zines made a good start for me to know about eating disorders. It made me feel the disorders and patients closer to me. I chose eating disorders as my research topic since I was interested in it. However, I felt the topic might be too difficult when I first started to research on primary articles. The articles we found together were very scholarly (of course!) which is good for my papers! and had so many big terms that I had never heard of.

Also, the scholarly articles treated patients with eating disorders as just participants and did not have any descriptions about what they feel, what they have trouble with, or how they developed their issues. Ultimately, after I read zines I also read some blogs written by patients because I was more interested in how they felt and how they lived their everyday lives.
Thus, zines were very useful to know about eating disorders from the point of view of patients. I could see my topic not only the researchers' perspectives but also patients'. I really appreciate your kindness!

This past semester, after meeting with one of our librarians, I decided to have students write a zine in my Inequalities course. Dawn Stahura presented this idea to me one day and at first I have to admit I was a little skeptical. I grew up in a zine culture, but wasn't sure if the student population I teach would know or appreciate the power of zines. They are the generation that has grown up with social media at their fingertips. I thought they would view this as an antiquated practice that they would not be able to relate to. Dawn met with my class a few times over the semester and explained the concept of a zine and also helped them with the construction. Her enthusiasm for zines definitely inspired my students. The students LOVED making these zines! I asked them to write a one page reflection about the process and every student told me they were grateful for the opportunity to make a zine. They worked in groups of 4-5 and each group chose an inequality as the theme for the zine. They presented the zines to the class. I can say that each zine was remarkable and unique.
Some students are artists, some poets, and some are great at doing research. The students told me how much they appreciated the opportunity to express their creativity through this project. Some students stated in their reflection papers they initially feared they were not imaginative enough for this exercise, but this project opened their eyes to their own creativity. Students wrote zines about Gender Identity, Racism, Homelessness, Body Images, and Education to name a few. I was so impressed with the amount of work and thoughtfulness they put into this assignment. The students were eager to learn because they were able to connect to the topics in the class through the medium of art. I truly believe this improved my course evaluations and made this class more enjoyable for the students. Inequalities is a tough course to teach and I am so grateful to Dawn for encouraging me to incorporate zines in the classroom.
Research demonstrates the discrimination is a psychosocial stressor that adversely affects physical and mental health and contributes to racial disparities. Racism is a public health problem that contributes to higher levels of stress, greater exposure to risk factors, reduced access to medical and social services, and ultimately to excess of disease, disability and death.
Then there were a few sheets of blank paper...

Happenstance connected me with Gina Capra, Program Coordinator of Violence Prevention and Educational Outreach at Simmons College. Together we have held several really successful and inspiring zine-making programs around craftivism—where craft and activism meet and merge into something powerful and thought-provoking. One of our main goals is to publish a student-created zine centered on intimate violence.

Our zine workshops around consent and intimate violence here on campus has allowed us to expand outside of the Simmons community and this August we will be doing a workshop on craftivism and bullying for the Girls Rock Camp Boston!
Then there was a whole ream of paper...

The students' enthusiasm over the zine collection allowed me to start an informal zine group on campus called “To the Front.” We meet once a month in the library's 'makerspace' to create zines, talk about zines, read zines, and discuss the role zines can play in student activism and grassroots organizing campaigns. The group started out with 6 members and we have grown into a group of 17 and counting!

Not only has the Zine Group grown but so has the physical zine collection. We started out with only a handful of zines and now we have over 200. Some of the most popular subject areas are activism, gender, trans*, library-related, and race.

While we collect in all subject areas, currently the focus is on zinesters/creators who self-identity as female. However, any member of the Simmons community could donate their zine to the collection.
The Riot GRRL mantra was “girls to the front” because it sucked to stand in the back. For our zine collection, my vision was to extend that invitation to any marginalized group—to come forward and stand in the front and be not only heard but seen.

Then there was a zine!

Being a zinester myself has given me the unique advantage to attend local and national zine fests and network on behalf of the Simmons “To the Front” collection. I have acquired many of our zines through trades and donations from enthusiastic zinesters who want to be a part of the Simmons collection. It is because of this type of networking that the Beatley Library was able to partner with the Boston Zine Fest to bring the annual fest to Simmons College on October 11, 2015. This will be an awesome way for the Simmons community, in particular the faculty and students, to learn what zines are and interact with a plethora of creative folks.
A TRUE LOVE STORY

The 'To the Front' Zine Collection is located in Beatley Library.

Want to make your own Zine? Check out the new Makerspace. All the supplies you need (including a typewriter) are inside.

Enter Library, turn right.