

# Read a Zine, Then Make One, Then Catalog it: Creating a Zine Library at SUNY New Paltz

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## Abstract

Zines are self-published, low-budget printed, ephemeral works, motivated by a desire to share ideas of all kinds—personal reflections, political essays, how-to instructions, and more. During spring 2014, several undergraduate students and a metadata and reference librarian collaborated to create a zine library at the State University of New York (SUNY) at New Paltz. In the years that followed, they received a small programming grant, organized zine readings and how-to workshops, developed an interactive social media presence, and created a zine library intern position.

*Keywords:* zines, student collaboration, student authors, programming, outreach, collection development

# Read a Zine, Then Make One, Then Catalog it: Creating a Zine Library at SUNY New Paltz

Madeline Veitch, SUNY New Paltz

What is a zine? This is a question heard many times since the SUNY New Paltz Zine Library began, and one that always takes some time to answer. My favorite response, which comes from Stephan Duncombe's 2008 book, *Notes from the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, is to let the inquirer arrive at their own conclusion. As Duncombe tells it, "my initial, and probably correct, impulse is to hand over a stack of zines and let the person asking the question decide, for this is how they were introduced to me" (p. 6).



Figure 1. Zines from the SUNY New Paltz Zine Library. Image courtesy of the New Paltz Zine Library, Sojourner Truth Library, SUNY New Paltz.

Time and circumstances don't always allow for this kind of hands-on encounter, so staff have come up with talking points to introduce this latest special collection at the Sojourner Truth Library. Zines are self-published, typically on a low budget, with authors laying out spreads on their own computers, or by cutting and pasting text onto a master document that is then photocopied and distributed. Zine creators, sometimes referred to as *zinesters*, are generally motivated by a desire to share ideas, not to amass profit from the sale of their work. They often sell their zines at cost, trade them, or give them away.

If these are some broad (but certainly not exclusive) parameters, the actual content of a zine knows no such bounds. A zine can be a collection of political essays, a how-to manual, a comic book, or a personal narrative. It may include art, be printed in color or black and

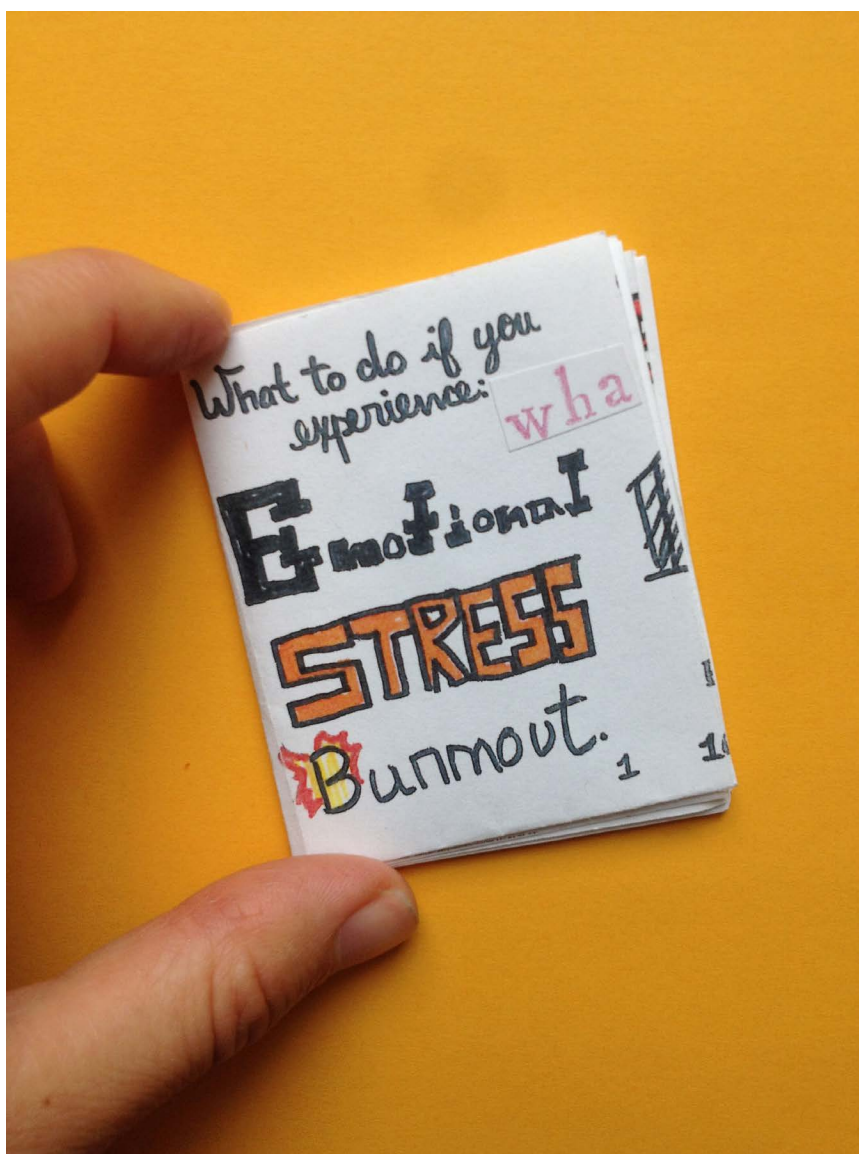


Figure 2. What to Do if You Experience Emotional Stress Burnout. By Jordan Alam, 2011. Image courtesy of the New Paltz Zine Library, Sojourner Truth Library, SUNY New Paltz.

white, bound by hand or stapled at the fold with a long arm stapler. Zines can feature hand-colored illustrations, deluxe audio companions, screen-printed covers, and vary considerably in size (the smallest zine in our collection, Jordan Alam's *What to Do if You Experience Emotional Stress Burnout*, measures approximately 7 x 5.5 cm). They can be as breathtakingly beautiful as one of their semantic neighbors, the artists' book, or entirely functional, like a simple pamphlet.

I was compelled to start a zine collection at SUNY New Paltz, the 4-year comprehensive college where I serve as metadata and reference librarian, after Barnard College zine librarian Jenna Freedman and artist and author Jacinta Bunnell presented on our campus in February 2014. Freedman has been a leader in the zine library world for over a decade, creating invaluable web resources for other zine librarians and contributing to efforts to organize and collaborate across collections. In addition to creating zines, Bunnell is the author of well-known radical coloring books including *Girls Are Not Chicks* (2009) and *The Big Gay Alphabet Coloring Book* (2015). In February 2014, our University Writing Board provided organizational and financial support to bring them to campus. Together, Bunnell and Freedman offered an afternoon workshop on how to make zines and an evening lecture entitled "Make Your Own Culture: Who Zine Creators Are, Why They Do What They Do, and Why it Matters."<sup>1</sup>

As Stoddart and Kiser (2004) suggest, many zines present "a first-person attempt to decipher and decode the world" (p. 193). In the context of an academic library, zines suggest to a user-community of predominately undergraduate students that they themselves could be authors, and their ideas are equally as worthy of an audience as the books that fill the stacks. In reference and instruction work, I have increasingly situated my definition of peer review in a critical framework that challenges and seeks to democratize the concept of "expert" knowledge. The zine library allows me to reinforce this by telling students: we want your writing—*your* ideas—for the library collection, just as much as the latest university press anthology. Since the zine library's inception, over forty students have contributed to the collection, providing their own summaries and keywords to guide choice of subject headings for the catalog records. Their zines sit on shelves near the main floor periodicals area for anyone to pick up and read. In her 2008 article "Why Zines Matter: Materiality and the Creation of Embodied Community," author Allison Piepmeier clarified the impact of sharing actual print copies of zines on student participation in her classes:

1. Slides from this talk are available on Slideshare at <http://www.slideshare.net/jenna/newpaltz>

My students have been inspired to become part of the zine community because of physical encounters with actual zines, not by reading anthologized zines. In a world where more and more of us spend all day at our computers, zines reconnect us to our bodies and other human beings. (p. 214)

Education scholar Joe Kincheloe suggested, “critical pedagogy is dedicated to the alleviation of human suffering,” particularly in its focus on the experiences of those who are silenced by the dominant culture (2004, p. 11). Zines can give voice to those experiences and share resources for creating change, bringing a critical lens into the library where personal narratives are often muffled or muted by the scholarly discourse in which they are embedded. Users may find their own concerns reflected on the photocopied page. They may also gain new insights that inform developing social critiques, or critiques of their chosen field of study.

In keeping with a critical pedagogical framework, the zine library at SUNY New Paltz developed as a collaborative project undertaken with students, as opposed to a top-down offering from the library to the campus. At Freedman and Bunnell’s presentation, I connected with several students who were involved with zines (both as makers and as readers) and started an email list of those interested in starting a zine club or campus project of some kind. The community that evolved out of this initial group of contacts was instrumental to building and promoting the zine library and has been active in nearly every part of its maintenance and growth.

## **The New Paltz Zine Library: a Proposal**

In early spring of 2014, I presented a short proposal for a zine collection to Mark Colyson, Dean of the Sojourner Truth Library at SUNY New Paltz. Knowing that librarian time and institutional budgets were already stretched thin, I envisioned a collection that compromised access in order to conserve time and resources. To limit processing and preservation costs, the collection would be for browsing in the library only. Zines would not be cataloged in our ILS, but tracked in a spreadsheet and inventoried periodically. As Stoddart and Kiser (2004) found in their survey of zines in libraries, zines are sometimes cataloged, but often outside of an ILS or within an ILS but described at the collection level only. While I was confident that users would stumble on an un-cataloged collection, I did lament what would have been a missed opportunity to collocate zines with other research materials. Thankfully, the Dean disagreed with my proposal



to leave the collection un-cataloged, allowing me to commit some of my time to original and copy cataloging. Ultimately the zine library has been fully integrated into our ILS, significantly enhancing discoverability.

In “Your Zine Tool Kit, a DIY Collection,” Freedman suggests a start-up budget of \$500 for a new zine library. Following this suggestion allowed us to purchase the zines and display materials needed to establish a small collection.<sup>2</sup> The majority of zines are priced somewhere between free and ten dollars, which in many cases covers little more than the author’s copying and mailing costs.<sup>3</sup> How to select zines for the collection was a more challenging question, one that the students helped to answer. Especially in the first year of the zine library, a student group which had formed out of discussions at Freedman and Bunnell’s presentation met regularly to talk about zine making and the development of the zine library. In the early meetings of what was then called the Zine Collective, I collaborated with the students to craft a collection development policy for the zine library.

We agreed that zines dealing with identity or intersections of identity were a good fit for our campus; SUNY New Paltz has a number of academic programs that address issues related to identity (Black Studies, Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Deaf Studies to name a few) and a student body that is engaged in conversations about identity, power, and oppression. We also agreed that including zines with strong visual elements would serve the interests of our undergraduate and graduate Fine Arts programs. DIY or “do it yourself” instructional zines were included as they represent an important genre in the zine universe. Zines locally produced, both by students on our campus and throughout the Hudson Valley, were a high priority.

When I presented the collection development policy to the library faculty, there was general support and enthusiasm for the project: one librarian suggested that it would be better suited to a public library environment, but providing evidence of similar collections at peer institutions allayed concerns. The only suggested change to the policy itself was that we include zines that address sustainability as an environmental and energy-use concept. SUNY New Paltz hired a sustainability coordinator in May 2013 and has been actively working toward creating a more environmentally conscious and sustainable campus. Including zines that deal with related issues seemed like a good way to reflect this campus-wide priority. The final collection development policy for the zine library, approved by the library faculty in April 2014, is as follows:

2. It’s worth noting that the \$500 estimate was made by Jenna Freedman in 2006 dollars, and that since we received this initial investment from Sojourner Truth Library we have been able to integrate zine collection development into the general print budget, allowing us to continue purchasing zines.

3. Artist’s books, a category that overlaps some with zines, can be considerably more expensive.

As defined by the Barnard College Zine Library, 'A zine is a self-publication, motivated by a desire for self-expression, not for profit.' The Zine Collection at the Sojourner Truth Library touches several distinct topical areas of importance to the campus and wider New Paltz community. Among these are zines that address intersections of gender, sexuality, race, ability, and identity, particularly in a larger political, social or economic context. Other areas include environmental or sustainability-related topics, how-to zines, and zines that express strong visual or fine arts elements. Local zines, and zines produced by New Paltz community members are heavily collected, while equal efforts are made to draw from unique or under-represented voices from across the country.

Initially, I was a bit concerned that we were being too broad in our policy, so I contacted other zine libraries to learn more about how they approached collection development. Through these informal conversations, I found that libraries employ a significant range of practices. Some had carefully defined policies that had been fine-tuned over the years; others accepted almost any zine (this was especially true of collections that relied exclusively on donations). Given that our collection is new and resources are limited, we have been slightly more relaxed in applying the policy to donated items, but adhere to it closely when purchasing zines with library funds.

## **Collaborative Collection Development and Description**

After co-creating our collection development policy, students involved in the project began to populate a shared spreadsheet with requests for zines they felt we should purchase. Together we read reviews, located zines seen or heard through personal connections, and selected titles from zine "distros" (online distributors that sell zines produced by multiple authors, anywhere from a few to dozens). I worked with the collection development librarian and acquisition clerks to order many of these online, and purchased dozens more at the Brooklyn Zine Fest and other zine-related events.

I quickly realized I would not be able to catalog all the zines myself and keep up with my regular cataloging work and reference responsibilities. In a show of support, the library funded two zine library interns at four hours each per week for the summer of 2014, and has continued to support one (and occasionally two) interns per semester ever since. By working with these students, all of whom were zine-makers and readers themselves, the collection began to take shape.



The zine library interns and I used a relay workflow to catalog zines: for titles requiring original records, interns entered metadata in a Google spreadsheet broken down by MARC fields, and I reviewed entries and transferred them into an OCLC record. Along the way, we built a list of local subject headings, drawing on a zine thesaurus created by the Anchor Archive in Halifax, Canada. Some Library of Congress Subject Headings have been sufficient to describe the collection and we use these whenever possible to collocate zines with books and other media in our library-wide holdings, but there are cases where the language used by a particular community is not accurately reflected in LCSH. Anchor Archive headings like “queer identity,” “ableism,” and “body politics” have allowed us to describe important concepts in zines and ensure language used by readers and researchers is reflected in the catalog records for these items.<sup>4</sup> Borrowing heavily from Barnard College Zine Library’s genre descriptions, we also developed our own high-level categories for organizing the zine library (e.g. personal zines, DIY zines, minicomics), so users might browse categories in addition to entering topical keyword and subject searches. To make locally produced zines discoverable, the heading “Hudson Valley zines” is applied to works from the region, and “School zines” to any zine made for course credit.<sup>5</sup>

## Outreach and Programming

Promotion of the zine library began in 2014 with campus emails and a Facebook page which has been maintained by zine library interns. Zine collective students also designed buttons and stickers to distribute at events.

In the first year, we applied for and received a \$500 grant from College Auxiliary Services to provide programming related to the collection, which funded three events: an evening zine reading, a two-hour workshop where participants would learn how to get started making cut and paste zines, and a more advanced tutorial on using Adobe InDesign for zine layout. We also began taking a “pop-up” library to events, and collaborating with faculty to bring zines into the classroom.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, the number of librarian and paid intern hours devoted to the zine library grew considerably as another librarian, Lydia Willoughby, joined the project and we were able to hire two zine library interns to work simultaneously for the spring semester. This growth in numbers and devoted time facilitated a significant expansion in outreach and programming. We collaborated on zine-making/reading events with several student organizations and the Graphic Design program, increased course-related instructions, added an Instagram

4. For a discussion of ethical concerns around zine librarianship, including issues around cataloging, and collocation see *Zine Librarians Code of Ethics Zine*, accessible as printable PDF at [zinelibraries.info/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/EthicsZine-rev-20151105.pdf](http://zinelibraries.info/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/EthicsZine-rev-20151105.pdf) or [bit.ly/zineethics](http://bit.ly/zineethics)

5. This heading is borrowed from Barnard College Zine Library although we may defined its scope in a slightly different way.

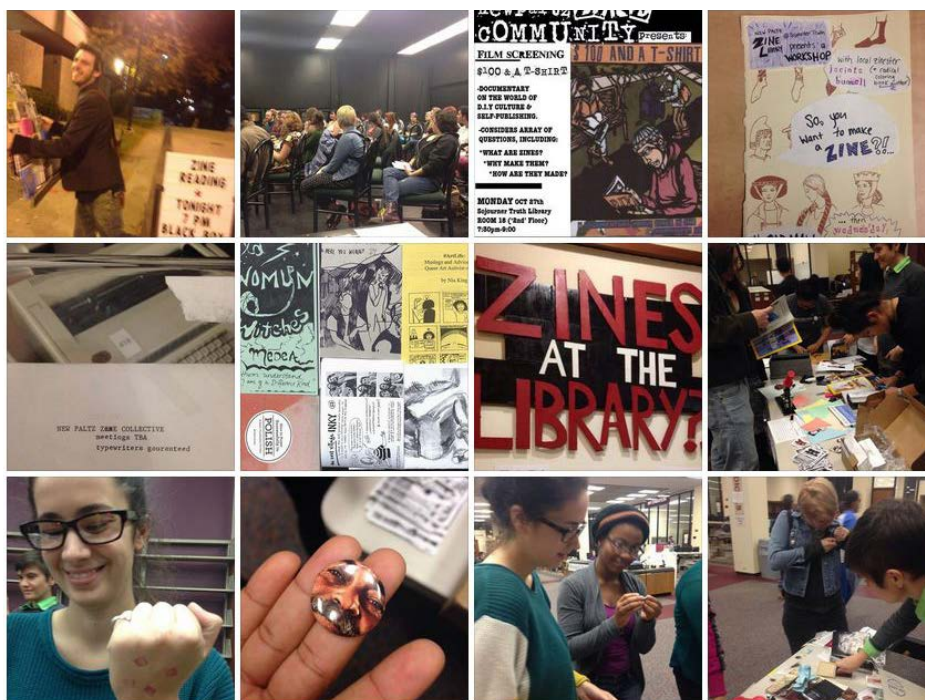


Figure 3. New Paltz Zine Library Facebook Group, Screen capture of photo library grid, November 2014. Image courtesy of the New Paltz Zine Library, Sojourner Truth Library, SUNY New Paltz.



Figure 4. Buttons designed by Portia Melita and Brian Sarco and digitally edited by Crystal Zoodsma, 2014. Image courtesy of the New Paltz Zine Library, Sojourner Truth Library, SUNY New Paltz.

account, and replaced what was a very clunky zine library LibGuide with a WordPress site.<sup>6</sup> The intention of the new website is for collection communication (who we are, kinds of programming offered). It also serves as a point of contact, inviting submission of zines for inclusion in the collection, instruction requests, and requests for one-on-one consultations about zines and zine-making.

6. See New Paltz Zine Library website at <http://hawkites.newpaltz.edu/zines/>.

Across all programming and outreach efforts, communicating what zines are and the kinds of opportunities they provide for author agency, connection, and self-expression has been essential. We have endeavored to achieve this by “showing” as often as “telling”: bringing zines into new spaces and using them to start conversations. We created a small zine about zines to serve as another tool, and in the future hope to run a flyer campaign highlighting the collection and its offerings to the campus and community.

## Zine Library Interns

It is the creativity and dedication of our zine library interns that drives programming and outreach. The interns are paid library student staff working between 3-4 hours a week; most semesters we have one, but for two (nonconsecutive) terms we have hired two, allowing valuable programmatic growth and maintenance of institutional memory. The interns have helped set our course for the collection, facilitating new relationships with student groups, classes, and guest speakers. They have also developed workshop ideas and co-led instruction both in and beyond the classroom. Over the past year, they helped develop our mission and vision, organize content for a new website, and develop policy for a zine kit project we are piloting in fall 2016.

In spring 2016, Kelly Lindberg, an intern who worked with us for over a year, elected to take on additional internship hours for credit toward her major in Digital Media and Journalism. During that time, she created a short film about the history and significance of the New Paltz Zine Library in the lives of students, faculty, and alumni. This film, accompanied by a short zine, became an honor’s thesis project.<sup>7</sup> Lindberg shared selections from the film at conferences hosted by the State University of New York Library Association (SUNYLA) and the Southeastern New York Library Resources Council (SENYLRC).

We have been fortunate to have funding for zine library interns during lean budget years. The position value can be articulated in the language of the College’s strategic plan, which calls for the establishment of “an engaged living and learning community,” and stronger “regional and community engagement” (SUNY New Paltz, 2013).

## Zine Readings

While zines often facilitate a private exchange of art and ideas, hosting public readings has increased visibility and community engagement. Inviting readers to share not only their own zines but other zines from

7. The film, *Aboveground and the Underground Converge: The New Paltz Zine Library*, is available for streaming

the collection helps to inspire participation across the spectrum of readers and authors, and encourages readers to become authors. At our first reading in the fall of 2014, four readers presented their own zines and the remaining five shared zines from the collection, including *The Unlikely -- Yet True -- Love of Nikola Tesla and Captain Ahab*, and *How to Swear Successfully in Polish: a Basic Vocabulary Primer*. We held the event at the campus black box theater, and set up a document camera so readers could project any portions of the zines they wanted to highlight (illustrations, spread layouts, etc.) As the readers turned pages under the camera and prefaced selected passages and illustrations with their own reflections, the audience was folded into a personal encounter with the zine.<sup>8</sup> While most readers were current students, we had extended a special invitation to Kate Larson, author of the personal zine *No Better than Apples*. Larson is well-known in zine communities on the East Coast and beyond, and also a New Paltz alumna and early supporter of the zine library who started making zines while a student at New Paltz.

Subsequent readings have been more informal and paired with other events, as have our pop-up libraries, which bring curated selections from the collection into an array of spaces on campus and in the community. At campus student fairs and orientation events, our goal has been to facilitate first encounters with zines and encourage engagement with the collection. Topical pop-ups have included a selection of environmental zines shared in the foyer outside a lecture on sustainability, LGBTQ+ zines brought to a trans\* issues conference, and feminist zines highlighted at an off-campus book talk and music event about the riot grrl movement.

## Zine Workshops

Since the zine library's inception, we have held four stand-alone workshops on creating zines and collaborated with several student organizations incorporating zine-making into existing programming or club meetings. While most of our workshops focus on the cut and paste method of creating zines, collaboration with the Graphic Design program and a guest lecture by book designer Darla Stabler has provided guidance for laying out zines using Adobe InDesign.

At the fall 2014 workshop, local artist and zinester Jacinta Bunnell introduced participants to some of the tools and practices of cut and paste zine-making.

The majority of students in attendance had never made a zine before; many were there out of curiosity, and a few for extra credit offered by faculty teaching related courses. Bunnell asked students to look at zines

8. This format for simultaneously "showing" and reading is one I first saw employed by artists's book maker and Art Library Technical Assistant Josh Hockensmith at an event he organized at UNC Chapel Hill's Sloane Art Library on September 14th, 2010.





Figure 5. Flyer from zine-making workshop, November 2014. Image courtesy of the New Paltz Zine Library, Sojourner Truth Library, SUNY New Paltz.

from the library collection and share some of the things they observed—ranging from the tone or content to physical observations about printing, size, and binding. During the hands-on portion of the evening, she covered the tables with old magazines, glue sticks, scissors, and sharpies, and demonstrated how to make a one-page mini folded zine, along with larger format layouts.

Zines produced that evening ranged from the personal to the surreal, and included titles like *How to Survive College Swimming*, *Rules I Live By*, *Birth of Chet*, and *The Guide to Escaping Successfully without a Trace*.

As everyone was packing up to leave at the end of the night, one student commented “it felt good to use my brain in a different way,” and another expressed how hard it was going to be to put her zine down and get back to writing a paper. While zine-making is certainly an avenue for political and creative self-expression, this feedback served as a reminder that creating zines can be a welcome opportunity for stress relief. As many academic libraries turn to leisure reading collections, and special events intended to meet this need, it was instructive to find that zines could play a role in stress reduction programming.



Figure 6. *Birth of Chet* (back cover) by Goat Girl, made at the November 2014 zine-making workshop held at SUNY New Paltz. Image courtesy of the New Paltz Zine Library, Sojourner Truth Library, SUNY New Paltz.





Figure 7. Excerpts from *Self-Care Quilt*. By Take Back the Night and the New Paltz Zine Library, Edited by Zine Library Interns Jen Campos and Kelly Lindberg, Spring 2016. Image courtesy of the New Paltz Zine Library, Sojourner Truth Library, SUNY New Paltz.

In spring 2016, we collaborated with the Take Back the Night programming committee (a student group) to bring zine-making to a self-care event they hosted on campus. Zine library interns Jen Campos and Kelly Lindberg organized a compilation zine project, inviting each participant to create a page about their own self-care strategies. The pages were assembled, copied, and distributed to contributing authors as the zine *Self Care Quilt*.

The interns also created their own anthologized zine with cited excerpts from our collection, *A Handy Guide for Hands-On Self Care*, which was distributed at the event.

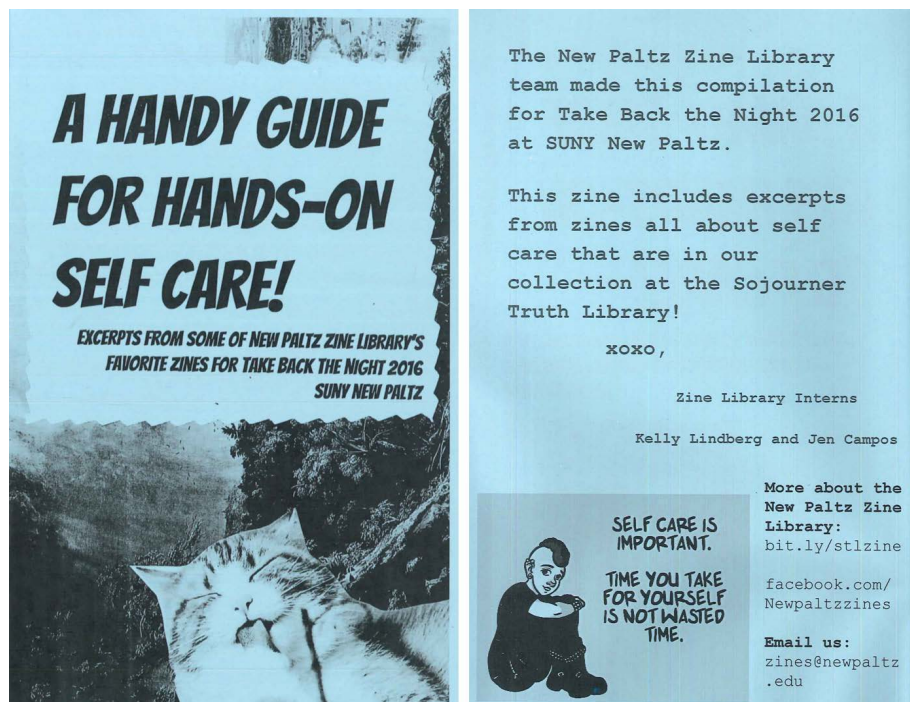


Figure 8. Cover and introduction from *A Handy Guide for Hands-On Self Care*. Edited by Zine Library Interns Jen Campos and Kelly Lindberg, Spring 2016. Image courtesy of the New Paltz Zine Library, Sojourner Truth Library, SUNY New Paltz.

## Zines in the Classroom

Social media and regular events have been essential steps toward integrating the zine library into the broader culture of campus—both academically, and in the broader realm of student experience. Through targeted outreach, we have gradually developed relationships with faculty who are interested in using zines in the classroom. Several instructors in the English Composition Program have assigned students to make a zine that builds on a theme from their formal writing assignments.

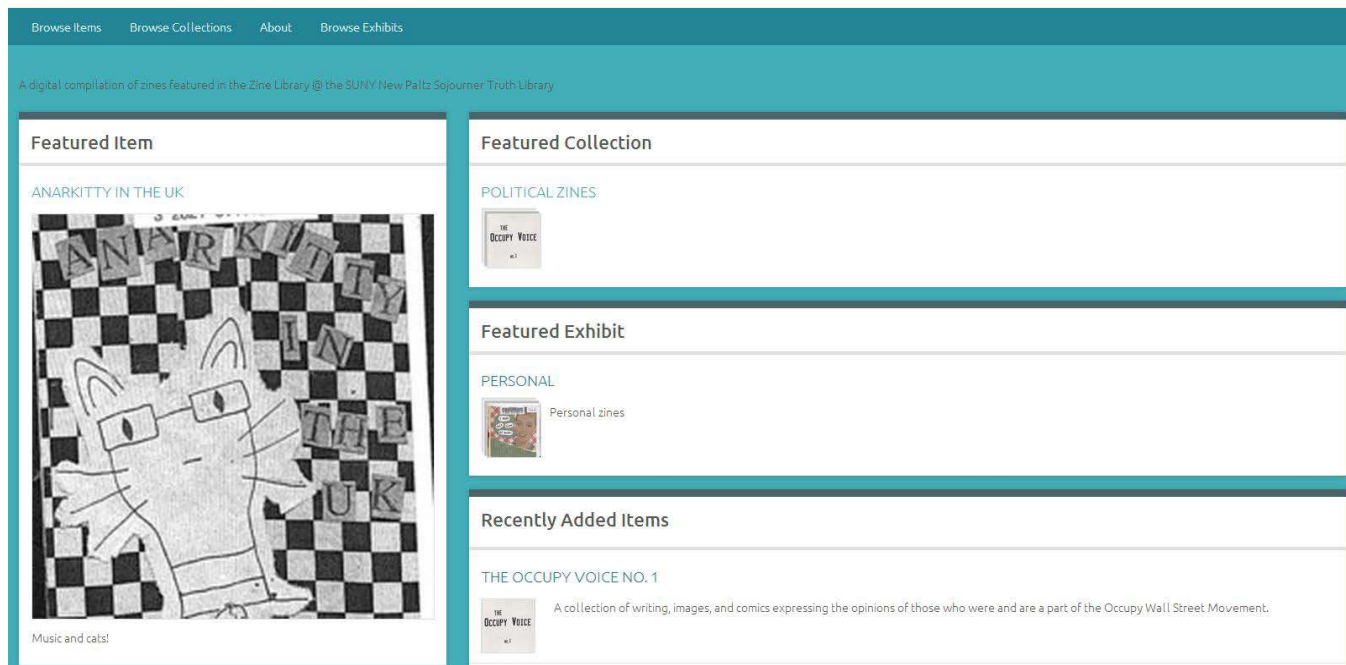
In spring 2015, I and current and former zine library interns gave a short presentation to a Thematic Drawing class, returning a month later to see zines produced in a related assignment, many of which were submitted for inclusion in the zine library. We have also been invited to give lectures on zine history and in-class workshops for courses in the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies department. As Alana Kumbier and others have pointed out, zines can be a great resource for helping students understand that “authority is contextual,” (2014, p. 164) which aligns with the first frame in ACRL’s Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (ACRL, 2015). In future instruction sessions, we hope to better integrate zines into instruction activities related to this portion of the Framework.

## Access and Digitization

As the collection grows and members of the campus community express new interest in these materials, we have received a number of questions related to accessing zines. Up until now, nearly all of the zines have been non-circulating, though a few commercially bound and anthologized zines circulate, but will transition to circulating in protective envelopes in the coming year. Circulating zines means compromising on preservation but this is very much in keeping with our mission to provide a low barrier of access to the collection.

In a world where so much art and writing is published online through Tumblr and other online blogging platforms, we have been asked about whether our zines could be put online for easier access. In fact, in spring 2015, students in a digital humanities class built an online collection through Omeka to house works from the zine library. Students were careful to obtain permission from zine authors and artists before posting scans of the work online.

While selected titles may be shared digitally at some point, the important truth remains that zines are first and foremost print entities, dispersed on a human scale since long before the Web provided other



options. In “Zines are not Blogs,” Freedman outlines several highly significant distinctions between these two media. She points out that blogs are often hosted by an entity beyond the author, one who maintains some level of control including the possibility of removing content. In contrast, zines are usually self-published, can more easily remain anonymous, and are unlikely to undergo content changes once printed (Freedman, 2005). Because zine content often assumes relative privacy afforded by a limited print run, wide-scale digitization is not something we plan to pursue at New Paltz, although we may seek author permission from local zinesters to digitize selected titles from the Hudson Valley. We will continue to acquire, catalog, and promote zines as a tangible print collection.

As we look to the future of the zine library, we plan to bring a more expansive definition of access to our work by circulating materials used to create zines. In fall 2016, we will pilot zine-making kits that students will be able to check out, including tools like exact-o knives, funky scissors, glue sticks, sharpies, stamps, and needles/floss for sewing bindings. We’ll also circulate several typewriters that have been generously donated by faculty to support zine-making on campus. We’re hoping that sharing materials will encourage more readers to become authors, adding to the 40 and counting zines from Hudson Valley authors that we currently hold in our collection. As always, we cannot wait to see the next submission.

Figure 9. Screen capture of the Omeka site, “New Paltz Zine Library Online,” by Jacquelyn Behan, Carly Rome, Lauren Alberti, and Caitlin O’Brien. Site created for Assistant Professor Annie Swafford’s Spring 2015 course, Digital Tools for the 21st Century.

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