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### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Action: Planning, Leadership, and Programming: Introduction

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## Introduction

**T**he ponderous pace at which institutions of higher education are moving toward achieving a state of social justice may be one of the most challenging problems academia has ever faced. For many decades in the United States, academic communities have been making sustained efforts to educate their communities about the necessity for diversity and to attract a diverse population of students and staff to their campuses. However, lacking intentional plans to ensure that equity and inclusion are also deeply embedded in an institution's identity, those individuals recruited as diversity representatives to otherwise non-diverse communities have often experienced inequity and exclusion from the dominant populations. This problem continues to plague higher education. Academic libraries, often considered to be bastions of liberal ideology due to, for example, their work preserving intellectual freedom, opposing censorship, and advocating for equal access to information and education for the greater good of society, are not immune from societal and institutional inequities.

Librarians have in recent years begun expressing commitment—both personally and institutionally—to the ideals of diversity, equity, and inclusion

(DEI). Diversity standards have even been codified by our national organizations.<sup>1</sup> However, the staffs, and particularly the leadership positions, of many libraries remain overwhelmingly in white hands.<sup>2</sup> Further, as we examine libraries through the lenses of diversity, equity, and inclusion, we can easily conclude that social justice within our environments is still mostly an ideal. One scholar has gone so far as to say that the profession is “paralyzed” by a lack of diversity.<sup>3</sup> As might logically follow, there is emerging evidence suggesting that librarians are likely to extend biased and inequitable service to patrons, despite the fact that underrepresented groups find libraries to be valuable resources.<sup>4</sup> Some librarians in majority communities might rightly claim that their immediate environments are not overtly hostile toward underrepresented or marginalized groups, yet there still exist more subtle forms of inequity that should be examined and addressed. In public and academic libraries alike, studies indicate that librarians treat underrepresented groups differently, and that microaggressions or more serious attacks levied against colleagues are sadly not uncommon in the library profession.<sup>5</sup>

The slow pace of achieving a state of social justice may indicate that liberalism in librarianship, at least institutionally, is something of a myth. There is a wealth of professional literature revealing that leaders in higher education are aware of the injustices wrought on their campuses that affect how students and staff members are treated, what opportunities they may or may not be privy to, and what barriers stand in the way of their learning experiences and future careers. Yet these same institutions of higher education, with their libraries being no exception, continue to struggle to find ways to make their environments welcoming and equitable to all those who learn and work there.

Part of the problem in addressing DEI issues starts with terminology and perception. The term “diversity” in itself does not and cannot capture the many forms that diversity may take, let alone the essence of social justice. A diverse environment is not easily recognizable if one relies solely on visual cues and associations with which individuals might be willing to openly identify. A diverse population may consist of those with permanent or temporary differences in physical abilities, mental and emotional changes, ideologies, financial statuses, and personal experiences. However, Hudson argues that diversity discussions have been largely centered on race, and further, that some solutions to the diversity problem have the effect of further homogenizing populations through “assimilation, cooptation, or more complex strategies of inclusive control.”<sup>6</sup>

Morales, Knowles, and Bourg differentiate diversity from social justice in libraries by explaining that diversity encompasses ground-level efforts to improve services, collections, and staffing challenges, while “social justice addresses power and privilege on a structural level, as well as at the level of mere representation.”<sup>7</sup> Making concerted moves toward diversity, equity, and inclusion requires different responses based on the state of each individual

environment. An environment that is perceived to be welcoming by one group may seem isolating or inequitable to another. It should be no surprise, then, that change might come at a slow pace when attempts to rectify injustices are handled without careful study of the individual local environment, and more specifically, how an understanding of broader social forces affect local environments.<sup>8</sup> When considered in this light, it becomes obvious that the move toward social justice—especially when limited by physical and conceptual boundaries such as a library and its working environment—cannot lend itself to few, simple, uncontroversial, and cheap solutions.

Many colleges and universities in the United States have been attempting to increase diversity on their campuses by recruiting students and employees from underrepresented groups, according to whatever “underrepresented” means to each population. Diversity cannot be achieved without a diverse population; however, it is also generally understood that an increase in the population of physically recognizable underrepresented groups does not on its own create diversity, nor does it improve equity and inclusion.<sup>9</sup> When implemented without context and without concerted community outreach, communication, and programming, attempts to increase diversity may increase feelings of isolation and inequity experienced by individuals in minority groups who must navigate systems from within the long-established majority norms and expectations; this may ultimately result in those newer members of the community leaving it.

Merely throwing money at the problem has proven to be ineffective in changing pervasive, extant historical systems of oppression in higher education. Newkirk has observed that some universities

have for the first time hired diversity czars, while others have commissioned campus-climate surveys, consultants, and anti-bias training, or expanded the number of diversity officers in schools and departments. While these initiatives have helped power the multibillion-dollar diversity industry, there is little indication that they have resulted in more diversity or less bias.<sup>10</sup>

Though many recognize the need to reach states of social justice, librarians must recognize how their roles and statuses are intertwined with the perpetuation of inequities at their institutions. Regardless of any personal identifiers that would brand them as minorities in outside settings, librarians, academic ones in particular, are members of a group rife with inherent privilege. Many librarians hold decently paid professional jobs with benefits and relative professional autonomy. Academic librarians further may be considered faculty members at elite institutions and are thus deeply embedded in systems built upon hierarchy and exclusion. Most obviously, librarians are highly educated and are likely knowledgeable, if not authorities, on any number of academic disciplines beyond those relating strictly to library work.

While it may be true that some librarians have struggled to reach a point of relative security in their careers, most accomplished it by navigating through a system that favors those with access to quality K–12 education and active mentorship. Librarians arguably have regular interaction with more students and faculty members than any other academic support group on campus, even more than some faculty members, and therefore maintain a certain level of privilege over other employees and students related to the abilities, authority, influence, knowledge, and institutional understanding they possess. Such privilege can be ignored or can be leveraged for the greater good. It is therefore imperative that librarians recognize how their personal and professional assumptions, spaces, programs, and services impact those who enter the library to work independently, meet with groups, use resources, and seek help.

Even librarians who consider themselves to be allies of marginalized groups and are well educated on issues related to DEI and social justice may find the work of achieving those ideals difficult to carry out. It is not possible for individuals who are members of dominant groups to completely understand the struggles of every marginalized individual with whom they may come in contact. Nor is it possible to always recognize an individual as part of a marginalized group, particularly in ubiquitous “one-shot” class sessions, in which librarians cannot get to know all the students they teach as well as they might want to. Librarians, of course, want to create environments that are welcoming, interesting, supportive, and inclusive for all members of their communities. As members of institutions that commit themselves to producing critical thinkers with societal awareness, it is not simply an ideal but a moral obligation to make sure that we are not merely trying our best to overcome the obstacles in the way of achieving DEI but are also constantly working toward getting it right. To do otherwise is to be complicit in systems of oppression.

## CHALLENGES AND CONTROVERSIES

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There are many possible reasons why moves toward DEI and social justice have been slow and ponderous in libraries, even when desire is high and leadership is strong. Breaking out of embedded institutional systems takes courage and may involve some risk to an individual, whether to their job or personal well-being. While many librarians have certainly made meaningful strides toward DEI and social justice, those steps may be small, and even in environments where progress may be apparent, the profession as a whole clearly is not immune from misunderstandings, backsliding, contentiousness, and sometimes outright assault upon one another and those we serve. While

nothing should excuse every one of us from taking leadership positions in approaches to DEI, it is important to understand what may impede progress so that local challenges can be anticipated, identified, and overcome.

The ever-changing nature of the vocabulary surrounding DEI is a glaring point of concern involving far more than just the term “diversity.” For example, there is a difference between “equality,” the process of making sure that all members of a population have the same access to the same benefits, and “equity,” the process of making sure that those who start off at a disadvantage are given the tools they need to catch up with others, thus assuming that some individuals will require forms of support that others do not. Similarly, language used to describe those with nondominant characteristics can change quickly or be subject to preference, as is now evident in the debate around how individuals with physical challenges are described: as “person first,” in which a person is acknowledged as an individual with an impairment or disability (a person who has a visual impairment) vs. “identity first,” in which a term for an impairment or disability is used to describe an individual (e.g., amputee, deaf person).<sup>11</sup> The term “first-generation student” is particularly unsatisfying because discussions surrounding that group often focus predominantly on socioeconomic status. Even the term “racist” has been challenged, as it is often bandied about on social media without context or thought to the sort of accusation the term levies on an individual; there has been discussion about whether the term describes a fixed identity or a state that changes, even daily, with circumstance.<sup>12</sup>

Tokenism is a contentious issue that has resulted from the well-intentioned attempt to make library staffs more diverse by hiring fixed-term “diversity residents” (in other words, candidates of color) to librarian positions. Some libraries have hired and mentored diversity residents who have subsequently forged highly successful careers, such as those described by Velez, et.al. at the Association of College & Research Libraries Conference in 2019.<sup>13</sup> Without appropriate support and well-planned experiences and communication, however, some diversity residents who were not well-mentored have felt ill used or more like interns than professional colleagues.<sup>14</sup> Alabi described the practice, when poorly executed, as a never-ending cycle of a new person of color replacing the outgoing one, which may give the illusion of diversity but does not in fact constitute a commitment to diversifying the library profession.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, a diversity hire may feel pressure to represent all members of their own group as well as other marginalized groups with whom they may not identify. The Kaleel Jamison Consulting Group went so far as to say that an “organizational pioneer” such as a diversity candidate should fully expect the work of increasing awareness about DEI to be a tough job: that they should be willing to make others feel comfortable, accept responsibility for being “the only one of their ‘kind,’” and have “the ability to deal with constant

questioning.”<sup>16</sup> Some individuals have expressed fatigue with this sort of expectation, in which “underrepresented faculty and staff members share the burden of diversity work in many visible and invisible forms: they often assume heavier workloads in teaching, advising, mentoring, and counseling, and spend more time on outreach, recruitment, training and workshops, and other service work.”<sup>17</sup> Further, those self-identified members of diverse or marginalized groups asked to train or run workshops must also speak to diversity as if it is a fixed concept, rather than a nebulous and ever-changing value greatly dependent on context.

Another serious, though controversial, concern in DEI programming is insensitivity to majority groups, which can result in unintended but dangerous consequences. This phenomenon may be observed during training sessions or workshops in which participants are asked to discuss their own inherent negative influences and biases. While self-awareness on the part of majority groups is critical to gaining allies and enacting meaningful change, the practice can backfire if those making a good faith effort to be introspective and learn are subsequently made to feel shame about a background over which they had little control or that they are being monitored by thought police. Participants in some DEI programs may be encouraged to share thoughts freely but privately fear reprisal when attempting to speak extemporaneously in what may be an emotionally charged situation or if the threat of being made to account for past, uninformed behavior looms over the discussion. Unintentional though still insensitive and inappropriate blunders may be expressed during open discussion when, for example, participants use terminology that they are unaware is no longer acceptable or when they express feelings that seem over-the-top with guilt or overflowing with “oppressive empathy,” thus detracting from the important issues under discussion.<sup>18</sup> A poorly managed reaction to an unpopular or even offensive opinion might turn potential allies against the learning process or more deeply embed their biases and participation in systems of inequity. In addition, Dobbin and Kalev reported that “the positive effects of diversity training rarely last beyond a day or two, and a number of studies suggest that it can activate bias or spark a backlash.”<sup>19</sup>

One way that some institutions have attempted to gauge levels of acceptance and inclusivity among their populations is by using assessment tools that purport to measure individual or organizational “cultural competence.” Such evaluations are made by scoring individuals’ self-reported perceptions and attitudes toward unfamiliar or little-experienced situations and groups and are meant to show how experience shapes a person’s attitudes, reactions, and flexibility. These tools can be expensive for the institution and time-consuming for individuals. Whether available tools can actually measure cultural competence accurately, and whether expressed attitudes and knowledge indicating cultural competence actually translate into practice, are matters for

debate.<sup>20</sup> While the intent of using cultural competence tools may be to scan an environment in order to better address DEI issues and improve service and working and learning conditions, they may overtly or subtly pigeonhole participants into categories of ignorance, divisiveness, or even bigotry from which it may be perceived that they cannot emerge.

## SEEKING SOLUTIONS

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The challenges associated with making meaningful changes and moves toward DEI and social justice are considerable and sometimes daunting. These challenges should not detract from efforts to effect change but must be taken into consideration when designing programs to challenge inequality so that the ultimate goals of forming alliances, creating welcoming environments, and breaking cycles of inequity can be achieved. Without bold and assertive action that is well designed and artful in its execution, the library profession will only perpetuate oppressive power structures, even as the importance of social justice is preached at the highest levels of our professional organizations. Challenges should not be taken as excuses for limited action, but rather as the catalysts to developing DEI initiatives that are meaningful, long-lasting, and impactful. Indeed, the challenges associated with creating an environment that genuinely reflects social justice were the motivation for beginning this book project.

There is no “right,” easy, or cheap way to overcome generations of inequity in the library profession and beyond, and solutions will be different from institution to institution and year to year. Any effective program will be time-consuming to develop and manage and thus will take serious long-term commitment on the part of its organizers. This work cannot be taken lightly, cannot be a “side job,” and cannot be undertaken by those who are not mentally prepared to deal with unforeseen complications. Librarians have been, and are still, at the forefront of momentous change, and many are working to make their campuses more equitable and inclusive in ways that are challenging, yet creative, effective, and impactful. Some of those librarians who are doing the hard work of social justice and enacting meaningful change at their institutions and beyond, despite considerable challenges, offer their insight and advice in this book. The authors are creating library environments in which individuals are treated with courtesy and respect and where people who can bring positive change and fresh ideas to their organizations are heard. Through their strength and commitment, they have taken the time to understand the motivations and fears behind any resistance to meaningful change. They respect ability, cultivate trust, and view differences as motivators rather than roadblocks. At their organizations, leaders committed to social justice



look beyond their immediate responsibilities and use their authority and influence to break down dominant narratives and power structures that impede individual and, by extension, institutional success.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTERS

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No one source can hope to address all the issues associated with DEI or pretend to know what might be right for every possible sort of difference, challenge, or environment. Nor can we expect to change opinions, biases, or behaviors of individuals whose thoughts and opinions differ from our own, or even necessarily to align anyone's personal belief with institutional values. Rather than focusing on changing individuals, librarians can affirm the expectations of their institutions by examining their own environments and looking for any number of ways that resources, services, spaces, and atmosphere can be improved in alignment with declared values. The authors of this book see diversity, equity, and inclusion as necessary elements of a thriving academic environment.

This book evolved from an intended set of case studies to a thought-provoking series of chapters that will help readers think broadly and critically about DEI. The authors, diverse themselves in many aspects of the term, offer provocative commentary as well as many alternatives for active and significant change that can have impact both immediately and for the long term. Much of their advice can be enacted either as offered or with some adjustment to the local environment. While written with academic libraries in mind, these ideas can apply broadly to education in general, including at public institutions or even secondary schools. Some actions described herein are monumental and required significant institutional support by way of campus governance and financial backing to execute. Other actions can be adapted with little or no budgetary impact and little if any intercession from campus governance. Many programs—especially those that started with library staff—gradually developed and matured, with the true impact being evident within and beyond the library only after a period of months or years. All the authors faced challenges to their programs, and all maintained unwavering commitment through setbacks.

In chapter 1, Matthew P. Ciszek of Penn State Behrend describes the history behind the social justice movement, particularly as it relates to higher education. He describes the evolution from diversity to social justice in higher education and examines the roles libraries and librarians have played in the movements from homogeneity to diversity, which further necessitated consideration of equity and inclusivity, which in turn have now revealed the need

for social justice. Ciszek challenges librarians to think about how they, as a profession, have influenced progression toward diversity, equity, and inclusion and what they can now do to contribute meaningfully toward continuing change.

While acknowledging some of the many challenges associated with achieving social justice, Pamela Espinosa de los Monteros and Sandra Enimil of the Ohio State University point out in chapter 2 that empirical data showing the effectiveness of DEI training and awareness models is lacking in professional literature. They encourage us to lead change from within, not by burdening a few motivated individuals but by including an entire organization in conversations about what its values are, what DEI really means, what systems are most oppressive locally, and what practices can be most effective in each environment. They remind us that DEI requires constant adaptation and that attention to it represents a long-term investment in the health of each library and the institution to which it belongs.

Environmental scanning is a critical early step in gauging the level and complexity of DEI work needed at each library organization, and for planning programs that will be meaningful and long-lasting. In chapter 3, Orolando A. Duffus of the University of Houston and Tiffany N. Henry and Stacey R. Krim of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro provide readers with a range of tools they can use to determine where to focus their energies in order to enact the most impactful change following an environmental scan. Suggestions include long-term strategic planning informed by the environmental scan and creating communities of practice.

Using Jefferson College, a rural community college, as a backdrop for a case study about a student-led movement to make their environment more open and welcoming for LGBT students, Joe Kohlburn and Tracy Gomillion remind us in chapter 4 that change may come gradually and only after initially modest efforts are shown to be successful. Their experience has demonstrated that when students, advised by committed faculty and staff, take the lead in forming grassroots DEI movements, the groups and programs they create will have the greatest chance of achieving campus support and surviving through multiple generations. Kohlburn and Gomillion further maintain that neutrality cannot and should not be a driving force when making attempts to achieve equity.

In chapter 5, Molly Higgins of the Library of Congress and Rachel Keiko Stark of California State University, Sacramento, help us to recognize the implicit bias that is built into our discovery systems and, by extension, reference interviews. Using their workshop on implicit bias in medical research as a framework, they challenge us to recognize bias not only within ourselves but also within the systems that govern how we find, analyze, and interpret

information. In the case of medical research, implicit bias can cause serious harm or even death. Higgins and Stark provide strategies to help mitigate implicit systems bias and new sources of information that take previously ignored groups into account. They challenge us to improve existing systems so that underrepresented populations are not unintentionally brought to harm by those who should be helping them.

Anna Sandelli, Janelle Coleman, and Thura Mack of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, describe in chapter 6 a certificate-based teaching and learning program on cultural competency that includes all library staff, engages the assistance of campus partners, and situates DEI within each employee's regular course of duty. Their program greatly reduces the probability of perpetuating a system of invisible labor that places the burden of DEI education on only a few employees, often those who are racially or ethnically diverse, which can compromise the rest of their work. Their plan for inclusive pedagogy was developed by gathering recommendations from potential participants and encourages self-reflection not by identifying personal shortcomings but by responding to structured prompts that urge participants to consider barriers to equity and inclusion from different points of view. The program developed by Sandelli, Coleman, and Mack also encourages employees to plan and put into daily practice strategies to make their work environment more inclusive.

With the narratives of human history documented through the decisions of information gatekeepers largely represented by dominant, privileged groups, it is now necessary for archivists and curators to reveal the stories of those who have long been marginalized, ignored, and fearful. Stacey R. Krim, David Gwynn, and Erin Lawrimore of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro explain the history of marginalization in archives and offer strategies to help reveal the histories of those who were silenced and make their stories widely available to the general public. Information that may seem permanently lost in the dominant narrative can emerge when archivists commit to inclusivity in their archives by carefully cultivating and maintaining community partnerships that involve not only a deep dive into existing resources but include sensitively conducted oral histories and collaborative digitization projects.

Veterans of the United States Armed Forces are a group often overlooked in diversity discussions. In chapter 8, Eduardo M. Tinoco and Win Shih of the University of Southern California describe the many challenges faced by veterans and their families upon entering or re-entering higher education following a period of service to their country. The University of Southern California has an impressive and extensive array of veterans' programs, some of which are funded by the United States government, that are highly integrated with library services. These programs seek not only to support the veterans' educational experiences but also to sustain their emotional well-being, assist with financial management, ease their reintegration into civilian life, connect them with career opportunities postgraduation, and help them care for their families.

In chapter 9, Neal Baker, Bonita Washington-Lacey, José-Ignacio Pareja, Amy Bryant, and Karla Fribley of Earlham College describe the development of their expansive engagement with first-generation students following a call from their administration for ideas on how to improve retention rates. The Earlham library's series of engaging and exciting programs for first-generation students, including meaningful work opportunities and off-campus experiences, stretches far beyond a library's traditional role. In addition to helping first-generation students become information literate, Earlham's programs link students with institutional infrastructure, help them navigate an environment that no one else in their families may have experienced, and pre-arrange access to vital resources such as the writing center and the career development office. While it is difficult, if not impossible, to directly correlate library programs with improved retention, the various large- and small-scale experiences offered at Earlham provide their first-generation students with personal attention that mitigates the effects of the barriers they often face as the first in their families to attend college.

Finally, in chapter 10, Andrea Baruzzi, Pam Harris, and Roberto Vargas describe how Swarthmore College's long-running and highly successful internship program begins the process of recruiting a diverse field of candidates from their undergraduate student body to various information professions. Their program led to the development of additional inclusive library- and archival-related employment and fellowship experiences for students and early career librarians, which in turn benefited the college by contributing diversity education to their general hiring practices.

As the authors of our final chapter will remind us, it took a long time to get to the point where social justice is not a given and must be addressed courageously and methodically by leaders who may need to find ways to rise above oppressive, systematic power structures. Likewise, it will take hard work, time, dedication, and money to correct the iniquities that have become embedded in our educational systems and improve our environments for everyone who is a member of them. The authors of this volume believe that librarians can and should be the leaders who influence and effect this change.

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December 6, 2019*

## NOTES

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