MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

Dear Colleagues,

Libraries have the opportunity to be an active ally in the journey for social justice, inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA). It is a matter of ongoing commitment to challenging our assumptions, habits, and, at times, our very systems and codified standards. This commitment to lean into our discomfort arches into our fundamental values as a discipline.

Recent news articles demonstrate that not all in the field opt to live these values when working with underserved populations. It is imperative that libraries, like ours, voice and live their commitment throughout their work, research, and service. By modeling what can be, and by challenging what should not, we participate in the path forward. This issue highlights the many ways, direct and indirect, that we demonstrate our commitment to IDEA.

We believe in digital collection development and curation to grow the open collections as a common good, increasing access to knowledge and research. We do so leveraging leading practices for web usability and accessibility so that most can interact with independence and dignity. We also present the materials in a way that allows their use from any device that will allow the bridging of the digital divide.

We focus on Universal Design Principles for Learning to honor the many learning styles and abilities we support in the classroom and online. We bring a variety of approaches, methods, and media to ensure accessibility and usability. We do this so that students and professors can interact self-sufficiently and without self-disclosing.

We offer peer-led services for students, lowering the threshold for access. Peer consultants, trained to work as guides, explore the learning path *with* students, not *for* students. We train them to be user-centered, to have a person-first approach and to ask questions, not make assumptions. We do this to support human connections where students feel seen and heard, supporting their success and persistence. We also do this to ensure our services are inclusive, keep the student's voice centered, and support access by all.

Our front-facing services focus on a student-centric approach that incorporate leading practices for accessible and inclusive services. We anchor our service development approach in user experience, user engagement, appreciative inquiry, and design thinking philosophies. We do this so that we continue to challenge our assumptions of what users want or need, and center their voices and their lived experiences.

In all of this, it is important for users to be able to identify with our profession. We participate in a Diversity Alliance that seeks to increase retention for new librarians from underrepresented groups by providing high-impact visiting faculty positions. We do this to advance social justice.

I leave you to your reading and ask that you reflect on ways to collaborate to improve IDEA in our Libraries.

Regards,

Annie Bélanger
Dean of University Libraries
she / her / hers