Ways to Demonstrate the Value of DEI Programs

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Abstract:

In recent years, academic libraries have focused increasing attention on the lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion that is evident among library staff as well as the populations they serve, including both the faculty and students. In order to combat this problem, organizations such as the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) have focused on equity and inclusion by instituting programs and initiatives that would address these issues. One prominent instance is the yearlong EDI Discussion Series launched by then ACRL president Lauren Pressley.[1]

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Article:

In recent years, academic libraries have focused increasing attention on the lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion that is evident among library staff as well as the populations they serve, including both the faculty and students. In order to combat this problem, organizations such as the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) have focused on equity and inclusion by instituting programs and initiatives that would address these issues. One prominent instance is the yearlong EDI Discussion Series launched by then ACRL president Lauren Pressley.[1]

The importance of diversity

There are many reasons to invest in diversity initiatives in academic libraries. This section will review some of the important shifts in demographics that make these programs worthwhile.

The changing population

Academic libraries have evolved, and they have continued to transform themselves in their efforts to remain relevant to their parent institutions. In order to continue that successful trajectory, libraries will have to weave the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into

their strategic planning and organizational structure. Adding DEI initiatives focuses attention on the conversation regarding a library's mission, and vision planning will demonstrate a library's dedication to meeting the needs of its users, something that libraries have been doing all along. It is just that now the emphasis on the user has expanded to embrace diversity. As the demographics of our parent institutions change to include more groups in our communities, library users will also change. And this change will affect how libraries operate, design services, and hire staff. When libraries make attempts to contribute to changing societal needs, such as addressing diversity and inclusivity, libraries will strengthen their purpose of supporting others, and once again, they will validate another transformation of finding effective ways to meet the needs of its users by serving all populations that are represented.

A 2018 blog post from Brookings Institution researcher William Frey notes that new census projections confirm that growth in the number of racial minorities in the United States will overtake the declining white population in 2045. "During that year, whites will comprise 49.7 percent of the population in contrast to 24.6 percent for Hispanics, 13 .1 percent for blacks, 7 .9 percent for Asians, and 3.8 percent for multiracial populations."[2] In the near future, the population using libraries will be from a wide range of multicultural groups. Librarianship, like other professional industries, will also be affected by this demographic shift. As Damon Williams notes,

> "The Perfect Storm" is the changing face of American Society. For years, demographers have tracked the growth of minority populations and the fact that America's population will reach a "minority majority" tipping point during this century. The future is approaching quickly, and this demographic shift offers an unparalleled opportunity to diversify our campuses even as our emerging knowledge-based, global economy demands a similar reframing of diversity's importance in this new reality.[3]

For academic libraries, the shift may be faster than in other library types, as Williams notes that although "the overall population would become minority White by 2042 ... the youth population would reach this state by 2023."[4] This younger demographic will soon be attending American universities and changing the makeup of the users of academic libraries. In response, librarians should examine practices that adapt to these foreseeable demographic shifts and begin to explore ways in which students, staff, and faculty from these multicultural and diverse populations can be supported. "Academic libraries, as agencies of higher education, should strive to be more responsive to a changing world and particularly to new pressures that are exerting themselves on higher education."[5] Matthew Ciszek confirms this view when writing, "These changing demographics have influenced higher education institutions in ways that inform strategic planning and goals, mission statements, and positions on inclusion efforts, which in turn, take social justice, multiculturalism and socioeconomic equality all in consideration."[6] It is obvious that alignment with current research and population projections that will affect our potential user groups is essential as libraries address their future plans.

Workforce Implications

What does all this mean for academic libraries and their personnel? The demographic shift will not only affect the way libraries provide services to users but also determine who those service providers are. It will also have a strong impact on how the organization as a whole will

look in terms of personnel and leadership within the library. In order to meet these user needs, efforts include "aggressively hiring more minority librarians, staff, and student workers in an effort to foster a workforce that is representative of our quickly diversifying university community."[7]

With diversity efforts, many arguments arise about representation and how it is displayed in the organization. For example, does the staff of the organization truly represent the population of its users? If most of the users are from a particular group, does the staff match that of the dominant population? While considering these questions, library users such as students, staff, and faculty may wonder why there are not people at the service desks who look like them. These are important considerations in terms of diverse representation. "To create a truly inclusive work environment, organizations must first design and implement employment practices to ensure diverse representation throughout the organization and a welcoming and inclusive work environment."[8]

A diverse workforce makes a statement in the library just as it does in the university as a whole within areas such as curriculum and with faculty members who are leading the discussions, lectures, and critical-thinking topics that influence the future leaders of society. Juleah Swanson and colleagues sum up this situation when they write,

> Diversity matters because we all play a part in the messages we disseminate, regardless of how we identify. Librarians contribute towards the preservation and accessibility of information, representations of authority in the intellectual sphere, and advocating against censorship. What is the message that our collections, library staff representation, research, or programming gives to the communities we serve? And what are we doing to serve our patrons in ways that take into account their race and/or ethnicity?[9]

Ensuring a diverse workforce means understanding the deeper issues of inclusivity and expression of acceptance.

> People of color (as well as other disenfranchised groups) are more than just laboring bodies, more than just token representatives of a diverse workforce under the conditions of capitalism, but also possess, practice, and embody different ways of understanding and inhabiting the world, which ... can help to reinvent the culture of the library, and higher education, more generally. It is this possibility of transformation that I think is why diversity matters.[10]

This is why it is important to incorporate diversity into our libraries. Libraries should provide an inclusive environment that includes a staff that is representative of the community it serves. Libraries should also demonstrate what embracing diversity really means to library users by acknowledging the entire community's needs through programming, resources, and support. When libraries are "on board" with their missions to be more inclusive by their actions, those efforts will be evident as the library culture will reflect a sense of empathy for its users.

Defining Diversity

Although the strict dictionary definition of diversity is "the condition of having or being composed of differing elements," diversity can take on different meanings when implementing a

library DEI program. As libraries begin to demonstrate how they embrace differences, it is important to know what groups and populations are included in the definition of diversity. Determining how diversity is defined is the work and the decision of the library leadership working alongside diversity representatives within the library. As Jennifer Vinopal notes, "What do librarians mean when we say 'diversity'?" If there is a goal for inclusion, the term has to be extended to include all differences, making the scope much broader, not excluding any concept of diversity: "race, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, creed, color, religious background, national origin, language of origin or disability."[11]

Forming a diversity committee with staff representatives fitting these definitions is a good way to start the process. These stakeholders, along with input from other members of the library, need to mark the boundary lines of inclusion efforts. Diversity can easily be viewed as differences that exist between groups of people, but defining what those differences are is the challenge. Focusing on "variety" only offers blurred boundaries that are visible when specificity is implemented. Knowing what diversity is to a library is knowing what the library's vision, mission, and values represent. As library leaders create strategic plans and lay the foundation of the organization's principles, having a specific definition can be a touchstone for prioritizing the implementation of those efforts.

Diversity seldom stands alone. Often, when diversity initiatives are begun, other terms such as equity, inclusion, and multiculturalism are part of the equation. Textbox 4.1 provides details about these interconnected concepts based on Williams's definitions.[12]

Diversity refers to a set of characteristics that can be used to differentiate people. There are two types of characteristics:
- Primary characteristics include gender, age, and sexual orientation.
- Secondary characteristics are extrinsic to the person and include income, work experience, language skills, and geographic location.

Equity refers to a process that ensures "equivalent outcomes for members of historically underrepresented and oppressed individuals and groups." The process seeks to end systematic discrimination against diverse groups.

Inclusion can be seen when traditionally marginalized individuals and groups feel they belong and can participate fully within a community.

Multiculturalism promotes the acceptance and understanding of different cultures in a community. It focuses on the peaceful coexistence of diverse peoples in a given environment.

All of these terms should be considered when determining what diversity means to an organization. It is up to the library to determine how broad or how narrow it chooses to be in order to demonstrate how accepting and welcoming it is to others. "Establishing the definition and mission of library diversity can be difficult because so many diversity topics are part of the strategic diversity leadership paradigm. The strategic diversity leadership includes questions of access and equity, improving campus climate, fundraising for diversity, managing the diversity brand, and engaging diverse alumni."[13]

Understanding how diversity is defined within the organization will inform the mission and vision that is set forth by the diversity committee and the library's leadership. Recognizing that there are decisions to be made about what is included and intended by "diversity" will help

clarify what initiatives fall into the specific categories surrounding the subject, which are closely associated with the terms *diversity*, *equity, inclusion,* and *multiculturalism*.

Creating a Diversity Program

Getting on the same page as leadership and administration is the only way change with diversity can occur in an organization. Diversity efforts will only happen if the decision makers are on board in making it happen. It is important to have conversations with the leadership of the library about the way the organization is viewed as well as the message the organization is sending in relation to representation. Being attuned to particular observations, such as personnel hires as well as the kinds of outreach, resources, and programs that are in place, is going to have an impact on the library's organizational culture, something that is visible to the public as well as to the library's employees. When the library's leadership recognizes this, discovery begins to take place, which helps in identifying what actions are needed to implement the library's level of inclusivity and how much it is committed to embracing diversity. Williams writes, "If transformation is to be successful, senior administrators must be willing to reengineer existing institutional processes, infrastructures, hierarchies, and resource allocations to drive the campus agenda."[14]

      Discussions about diversity are extremely uncomfortable, but in order for diversity and inclusion to be fostered in a safe environment, these uncomfortable conversations must happen, and they must be supported by library leadership. Williams notes that "top-level support and long-term commitment are critical in diversity efforts. Senior leadership can contribute to the process by creating a broad institutional vision, and requiring plan development and accountability from individuals at multiple levels."[15]

      When it became noticeable that Atkins Library at the University of North Carolina (UNC) Charlotte did not have a diversified library faculty and staff, discussions took place on how the organization could address the issue. The library staff worked together to take on the challenge by exploring the possibility of hiring a diversity resident librarian; examining our hiring, recruitment, and retention process; hosting a diversity day event; and looking at ways to improve our library fellows program to embrace diversity in its recruitment efforts. All of these diversity initiatives could have only taken place if there was support from the library and university leadership. The work was patterned, in part, by what had happened at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) in 2008 and 2009 when it first developed a diversity residence program. More about those initiatives will be detailed in a later section.

      The founding of the Atkins Library Diversity and Inclusion Committee is instructive for how a library might begin this work. After carefully selecting committee members and writing a committee charge, work was done to ensure diversity and inclusion initiatives were addressed. The next sections detail how it was done at Atkins Library.

Diversity and Inclusion Committee: Subcommittees

In order to have balanced diversity initiatives in the library, the work that the organization needs to do should not be limited to one particular area. The Atkins Library Diversity and Inclusion Committee established a series of subcommittees to address diversity needs that expand across various areas such as recruitment and hiring, learning and development, and workshops and programing. The development of these subcommittees allowed the library the opportunity to

address the diversity, equity, and inclusion needs from a holistic perspective, focusing on the entire organization and its employees.

Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention

The origins of the Diversity Subcommittee on Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention can be traced to a meeting of the library faculty in fall 2018 at which several faculty members expressed concern about the largely white makeup of the employees in positions that are Exempt from the Human Resources Act (EHRA). These non-faculty positions include instructional positions, research positions, public service/extension positions, and senior academic and administrative officer positions. Faculty members proposed creating an ad hoc group to study the issue and make recommendations on how to recruit, hire, and retain librarians with a more inclusive racial profile. Following conversations with the dean of the libraries, the membership of this ad hoc study group was broadened to include staff, and its scope was accordingly extended to look at hiring and retention practices for both EHRA and SHRA (positions that are covered by the State Human Resources Act) employees at Atkins. Organized under the umbrella of the already-existing Diversity Committee, the new study group was conceived as a limited-term subcommittee with a specific charge. Its work began in January 2019 and concluded in September of the same year.

The subcommittee report summarizes the findings and recommendations of the Atkins Library Diversity Subcommittee on Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention. The subcommittee, which was chaired at this time by Joseph Nicholson, took a broad, holistic approach to its work. It employed quantitative methods such as statistical analyses and surveys to capture data about the racial and ethnic makeup of Atkins faculty and staff and perceptions of the organization's commitment to diversity. It conducted interviews with faculty and staff at other institutions in order to gain a sense of diversity, inclusion, and recruitment efforts elsewhere and how some of them might be applied locally. It sought to acquaint itself with the broad literature on diversity and inclusion in academic libraries and use its conclusions to analyze organizational culture at Atkins. It made contacts with UNC Charlotte staff responsible for diversity and inclusion efforts at the campus level in order to bring its own work into alignment with efforts outside the library. Not least, the subcommittee subjected all phases of its work to the scrutiny of subcommittee members, whose discussions at its monthly meetings served as a lively stimulus and sometimes as a needed check to its efforts.

Book Club

The Atkins Library Book Club was established as another subcommittee of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee. It explores diversity/inclusion issues by sponsoring a university-wide reading opportunity focused on diversity and cultural topics to spark conversations on inclusivity, equity, and awareness of human differences in today's society. The book club, created at the recommendation of the provost, is open to all faculty, staff, and students. The first book selection was The Person You Mean to Be: How Good People Fight Bias by Dolly Chugh. Members of the campus community are welcome to lead future book discussions and offer suggestions for readings. Discussions take place in the library.

Diversity View

This subcommittee focuses on outward-facing promotion of diversity presence in the library. It is responsible for the Diversity web page, crafting a diversity statement, and policies that can be shared with the public. Other projects include content for the digital signs that appear in the library as well as on digital monitors throughout campus buildings.

Diversity Month Event

In 2020, Atkins Library partnered with the CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services Center), IEE (Office of Identity, Equity, and Engagement), and CAB (Campus Activities Board) to bring Dr. Angela Davis to the UNC Charlotte campus. Atkins Library was responsible for the student reception for the event. Members of the Diversity Month Event Subcommittee coordinated and hosted an intimate group of about forty to fifty people that included student leaders. Diversity Month is a recurring event on the UNC Charlotte campus.

DEI Program Committee

This subcommittee has the responsibility of scheduling continuous education/training and professional development workshops and classes for library employees on diversity, equity, and inclusion topics. Since the establishment of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee at Atkins Library, the committee has sponsored and hosted a workshop on micro- and macroaggressions, several webinars related to implicit bias, recruitment for librarians, and a series of Conversations That Matter, a forum that allows all Atkins Library employees to participate in a discussion about diversity and inclusion. Topics of each session vary, welcoming open dialogue that includes the very broad scope of diversity such as, but not limited to, race, gender, age, education, and other topics that have a connection to DEI This subcommittee is also responsible for sharing news items or "spotlights" pertaining to diversity, equity, and inclusion. With this subcommittee, education is the key. The subcommittee created a spreadsheet of national observances of significant dates, anniversaries, and celebrations of various cultures and groups that are embedded in the circle of diversity. This information is displayed on the library's website on the diversity and inclusion page.

Other programs

Both Atkins and UNCG Libraries have developed several other initiatives that also contribute to the diversity program. These are described here and are listed by name of the program.

Atkins Fellows Program

The Atkins Fellows program is an eleven-week, paid summer residential fellowship for students at the midpoint of their library, archives, or information science degree program or those within one year of having completed such a program. It is designed to provide each fellow who participates with a work experience that is focused on professional-level tasks with high levels of independence and creativity, while also supporting Atkins Library's mission, goals, and initiatives. These fellowships are designed to give LIS students hands-on experience in an academic library.

Fellows work on a specific project throughout the summer. They also have the opportunity to attend workshops, job talks, and local conferences, as well as job shadowing and participating in departmental and all staff meetings. Through this experience, fellows learn about the operations of an academic library, better preparing them for work opportunities in the profession.

The Atkins Fellows coordinator incorporates diversity representation in the selection of the "fellows" each year.

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

In 2007, it became clear that the Jackson Library of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro did not have a diverse faculty or staff that reflected the makeup of the university's student body or the community it served. The university librarian, Rosann Bazirjian, took a leadership role in exploring ways to increase the diversity in the applicant pool of open positions. She appointed two committees: (1) the Ad Hoc Committee on Exploring Diversity Issues, which subsequently became the Library Diversity Committee, and (2) the Post MLS Diversity Residency Planning Committee.

Library Diversity Committee The Ad Hoc Committee on Exploring Diversity Issues, as it was first known, explored diversity by taking four different approaches to the problem. These were as follows:

1. research being done across the university on diversity issues;
2. researching what other university libraries were doing, especially viewing their web page sites;
3. determining whether a permanent diversity committee needed to be appointed; and
4. making recommendations regarding the specific goals to be accomplished by a permanent committee.

The results of these explorations led to the documents that informed the librarians and library staff about diversity issues and the connection between these and the library's mission. From this foundational research, the library could look to grow and support the newly formed Library Diversity Residency Program.

Post MLS Diversity Residency Planning Committee The Post MLS Diversity Residency Planning Committee created a two-year, post-MLS diversity residency program that was and still is designed to foster new librarians' professional growth while demonstrating the University Libraries' commitment to diversity and investing in the future of the library profession. The Diversity Residency was designed as a non-tenure-track, visiting faculty position. The resident participates in diversity initiatives for both the libraries and the university. The resident rotates between three library departments (four months in each department) during year l and then chooses one of those areas to specialize in during the second and final year.

The (purpose) value of this DEI program was to foster new librarians' professional growth while investing in the University Libraries' commitment to diversity. Recruiting and retaining librarians for future positions in academic libraries is both critical and challenging in today's environment. The first diversity resident was hired in 2008, and a total of six have completed the program.[16]

Other Initiatives

The Library Diversity Committee has continued its work since its beginning in 2007. Two important new initiatives are described in this section. They show that what may begin as ad hoc can be incorporated into permanent work when the climate and situation require it.

2014-2019 Library Diversity Strategic Plan

The 2014- 2019 Library Diversity Strategic Plan is a working document that was created to serve as a guide to diversity and inclusion in the Libraries. The Libraries hosted three diversity forums with library staff and librarians to brainstorm and discuss ideas for actions items to include in the strategic plan. The plan emphasized that the University Libraries wanted to build on diversity initiatives in the library and on campus. The library would build on the value of the DEi goals, initiatives, and action items to advance the library mission and add to the welcoming environment of the library to all library users. The plan was updated in 2019 to extend the work through 2024.

Library Diversity Institute Pilot Project Grant

The Library Diversity Institute (LDI) Pilot Project Grant is a program that was funded in 2018 by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). In 2017, the UNCG Libraries joined the ACRL Diversity Alliance (forty member libraries) to attract a more diverse candidate pool for all library open positions. Referring to membership in the alliance when crafting job postings helps to promote diversity initiatives and commitment on the part of the library. The funded grant project included forming an advisory committee to create a curriculum that would promote cohort development for the residents that attend a three-day institute at the beginning of the residency program. UNC Greensboro organized two institutes. In 2018 we hosted thirty-seven residents and in 2019 we hosted thirty-six residents. The LDI Pilot Project also included creating and providing two webinars and producing a journal for anyone interested in advancing diversity initiatives in this area of librarianship.

The value of this DEI program was to build on the success of Diversity Residency Programs to recruit and retain librarians from underrepresented communities for future positions in academic libraries. This grant includes building on the ACRL Diversity Alliance Institute program by creating a Cohort Development Program for the residents from libraries all over the United States and sharing best practices for establishing a residency program and for the residents to take full advantage of the program in which they participate.

2019 Library Diversity and Residency Studies (LD&RS) Conference

The LD&RS (pronounced "leaders") Conference was held at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro Libraries in 2019 in order to advance the workforce diversity found in American libraries. UNCG Libraries believe that this diversity is critically important for the future of the field. The conference was held in collaboration with the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) as a conference and follow-up to the pilot program described above. The LD&RS Conference addressed the needs of professionally underrepresented racial and ethnic

groups by directing presentations to residency coordinators, library deans, and various library staff members.

The success of the 2018 LDI led to many librarians interested in diversity initiatives wanting to attend a workshop like the LDI. Librarians heard a lot of good things from residents who attended the 2018 Library Diversity Institute. The value of this DEI program was to build on the success of Diversity Residency Programs and overall library diversity initiatives to recruit and retain librarians from underrepresented communities for future positions in academic libraries. The LD&RS Conference was the first step in building on the diversity initiatives, adding ideas to cohort development, and learning more about the needs of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. A website and journal document some of these important initiatives.

The long game

Although libraries may fill the bucket with initiatives by providing meaningful learning opportunities for library staff and the campus community, it is important to recognize the amount of time that it takes to change the culture of an organization. Be prepared to wait for the results of diversity efforts as this work usually takes on a building-block structure, as evidence of effective initiatives will not be visible overnight. It often takes months, sometimes years, to see the results of diversity efforts.

Buy-in and acceptance are extremely important while implementing diversity efforts into organizations, and starting with activities that are not overbearing, threatening to others, or forceful may be a good starting place for initiating diversity efforts. Atkins Library at UNC Charlotte took this approach when their Diversity and Inclusion Committee hosted their very first diversity event. They started with simple conversations on diversity topics. These events, called "Conversations That Matter," allowed all Atkins Library employees the opportunity to participate in open discussions about diversity, inclusion, and equity on a very informal level. These open-forum sessions involved the following: a diverse topic, a comfortable space where participants could all see each other (conference-room-style seating), an open mind and the willingness to listen to all perspectives, and professional respect. Topics for Conversations That Matter have included workplace harassment, race and ethnicity, religion and culture, and age and gender.

It took a while for employees to show interest in this diversity event. Participation in the very first session was low compared to the number of faculty and staff members in the organization. However, the people who came out to support the event were highly appreciated as it is important to recognize that change happens one step at a time. If just one person is affected from an action, the response is a successful outcome.

After the initial session, participation grew to greater numbers. Conversations That Matter functioned the way it was intended, which was to get the library staff to a place where the group could build trust and feel comfortable with one another in order to take on difficult and sometimes-uncomfortable activities involving diversity. As it was alluded to earlier, diversity isn't something to expect to have the acceptance of the entire organization early on. It will take time to gain the leverage of support and a full understanding of why inclusive activities and events are important to an organization.

In addition to recognizing that culture change will not happen overnight, diversity efforts, as with anything new that the organization is not used to,should never have mandatory attendance. While it is evident that diversity events are necessary and should be viewed as

training and learning opportunities for all employees of the organization, individuals will not reach the same comfort levels for these events and activities at the same time. Just as people are entitled to have their own reasons and beliefs about various topics in our society, they are also entitled to either accept or deny cultural changes within the workplace, and diversity is an enormous area that invites varying perspectives. Change and acceptance to change will occur gradually. In order to get to the place where the majority of the organization accepts the concept of the implementation of diversity efforts, it is advised to take things slower rather than faster.

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