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Chapter 4

Curating Inclusive Collections: An Assessment of Diversity in Literature-Related Subjects at the HSU Library

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Introduction

The HSU Library periodically conducts collection assessments to ensure that we are meeting the curricular and research needs of faculty and students. Past assessments, often conducted in conjunction with departmental program reviews, have examined use data, spending, and other statistics related to specific collection areas.

This report describes a collection diversity assessment undertaken in Spring and Summer 2020. We begin by setting the context for our study then describe the assessment we conducted, including our methodology and the data collected. We then draw some conclusions from our data and offer brief recommendations for improving collection diversity in the future.

Context

Collection diversity has been emphasized in various library association statements and standards for many years. In 2012, the Association of Research and College Libraries (ACRL) published a diversity standard for collections which states: "Librarians and library staff shall develop collections and provide programs and services that are inclusive of the needs of all persons in the community the library serves" (Association of College and Research Libraries). In *Diverse Collections: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights*, originally published in 1982 and subsequently updated, the American Library Association states: "A diverse collection should contain content by and about a wide array of people and cultures to authentically reflect a variety of ideas, information, stories, and experiences" (American Library Association).

Professional literature and programs likewise reflect the ongoing importance of diversity as a principle of collection development. In the *Progressive Librarian*, Katy Mathuews writes:

Academic libraries play a role in knowledge construction through collection development. The content that is selected to be part of collections is directly related to which views are permitted to be represented in the broader academic pursuit. As students perform research projects and faculty conduct scholarly work, it is essential to offer an inclusive pool of

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resources from which to pull. The voices that library patrons have access to directly impacts future knowledge construction (Mathuews).

A session of the 47th annual ARLIS conference (2019) describes a Special Collections initiative at Johns Hopkins that “was born to engage students in critical librarianship and encourage them to take active steps in addressing issues of marginalization via scholarly discourse, such as selecting materials for acquisitions by authors or social movements that were in the past deemed outside of the collection scope” (Art Libraries Society of North America).

Comparable efforts towards diversifying academic library collections continue to trend across the nation, as described in Rebekah Scoggins’s, “Broadening your library’s collection: Implementing a LGBTQIA collection development project,” and many of which place a similar emphasis on acquisitions that value self-expression and celebrate a variety of cultures. As an avid advocate of LGBTQIA rights and scholarship, Scoggins reports on her diversity-related assessment efforts, which guided her selection process—emphasizing recently published scholarship and literature—and were later highlighted as part of well-received book displays. Considering the similarities between the HSU Library and the Jackson Library at Lander University’s information environments, Scoggins’s diversification efforts serve as inspiration for our project and affirms its potential for success within the Library.

The need for collections that represent diverse perspectives is reflected in Humboldt State University’s mission, vision, and values. One of HSU’s seven vision statements commits the university, “to increasing our diversity of people and perspectives” (Humboldt State University, “Mission, Vision, Values”). The need for inclusive collections comes at a time when the university is seeing demographic changes in its student enrollment. For example, HSU saw the number of students identifying as Hispanic/Latino increase from 25.6 percent of the overall student enrollment in fall 2013 to 33.5 percent in fall 2019 (Humboldt State University Office of Institutional Effectiveness, *Fast Facts Fall 2019*; Humboldt State University Office of Institutional Effectiveness, *Fast Facts Fall 2013*). Additional demographics that saw their percentages increase from 2013 to 2019 include American Indian and students identifying as two or more ethnicities. At the same time, the percentage of white students enrolled at HSU has decreased from 50.8 percent in 2013 to 44.6 percent in 2019. HSU was designated a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in 2013, which the U.S. Department of Education defines as an institution where at least 25 percent of the student population identifies as Hispanic or Latino (Department of Education; Humboldt State Now). Diversity, equity, and inclusion are central in the University’s development of the HSU Strategic Plan 2021-2026. The steering committee and working groups have been charged by the President to, “integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion into its planning” as the group works to develop the vision for the next five years at HSU (Humboldt State University, “HSU Strategic Plan”).

Focus Area

Collection diversity can mean many things. It may entail increased representation of marginalized, “minority,” or historically neglected authors, or result from a greater focus on works about underrepresented groups. It can mean collecting that is concerned to provide materials that represent a wealth of racial, ethnic, geographic, religious and identity-related perspectives and orientations. While no one- or two-sentence definition is likely to cover every aspect of diversity, we can envision collection development as an activity that embraces an inclusiveness that seeks to represent of a

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“diversity of people and perspectives” and is motivated by what Martin Garner, co-chair of ALA's Task Force for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, calls a “*striving for social justice for ALL*” (ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom).

With this broad understanding of diversity in mind, we conducted a collection diversity assessment by examining library holdings for a small selection of diversity-related Library of Congress subject headings. The selected headings are typically used with materials in the language and literature classifications (P-PZ). We chose this area because materials in these classifications circulate well. For example, more than 7,200 physical items circulated (in-house and externally) over the last three fiscal years (2017-2019) in the PR and PS classifications, which include more than 19,000 creators (authors, editors, compilers, etc.) and approximately 44,000 physical items. With the addition of new materials, these areas are likely to see continuing good use.

Methodology

To assemble a list of headings to analyze, we used Google to locate academic library research guides listing Library of Congress subject headings representative of diversity. Examples include guides from Ball State, Emory, Franklin Pierce, and Reynolds Community College (Ball State University Libraries; Dragovic; Franklin Pierce Library; Reynolds Community College Libraries).

This search resulted in a large list of diversity-related headings, from which we selected a group of 63 literature-related headings to analyze.

We then searched the combined HSU/California State University (CSU) and Library of Congress catalogs, retrieving and recording search results for each of the selected headings. To simplify searching, counting, and comparative analysis, we limited results to material type: book.

After compiling our results into a table (see Appendix), we developed an assessment of the strength of HSU's holdings relative to the Library of Congress, ranking HSU's level of support as: Basic (0-25% of LC headings), Instructional (25-50%), Research (51-75%), or Comprehensive (76-100%).

We then chose nine of the 62 headings for further analysis, compiling data on: 1) the language of items held by HSU, and 2) the age of HSU's holdings in each subject, represented by publication date ranges and number of items published in the last 5 and 20 years. In this analysis, we focused on HSU and CSU search results, included all formats, and relied on search facets to gather data on publication dates and languages.

Limitations of the Methodology

The data assembled reflect the peculiarities of the catalogs searched: the same work may be counted more than once when reprint records exist or when separate records exist for different formats (e.g, print and online). We assume the number of duplicates is limited and have not removed these from our tallies.

Any in-depth diversity analysis using subject headings should consider how subjects are assigned. In fiction, the Library of Congress advises: “Assign topical and form headings ... only as they come readily to mind after a superficial review of the work being cataloged (Library of Congress).” This means that many fictional works will not be assigned any subject headings (although a 2001 special

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provision permits headings for individual characters, classes of persons, settings, and topics, noting that “many works will have no topical heading”) (Library of Congress).

Given these descriptive practices in our focus area, a more complete diversity assessment would go beyond subject headings analysis to consider other measures of diversity, such as the range of authors and publishers represented in the collection.

Additional analysis could also examine areas of strength and weakness in materials acquired from 1970 through the early 2000s, when print collecting was at its height.

Data Collected

Initial Holdings Comparison

The Appendix presents our initial holdings comparison. The table shows the number of items retrieved for each subject in the HSU, CSU and Library of Congress (LC) catalogs. We used the Library of Congress results as a benchmark for comparison because it is the largest in the world and will have collected most of the materials in any given subject (Library of Congress). We show HSU’s holdings as a percent of LC’s and, as noted above, indicate the level of support in each subject: Basic (B), Instructional (I), Research (R), or Comprehensive (C). The data for this table was collected on May 5, 2020.

Additional Holdings Comparison

We chose nine headings for further analysis, searching the CSU/HSU catalog to compile information on publication date ranges (including last publication date) and number of languages represented. Results vary from the initial analysis because we included all subject heading types (records in the Alma catalog may include non-LC subject headings types) and all resource types (not only books). Data for this table was collected on August 31, 2020. In this table, CSU results include HSU results. For example, HSU has 2 of the 27 items in the subject: African American gays--Fiction.

Subject Heading	CSU Results	HSU Results (% of CSU)	HSU Results Last 5 Years	HSU Results Last 20 Years	HSU Date Range	Languages (HSU)
African American gays--Fiction	27	2 (7.4%)	0	0	1996-1999	English (2)
Gay teenagers--Fiction	126	5 (3.9%)	1	2	1951-2018	English (5), Spanish (1)
Gay youth--Fiction	99	5 (5%)	0	2	1959-2001	English (5)
Homosexuality in literature	395	114 (28.8%)	6	68	1975-2018	Czech (1), English (113), French (1),

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						German (1), Spanish (1)
Lesbians--Fiction	1,638	65 (3.9%)	2	6	1940-2019	English (65), German (1)
American literature--Indian authors	353	172 (48.7%)	5	82	1971-2019	English (172), Spanish (1)
Indians in literature	598	273 (45.6%)	9	133	1930-2018	English (268), French (1), Spanish (4)
Indians of North America--Juvenile fiction	509	46 (9%)	3	5	1951-2017	English (46)
Indians of North America--Poetry	304	75 (24.6%)	2	20	1900-2017	English (75)

Discussion of Data

Initial Holdings Comparison

The quantitative data from our initial holdings comparison indicates that the Library has achieved only basic support in a majority of the headings studied. Few of the subjects meet an instructional level of support or above. In a few subjects, HSU lacks any holdings (see the HSU column in the Appendix, where three subjects have zero HSU holdings).

Examining the data more closely, in a majority of the headings (41/62 or 66.13%), the holdings offer only **at** a basic level of support. Subjects that meet an instructional level of support comprise the second highest rank (17/62 or 27.41%), and there are zero subjects within our sample of headings which reach the research level of support. Lastly, there is only one heading (1/62 or 1.61%)--namely, *Asian American authors*--from our initial sample which meets the comprehensive level of support. The three remaining subjects (3/62 or 4.89%) from our sample fall entirely below our designated scale of literary support (indicated by N/A: not applicable), as the Library presently does not reflect any holdings under the headings: *Children with disabilities in literature*, *Indians of North America--Social life and customs--Juvenile literature*, and *People with social disabilities in literature*. Works with a Muslim, Jewish, or Arab focus are not well represented, given that a single title has been acquired for: *Arab American fiction*, *Arab American poetry*, *English literature--Muslim authors*, *Fiction--Muslim authors*, and *Jewish historical fiction*. Some of the conspicuously low numbers (relative to what could be acquired), suggest that collecting in that subject has been piecemeal or very unsystematic (but it is also important to note that previous weeding of unused materials may account for low numbers in a given subject).

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This data strongly suggests that there is room for improvement in numerous subjects, and that collection development should focus on identifying inclusive, diversity-celebrating literature supportive of various ethnic identities, including African-Americans, Arab Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Mexican Americans, and as well as women, those in the LGBTQIA+ communities, and those with disabilities.

Additional Holdings Comparison

To better understand the numbers in our initial holdings comparison, we examined nine headings in subjects related to the LGBTQIA+ and Native American communities, adding an intersectional aspect by examining subjects about African Americans, teenagers, and youth.

Overall, the data here indicates that—in relation to the material available—we are woefully lacking an adequate representation of diverse and inclusive materials.

For example, under the heading *African American gays--Fiction*, CSU holds 27 items, while HSU has only two titles, published in 1996 and 1999. Other LGBTQIA+ subjects examined (*Gay teenagers--Fiction*; *Gay youth--Fiction*; *Lesbians--Fiction*) are similarly deficient, suggesting that there is much room for improvement in supporting the LGBTQIA+ community. Only the heading *Homosexuality in literature*, with 68 items published in the last 20 years, has been developed more fully.

Additionally, our findings revealed that Native American experiences, cultures, and perspectives are very inadequately represented at the subjects examined. For example, the subject *Indians of North America--Juvenile fiction* includes less than one-tenth of the items (46 of 509) available across the CSU, suggesting insufficient representation of the material at HSU. Of the Library's 46 titles, only five were published within the past twenty years, and a meager three titles in the past five years. All of HSU's titles at this heading are in English, whereas the CSU includes titles in English, Spanish, Ojibwa, Swedish, German, French, Central American Indian, and Polish.

For almost all of the selected subjects, acquisitions have been limited when compared to the CSU as a whole, and this is reflected in both publication dates and the number of languages represented. The lack of materials published within the last 20 years is concerning, and there is an especially sizable absence of diversity-related materials published within the last five years. Across all subjects examined, a small number of languages other than English are represented (these include English, Spanish, Czech, French, and German). The dominance of English language materials across all subjects limits how individuals inclined to read in their native tongue may use the Library.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, subject heading analysis can be an effective starting point for an investigation of collection diversity. The data reveal the relative strength of library holdings in particular topics, and the examination of publication data provides a snapshot of the age of materials. As a next step, examination and discussion of specific works within specific subjects would help to reveal how collection development might proceed within the context of the curriculum at HSU and the universe of items available through the CSU and beyond. Ideally, the Library should strive to be an active partner within the CSU in developing more diverse collections.

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Given the shift in library acquisitions from print to online materials in the last 15 years, and the reliance on ebook packages for access to most recently published print monographs, it would also be important to examine the Library's multi-subject ebook packages from a diversity perspective, and to consider for acquisition ebook collections with a diversity-minded focus. To address language diversity, a more thorough examination of the Library's non-English materials could point the way towards more inclusive language representation.

This report acknowledges and identifies significant diversity-related gaps within a small selection of the hundreds of subject headings that guide library users to materials related to ethnicity, identity, race, religion, impairment, and other diversity-related subjects. Recognizing these gaps is a necessary first step towards more intentionally inclusive collection development that does not inadvertently silence invaluable experiences, voices, and histories. Because the shortfalls are significant in numerous areas, we advocate a continuing emphasis on the acquisition of inclusive, diversity-celebrating materials, including support for communities with a long history of under- and mis-representation, such as Native Americans and the LGBTQIA+ communities. Newer materials that document and celebrate diversity should be a priority.

The authors hope that ongoing, data-driven assessment will reveal opportunities to grow the Library's collections in ways that engage, inspire, and support the HSU community both academically and emotionally. These efforts will ensure that the Library is meeting one of the key goals of its collection development policy: "The Library is continuously seeking to diversify its collections through the acquisition of inclusive materials that represent the ever-growing community of HSU Library patrons" (Humboldt State University Library).

We join the library and information science community in advocating for diversity in collection development and look forward to supporting the University's diversity-embracing mission, vision, and values through ongoing collection assessment.

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Appendix

Library of Congress Subject Heading Comparison

LCSH	LC (Book / Printed Material)	CSU (Resource Type: Books)	HSU (Resource Type: Books)	HSU Percent of LC	Assessment (Basic (B), Instructional Support (I), Research (R), Comprehensive (C))

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African American authors--Fiction	521	16	2	0.38%	I
African American families--Fiction	481	227	37	7.69%	B
African American gays--Fiction	36	27	2	5.56%	B
African American women in literature	488	318	165	33.81%	I
African American women--Fiction	1968	495	78	3.96%	B
African Americans--Juvenile fiction	16	4	2	12.50%	B
African Americans--Literary collections	266	225	76	28.57%	I
American fiction--Arab American authors	8	7	2	25.00%	B
American fiction--Asian American authors	43	34	12	27.91%	I
American fiction--Jewish authors	124	98	38	30.65%	I
American fiction--Mexican American authors	41	42	11	26.83%	I
American literature--African American authors	1,887	1,189	471	24.96%	B
American literature--Arab American authors	39	17	2	5.13%	B
American literature--Asian American authors	199	173	58	29.15%	I
American literature--Hispanic American authors	210	242	73	34.76%	I
American literature--Indian authors	402	342	181	45.02%	I
American literature--Iranian American authors	7	6	3	42.86%	I
American literature--Jewish authors	265	144	58	21.89%	B
American literature--Pacific Islander American authors	7	6	3	42.86%	I
American literature--Women authors	2,547	1,035	420	16.49%	B
American poetry	10,000	17,262	3,752	37.52%	I
American poetry--Jewish authors	32	25	8	25.00%	B
Arab American fiction	24	3	1	4.17%	B
Arab American poetry	9	4	1	11.11%	B
Asian American authors	253	322	201	79.45%	C
Asian American women in literature	24	19	7	29.17%	I

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Children with disabilities in literature	36	7	0	0.00%	N/A
Children's literature, American	2,049	499	104	5.08%	B
Chinese Americans--Juvenile fiction	154	186	21	13.64%	B
Disabilities in literature	189	102	28	14.81%	B
English literature--Muslim authors	13	2	1	7.69%	B
Fiction--Muslim authors	38	3	1	2.63%	B
Gay authors	327	86	18	5.50%	B
Gay teenagers--Fiction	136	124	5	3.68%	B
Gay youth--Fiction	114	100	6	5.26%	B
Gays in literature	175	61	21	12.00%	B
Harlem Renaissance	298	277	101	33.89%	I
Hispanic American women in literature	41	25	6	14.63%	B
Hispanic Americans in literature	109	105	44	40.37%	I
Hispanic Americans--Juvenile fiction	212	212	8	3.77%	B
Homosexuality in literature	779	369	126	16.17%	B
Indians in literature	804	613	300	37.31%	I
Indians of North America--Juvenile Fiction	769	503	46	5.98%	B
Indians of North America--Poetry	439	291	73	16.63%	B
Indians of North America--Social life and customs--Juvenile literature	429	0	0	0.00%	N/A
Jewish historical fiction	462	1	1	0.22%	B
Jewish women--fiction	415	134	19	4.58%	B
Lesbians--Fiction	2184	1636	69	3.16%	B
Literature--Asian American authors	200	182	62	31.00%	I
Mexican American women in literature	60	57	15	25.00%	B
Mexican American women--Fiction	94	62	9	9.57%	B
Mexican Americans--Fiction	802	705	71	8.85%	B
Mexican Americans--Juvenile fiction	140	289	21	15.00%	B
Muslim authors	373	22	9	2.41%	B
People with disabilities in literature	158	81	23	14.56%	B
People with disabilities--Fiction	1648	742	54	3.28%	B
People with disabilities--Juvenile	250	400	30	12.00%	B

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fiction					
People with mental disabilities in literature	22	12	4	18.18%	B
People with social disabilities in literature	23	0	0	0.00%	N/A
Prejudices--Juvenile fiction	189	357	27	14.29%	B
Science fiction, American	3,320	6,883	360	10.84%	B
Women authors, American	4,064	530	159	3.91%	B