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Creating Inclusive Communities: Diversity and the Responses of Academic Libraries

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In mid-October 2008, a group of University of Illinois' alumni returned to their campus to join community members in a celebration of a transforming moment in the life of the university. *Project 500*, as it was named by university officials in fall 1968, was launched in the aftermath of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., as American sensibilities were heightened to the cost of discrimination and social inequality. With great ambition, they sought to change the campus overnight by enrolling at least 500 new undergraduate students of color. As Clarence Shelley, the university's long-standing special assistant to the chancellor,[1] remembered, neither student nor campus was sufficiently prepared for the abruptness of change. Shelley asked, "How do you prepare a university for a different kind of student?"[2]

Students of color were not unknown to the Urbana-Champaign campus. Like many other colleges and universities across America, Illinois had its distinguished list of graduates and "firsts" well before 1968. Yet, after nearly a decade of federal legislation aimed at turning the Civil Rights Movement into public policy and a growing number of acts of micro-aggression in cities and on college campuses, there seemed to be a great urgency for social reform. Inside campuses across America, community and student activism mirrored social protest in the broader society; and schools responded by aggressively recruiting diverse students and faculty, broadening the curriculum, and opening avenues for new areas of research and scholarship. As Martin Kurlansky stated in the opening paragraphs of his book, *1968: the Year that Rocked the World*, "There has never been a year like 1968, and it is unlikely that there will ever be one again."[3]

Where among a multiplicity of scenarios for creating inclusive communities will libraries likely have their greatest impact?

Despite flaws, missteps, and shortcomings among the plans that would unfold to broaden access to higher education and increase opportunities to provide a home for racially and gender neutral curricula and scholarship, one might say that they got it

right. In the long run, the labors of higher education's reformers also forged systematic and structural changes that enabled diversity and inclusion over successive decades. In looking back over 40 years of reform concerning access to higher education, what sort of challenges will diversity pose to colleges and universities in the coming decade? Where among a multiplicity of scenarios for creating inclusive communities will libraries likely have their greatest impact?

A "Social Contract" with Higher Education

In her 2002 speech before the Third National Conference on Diversity in Academic Libraries, then University of Illinois Chancellor Nancy Cantor proposed that universities should be viewed as "prototypical public goods" exemplifying "the values of exploration, preservation, and community." Accordingly, universities and their libraries "cannot serve the public good unless we learn the fundamental lesson of diversity."[4] Following Cantor's argument, a case can be made that, since World War II, colleges and universities entered into a social contract with the government, maintained through systems of public support for educational opportunity and access and unfettered research, scholarship, and creative activity. For their part, federal and state officials have revisited the government's social contract with higher education and revised the terms of access to education for those seeking postsecondary degrees. Beginning with accommodations for education for veterans in the *G.I. Bill*, government has addressed educational access in various ways since the 1950s through federal decisions and presidential executive orders that have been issued to end segregation and discrimination in public schools, libraries, and higher educational institutions. In the 1960s, a succession of major legislative initiatives were passed by Congress and signed by President Lyndon Johnson, beginning with the *Economic Opportunity Act of 1964*[5] and the *1965 Higher Education Act*, which broadened access to federal-backed student loans.[6] Other government agencies, such as the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the Department of Education, created aggressive programs to encourage researchers to recruit underrepresented students to their disciplines, pursue areas of research that would respond to societal disparities and broaden knowledge about diverse communities, and award scholarship and fellowship support in scientific, humanities, and social sciences disciplines.[7]

Broadening the contract toward inclusion has proven to be a greater challenge for higher education than imagined at the outset, given such obstacles as high school attrition, linguistic isolation in English as a second language communities, educational costs, legal challenges, and modest gains in faculty from diverse backgrounds. As reported in the *Digest of Educational Statistics: 2008*, the proportion of baccalaureate and advanced degrees awarded to populations still considered underrepresented in higher education, including American Indians, African Americans, and Latino/as, has yet to achieve parity with their representation in the U.S. population and lag behind other degree awardees.[8] Recent research on college completion among undergraduate students at leading public universities points to persistent disparities in degree attainment, particularly among lower income and underrepresented populations.[9] The consequences of slow growth, as indicated by graduation rates and years to degree, not only hamper progress toward educational equity and social equality but also have far reaching economic consequences.

Restructuring and realigning support for diverse students not only poses challenges for enrollment and student retention but also for diversifying graduate and professional programs, especially among doctoral programs. Development of inclusive programs for graduate students is a necessary step in diversifying faculty and research positions and refocusing and broadening scholarship across the hard sciences, social sciences, and humanities disciplines.

Not only is scholarship affected by broadening access but this access has also affected the practices of corporations, government, and the nonprofit sector. Alfredo Behrens has observed this in *Culture and Management in the Americas*—a study of failure and promise for U.S. companies doing business in Latin America. According to Behrens' analysis, much of the strategic miscalculations of U.S. companies engaged in Latin America are traceable to their lack of understanding of the cultural dimensions of life and work across Latin America. Accordingly, business leaders and decision-makers would benefit from lessons about cultural differences that can be found in Latin American literature and other forms of expressive culture.[10]

Such shifts to incorporate cultural frameworks have had a favorable effect on public policy decision-making. For instance, public health officials such as those at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control have learned to expand their work in understanding differences in demographic and cultural identity by sponsoring and encouraging research activity in the area of health disparities. Other research has taken advantage of new developments in multidisciplinary scholarship in the social sciences that better inform practitioners about the impact that culture and social inequality have on diverse populations.[11] By rethinking and broadening scholarship and learning in the academy, colleges and universities can strengthen their connectedness to the broader society through their sway on organizational and institutional decision-making.

Implications for Academic Libraries

In the late 1960s, many college and university libraries responded to student and faculty demands to broaden the curriculum and opportunities for scholarship by aggressively evaluating and strengthening collections. These initiatives often addressed perceived gaps in collections or corresponded with new program initiatives in race, ethnic, and gender studies and revisions to the canons of traditional disciplines. Systematic inventories and collection assessments often led to the acquisition of books, journals, newspapers, microfilms, and other resources. Over time,

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the dash to purchase materials was tempered by long-term allocations of resources and part-time and full-time appointments of race/ethnic and gender studies specialists in academic libraries.

Today, access to primary and secondary resources and the preservation of information in print and digital formats constitute a significant advancement in prospects for libraries to shape their responses to campus diversity initiatives. Access to and preservation of resources that document diverse cultures and communities have created many openings for new streams of scholarship, reflecting interests in race and ethnicity, gender and women's issues, LGBT studies, studies of the cultures of disability, and groundbreaking studies of migration and diasporas. Moreover, access to new and previously obscured scholarship and primary source materials has opened new possibilities for teaching and learning in and out of classrooms. For instance, access to testimonies of ex-slaves in the American South, oral histories from Depression era workers and Holocaust survivors, and documents of refugees and migrant workers have not only broadened the perspective on the American experience but encouraged the use of oral histories and other non-textual materials in capturing the experiences of communities in the United States and other parts of the world.[12]

The evolution of support to students remains one of the remarkable changes in library practices during the past 40 years. Although the instruction movement has its nineteenth century origins, progress made in campus environments that are increasingly student-centered can be observed across two- and four-year colleges and universities since the late 1960s. Arguably, instructional and learning initiatives created by libraries have benefitted from advances in student development research and practice. Central to the development of student-centered academic support is an institutional response among colleges and universities to broadening participation of low to moderate income, first generation students in higher learning.

Since the mid-1960s, many colleges and universities across the United States received state, federal, and private funding to support programs aimed at diversifying student populations. Many schools also found it necessary to launch programs to support the academic and social needs of new communities of students. Such efforts gave birth to a new generation of thinking about student development, which included advanced training for residence hall staff, academic and financial advising, tutoring, formally structured research opportunities for undergraduate students, and other forms of networked academic, social, cultural, and personal counseling and support to augment instruction and learning.

As a consequence of the growth of academic support for college students, campus administrators and faculty are substantially more cognizant of student learning experiences outside of the classroom, particularly as students engage in research as undergraduates and in other forms of self-directed, independent learning. An extensive body of literature has since grown around the concept and practices associated with information literacy that essentially reflects a desire to rethink library learning and instructional strategies for an increasingly diverse population of students. Enriched by research on students' cognitive development, an increasing number of studies have drawn from student development theory to analyze student engagement with libraries. Studies conducted by researchers Etheline Whitmire, Denice Adkins and Lisa Hussey, and George Kuh and Robert Gonyea give insight into undergraduate student engagement with academic libraries and consistently point to the significance of libraries in the lives of students of color.[13] Yet, as Adkins and Hussey observed, the challenge for

academic libraries may extend beyond satisfaction with libraries as "safe havens" or comfort zones to understanding the cultural purpose and relevance of libraries for diverse communities of students.[14]

Recent trends in research on the undergraduate student experience may provide a vital road map for developing library services by understanding the academic and social needs of diverse communities of students. Several studies of the background characteristics of undergraduates enrolling in selective institutions points to the impact that "capital deficiency" and "stereotype threat" (or group stereotyping) have on the achievements of diverse communities of students. These studies dig deeply into group differences that distinguish diverse communities of students in order to understand predictors of success.[15] They have also looked through longitudinal lenses in search of a clearer understanding about the strategies that diverse student communities use to negotiate their way through their undergraduate years.[16] Research on cultural diversity and intergroup relations has provided evidence of the impact of personal identity and group stereotyping on college student socialization and academic experiences, revealing that reinforced negative stereotyping of students of color appears to have an adverse effect on their success in school.[17] Changing campus structures, such as increasing the numbers of students from diverse backgrounds, does not alone strengthen campus climate and broaden opportunities for student diversity. A longitudinal study of undergraduate students at U.C.L.A conducted by Jim Sidanius and his colleagues reached a number of conclusions that are relevant to the discussion of diverse communities of undergraduates, including their observation that "a focus on structural diversity alone—without addressing larger negative campus climate issues—can have negative effects on campus race relations."[18]

Libraries will benefit from carefully examining research on cultural diversity and student development, giving further thought to the cultural purposes libraries offer diverse communities of students. As schools accept more transfer, returning or nontraditional, and culturally and linguistically diverse students, libraries will need to strengthen their expression of independent and self-directed learning opportunities as a way of enabling students to achieve the experiences they hoped to

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have in college. No matter what is taught in classrooms, no matter what vicissitudes are experienced by students in their academic and personal lives, there is always a campus library to pursue ideas without interference.

Not only have libraries been effective and active partners in broadening scholarship and student access during the past 40 years, the very nature of leadership and decision-making in libraries has shifted through conscious efforts at achieving diversity. While it may be unnecessary to revisit the story of how librarians pushed for their share of library and campus governance in the early 1970s, the impact that diversity had on academic libraries in subsequent years has resulted in striking shifts in the gender equation in

college and university library administration and in empowering frontline librarians as leaders. Racial and ethnic diversity is far more common in the staffs of academic libraries in predominantly white colleges and universities now than 40 years. Associations such as ACRL and ARL have become more inclusive in both participation and programming, leading initiatives that have created opportunities for groups that have been historically underrepresented among professional and managerial ranks.

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The strategies employed in cultivating leadership are well known in the academic library community.[19] They begin with scholarship support to recruit new librarians from underrepresented backgrounds and one- to two-year residency programs in academic libraries, and continue with leadership institutes, dissemination of ideas at national conferences on diversity in libraries, and development of inventive hiring strategies. These strategies have enjoyed some important successes, as the competition for scholarships has increased and involvement in institutes has received widespread support within the academic library community.

While turning the tide on declining participation and gaining in frontline and middle management positions, higher education in its libraries will continue to struggle over diversifying senior leadership. Here associations have played a critical role by sponsoring mentoring programs such as the ALA Spectrum Initiative Leadership Institute and the ARL Leadership and Career Development Program.

Future Paths for Diversity and Inclusion: Creating Inclusive Communities

College and university libraries can review with a sense of accomplishment the progress in diversity over the past 40 years. Access to information resources has been responsive to new and emerging scholarship on race, gender, and identity, and instructional and learning initiatives have answered continued growth in the number of underrepresented students in undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs who use networks of academic support. There is more participation by women and men from diverse backgrounds in academic governance and decision-making in higher education than 40 years ago. More women and people of color now hold faculty, librarian, and other professional positions in two- and four-year institutions, and their contributions are reflected in rethinking the cultures of programs, departments, and disciplines.

It is also evident that much work needs to be done regarding diversity to effectively transform higher education. Many institutions continue to convene committee after work group that reach similar conclusions that the promise of diversity made in the late 1960s has yet to be fulfilled. A June 2007 report of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Chancellor's Diversity Initiatives Committee stands apart from the corpus of Web-accessible documents and reports surveyed for this essay. Not only does the university's Diversity Initiative Committee draw a parallel to the days of *Project 500*, their report (*Project 2012—Transforming Illinois: Re-envisioning Diversity and Inclusion*) contributes to a much broader discussion of diversity and the quest for an inclusive

community from which other institutions and members the library community can derive benefit. The report highlights the synergy needed between the twin concepts of diversity and inclusion as key to institutional transformation. It does so by delineating a need to transform existing institutional practices as they "maintain structures of power and privilege based on race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexuality, economic class, religion, and disability."[20] The committee further identified four crucial areas of transformation: enhancement of education and workplace environment, an increase in representation, enhancement of scholarship, and expansion of community and public engagement. These four areas of transformation are especially useful to thinking about diversity and inclusion in libraries.

As the Illinois report identifies the need to enhance scholarship, there is a critical need for the presence of diversity in libraries' discussions of scholarly communication. In *How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment*, a study of peer review and the external support of scholarly research, Michèle Lamont observed,

> Partly because they are interdisciplinary disciplines that concern "diverse" populations, fields such as women's studies, African American studies, and ethnic studies struggle to keep from being pushed to the periphery, or to the bottom of the academic totem pole. The same is true of other interdisciplinary fields, such as cultural studies. That so much uncertainty remains about how to insert consideration of diversity and interdisciplinarity into scholarly evaluation underscores the fact that older, more established disciplines continue to define the rules of the game, contributing to the fragility of these fields.[21]

According to Lamont's observations, pressures form between the underlying democratic principles of higher education reviewed earlier in the present discussion and knowledge and market forces that appear to influence review processes. One can draw an important inference from Lamont's writing on interdisciplinary and diversity research in peer-review panels that sheds light on how scholarly communication will support gifted young scholars who seek to open new avenues in scholarship.[22] Much more inquiry is needed to understand the requirements of students and scholars engaged in the production and dissemination of diverse knowledge through systems of scholarly communication.

Continued emphasis on the physical and virtual library as a focal point for both guided and self-directed student learning must take greater advantage of our growing understanding of students, their educational and personal backgrounds, and the academic, financial, and social challenges they face in navigating through college. Institutional responses that deliver on a promise of promoting stronger hetero-ethnic and cross cultural engagement among students from diverse backgrounds are more likely to improve the overall campus climate and increase student persistence and success over those that try to wash out differences. College and university libraries must seek to help erase prior educational inequities among students by creating opportunities for synergy between knowledge, students, and learning opportunities that are mindful of cultural and cognitive differences.

In broadening participation within campus communities, greater emphasis must also be placed on cultivating administrative and frontline leadership that is assertive on the challenge of diversity. Libraries will continue to benefit from the best practices of

their peers and from the successes of other organizations, governmental agencies, and corporations for models that cultivate leadership and engagement.

Perhaps the greatest diversity challenge for libraries in the academy is to locate a reference point from which to benchmark progress on diversity and inclusion. This essay has argued for the long view, that progress is best measured by the initial impetus for change some 40 years ago.

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Notes

1. In 1968, Shelly was appointed director of the University's Special Educational Opportunity Program.
2. Paul Cisneros, "How Project 500 Shaped Diversity on Campus," *Daily Illini* (October 21, 2008), http://www.dailyillini.com/news/2008/10/21/how-project-500-shaped-diversity-on-campus (accessed April 1, 2010).
3. Martin Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: Random House, 2004), xvii.
4. Nancy Cantor, "Diversity: Building a Strategic Future" (opening address, *The Third National Conference on Diversity in Academic Libraries*, April 4–6, 2002, Iowa City, IA, sponsored by The University of Iowa, Committee on Institutional Cooperation, and the Association of Research Libraries, 2002).
5. This act laid the foundation for such access to college programs as the federal TRIO programs (Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services).
6. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, "History of the Federal TRIO Programs," U.S. Department of Education, http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/triohistory.html (accessed April 1, 2010). In 2010, the Obama administration sought sweeping reforms in financial aid by expanding grant programs and inserting the direct lending model in the federal loan process in an effort to reduce debt for low- and moderate-income families.
7. National Institute of General Medical Sciences, "Minority Programs," National Institute of General Medical Sciences, http://www.nigms.nih.gov/Minority/ (accessed April 1, 2010).
8. *Digest of Education Statistics: 2008* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences, 2009): 270, 292–3, 296.
9. William G. Bowen, Matthew M. Chingos, and Michael S. McPherson, *Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America's Public Universities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). For a review of recent reports on the impact of a college education on income, see also David Leonhardt, "The College Calculation," *New York Times Magazine* (September 24, 2009), http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/27/magazine/27fob-wwln-t.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=leonhardt%20college%20calculation&st=cse (accessed April 1, 2010).
10. Alfredo Behrens, *Culture and Management in the Americas* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 197–219.
11. Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities, "About OMHD," Centers for Disease Control, http://www.cdc.gov/omhd/About/about.htm (accessed April 1, 2010).
12. Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).
13. Ethelene Whitmire, "The Campus Racial Climate and Undergraduates' Perceptions of the Academic Library," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4, 3 (2004): 363–78; Whitmire, "Cultural Diversity and Undergraduate Academic Library Use," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 29,

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14. Denice Adkins and Lisa Hussey, "The Library in the Lives of Latino College Students," *Library Quarterly* 76, 4 (2006): 476–7.

15. Douglas S. Massey et al., *The Source of the River: the Social Origins of Freshmen at America's Selective Colleges and Universities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

16. Camille Z. Charles et al., *Taming the River: Negotiating the Academic, Financial, and Social Currents in Selective Colleges and Universities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

17. Jim Sidanius et al., *The Diversity Challenge: Social Identity and Intergroup Relations on the College Campus* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009).

18. Ibid., 290.

19. William Welburn and Janice Welburn, "The Promise of Diversity in the Library Community," in David Bogart, ed., *Library and Book Trade Almanac 2009* (Medford, NJ: Information Today, 2009), 7–11.

20. Office of the Provost, Diversity Initiatives Committee, *Project 2012—Transforming Illinois: Re-envisioning Diversity and Inclusion. Final Report* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, Chancellor's Diversity Initiative Committee, 2007), 2.

21. Michele Lamont, *How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 235.

22. Ibid., 202–38.