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Cultural competency on campus

Applying ACRL's Diversity Standards

Over the past several decades, diversity has been a regular topic of conversation within academic libraries. Countless conference programs, publications, and blog posts address the need for more awareness surrounding the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce, as well as the shaping of our collections and public services for our multicultural user communities.^{1, 2, 3, 4}

Despite this heightened attention, it remains difficult to effectively implement diversity initiatives in our *particular* libraries to support our *particular* communities, as populations shift and the pressures faced by students and co-workers change over time. Voluntary diversity programming is often underattended due to staff time constraints and mandatory training risks being perceived as formulaic, reductive, and administratively driven.

To address these challenges, the ACRL Diversity Committee released the “Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries” in 2012. With strong support from our administration and clear guidelines from the standards, the University of Washington (UW)-Bothell and Cascadia Community College Campus Library Diversity Team formed in the autumn of 2012. The team developed a plan informed by social justice principles that aims to forge authentic connections based on shared values and experiences among team members, library staff, and our community as a whole. We dedicated our work to revealing,

interrogating, and working to remedy the imbalanced access to power that is always present—but largely unexamined—within those relationships. This article will describe our consensus-centered model, the design process and content of our trainings, our assessment philosophy and methods, and our relationship-building focus on campus.

Planning and decision-making

Comprised of individuals from different departments and staff classifications, our team employs a consensus decision-making model to equitably distribute power and foster inclusion and active collaboration. We deliberately declined to appoint a committee chair in order to build an egalitarian structure that would encourage flexible member roles and unrestricted communication within the group. All activities and accomplishments are the result of deliberate listening and negotiation between team members as we strive to address an endless list of possible topics,

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activities, and methods. Absent any hierarchy within the group, all members are empowered to express and consider a multitude of perspectives, resulting in shared ownership of decisions and actions. As we bring trainings and other activities to the library, we are able to present them as true collaborative efforts.

Standards-based trainings and workshops

During its inaugural year, the team's most substantial accomplishments were two all-library-staff trainings held in January and May 2013. In these trainings, we developed a foundation of knowledge and skills to be leveraged collectively in future conversations and actions around diversity. For guidance, we looked to the ACRL "Diversity Standards." Using our knowledge of instructional methods and practices, we wrote learning outcomes for each training addressing these standards and guiding activity development. In addition, team members drew upon their creativity and experiences in prior diversity-related trainings to develop engaging and meaningful activities.

In our first training, we concentrated on "Standard 1: Cultural awareness of self and others," encouraging participants to explore their own cultural backgrounds as an essential first step toward developing a fuller cultural awareness of others.

Recognizing the extent to which culture is present in our actions, values, and attitudes can be challenging, especially for members of dominant groups (men, white people, heterosexuals, the wealthy, etc.) as their cultural practices are often perceived as the norm. To address this challenge, the first training focused on understanding our campus demographics (*cultural awareness of others*) and exploring our own individual cultural backgrounds through reflection and discussion (*cultural awareness of self*).

The training began with a demographics "guessing game" in which staff compared their perceptions of campus, community, and library workforce demographics with actual historical and current statistics. This exercise highlighted the fact that our campus is increas-

ingly ethnically diverse, while our librarians and library staff remain largely homogenous (white and female).

Next, we did a "cultural shield" activity, borrowed directly from a training led by intercultural communication consultant Eric Davis at UW-Bothell in 2012. We asked staff to visually represent their understanding of family, fun, food, and heritage, and later share these cultural shields in small groups, discussing differences, similarities, and stories from their pasts. Based on observations, and both written and verbal feedback, participants relished the opportunity to reveal aspects of themselves in a structured and safe environment. They left feeling more aware of their culture and closer to their colleagues.

Our second training, held five months later, focused on the power differences that arise at the intersections of individuals' various cultural identities. We targeted "Standard 2: Cross-cultural knowledge and skills," building a framework for thinking about the complex links between identity and power as well as how those factor in to cross-cultural communication.

We started this training with another statistics "guessing game" in order to demonstrate how certain identities have greater access to positions of power (e.g., in government, higher education, etc.). Next, we brainstormed a list of identity characteristics ranging from the more-familiar race, class, and gender to the less-discussed veteran status, first-generation student, and even sibling order. Drawing from these identity characteristics, we explained the concept of intersectionality, which establishes how access to power in different contexts is influenced by multiple identities.

To illustrate this concept, we discussed the experience of a hypothetical professor whose age, race, and gender play different roles in her ability to access power in the classroom, at faculty meetings, and with her family. Lastly, we divided participants into groups and asked each to analyze different scenarios in which individuals had complex relationships with power and authority based on their identity characteristics. The scenarios and subsequent

discussions gave groups time to explore the connection of power and identity and build empathy for others.

Capitalizing on the momentum created by our trainings, the team launched a brownbag series in May 2013. Attendance is optional, and sessions are designed for library staff who wish to engage more deeply with diversity-related issues. Our first brownbag focused on the impact of generational poverty on our students. We invited three guest speakers: two Americorps retention specialists from Cascadia Community College and an alumna with personal experiences of generational poverty. Part of the session was devoted to brainstorming strategies for improving our services for economically disadvantaged students. In addition to this brownbag, we facilitated a workshop for instruction librarians on culturally responsive teaching and developed a diversity-themed display for the first floor of the library. We are building upon the cultural competencies cultivated over the past year with another all-staff training on culturally responsive listening, periodic brownbag sessions, and other targeted workshops this year.

Assessment

The team's focus on assessment is driven by the desire to improve our work and respectfully engage with our colleagues. With the understanding that preferences vary when it comes to providing feedback, we offer staff a number of ways to share their thoughts and experiences. After each training or workshop, we distribute an open-ended questionnaire for participants to fill out or take with them and complete at their convenience. The team maintains a spreadsheet to track feedback received informally in conversation with staff. Furthermore, we conduct follow-up assessments several months after a training to see how staff used tools or information presented. This also provides an opportunity to discuss other thoughts and observations staff may have had since the training. Our ongoing assessment process enables us to be in tune with our staff and adapt our approach as we feel necessary. Seeking staff input and using

that feedback to shape our programming has contributed to the success of our work. It helps us remain engaged with staff and their needs while guiding our plans for the workshops, keeping the work personal and relevant.

Relationship-building and outreach

While we work most closely with library staff, we also actively reach out to multicultural and social justice groups in our broader academic community to lay the groundwork for future collaboration and support. In our roles serving both Cascadia Community College and UW-Bothell, as well as our ties to the larger UW Libraries system, we are uniquely positioned as a point of connection for many groups on campus. Team members intentionally visit spaces and attend events where diversity and social justice take center stage. This allows us to form relationships with like-minded colleagues as we demonstrate the library's support for these communities and build our own knowledge base. These connections also help us contextualize our work and link it to campus-wide efforts. Each team member also serves on a related committee or liaises with an underserved population as part of his or her job responsibilities, further legitimizing and enriching our team roles.

Conclusion

Building cultural competency among a library staff is complicated work that is never finished, as our staff and student populations grow and our understanding of the work deepens. Discussing difference, even in the most celebratory way, brings up feelings of guilt, exclusion, anger, and frustration that can be challenging to confront in the workplace. We found that despite the challenges, however, this work is also rejuvenating and joyful. Talking about differences we normally minimize creates understanding and intimacy that make it possible to connect more authentically with our colleagues. Our assessments showed that staff members appreciated structured time to share the personal experiences they would not normally feel comfortable bringing up at work.

Getting out into our campus community and attending diversity events and trainings led some students, staff, and faculty to feel more welcome in the library. Sharing our stories, supporting each other's work, fostering respect, and understanding are key to building cultural competency and a strong, just community.

Notes

1. D. Adkins and I. Espinal, "The Diversity Mandate," *Library Journal* 129 (April 2004): 7.

("Booxter and . . ." *cont. from page 323*)

person throughout the project. She was able to make over-arching decisions and organize staff trainings.

Next steps and closing thoughts

In fall term of 2013, we piloted the library circulation policies and procedures with the APCC, CCCC, NAL, and PC. We trained the center staff and asked them to market the existence and availability of the libraries so that the campus community could begin using the books with the new system. To further market the collections, each center will add the LibraryThing widget to their center's homepages, which will act as a direct link to the LibraryThing account for potential patrons to browse the collections.

The next steps are to determine if changes need to be made to the policies and procedures; address the need for an overdue policy; assess the circulation statistics; and schedule annual inventories. To complete the project, BCC and the Women's Center will be added within the next year. While the project research and implementation took about 80 hours, the maintenance of the system should be minimal.

A project such as this is applicable beyond cultural resource centers. Any group such as a student organization or department who wishes to make their library collections accessible could potentially use the Booxter/LibraryThing combination. This project offers a creative and innova-

2. F. Brook, "Call for an Anti-Racist Approach in Librarianship," (June 3, 2013, web log post), retrieved from www.thebookaneers.com/2013/06/call-for-anti-racist-approach-in.html.

3. K. H. Hill, *Diversity and multiculturalism in libraries* (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1994).

4. L. Mestre, *Librarians serving diverse populations: Challenges and opportunities* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2009). ❧

tive solution that enables OSU's CRCs to manage and promote their collections and allows OSU Libraries to extend its services and embed librarians throughout campus.

Notes

1. Emily Love and Margaret B. Edwards, "Forging inroads between libraries and academic, multicultural and student services," *Reference Services Review* 37, no. 1 (2009): 20-29, <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/journals.htm?articleid=1771179&show=abstract>.

2. OSU Libraries and Press, OSU Libraries and Press Strategic Plan 2012-2017, <http://osulibrary.oregonstate.edu/flipbook/strategicplan/>.

3. Love, 21.

4. Oregon State University, OSU Strategic Plan, <http://oregonstate.edu/leadership/strategicplan>.

5. *Encyclopedia of African American Education: Predominantly White Institutions*, 2010, N-Z. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412971966.n193>.

6. Ibid.

7. Lee Jones, Jeanett Castellanos, and Darnell Cole, "Examining the Ethnic Minority Student Experience at Predominantly White Institutions: A Case Study," *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 1, no. 1 (2002): 19-39, <http://jhh.sagepub.com/content/1/1/19.abstract>.

8. Ibid.

9. Love, 21. ❧