Academic Libraries and the Strategic Vision for Diversity in Higher Education

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Introduction

Academic libraries play a vital role in supporting strategic goals for diversity in American higher education. American universities have integrated language on diversity and inclusion into their strategic plans focusing on hiring and research, thus articulating the importance of diversity on their campuses. Academic engineering librarians can consider two strategies to playing this role effectively. The first strategy involves three areas of activity: collection development, public services, and outreach. All three directly support institutional strategic goals related to research and diversity. The importance of collection development lies in the selection of educational resources to support academic programming and faculty/staff development. Public services (reference, instruction, and circulation) would need to connect users with such resources and understand special populations identified by ability, prior military service, and identity (ethnic, gender, language, religion, and social). The needs of less visible communities of international students and ESL (English as Second Language) mean that libraries must ensure that these students benefit from their services and resources. Studies (e.g., Aytac 2016) have also shown that multiple contacts between the library and ESL student have a positive impact on academic progress. Outreach programming could be targeted to a variety of communities including international, LGBTQA+, and other underrepresented student groups such as women in STEM and students with disabilities. Outreach efforts can significantly improve users' experiences with librarians, the library, and the range of resources. Workshops could also help library faculty and staff work effectively with these underrepresented groups.

The second strategy involves library personnel and management to champion the cause for diversity by developing and reinforcing an organizational culture supportive of diversity hiring plans. This strategy is also in line with strategic goals to develop a diverse and multicultural community of scholars, students, and support staff. Methods usually include professional development programs, incentivizing, and professional support. The combination of diversity and inclusion through hiring and promotion practices and core library functions may communicate the organization's commitment to diversity. The importance of collection development, public services, and serving on diversity committees translates into the library's ability to meet the diverse information needs of the campus community. This paper addresses the conceptual framework for the role of academic libraries serving engineering colleges in supporting institutional strategic goals for diversity and inclusion, and will show how that role translates into core library functions such as collection development, instruction, and outreach. It also provides an overview of assessment approaches and challenges. Although it is important to assess the efficacy of diversity initiatives in academic libraries, a quantitative study is beyond the scope of the present study. Instead, this paper addresses the issue of disparate data related to diversity and student success. The challenges arise due to the dissimilar structure and characteristics of student data obtained through Banner and the highly subjective nature of data obtained through diversity surveys.

Defining Diversity

In a joint statement by the American Library Association and the Association of College and Research Libraries, "Diversity is an essential component of any civil society. It is more than a moral imperative; it is a global necessity. Everyone can benefit from diversity, and diverse populations need to be supported so they can reach their full potential for themselves and their communities…To achieve diversity in substance as well as in form, libraries have to open their arms to all perspectives and experiences. That requires competency in matters of cultural pluralism that are not intuitive and must be learned, like any other essential skill" (2012). A related concept is cultural competence, which the National Association of Social Workers (also used by the ACRL) has defined as

> A congruent set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that enable a person or group to work effectively in cross-cultural situations; the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each. (2015)

Diversity needs to remain an educational—not just administrational—goal to enrich the educational experience of students and increase the cultural competence of the academic community. Among the standards listed by the ACRL are: 1) Cultural awareness of self and others; 2) Cross-cultural knowledge and skills; 3) Organizational and professional values; 4) Development of collections, programs, and services; 5) Service delivery; 6) Language diversity; 7) Workforce diversity; 8) Organizational dynamics; 9) Cross-cultural leadership; 10) Professional education and continuous learning; and 11) Research. These standards explicitly communicate a high level of expectations for library managers and staff.

The perspective on diversity has changed considerably over the past few decades, as discourse on diversity has shifted from visual dimensions (gender and race) towards more subtle ways of identifying people on the basis of their ethnicity, race, ability, language, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and national origin and recognized by the Association of Research Libraries (Koury et al. 2018). In his landmark work *Beyond Race and Gender*, R. Roosevelt Thomas has pointed out that contrary to earlier emphases on gender and race, diversity implies visible and non-visible characteristics such as "personality traits, internal and external qualities, and formal and informal organizational roles." (quoted in Kreitz 2008, 102). The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) has developed a list of nine preferred best practices for managing diversity. Among these practices are making diversity a part of a strategic plan, engaging leadership, recruitment, diversity training, employee involvement, and other generic approaches. Best practices for academic libraries mirror the GAO practices because they face similar pressures with other added responsibilities such as collection development in support for multicultural studies, but this is also a very singular approach. Diversity also takes into account

the abilities and perspectives of the user regardless of subject matter (Kreitz 2008). More recently, there has been yet another model for assessing diversity in libraries. Albarillo (2018) has addressed super-diversity among foreign students with multiple identities. "A super-diversity approach involves a shift away from studying only one variable (such as ethnicity, language use, gender, or the like) and looks instead at the effects of multiple variables on an issue, in this case library use" (59). In fact, the study points out that foreign students are actively using academic and public libraries.

A significant emphasis in workplace diversity has fallen on recruiting and retaining individuals of color through incentivizing and promotion. Riley-Reid (2017) has reported that overt and covert manifestations of racism have placed and maintained implicit and explicit barriers and shaped the careers and workplace experiences of affected librarians. In fact, Riley-Reid cites a considerable statistical gap between the majority-to-minority ratio among students and the same ratio among librarians. She has listed a number of helpful tools to make workplace more friendly to librarians from diverse backgrounds, which include a welcoming climate, balance of work and life, communication channels, networking, mentoring, professional development, support for research. Of these tools, networking and communication are vital components of collaboration across campus units—one of three categories of diversity initiatives, which include library collections, and recruitment (Koury, 2018).

Supporting Institutional Goals for Diversity

The role of libraries in supporting institutional goals for diversity and inclusion can be both direct and indirect, depending on parent institution's structure and mission. Support is direct where academic libraries are integral to the strategic goals for research and teaching—two strategic goals that are easily quantifiable and universal aspects. Academic libraries can articulate direct support through collection development, reference, and instruction. Selecting materials is in the purview of subject area liaisons—who are engaged in reference and instruction as well—whose commitment to diversity and inclusion may vary by institution, department, or the particular faculty requesting such materials. In addition to supporting the curriculum through the selection of culturally diverse resources, libraries can also provide materials for diversity workshops offered to employees, which is also a form of direct support because the selection of culturally diverse material aims to shape collective understanding of diversity and inclusion. Libraries can generate quantitative data to demonstrate support for teaching and research.

Collection Development

Perhaps the most important issue here is whether the collection development policies and practices reflect the strategic (research, teaching, community development) goals of the university. Both public and academic libraries have been adding language about diversity, which may conflict with cultural and political motivation to exclude some resources in some areas specifically with respect to banned and challenged books. Well over a decade ago, the varying visibility of information regarding diversity in collection management was evident on academic library websites despite the commitment of the parent institution to diversity and inclusion. Young (2006) wrote then that "While the parent institutions of these academic libraries have demonstrated their commitment to diversity and provide access to that information with a link

from their home pages, most libraries fail to demonstrate diversity's importance on their Web sites" (under "Conclusion"). Websites have become the primary channel for academic libraries to communicate policies to the public, and while they were pioneers in providing online access to their catalogs and other resources, communicating information on diversity had lagged behind.

Conversely, libraries' support of strategic diversity goals is indirect since hiring and promotion practices are aimed at developing diverse and culturally competent community of scholars, students, and support staff, thus having an indirect effect on research and teaching. By committing to diversity and inclusion within their departments, libraries can promote diversity and inclusion through both their employee profile and services to the university. Through their pools of diverse staff, academic libraries may effectively support various strategic goals, thus bringing those goals into a close relationship.

Methods for assessing diversity in collection development have presented challenges to large libraries. Ciszek and Young explain, "Collection size and organizational complexity become issues when considering any collection assessment activities for large academic libraries. In smaller libraries where diversity-related materials are often in a single location, traditional assessment strategies can be very effective" (2010, under "Introduction"). In contrast, the multidisciplinarity of library collection management in large research libraries is another factor, as diversity may not apply monolithically to all fields. While collections should open the minds of instructors, researchers, and students to diverse methods and perspectives rooted in cultures outside the United States, uniform practices and proven solutions that do not explicitly and ubiquitously communicate diversity must also be included in the curriculum. Whether academic libraries are perceptive to input from faculty depends on the working relationship between academic units and the library, the academic units' preparedness to communicate their information needs, and the libraries' commitment to diversity and inclusion matching that of the parent institution.

Developing a climate of cultural diversity through academic library outreach efforts is important for a number of reasons. For libraries, outreach efforts indicate relevance to the university's strategic interests in retaining and graduating undergraduate student. Working with diversity, after all, would only expand their capabilities in handling administrative, cultural, and intellectual dimensions of learning. Scott Walter (2005) has connected the meaning of diversity to the commitment to provide all people with high-quality library services. Some libraries have established diversity committees while others have embedded themselves in the curriculum of traditional departments. He writes, "Simply put, we have done a better job developing structures to support diversity initiatives within our own profession and using existing structures to support academic programs that include diversity-related subjects of study than we have developing structures to support the wide array of student services and co-curricular programs aimed at enhancing diversity among the college student body" (Water 2005, 440). Thus, collection development and liaison activities have prevailed in the more traditional paradigms of library outreach, but the success of working directly with diverse student populations via the Multicultural Student Center at Washington State University Libraries has proved to be more effective.

Outreach

As Whitmire (2003) has reported, "Previous studies indicate that undergraduates' academic library use affects the retention and academic achievement of students of color by integrating them into the college environment" (148). Whitmire's study has demonstrated a positive impact of outreach to college students in such underrepresented groups as African-, Asian-, Latino, White, and Native American who used the library more frequently than White students did. These findings were echoed in a more recent study by Denson and Chang (2009) who reported that engaging with racial diversity improves knowledge acquisition and interaction with others who are also engaged with various forms of diversity.

Finally, library displays planned during Black History Month, International Women's Day, Latino Heritage months, and other noteworthy cultural events exemplify the visual form of outreach focusing on the visualization of the theme through the display of library books, special collections, and programming. "While library displays might be the most ubiquitous form of passive outreach conducted by an academic library, displays boost awareness of a library's collections and services and can be a surprisingly effective fulcrum for partnerships with groups across campus and help cultivate conversations in the community" (Everett, 2018, p. 518). In addition to the themes on display, exhibits such as Artists and Authors can demonstrate the diversity of artists and authors.

The Reference and Users Services Association (RUSA) division of the American Library Association (ALA) issued a statement in 2018 that said, in part, "Recognizing the importance of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, the association affirms the right of access to information for people of all identities, backgrounds, ages, and abilities especially with regards to marginalized peoples." In light of this statement, public services staff and librarians should be sensitive to cultural differences of international students and those permanently residing in the United States for whom English is a second language. Being deferential to authority figures or not being confident in their verbal communication skills may cause ESL and international students either not to interact with a librarian or to accept the resources the librarian provided even if it was not exactly what they wanted. In-service training from the university diversity office or similar campus resource could be useful.

Lately there have been increased efforts by universities as well as organizations such as the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) and Society of Women Engineers (SWE) to encourage women to enter the STEM disciplines and to retain women who are undertaking those majors. Targeting student chapters of SWE, for instance, for information literacy sessions is a good way to build rapport with women STEM majors. Librarians may also wish to make Webpages or LibGuides for resources of interest to women STEM students. Engineering librarians can offer to collaborate with student chapters of SWE, The National Society of Black Engineers, The Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, and similar organizations to sponsor or provide space for events and meetings. Offering library space to student groups can also build relationships with the library and women STEM students.

Academic honesty has always been important in higher education. More than a decade ago, a plagiarism scandal broke at Ohio University involving its College of Engineering graduate program. It was alleged that more than 30 master's theses contained plagiarized material. Today most, if not all, institutions of higher education have policies defining what constitutes academic

dishonesty and what actions may be taken if a student is found in violation. Librarians are often asked to speak to classes, orientation sessions, or student groups about citing sources properly and to remind students of any institutional policy that might apply. LibGuides or similar Webpages can be a useful tool to provide this information along with links to resources such as style guides and online resources to assist students.

A course in research methodology for engineering master's students at Blekinge Institute of Technology in Sweden included instruction on academic honesty (Gunnarsson et al. 2014). The course is aimed at students preparing to write their thesis proposal and thesis. Eighty percent of the students enrolled at the Institute are from India, Pakistan, Iran, and China. A web-based tutorial called Refero (2015) was used to teach students what plagiarism is, how to avoid it, why to cite their sources, when a citation is not needed, how to quote and paraphrase, and what the consequences of plagiarism are. Additionally, libraries will also need to orient international students towards US Copyright Law and issues related to academic honesty, which may be interpreted differently in other countries. Finally, outreach would need to focus on all three areas whereby libraries can offer workshops and public events to engage with the university's diverse student population.

Information Literacy

Taking a diversified approach to information literacy may be helpful in libraries with reference and instruction librarians interested in foreign classification systems and information seeking behaviors in other countries, and combine them to improve information literacy sessions in the US. International, displaced, and ESL students may benefit from this approach when locating resources for their studies in the United States and understanding how that may be different from what they were familiar with in their respective countries. A survey of undergraduate and graduate ESL students has indicated that while ESL students can use English up to a point during a reference transaction they will eventually revert to using their native language (Ferrer-Vinent 2010), which is where the ontologies vary in language as well as formal classification of countries and regions.

While the Library of Congress (LC) call number system may appear self-explanatory, understanding the logic behind the subject-based ontology and the Library of Congress Subject Headings will have a diminished relevance to the present and recent generations relying on folksonomies (social tagging) instead. In fact, there have been debates in favor of one over the other. The growing criticism of top down categorization—or ontologies—as a way of finding and organizing information in favor of folksonomies points to user participation as opposed to professionally classification (Gruber, 2005). Critics view (Peterson 2006; Lee & Neal 2010; Weinberger 2005) folksonomies as unsophisticated, unsystematic, interpretive, and subjective, but those in favor of social tagging point out the value of collaborative indexing and group intelligence (Avery 2010). Language, cultural, intellectual, and experiential barriers may complicate the understanding of the Library of Congress classification system for ESL students because even if they understood the search terms, they may not understand their association with the resource(s) they are looking for. Academic libraries in the United States now have a unique opportunity to serve as mediators between knowledge organization systems and

ESL/international students, but this is also an opportunity to understand better some foreign classification systems and social tagging approaches in other parts of the world.

A Deeper Understanding of Diversity

Contrary to general (and often misinformed) understanding of diversity, there are two sides to diversity: the one that shows the organization's quantifiable efforts to boost diversity through resources, staffing, and leadership; and the more subtle side characterized by perception and approachability of librarians, which is not as easy to represent through data. Bonnet and McAlexander (2012) associate approachability with demographic characteristics of librarians, which is an important manifestation of diversity in libraries. In the context of their study, approachability is a measure of how the diverse community perceives librarians and the prevailing social attitudes to librarians, not just the services and resources, which are available for library users to become more informed about diversity—hence, their own cultural attitudes. "Whereas recent library literature has emphasized the growth of ethnically and racially diverse populations on college campuses and in academic libraries, interventions have tended to focus on outreach opportunities and library instruction for traditionally underserved populations, and not on issues of approachability or reference service" (277). One irony of diversity may be that while institutions committed to diversity recruit students, faculty, and staff from geographically scattered areas throughout the country and the globe, understanding and respect of diversity can vary from the absence thereof to very high levels of cultural awareness and integration. Attitudes towards women in such professions as librarianship may pose challenges to implementing and accurately assessing the efficacy of diversity programs.

Another ironic factor is selector bias whereby collection managers' personal preferences, political leanings, or cultural insensitivities shape their libraries' collections in ways that does not reflect on their institution's path towards diversity and inclusion. Harmayer (1995) has reported on concern about selector bias in California—one of the most culturally diverse regions in the U. S.—with concerns about partiality, lack of tolerance, and censorship among academic and public librarians despite the *Library Bill of Rights*, which was created to guide collection development practices. Harmayer's study focused on the librarians' preference of collections related to pro-choice over those representing pro-life. Quinn (2012) has addressed both the psychological and philosophical reasons for bias. The latter is related to librarian's commitment to an ethical code whereas the former can be both conscious and unconscious. The banning and challenging of books and media has also been an act of censorship whereby works on controversial topics are placed on a list. Implicit behind this explicit and consciously biased selection of books is the covert bias against target communities such as LGBTQA, religious communities, and ethnic enclaves. Sadler and Bourg (2015) point to libraries' lack of neutrality, as the selection bias may not be based in the community of collection managers but at higher level. They write, "Research libraries in particular have always reflected the inequalities, biases, ethnocentrism, and power imbalances that exist throughout the academic enterprise through collection policies and hiring practices that reflect the biases of those in power at a given institution" (Under "Libraries are not Neutral"). These practices and attitudes not only negate the commitment to diversity and inclusion but also render libraries unable to support institutional goals toward diversity. Hence,

the partnership between academic libraries and to-level administration should be able to neutralize localized biases in selection and curation practices.

Assessing the Effectiveness of Diversity Initiatives

Assessing the effectiveness of diversity initiatives can inform administrators and diversity coordinators regarding choices for new programs and approaches. Various qualitative and quantitative instruments may be available to measure the impact of academic libraries' diversity initiatives on undergraduate students from acceptance through graduation. Evaluating the effectiveness may, however, need to rely on the analysis of disparate and heterogeneous data obtained from multiple data silos maintained possibly by as many units at the institutions, such as institutional research, library administration, and individual academic units. Banner systems can yield such hard data as student grades, graduation rates, and even demographic data. Some diversity dashboards and databases contain demographic data for employees and students including their gender, ethnicity, faculty tenure, and rank, and college with support for longitudinal studies needed to analyze trends and correlation with the outcome of various diversity-related initiatives. The purpose of longitudinal studies would be to demonstrate institutional commitment to hiring and promoting faculty, support staff, and administrators of all ethno-racial backgrounds represented on campus over a period of time. A longitudinal study of students from different ethno-racial backgrounds succeeding, graduating, and finding opportunities after graduation should be possible through Banner and other databases. Bringing these two datasets into a cohesive dataset to demonstrate the direct effect of diversity efforts on student success may be more challenging.

While such data—such as the one obtained from the Institutional Research's Diversity Dashboard—may help researchers calculate faculty-to-student, librarian-to-faculty, and librarian-to-student ratios for longitudinal studies, it will not indicate the effectiveness of diversity initiatives within the library. Libraries offer information literacy workshops, prepare diversity-related displays, organize events, and coordinate outreach efforts, and may use surveys, questionnaires, and anecdotal data to document whatever it is they want to be evaluated for. Where librarians do not teach for-credit courses throughout undergraduate and graduate programs, such data may not demonstrate the direct effect of information literacy on student success measured through grade-point-average. Studies with specific groups, however, may have generated helpful comparative data focusing on minority and majority students, such as the correlation of library use and grades. Institutions can isolate data related to ESL (international, displaced, and other bilingual resident) students as well as members of minority groups to track student success but much of that data may not reflect the extent of contact with librarians even with library data to back that up. Campuses with a separate engineering library may be better able to provide data on how effective library services are serve diverse student populations.

The effectiveness of diversity efforts in academic libraries, therefore, must involve a more systematic approach, which may be a political or cultural issue or a combination thereof after all. Public and private institutions may also be using various standards for reporting on the efficacy of their diversity programs, and the data from academic units including libraries will follow those institutional standards. Libraries may additionally supply data to professional

organizations such as ALA, but those reports may not mesh completely with university diversity programs provide in their respective reports.

Conclusion

Academic libraries are the intellectual hubs of their campus, and as such, they also have a role in shaping diversity and the conversation on diversity and inclusion through culturally competent collection management and hiring and promotion practices. Engineering students and faculty are drawn to the campus library as an information resource. Increasingly the idea of the library as place has come to define the ways library administrations design and manage library space, resources, and services. It is essential that either as an information resource or place to study, collaborate or socialize an academic library needs to accessible and welcoming to all users.

Engineering librarians and staff who have been trained to meet the diverse needs of today's multicultural and multi-ethnic/racial campus populations will be able to create inviting library environments. Most campuses already have offices of diversity, offices of multiculturalism, LGBTQ student groups, offices of accessibility and other diversity resources that can provide training for librarians and staff. Academic libraries can have available foreign language newspapers and magazines in addition to language instruction materials to help international students feel at home and acclimate to campus life. Libraries serving engineering students can also make space available to student events and activities. Outreach to groups serving women and other diversity-oriented populations is, therefore, an important marketing opportunity.

Although the analysis of quantitative data falls beyond the scope of this paper, it has addressed the challenges of working with disparate data obtained through different sources—specifically via Banner systems, data dashboards, and diversity surveys. The challenges rise from the fact that data systems provide objective data while surveys yield subjective data. While one may provide some context for the other, connecting library diversity initiatives and survey data to hard data on student success may pose further challenges. Best practices in promoting diversity and inclusion in the academic libraries is, however, a safe strategy for minimizing the gap across data sources and demonstrating the effectiveness of diversity initiatives in the academic library.

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