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Competencies in Action: ACRL Standards and Library Diversity Plans

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BACKGROUND

In 2012, ACRL published Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries to guide academic libraries to better serve diverse populations. Some academic libraries have created individual diversity plans to define how to best serve diverse patrons. How do academic library diversity plans reflect these ACRL standards? What standards are underrepresented? Do the standards reflect current policy and/or practice, or is there evidence that current policy and/or practice have been informed by these standards? The intersections between diversity plans collected from U.S. academic libraries and the standards are explored through content analysis. Examples of how these standards are reflected in diversity plans can help those engaged in diversity efforts learn how to integrate these standards into their own plans to ensure inclusive learning environments.

METHODOLOGY

- Content analysis
- Deductive analysis
- Coding
- Study limitations & challenges
  - Single coder
  - Diversity plans only, not strategic plans or university-level diversity plans
  - Unknown quantity for sampling purposes
  - Although 1,561 libraries solicited, only 22 plans collected for analysis

Diversity plans at 4-year U.S. colleges & universities* (n=1,561)

- Cultural awareness of self & others: 22 (14%)
- Cross-cultural knowledge and skills: 39 (25%)
- Organizational and professional values: 20 (13%)
- Development of collections, programs, and services: 19 (12%)
- Service delivery: 17 (11%)
- Language diversity: 6 (4%)
- Workforce diversity: 22 (14%)
- Organizational dynamics: 22 (14%)
- Cross-cultural leadership: 9 (6%)
- Professional education and continuous learning: 22 (14%)
- Research: 3 (2%)

*public and private non-profit schools in all 50 states and Washington, D.C. only

FINDINGS

DIVERSITY STANDARDS:
Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries [ACRL, 2012
http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/diversity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>No. of plans</th>
<th>No. of references</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Cultural awareness of self and others</td>
<td>4 (18%)</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cross-cultural knowledge and skills</td>
<td>10 (45%)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational and professional values</td>
<td>20 (86%)</td>
<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development of collections, programs, and services</td>
<td>19 (86%)</td>
<td>165</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service delivery</td>
<td>17 (77%)</td>
<td>121</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language diversity</td>
<td>6 (27%)</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workforce diversity</td>
<td>21 (95%)</td>
<td>197</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational dynamics</td>
<td>22 (100%)</td>
<td>144</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cross-cultural leadership</td>
<td>9 (41%)</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional education and continuous learning</td>
<td>22 (95%)</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>3 (14%)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Top 3 Standards

- Organizational dynamics
  - Emphasize importance of civility in the workplace and foster positive working relationships
  - Improved communication for and participation in diversity efforts across all libraries’ locations
  - Library seeks to institutionalize and assess diversity in all aspects of the Library’s performance
- Workforce diversity
  - Develop and implement recruitment and retention strategies for staff, faculty, and students from underrepresented groups
  - Coaching regarding unconscious bias for search & screen committees, as well as supervisors
  - Investigate additional retention incentives; i.e., a mentoring program
- Professional education & continuous learning
  - Organize workshops and other activities on topics related to diversity and have discussion of workplace applications
  - Create practical experience opportunities where possible for libraries staff, especially diverse staff pursuing MLS/MLIS degrees and Library Support Staff Certification

Bottom 3 Standards

- Language diversity
  - “Create guides and brochures in languages other than English, e.g., Chinese, Japanese or Spanish.”
  - “Explore translating portions of the library’s webpage into other languages, in order to highlight diversity and be more welcoming.”
  - “Highlight regional and historical linguistic diversity in signage by creating select trilingual signs.”
- Cultural awareness of self & others
  - “Individual diversity / intercultural competence goals”
  - “The creation of these displays will be an important opportunity for all members of University Library staff to become involved in increasing their own and others awareness of many cultures and points of view.”
- Research
  - “Library faculty is also encouraged to engage in publishing and research relating to topics related to diversity.”

OBSERVATIONS

- Organizational dynamics: Includes topics like workplace climate, assessment, and employee engagement. Without a good understanding of an organization’s culture and climate, it is very difficult to implement new initiatives or develop new programs, especially if the members of that organization do not feel like they are valued members or if they have to work in hostile conditions.
- Workforce diversity: The lack of diverse racial representation, particularly among faculty, is a real problem. We have all heard time and time again that research has shown how important it is for students to see themselves represented at the front of the classroom—why wouldn’t this also be true for libraries, the places that support the work they do in the classroom? So it’s not too surprising to see that most of the diversity plans I looked at included a focus on recruitment and retention of diverse employees.
- Professional education & continuous learning: Honing our skills in cultural competence is no different from learning any other discipline. Librarians need to continually challenge and push themselves to learn new content. Libraries and librarians need to seek new opportunities and seek out new programs to better serve our students at all levels.

CONSIDERATIONS

Should current conversations around diversity and inclusion inform the language of academic library diversity plans?
What are the implications of the absence of certain words in diversity plans? Words such as “racism,” or “privilege?”
What other ways can we codify the ACRL standards into our daily practice? Most libraries do not have a stand-alone diversity plan. Can these be incorporated into larger strategic plans?
Intersectionality is a concept that can inform how we look at the standards, and how we put the standards into practice. How can we challenge ourselves and the profession to be more articulate around intersectionality? Do we fully understand how serving diverse patrons means serving patrons who not only have multiple, intersecting identities, and who may also be multiply marginalized?