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Review: Implementing Excellence in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Handbook for Academic Libraries

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**Review: *Implementing Excellence in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Handbook for Academic Libraries*,
edited by Corliss Lee and Brian Lym**

Reviewed by Lalitha Nataraj, California State University, San Marcos

Abstract

Review of Lee, C., & Lym, B. (Eds.). (2022). *Implementing excellence in diversity, equity, and inclusion: A handbook for academic libraries*. Association of College and Research Libraries.

Keywords: book review, diversity, equity, inclusion, recruitment, retention, organizational change, assessment, *Implementing Excellence in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Handbook for Academic Libraries* (book)

***Book Reviews* edited by Jennifer Joe**

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Review: *Implementing Excellence in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Handbook for Academic Libraries*, edited by Corliss Lee and Brian Lym

In recent years, increased scrutiny around equity practices in hiring and retention has prompted academic libraries to formalize substantive policies aimed at confronting and mitigating the glaring lack of diversity in the profession. Prior to the Covid-19 crisis, the library and information science (LIS) field was only just starting to reckon with its complicity in upholding and perpetuating white epistemologies and ontologies while simultaneously suppressing knowledge systems and identities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

Fobazi Ettarh, Sofia Leung and Jorge López-McKnight, Angela Galvan, Jennifer Ferretti, Kaetrena Davis Kendrick, April Hathcock, and countless other LIS scholars have elucidated critical theoretical frameworks that help us understand how BIPOC workers are systematically marginalized through institutionalized library practices. They have also written with frank eloquence that despite exposure to nuanced explanations (and firsthand experiences) of systemic inequity and discrimination, academic libraries still lack intention and definitive action behind their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives.

The pandemic brought into stark relief, various socioeconomic injustices related to front-line services and viral exposure, balancing work and caregiving responsibilities, and of course, flexible and remote work options. It amplified the need to re-examine recruitment and retention through a DEI lens particularly as institutions struggled to rethink perspectives around accessibility and work modalities. In the last two and a half years, academic libraries have simultaneously designed on-the-fly solutions while also considering what is sustainable in the face of an uncertain future. Inspired by Tressie McMillan Cottom's concept of "pragmatic hope," which she described in her opening keynote address at the ACRL 2021 conference, the editors of *Implementing Excellence in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Handbook for Academic Libraries* have compiled practical approaches to "transforming libraries into change agents for social justice" (p. xiv).

This comprehensive monograph has 19 chapters spread across six sections with content geared to a wide audience, ranging from early career library workers to administrators. Sections include:

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- Recruitment, Retention and Promotion
- Professional Development
- Leveraging Collegial Networks
- Reinforcing the Message
- Organizational Change
- Assessment

The first section, “Recruitment, Retention, and Promotion,” offers viable, inclusive strategies for actively hiring and retaining a diverse workforce as well as surfacing discriminatory factors in hiring practices related to ageism and disability. Tureen’s chapter addresses matching library faculty representation to the diverse student body at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Tureen also provides excellent tools for creating appealing and inclusive recruitment materials and promotional tips, such as a pared-down list of required qualifications and a LibGuide describing quality of life beyond the Las Vegas Strip. Similar to Tureen, Bélanger et al. explore a compassionate approach toward attracting historically underrepresented candidates, noting that onboarding must explicitly support the ways lived values and experiences are vital to how employees connect with an institution’s values. Stieglitz’s chapter considers the pervasive bias against female librarian candidates over the age of 40 who are recent graduates of LIS graduate programs; they astutely declare that current research needs greater intersectional analysis to fully understand the various identities at play in the hiring process. In their chapter, Litwack posits the important view that DEI initiatives must be more inclusive of disability, stating that respondents to an information gathering survey want employers to see disability as an asset, not a deficit. In their chapter on mentoring and diversity, Lewis et al. discuss how a formalized mentoring program can significantly shift the institutional culture to a place where new and current employees are included and valued. The section concludes with Bugg’s chapter, which applies a qualitative methodology of narrative inquiry through critical incidents to showcase how specific circumstances significantly impacted the career paths of library leaders of color.

The second and third sections, “Professional Development” and “Leveraging Collegial Networks,” provide templates for developing cultural competencies as well as embracing cultural humility. Bopp encourages libraries to develop robust training programs for student workers and provide opportunities for them to participate in peer learning initiatives and

campus outreach; these experiences ultimately benefit students in post-college job searches. Kapsidelis and Galoozis discuss how a series of internal training workshops at the University of Southern California Libraries provided space for library workers to self-reflect on topics like the pandemic crisis, climate change, and Black Lives Matter movement, and consider how these broader social justice issues provide the necessary context for incorporating radical compassion into our work, along with fostering cultural humility across the organization. The following chapter by Villagran recommends having libraries actively help their workers develop cultural intelligence through continued training and practical application of skills. While Villagran observes that a foundational understanding of biases is a critical first step towards cultural intelligence, they could have gone further and explicitly stated that ongoing engagement with biases and their impact on power inequities has a greater influence on accountability. In their chapter, Jones et al. provide practical tips for using a virtual book club as a venue for conversations on implicit bias but note that their initial foray—the MLA Reads Virtual Book Club for the Medical Library Association Discussion Group Program—lacked facilitator training on DEI topics, which they acknowledge as an area of improvement. Closing out the third section, Velez discusses how the Library Diversity Institute at the University of North Carolina Greensboro Libraries enhanced its Diversity Resident Program by drawing together previous and current residents to create a sustained network that mitigated the isolation often felt by solo residents.

The fourth section, “Reinforcing the Message,” contains a lone chapter by Dozier et al. that essentially serves as the accountability call of this entire text. The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) “encourages, but does not require, . . . visible [DEI commitments] from all member institutions” (p. 281) in the form of diversity statements, initiatives, and other web content. Wanting to assess the accessibility, and veracity of such material, the authors conducted a content analysis using a critical discourse lens of 125 member institutions’ diversity statements. The authors saliently conclude that library diversity statements must be distinct from the parent institution in order to effectively center goals and objectives.

Whereas the first four sections are granular and provide practical and specific steps for achieving critical DEI outcomes at institutions, sections five and six, “Organizational Change” and “Assessment,” impart strategic, bigger picture guidance for addressing structural issues. Raza et al. describe a several years-long process of developing a DEI committee at Emory University Libraries. This process included developing a core framework for addressing DEI issues, various assessments and peer benchmarking, training

and outreach, all of which ultimately culminated in a recommendation for creating and sustaining a DEI committee. Underscoring Dozier et al.'s chapter, Redd et al. note that library strategic planning is distinct from university-wide priorities, designed to communicate the specialized work and value of the library to campus stakeholders. Callison and Ford describe the creation of a 13-week long Indigenous Cultural Competency Training at the University of Manitoba Libraries intended to foster a holistic Indigenous worldview and build relationships with the UM Indigenous community. Addressing larger-scale accountability related to how librarianship has reinforced settler colonialism, Harrison et al. discuss how Canadian institutions have substantively (or not) responded to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 94 Calls to Action. They share that several institutions developed initiatives without engaging in relationship building and establishment of trust with Indigenous communities, which indicates a sense of failure from the start. They conclude with an eye towards futurity where libraries "radically [assert] a future of Indigenous participation and presencing within our [institutions]" (p.407).

The final two chapters of the book focus on discussions of holistic efforts to assess DEI efforts in academic libraries. Bright writes that the purpose of creating and refining an assessment tool, the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Self-Assessment Audit (DEISAA), was to move beyond classifying DEI work as a "body count" and visibilize substantial work beyond simply representing a diverse personnel. Finally, Anaya and Harris review how ARL libraries' DEI efforts between 2010 and 2017 evolved and were impacted by political and social justice movements.

The intent of these collected essays, it seems, is not only to provide readers with practical guidance on building DEI programs at their institutions but also to help us collectively manifest a better profession that enacts the very values it professes. Realizing that libraries want to invest in DEI initiatives, but often feel overwhelmed when it comes to follow-through, the editors have assembled writings that showcase the continuum of DEI work, starting with what is presently achievable while also planning for longevity. Given the incredible breadth of what is actually possible in libraries with respect to DEI, this text shows us that there is really no excuse for not fully engaging in this hard but absolutely necessary work.