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Library Diversity and Inclusion Statements in Action

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Library diversity and inclusion statements in action

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Abstract

In recent years, many academic libraries have renewed their commitments to advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives in public statements. In this qualitative study, the author interviewed academic librarians to understand how these commitments have been actualized in libraries, and what barriers and challenges have been faced by individuals coordinating this work. All libraries had established committees to implement EDI initiatives, but committees with dedicated positions, budgets, and consistent support from administrators were able to attempt more large-scale, systematic work. The study includes recommendations for library administrators for providing effective structures and support for EDI efforts.

Introduction

Over the past five years, acts of bias and harassment on college campuses have increased, (Bauer-Wolf, 2019). As part of broader campus responses, academic libraries in the United States have felt an increased urgency to articulate the centrality of social justice in their missions and agendas, especially early in the presidency of the Trump administration. This sentiment resulted in the release of new or revised diversity and inclusion statements and plans by a number of libraries (Anaya & Maxey-Harris, 2017). In these statements, libraries have pledged to stand against racism, xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia, and ableism and to equip themselves to act when their communities experience violence or bigotry. To understand the outcomes related to these statements, there is a need to examine the actions that have resulted. How do we identify and assess the efforts of libraries to support equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) over the past 5 years, especially as the profession negotiates its role and approach to social justice initiatives, and its identity as a social institution? How have these calls for action been implemented in academic libraries, and what can be improved? How can library leaders position their organizations to make progress in EDI initiatives?

This qualitative research study seeks to understand 1) what, if any, actions have occurred within academic libraries to begin the work associated with their new written commitments to advancing EDI and 2) what, if any, successes or barriers were experienced as part of these efforts. The author interviewed representatives from academic libraries that have released new, revised, or renewed diversity and inclusion statements since the fall of 2016. “Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion” or “EDI” is used broadly to describe the commitments made and actions taken by libraries related to these concepts. Ideally, EDI work represents critical, anti-racist and anti-oppressive approaches to library activities and initiatives, yet what is described as EDI work in libraries may include many different approaches. In this paper, EDI is used as a catchall term to encompass the work as a particular library defines it and may encompass anything from performative messaging about diversity to critically shifting power in an organization’s structure to promote equitable and inclusive practices.

Interview questions aimed to solicit information about what actions have been taken to implement these statements related to either, 1) internal opportunities for employee or organizational growth and 2) external support offered to students, staff, faculty or community members (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Examples of anticipated internal and external actions

Category	Types of Action
Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offered employee training or professional development • Developed hiring and retention programs • Revised policies or practices
External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed new programs or workshops • Created exhibits or displays • Provided spaces for gathering or discussion • Established new partnerships with campus affinity groups • De-named or renamed buildings • Made additions to library collections of underrepresented perspectives • Altered building infrastructure (ex: gender-inclusive bathrooms) • Created new resources such as LibGuides, websites, bibliographies, training tutorials or modules

Data about the topics that were addressed through the actions were also collected. Other categorical variables were examined, which include implementation structures, available resources, and barriers and/or successes experienced in the work. This research provides an overview of the actions that some academic libraries have taken to address campus climate since the fall of 2016 and will provide an opportunity for library leaders and administrators to reflect on the relationship between their public statements about EDI and resulting actions within an organization.

Literature Review

Establishing diversity committees within academic libraries is not, of course, a new idea. In 1994, a large survey of academic library directors at urban universities found that libraries commonly worked to improve support for racially and culturally diverse communities. Library workers pursued projects to improve representation in collections, recruitment of new librarians, and instruction for international students. The results of the survey indicated that most of these directors (92%) even reported having the “appropriate financial resources to facilitate cultural diversity”, in their libraries, (Buttler, 1994). A year prior, librarians at Iowa State University published an article describing how the work of their library’s diversity committee had evolved, and they explored the benefits of such a committee, which they claimed had a role in advancing campus diversity initiatives and climate, increasing awareness and knowledge among library workers, and improving recruitment efforts, (Gerhard & Boydston, 1993). Nearly a decade later, a qualitative study described the results of a survey administered to librarians who participated in leadership program through the Association of Research Libraries, and the results emphasized the importance of assessing workplace climate in the library and its “level of preparedness” to engage in diversity initiatives. Unlike the conclusions of the earlier Buttler study, this survey noted that in general, librarians of color had struggled with unwelcoming environments, inadequate support, and invisible barriers, (Love, 2001). Librarians at the University of Arizona later documented the work of their diversity committee in response to a campus climate survey, and they began developing competencies for both hiring and professional development, (Andrade & Rivera, 2011). While the work of diversity committees in earlier studies focused on internal practices, the charges of library EDI committees have increasingly represented work such as outreach and targeted programmatic support for marginalized student populations. Expanded definitions of “diversity” work in libraries began to represent support for racial and

ethnic groups as well as representing diversity of gender, sexual orientation and identity, ability, language, religious belief, national origin, age, and ideas, (Anaya & Maxey-Harris, 2017; Duffus et al., 2016).

As with higher education more broadly, diversity and inclusion initiatives, projects, and committees are “on-trend” in the dominant agendas of the library profession, and expectations that academic libraries will include this work among its priorities have increased. While there is a long history of progressive advocacy and labor in libraries, the actions of the Trump administration, including threats to programs like DACA and policies excluding international students from Muslim countries from attending colleges and universities in the United States, moved calls within the library profession from an active but small minority to more mainstream professional conversations and calls to action, (American Library Association, 2016; Kim, 2016; Sierpe, 2017; Todaro, 2016). More recently, libraries have more explicitly committed to the work of social justice during the COVID-19 pandemic and with rising awareness of police killings of Black and Brown People, (Puente et al., 2020). In this climate, many academic libraries created or renewed their commitments to advancing equity, inclusion, and diversity in the profession in the last 5 years through letters, statement, and action plans, (Anaya & Maxey-Harris, 2017; Edwards, 2016; Kim, 2016).

The work of diversity committees in academic libraries has been documented in the literature through studies and case reports of individual libraries as well as larger surveys, (Anaya & Maxey-Harris, 2017). However, there are also many calls in the literature for better assessment and benchmarks for the impact and outcomes of this work. While this study does not aim to fill that larger need, it does provide a deep dive into the recent barriers, approaches, and successes of the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion in academic libraries that may

complement larger but more general library surveys such as ARL SPEC kits, (Anaya & Maxey-Harris, 2017). Further, this study targets a population of libraries that have explicitly and publicly communicated their commitments to EDI work. With these promises in mind, this investigation explores the resulting actions, barriers, and outcomes. The analysis sheds light on the relationship between diversity statements and a library's resulting actions and may inform the approaches of other libraries who seek to explicitly center anti-racist and anti-oppressive agendas in their missions and take effective steps to act on their stated values.

Methods

Recruitment for this study invited a purposeful sample. Participants for this study were recruited from academic libraries that released new, revised, or renewed diversity and inclusion statements or updated their web presence related to the work of their EDI committee since the fall of 2016. Such libraries were identified by reviewing online lists documenting written statements in the profession and press releases after the fall of 2016, as well as by reviewing library websites of public universities for diversity, inclusion, equity, or social justice statements that have been added or updated since 2016, as indicated by the "last modified" date on the web content. The author identified 26 institutions through an initial review of known statements and academic library websites, and then invited the contacts listed on the statements or committee webpages at those institutions to participate in interviews. While the initial recruitment for this study was driven by publicly available library statements or web content related to EDI work, the focus on this study is on the resulting activities not on the content of the statements. Particular attention was given to identifying participants with positions that could be assumed to be directly involved in implementing the work related to this study and in non-administrative and/or public services roles within the library. Identifying the common challenges and effective strategies

described by people and groups executing the EDI work of a library may help library leaders at other institutions better understand how to support success within their organizations. These roles were identified by reviewing the individuals' titles on library websites and asking the initial contact for the appropriate person in this role. However, some of the contacts asked that the author speak to an administrator or someone in a human resources position within the library. Ultimately, the author conducted interviews with eight library professionals at seven different institutions, (one interview included two people, who served as co-chairs of the library's EDI committee).

The interviews were scheduled and completed during the fall of 2019. Subjects participated in remote interviews with the investigator lasting approximately 30 minutes. The author captured audio recordings of the interviews and took notes. Immediately after each interview was complete, the author recorded reflective notes to capture immediate observations. Participants were asked to share general information about their professional background such as years of experience in academic libraries, length of time in their current position, and their position title. They were also asked to describe their role in advancing the equity, inclusion, and diversity initiatives at their library. In order to address the research questions for this study, participants were asked the interview questions outlined in figure 2.

Figure 2: Interview Questions

1. Your library [released or updated] a statement/webpage on equity, inclusion, and diversity since the fall of 2016. Can you describe how this was created or updated? What was the process and why did it occur?
2. Can you describe actions that have occurred that relate to the commitments made by your library's statement?
3. In what ways is the work of equity, inclusion, and diversity formerly or informally structured at your library? (please explain committee, position, job duties, service commitments, etc.)
4. Can you describe if and how related work receives administrative support within your library? (ex: financial or human resources, encouragement, advocacy, training or guidance)
5. Can you describe if and how this work has received support external to the library?
6. What aspects of this work have you found to be most impactful or successful in this context?
7. What challenges or barriers have you faced?

The author reviewed audio recordings of the interviews three times. With each listen, she recorded additional notes and reflections, which were later read twice. The author then began to identify initial themes and coded the text using Microsoft Excel. Initial themes were reviewed for accuracy, consistency, and appropriate level of specificity, then refined and grouped. Next, themes were analyzed to identify commonalities and patterns across the experiences described by participants and to understand implementation structures, available resources, and barriers and/or successes that individuals experienced in the work. In the sample population, this analytical process revealed what actions did or did not occur at each institution and illuminated the

experiences of the library professionals working to activate the promises of equity, inclusion, and diversity statements made by their institutions.

Results

Institutional Characteristics

Interview participants represented seven different academic libraries in the United States. General details about each library represented in the sample are described in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Institutional characteristics

	Characteristics of institution
Library 1 (L1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created EDI statement for internal use; LibGuide describing EDI activities in the library • No committee budget • No dedicated position • Large public university
Library 2 (L2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement at campus level, and the committee's work is represented on the library's website • Budget was originally \$3000/year, increased to \$10,000/year • Dedicated position • Large public university
Library 3 (L3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement on website, opt-in for employees • No formal budget, but some funds for collection development • No committee budget • No dedicated position • Large public university
Library 4 (L4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No statement, but a long-standing committee and their work is represented on their website • No formal committee budget, but well-supported in the organization, including conference attendance/travel • Dedicated position • Large public university
Library 5 (L5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement on website • Budget of \$5-10,000/year • No dedicated position • Medium-sized, private university
Library 6 (L6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement on website • No committee budget • No dedicated position • Large public university
Library 7 (L7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement on website • No committee budget, system-level committee affiliation • No dedicated position • Large public university

In the sample, all libraries represented were public universities except one. Most of the libraries are “large” universities, enrolling more than 15,000 students; one “medium” university was included in the sample, which enrolls between 5,000-15,000 as defined by Carnegie Classifications, (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2021). Public research universities are over-represented in the sample, and these institutions, based on the recruitment process for this study, seem to be more likely to document EDI library statements and related committee work on their websites, thus they were more likely to be a target for recruitment. The availability of resources to form a committee and document the work of that body on a website may indicate that the institutions represented in the sample are comparatively well-staffed and resourced.

All the libraries represented had some sort of committee responsible for equity, diversity, and inclusion work. The titles of the committees included two “Diversity Committee”, three “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee”, one “Diversity and Inclusion Committee”, and one “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Committee”. For the purposes of clarity, all committees represented in the sample will be referred to as “EDI committees”, regardless of their unique names. All participants were involved in their library’s EDI committee, most as chairs, and some as committee members who served as liaisons to library administration or human resources.

The library workers who were interviewed had an average of 18 years of experience in the profession and an average of 11 years in their current position, indicating that the workers typically assigned to lead this work were mid- to late- career workers. Participants held a range of different positions in their organizations. Their positions included two subject/liaison librarians, one collections librarian, two heads of units/departments, and three administrators.

EDI Statements

All academic libraries represented by interview participants had released a statement on EDI or updated their committee's web presence since the fall of 2016. Of the seven institutions in the sample, four had released formal library statements on EDI, one relied on a campus-level statement but documented their EDI committee work on the library websites, one created a statement that was not publicly posted but represented its work on a well-promoted LibGuide. The other had no statement but posted the details of EDI committee work and initiatives on their website.

Of the institutions with documented EDI statements, two themes emerged. The first theme broadly captures the process of developing the library statement on EDI. Most participants indicated that that statement was important in formalizing the work for the committee and communicating the library's commitment to EDI work to the campus community. Most participants described the process of developing their library's statement as time-consuming and involving considerable rounds of input and revision, and sometimes taking more than a year to complete. While the involvement of library deans or directors in committee work itself tended to be limited, most participants noted that library administrators were involved and interested in the messaging of the statement. Participants commonly described that decisions about word choice and determining the scope of these statements were scrutinized by library administrators. Participants commonly pointed to a second theme related to their library's statement. They noted that one should not assume that the commitments made in these statements represented a cause-and-effect relationship between the actions taken to implement the work. On the contrary, some noted a clear gap in the promises made in their library's statements and the resulting work,

describing that only some or minimal amounts of the work occurred related to the written commitments. This gap may result from the inherent complexity and difficulty of this work and the amount of time it might take to implement such initiatives fully. More significantly, participants noted that these initiatives challenge the deeply rooted, homogeneous, culture of whiteness in libraries, and efforts were often met with resistance on many levels as people worked to implement the promises of the statements. Some participants felt that while library deans and directors were interested in creating messaging around EDI work, they were unwilling to allot adequate resources or support. The frequency of the themes described above are represented in figure 4.

Figure 4: EDI Statements

	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7
Statement Creation Process	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Disconnect between words and actions	█	█	█	█	█	█	█

Committee Characteristics

Several participants addressed the make-up of their EDI committees’ membership. Often, membership was highly interest-driven, and many individuals in the organization expressed an interest in being involved. Unsurprisingly, the membership on these committees tended to reflect that of the profession overall- predominately white, female, and middle-class- and participants acknowledged the challenges of accomplishing the work of equity and inclusion when the composition of these committees are barely less homogeneous than their library or profession.

Most interview participants expressed frustration around the scope of the EDI work assigned to their committees. They described a lack of clarity around who does what work and the focus for the committee. One participant explained that the committee had a “rocky start” and

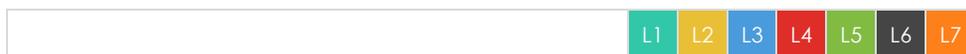
struggled to establish a shared understanding of its role and identity. Multiple participants explained that, at times, there was confusion among committee members, library colleagues, or even library leadership about what populations should be targeted by EDI efforts. One participant provided an example related to recruitment and retention in their library. They mentioned that some people in their library considered hiring men to be a “diversity hire” given the majority-women composition of their workplace. The participant described having to define and explain marginalization and systematic oppression in the context of the profession, and the ways that (white) men, in fact, have not been excluded from the profession.

Some participants also describe how their organization’s investment in the committee varied over time or among individual committee members depending on priorities, social climate, hiring and turnover, funding environments, and university strategic priorities. In recent years, committee members expressed more urgency in advancing EDI work due to campus climate and a strong desire to elevate the work and activism on the part of the library. One participant explained that this is, “just the atmosphere and environment we are in.” Some libraries represented in the sample had long standing EDI committees and had a sustained history, even decades long, of working to improve equity, diversity, and inclusion within the context of the library, while others initiated this work more recently. Many participants felt that the awareness, support, and impact of the work grew slowly and over time.

The relationship between the EDI committee and library leadership/administration emerged as a key theme related to the work. At libraries that had committed positions and committee budgets, the work of the committee tended to be larger in scope, more sustained, more likely to be recognized and applauded by campus leadership, and more integrated into the strategic directions of the library. The committees had stronger and broader charges, committee

members were encouraged to be bold and creative with their work, and they were granted direct access to library leadership and participation in decision-making. These committees were encouraged to move beyond surface-level or performative work that would be palatable to those in power and the dominate culture, but instead, to do work that would “interrogate and dismantle power structures” through an anti-oppressive framework for achieving equity. In addition, committee members were given more access to professional development opportunities at these libraries. At institutions where the committees had comparatively less access to resources or support from library administrators, members faced more barriers and more turnover among committee members. The committee members struggled with authority and effective advocacy and felt gaslit by shifting goals and expectations from administrators. They were unable to assess their work or examine the impact of their efforts, and they had little support for promoting or marketing their activities to the campus community. A theme common among all interview participants was that support from library leadership was directly related to a committee’s ability to advance its work. In addition, changes in library deans or directors often had a significant positive or negative impact on the ability of the committees to do their work, depending on the individual leader’s identity, and their commitment to and competency around the work. All participants felt that if EDI initiatives in libraries are to be successful, the people doing the work need resources and support from leaders. If library leaders have the awareness, knowledge, and expertise around issues of inequity and exclusion in libraries, then the organizational structures are more likely to be in place to help the work succeed. The frequency of themes related to characteristics of EDI committees are represented in figure 5.

Figure 5: Committee Characteristics



Committee stability and impact	Green			Red		Grey	Orange
Inconsistent organizational investment	Green	Yellow	Blue	Red	Light Green	Grey	Orange
Committee membership	Green					Grey	Orange
Defining scope of work	Green		Blue		Light Green	Grey	Orange
Support from leadership	Green	Yellow	Blue	Red	Light Green	Grey	Orange

EDI Committee Leadership

Several themes related to the leadership and strategic direction of the committees emerged in the data. Most notably, all participants described challenges around the emotional and invisible labor involved in leading committee work. This effort involved logistical work such as scheduling, planning, and facilitating effective and inclusive meetings, but comments also detailed the frustration, stress, vulnerability, and risks associated with serving in EDI committee leadership roles. Committee leaders were often tasked with managing resistance from colleagues, including administrators, and they were frequently asked to justify their approaches and the relevance of EDI work within the context of other library priorities. One participant noted that having to advocate and justify the work continuously takes a toll on EDI committee members and was particularly challenging for librarians of color or other marginalized workers. Several interview participants made note of the value of a co-chair model for leadership of their committees, which allowed co-leaders to build on one another’s strengths, improve advocacy, share connections, and distribute workload. Co-leadership allowed individuals to talk through complex issues, strategize, share risk, and find mutual support.

Many participants noted that librarians of color are often asked to lead or participate on EDI committees. They noted that this common expectation placed colleagues of color in vulnerable or risky conflicts with people in power. The work of addressing EDI issues in a

library is often frustrating, slow, and exhausting work, and librarians of color felt unheard and undervalued for their work. In one case, the interview participant speculated that a person of color left a position at their institution because of the pressure and frustration around EDI work. Participants described the work as sensitive, complex, and requiring deep expertise, however, people leading or participating in EDI committee work in libraries were often expected to do their work on the side of their other primary professional responsibilities. One participant also noted that having descriptions of the committee's work or public LibGuides has meant that individuals were trolled and threatened.

Interview participants almost uniformly described personal missions or values-based commitments to their EDI work in the library, and one participant described a "personal calling." For many, their personal commitments had recently been amplified due to current events and cultural shifts in the library that opened the door to more openness to and progress in their work. One participant described a "sociocultural urgency" for the campus community to respond to local and national incidents of bias and racism, and another explained that they were compelled to act on their professional values as both workers in libraries and in higher education.

Several participants also described their own positionality and privilege as a lens through which they approached their work and reflected on the relationship between their identity and their role as a leader. One person, who self-identified as a middle-aged, white woman, questioned whether she was the right person to lead the EDI work and whether that was appropriate, but she noted that there were no other people available or interested in leading EDI efforts in the library.

Some participants seemed perplexed and concerned about the organizational expectations placed on them when leading EDI work in the library. One participant noted that being in a

leadership role “assumes, requires, and necessitates” expertise, but that they felt that they neither came into the role with the appropriate level of expertise or were provided the support (both time and resources) to develop that expertise. Yet, they were still seen as the expert in their library. Another participant reflected, “to what extent are we equipped to even do this work...I am not sure,” but acknowledged, that relative to others, they may well be the most expert in the organization. They stated, “you accept that you are the educator because there is no one else.” More specifically, a participant described work that involved handling challenging, emotionally charged, and sensitive situations that arose with regularity and feeling ill equipped to navigate the issues.

Another theme described by participants related to managing and addressing resistance to EDI initiatives internal to the library from colleagues. One participant noted that there were extremely varied levels of openness and understanding of EDI issues. Another committee leader mentioned the care and work required to provide many different learning opportunities for internal professional development to meet people at varied levels of growth. Some colleagues were described as not having the vocabulary or skills to engage with issues at the same level as others, which at times would lead to conflict and frustration. They learned that using social justice terms like “equity” and “inclusion” without having a shared understanding of what those words mean in the context of the library became a problem, and that efforts to build organizational competencies in areas of EDI were sometimes met with resistance and defensiveness. Resolving issues of conflict and disagreement was often left to the committee members, who also tended to have varying levels of time and interest in the committee. A participant noted that some committee members really “dig into” the work and make it a priority in their busy positions over competing demands, while other members of the committee may

have less time, expertise, or may be involved in the committee to receive personal credit for being involved in the work than affecting change in the organization. Another person commented that there was a need to build a culture that would support efforts to improve EDI in the organization and that to build a culture is long-term and difficult work. Overall, participants felt that building internal support for the work, while being inclusive and respectful to individuals in the organization, was essential to success. Themes related to EDI committee leadership are represented in figure 6.

Figure 6: EDI Leadership

	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7
Emotional and invisible labor	Green	Yellow	Blue	Red	Light Green	Dark Grey	Orange
Lack of expertise	Green		Blue		Light Green		
Personal commitment	Green	Yellow	Blue	Red	Light Green	Dark Grey	
Resistance from colleagues	Green	Yellow	Blue	Red	Light Green	Dark Grey	

Structure and Implementation

In addition to the identified themes related to leadership and participation in the EDI committee, participants also shared their perspectives on the structures that either facilitate or obstruct getting the work done, (See Figure 7). At times, participants felt that their EDI committee work was seen by library leaders as “on the side”, “non-core”, or in addition to one’s individual professional duties or to the library mission more broadly, and they stressed the importance of building the work into position descriptions so that people can have responsibility for and ownership of the work more formally. When the work of EDI in libraries is treated as “extra”, participants had trouble balancing the demands of their committee role with their primary professional responsibilities and found it difficult to devote an adequate amount of time

and effort into the work, despite a personal investment and commitment. In addition, because the leadership of these efforts was often not a formal part of the organizational structure, when turnover occurs the work often stalls or is dropped all together.

Figure 7: Structure and Implementation

	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7
Balancing primary job responsibilities	Green	Yellow	Blue	Red	Light Green	Grey	White
Organizational goals and values	White	Yellow	White	Red	White	White	Orange
Turnover	Green	White	White	White	Light Green	White	Orange
Work viewed as non-core	Green	White	White	White	Light Green	White	Orange

Campus Environment

All EDI statements and committee charges involved a commitment to supporting professional development in the workplace. Many libraries relied on existing campus expertise, programs, workshops, and resources to advance this effort, although some participants felt their options at the campus level were inadequate and did not address issues in the both the local and professional context of libraries. Results showed a connection between the library EDI efforts and campus initiatives. Participants at libraries with the most robust EDI programs tended to exist within a campus with a strong commitment to advancing an inclusive culture, and they noted explicit alignment with their campus’ strategic plans and priorities. As with the level of support and investment of library leadership, having a campus culture aligned with the EDI efforts in the library was important for success. In some cases, this connection seemed to be mutually beneficial where library workers were invited to serve on campus-level committees because of their committee work within the library, and the work of the library was looked to as a model for other campus units. In addition, many campus partnerships formed with units or

departments with an existing affinity to social justice work, such as women’s and/or ethnic studies departments. Themes related to campus climate and initiatives are represented in figure 8.

Figure 8: Campus Environment

	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7
Campus culture							
Campus training opportunities							
Library as campus partner							

Actions

In this study, the author questioned participants about what actions they have taken to implement the work promised by their EDI statements or committee charges. Participants were prompted to describe two types of committee actions: either externally focused and internally focused actions.

External Actions

When asked about external or community-facing activities, participants described actions related to outreach, collections, and events. Most of the participants in the study noted that library workers had done some collection development to better reflect traditionally underrepresented or marginalized subject areas, scholars, or formats. One library developed a zine collection, for example, and another library expanded their gender studies collection. Those libraries also often highlighted new or existing collections and other resources on EDI topics using displays in the library. In addition, three of the participants described creating online resources, digital collections, or guides to support EDI efforts within their campus community. One library also bought course textbooks, increased support of open educational resources, and developed a technology lending program to support access for low-income students.

Most of the participants noted that their library hosted or organized EDI events or what was referred to as “programming” or “outreach” for the campus community. Some examples of this work included support for special populations on campus, such as DACA students, STEM programming targeting women, international students, and first-generation college students. In addition, library workers at one institution worked to redesignate areas of the library as a family care space and a prayer space. Several participants noted that the library was a uniquely positioned space on campus for hosting EDI events, because the buildings are often used by campus population across disciplines, and the buildings have comparatively large and flexible spaces. Overall, external events and outreach activities primarily involved improving and promoting representation in the library collections, hosting events, and connecting with EDI-affinity groups or centers on campus. Participants reported external activities less commonly than internal EDI activities. Common external action themes are represented in Figure 9.

Figure 9: External Events and Outreach

	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7
Collection development			Blue	Red	Green		Orange
Displays			Blue	Red	Green	Grey	
Events and outreach	Teal		Blue	Red	Green		
Online resources	Teal			Red	Green		

Internal Actions

Participants described a greater number and variety of internal actions.

Internal professional development

Most EDI activities described in this study represented internal efforts by committees to improve equity and inclusivity within the library workplace or raise competencies among library workers. Almost all the library committees represented in the sample developed, offered, or participated in EDI-related trainings and workshops. This work involved library workers attending existing campus trainings. Some topics covered in these trainings included “unconscious bias”, “inclusive language”, “non-western name pronunciation”, “gender neutral language,” “meeting norms”, “difficult conversations,” and “inclusive pedagogy”. In addition, many participants noted that their libraries invited in expert speakers or facilitators. These internal events often focused on providing library services to special populations such as students with autism, deaf communities, Muslim students, and members of the campus community who are without stable housing. Two libraries hosted social and informal gatherings with themes around multicultural awareness or understanding differences.

In other cases, professional development activities were self-directed. Sometimes these actions took shape informally through conversations with colleagues or discussion groups. At other times, participants described watching webinars with colleagues or discussing readings related to EDI issues in the library field. One participant noted that professional development often occurred at the individual level, where a library worker sought out education on their own to improve their competence in serving marginalized populations within a campus community.

Figure 10: Internal Professional Development

	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7
Educational training	Green	White	Blue	Red	Green	Grey	Orange
Self-directed learning	Green	Yellow	Blue	White	White	Grey	White
Understanding special populations	White	White	Blue	Red	White	White	White
Webinars and reading discussions	Green	White	Blue	White	White	White	Orange

Hiring and Retention

Much of the work in library EDI committees, as reported by participants in this study, related to improving recruitment and retention practices in the library. Committees worked to improve recruitment by adding library diversity statements, inclusive language, qualifications requirements related to diversity competence to position descriptions, removing unnecessary steps or requirements for the application process for candidates, requiring a diversity statement from candidates applying to librarian and administrator positions within the library, and broadened advertising of positions. One library offered paid diversity fellowship opportunities for undergraduate students as a method for recruiting new library professionals from their campus community. Two of the libraries had or were in the process of hiring at least one full time position devoted to EDI work in the library.

Most participants also described how their libraries have tried to improve retention of library workers as part of the EDI efforts. Examples included connecting library workers with mentorship opportunities and supporting employee growth, as well as training managers in inclusive and equitable supervisory practices. In addition, several libraries had done work to structurally incentivize EDI work as part of the annual evaluation process for library employees. Employees and managers were encouraged or required to include a work goal(s) that connected to EDI strategic initiatives in their library or on campus. In accomplishing these goals, the individual employees then have a formalized way to get credit for their EDI contributions. Two of the libraries represented in the sample were working on a deeper review and analysis of their systems for employee performance management with the goal of making improvements that promote equity in the workplace. In addition, two participants mentioned that their universities

were working to add EDI elements to the requirements for promotion and tenure of faculty members, again, providing formal structures for giving credit for EDI work.

Figure 11: Hiring and Retention

	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7
Creating positions							
Recruitment							
Retention and recognition							

Revising policies and systems

Participants at four of the institutions in this study shared that people in their libraries were working toward higher-level changes to systems and policies to reduce structural inequalities. These participants described the ways that their libraries have sought to examine their organizations’ reinforcement of systems of oppression and strategies for dismantling those academic or workplace structures to increase equity. Participants mentioned critical cataloguing practices, evaluating library discovery systems, and reviewing and revising policies with a lens of inclusivity. One library worked to examine and reflect on how money is spent in the library, how resources are allocated, and how facilities operate. The goal was to evaluate who in their university community has benefited and who has been excluded. Notably, this level of work was only achieved, at least as reported by participants of the study, at institutions with significant support and resources from campus and library administrators.

Of note, the work in this category was more significantly identified for Library 2 and Library 4, and it was identified to a lesser extent at the two other institutions. This theme captures some of the most robust, high-level, and impactful work described in the interviews. For these two institutions in particular, this theme went beyond positive messaging and marketing of

the library to satisfy administrative needs, but it represents attempts to shift power in the organization and expand justice-focused leadership and operations to achieve organizational EDI goals. Participants at these institutions recognized that the outcomes and impact of this approach is not yet understood. It is notable that these two participants described many of the same barriers, challenges, and resistance to their work, but the libraries were unique two ways: they had the most consistent and stable support for their library leadership, and they have dedicated positions.

Figure 12: Policies and Systems

	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7
Critical examination of systems							

Committee Administrative Activities

Several participants noted that their library EDI committees completed surveys within the library to examine workplace climate and/or identify training needs and assess outcomes in the organizations. As a result, committees were often tasked with analyzing the results of these instruments and making recommendations based on their conclusions. Some participants also describe the work that they had done to record and communicate their committee’s work through internal reports and documentation.

Figure 13: Committee Administrative Activities

	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7
Assessment							
Documentation and reports							

Barriers and Challenges

The barriers faced by library workers in implementing EDI initiatives often related to defining the work and messaging. When asked to describe the barriers to success, many participants struggled with a sense that there was only a performative commitment to the work of equity and inclusion within their library or campus. The efforts were valued more for the purpose of reputation management or because the work either seemed required or on-trend among administrators. One participant mentioned that the “cosmetic work of diversity” was seen as a marketing opportunity for library leadership or campus administration. Another stressed the care with which outward messaging about diversity was shaped, while the labor and resources needed to address inequity and oppression within work culture was ignored in favor of efforts to maintain the status quo. The work was often impeded by navigating the size or bureaucracy of the institution, which, one person remarked was likely “by design”. Two participants described their observations that people in power, (within the library, university, or even local and state representatives) do not reflect the diverse demographics of their community or state, and they are less inclined to understand the work or make it a priority. In addition, some felt that library leaders act with caution or avoidance due to concerns that university donors may be unsupportive or uninterested in EDI initiatives within the library. Especially for public institutions, participants explained that library leadership often showed a deep discomfort with anything that appears (to them) political, and leaders would prefer a risk-averse approach to the work. They fear missteps or drawing too much attention to the library, such as upsetting leaders at the campus level or encountering negative press. Even at libraries with more robust and expansive EDI programs, participants acknowledged that the work causes “discomfort at many levels, exposes painful blind spots, and shines a light on problems that are not easy to fix”.

Figure 14: Barriers to Success

	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7
Discomfort among leadership	■			■	■		
Concerns for political climate	■			■		■	
Surface commitment by leaders				■	■	■	■

Key Recommendations

In this qualitative study, library leaders and administrators in academic libraries commonly created a committee-based structure to implement the commitments made in their equity, diversity, and inclusion statements. These committees typically have a chair appointed to lead the group. These leaders of library EDI initiatives often experienced enormous stress and felt their work was heavily scrutinized, especially by library administrators. Interview participants often felt that they had not received the training, support, or resources necessary to successfully advance EDI initiatives in their libraries. They were responsible for extraordinary sensitive and complex work that they felt required expertise and resources that they did not have. Participants usually felt that the progress that they made with their committees was slow and incremental but stressed that having support in library administration improves the impact of the work tremendously. Several chairs suggested that the best leadership model is to have co-chairs or co-leaders in order to share the workload. More ideally, they recommended that library should have dedicated positions, at least in part, if the organization is serious about advancing the most impactful and transformative work. The two institutions with dedicated positions for the work were also the institutions with the most expansive and stable EDI programs and the strongest support from library and campus leadership. Investments of resources, money, time, and people, as well as intellectual and philosophical support makes or breaks this work in academic libraries.

So often these efforts start as grassroots efforts organized by an interested and engaged group of library workers, but structures established to execute the work only last and have impact, based on the data in this study, if library leaders make the work a priority over many competing priorities, and even then, the work is still complex and difficult. Participants involved in committee work found it challenging to do this work in addition to their core job duties in many cases. Additionally, the library does not operate in a vacuum, and participants noted that campus climate and culture also impacted progress both positively and negatively.

All EDI committees represented by participants in the study engaged in activities that were both external and internal, though the latter was more common. External activities often involved collection development work or promoting existing library resources or collections in support of EDI initiatives. Internal activities involved professional development, efforts to improve recruitment and retention, and policy review. EDI committees with more resources and support from library administrators were able to engage more with their campus communities and university or college-wide EDI initiatives. Many libraries have EDI elements in their strategic plans, missions, and/or visions but few document publicly how they are implementing and engaging with this work. In sum, themes from this study shaped the following recommendations:

- For EDI efforts in libraries to grow and find success, library leaders need to be strong and well-educated advocates who are willing to set expectations, provide meaningful resources, and think broadly and critically about advancing equity and the work of the library in meaningful ways that recognize the impacts of racism, oppression, and exclusion in the profession by historically and in a contemporary context. They need to hold themselves and the library as a system and an organization accountable.

- EDI work should be a stable part of the library's organizational structure and job duties should be built into permanent positions.
- EDI committees should not be constrained to doing the work that leaves power structures intact. They should not have to limit their work to that which is comfortable or palatable to people in power. Structures should be established for accountability and administrators must commit to listen to and learn from the people leading this work.
- Co-chairs are helpful for committees, and positions dedicated to the work are recommended.
- To improve the outcomes of your library's EDI commitments, library leaders must invest more resources, including positions and money, and proactively support the work. They should provide training for individuals engaged in this work or hire experts.

Study Limitations

The libraries represented in this sample may be doing work not described in the study, either because the person interviewed was not involved or aware of this aspect of work or the effort was not discussed during the interview. Some additional work may have occurred in the past as well, while the interview questions focused on present work. While the data gathered in this study represent a detailed look at the institutions in the sample, the methodological approach may limit the broad generalizability of the results and conclusions. However, the challenges identified within the sample may raise awareness among other library leaders as they consider how they can better support EDI work in their libraries.

Conclusion

Understanding the work that is occurring at academic libraries is challenging because EDI initiatives and actions are not always well-documented on library websites or visible in any way from outside of the institution. Though equity, diversity, and inclusion work may be explicitly represented within library mission and vision statements, the practical structures for executing the work within the organization are more difficult to uncover. In this qualitative study, the interview conversations with library workers, who are executing the EDI work of a library, provided detailed and robust information for understanding what and how actions are occurring in libraries. More importantly, participants described common constraints and barriers that they faced as coordinators of library EDI efforts. The recommendations that emerged from these challenges may help library administrators provide better support for EDI initiatives in academic libraries.

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