

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access Strategic Plan

As Northwestern University Libraries strives to create a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable work, learning, and teaching environment, we recognize, that while progress has been made, there is still more work to be done to actualize our workplace as an environment that cultivates, nourishes, and emboldens positive change. The collective framework for Northwestern University Libraries presented here, crafted after listening to stakeholders and holding discussions around next steps, will shape the Libraries' future strategies and priorities. The Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Planning Group's (hereafter "Planning Group") background work can be found on pages 3-8 of this document.

Northwestern University Libraries and Northwestern University Press (hereafter "the Libraries") commits to furthering diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in all our work, including collections, services, and spaces, with the understanding that our employees and work culture underpin all of it.

The Libraries aspire to be an organization where we:

- Celebrate questioning the status quo—one fraught with systems and structures that perpetuate unconscious bias—and seek ideas from employees at all levels that would result in a more inclusive, collaborative, and innovative environment
- Value both the seen and unseen differences amongst diverse employees and embrace a divergence of ideas that will inspire new directions, especially for the ways in which the Libraries can provide services to its users and access to its collections
- Prioritize employee inclusion using distributed decision making processes to increase engagement and trust

Strategic Priorities

These strategic priorities will move the Libraries toward its aspirational values.

Recruit and retain employees from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups.

The Libraries will be a thoughtful leader among academic research libraries and publishers that develops solutions to the pervasive barriers to attracting and retaining employees from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups for all positions.

Cultivate a climate that fosters inclusive behaviors to contribute to a sense of belonging for all employees.

The Libraries will continue its commitment to creating a work climate based on mutual respect and caring, so that employees feel they are treated fairly and that their wellness is taken seriously.

Activate our spaces for wellbeing to sustain and enrich an inclusive campus experience.

The Libraries will utilize its spaces to prioritize wellbeing. This entails removing physical barriers to access for all, allowing for creativity and enrichment, enabling safety and a sense of belonging.

Develop and contribute to solutions to support the success of students from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups.

The Libraries will develop strategies and collaborate on solutions to achieve equity and inclusion for Northwestern's increasingly diverse student population by offering relevant and relatable services and opportunities.

Reframe our center of knowing through the selection, acquisition, description, and dissemination of diverse collections.

The Libraries will acknowledge it operates within a hierarchical system of mainstream vs. periphery knowledge and scholarship, and will continue to invest in practices and structures that disrupt this system.

Goals

The goals outlined below were developed to support the strategic priorities to further diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA) across the work of the Libraries.

- **Goal 1:** Continually expand and modify our recruitment and hiring practices to increase historically marginalized and underrepresented groups in all our positions, using demographic data when available and pertinent to measure progress
- **Goal 2:** Create a baseline retention rate and increase retention rates of the Libraries' current historically marginalized and underrepresented employees through developing a system for promotion, both lateral and upward
- **Goal 3:** Implement and strengthen consultative and distributed decision-making processes across the Libraries, that increase mutual respect for each other's differences and encourage strong interpersonal relationships across the organization so that employees are empowered to own their work and be responsible for accomplishing it
- **Goal 4:** Intentionally nurture an inclusive work environment through training, professional development and enrichment activities
- **Goal 5:** Ensure policies, procedures, and documentation are current, standardized, unbiased, consistently communicated across the organization, and reviewed using an equity analysis framework.
- **Goal 6:** Increase trust with patrons and contribute to an inclusive campus experience by activating our physical and digital spaces to be accessible, flexible, and welcoming
- **Goal 7:** Protect the safety and wellbeing of all community members by expanding training and policies
- **Goal 8:** Actively engage with students and their success, by expanding services, hiring practices, and professional opportunities that support historically marginalized and underrepresented students
- **Goal 9:** Infuse our collection-building practices and stewardship with diversity of opinion and thought by involving members of historically marginalized and underrepresented groups and by confronting biases inherent in existing systems within our collections

Implementation

To realize the above DEIA strategies and goals, the Planning Group gathered feedback from across the Libraries and drafted nearly 70 action steps in close consultation with Libraries employees. Once they have been reviewed with the Libraries Executive Team, these actions will shape an internal operating plan that is updated annually, used to assign responsibilities, and take concrete steps at every level of the organization.

These actions will serve as a roadmap, moving the plan forward and ensuring accountability for the creation of a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible organization. Cross-functional and departmental goal teams will be formed and tasked with implementing, providing progress updates, and evaluating the plan biannually, in consultations with the Planning Group, the Leadership Team, and other stakeholders.

Future Assessment

The DEIA Strategic Plan will be evaluated at a basic level via biannual reporting of progress, determining whether the goals and actions were accomplished and what resources were required. During year one of the plan, the relevant goal teams and administrators tasked with implementing the work will determine the most resonant actions with each strategy and create a deeper form of assessment for those actions, including assessment of needs met, overall impact, and their cost vs. benefit. Consultation and partnership with the Libraries' Assessment and Planning workgroup will occur in year one to help determine tools and measurements of the impact that these selected actions may have on DEIA and on the Libraries' operations. The Planning Group will serve as collaborators and accountability partners, shepherding the plan through various iterations. Additionally, as the Libraries' administration will collect information about progress being made each year, the Planning Group will be responsible for updating the Libraries employees on the plan's progress.

Development of the Plan

The Planning Group was charged by the Libraries Executive Team in consultation with the EDI Project Coordinator and Head of NUL Organizational Development (OD) in the fall of 2020. With input from employees across NUL and Northwestern University Press (NUP), the group's first and main responsibility was to draft a DEIA strategic action plan that addresses the Libraries' current DEIA gaps and plans accordingly for the future. Once completed, the Executive Team and the Dean of Libraries will be responsible for supporting, promoting, and advancing these goals and strategies going forward. Members of the Planning Group included a combination of Libraries employees from a range of workgroups with complementary strengths representing a diversity of experiences, interests, and organizational roles—all of whom were selected by the Head of OD and EDI Project Coordinator in December of 2020.

In early January 2021, the Planning Group meetings commenced with an intense inclusive chartering process designed to develop trust with one another and to further refine group objectives. During this stage, the group adopted the following mission statement: **Be change agents to foster a culture of inclusion within NUL and NUP through the shared responsibilities of learning, assessing, designing goals, and maintaining plans that create a more diverse, equitable, accessible, and inclusive space for all.** Additionally, the group agreed on shared responsibilities that included:

- Building the Libraries’ DEIA Strategic Plan by articulating priorities and developing specific goals
- Facilitating communication across the Libraries about DEIA initiatives within the organization and coordinating speakers and events in collaboration with others
- Tracking opportunities (internal and external) for Libraries employee training and development and proposing/organizing training as needed
- Gaining an understanding of DEIA-related campus initiatives and resources to share with Libraries employees as appropriate
- Making all Planning Group work visible and easily shared across the Libraries

The group agreed also to employ the DEIA definitions from DeEtta Jones Associates Glossary of Terms found in their “Essentials of Cultural Competence” course, a course that the group, along with NUL’s Leadership Team (Executive Team and workgroup leaders) and OD employees, completed in February 2021. These definitions helped the group more efficiently communicate with each other and to the rest of the Libraries about their work and DEIA issues.

Methodology

Environmental Scan

The first stage of the strategic action planning assessed where the Libraries stood in terms of furthering diversity, equity, inclusion, and access as it related to the Libraries’ staffing and culture, spaces, services, and collections. The assessment took the form of an environmental scan and two subsequent two-hour meetings (February-March 2021), where the group outlined the resulting strengths, opportunities, and aspirations to create a “more diverse, equitable, accessible, and inclusive space for all.” Using the NUL Mission Statement and shared values from the Learning Organization Task Force as a guide, the group divided the tasks required to complete the environmental scan. The research during the assessment phase included a review of DEIA plans shared online by other academic libraries; review of NUL survey data and task force reports from the past four years; review of NUL policies that affected equity and inclusion among all Libraries employees and library users; informal interviews with colleagues at peer libraries engaged in their own DEIA strategic planning; and lastly, the group developed an employee survey, which had a ~62% response rate, to help guide our work in setting priority areas for goal development.

The group used appreciative inquiry exercises to outline strengths and opportunities and developed shared aspirations with measurable results. The results were further refined in our analysis through a robust feedback process, which informed the remainder of our strategic action plan.

Strengths

Of note from the environmental scan were the Libraries’ current strengths in promoting DEIA within its staffing and culture, spaces, services, and collections, including:

- Implementing the Decentering Whiteness Steering Committee and action steps in the Libraries’ special and archival collection areas to dismantle racism in all facets of that work (2020)
- Commitment to collecting archives related to the history and presence of Black students, faculty, staff, and alumni at Northwestern University, primarily through the work of the Archivist of the Black Experience (role established 2017)
- Dedicated librarian role for creating and promoting Open Education to help make the student experience more equitable (role established 2020)
- Providing benefits, such as release time, for employees enrolled in graduate programs in the information science field

- Providing librarian support for the Northwestern Prison Education Program as a unique way to provide resources to a marginalized population (new as of 2021)
- Appointing librarians as affiliated faculty for the Center for Native American and Indigenous Research (CNAIR) responsible for growing the Libraries' Native holdings, collaborating on digital projects, coordinating events, and serving on committees (role established 2019)
- Seeking representation of Libraries employees of all levels on various committees and task forces to help inform select decision making across the organization
- Dedicated Accessibility Librarian to help ensure our spaces and online resources are accessible (role established 2020)
- Forming the Metadata Inclusivity Steering Group and its work to address bias in metadata standards
- Encouraging liaison roles that support historically marginalized and underrepresented groups on campus, as well as building, developing, and maintaining collections that support research, teaching, and learning about historically marginalized and underrepresented people and groups
- Commitment at University level to furthering DEIA on campus through its Chief Diversity Officer position (role established 2016); Diverse Candidates Slate policy; new University committee on Public Safety; increasing the percentage of students receiving Pell grants to 20% by 2020; formation of CNAIR in response to University Native American Outreach and Inclusion Task Force recommendations—all of which support a strong climate for the Libraries to further its own DEIA work

While many of these initiatives are new, the group felt the Libraries should continue to support and build upon these strengths with additional resources as required.

Opportunities

Of particular interest in the strategic planning were the areas where the group's environmental scan revealed opportunities for the Libraries to better promote DEIA within its staffing and culture, spaces, services, and collections, including:

- Creating an internal pipeline for employees, especially targeting historically marginalized and underrepresented employees, to move into leadership positions or roles of impact and influence
- Building on the city of Evanston's reparations commitment, which creates a hyper-local climate of restorative justice and provides an opportunity for the Libraries to serve as a resource for the Evanston community through programming, exhibits, and/or historical research
- Leveraging Libraries' memberships with professional organizations like the Black Metropolis Research Consortium (BMRC), which could foster deeper reciprocal partnerships
- Increasing support for Open Educational Resources across academia to help create equitable access to information for students
- Emphasizing and promoting more widely the Libraries' partnerships and projects with CNAIR, Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa, Prison Education Project, and others whose objective is to stimulate growth and learning about histories, thoughts, and communities that have been marginalized
- Communicating internally and externally when the Libraries acquire materials that support certain departments, programs, and centers on campus whose focus is to stimulate growth and learning about histories, thoughts, and communities that have been marginalized
- Providing Northwestern students support in their activism to change racist systems and structures
- Building a sense of community across organizational workgroups by engaging in community service to promote a climate of inclusion beyond the Libraries
- Incorporating DEIA goals into every employee performance review (PEX) so that issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access remain at the forefront of our collective work at the Libraries

These opportunities represent areas where the Libraries can deploy more resources than it does presently to either grow each initiative or radically shift its level of leadership or participation.

Aspirations

Drawing from the Libraries' current strengths and opportunities, the group considered the aspirations and vision for the Libraries as an ideally diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible workplace. While aspirations ranged from serious to playful, the group collectively recognized that

- An organizational culture that celebrates questioning the status quo—one fraught with systems and structures that perpetuate unconscious bias—and seeks ideas from employees at all levels would result in a more inclusive, collaborative, and innovative environment
- Valuing both the seen and unseen differences amongst diverse employees and embracing a divergence of ideas inspires innovation, especially for the ways in which the Libraries can provide services to its users and access to its collections
- A more consultative organization, or one that prioritizes inclusion with those directly impacted by final decisions, would increase engagement, trust and consensus building with all employees

In sum, the **intentional** creation of an inclusive work culture underpins all aspirations about how best to support the mission of the Libraries.

Gathering and Reviewing Feedback

The DEIA Strategic Plan's priorities, goals, and actions were developed April-June 2021 and were heavily influenced by feedback from Libraries employees. All employees were invited to provide feedback through a series of virtual sessions and anonymous written feedback. Sixteen respondents provided feedback in virtual synchronous sessions, and 27 written responses were gathered through a Google form. Responses were coded and themes identified from feedback to produce another iteration of the proposed actions. The second stage of feedback was conducted with stakeholders and decision makers from Organizational Development, Metadata Services, McCormick Library of Special Collections and University Archives, Acquisitions, Academic Engagement, Business Operations (BOS), NUP, Research Services, Repository and Digital Curation, and Assessment and Planning in June 2021, where the goals and actions were further refined.

Framing the Strategic Priorities

Staffing

In support of the mission of Northwestern's Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion (OIDI), the Libraries will be a thoughtful leader among academic research libraries and publishers that develops solutions to the pervasive barriers to attracting and retaining employees representing historically marginalized and underrepresented groups for all positions. For this strategy, it is important to emphasize the intersectionality between historically marginalized and underrepresented. Having diverse and thriving employees is core to supporting a diverse and inclusive campus and larger community of global researchers.

The Northwestern Diversity and Inclusion report from 2019 and the November 2020 demographic data snapshot for NUL includes the racial and ethnic data for employees and demonstrates that improvements are necessary, since the University is positioned within a physical location that is racially and ethnically diverse. Additionally, the 2017 University-wide Staff Engagement Survey revealed areas where the Libraries lagged

compared to the University. Within the survey's Diversity and Inclusion dimension, the Libraries were 11 points lower, while 12 points lower within the Staffing and Talent dimension in comparison to other campus units.

Advancement of employees is a tool for retention of qualified employees from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups. For example, most workgroup leaders identify as white and make up the middle management category within the Libraries organizational structure, based on a self-disclosing poll of race/ethnicity taken during cultural competency training in March 2021. In November 2019 Program Review Staff Survey, the lowest mean score for all the questions was related to the question about opportunities for career progression: 25% of responding employees slightly disagreed and 13% strongly disagreed.

Culture

Inclusion is about making people feel like they are insiders, that their uniqueness is valued and that they can be successful in the organization. One of the Libraries' most needed areas for improvement identified by the 2017 Staff Engagement survey relates to unfair treatment in the organization, which was part of the Diversity and Inclusion dimension. The inequities of the pandemic combined with heightened awareness of systemic racism and other social injustices have exacerbated existing disengagement levels amongst employees. Factors that support "fair treatment in the workplace include mutual respect, strong interpersonal relationships and honest communication." The Libraries needs to continue its commitment to creating a work climate based on mutual respect and caring, so that staff feel they are treated fairly and that their wellness is taken seriously.

Spaces

Findings from listening sessions held by the Northwestern's Community Safety Advisory Board, indicated that while Northwestern students do not feel threatened physically, they feel an emotional unsteadiness about external influences like police, and overall are unhappy at Northwestern University. Dr. Clyde Yancy reported this to the Faculty Senate, saying, "In other words, the climate—defined by how we interact with one another—at Northwestern is problematic." Yancy concluded that Northwestern students are aware of the value of the education they are receiving, but they perceive their wellbeing to be at risk. In light of this climate assessment, the Libraries will utilize our spaces to prioritize wellbeing.

Wellbeing can be defined by one's overall physical, emotional, social, intellectual, environmental, spiritual, vocational, and financial health wellness. It is also evident when one flourishes beyond productivity and academic accomplishment. Taking inspiration from the transformational strand framework of OIDI, the Libraries recognizes that wellbeing is intertwined with accessibility, equity, and enrichment, and is the key to success in any DEIA strategy. Prioritizing wellbeing in Libraries' spaces means removing physical barriers to access for all, allowing for creativity and enrichment, enabling safety and a sense of belonging.

Services

In 2019, the entering cohort of students at Northwestern was described as the most diverse ever, with students hailing from 67 nations, 13% representing the first generation of their families to attend college; more than 20% coming from low-income, Pell Grant-eligible families; and 6% coming from Chicago Public Schools. OIDI publishes a diversity report every year with slow but steadily changing student body demographics. The Libraries has an opportunity and a responsibility to develop solutions to achieve equity and inclusion for this increasingly diverse student population by offering relevant and relatable services and opportunities.

Collections

The Libraries play a key role in advancing the University's priorities through the creation, collection, and dissemination of knowledge. Library collections realized physically and digitally, are fundamental to the support of teaching and learning and to the reputation of the University. While we build collections primarily to support faculty and students' research and instruction, we must acknowledge that we are operating within a hierarchical system of mainstream vs periphery knowledge and scholarship, and continually invest in practices that disrupt this system. Periphery is used here to refer to historically marginalized and underrepresented groups.

Conclusion

The Libraries have an opportunity and a responsibility to be a leader for diversity, equity, inclusion, and access on the Northwestern campus and in the broader academic research library community. While we have not been idle on this front, the research of the Planning Group clearly shows the many ways we can do more in the areas of employee recruiting and retention, employee engagement and job satisfaction, improving the accessibility of our spaces, supporting student success, and bringing a new lens to our collections. This great undertaking will be the work of the entire organization and will take the support and commitment of all Libraries employees. Realizing the goals stated in this document, Northwestern University Libraries and the Northwestern University Press will become organizations that celebrate questioning the status quo, that value both seen and unseen differences, and that prioritize making all employees feel included.