



Beyond Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Supporting Young Men of Color

Amy Phillips

Presenter

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Presenter

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Recorder

In the second NASIG Conference Vision session, Amy Phillips examined the shortcomings of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts taken up by libraries. Despite all these shortcomings for DEI initiatives, she highlighted library initiatives that promote DEI in libraries. Speaker Anthony Davis Jr. detailed his involvement with the establishment of the Men's Success Initiative Center (MSI) at California State University. He outlined the history of the center, how he became involved and the help he received from the library's technical services—also known as Collections and Scholarly Communications (C&SC) department—to set up a library in the Men's Success Initiative Center.

Keywords: diversity equity and inclusion (DEI), technical services, professional associations, branch libraries

Beyond DEI

Introduction

Amy Phillips works at the Library of Congress (LC) as a Cataloging and Policy Specialist. However, she spoke, not as a representative of LC, but as a woman of color and as the managing editor for WOC+Lib, an online space for Black, Indigenous, (and) People of Color (BIPOC) library workers to share their transformative work, commentary, critiques, personal experiences, and original research.

Phillips began her talk by calling attention to the NASIG webpage “Beyond the Land Acknowledgement.” She praised NASIG for inviting library workers to action and offered involvement through donation. Donations to organizations that build and empower Indigenous communities in North America is a way for NASIG members to embody their values and not just offer land acknowledgements that list names of stolen lands that, in many cases, are currently desecrated by highways, pipelines, and developers.

The scope of Phillips’s talk included personal reflections, an overview of diversity programs, their value and the continued need for their improvement. Interestingly, Phillips also emphasized equity in library work, where librarians working in technical services are typically paid less than their public facing colleagues. She discussed the work of WOC+Lib and concluded with an overview of diversity equity and inclusion (DEI) projects and initiatives that have been organized by the cataloging community.

DEI in the profession

Phillips noted her own alienation in a profession that is predominately white, including experiencing microaggressions like being asked “what are you,” and “where are you from,” which is a question that is often followed with “where are you *really* from.” Phillips also indicated that other marginalized identities also encounter similar microaggressions and sense of alienation.

In 2003 library residency programs were rare but were around to promote librarians of color. Now there are thirty-two residency programs in the United States.¹ These programs were designed for new librarians to develop their expertise. Residency programs have helped to change the face of librarianship. Phillips also compared the American Library Association (ALA)'s 2014 and 2017 statistical breakdown of its members by race or family origin. Statistics show that there only 14 percent of ALA members who identify as BIPOC.²

Promoting DEI-Professional Organizations

Phillips offered her own ideas about promoting diversity in the profession: BIPOC library workers should continue creating communities for themselves. She asked, what can we [librarians in the profession] do about this? She answered her question, we can create communities for ourselves. She listed the ways in which this has already taken place, she listed the earliest professional associations that were created by and for underrepresented groups:

- 1973 Chinese American Libraries Association
- 1975 Black Caucus American Library Association (BCALA)
- 1979 American Indian Library Association
- 1992 Asian Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA)
- 2015 Joint Conference of Librarians of Color (JCLC)
- 2016 We Here
- 2019 WOC+Lib

She paused at WOC+Lib, an integrating resource and place for people of color, and specifically women of color to spread research and exchange ideas. Phillips focused on one contributor: Tiffany Grant wrote about experience with beginning of COVID-19 and losing her brother.³ If you would like to contribute, talk to Amy Phillips. Secondly, it is important to immerse yourself in the lives of BIPOC workers. The article content has a recurrent format of personal interviews of librarians of color.

Phillips described other associations and interest groups: Rainbow Round Table (RRT) of the ALA, this group supports both LGBTQIA+ library professionals and users; founded in 1970. In 2021, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) established a disability network to support library and information workers with disabilities. She thought there was no association for librarians with disabilities even though librarians try to serve patrons with disabilities because finding a community of professionals does risk losing privacy and is potentially stigmatizing.

Technical Services and DEI

We [technical services librarians] live behind closed doors. We are overlooked in favor of public facing colleagues and this causes disparities in salaries. Reference librarian salaries in United States are \$71,000 on average based on data from salary.com. Phillips juxtaposed annual salary with rent in places where jobs were listed. The average salary made by special materials/continuing resources and cataloging librarians is \$67,000, which is \$4,000 less than the national average. It is evident that salaries for technical services librarians are lower than reference or public facing librarians. An electronic resources librarian makes \$10,000 less than a reference librarian.

Technical services librarians make significant contributions to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, especially for our users. Technical services serve our diverse users in very important ways. Technical services librarians started the Homosaurus linked data vocabulary to enhance vocabularies to describe LGBTQIA+ terms within libraries, museums, and archives. Librarians at the University of California, Los Angeles are reevaluating indigenous subject headings from the Hispanic American Periodicals Index (HAPI). There is also the Queer Metadata Collective that has created best metadata practices for cataloging practitioners. There is a lot of momentum in inclusive cataloging at the moment.

Phillips also drew attention to the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) and the array of reparative cataloging work being done

by its task groups. The Library of Congress PCC Task Group on Gender has written best practices for Library of Congress Classification (LCC) metadata on machine-readable cataloging (MARC) field 375 authority record fields. This ad hoc task group formed to evaluate this field. Subject Authority Cooperative Program (SACO) Funnels can focus DEI efforts. For example, the Latin American Indigenous Peoples of the Americas funnel has created best practices to improve indigenous headings for indigenous nations and to be more accurate. The Gender and Sexuality Funnel have worked to change “gays” to “gay people” in Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). The Medical Funnel continues to work on updating LCSH and Medical Subject Headings (MESH) by improving accuracy, creating less offensive terms, and describing disabilities and illnesses in a correct way.

Collectively, these projects show a momentum in inclusive cataloging, which, in turn, promotes DEI in collections and services for users. The state of DEI in libraries is evolving and, most importantly, improving thanks to the efforts of technical services library workers, including serials and cataloging librarians.

Supporting Young Men of Color: the MSI Fullerton Men of Color Collection

Introduction

In the last twenty years, male success initiatives have been created to tackle the difficult statistic that young men of color underperform than any other demographic. In 2013, a pilot was started for African American men at California State University, Fullerton to address this statistic. In 2014, they expanded the program to support all men of color and men of trans experience. In 2016, the Male Success Initiative (MSI) department was founded at Cal State Fullerton (CSUF). The purpose of MSI is to narrow the achievement gap for all students who identify as men of color with the intention of increasing student persistence.

This is a middle career story for Davis; the director of MSI stopped him and asked if the library could help the MSI program build a library in the MSI center. Davis is the Copyright & Policy Librarian at Pollak Library and did not have any collection development experience. He was personally and professionally motivated to work out a solution because he was an ALA Spectrum Initiative Scholar. As the project began moving forward, his colleague, Rosemary Farr, a staff member in Interlibrary Loan (ILL), approached him with a desire to be involved with any DEI initiatives he might be working on. She joined him in his initial meetings with the MSI Director.

The Four Pillars of MSI guided the collection development. They are:

- Academic coaching/mentoring
- Leadership/agency
- Career trajectory
- Gender/Masculinity

The MSI Center

Collection development is not something Davis had experience with, but he dove right in to make sure this project succeeded. The team developed and distributed a community survey to various campus departments that asked for book recommendations to include in the collection. Brotherhood is what members call each other because it breaks down competition amongst men of color. Dr. Futoshi Nakagawa is the new assistant director of MSI at CSUF and he requires brothers submit book suggestions as part of a 100-level class. Farr got the bookstore title list and everyone worked to synthesize a master list of suggestions. Dr. Nakagawa reads each title in the list and gives final approval because he is engaged in the collection development. Farr learned how to use GOBI, an EBSCO product that is a leading provider of books to libraries, and has since submitted requests for the acquisitions department to purchase 500 titles.

The center hired an interior designer. The centerpiece of the center is a seventy-two inch credenza and a big screen television. Bookshelves and bookcases were purchased with grant funds. Furniture is used to foster community amongst brothers to invoke a feeling of home when brothers arrive at the center. If brothers feel like they are home, they will have greater feelings of belonging.

Funding

For this project to be successful, it needed to find funding. In 2019, Davis received approval from the library dean to apply for a grant. CSUF's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (OSRP) offers faculty intramural grants to help them establish their research. As Principal Investigator (PI), Davis, the MSI Director (co-PI), and Farr (support staff) applied and were awarded a \$15,000 grant! As PI, Davis made sure to provide stipends to his co-PI and support staff.

The library promised to help with this grant and secured partnerships from the acquisitions, cataloging, and circulation departments for this project. The acquisitions part of the project required a lot of special funds and ordering, which is not Davis's expertise. Personnel in the cataloging and metadata department created a local collection with a field attributing the title to the MSI collection. The bookplate is hyperlinked, so that when clicked, users will be redirected to the MSI site. This collection has over 60 percent unique titles that are not found at Pollak Library.

Library Circulation assisted by creating the borrowing permissions for patrons of the collection. This collection circulates books to MSI brothers but not to general campus. Library Circulation also set up a Meescan station—a self-service check out station—so that brothers can check out books on their own.

Davis drafted the Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) which establishes cross divisional partnerships at CSUF between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. The MOU outlines role and responsibilities, ensures maintenance of the collection, and designates routine times to perform audits for collection evaluation.

Takeaways

This collection was an excellent opportunity for colleagues in Pollak Library's Collections and Scholarly Communications department (technical services) to contribute to DEI. The collection is publicized in media and campus administration sees it. Farr was awarded staff member of the year at Pollak Library for her work on this project. Davis diligently works to acknowledge all the help he has received along the way to establish the MSI Collection. MSI, including Davis, are fighting for funding to continue to do the work of supporting men of color. The MSI collection is going to be used for campus-wide visibility at the MSI Center ribbon cutting ceremony. This is part of the strategy to secure funding for MSI scholarships. Strategic engagement and allyship are crucial, and create opportunities for other people to be allies.

Davis learned some vital lessons. MSI practice does not focus on deficit narratives, but emphasizes social capital inherent in the young men's lives and community. This is how you build persistence and tackle toxic masculinity. The MSI center creates a home away from home for brothers. The center is a place these young men can go to. This collection is being used and it shows the social impact of this collect development work on these students.

Davis showed a picture of him on his way to the Young Men of Color Conference with MSI brothers. He published a book chapter on this topic and received a sabbatical to work on this research. As faculty within C&SC, there are few opportunities to publicize the work of technical services because it happens behind the scenes. The visibility and scholarship that came out of this collection shows opportunities for espousing DEI values in technical services. As a personal ambition, Davis hopes to attract young men of color into librarianship.

Contributor Notes

Notes

- 1 "Library Residency Programs," Association for College and Research Libraries, Residency Interest Group, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://acrl.ala.org/residency/programs/>.
- 2 Kathy Rosa and Kelsey Henke, "2017 ALA Demographic Study," American Library Association Office of Research and Statistics, accessed April 9, 2024, <http://hdl.handle.net/11213/19804>.
- 3 Tiffany Grant, "Black Lives and COVID-19: Dying to Breathe," *WOC+Lib* (May 4, 2022), accessed April 17, 2024, <https://www.wocandlib.org/features/2022/5/3/black-lives-and-covid-19?rq=COVID>.