The Virtuous Circle Revisited: Injecting Diversity, Inclusion, Rights, Justice, and Equity into LIS from Education to Advocacy*

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ABSTRACT

The field of library and information science (LIS) has long struggled with issues of diversity and inclusion in the composition of information professionals, in educational content, and in connecting with many communities. Yet the field has also produced many innovative approaches to meeting unique community needs and incorporating issues of justice, rights, and equity into educational activities. Although these approaches rarely connect education and advocacy, connecting these two can both facilitate better sharing of best practices in these areas and enable the educational and professional efforts of the field to better complement one another. Building on the “virtuous circle” concept that a truly effective focus on inclusion in the field will require involvement of both educators and professionals, this article offers a series of cases from LIS education programs and information institutions focusing on intersecting issues of diversity, inclusion, rights, justice, and equity.

The Symposium on Diversity and Library and Information Science Education exists because there are long-term and widely recognized issues with diversity, inclusion, and equity in the library and information science (LIS) field that clearly need to be addressed. There are several significant gaps in representation among library professionals, students, and faculty that have persisted for generations, such as the representation of Latinos and African Americans. However, most curricula of LIS programs do not adequately address issues of diversity and inclusion, and the majority of LIS students never get the chance to take a single class related to these issues to prepare them to serve as culturally competent information professionals (Mestre 2010; Subramaniam and Jaeger 2010, 2011).

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At the root of focusing on diversity and inclusion in LIS education is the belief that injecting an understanding of these issues into the education of all future information professionals will lead to more inclusive collections, services, outreach, and practices. An increased educational focus on diversity also offers the opportunity to make the field more welcoming to those who are currently underrepresented in it by demonstrating a commitment to inclusion. Building on research about career choices and workforce diversity, Paul Jaeger and Renee Franklin (2007) have suggested that LIS curricula with a clear focus on diversity and inclusion would result in a “virtuous circle” in which inclusive education would promote inclusive practice, which, in turn, would promote a greater diversity of people drawn to join the profession.

The Virtuous Circle

Historically, the focus on addressing concerns of diversity and inclusion in the field has primarily emphasized recruiting, and such efforts have been sporadic; only a few LIS programs have altered their curricula to give greater emphasis to issues of diversity and inclusion (Jaeger et al. 2011; Jaeger, Bertot, and Subramaniam 2013). Sadly, observations made by E. J. Josey decades ago about the inattention to diversity and the limited progress with issues of diversity in the field still hold true (see, e.g., Josey 1993, 1999).

The reasons for the lack of a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion have never been clear. The profession is committed to supporting equity through information access and education—the underlying goals of the profession are inherently inclusive in intent. Perhaps it is simply much harder to actually provide service to all than it is to say you are committed to providing service to all. Yet many elements of library practice that are dedicated to improving the lives of members of communities and society at large are as old as the modern public library. The historical starting point of libraries as institutions fostering human rights and social justice can be seen as occurring during the influx of new immigrant populations to the United States during and shortly after World War I (Jaeger, Gorham, and Taylor, forthcoming). To help these immigrants, libraries quickly developed English-language courses for adults, employed children’s story time to teach English to children, began offering job-training and job-seeking classes, emphasized health information, and even created resources to help new immigrants find housing.

Such efforts—and their multitudinous modern equivalents—are acts of inclusion, even though they are not typically named as such. Although librarians do not generally discuss themselves and their work in terms of the social and societal implications, such efforts are a large part of what they do. If LIS education better prepared future professionals in terms of diversity and inclusion, then they would be ready not only to meet community needs as culturally competent practitioners but also to better explain their activities in terms of diversity and inclusion.
To present the range of educational and professional initiatives in the field, this article offers a series of examples and lessons for both areas. The first part of the article details three educational initiatives—a course on social justice, a course on information ethics, and a course on human rights. The second part of the article focuses on a range of initiatives by three different information institutions. Each section is written by a different author, providing a firsthand perspective on an effort to which they have been central.

Identifying best practices and key themes in diversity and inclusion across these areas not only helps to provide a sense of the scope of the current activities and opportunities but may also help our field be better at articulating our roles in these areas. These six cases also demonstrate different avenues through which a virtuous circle of diversity in the field of LIS can be constructed through professional and educational efforts.

Examples and Lessons from Educational Initiatives

This section offers perspectives on three types of courses that can be created to bring issues of diversity, inclusion, rights, justice, and equity into the LIS curriculum, from the people who have designed and taught the courses.

Teaching Social Justice

In their book *Critical Theory for Library and Information Science*, LIS educators Gloria Leckie, Lisa Given, and John Buschman (2010) advocate for the adoption and utilization of critical theory in our classrooms and research. LIS tends to be a very practical field, examining information critically, but only as it pertains to our profession, our organizations, and the technical mechanisms by which we retrieve and use information. However, information and its use are not black-and-white entities; rather, they are colored by the world around us. Critical theory enables us to take an inward look at LIS and align our goals and outcomes with the societal influences that inevitably touch our profession. Critical theory enables us to get out of our own heads: “Critical theorists give us an array of perspectives or approaches to the very concerns that we have in LIS and help us to think about/examine those issues in new ways. . . . Critical-theoretical perspectives help us to understand how large-scale changes in society, such as globalization and the permutations of capitalist production, affect what might seem to be routine and local practices, such as collections development or the purchase of catalog records, thus bringing fresh insights on who we are and what we do, collectively and individually” (Leckie, Given, and Buschman 2010, xiii). With the notion of critical theory and Jaeger and Franklin’s (2007) virtuous circle model firmly in mind, it is a pedagogical goal to try to produce the type of LIS professionals we would like to see out in the world and in the field. As ever-evolving culturally competent and socially just educators—and, some of us, former practitioners—we work to inspire and cultivate these traits in LIS graduate students so that, in turn, they will be able to effectively share their critically astute knowledge with
the diverse communities that they will serve after graduation (Cooke 2013). Contribution to the virtuous circle and empathetic skill development are rooted in the LIS curriculum.

For example, as a faculty member at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois, Nicole A. Cooke consciously tries to infuse issues of diversity and social justice into all the classes that she teaches, even if only through a consistent use of specific examples and readings. In a more concerted attempt to influence the curriculum, she teaches explicit courses titled Information Services to Diverse Users and Social Justice in the Information Professions (Cooke 2014). Teaching these courses is of personal interest and importance and, she hopes, may serve as an example to other faculty members interested in incorporating this content into their classrooms. Diverse Users was created from scratch and was designed as a practical studio course that introduces students to a variety of diverse user groups and facilitates the development of applicable knowledge and skills. A variety of guest speakers—current LIS practitioners serving diverse populations—gives learners an opportunity to hear firsthand accounts of the work, initiative, innovation, and constant care required to efficiently and compassionately serve and work with diverse (and typically underserved) populations.

Social Justice in the Information Professions was a previously dormant course that was revised to facilitate deep reflection and assist in the development of empathy and cultural competence. It is a course that has the potential to shift students’ existing paradigms as they are challenged to learn about themselves and others and to take action to change the status quo. Students are steeped in the ideas that social justice is about eradicating systematic marginalization and privilege and that “social justice is about giving voice to communities who have been forced into silence; social justice is about equity and equal access” (Humboldt State University 2015). The class also discusses the notion that equality is not always justice, suggesting that just providing access and information to customers or patrons is not enough. How do LIS professionals facilitate experiences with information and help ensure that members of the communities being served can access, decipher, evaluate, and effectually use the provided information and resources to benefit their lives? Patrons should leave empowered and better able to participate in the global society.

Librarian, author, and social justice advocate Audre Lorde once said, “It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences” (1984, 27). One of the goals of the social justice course is to enable students to develop empathy through multiple perspectives. Ideally, students will also learn to develop a better sense of fairness and equality of treatment, recognize and respect the differences around them, and be able to work toward empowering and giving voice and agency to their communities (Wade 2001; Pateman and Vincent 2010).

Empathy—and, subsequently, cultural competence—is what empowers aspiring librarians to understand their diverse communities and their needs. In order to inspire empathy
and cultural competence, hard and sometimes uncomfortable conversations are necessary. For this reason, framing the course expectations and learning outcomes is essential; students are charged with being comfortable with being uncomfortable and participating in a learning environment and culture of risk taking and respect. This setup and framing require continuous reinforcement, especially for online courses that lack face-to-face contact and interpersonal interaction. This type of learning environment also requires risk taking on the part of the instructor, who needs to model the vulnerability and open-mindedness required of the learners. To complement this cocreated learning environment, the course also encourages student-centered design, which allows learners to select an area of interest (from an instructor-provided list of topics explicitly related to social justice) on which they would like to focus for the duration of the semester. Students study topics such as ableism, adulthood, ageism, classism, racism, rankism, religious oppression, sexism/heterosexism/homophobia, socioeconomic status, and unexamined privilege and contemplate how they would incorporate these topics into their LIS practice.

The course Social Justice was taught online (synchronously), and as part of the course requirements, these distance students were required to come to campus for an intensive day. During that daylong session, students met and interacted with their classmates, delivered oral presentations on the aforementioned topics, and engaged in a workshop put on by the Program on Intergroup Relations through the Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations at the University of Illinois. The workshop was essentially a crash course on the concept of privilege—what it is and how it can influence one’s outlook and affect the provision of services to diverse communities. The workshop was concentrated, informative, and powerful. At the conclusion of the session, Cooke asked her students how they felt, and one replied that the workshop had been enlightening; she felt overwhelmed and exhausted, but it was appropriate for her to feel that way because she was “comfortable with being uncomfortable.” Her classmates agreed. From Cooke’s point of view, this internalization and the demonstration of open-mindedness and open-heartedness by the students indicated the development of empathy and cultural competence. The spring 2014 offering of Social Justice was a success and is a positive indicator that courses such as Diverse Users and Social Justice are necessary and worthwhile additions to the LIS curriculum. To return to the virtuous circle model (Jaeger and Franklin 2007), incorporating explicit courses in diversity and social justice into LIS education is a definitive way to prepare students to better serve diverse populations. Becoming oriented toward social justice empowers new LIS professionals to work deeply and meaningfully with their communities.

Values and Ethics into Action
Another way to begin talking about diversity and inclusion in the classroom is to engage LIS students in naming, exploring, and questioning their own values and those encouraged within
professional settings. Values are abstract interests and goals that become the basis for ethical action (Rokeach 1973; Schwartz 1994). Ethics is the consideration of what actions might support those values. Values might be professional—those upheld by a professional society or a workplace—or personal. Inclusion is a value, as are justice and equity. Actions that discourage oppression and encourage diversity might be considered ethical. Getting students talking about values and ethics can serve as a bridge to larger discussions about why we, as a profession, care about inclusion and diversity.

One place to start exploring values in the classroom is in professional codes of ethics. The American Library Association, the Society of American Archivists, and other professional organizations maintain codes of ethics that clearly state both values and actions to support those values (American Library Association 2006; Society of American Archivists 2006). Asking students to compare and contrast the values of our field with their personal values can provide an opening for conversations about the similarities and conflicts among those values and how to settle values conflicts in the workplace.

Values are the tenet not only of workplaces but of the mediated world in which we live and work. Not only can people and professions have values—technologies can have values (Winner 1980; Friedman 1997; Nissenbaum 2001; Johnson 2007). Technologies can support privacy, intellectual freedom, openness, or control and ownership. Exploring values in the technologies we use can provoke stimulating discussions about accessibility, autonomy, and discretion and a host of other values built into—or absent from—information and communications technologies. For instance, the familiar social media site Facebook takes on layers of complexity when students are asked to evaluate the values supported in both the platform’s features and its policies. Students can then reflect on how those values support different stakeholders, such as teens, parents, employers, or FBI agents. Discussions about values in Facebook’s design tie in nicely with readings that explore the sometimes exclusive nature of social networking sites (Ahn 2012).

Values in the workplace and in technologies are two jumping-off points for classroom discussions about values and ethics. A classroom discussion might begin with reading the ALA Code of Ethics. The facilitator can then pose a number of challenging workplace scenarios (e.g., a child asks you not to tell his mother that he is checking out books with explicit material) and ask students to apply traditional LIS values to those scenarios. The facilitator might next pose an example involving the use of an information technology (your library wants to use Facebook to connect with patrons) and ask students to apply the same values to that technology.

As the class progresses, students can apply increasingly complex ethical frameworks in similar discussions. Instead of invoking traditional LIS values, later discussions might ask students to apply utilitarian (Greene 2004), deontological (Moor 1999), virtue ethics (Benkler and Nissenbaum 2006), feminist (Allen 2003), and non-Western (Capurro 2008) ethical perspectives.
Finding values levers in professional work can be another avenue for opening up discussions about values and ethics. Values levers are work practices that trigger underlying social norms to encourage conversations about values (Shilton 2013). Daily activities of information professionals can serve as values levers, raising values issues for contemplation and debate. These activities include hiring (How do I evaluate potential colleagues?), collection development (How do I create a diverse and accessible collection?), negotiating book challenges (Should I remove controversial material?), and strategic planning (What should our institution prioritize in coming years?). These are value-laden everyday activities that can encourage professionals to contemplate their values and those of their workplace.

One assignment that works particularly well for evoking values discussions is asking students to write an op-ed article on an information policy issue. Op-eds are purposefully polemical, and students must identify and argue for their values in order to write a convincing and compelling editorial. In the information policy course in the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland, we prompt students with a series of provocative quotations about information access, freedom, e-government, and intellectual property. Op-eds must argue for or against a quotation, with clear reasoning about why.

Course assignments can also focus on values tensions—places where stakeholders might legitimately hold conflicting values—in workplaces. An assignment in UMD’s Information Ethics course asks students to select a contemporary dilemma relevant to their professional background, experiences, and interests. They must then use this dilemma to build a case study involving multiple stakeholder perspectives. Examples chosen by students have included overstepping professional boundaries during reference interviews, installing Internet filters in a public library, and balancing equitable e-book access with digital rights management and copyright law.

There are also several classroom activities that values scholars have made available that work well when adapted to LIS classrooms. Grow-a-Game cards (http://www.tiltfactor.org/growagame) were designed by the Values at Play research group to get students thinking about values by invoking the familiar context of playing games (Belman et al. 2011). Students are assigned a familiar game (Scrabble, Life, Pac-Man) and asked to change the game rules or play to support a value drawn from a deck of cards. The activity fosters thinking about how values shape action.

Envisioning Cards (http://www-envisioningcards.com) is a structured brainstorming technique that engages students in the task of simultaneously implementing and critiquing information technologies (Friedman and Hendry 2012). The cards ask students to think about diverse aspects of a new technology (perhaps a new asset management system or online reference service) by prompting them to brainstorm about the stakeholders involved, values, pervasiveness, and long-term impacts. The cards and their images prompt group brainstorming around each of these criteria.
A major challenge when talking about ethics and values is to ask: Whose values? Classroom discussions of professional values should always include this question as a way of understanding whose viewpoints are included and whose might be excluded. Another challenge is incorporating values discussions into online courses and distance learning. It can be difficult to guide sensitive discussions on online discussion boards when students can avoid gentle challenges and requests to unpack their statements. Pushing back and challenging bias can be harder online than in a classroom setting. As platforms and pedagogy for distance education improve, LIS educators can lead the way in incorporating methods for teaching and facilitating controversial or difficult material.

Teaching students to talk about and be cognizant of values and ethics is an important goal in and of itself and is at the heart of courses in information ethics. But talking about values and ethics can also be a bridge to important conversations about diversity and inclusion, as illustrated in the following sections.

Information as a Human Right

The concept of human rights is the belief that all individuals deserve certain equal rights as members of society. The College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland offers a course titled Information and Human Rights, focusing on the nature of information within human rights, the rights dependent on information, and the ways in which information professionals can support the implementation of these rights and advocate for policies that better support and extend these rights for their communities. As part of its suite of courses related to the roles of information professionals in embracing diversity and promoting inclusion, these courses collectively prepare future information professionals who will be ready to work in libraries that are quickly becoming “actively engaged, information-enabled community center[s]” (Jaeger et al., forthcoming).

Information professions are guided by many principles that are also embodied in the concept of human rights. As information and related technologies have become increasingly essential to education, employment, social interaction, and civic participation, greater focus has been placed on the idea that information is a necessary human right. Libraries help community members become digitally literate and included, have free access to the Internet, apply for jobs and social services, continue their education, engage civically, and pursue so many other activities that are central to human rights that librarianship can—and should—be seen as a human rights profession (Jaeger et al., forthcoming).

To see how information is such a significant and pressing issue in human rights, an examination of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is instructive. Information technologies were still fairly new when the United Nations issued the UDHR in 1948. Since its passage, however, the idea of human rights has been evolving and adapting to social, cultural, and technological change. Although the computer, the Internet, and mobile
devices were developed long after the UDHR was originally drafted, many of the principles articulated in the UDHR relate directly to information, communication, and technology; many more rely on information, communication, and technology for support. Most items directly stated as rights are now either entirely dependent on or enabled by information access and digital literacy, including such major activities as education, employment, and civic participation. As examples, freedom of speech, press, assembly, and expression are far more practicable when involving a literate populace with access to information technologies. The human rights to education and development are possible without access to and use of information technologies, but they are much more effectively achieved with the technologies.

Article 19 of the UDHR most explicitly deals with issues of information, enshrining the right to “freedom of opinion and expression” and the right to “seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media,” as well as freedom from “interference” in seeking and exchanging information and ideas. Based on this article and many other parts of the UDHR, the ability to have access to and use the Internet for purposes of education and expression has been identified as a human right in many quarters. Not long after use of the World Wide Web became commonplace, scholars of law, information, technology, and education began making arguments in favor of universal Internet access as a necessary part of human rights (e.g., Brophy and Halpin 1999; Lievrouw and Farb 2003; Mart 2003; McIver, Birdsall, and Rasmussen 2003; Willingham 2008). As Internet-enabled technologies have become more mobile and omnipresent—and vital to education, employment, civic engagement, communication, and entertainment—these arguments have matured into assertions that the abilities to successfully access and to successfully use the Internet are both human rights (e.g., Sturges and Gastinger 2010; Lyons 2011; Jaeger 2013; Koepfler, Mascaro, and Jaeger 2014; Thompson et al. 2014).

Similarly central to human rights are educational and cultural heritage institutions—including public libraries, public schools, academic libraries, archives, and museums—that ensure human rights related to the Internet in an age dependent on information and technology (e.g., Duffy 2001; Hoffman 2001; Phenix and McCook 2005; McCook and Phenix 2006; Suarez 2007; Stinnett 2009; Thompson et al. 2014; Jaeger et al., forthcoming). The American Library Association (ALA), the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and other information professional and governmental organizations have adopted Article 19 and the principles of information access as a human right in their bylaws and policies. These statements demonstrate the centrality of Internet access, digital literacy, and digital inclusion—along with the professionals who provide such access and education—to human rights.

In order to prepare students for these critical roles, the Information and Human Rights course examines the information professions as part of the overall idea of human rights, including:
The Information and Human Rights course draws students who have entered LIS degree programs hoping to devote their careers to providing better community services and to becoming agents of change in their communities. Many students who have taken the course immediately turn their class projects into new programs at the libraries where they work, new ways of teaching specific skills or literacies, or even new services for their communities on their own time. Projects from the class that have become a reality in short order range from lessons for innovative approaches to teaching computer skills in multilingual environments, to story-time sessions for young children on the autism spectrum, to making spaces for children with disabilities, to a community archive for Korean American immigrants, among many others. It is impossible to teach this class and mentor these students without being deeply impressed by the commitment of future LIS professionals to using the knowledge and skills they have acquired to help others overcome barriers and to build stronger communities.

Examples and Lessons from Professional Practice
This section offers three different ways in which information practice can emphasize diversity, inclusion, rights, justice, and equity. The first explores these issues from a library administration perspective, the second from a public service perspective, and the third from an academic library perspective.
Equity as Organizing Principle

It seems as if the browning of America, along with the growing homeless population, the surging poverty rates, and all of the social “isms” that exist, make it challenging for public libraries to equitably uphold the Library Bill of Rights and the Code of Ethics as established by the American Library Association. Librarians’ mental models of what customers need often prevent us from providing fair and equitable service.

Libraries have a history of analyzing data to determine who and how many they serve. Libraries have become more efficient at determining the gaps in services that exist in our communities. We have done an even better job at filling some of those gaps by developing programs and services on the front lines. Unique services fill a need but often are not sustainable. Due to changes in staffing, changing policies, and lack of support, encouragement, funding, and resources, libraries have difficulties maintaining these valuable services.

In order to provide effective service, librarians must learn the information-seeking behaviors and needs of the diverse populations they serve. Most library systems begin by studying and communicating with their users. In order to find out what people want, library staff must ask them and must get to know them and their culture. Such inquiries allow us to offer service in a manner that will be received and accepted by those we serve. But is this enough?

Such conversations should not be our first step. The library director and the administrative team must be made up of people who are passionate about delivering library services that will truly make a difference in the lives of those in need. Administrative team members must be willing to accept that their perception of what the user population wants and needs may be very different from those people’s actual wants and needs. Administrators must be willing to examine and adjust their policies and services as needed and where necessary. Serving diverse populations must become ingrained in the organization and culture. This means being willing to (a) make changes that do not inhibit services to a diverse population, (b) examine the vision and mission statements to ensure that they promote inclusiveness, and (c) advocate for the target population to obtain funding for the services needed to provide for the underserved. To accomplish these goals, libraries must fight for more funding and for inclusive policies that will assist the population in need. Human resources (HR) departments must be committed to hiring a diverse staff so that those working in the libraries reflect the communities that they serve. HR must be committed to keeping diversity training before the staff and, along with library administrators, should establish a library code of conduct that genuinely addresses diversity and emphasizes respect for all. There must be consequences for not adhering to the code of conduct. Library policies must be developed that show the library’s commitment to serving diverse populations, and diversity must be ingrained in all administrative services.

Libraries must also be nimble organizations in order to remain relevant to the communities that they serve. Library directors and administrative teams must be passionate about making a difference in the community and willingly carry out the following procedures:
• Use politics to get funding for the services constituents want and need.
• Develop strong vision and mission statements that address diversity.
• Hire and constantly train a diverse staff.
• Keep diversity as part of all aspects of service.
• Create a code of conduct addressing diversity that sets forth clear expectations.
• Establish consequences when staff does not meet the expectations set forth in the code of conduct.
• Make sure diversity is included in all policies, from materials selection policies to public bulletin board postings.
• Encourage staff to develop programs that meet the needs of the community.

In order to bridge gaps and transform communities, acceptance, tolerance, and serving with passion must be part of the library culture. Making a difference in the community starts at the top.

“Dating Your Town”: Inclusive Public Library Services
One of the main goals for the Fairfield Free Public Library is to have successful educational and cultural programs that target all residents of the small community. The only way to get to know the community’s personality and needs is to “date” it. “Date your town” is a key idea Cecilia Feltis has used to get to know the community of Fairfield. There is no way to get all types of residents to the library if they do not know of the library and what it has to offer. Therefore, conducting some research, as one would for a potential date, helps librarians decide what type of programs to have. Some Internet search options to query are the history of the town, current leaders, cultural makeup, demographics, and size of the population. Once one has those details, it is important to get out of the library and go to where the patrons are. Take flyers to hair salons, go to local restaurants and introduce yourself, go to the municipal office and make sure they know that the library is there as a partner to help the community.

Fairfield, as an example, is a small town of about 7,500 inhabitants. It is culturally an Italian American town with 15% of the constituency speaking Italian at home and 55% identifying as being of Italian origin. The library had no Italian programs, books, or materials until Feltis researched Italian booksellers in the area and personally went to them to set up accounts and build a collection by purchasing books, DVDs, and music. She showcased this new collection in a visible area of the library and made flyers in Italian listing the titles of the new Italian materials, which she took to Italian-owned businesses. To expand programs, she partnered with a high school Italian teacher who began teaching basic classes in Italian for children and adults. All of the classes were quickly booked, and registration required a waiting list. Other successful programs included lectures on the Italian American immigration
experience, lectures on Italian opera, genealogy workshops, and a concert series featuring Italian folk music. The results have been outstanding. The Fairfield Free Public Library is the only local library to have an Italian-language book collection, so many of its books circulate through interlibrary loans; overall program attendance has doubled, and many more books have been circulating.

Most people have the ability to reach the library. However, there are many people who would benefit from the library but cannot make it there on their own—for example, preschool children, special needs children, and adults in senior centers. The Fairfield Free Public Library has networked with all the day care centers in town to set up regular visits from the children’s librarian so the children know to expect her as part of their routine. The children’s librarian packs a bag with books and craft kits, the same she uses at the library, and goes to the day care centers to conduct story-time visits with the children. In addition, she has organized with local special needs schools to have the children come to the library during the day as a field trip. The children enjoy a story time with songs and a craft and then are given time to explore the books on their own, taking home what they like. Finally, the library has partnered with a senior bus service in town. The bus goes to each interested senior’s home to pick up those who cannot drive to the library. The library has created daytime concerts, nutrition lectures, and even chair yoga programs for the seniors to enjoy each other’s company and learn something new. The library also sends publicity materials to several senior centers in Fairfield that bring seniors to events with their own buses. Table 1 shows the Fairfield programs that have worked well for each age group in this community.

Marketing is vital to the success of the library and its programs. Patrons will never know about a program unless the news gets to them in a format they use, which means all types of marketing must be used to reach all patrons. The Fairfield Free Public Library uses online social media sites, prints flyers and newsletters, and has a street sign (a sandwich board) that is changed weekly to show new programs. In addition, each member of the library staff has a “paper route” for taking program flyers to local businesses.

This combined effort of “dating the town,” bringing the library to the patrons, and marketing in various formats has brought success to the library in terms of attendance (which has doubled over 2 years) and circulation of books. Success has been tracked by keeping a monthly statistics chart and comparing it with the attendance of previous years. The chart measures the number of programs per age group and the number of people attending programs. Statistics for circulation are also kept but are not compared in the graph.

Embedding Diversity in the Academic Library

Academic libraries play a central role in supporting diversity on university campuses. Libraries are traditionally associated with students’ academic success, an area that is inexorably tied to race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. Although retention and graduation rates are
Table 1. Successful Inclusive Programs, Services, and Outreach

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<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Program</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Toddler book and craft to local day cares</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Puppet show on topics such as bullying and friendship</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent and child craft where they make things together as a team</td>
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<td>Teens</td>
<td>Monthly home school improve class</td>
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<td>Special needs story time and library tutorial</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Volunteer opportunities: making fleece blankets for a children’s hospital, bake sale for the Wounded Warrior Project, book sale for the Alzheimer’s Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>Cultural programs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Monthly new release movie</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Language classes</td>
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<td>Book clubs</td>
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<td>Painting classes</td>
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<td>Creative-writing workshops</td>
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<td>Seniors</td>
<td>Morning programs</td>
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<td>Book club for seniors</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daytime concerts</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Computer literacy classes: computer basics, Skype, e-mail, Internet searching</td>
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not tied to any one particular thing, with financial, cultural, social, familial, and academic factors all playing a part, Ethelene Whitmire (2003) finds that students of color who reported higher academic library use also had a higher rate of student retention and academic achievement. Emily Love (2007) recognizes that although diversity initiatives “may not necessarily produce improved retention rates of minority students . . . the combination of the disadvantages and barriers [these students] face should encourage more libraries to implement multicultural programming” (14).

Love (2009) comments that “too few libraries promote their services to minority students” (5), the very students who could most benefit from the services offered by the library and its librarians. K. E. Downing (2000) highlights several barriers that racial/ethnic minority students might face in attempting to make effective use of academic libraries:

- They are more likely to come from K–12 schools where libraries were underfunded and services limited.
- They do not see themselves reflected in library personnel, which may make them less likely to approach service or reference desks.
- Ever-changing subject headings relating to topics of potential interest make the information harder to find.

Academic libraries play a central role in overcoming the “digital divide,” the gap between technology haves and have-nots. Despite the ever-increasing methods of access—for example,
Internet access on smartphones versus computers (Jaeger et al. 2012; Yelton 2012)—racial/ethnic minorities are more likely to be digital have-nots. Furthermore, those with disabilities are hampered when access to adaptive technology is limited, thus restricting effective use of many resources. An academic library must create a welcoming environment and effective programs to lessen this divide, especially in a climate in which the number of nonwhite and disabled students is increasing each year (Phan, Hardesty, and Hug 2014).

Scott Walter and Michele Eodice (2005) stress the importance of “creating a ‘seamless learning environment’ on campus that allows students to benefit from complementary educational programs delivered through the curriculum and co-curriculum” (221). This holistic approach to student development necessarily has to include the library, “the ‘bedrock’ of higher education, where students can get as close to the ‘truth’ as possible” (Maloney 2012, 283). The truth found in a library is nonpartisan and cuts across all disciplines; it is the “place where people come together on levels and in ways that they might not in the residence hall, classroom, or off-campus location” (Freeman 2005, 6).

M. M. Maloney (2012) states that “well-curated displays can transform ‘passive’ library collections into communal spaces of discovery, cultivation, and contemplation” (282). This is part of the ever-changing nature of the academic library: “Contrary to the predictions of diminishing use and eventual obsolescence of libraries, usage has expanded dramatically—sometimes doubling or even tripling” (Freeman 2005, 2). G. T. Freeman (2005) explains why this might be: “The library is the only centralized location where new and emerging information technologies can be combined with traditional knowledge resources in a user-focused, service-rich environment that supports today’s social and educational patterns of learning, teaching, and research” (3).

It is essential that an academic library be a champion of diversity, aware of cultural sensitivities, and supportive of difference. “Traditional faculty-based library instruction reaches students only in their academic role, thereby overlooking the multiplicity of identities students may assume” (Love and Edwards 2009, 21). Libraries must develop initiatives that go beyond this traditional instruction if they are to become that champion. The Diversity Book Display Project can help libraries start down that path.

In her 2012 case study, Maloney examines how the University of the Pacific’s Diversity Book Display Initiative was implemented and highlights some of the outcomes. It was from this examination that the Diversity Book Display Project (DBDP) at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMD), was developed.

Over the course of the 2013–14 academic year, an MLS graduate student created in the central UMD library a physical book display correlated with each heritage month (e.g., Black History Month) and coordinated by the office of Multicultural Involvement and Community Advocacy (MICA), a department within the Adele H. Stamp Student Union. A virtual display was created using the WorldCat’s list feature, thus allowing those unable to physically visit
a library to still view the display. All books and DVDs selected were culturally, socially, and/or historically relevant to the communities celebrated.

As a direct response to Downing (2000), a primary goal of the DBDP is to offer a way in which members of the university’s diverse communities can see themselves reflected at the library. In addition, all library users can benefit from an increased awareness of issues facing minority communities as well as greater familiarity with scholarly, literary, and film works by members of those communities. A by-product of this project is an increased awareness of heritage month events.

MICA “advance[s] a purposeful campus climate that capitalizes on the educational benefits of diversity, through student-centered advising, advocacy, programs, research, and practices” (Multicultural Involvement and Community Advocacy 2014). With dedicated staff members for each “involvement area,” there is departmental expertise on the cultural, social, and historical issues facing minority communities. For these reasons, as well as its experience in diversity initiatives and cross-department collaborations, MICA was a perfect partner for the DBDP.

MICA is responsible for coordinating the following campus-wide heritage months:

- Latin@ Heritage Month (September–October)
- Native American Heritage Month (November)
- Black History Month (February)
- Mixed Madness Month (March)
- Asian and Pacific Islander American Heritage Month (April)
- LGBTQ Pride Month (April)

Materials for each month’s display were selected by the appropriate MICA staff member based upon the theme of the month, for example, “La Revolución” (Latin@ Heritage Month) and “____ Looks Like Me” (Mixed Madness Month). In the future, the selection of materials could be done in partnership with subject librarians, providing those librarians with an opportunity to promote the essential service they provide to students as well as demonstrate their commitment to diversity and inclusion.

All materials from the MICA list were entered into a public WorldCat list. A short link and quick response (QR) code for the list were created and included in the physical display. The physical display area for the DBDP was in the lobby of the main UMD library and included not only a selection of materials from the MICA list but also a large, eye-catching heritage month poster and a stack of that month’s event calendars for distribution to library users.

Those tasked with physically compiling the book display should be aware that oftentimes dust jackets and DVD cases have to be re-created (printed in color from images found online) because academic libraries frequently discard them when an item enters circulation. Given
this need to “dummy up the display,” any book can be re-created for the display, which then allows the actual book to remain on the library shelf, available for checking out.

Given the passive nature of a book display, there are limited options for direct assessment of the success of the DBDP. Assessment options include surveying those entering and leaving the library, asking attendees of heritage month events where they heard about the event, and collecting data about circulation of the materials on display as well as others specific to the heritage month. No attempt to assess the success of the display was undertaken during this pilot year of the UMD DBDP. The decision not to pursue more formal data collection was made based on informal feedback that indicated very few library users—including those who work in the library—even noticed the existence of the display due to its off-to-the-side location. This feedback led to the conclusion that the location of the display is a major factor in this project’s success. The location must be prominent, visually striking, and thought-provoking to catch the attention of an academic library user and maximize the project’s impact and success.

A DBDP offers academic libraries a unique opportunity to create diverse and inclusionary physical and digital book displays. Such displays have the potential to make the library more welcoming for all, which could positively affect retention and graduation rates. However, displays must be noticed to have any impact.

This project provides a relatively easy opportunity for academic librarians to become involved in a diversity and inclusion initiative. In addition, MLS students, particularly those interested in academic librarianship and/or social justice issues, make ideal candidates for involvement in such a project, not only for the hands-on experience of creating a book display but also, more important, to prepare them to be culturally competent information professionals.

**Conclusion: The Virtuous Circle Revisited**

The notion of the virtuous circle is that diversity and inclusion in LIS can be fostered by changes in many different areas individually or simultaneously, including the ways in which diversity and inclusion are made part of the LIS curriculum, are handled in recruiting for degree programs and professional positions, and are implemented in programs and services provided by libraries and other cultural heritage institutions. The stories of course development and innovative programs and services detailed in this article illustrate a range of ways in which diversity and inclusion can be incorporated into educational and professional activities: education, programming, services, outreach, organization, administration, and evaluation, among others.

These examples provide ideas for other institutions to use, but the examples also point to an issue for the entire field to consider. The virtuous circle idea will be most effective—and
change will occur faster—when many individuals and many institutions simultaneously commit to making diversity and inclusion more central to their activities. That commitment includes not only sharing practices but also acting on these practices. In a world in which human rights, social justice, and equity are dependent on information access, digital literacy, and digital inclusion, considerations of serving diverse populations and acting as a force of inclusion in the community must serve as drivers of the activities of information professionals. Continually re-visiting the idea of the virtuous circle and assessing the ways in which diversity and inclusion can be made a more integral part of all aspects of the information professions will be a long-term process for the information professions, but it is a necessary one.

References


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