Using ACRL Diversity Standards to Transform Libraries: How Do We Practice & Value Cultural Competencies?

Introduction

For our panel presentation at the ACRL 2017 Conference, our team of librarians set out to explore the inquiry questions in our program title: How do libraries value cultural competencies and how do we actually practice these competencies? But, first, what exactly are “cultural competencies”? In 2012, the Diversity Committee of ACRL published the first draft Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries, which exists now as the only document sanctioning the advocacy for “cultural competencies” on behalf of the Association of Research and College Libraries. Since the publication of these Diversity Standards, the extent to which academic libraries are utilizing the document to guide their diversity-related efforts has been unclear. Our team of librarians began their collaboration through the California Academic and Research Libraries (CARL) organization, and thereby wondered how academic libraries in California were aiding themselves in serving their diverse populations and fostering a “culturally competent” climate. How do you measure how well you are serving a diverse user population? We aimed to identify a particular diverse group to then inquire how libraries have attempted to meet the needs of that particular user group. Keeping in mind that the diversity of our users is multi-layered and intersectional, we decided to focus on the Latino populations which are prevalent in California campuses. Out of the national percentage, California contains 34% of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) in the United States. Simply put, HSIs are defined by having at least a 25% FTE of Hispanic undergraduate students. Having identified the campuses with an HSI designation, our team of librarians created a list of the Library Heads (Directors, Deans, Chairs) for each corresponding library affiliated with an HSI campus in California. We then developed a survey with questions aimed to discover what cultural competencies look like in these libraries with the context of an HSI responsibility. In the following section, we have summarized the general trends, challenges, and best practices from our survey responses.

Survey Methodology
The survey instrument was developed by the principal investigators. The survey was sent in December 2016 to all HSI libraries in California (152), which included private and public, two-year and four-year, institutions of higher education. The electronic survey was sent to all Library Deans, Directors or Chairs of the corresponding HSI campuses in California. We received a 24% response rate.
Summary of Survey Results

Q. 1. How long has your institution been a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI)?

General Trends:
- Received wide range of responses.
- One third of our survey participants received the HSI designation within the last five years.
- Some institutions have held the HSI designation for more than 25 years, some have held it for more than 10 years.

Challenges Observed:
- No correlation was found between the HSI designation and the institutions’ awareness about ACRL Diversity Standards and different diversity services they offered from their institutions.

Q. 2. Since receiving HSI designation has the diversity of your library staff or library faculty increased to specifically serve your HSI user population?

General Trends:
- Diversity is a high priority for all populations.
- With every new hire, many institutions look for diversity, but not necessarily Hispanic librarians.
- Findings from survey responses was that staff is more diverse than library faculty. There is more representation of Hispanic and Latinos among the library staff members.
- In terms of library faculty, majority of them are still Caucasians, even in HSIs.

Challenges Observed:
- Federal and state law forbids us from making employee selections based on ethnicity or race.
- Attempts to hire part-time or full-time staff of Hispanic background, but have not found anyone.

Q. 3. Are you aware of ACRL’s Diversity Standards?

General Trends:
- Majority of the respondents said they are aware of it.
- Some did clarify that they only have cursory knowledge about the standards, not in depth knowledge.

Challenges Observed:
- ACRL’s Diversity Standards are not as widely-known as other ACRL’s standards, for example ACRL’s Information Literacy Standards.
Q. 4. Do the ACRL Diversity Standards assist you in serving HSI user populations?

General Trends:
- Many respondents mentioned how ACRL diversity standards reinforce their belief and practice in building a diverse workforce.
- It helps with libraries’ collection development, professional development, interactions with students, and hiring.
- It was mentioned how ACRL diversity standards provide “a wide variety of ways that libraries as organizations can be sensitive to cultural differences, to unlearn misconceptions about other cultural groups, to recognize our own preconceptions and biases, and to find ways to become more attuned to the diversity of our society, especially in higher education”.

Challenges Observed:
- Many institutions follow institutional guidelines in their hiring practices and therefore do not consider the ACRL Diversity Standards to be necessary.

Q. 5. Does your institution use the ACRL Diversity Standards as a hiring practices guideline?

General Trends:
- 85% of respondents answered "no".
- For those institutions that responded "no", reasons included:
  - They follow established campus, district, or state hiring practices/procedures/guidelines and provide training to those who serve on the screening committees.
  - Many respondents were not aware of the ACRL standards.

Best Practices Observed:
- Now that the respondent is aware of the ACRL Diversity Standards they feel it’s worth discussing with HR the feasibility of incorporating them into existing hiring practices guidelines.
- Some respondents noted that they plan to use the standards in the future now that they are aware of them.

Challenges Observed:
- Institutions struggle to view the ACRL Diversity Standards as a framework that can be used to complement existing federal, state, and local laws and campus guidelines for hiring.
- **Note:** The principle investigators feel that the phrasing of this question may have been unclear or misleading since it asked about the use of the ACRL Diversity Standards as a “hiring practices guideline” rather than as a framework, which is what these are meant to be.
Q. 6. Has the HSI designation prompted unique minimum or desired qualifications listed on your job announcements for library staff or library faculty, i.e., bilingualism, cultural competency?

General Trends:
- 62% responded “no”.
- Of those institutions that responded “yes” some stated that they ask for desired or required qualifications such as:
  - Cultural competency.
  - Ability and commitment to work in a diverse campus community.
  - Ability to work effectively, respectfully, and collaboratively in a diverse, multicultural, and inclusive setting.
  - A demonstrated ability and/or interest in working in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic environment.
  - A commitment to diversity in all forms.
- Of those institutions that responded “yes”, some pointed out that:
  - Their institution’s job postings identify the institution as an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer.
  - Their institution considers qualified applicants “without regard for race, color, religion, national origin, gender, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, genetic information, medical information, marital status, or veteran status”.
- Of those institutions that responded “no”, some respondents noted that:
  - It's still too soon since receiving their HSI designation and receiving a Title V grant.
  - Diversity standards exist in the district hiring standards.
  - Campus policy and considerations existed before receiving the HSI designation.
- Of those institutions that responded “no”, some stated that, regardless of the HSI designation, their institution asks for desired or required qualifications such as:
  - Sensitivity to working with diverse populations. Some noted that this language is standard for all job announcements.
  - Every job announcement requires candidate to have experience and/or knowledge of working in a multicultural environment.
- Some respondents noted that job announcements for faculty positions require “the ability and commitment to work with a diverse campus community” and they seek out faculty and staff from all different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, as well as “LBGTQ and other designations”.
- Some respondents pointed out that their institution has a strong sense of their campus demographics and they look for candidates that can best serve their student population.
- Many respondents emphasized that their institution strives to create a community, in which diverse populations can work, teaching and learn together.

Best Practices Observed:
- Diversity standards in the district and/or campus hiring guidelines/procedures.
Language that asks candidates to “demonstrate” their commitment, experience, desire, ability, competency and/or knowledge.

Having a strong awareness of the students the institution serves and their needs.

Challenges Observed:

- A need for a shared understanding of the differences between experience (prior or demonstrated experience working with diverse populations) and concrete skills (bilingualism and cultural competency).
- A need for language that would allow hiring committees to measuring candidates’ qualifications when vague language is used, such as “Sensitivity, ability, and commitment to”, when looking for candidates with cross-cultural knowledge and skills (see ACRL standard #2).
- A need for the promotion of the ACRL Diversity Standards as a framework that can help measure the candidate's cultural-competency qualifications.
- A need to advocate for and work with library, district, campus, and/or other institutional parties responsible for HR to adopt language that encourages candidates to demonstrate how they meet the qualifications, if it isn't already happening.

Q. 7. Does your institution ask a weighted diversity question(s) during the library staff or library faculty interview process?

General Trends:

- 70% responded “Yes”.
- There is always one question related to the applicant's background and experience working with diverse populations.
- A diversity question is asked based on district and state hiring procedures.
- A question related to diversity is always asked during interviews.
- The diversity question is weighed the same as all other questions.
- The diversity question is not weighted.

Best Practices Observed:

- The diversity question is important in the interview and selection process.
- It is required for all positions regardless of department.
- A question is asked in every library staff and library faculty hiring interview.
- The diversity question receives the same weight as the other questions. But, if a person does not show experience or knowledge of diversity, they are not offered an interview.

ChallengesObserved:

- One respondent said they “are not sure what weighted means”.
- Some respondents stated that “one” diversity question is always asked. The principal investigators are curious if one question is enough to get to know a candidate’s cultural competency skills.
• How can institutions measure the efficacy of a diversity question(s) if it isn't weighted?
• The term "diverse perspective" is sometimes used interchangeably with cultural competency.

Q. 8. Does your library require library staff or library faculty applicants to submit a diversity statement with their application?

General Trends:
• Over 58% responded “No”.
• Of those respondents that answered "yes", some noted:
  o There is a confidential form for HR use. The interview panel is not shown this form.
  o Applicants are given a prompt to respond to.
  o It is a campus-wide requirement.
  o A statement is required but it isn't specific to diversity. Candidates are asked to demonstrate their work with multicultural, international, interdisciplinary, and service learning.
• A statement is not required, but candidates are expected to agree to the college’s mission based values and/or code of conduct.

Best Practices Observed:
• Candidates must demonstrate proof of experience with and/or knowledge of diversity in order to be considered for the next step in the hiring process.
• A diversity statement is a campus-wide requirement.

Challenges Observed:
• A Diversity statement and/or agreeing to a statement or code of conduct during the application process and diversity questions during the application process may serve different purposes, but it isn’t clear that the purpose is well defined for each at most of the respondents’ institutions.
• A need for clearly defined objectives for the use of diversity questions, diversity statements, and/or institutional diversity statements. Nebulous diversity requirements may send a message that the diversity questions/statements are a bureaucratic HR processes that need to be checked off in order to move on to the next phase of the interview.

Q. 9. How does your institution as a whole demonstrate that it values the cultural competencies of library staff or library faculty?

General Trends:
• A strong emphasis on diversity at the campus level for serving multiple underrepresented populations, not just Latinos. It was noted that the most effective implementation, especially those associated with incentives, were always when top
leadership makes diversity a priority and when those values are included in hiring, training, and regular periodic personnel reviews.

Best Practices Observed:

Institutions:
- Having a Chief Diversity Officer.
- Having a President and Provost who make public statements strongly encouraging more diversity in faculty hires.
- Campus-wide training & lectures for full-time tenure track faculty.
- Campus-wide Diversity Committee.
- Diversity lounge.
- Regularly conducted campus climate studies to measure institutional effectiveness.
- Mission statements that provide language on valuing and empowering students from diverse communities.
- Hispanic Serving Institution grant projects that involve the entire campus.
- One of the metrics for university’s strategic priorities is increasing educational opportunities to enhance cultural competencies for all employees.
- Incorporate cultural competencies into all job descriptions.
- Incorporate cultural competencies into all job interview questions.

Faculty:
- Cultural competency is integrated into the tenure evaluation process for faculty.
- Cultural competency is integrated into department program reviews.
- Required professional development classes, i.e. Teaching "Men of Color" class at the community college level (required course for all 1st year faculty).

Staff:
- All staff is evaluated on cultural competency during annual performance management appraisals.

Challenges Observed:
- Moving diversity or strategic plans into action.
- A challenge for Libraries is to move beyond institutional directives/programs to see what unique services they can provide.
- What does a HSI campus look like? How is a HSI Library distinguishable from any other university setting? How would you know that you are in an HSI library or campus?

Q. 10. How does your Library foster/sustain, as a whole, a culturally competent work environment?

General Trends:
- The main trends in this response mirrored the institutional diversity responses in Question #9 including the fact that strong library administrative leadership made all the difference, many university Libraries include the evaluation of cultural competency
during the library faculty tenure review process, conducting continual intersectional training, and hiring of staff and librarians from diverse backgrounds, and ongoing participation in college-wide diversity initiatives.

- The unique, but far from innovative activities, that Libraries are doing beyond institutional mandates, include hosting cultural events, creating displays that highlight diverse cultures, integrating diversity into library skills curriculum, and developing diverse collections that reflect the histories and cultures of diverse communities.

Best Practices Observed:

- Include cultural competencies as part of the position responsibilities.
- Investigating assessment tools for library faculty and staff such as the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a commercial 50 item questionnaire that measures cultural competence.
- Not only striving for a diverse population of student library workers, but offering them scholarships and an annual recognition luncheon for their academic achievements.
- Dean funds and supports diversity training including a “Power and Privilege” workshops for library faculty and staff.
- Dean sent out letter to all library faculty and staff after the November 2016 elections stating continued commitment to diversity. That same day the Dean addressed library employees at a town hall meeting where message was: “The library is a safe place where respect for others who are different than us is encouraged and disrespect, hate and marginalization of others will not be tolerated. Libraries have long been the haven for immigrants, refugees, and others in society who have been disempowered and marginalized because of their race, religion, gender or sexual orientation. We will continue to provide the services, resources and information that bring hope and encouragement and knowledge to everyone who walks through the doors. Just as importantly, we are a safe space where personal attacks against our students and staff will not be tolerated.”
- Support and encourage a variety of viewpoints.
- Learn from the community we serve.
- Work with campus Ethnic Studies departments to foster understanding and keep up with latest diverse populations, i.e. Mixtec community.
- Constant conversations at all levels of the library reinforced by language in the Library strategic plan.

Challenges Observed:

- Attracting and hiring diverse staff. The library profession remains 85.2% white and female, ALA Diversity Counts, 2012. Just because we hire diverse staff does not necessarily make them culturally competent to work with all groups. Consequently, there is a need for constant intersectional training. Libraries must challenge themselves to move beyond the institutional parameters in terms of the unique library services to user populations.
Q. 11. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the ACRL Diversity Standards or your library services to HSI user population?

General Trends:

- The responses ranged from “thanks for making me aware of the ACRL Diversity Standards. I will take a look at them.” to “District/Campus mission and values align very closely with ACRL Diversity Standards.”