Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

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For several decades now, institutions of higher learning and professional organizations, including the American Library Association and the Association of Research Libraries, have addressed and launched initiatives in the areas of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). As concepts, equity ensures equitable opportunities for historically underrepresented populations in accessing educational and employment opportunities; diversity embraces the distinctiveness of each individual and recognizes and values differences in external and internal attributes; and inclusion seeks to foster an inclusive work or education environment where all individuals are valued for their unique skills, experiences, and perspectives.

A recent survey by a panel of higher education experts reported that a recent Supreme Court ruling upholding affirmative action in admissions was the most positive event with high-impact, while protests surrounding high-profile controversial speakers was the most negative trend on college campuses, but that both occasions provided for an open exchange of ideas and a more diverse community for students. Racial tension on campuses can also lead to a recommitment by college administrators to make diversity-hiring, cultural competency trainings, and curricular changes a priority in order to address racial issues. University policy may also be informed by social network analysis of the interactions of a diverse student body. Administrators may be susceptible to “diversity fatigue” and minority faculty members may express feelings of stress in terms of meeting the demand for EDI and cultural competency, while simultaneously negotiating resistance to such work on campuses. Looking forward, the Association of American Colleges & Universities conference in 2019 will concentrate on “engaged inclusivity” which aims to “examine what it means to work toward a campus environment where inclusivity thrives through constant reflection, analysis, and accountability.”

A lack of diversity in certain academic disciplines has led to some inquiries into the effects of building diversity and inclusion into the curriculum for specific programs. The identification of equity and diversity gaps in general education classes and new student orientations also can be viewed as a first step in ensuring institutional support of student success for all students. Several campuses nationwide are undertaking a variety of approaches at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels, in order to advance diversity and inclusion at their institutions.

Academic and research librarians are increasing efforts to raise awareness of EDI by incorporating it into their outreach programs, professional development, and graduate programs. Even the Open Access (OA) movement has come under scrutiny in an attempt to ensure that scholarly communication initiatives seek out social justice and the “missing voices” in order to pursue a truly equitable, global exchange of ideas.

Implications

- Academic libraries should increase equity, diversity, and inclusion within the profession by creating workplaces in which staff with diverse backgrounds and perspectives can succeed.
- Librarians should look to advance outreach activities and supplement instruction with classroom practices and examples that promote inclusion and diversity of thought.
- Library administrators need to seek out and provide for faculty and staff development opportunities which promote intercultural awareness and competencies.


