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# information outlook

THE MAGAZINE OF THE SPECIAL LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION



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# Diversity in the Library

There is broad agreement that the library profession needs to become more diverse, but also that we cannot simply try to hire our way to that goal.

BY STUART HALES

The comedian and actor Groucho Marx famously said that he didn't want to belong to any club that would accept him as a member. At today's libraries and information centers, the challenge is to create a culture that will make clients and staff *feel* accepted—and to which they'll want to belong.

That's the central message of this issue of *Information Outlook*, the theme of which is "Diversity in the Library." As Michele Villagran states in her interview and Lisa Lopez-Torrones and Natasha Chowdory note in their personal reflections, the widespread use of the term *diversity* has stripped it of much of its relevance. But all three agree that diversity benefits organizations (including libraries and information centers) that promote it and that the success of diversity initiatives depends to some extent on creating a culture in which diverse individuals—be they employees, volunteers, or customers—feel included in the organization's mission and activities.

"Does everyone have a voice and a safe space where they can talk freely?" Michele asks in response to a question about knowing when your diversity efforts are succeeding. "Do they feel like, I want to go to work every day, and I know it'll be a safe environment for me

to be who I am? . . . These are all signs that you can look for."

"There is a wide swath of library professionals who have been in the field for 10 years or less who have a clear appetite for greater awareness of, and change in, the diversity arena," Natasha writes. "There are individuals who are keen to keep the conversation going and to explore practical solutions."

"The key to diversity success is to start with management, where it trickles down to the hiring of people and the approval of projects," Lisa writes. "This, in turn, creates a successful environment, because employees from diverse backgrounds provide different ideas and experiences that contribute to innovative solutions and services that can appeal to a diverse audience."

Senovia Guevara takes a different perspective on diversity by sharing resources that can help librarians and information centers better serve disabled patrons. But she, too, recognizes that the goal is not so much to increase diversity as to improve the visitor experience for disabled patrons and, concomitantly, to make the library or information center more attractive to disabled workers.

"As someone who knows individuals

with vision, mobility, and cognitive disabilities, I understand the importance of offering an inclusive environment to those who visit and work," she writes. "Misconceptions, lack of information about services, and collection access are just a few pieces of a larger picture."

Diversity (of a sort) also features prominently in Cindy Coan's "Info Careers" column. After nearly 15 years as a librarian at an aviation history museum, she found herself unemployed soon after the Sept. 2001 terrorist attacks. To keep money coming in, she turned to book indexing and started her own business, which now includes document translation services.

"Looking back on my working life, it seems that the element of the unexpected has been a recurring theme," she writes. "Often, what has transpired has been a far cry from what I thought I had signed up for. Yet, through all the messy, unpredictable twists and turns, I have managed to learn new skills and to grow, often in ways I might not have if my career had remained on a predictable path."

Ann Cullen rounds out this issue of *Information Outlook* with a summary of the contributed paper she presented at SLA 2018 in Baltimore. Her paper resulted from a study of experiential field-based learning (FBL) courses in graduate-level business programs and specifically the roles that business librarians play in such courses. She identified three such roles—self-service, on demand, and embedded—and postulated that they could also be useful in examining other areas where librarians provide research support.

"This framework could also be used to strategize and assess the best means for librarians to engage with different courses as well as other areas in their programs," she writes. "When exploring partnerships with a course, program, or department, it could be used to determine which types of support are required for a particular engagement."

To learn more about Ann's paper or Cindy's career agility, or to explore the many nuances of diversity in the library, read this issue of *Information Outlook*.

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# 'Keep an Open Mind and Appreciate Different Perspectives'

ACHIEVING TRUE DIVERSITY IS AN ONGOING PROCESS THAT REQUIRES OPEN AND HONEST CONVERSATION AT ALL LEVELS.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. MICHELE A.L. VILLAGRAN

**H**ow diverse is your library or information center? Do you actively recruit and hire employees with the goal of increasing the representation of women and minorities? Is diversity a priority in your library or information center? Should it be?

These and related questions often guide discussions and decisions within libraries and their parent organizations, but Michele Villagran thinks a better place to start is by examining the biases—both conscious and unconscious—that currently exist within your workforce. Identifying these biases will give you a good feel for the culture of your workplace and reveal where your diversity efforts will bear the most fruit.

"I don't think hiring more women and people of color should be done first, and then it's like, check, we're done—we're now diverse, and our culture is going to change overnight because

we now have women and people of color," she says. "The culture should be worked on regardless of who is hired and when they're hired. Plus, just hiring diverse individuals like women or people of color does not necessarily mean that the internal culture will change, because it takes more than just hiring. You need to think about good 'fits' internally and what your culture already looks like."

Michele, an assistant professor in San Jose State University's School of Information and president and CEO of CulturalCo, LLC, a consulting firm specializing in cultural competency, diversity, and inclusion, spoke to *Information Outlook* about biases and microaggressions, engaging staff in the effort to create a more inclusive culture, and the role that library schools can play in creating more inclusive libraries and information centers.

**Historically, discussions about workplace diversity typically focused on gender and race—making sure that women and racial minorities were adequately represented. Do you think that's still a good starting point for a discussion about diversity in the library, or do you think we've moved past that point and we're on to other things now?**

I think we can start there, but I think there are many more elements to diversity. If we only start with what we already know—the history and knowing about race, ethnicity, and women—that really limits our view of what diversity is. Diversity is deeply rooted in history, but I would say that diversity as a whole has lost its context, because the term is thrown around a lot—this is diversity, that is diversity, and so on. For decades we've seen it, and it's been a part of our lives.

But for libraries, I think a good starting point is looking at where you're at and understanding what your library is defining as diversity. For example, is diversity a part of your mission? What does that mean to your library? Does it include things like age, cultural background, and invisible characteristics? And I would even look at collections, services, and programming.

**MICHELE VILLAGRAN** is a consultant, author, and lecturer on diversity and cultural issues and an assistant professor at San Jose State University's School of Information.





When I'm consulting, I always like to start the discussion by reflecting on yourself and your biases before we get to diversity. So I would say I *don't* think it's still a good starting point, because we already know the history, unless within your library there are individuals who are not aware of what's gone on in the past. In that case, it might be good as a background lesson. But overall, there's so much more to diversity than just the historical elements.

**You said something in your answer about invisible barriers. You recently co-authored a couple of articles on the importance of minimizing two invisible barriers to workplace diversity: implicit bias and microaggressions. Can you explain what they are and why they matter?**

We all have biases. We have explicit biases and implicit biases, and they're a part of who we are as human beings. Biases really are prejudices for or against something or someone, or even for or against a particular group. They're already built in within our brain.

Implicit bias is different than explicit bias, because we might not choose to reveal an implicit bias or might not even know we have that bias. What I mean is, it's unconscious; it's deeply rooted in our subconscious. A lot of times, it could be an attitude we have, or maybe a stereotype that impacts how we understand another person, or maybe even our own actions.

An implicit bias is built on an unconscious manner. So if there's an implicit bias, we might not be aware that we even have it. That's why it's called implicit—it's unconscious.

An exercise I do when I conduct trainings is to show images on the screen, some pictures or photographs. The goal is to reveal your initial reaction, your quick judgment based on what you see without even thinking about it. It's your first impression upon seeing a visible image. A lot of times, those impressions are built on your own biases, your experience with or fear of a particular group.

The two articles you referenced go hand in hand because they start with biases. Implicit biases are what lead to microaggressions. Microaggressions can be nonverbal; they can even be things we see in the environment, like snubs. They can be intentional or unintentional. They're really communication that is hostile and negative toward other people and targeting marginalized or under-represented groups.

They can be semi-conscious, so they're not necessarily completely implicit because there might be some explicit bias behind them, too. But they do reside in us, and we are unaware sometimes of our own biases and attitudes and actions. You can think of it this way—bias is in our mind. Once it manifests into an action or turns into a particular behavior, that's when we're illustrating an actual microaggression.

As for why they matter, research confirms that implicit biases and microaggressions have detrimental effects in the workplace: lower work productivity, self-esteem, morale, stress, mental health concerns or issues, depression. If you're the recipient of a microaggression, the more likely you'll have or feel some depression or some impact on your work productivity, and you'll also feel you're in an unhealthy work environment. We spend so much time at work that we don't want to go to a toxic or unhealthy workplace. In the long term, that's a huge detriment.

**While we're on the topic of microaggressions, the article you co-authored on that topic contained a sentence that caught my eye. It said we need to first accept that microaggressions are happening all around us in the workplace. If they're that pervasive, is it realistic to expect that in your library or information center you could really eliminate or at least greatly reduce them? If so, what would it take to make that happen?**

I think we cannot realistically eliminate them 100 percent. We're all human, and we each can work on ourselves and work to help each other be better individuals to make that impact

in our workplace. But I don't think they can be 100 percent eliminated.

So, yes, they can be reduced, but it takes time and effort by all. And when I say *all*, I mean everyone from administration to professional staff to staff at every level within the organization. We can't just commit to, say, one day we'll focus on issues related to bias and microaggressions and then the next day throw it out the window, because that defeats the whole purpose. It's not a one-time thing; it's ongoing, and I think there are many tactics and ways you can respond.

You can help by identifying your own biases and then identifying workplace microaggressions, whether you or another person are committing them. Then you can attempt some of the coping tactics to help try to shift your organization's environment.

**In the other article you co-authored, about implicit bias, you emphasize the importance of changing the culture of an organization, which I think a lot of people would describe as the "feel" or "personality" of a workplace as opposed to its "look," which I think people associate with diversity. If you want to create an inclusive workplace culture, does the diversity need to happen first, or should you work on the culture first, then try to increase diversity?**

I think you have to focus on both at the same time. Changing culture doesn't happen overnight; it takes a long time, and it depends on the history of the organization. In an organization that's been around for 125 years, it's going to take quite a long time to change the internal culture.

I would say that creating an inclusive environment really means we're all treated fairly and with respect, and that everyone's perspectives are valued and they have equal access to opportunities for promotion. As an example, say there's a particular marginalized group or a few individuals or even one person not being included. Bring them into meetings and ask for their thoughts and opinions on a particular project.

## I think diversity fatigue, at whatever level, is often an excuse for not doing what needs to be done.

**While researching questions around culture and diversity, I came across a website for a consulting firm that works with organizations to enhance their diversity. On their blog was a post that said, “The biggest mistake organizations make is letting their workplace culture form naturally without first defining what they want it to be.” Do you agree with that, and if so, how can library or information center managers define an inclusive culture in a way that will engage their staff?**

Just based on my own consulting work with clients, I would tend to agree with this statement. I think if you define your culture first, it'll actually save you time and effort when you're hiring and especially hiring individuals that fit within your culture. Also, if you have a clear vision and a clear mission and there's transparent communication amongst, say, administration or your leadership, that is all part of defining your culture. If you already have all that in place, it can help you save time in assessing people who might be a good fit.

However, I will say that culture does form naturally, even when we're trying to define it. That's because when we have policies and procedures in place and we have rules we follow within our organization and we have an environment that's structured, there's already some formal structure in place that is part of the culture. Even your logo and tagline are part of your culture.

And within that overarching organization, there are subcultures—your department or your branch, or your location within the library. So there are all these subcultures that are forming naturally while we have our larger culture that's in place, and we need to be aware of that when we're thinking

about developing or defining our overall culture.

I think managers can define an inclusive culture that will engage their colleagues by bringing in marginalized groups, those that have been excluded from processes and activities. This can allow for sharing of power or giving them some responsibility, so they are owning a project and showing their contribution. Because a lot of times, excluded individuals or marginalized groups are pushed to the side and not asked to be a part of things. This would bring them in so they're included.

Also, having ongoing, transparent communication, so if there are going to be changes—maybe layoffs, or you're acquiring a new entity or practice area—you share them with your staff, and then everyone can contribute. I think everyone having a voice is a prerequisite to an inclusive culture.

**We were talking earlier about the microaggressions article that you co-authored. In that article, you advocate for regular “sentiment assessments” to gauge how employees are feeling, and you also recommend annual cultural competence training. Are you concerned that these tactics could contribute to what's known as diversity fatigue—a feeling that so much time and attention are being focused on diversity that it begins to have the opposite effect of what was intended?**

In my experience on the consulting side, the clients I've worked with have not experienced diversity fatigue, except one that was already there. But I think diversity fatigue, at whatever level, is often an excuse for not doing what needs to be done. The organizations that fall prey to this are either not doing

anything about diversity and inclusion or they're doing it maybe once a year, and they're going to fail—because the employees will see this as a checkbox, as a requirement. So the organization will lose talent, and there'll be a lot of issues internally.

I think the commitment to diversity needs to be throughout the organization, and it needs to be ongoing. If there's discussion about these issues and there's open dialogue regularly, then just having, say, two annual events will suffice as a starting point. But we do need to know how our employees feel, so one of these events should be the sentiment assessments. If we don't know how our employees feel, then we won't know what we can do, or what needs to be done, to improve the organization.

I don't see these things contributing negatively to employee well-being. But I will say they could be harmful if they are isolated or one-time programs without the ongoing dialogue.

**When people discuss diversity and inclusion, a lot of other terms often pop up, like *equity* and *justice*. Do you think they have a place in this general discussion, or do you think including them just muddles things further?**

I think they definitely have a place. I see *equity* as looking more at your practices and actions, whatever actions you're taking to produce equitable power or equitable access or even opportunities for all. Equity assumes differences, and it takes into account what's needed to ensure a fair outcome.

So I think equity definitely fits in, because in order to have an inclusive environment, we're appreciating our differences and looking at our attitudes and actions and trying to be fair. That's part of what equity does.

Now, when you say *justice*, are you talking about social justice? Because that's the big term now, and one that I think certainly fits into library and information centers and plays a huge role in the fact that we're really advancing social justice agendas and issues. Social justice wraps up so many ideas

related to society and information and individuals and what's fair and equitable. So that term has a place, too.

And it all fits, I would say, within the diversity umbrella or tree. It's a part of the conversation, and even more so now with the things we've been seeing lately and considering that information is a driver toward social justice and being equal.

**Let's say you manage a library or information center, and you're working on creating a diverse workforce and inclusive culture. How do you know when you're there—when you have a workplace where people feel included and respected and welcomed?**

I don't think there's a checklist where you just say, check, check, check, check, and now we're there, we're done. It's a process; it's ongoing. What I think there is are signs, which is probably a better way to answer this. There are signs that you are improving or progressing or your organization is valuing diversity and inclusion.

For example, earlier we talked about not hiring women and people of color unless the work environment is welcoming, inviting, fair, and respectful. If you hire those individuals and the environment is not like that, then it's almost like you're setting up a fail. You have to have that culture and that environment, and then hire the individual so it's a good fit. If it is, individuals will want to stay in the organization.

One sign is related to your purpose. What is your organization's purpose or vision? What are your values related to diversity and inclusion? Do you have a diversity statement, and is it clearly listed? And what actions are tied to that, so there is proof or evidence of what your organization is saying?

Then, look at your leadership and the leaders that you have in place. Are they behaving accurately, in the sense that they are doing what they say? Are they sending a message about whether they're committed to diversity and inclusion? As managers, we look toward those leaders to see what they are

doing. What are they doing versus what they're saying, and does it translate into the real practice that is going on within your organization?

I think another sign is thinking about the voice, like I mentioned earlier. Does everyone have a voice and a safe space where they can talk freely? Do they feel like, I want to go to work every day, and I know it'll be a safe environment for me to be who I am?

And also, when hiring, not just thinking about diversity, but thinking about inclusivity and whether we are being inclusive in our practices.

These are all signs you can look for. But again, there's no magic list.

**You've talked about the consulting you've done around diversity and inclusion. You're also an assistant professor at San Jose State University's School of Information. What role you think library and information schools should play in helping create more inclusive libraries and information centers?**

I'm glad you asked this question. I was hired in August, so I'm new in this role. My focus is on cultural diversity. That's my research area, my teaching area, my focus. And I'm actually writing an article about this particular question, so it's very timely.

Without saying too much, I will say that, based on the literature and the research I've done to date—and I'm looking at aspects of cultural competency, which also ties into being inclusive and diverse—if library and information science faculty can help create awareness and also instill values necessary to create a positive impact on the student experience in school that will flow over into their professional career, and if we can attract more diverse students and those marginalized groups into the profession, then once they graduate, they'll move into these organizations that are looking for individuals that have cultural competency, that have learned about diversity and inclusion and social justice issues, and then they can help their organizations move to that level.

So I think diversity and inclusion and

all these topics we are talking about should have some presence, some form within the curriculum, and they should also be on our website. And not just in the curriculum—I'm thinking about accessibility, with the tools and resources you use if you're taking an online class as a student. So there's a huge role, I think, that library and information schools can play in trying to shape librarians' role for the future.

I think we need to do more work. There are certainly things that we are doing well, and there are things we can do better, and I think if some of the things I described above can be done, and if a majority of schools start to do those, then we will be helping develop diverse workforces out there.

**Given your academic experience and your consulting background, what one piece of advice would you give to a library or information center manager who really wants to create an inclusive and diverse workplace?**

That's a hard question. I think I would say to keep an open mind and to consider that everyone comes from a different perspective. If you can keep an open mind and realize that everyone has a different perspective that's driving them, that can help you understand where they're coming from and why they are where they are and where they want to be and how you can be a part of making their journey a successful journey.

It takes time—baby steps, not overnight. Just keep an open mind and appreciate those different perspectives.



# Starting the Conversation: The Disabled Library Patron

NUMEROUS RESOURCES AND EXAMPLES ARE AVAILABLE TO INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS WHO WANT TO MAKE THEIR LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTERS MORE ACCESSIBLE TO THOSE WITH DISABILITIES.

BY SENOVIA GUEVARA, MPA

**M**y workplace recently held a discussion on how to assist people with disabilities who do business with our organization. The suggestions were varied, ranging from developing new hiring initiatives to educating staff to implementing new services to purchasing new equipment. It became evident that there were many ways for our organization to improve our services to this group and include them in our workforce.

This wasn't a discussion that was focused on spotting all of our weaknesses in addressing this situation. As an organization, we already had several services in place that offered a good start, but it was evident that building upon these services would create a better experience for people with disabilities who do business with us or desire to join our family as employees. The

discussion was open and rewarding, increasing awareness of the situation and generating real opportunities from inside the team to better meet this new goal. People with personal knowledge of those with disabilities as well as people without such knowledge were free to add to the discussion—there was no wrong idea.

Starting a conversation in your library about how your team currently meets the expectations of your patrons is routine in many libraries. Generating ideas on how to better meet the future needs of patrons, regardless of their ability to access your library or information center, can become a natural part of that conversation.

When starting this conversation, different viewpoints and experiences will come into play, as they did at my organization. There will be those who have personal experience with disability and

access issues or know someone who is affected. Some will have little to no knowledge of the topic because they aren't close to anyone who is disabled. Regardless, starting a conversation provides all with an opportunity to learn. Following are several resources and examples that can help you learn and/or facilitate a conversation on the topic.

## Serving Disabled Students

The National Center for Information Statistics published a report in 2011 covering disabled students enrolled in institutions of higher education. The report, titled, "Students with Disabilities at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions" (Raue and Lewis 2011), contains the following findings and recommendations:

**Accessibility.** "Many institutions reported integrating accessibility features during major renovation and new construction projects (89 percent); offering students, faculty, and staff the opportunity to provide input on accessibility features during project planning stages (65 percent); and conducting needs assessments pertaining to accessibility (64 percent)." (Raue and Lewis pg. 4)

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**Barriers.** “A few of the barriers cited by institutions as hindering implementation of universal design to a moderate or major extent were limited staff resources to provide faculty and staff training on accessibility issues (52 percent), costs associated with purchasing appropriate technology (46 percent), and other institutional priorities (45 percent).” (Raue and Lewis pg. 4)

**Enrollment.** Approximately 707,000 disabled students were enrolled, with the majority in 2-year public institutions versus 4-year public institutions, with numbers heavier at larger institutions that totaled students of 10,000 or more. (Raue and Lewis pg. 6)

How do libraries serve this population, and how do they approach topics such as access to information, education and hiring? Several examples from both library and non-library organizations are provided below.

An article in *Behavioral & Social Sciences Librarian* titled “Differently Able: A Review of Academic Library Websites for People with Disabilities” looks at how libraries use their websites to deliver information about their services, collections, building accessibility, and technology. The authors highlight information about “retrieval of materials, photocopy, circulation/access assistance, reference and reference assistance, services at branch libraries, interlibrary loan, instruction, proxy users, and flyers or information sheets about the services” and discuss other information that would be of importance to disabled patrons, including adaptive technology, parking, and communication options (Cassner, Maxey-Harris, and Anaya 2011).

Several academic libraries highlight these types of information on their websites. For example, the University of Washington Libraries’ “About the Libraries” website has a link to another page titled “Accessibility at the Libraries” that displays information on technology, facilities, and borrowing accommodations. A sidebar highlights other university accommodations for

those with disabilities, such as parking and transportation services and the disability and deaf cultural center. In addition, a cooperative effort between the University Libraries and the Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology Center (DO•IT Center) led to the production of an online resource, “Universal Access: Making Library Resources Accessible to People with Disabilities,” which provides more than 50 tips to consider when trying to improve access for patrons with disabilities. Building access, education of library staff, and development of services are among the topics covered.

Temple University Libraries’ website provides information about accommodations for students with disabilities on a page linked from the “Services” tab. The information addresses topics such as accessing materials in the stacks, delivery of print or online resources, assistive technologies, and research assistance.

The Northwestern University Libraries’ website has a “Disability Services” link under the “Visit” tab that provides excellent information on parking and building accessibility for each of the libraries in the system. The link goes so far as to note the type of flooring (carpeting) and distance considerations between departments.

The University of Minnesota Libraries’ website provides users with detailed information about the physical accessibility of each library and the various technologies (e.g., closed circuit TV readers and wheelchair-height workstations) available at each.

## Training and Education

An article in *Education Libraries* titled “Providing Services for Students with Disabilities in an Academic Library” provides examples of staff training considerations, with attitudinal, facility, service, and legal training all highlighted (Carter 2004). The author explains that training is critical because misconceptions and uncertainty about interacting with disabled patrons are just some of

the hidden issues that can block staff from providing better, more inclusive service (Carter p. 16).

“... [S]taff training issues benefit all users through increased sensitivity and understanding of users’ needs, improved quality of library service to better enable students to conduct research independently, and improved access to information,” she writes. “As methodologies and technologies change, it is necessary that these issues are constantly reviewed and new processes implemented to continue to meet the concepts of equitable access” (Carter p. 18).

Staff training and education should be seen as a perpetual goal that can be constantly improved, with a service benefit to all patrons, regardless of disability status. Although the examples below do not come from academic libraries, they represent the types of resources that are available.

The Connecticut State Library’s “Libraries and Accessibility” page provides links to resources for staff training, a guide to developing services for disabled patrons, and sample policies and procedures. It also includes information on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), selecting assistive technologies for those with visual, hearing and mobility disabilities, and designing accessible websites.

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services has developed a list of 23 dos and don’ts for interacting with someone with a visual disability.

The American Library Association’s New Members Round Table (NMRT) produced a short guide titled “Working with Patrons with Disabilities: How Do I Get Started?” Created by Lorelei Rutledge and posted on the NMRT website, the guide provides information about serving disabled patrons based on the author’s personal experience, both as a patron and a librarian. An interesting tip: She advocates “building the role of disability services liaison into job descriptions” to ensure that “outreach to this group becomes institutionalized” (Rutledge 2014).

## Another option to explore for hiring examples is the for-profit sector. Essays by those who advocate for more inclusive hiring policies and programs abound in this area.

### Hiring

The U.S. Department of Labor teamed up with the White House Council of Economic Advisors in 2014 to produce an economic snapshot of the disabled community and employment projections for people with disabilities through the year 2022 (Department of Labor 2014). The snapshot and projections include the following:

- Only one-third of working-age people with disabilities were employed on average in the 2010-2012 period, compared to over two-thirds (72.7 percent) of people without disabilities.
- Employed people with disabilities are underrepresented in management and professional/technical jobs and overrepresented in service, production, and transportation jobs.
- The potential for increased employment of people with disabilities will depend in part on public and corporate policies regarding access to appropriate education, computer skills, and other training; disability income policies; and the availability of workplace accommodations and other employment supports.

When it comes to libraries, an article published in the *Australian Library Journal* shared examples of hiring programs in both American and Australian libraries that are targeted toward the disabled. In “Employment of Disabled Persons in the Academic Library Environment,” author Jodi Johnstone notes, “With some planning and understanding of the issues, disabled people can be included, accepted and celebrated as an integral part of the personnel of an academic library, espe-

cially when so much is being accomplished in regard to adapting the library environment for disabled students” (Johnstone 2005). Citing Northern Illinois University, Johnstone explains that the NIU Library decided to hire sight-limited student employees and describes the steps taken to ensure this initiative was implemented smoothly.

Another option to explore for hiring examples is the for-profit sector. Essays by those who advocate for more inclusive hiring policies and programs abound in this area. Here is a short list of a few interesting reads that provide examples and information.

“Why Hire Disabled Workers? 4 Powerful (and Inclusive) Companies Answer.” Written by Sarah Blahovec for the *Huffington Post* in 2016, this piece provides information on why four companies—Starbucks, Ernst & Young, AT&T and Northrop Grumman—decided to hire the disabled.

“How Disability-Friendly Is Your Workplace? 4 Ways to Put Your Business to the Test.” Written by Denise Brodey for *Forbes.com* in 2018, this short read provides some valuable information on different associations that focus on the disabled and employment.

The United States Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy’s website is a must-view resource for those who are interested in hiring employees with disabilities and would like to know where to start. The ODEP section links to organizations that assist in connecting potential employers with candidates and contains reference guides and tips on how to ensure an accessible hiring process. The section is also a portal to other employment resources, including the Job Accommodation Network (JAN),

the Employee Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN), and information on state vocational rehabilitation agencies.

“Recruiting Workers with Disabilities: Where can employers find qualified applicants with disabilities?” This helpful piece from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) provides information on disability-focused hiring options and addresses different topics associated with employment and the disabled worker.

### Start a Conversation

As someone who knows individuals with vision, mobility, and cognitive disabilities, I understand the importance of offering an inclusive environment to those who visit and work. Misconceptions, lack of information about services, and collection access are just a few pieces of a larger picture. When it comes to the topic of employment, a disability that is evident visually or vocally can have a devastating effect on a potential strong hire (often fueled by worries over cost or ability to perform essential functions of the job). Much of this has to do with a lack of information.

Want to address the problem? Start a simple conversation with the resources mentioned here. Small changes can have a large impact, and the costs may not be as high as you think. Changes could be as simple as including more varied information on the library’s website and incorporating a discussion about disability/access into staff meetings. When it comes to hiring, be open to potential candidates who may have a lot to offer. They may not be as limited as you think.

All it takes is starting a conversation.

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*continued on page 15*

# Diversity is Not a Trend

BY NATASHA S. CHOWDORY, MSC, MA



Natasha Chowdory has worked as a librarian at Microsoft U.K., an information officer at Oxfam, and a database officer at a construction consultancy. She is currently an information specialist at University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust. She blogs at [infoprotasha.wordpress.com](http://infoprotasha.wordpress.com) and tweets at: @InfoPro\_Tasha. Contact her at [natashachowdory@gmail.com](mailto:natashachowdory@gmail.com).

**A**t the moment, librarianship in the U.K. is in a state of flux. People are realizing that we need to reassess how we define librarianship and what it means for the future. One of the biggest issues of discussion over the last 18 months has been diversity. In the U.K., *98 percent* of the members of the library profession identify as white.

Take a minute to understand what this means—that a country with one of the largest multi-cultural populations in the world has a library workforce that does not remotely reflect that diversity. This is an area of concern, so much so that many diversity initiatives have been created and launched (although we will not see the results of these for several years) and many people, myself included, have started to speak out on this matter.

The hardest thing about talking about diversity is that it means something different to each person. For me, it means getting more women into senior positions. (It's a standard trope in the U.K. that you can have a predominantly female profession but only male directors). But it also means seeing more BAME (black, Asian, and minority ethnic) individuals in library roles. However, this approach is not without its own problems, as it results in "positive discrimination" and programs geared at funnelling BAME individuals into senior positions.

The emphasis on diversity has forced a lot of senior library managers in a number of organizations (public, private, and nonprofit) to consider their unconscious biases and how these biases have affected, currently affect, and will continue to affect their recruitment policies. Increasingly, people in positions of power—for example, those who run conferences—are being encouraged to assess whether their conferences are diverse and inclusive beyond the one non-white person they

have invited as a keynote speaker. One person of color at a conference as a speaker does not mean you are running an inclusive and diverse conference.

Earlier this year, there was a conference in Wales (#walesgate) with a panel on diversity. The people on this panel were all white, with no visible disabilities. They were of a similar age, held similar job titles, and had similar backgrounds. Until this was called out on social media, no one really understood why it was a problem.

Similarly, I engaged this year in a dialogue with a librarian who lives in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood, and she commented on how coming from North Carolina to this new neighborhood meant that she felt out of place and in the minority. I didn't know how to respond, because she was feeling like this for the first time in her life, but that's how I've felt my whole life.

More recently, I chaired a 'Diversity Panel' at the Internet Librarian International (ILI2018) in London. I chose my own panel members: Marisol Moreno Ortiz, Joshua Sendall, and Natasha Howard. Each is at a different career stage, and each came to the session ready to share personal stories. In a room of 57 people, there were only about 10 people of color (including the 4 on the stage). Their different stories and experiences of diversity are a sign that we are starting the work, but we have a long way to go.

Marisol shared her experiences with the Oregon State University Libraries and Press (OSULP) Diversity Scholars Program (DSP), developed in 2015 at the request of the university librarian and OSU press director. Marisol is the first Diversity Scholar, and thanks to this program she has been able to gain experience in her areas of interest: teaching, outreach, developing workshops to help students learn library resources, and attending conferences as part of her future academic librarian life. As the first OSULP Diversity Scholar, Marisol is expected to work with the current Diversity Scholars Program Committee to improve the program for future scholars, with the intention of having a more diverse workforce in the future.

Josh is Lancaster University's recently appointed research data manager, responsible for developing and providing training, services, and systems across the institution to facilitate

research data management best practice. His library has been actively engaging with diversity issues with help from the university's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team. They challenged the library team to acknowledge and address their own unconscious biases around a multitude of characteristics, including ethnicity, gender and disability.

The library team explored the ways in which unconscious bias affects the way they treat each other, make decisions, and deliver their services. Josh highlighted how there is a genuine desire in some parts to address inequalities and to bring about a more equitable workplace environment for the library team. However, this is a work in progress, as change is rarely seen as a positive by some people.

Natasha has been the library manager at the North East London National Health Service Foundation Trust (NELFT) for nine years, during which time she has helped develop remote and outreach services to meet the needs of an organization that now covers 200 sites across London Essex and Kent. The "NELFT Approach" (or "Inclusive Leadership in Action") is working to address concerns about the lack of career progression for BAME individuals as well as the absence of BAME staff at senior levels in the NHS. NELFT is setting out steps to enable the organization to become more inclusive, including designating Equality and Minority Network staff ambassadors, placing BAME representatives on interview panels, improving staff management procedures, and providing mentoring and coaching.

Data show that what has become known as the "NELFT Approach" is working. Following are just some of the measures of improvement over the past four years:

- BME staff at bands 8-9 (these are higher bands within the NHS, usually those within senior management or at the director level) have increased from just under 20 percent to nearly 30 percent.
- The incidence of bullying and harassment of BME staff is down from 50 percent to 16 percent.
- Belief in the provision of equal opportunities for career progression has risen from less than 40 percent to 80 percent.

If we go outside the NHS and look at librarianship, there are very few programs that are similar in scope, sensitivity, and understanding. Representation has always been an issue in librarianship, but getting staff who aren't white into senior positions will continue to be a problem without initiatives like those mentioned in this article.

There is a wide swath of library professionals who have been in the field for 10 years or less who have a clear appetite for greater awareness of, and change in, the diversity arena. There are individuals who are keen to keep the conversation going and to explore practical solutions, but there are also those who need more convincing that difference is good and that changing certain models of hiring and recruiting will only benefit the profession in the long term. **SLA**

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# Diversity Matters for Success

BY FLORDALISA LOPEZ-TERRONES



Lisa Lopez-Terrones is an electronic resources analyst for Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP in New York. She serves on the advisory board of the SLA New York Chapter and is co-chair of the chapter's Diversity Committee as well as secretary of the SLA Legal Division. She can be reached at [flordalisa.lopez-terriones@skadden.com](mailto:flordalisa.lopez-terriones@skadden.com).

**I**n my personal experience as a Hispanic American, I have had a fruitful career and a positive experience in what I would call a diverse work environment. In the workplace, diversity is defined as “committing to combat discrimination based on race, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, creed, color, religious background, national origin, language origin, or disability” (Vinopal 2016). The success of diversified employment begins not with its definition, however, but with identifying why diversity is important to the workplace and the overall institution.

Diversity is important for a number of reasons: it brings different skill sets, knowledge, ideas, and experience to the table; it produces better results for business; and it leads higher-ups and management to understand what needs to happen to reach those results and how to execute it. Indeed, while the term *diversity* may be loosely used and to some extent has lost its true meaning, in the case of business it “focuses on the economic benefit for the company” (Vinopal 2016).

I live in a big tri-state area, so diversity in my city is not an issue. The workplace is a different matter—the most recent data published by the American Library Association show that 87 percent of librarians identify as white, while slightly more than 4 percent are black, 3.5 percent are Asian, and 3.7 percent identify as “other” (Larsen 2017). So, when it comes to the numbers, the library profession hasn’t made much progress on diversity.

Keeping these numbers in mind, how can diversity take root in a workplace? There can be an aim to hire a diverse group of employees, but a bias may influence final personnel

decisions, thus creating a result that is quite different from the stated goals. The key to diversity success is to start with management, where it trickles down to the hiring of people and the approval of projects. This, in turn, creates a successful environment, because employees from diverse backgrounds provide different ideas and experiences that contribute to innovative solutions and services that can appeal to a diverse audience.

Diversity is also not only about personnel. Libraries historically are institutions that collect various types of materials. In the broader scope, these institutions can vary from public libraries to school libraries to specialty libraries, like those in museums, galleries, and corporations, among other locations.

I have been exposed to several different work environments because my professional preference has been to try new things. One of my first full-time jobs was at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, an experience like no other. It has an incredible collection, and I worked with a talented group of diverse and dedicated individuals. I’ve also worked at Hunter College’s art library, interned at an academic institution (Brooklyn College) and a news media company (Democracy Now), and worked in corporate libraries, including USB Investment Bank (a business library) and Skadden Arps (a law library).

Being exposed to so many different organizations and work environments has widened my skill set, which I believe brings value to my current employment. Success, in my experience, is providing superior service to our customers by having diversity in both our personnel and our collection. The term *diversity* is very gray; we can take it in many directions. The firm where I’m employed is fairly diverse, and even though I illustrate success, a lot of work still needs to be done.

I’m committed to supporting diversity because I have been given the opportunity to grow within the institutions and organizations in which I’ve worked and volunteered. Demonstrating specific programs that can draw attention to different topics has been one of my missions. Among my many activities, I co-chair the SLA Diversity Committee alongside a good friend, Clara Cabrera. New volunteers are always welcome!

To date, we have focused our committee programming on socially diverse events. Why? Because diversity doesn't have to be "serious" and only focused on statistics—it can also be a fun learning experience. The programs we've held over the years have ranged from immigration walks in lower Manhattan to walking in solidarity with LGBTQ colleagues. We've had fun programs, like evaluating the diversity seen in Hollywood costumes and understanding causes like saving birds (illustrated in the Audubon Mural Project in Harlem).

Success for me starts with a desire, a belief, and some support. I've been privileged to live it in my work environment, in work-related projects like the Diversity Committee, and in my personal endeavors. **SLA**

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# Business Librarians' Involvement in Experiential Field-based Learning Courses

**Business librarians are taking three different approaches to FBL courses, and that framework could be useful in examining other areas of research support.**

BY ANN CULLEN, MLS, PHD

There has been much debate at educational institutions offering master of business administration (MBA) degrees about the best approach for preparing today's students for the 21st century information-rich workplace. Many have raised concerns that these programs overemphasize a rational-analytic approach and do not provide the practical skills graduates need, such as how to identify and gather unfamiliar information to gain insight (Bennis and O'Toole 2005; Ghoshal 2005; Mintzberg 2004; Pfeffer 2007; Thomas, Lorange and Sheth 2013).

As one way to address this, most MBA programs today include experiential field-based learning (FBL) courses. The foci of FBL courses are consulting projects in which students work outside the classroom to develop recommendations for solving a real business problem posed by a company or organization (Corey 1990). In some MBA programs, the business librarians are highly engaged in supporting this pedagogy.

There have been few comparative surveys of how librarians provide instruction across business school programs. A 2001 survey administered by

Abels and Magi was the most recently published systematic review of the operations of U.S. academic business libraries. The authors focused their review on the libraries of the top 20 U.S. MBA programs based on the most recent *U.S. News & World Report* ranking (published in 1999). Abels and Magi reported on the resources and services of the business libraries in the survey and found that ". . . there seems to be a preference for user education sessions that focus on topics over resource-specific sessions" (p. 17). However, they did not report further descriptions of how business librarians were working with their business school's curriculum.

## Research Questions and Methodology

To gain additional insights into this topic, I conducted a study that addressed the following research questions: What roles are business librarians currently playing in FBL activities at MBA programs, and are these roles formal or informal? Also, how extensively are business librarians integrated into the MBA curriculum?

In May 2015, an online survey was sent to a business librarian at each of the top 20 business schools in the 2015

*U.S. News & World Report* rankings (Boyington 2014). The survey asked questions about how the librarians supported FBL. In February 2016, the survey was sent to a business librarian at each of the schools ranked 21 to 50 from the same *U.S. News & World Report* list.

From the initial survey of the top 20 programs, six were identified for in-depth case studies. Following the case research methodology recommended by Yin (2014), the six programs were selected because they shared similar characteristics (top two-year U.S. MBA programs) as well as contrasting features, such as program size and their approach to support for experiential FBL projects. For these six case studies, data was collected by interviewing professors, career service professionals, and business librarians at these schools and reviewing their websites.

## Results and Analysis

The online surveys revealed that almost all of the librarians (94 percent) provided support to FBL project courses through standard reference service. Other common ways the librarians provided support was by creating web guides with lists of recommended secondary sources (58 percent) and providing optional workshops on research as part of experiential FBL project support (36 percent). Half of the librarians indicated there was no standard pattern to when they met with MBA students at their programs, while 22 percent indicated they typically met



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with students repeatedly throughout the length of the FBL project. A subsequent question provided additional context, with librarians at seven of the schools stating they often met with the whole course team even though they were not formally engaged with FBL or assigned to a team.

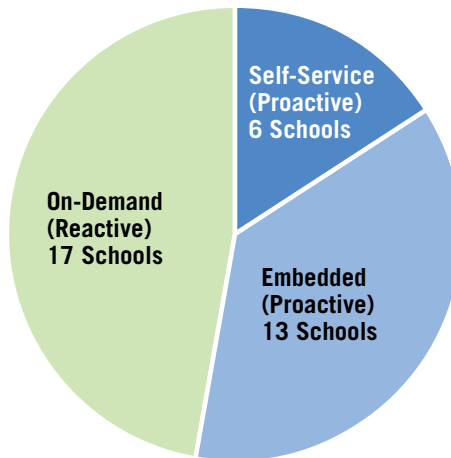
**Students' understanding of business librarian support.** A number of respondents indicated they did not think most of the MBA students knew how to gather information very well. One respondent reported that students “don't understand how to use the librarians,” while another reported that students had developed a false sense of complacency because so much information is available on the Internet. Several interviewees echoed this comment, with one saying “students are almost completely uninformed about what a modern librarian can do.”

**Three approaches to business librarian FBL support.** My research identified three approaches business librarians are taking with FBL project courses: self-service, on-demand, and embedded (see Figure 1). These approaches can be characterized by their positioning with FBL courses—either proactive or reactive (Spitzmuller and Van Dyne 2013). Within this framework, self-service is considered proactive because it supports experiential field-based learning by providing self-service online guides and resource tools tailored to FBL projects. Likewise, the embedded approach is considered proactive because librarians provide instruction and meet with FBL course teams, with a heavy focus on proactive in-person engagement to support research on FBL projects. The on-demand approach, on the other hand, is reactive in nature—it only provides FBL support through on-demand instruction or support, such as providing traditional reference services.

In many instances, the librarians' work with FBL was not exclusively found in one of these three approaches, although they may have used one approach as their primary focus. For example, some of the libraries identified

as self-service indicated that they also scheduled optional “research drop-in sessions specific for these student teams,” and another library with more of a self-service approach mentioned participating as “program managers” with FBL experiences. Some of the libraries with a more hands-on focus also created self-serve online guides for students to use for these projects.

**Figure 1: Business Librarian Approaches to FBL Support**



**Applying the Framework**

The three-approaches-to-support framework could be a useful tool for examining other areas of research support where librarians are assuming more proactive roles. This framework could also be used to strategize and assess the best means for librarians to engage with different courses as well as other areas in their programs. When exploring partnerships with a course, program, or department, it could be used to determine which types of support are

required for a particular engagement (see Figure 2).

It is worth noting that the findings from this research correspond with the perspectives of academic library deans and directors revealed in a recent ITHAKA study (Wolff-Eisenberg 2017). One key issue the ITHAKA study uncovered was the growth in libraries of teaching and research support positions that are similar to the roles of librarians working with FBL courses. As the ITHAKA survey report noted, “. . . nearly half of respondents indicated that their library is increasing the share of staffing and budget devoted to developing and improving services that support teaching, learning, and research” (p. 3).

FBL brings the ever-changing issues and real practices of business into the teaching of business schools. It gives MBA students the opportunity to practice what they are learning in a robustly supported environment with a diverse range of experts, including business librarians. The rich data uncovered by my study on FBL project curricula detail an important focus of business school pedagogy and how business librarians participate in it.

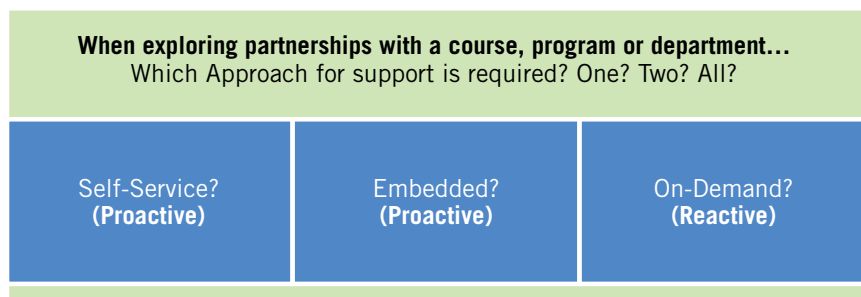
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**Figure 2: Using the Three-Approach Framework to Assess Engagement**



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# When Life Throws You a Series of Curves

**An unexpected journey from running a museum library to starting an indexing business posed many challenges—and delivered several rewards as well.**

BY CYNTHIA J. COAN, MLS

As a library student who had the good fortune to land a part-time job in a university departmental library, I fell in love with small libraries. Upon completing my library degree, I would have welcomed the opportunity for more work in a small library (preferably full time, of course). However, prospects for this seemed slim—everyone knew large libraries were where the jobs were. Accordingly, I sent out scores of résumés to public and academic libraries that were advertising openings, then waited hopefully.

No luck. Despite landing a few interviews, I didn't get a single offer from any of the large, promising-sounding libraries to which I had applied. It was an aviation history museum that ultimately requested my services. I would be working as a solo librarian in charge of pretty much everything—cataloging, reference, collection development, and all the other myriad tasks that go into making a library a library. Oh, and one other minor detail: Given that the collection, up to that point, had largely been stored in boxes, I would be organizing the library from scratch.

I was in heaven! The job offered plenty of challenges, but also the reward of working at tasks both interesting and

varied. Aided by my trusty volunteers, I watched the collection take shape and felt instant gratification when information requested turned out to be right at my fingertips. The library soon gained a small but loyal band of patrons, consisting mostly of museum staff and volunteers working on museum projects. Members of the public also used the library, for purposes ranging from conducting research for school papers to digging up information on relatives who had previously flown for the military.

I was happy, the library patrons were happy, and all seemed well. However, financial troubles loomed on the horizon. With museum revenues down significantly, those at the top decided they had to reduce expenses. I survived the initial round of layoffs, but my good luck could not last forever.

The year 2001 brought with it the terrorist attacks of 9/11. In the aftermath of the attacks, the tourism industry took a hit. My museum, already financially troubled, underwent a change in management and a further pruning of staff. Some of us at the museum chose to resign from our positions; others were fired outright. At the end of 2002, for the first time in nearly a decade and a half, I found myself unemployed—a

librarian without a library.

In the aftermath of losing my job, I immediately sought a new position at another library. I networked with other librarians, attended local meetings, visited libraries around town, and even performed unpaid volunteer work at a library to keep my skills fresh.

In the meantime, mindful of the need for income to tide me over until I found my next paying library job, I began offering book indexing services. To aid my fledgling enterprise, I took a correspondence course that covered not only indexing but also marketing. Like most indexers in my area (and elsewhere), I worked from home.

Months passed. While keeping an eye out for library openings, I made cold calls to prospective indexing clients. I landed my first paying project, sent off my first index, landed more projects, completed the indexing course. Still no library job, despite going for interviews. More time passed.

The ultimate outcome of my efforts to secure an income? At this writing, having built up my business, I'm still indexing. My subject specialties include history (especially of Arizona and the southwest) and health and medicine. In 2007, I added document translation services.

Looking back, I can either bemoan my fate at losing my former library and failing to gain paid entry into another, or I can focus on the positive. I prefer to do the latter. The only meaningful difference between past and present is that, in contrast to the days when I oversaw a library collection, I now help my patrons find information one book at a time.

At heart, I've never really stopped being a librarian. Now, as in the past, I benefit from the opportunity to use my library and information skills and learn new things. In addition, my work offers plenty of variety, though of course there's the constant pressure to meet deadlines.



**CINDY COAN** started her business, Indexing by the Book, in 2003 and thus far has indexed a wide variety of books and a few journals. In 2007, she added document translation services, translating texts from Spanish and Swedish into English. Before starting her business, she worked in a small museum library. Contact her at [indextran@cox.net](mailto:indextran@cox.net).

Do I miss being in a library? Sure, sometimes. However, I have found that working from home has its perks. I can pretty much create the kind of work environment I want. Another plus: during work breaks, I can stop and pet my dog.

Looking back on my working life, it seems that the element of the unexpected has been a recurring theme. Often, what has transpired has been a far cry from what I thought I had signed up for. Yet, through all the messy, unpredictable twists and turns, I have managed to learn new skills and to grow, often in ways I might not have if my career had remained on a predictable path.

My conclusion? Success doesn't come from always getting what you expected or thought you deserved. Often it means dealing with the unexpected. It means facing challenges head on. It means learning how to survive, even thrive, in the face of setbacks.

In the end, what counts is not just the opportunities that come your way—it's what you do with the opportunities you're given. Above all, success means acknowledging that you still have new things to learn.

The unexpected can and will come your way, but if you can deal with life's curves and still keep your sanity, amazing discoveries await you. Will you be ready?



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# information outlook

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