

Diversity, inclusion, inclusive excellence and academic libraries

In higher education, the word diversity has become an essential and visual component of most college's and university's mission and core values statement. Reflected in these statements is an evolving understanding of diversity to include individual differences (e.g. personality, prior knowledge and life experiences) and group/social differences (e.g. race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin and ability as well as cultural, political, religious or other affiliations).

In recent years, the focus in many higher education institutions has expanded from recognizing the value of diversity to emphasizing the importance of inclusion. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) suggests that inclusion is:

The active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity – in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum, and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect – in ways that increase awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions[1].

On our campuses, faculty, staff and leaders are working to develop the vision and practice of inclusive excellence. In these efforts, they are guided by the AAC&U, whose mission affirms the relationship between quality, equity, excellence and undergraduate education.

Inclusive excellence was first introduced by the AAC&U in 2005 as a methodology for helping colleges and universities realize the benefits of diversity and inclusion and their positive impact on institutional quality[2]. The intention was to end the debate surrounding the value of diversity and inclusion on college campuses. As a guiding principle, inclusive excellence is meant to include and engage the rich diversity of students, staff, faculty, administrators, alumni and community constituents in the overall success of the university.

Designed to help colleges and universities integrate diversity, equity and educational quality efforts into their missions and institutional operations, *Making Excellence Inclusive*[3] is AAC&U's guiding principle for access, student success and high-quality learning. Specifically, AAC&U "calls for higher education to address diversity, inclusion, and equity as critical to the wellbeing of democratic culture"[4].

Affirming that recognizing people with disabilities is critical to achieving inclusive excellence, we are especially excited that this issue of *Reference Services Review* focuses specifically on services to persons with disabilities. Typically, when we think of building a diverse and inclusive community, racial/ethnic, gender and gender identity diversity immediately come to mind. Also, many times, members of a diverse population are thought of on a univariate dimension – characterized by or depending on only one random variable, such as "disability," as opposed to thinking of members of a diverse population representing multiple layers. The fact is that disabilities occur across all races, ethnicities, ages and gender. And the fact is that people with disabilities comprise one underrepresented group of people who contribute to diversity across all races, ethnicities, ages and genders.

Data provide context for appreciating the service imperative shared by the guest editors and authors represented in this issue. There were nearly 40 million Americans with a disability in 2015, representing 12.6 per cent of the civilian noninstitutionalized population, according to the US Census Bureau[5]. The Census Bureau's American Community Survey[6] defines disability status through six types of questions measuring serious difficulty with hearing, vision, cognition, walking or climbing stairs, as well as difficulty with self-care and



independent living. In an article for the Pew Research Center's "Fact Tank," author Kristen Bialik notes that surveys with different definitions have estimated that a considerably larger share of Americans have disabilities[7].

Further, in a report released in 2012 to coincide with the 22nd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act[8], about 56.7 million people – 19 per cent of the population – had a disability in 2010, according to a broad definition of disability, with more than half of them reporting the disability was severe.

The report, *Americans with Disabilities: 2010*[9], presents estimates of disability status and type and is the first such report with analysis since the Census Bureau published statistics in a similar report about the 2005 population of people with disabilities. According to the report, the total number of people with a disability increased by 2.2 million over the period, but the percentage remained statistically unchanged. Both the number and percentage with a severe disability rose, however. Likewise, the number and percentage needing assistance also both increased.

So, where are we?

As our campus communities become increasingly diverse, it is crucial to build cultures in higher education that respect and support all aspects of students' and educators' multiple, intersecting identities. It is equally crucial that our academic libraries affirm their intention to be diverse and inclusive by providing library spaces which are supportive, safe and welcoming; by developing and managing collections that reflect a diversity of ideas, beliefs, and cultures; and by designing and delivering services. We can and must:

- design and implement services and programs that advance civic learning and democratic engagement, global learning and engagement with diversity to prepare students for socially responsible action in today's interdependent but unequal world;
- actively support efforts to increase recruitment, retention and promotion of faculty and staff from historically marginalized and excluded populations;
- actively support efforts to increase retention and recruitment of students of color from historically marginalized and excluded populations;
- contribute to the building of an environment where students are more culturally competent and have skills to enter into a diverse global workplace;
- improve the campus climate of inclusion;
- enhance effectiveness of curriculum, educational programs and research, with regard to diversity and inclusion; and
- increase outreach and engagement with external communities.

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Notes

1. Available at: www.aacu.org/making-excellence-inclusive (accessed 11 June 2018).
2. Available at: www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/mei/williams_et_al.pdf (accessed 11 June 2018).

3. Available at: www.aacu.org/making-excellence-inclusive (accessed 11 June 2018).
4. Available at: www.aacu.org/making-excellence-inclusive (accessed 11 June 2018).
5. Available at: https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_15_1YR_S1810&prodType=table (accessed 9 June 2018).
6. Available at: www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/tech_docs/subject_definitions/2015_ACSSubjectDefinitions.pdf (accessed 9 June 2018).
7. Available at: www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/07/27/7-facts-about-americans-with-disabilities/ (accessed 9 June 2018).
8. Available at: www.ada.gov/pubs/adastatute08.htm (accessed 11 June 2018).
9. Available at: www.census.gov/library/publications/2012/demo/p70-131.html (accessed 9 June 2018).