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# Micro Actions Support Culture of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in an Academic Library

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LILY HAWLEY grew up in the high deserts of New Mexico with storytelling in her blood and ink on her fingers. She followed the call to adventure and moved to Oregon to pursue her BA in English and later her Master of Library Science from Emporia State University. She currently works as a Collections Assistant at the OHSU Library and a Public Service Assistant at the Tualatin Public Library.



JENNIFER WELLS first fell in love with library science as a reference assistant at Oregon State University. She's now returning to the field after a near-decade-long hiatus of producing television news. Jennifer is a student worker at the OHSU Library in Portland and University of Oregon Portland Library and Learning Commons. She's in Emporia State University's SLIM cohort 19, with an expected graduation date of Summer 2020.

As student workers at the Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) Library, we wanted to better understand the role of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in an academic library. In conversations with staff, both in person and through emailed questions and responses, we have found that personal values are a driving force behind many smaller, continuous staff actions in promoting EDI throughout different departments.

Across libraries and larger institutions, EDI values are often built into larger strategic visions. However, guidance for the practical implementation of these values may be less specific, leaving staff to make their own decisions on how to achieve these larger institutional goals. Diversity and inclusion are top values at OHSU. Under the current strategic plan, known as "Vision 2020," the first goal is to "be a great organization, diverse in people and ideas," with which will be accomplished through strategies like "cultivate a climate of inclusion and respect for every individual in the OHSU community" and "foster a culturally



proficient, inclusive and diverse workforce” (Oregon Health & Science University, 2014). This goal has been in place since 2007, and sets a tone for the entire institution.

Under the OHSU Library 2016–21 strategic plan, explicit mentions of EDI are relegated to objectives to serve a larger mission where information discovery and collaboration are prioritized. For example, the library seeks to “ensure educational resources and services impact target populations of increasing demographic diversity,” to work toward a goal of “engag[ing] in the development, delivery, and evaluation of formal education programs” (Oregon Health & Science University Library, n.d.). However, there are no clear policies or guidelines for how to do this. For example, within the library’s collection development policy, there is no mention of EDI (Oregon Health & Science University Library, 2018). This does not mean, however, that there is not a culture of EDI at OHSU Library.

### Role of Diversity Committee

In 2017, the library formed a diversity committee charged to act as a guiding resource in an effort to help the library more specifically express its support for diversity, equity, and inclusion. The group has worked with the university’s Center for Diversity and Inclusion on several projects, including participating in the OHSU-wide ongoing staff unconscious bias training. It has also organized events for staff enrichment, creating environments for conversations around EDI involving guest presentations and podcast listening sessions.

These projects can have a huge impact on the library overall, but each arose from suggestions from individuals. By forming a group to discuss EDI topics monthly, the library formally supports building individual ideas into larger projects, e.g., going beyond recommending an interesting podcast to coworkers to organizing a series of listening sessions and discussions around it.

### Micro Actions

The concept of a series of small, consistent actions effecting larger change was broadly popularized by Charles Duhigg’s best-selling (New York Times, 2012) book *The Power of Habit*. Duhigg (2012) promotes the idea of “keystone habits”: repetitive behaviors that “help other habits flourish by creating new structures . . . establish[ing] cultures where change becomes contagious” (p. 109). While popular psychology has promoted this concept through a self-help lens (e.g., small actions like making your bed every day improve your overall quality of life) (Smith, 2015), there is also academic research relating to workplace management and organizational culture. A 2018 study at three Brazilian universities found that institutional strategies were better represented by staff micro actions than by formal strategic planning. This was demonstrated through small actions by managers positively affecting the performance of academic units (Meyer, Jr., Pascuci & Meyer, 2018). A 2015 business management study supports the idea that micro actions in a workplace environment “coalesce into macro-atmospheres and overall situations and overall cultures” (Stokes et al., 2015). These examples support what we have observed at OHSU: small, repeated actions by staff significantly contribute to the overall library culture.

### Staff Examples

Our idea for this article came out of personal experience. As student workers for Access Services and Collection Management, we had both noticed an increase in new library materials highlighting LGBTQ+ topics. Each of us, without any direction or consulting one another,



had made a point to showcase these particular titles on the library's new bookshelf by facing the covers outward. When we discussed why we did this, we each admitted to personally valuing EDI in library settings and thought this kind of small action was something we could do to visibly promote EDI through our collection. What patrons see in our collections represents a version of reality, of what is possible. It shapes the way our students, the medical professionals of the future, view and understand the treatment for diverse groups. It is crucial that students have access to a wide variety of resources: ones that allow them to see how diseases look on a range of skin tones, to understand how to make accommodations for people with physical and intellectual disabilities, to learn about treating the health concerns of the LGBTQ+ community, and to develop culturally sensitive practices for providing healthcare to patients from many cultures, socioeconomic classes, and marginalized groups.

This conversation led us to question why we had noticed the library acquiring more LGBTQ+ materials and, in particular, books on transgender health topics. As previously mentioned, the collection development policy does not directly guide purchasing toward EDI, but since OHSU provides transgender healthcare as a core health service, these materials are collected with the same depth and breadth and support all core services. As to why we had noticed more titles recently, we found the reason to be twofold. Collections staff see distributors offering more LGBTQ+ materials, which is likely a result of publishing trends. What we can confirm is that these titles already align with OHSU Library scoping rules established with vendors for selection, and then a selector agrees that these kinds of titles are a good fit for our library. Similar types of actions are being taken across every department of the library as a growing number of faculty, staff, and students study and research in this area.

To gain a broader perspective, we gathered information on some of the everyday actions by which staff promote EDI through conversations. We both spoke directly with library staff and emailed out a web form to collect replies.

Access Services staff primarily spoke to ways they engage with library users. One staff member told us they “try to meet people wherever they are at—physically, digitally, or socially” and “do what [they] can to promote a safe and comfortable space.” Another talked about the importance of treating all library users equally, despite what may feel like uncomfortable conversations. They provided an example where, upon acquiring a table for access and use by persons with physical disabilities using wheelchairs, their supervisor was unsure where to put it. This staff member then suggested simply asking the person for whom they got the table, going on to say, “I think sometimes people are afraid to mention topics and steer away from what they know. It requires being brave.”

When allocating funding for additional seating, the library director asked a staff group to recommend a broader range of furniture to meet the physical space needs of a spectrum of library users. While this was a top-down recommendation, staff members are now independently observing and manipulating furniture on a regular basis to promote user engagement and appeal to different body types, sometimes as simple as moving a table to create a wider path.

A staff member within the library's Education, Research, and Community Outreach (ERCO) department explained the importance of understanding gatekeeping and context as part of teaching information literacy. They make a point to teach search strategies to “make people think about how information is labeled and structured ... grant[ing] authority to



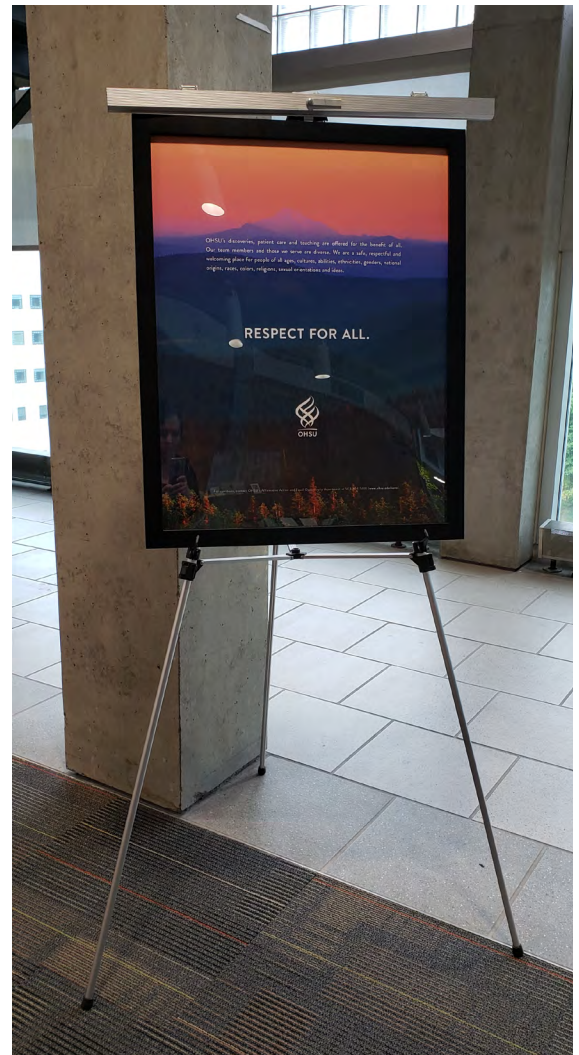
certain kinds of information over others.” This person also pointed out that at a health and science university, students may have a mind frame of seeking an objective truth, such as a correct diagnosis, but it is nonetheless important to teach that authority is constructed and contextual, pulling from the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015).

### Macro Effects

Beyond the examples of micro actions or general mindsets existing on their own, several spoke of larger projects growing out of individual efforts to promote EDI. For example, amid a larger national cultural conversation following the 2016 presidential election, several staff members felt moved to display signs on their office doors proclaiming that various marginalized groups were welcome. This led to the OHSU Library Council taking up the issue and assigning a task force to determine how the library could put out a unified message on the matter. Out of this came the sanctioning of posting Rebecca McCorkindale and Julie Syler’s “Libraries Are for Everyone” signs (McCorkindale, 2017) in designated locations and the prominent display of an institution-wide, OHSU-branded “respect for all” message. More than two years later, these signs are still part of the library landscape.

In 2019, OHSU Library rebranded ILL service as the “Get It For Me” service. This change came directly from student workers noticing the service not performing to its potential and seeking ways to make it accessible to more users. Student workers conducted research into how other libraries were labeling the service and found “Get It For Me” to be a common name intended to remove language barriers by replacing acronyms and jargon with plain language.

Two new collections, a game collection and a graphic novel collection, will expand user access to information in new ways and allow OHSU community members to “explore ideas in a social way” (Forero & Hamilton, 2019). The game collection started with the donations of games from one of the librarian’s own collections. According to one response we received, one criterion for the selection of new games is “to promote awareness or empathy for different



groups of people.” The graphic novel collection will be comprised primarily of narrative-driven graphic novels that tell stories about and around the healthcare profession focusing on stories from many perspectives. Both of these collections came from the initiative of staff members wanting to diversify the materials and information formats available.

There is also a growing effort to make other items, such as cameras, audio recorders, and 3D printers available for checkout. The staff member leading the charge on this has described it as a way to democratize access to technology that currently only certain members of the OHSU community may have. For example, a department may have a 3D printer available to its students, but students from other programs (or other OHSU staff or faculty) likely do not have access. Having this kind of equipment available at the library increases the equity of access.

### High Visibility Projects

There are also a couple of larger, long-term projects that are the result of the personal desire of staff members to use their current job roles to increase the overall visibility of marginalized groups at OHSU. The current exhibition on display at OHSU Library is one such project. *Queering OHSU: Honoring Our LGBTQ+ History* is the result of the University Archivist proposing, researching, selecting, and curating the exhibit. He also used this as an opportunity to build LGBTQ+ holdings within the archival collection. Through outreach and conversations with OHSU stakeholders, he added pieces from the university’s LGBTQ+ employee resource group, three oral histories, and various ephemera. The materials are evidence of the important roles that LGBTQ+ individuals have played in the University’s history as students, practitioners, and patients. History, as the exhibit suggests, is static. We are unable to change the past. However, we can learn from it. By making that past visible, we acknowledge the work and lives that paved the way for the environment of inclusion that we have today. This display, which is located just inside the entrance to the library and will be on display until Fall 2019, welcomes every person who steps through our doors.



Another project stemmed from tagging practices within the OHSU Digital Asset Management (DAM) system. In noticing a default application of the “diversity” tag to images featuring people of color, the repository librarian determined that there was a need for a more organized and accessible way to describe and locate digital assets involving diversity within the DAM. She and a faculty member from OHSU’s School of Nursing are now using funding from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine’s Pacific Northwest Region Health Sciences Library Partnership Award to build a photo repository of pathophysiological conditions that reflects the diversity of patients that medical students are likely to encounter in their careers. “This digital image collection will begin to provide teachers of health professions and students access to the photographs they need so that their students can learn to recognize different pathophysiological conditions in skin of various colors, increase their awareness of issues related to health and diversity, and prepare them for more effective clinical work with their future patients” (Pierce, 2019).

These examples show how the formal structures within the library can support individual initiatives, and in doing so foster an environment where larger projects can manifest and subsequently have a much larger impact.

### Conclusion

Most micro actions and macro effects mentioned in this article are based primarily on information collected through observation and conversations with staff. While there is quantitative data that measures the impact of some of these examples, such as the increased use of the “Get It For Me” service, this data is not necessarily contextualized to relate it to EDI. Additionally, many of these actions are difficult to quantify, such as the impact of curating the new books display to showcase materials about medically treating individuals from underserved populations or written by authors from marginalized groups. To appreciate the impact beyond what we have observed and concluded, we need further feedback from both



library users and staff. The potential for ways to assess impact would be a topic well-suited for the diversity committee. As the library continues to value individual efforts to support and promote EDI, we expect more formal practices to form organically. EDI is a continually evolving subject, where there is no finite goal to meet or threshold to cross. It is important that any goals and objectives set are regularly reevaluated. It is equally important to acknowledge the personal values that drive the everyday actions which set the stage for institutional goals to succeed. 🌱



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