

The LYRASIS Diversity, Equity and Inclusion 2020 Survey Report: Findings and Takeaways

by **Hannah Rosen** (Strategist, Research and Scholarly Communication at LYRASIS)

This past year we have seen social unrest foment across the country, highlighting the racial injustice still inherent to policing, economic opportunity, the availability of medical treatment, and almost every other aspect of American life. Every institution, no matter how well-intentioned, has been forced to recognize that their policies and activities may inadvertently create, rather than lower, barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Libraries are no different. There is a dearly held assumption in the library world that libraries, due to their central mission of providing unfettered access to information, are naturally inclusive institutions, welcoming both users and staff from all types of diverse backgrounds. However, this assumption, like so many assumptions about American society, must be continually re-assessed. From a hiring standpoint alone, the library profession is not diverse: the **Ithaka S+R** survey, “Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity: Members of the Association of Research Libraries,” (<https://sr.ithaka.org/publications/inclusion-diversity-and-equity-arl/>) published in August 2017, found that 71% of staff in responding ARLs are White, with 8% Black or African American; 8% Asian; 6% Hispanic or Latinx; 5% decline to comment; 1% two or more races; and less than 1% for American Indian or Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) have gained traction as core values to reexamine both internally and externally within libraries over the last several years and have proven even more relevant in 2020. In August of 2020 LYRASIS Research released its DEI Survey Report (<https://www.lyrasis.org/programs/Pages/DEI-Survey-Report.aspx>), an attempt to provide a snapshot of library policies and activities surrounding DEI. This article will briefly explain the background of the report, and some of its overall findings.

LYRASIS Research

LYRASIS Research began in 2019 as an effort to identify trends across the over 1,000 libraries, archives and museums within the LYRASIS membership. Due to the large size of our membership, we believed that we could map the landscape of policies and activities across GLAM institutions by soliciting member feedback to provide a 30,000 foot view of different topics that affect the profession.

In 2019, we designed, conducted and released the Accessibility Survey Report, which identified major trends in policies and activities surrounding accessibility for online library materials. In May 2020, LYRASIS Research became an official part of our new Research and Innovation Division, and we went a step further; we asked the top tier of our membership, the Leaders Circle, to identify their most desired survey topics. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) was one of the two topics chosen, along with open content. After choosing the topics, Zoom meetings were conducted with the Leaders Circle to narrow down the foci of each chosen topic, and volunteers proofread the surveys before they were distributed to the membership. We are pleased to say that the 2020 DEI Survey Report has been a truly collaborative effort.

Survey Response

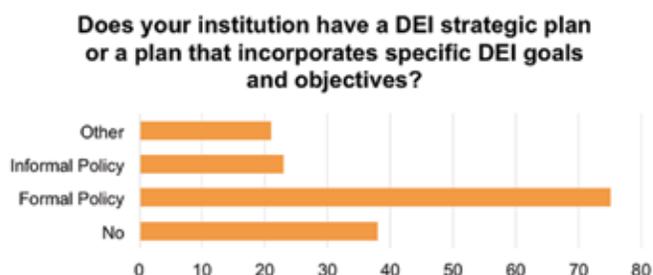
The survey was conducted between April and June of 2020. After data clean-up, the survey yielded 159 responses. The majority of respondents were academic libraries. Within academic libraries, approximately 8% of respondents represented Associate’s or Associate’s dominant colleges, 16% represented Baccalaureate colleges, 18% of respondents represented Master’s colleges and universities, and 37% of respondents represented doctoral universities.

The authors speculate that due to the sensitive nature of the survey topic, a certain level of selection bias is present in the results. Many respondents appeared to be quite actively involved in DEI activities. This selection bias should be taken into account when viewing the responses.

The survey was divided into three sections: policy and infrastructure; recruiting, hiring and retaining a diverse staff; and building/maintaining collections.

Policy and Infrastructure

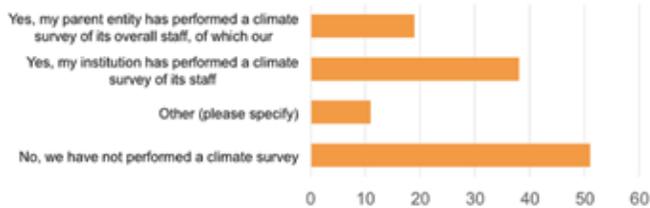
The majority of respondents, 47%, have a formal policy that specifically addresses DEI policies and objectives within their institution, while 14% have an informal policy (aka an intention or assumed directive, but not necessarily a written, institutionalized objective). In total, over 61% of all respondents have some form of DEI policy, and this was reflected across all institution types. Respondents were asked to provide open-ended examples of these policies, and those answers are included as examples in the report.



We also asked if institutions have performed climate surveys, aka conducting an anonymous survey within an institution, to gauge “the climate” of the environment in terms of DEI. The largest group of survey respondents for this question, 45%, have not performed a climate survey of their users. Broken down by demographic groups, Baccalaureate colleges in the survey appear to be an anomaly — they are more likely to have performed climate surveys of their users than both their academic and non-academic counterparts. Respondents were also asked if they had performed a climate survey of their staff, and, very similarly, only 43% had performed a climate survey of their staff.

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Has your institution performed a climate survey of your staff to seek input for your DEI initiatives?



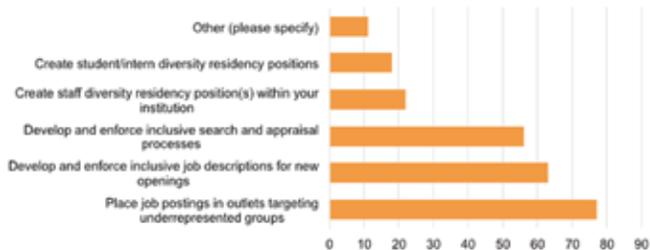
Finally, institutions were asked if they had one or more DEI committees. Most academic libraries have at least one DEI committee, with doctoral universities being more likely to have multiple committees within their libraries and/or participate in a DEI committee within their parent entity. Of all academic libraries, the masters colleges and universities were least likely to have a DEI committee within their library.

Recruiting, Hiring and Retaining a Diverse Staff

The majority of respondents said that their strategic plans include actions for recruiting a diverse staff. This was consistent across all academic library types.

Respondents were asked what strategies they employ to improve diversity amongst new hires. The most popular selections were 1) place job postings in outlets targeting underrepresented groups in libraries 2) develop and implement inclusive job descriptions, and 3) develop and implement inclusive search and appraisal processes. Less popular options were creating student/intern diversity residency positions and creating staff diversity residency positions. This could potentially be due to the fact that diversity residencies require extra financial resources, whereas the other options require changes in behavior, but no strain on financial outputs.

What strategies are employed at your institution to improve diversity among new hires?



One of the most interesting findings of the survey was related to DEI focused training/professional development. Respondents were asked which kinds of training options were provided to staff at their institutions. The top three most popular forms of training were all optional: optional in-person training, optional literature/reading guides, and optional online training. Mandatory training, whether in-person or online, is less popular amongst academic libraries. The authors theorized that mandatory trainings were either difficult to enforce or the most monetarily resource-intensive forms of training, and therefore less popular forms of training.

What kind of DEI training is provided to your staff?



Sexual harassment and discrimination were the top two most popular topics covered in DEI training. The authors speculate that this could be due to the legal penalties associated with the two topics. Sexual harassment and discrimination represent the main areas where institutions can be liable to litigation from employees, so the emphasis on these topics could be linked to training mandated by a parent institution, or preventative measures.

Respondents were asked what initiatives they have undertaken to make their physical spaces more inclusive. The most popular initiatives from survey respondents were creating gender neutral bathrooms, lactations rooms or spaces, and creating or changing wall art to increase a range of representation.

Maintaining/Building Diverse Collections

Unlike other areas of DEI work, only a small percentage of institutions, 18%, said that they have a formal DEI directive for their circulating collections, and only 11% have a formal DEI directive for unique collections. At this time, collections represent a lower priority for DEI work within the academic libraries surveyed. Of those respondents who do have mandates for their collections, they indicated doing a wide range of activities related to collecting policies, metadata creation and programming highlighting diverse collections.

Takeaways

Looking at the results of the survey, there are a few main takeaways. The libraries surveyed are actively thinking about DEI in many aspects of their work. However, current actions may only translate to surface work, rather than deep engagement with DEI. Upon deeper investigation, excavating the responses and carefully examining the nuances of open-ended questions, libraries are not necessarily doing the more difficult work to move the needle to a truly more diverse, inclusive, and equitable environment. Recruitment initiatives are more popular when they require less staff time and monetary resources; the important work of DEI training is popular, but more often optional, rather than required. Relatively few respondents are conducting the types of climate surveys which can reveal systemic issues.

It is our hope that this report will be useful on multiple levels. For those institutions that have been doing DEI work for some time, it is an opportunity to benchmark against your peers. For those institutions just beginning to create DEI policies, or those looking for new ideas, the report is a good roadmap for strategic thinking, and provides many examples of different policies and initiatives to consider. We at LYRASIS are not an exception: we face the same issues as our member libraries, and we do not have all the answers. What we do have is the ability to provide a space to have the conversation. 🌱