

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Statements on Academic Library Websites

An Analysis of Content, Communication, and Messaging

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ABSTRACT

Post-secondary education in the 21st century United States is rapidly diversifying, and institutions' online offerings and presence are increasingly significant. Academic libraries have an established history of offering virtual services and providing online resources for students, faculty, staff, and the general public. In addition to these services and resources, information on academic library websites can contribute to an institution's demonstration of value placed on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). This article analyzes the DEI statements of a library consortium's member websites to explore how these statements contribute to institutional construction of, and commitment to, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Descriptive analysis revealed 12 of 16 member libraries had explicitly labeled DEI statements in November 2020, with an additional member updating their website to include such a statement in early 2021. Content analysis examined how the existing statements contributed to institutional value of and commitment to DEI, and multi-modal theory explored the communicative aspects of DEI statement content. Analysis revealed vague conceptualizations of diversity and library-centered language in DEI statements, while a subset of statements employed anti-racist and social justice language to position the library as an active agent for social change. Implications and avenues for future research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 44% of US resident students attending US degree-granting postsecondary institutions were non-white during the Fall 2017 term.¹ Academic libraries can utilize their online presence to engage diverse students. These sites provide users with various services, resources, and information. The convenience of remote access may encourage physical library use and encourage lasting library utilization. Clearly demonstrating institutional values of diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) sends a message to users. Given the amount and variety of content on academic library websites, creating a shared vision regarding the purpose of academic library websites is challenging.² As instances of racial discrimination and marginalization continually occur within society, academic libraries can position themselves as agents for social justice via the presence and content of DEI statements. In addition to social justice and student demographics, professional values, outlined in the American Library Association's Bill of Rights, demonstrate the need for academic libraries to adequately serve non-white students.³ This article examines the DEI statements on academic library websites and examines the presence, or lack thereof, and content of these statements to address the following research question: How do DEI statements on academic library websites contribute to the construction of institutional value of diversity, equity and inclusion?

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature regarding DEI in academic libraries is plentiful.⁴ In addition to abundant scholarly research, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) addressed diversity via the “Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries,” while equity, diversity and inclusion are part of ACRL’s timeless core ideology.⁵ The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) has similarly addressed diversity via the *SPEC Kit 356: Diversity and Inclusion*, which compiled information regarding recruitment and retention of minority librarians, strategies for fostering inclusive workplaces, and diversity programs and assessment.⁶ Additionally, the American Library Association (ALA) announced the formation of a joint task force to create a framework for cultural proficiencies in racial equity.⁷ Despite ample research and professional attention to DEI, surprisingly, no studies have explicitly examined academic library DEI statements and few studies have examined diversity content on library websites.

Academic Libraries and DEI Statements

Examining website diversity content, Mestre reviewed 107 ARL member websites for the presence and visibility of diversity content.⁸ Employing content analysis, Mestre found that diversity language which focused on ethnic and racial diversity, particularly for Black, Latinx, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, was most included in a strategic plan (37%, n=39) and in a values statement (27%, n=29). Member sites that included diversity in a mission (16%, n=17), vision (14%, n=15) or diversity (13%, n=14) statement were less frequent. Generally, across types of diversity-related links and information, diversity content was limited on the ARL sites and, when present, was often difficult to find, situated deeply within a website behind multiple layers, or requiring a site search to locate.

Academic Library Mission Statements

Expanding the scope to include mission statements yields literature that examines communicating purpose. Salisbury and Griffis examined the presence and placement of mission statements on 113 ARL websites.⁹ Operating under the principle that considers website content as hierarchical (e.g., the most important information is most visible), the authors documented the number of steps necessary to reach the library’s mission statement. Eighty-four percent (n=95) of library websites contained a mission statement and 3.5% (n=4) of libraries contained a direct link from the homepage. The authors identified a visibility issue, as mission statements on 14% (n=16) of websites required one click to access, but only four were clearly labeled as mission statements. Despite this issue, Salisbury and Griffis found that mission statements were available in two steps or fewer in over 60% (n=72) of libraries. The authors’ findings indicate that academic libraries acknowledge the need to make their mission statements more visible to various stakeholders.

Academic libraries are responsible to the institutions within which they are situated, making their institutions a primary stakeholder. Wadas employed discourse analysis and compared library and institutional mission statements from 44 colleges and universities and found 14 (31.8%) institutions, “showed a discernable degree of agreement between the college or university and library mission statements,” while the remaining 30 showed none.¹⁰ Like Salisbury and Griffis’ finding regarding the lack of explicit labeling, Wadas also identified a labeling inconsistency regarding the information in, and purpose of, each statement type. Wadas’ analysis also identified a prevailing sense of vagueness across college/university and academic library mission statements, further contributing to confusion regarding statements’ purpose and intended messages.¹¹

Mission Statements, Strategic Plans and Diversity: Content Analyses

Wilson, Meyer, and McNeal examined institutional mission statements and other diversity-related content on 80 websites of institutions of higher education in the United States.¹² Fifty-nine (75%) referenced diversity in their mission statements and 52 (65%) had a separate diversity statement. Of these statements, Wilson et al. found most diversity references fell into two areas: population demographics (student body racial or ethnic composition) and cultural vitality (incorporating various cultures within the campus community). Of the 59 institutions that referenced diversity in the mission statement, 63% were related to changing student demographics, while 55% referenced cultural diversity. Furthermore, less than 10% of the statements included language that fell into both categories, indicating institutions conceptualized diversity in one area or the other. In addition to formal mission statements, Wilson et al. found that 52 (65%) of the institutions contained other diversity content. Given these findings, the authors state their disappointment in the 25%–35% of institutions that did not include diversity content in official, primary statements.

Recognizing the rapid developments affecting the LIS field, Saunders employed content analysis and examined the publicly available strategic plans of 63 ACRL institutions.¹³ Saunders' analysis indicated that while 40 (63.5%) libraries alluded to institutional mission, goals, or strategic plan to some degree, only 17 (27%) made explicit connections, results similar to Wadas' findings.¹⁴ Regarding specific content, Saunders categorized themes into three tiers: major emphasis (>75% of strategic plans), second tier, and other areas of emphasis. Saunders' analysis revealed that strategic plan diversity content was a second-tier issue related to library staff. Saunders found the term diversity was used in two ways: to refer to expertise, skills, and abilities; and to delimitate demographic characteristics, including ethnicity, nationality, or language.¹⁵ Like Wilson et al., Saunders' findings demonstrate academic libraries' recognition of the importance of diversity in higher education.¹⁶

METHODOLOGY

This study employed content analysis and examined UBorrow consortium members' library websites (see appendix A for a list) for the presence and content of DEI statements. UBorrow is an interlibrary loan service comprised of Big Ten Academic Alliance members, plus the University of Chicago and the Center for Research Libraries, in which "users at member institutions are granted access to the collective wealth of information of the entire consortium."¹⁷ UBorrow members leverage individual campus resources to collaboratively assist the academic pursuits of students and faculty of each institution via the expedited sharing of resources. These libraries were chosen as a representation of a model consortium and are a reasonable focus for examination.

Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts or other forms of contextually based data. It allows for data analysis "in view of the meanings, symbolic qualities, and expressive contents they have and of the communicative roles they play in the lives of the data's sources".¹⁸ Content analysis provides a foundation for understanding how messages and meanings are constructed. As such, content analysis is appropriate to analyze the content and meanings of DEI statements on UBorrow websites.

Additionally, this study utilized multimodal theory, particularly Lemke's hypermodality and three communicative acts: organizational, presentational, and orientational.¹⁹ Examining DEI statements as multimodal texts allows for the analysis of meaning making and construction across

each type of act. Just as users make meanings across sentences, paragraphs, and pages, users likewise make meanings from the ways in which they interact with digital information.²⁰ The organizational aspect provides a way to examine the spatial arrangement of library websites, for example, libraries that dedicate entire webpages to DEI statements or those in which these statements share pages with other content. Content analysis provides a way of examining the presentational aspect of information, the ideational content of texts, in this case how DEI statements are presented on UBorrow websites. Content analysis also provides a way to examine the orientational aspect, which indicates the nature of the communicative relationship, via exploring how libraries establish relations with whom they are communicating, for example, how the presence of DEI statements positions libraries as conscientious entities engaged in the promotion of diverse and inclusive environments.

I examined each UBorrow member website for an explicit DEI statement. Informed by previous literature, I created an Excel spreadsheet and entered data from each institution including: institution name, library website URL, DEI statement (Yes/No), homepage link (Yes/No), DEI statement URL, and notes following a standardized process. First, I recorded the library's homepage. Next, I searched the homepage for a DEI statement link. If found, I indicated the presence in the Yes/No columns and recorded the URL. Only direct links to library DEI statements were marked as yes in the homepage link column. If no homepage link existed, I searched the library websites using the following terms: diversity, equity, and inclusion. When it was difficult to locate DEI statements, I utilized the chat feature or e-mailed library administrators to ensure I was not overlooking relevant information. I conducted an initial search in July 2020 and a subsequent search in November 2020. No changes to explicit DEI statements occurred. I conducted a follow-up search in April 2021. In the intervening months, one major change occurred on the University of Minnesota Libraries website. Implications of this change are discussed below.

Once DEI statements were identified, I examined the pages on which they were located. First, I examined page organization. In this step, I noted if the DEI statement was the sole content on a page. If not, I noted the accompanying content. This analysis focused on Lemke's *traversals*, or the varied paths available to users in their search and navigation of websites.²¹ Second, I analyzed DEI statement content and identified the ways libraries presented their statements. This step included an examination of the language used in the DEI statement. Third, I expanded upon the presentational analysis and considered the ways DEI statement content oriented the library toward users by exploring how statement language contributed to portraying the library in a certain way. This analysis focused on two areas: library-centered language common across statements and social justice language, which a subset of libraries' DEI statements employed.

Limitations

UBorrow is a single 16-member library consortium. Further research of similar consortia or library associations would contribute to the study's limited size. This study focused on explicit DEI statements, thereby excluding other forms of DEI content (e.g., announcements, marketing material, events). Further research employing a broader view of DEI content on academic library sites would also contribute to this study's findings. Finally, this study represents library websites during a snapshot in time.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Twelve (75%) UBorrow member websites had an explicitly titled DEI statement in November 2020 and 13 had an explicitly titled and labeled DEI statement as of April 2021 (see table 1). In

November 2020, the University of Minnesota had a clearly defined statement; however, this statement was untitled, and its location was unique among websites during the initial search. Initially, this statement was not considered an explicit statement due to the lacking title, the implications of which are discussed in detail below. However, between November 2020 and April 2021, the University of Minnesota Libraries updated their homepage to include a link to a clearly defined and labeled DEI statement, which University Librarian and Dean of Libraries Lisa German approved on February 1, 2021. For this reason, the University of Minnesota Libraries website receives unique discussion in the analysis that follows. Three additional consortium members did not have an explicit DEI statement.

Table 1. UBBorrow member libraries and the presence of DEI statements

Institution	Explicit DEI statement (Y/N)
University of Chicago	Yes
Center for Research Libraries	No
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	Yes
Indiana University	Yes
University of Iowa	Yes
University of Maryland	Yes
University of Michigan	Yes
University of Minnesota	No (Fall 2020) Yes (Spring 2021)
Michigan State University	Yes
University of Nebraska	Yes
Northwestern University	No
Ohio State University	Yes
Penn State University	Yes
Purdue University	No
Rutgers University	Yes
University of Wisconsin - Madison	Yes

While 12/13 of the 16 UBBorrow members contained an explicitly labeled DEI statement, all member institutions addressed DEI in some form, which included LibGuides, links to library resources, library events, and statements responding to specific societal events. However, the degree to which additional DEI content prominent varied, with some content buried deep within library sites, as Mestre's work indicated.²²

DEI Statement Analysis: Organization, Presentation, and Orientation

The following section presents the descriptive analysis of the findings utilizing content analysis and Lemke's organizational, presentational, and orientational communicative aspects.²³ Analysis focused on questions about how the organization and presentation of DEI statements contributed to the construction of meaning, the content of DEI statements, and how content is oriented toward users in ways that position academic libraries as conscientious entities via their DEI statements.

Organizational Aspect of DEI Statements

The organizational aspect of communication is instrumental and organizes and composes content in such a way that it is coherent and cohesive.²⁴ Organizational meanings have practical consequences, as the example of the University of Minnesota's library website demonstrates.

Unique among UBorrow sites as of November 2020, the University of Minnesota Libraries' website contained a clearly focused, although untitled, DEI statement. This statement is accessed via the *About* option on the homepage's menu (see figure 1), which includes dropdown links to library policies, library overview, and the untitled DEI statement.

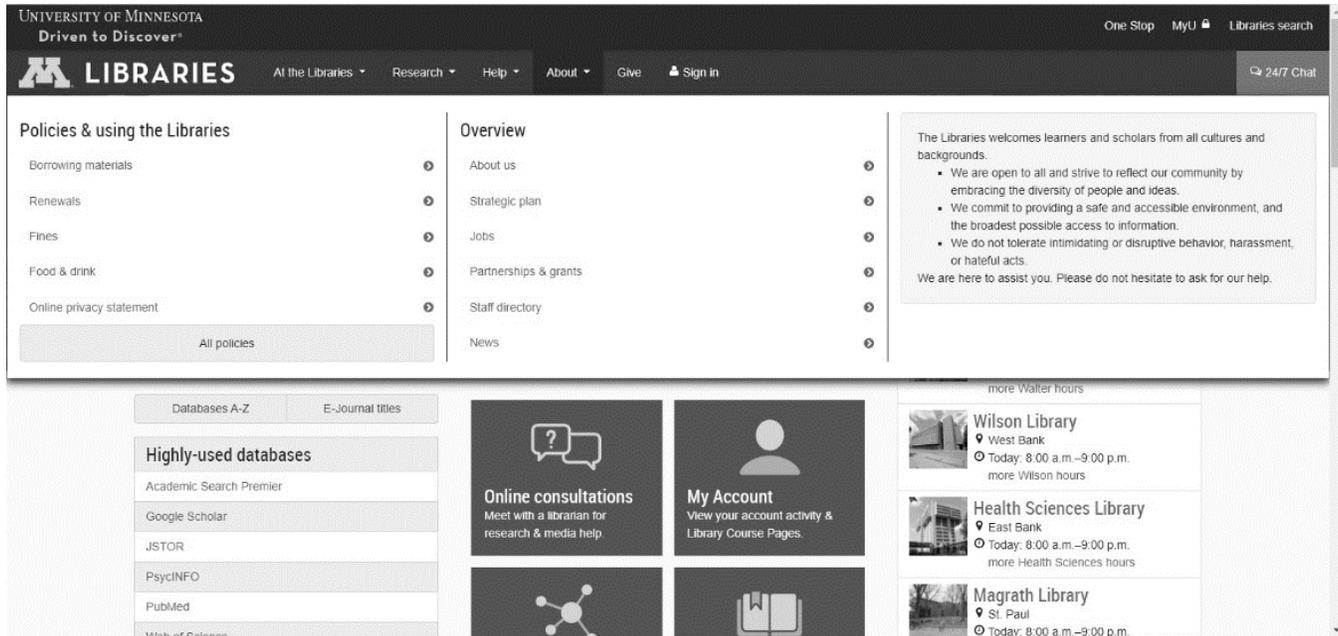


Figure 1. The University of Minnesota Libraries' homepage (November 2020).

The statement's placement is problematic for several reasons. First, the statement is easy to overlook. The researcher and a library staff member who responded to the researcher's query via library chat both overlooked the statement. Only when a third staff member was consulted did the identification of this statement occur. Secondly, Lemke discusses the affordances of hypertext and the many ways users can navigate websites, calling possible paths *traversals*.²⁵ Among the most basic is the visual-organizational traversal, which considers how webpage composition guides users' eyes across the page. In this instance, the links are a call to action and signify to users that clicking on a link will transport them to a page with more information. Static text on a webpage does not offer the same affordance. As a block of text located next to two panes of links, the statement is static, passive, and non-interactive, contributing to the ease with which users can overlook the statement. Finally, this statement did not appear in the results of a library site search for the terms diversity, equity, or inclusion. Given the various ways users can transverse a website, including actively searching for information, the lacking title makes this statement difficult to locate via scanning and searching. In users' traversals of websites, two common approaches, identifying links or actively searching for desired information, are not applicable in locating the University of Minnesota Libraries' DEI statement.

In the intervening months, between November 2020 and April 2021, the University of Minnesota Libraries website was updated to include an explicitly titled and labeled DEI statement, available via a link from the homepage, prominently located in the upper right quadrant between the menu bar and hours and locations information (see figure 2).

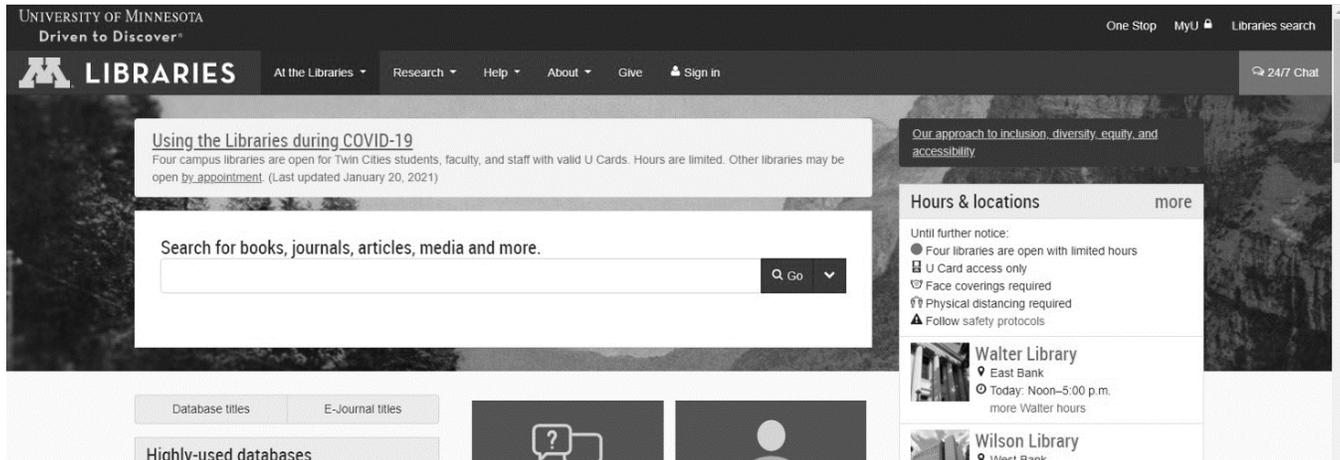


Figure 2. The UMN Libraries' homepage (April 2021).

This statement, written by the University Libraries' Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Leadership Committee, was approved on February 1, 2021. Presented on a standalone page, this statement is similar to those of eight other U BORROW consortium members, which are discussed in the next section.

Organization: Stand-alone DEI Statements

Of the websites that contained explicitly labeled DEI statements, eight libraries dedicated an entire page to the DEI statement (nine including the UMN Libraries update). Examination of these webpages revealed similar page titles, with variance according to the terms included. Some page titles only included diversity, while others included diversity, equity, and inclusion. The University of Michigan was unique as it also included accessibility. The relative consistency across these titles contributes to less frustrating and confusing user experience. Clear and descriptive titles provide a positive experience for users accessing pages with an assistive screen reader. Logistically, clear titles amplify page presence on searches conducted via Google or other search engines. In addition to webpage titles, examination of the eight/nine pages revealed a relatively similar page organization and structure. Each page contained headings that included some or all the terms diversity, equity, or inclusion. The pages were text heavy, with the University of Nebraska and Penn State University the only two whose pages included visual representations of diversity (i.e., images containing multi-racial groups). Furthermore, the detail level of libraries' DEI statements were relatively consistent across the eight/nine webpages.

While the page titles, organization, and detail of DEI statements were similar, differences existed in the amount of additional DEI content. For example, along with their DEI statement, the University of Maryland Libraries' diversity page defined diversity, an equitable environment, and inclusion. The University of Michigan Library followed their explicit DEI statement with information relating the statement to the library's collections, services, spaces, and people. Other library webpages did not contain as much other on-page information. For example, Rutgers University Libraries links to various DEI resources, which was another common trait (see figure 3). Although clicking links requires additional steps to reach DEI content, the presence of links is significant in consideration of Lemke's traversals.

Home > About > Diversity at Rutgers University Libraries

Diversity at Rutgers University Libraries

As the intellectual commons of one the most diverse universities in the nation, Rutgers University Libraries advance and promote diversity in all its forms. We believe the Libraries are stronger and can more effectively support the mission of Rutgers when we are inclusive and equitable. To this end, the Libraries endeavor to create a welcoming workplace that reflects and supports the many populations and programs of the university with which we engage and we strive to provide spaces, resources, and services that are accessible.

To learn more about how the University supports diversity, please visit these websites:

Office of Employment Equity: <https://uhr.rutgers.edu/uhr-units-offices/office-employment-equity>

Office of Diversity and Inclusion: <http://odi.rutgers.edu/>

New Brunswick

- [Office of Diversity and Inclusion \(ODI\)](#)
- [Center for Social Justice Education \(SJE\) and LGBT Communities](#)
- [Institute for Women's Leadership \(IWL\)](#)
- [Office of Disability Services](#)
- [Tyler Clementi Center](#)

Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences

- [The Center for Healthy Families and Cultural Diversity \(CHFCD\)](#) in the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health, Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School
- [The Office for Diversity and Community Engagement Opportunities](#), Rutgers New Jersey Medical School

Newark

- [Diversity at Rutgers Newark](#)
- [Rutgers Business School](#)

Camden

- [Committee on Institutional Equity and Diversity](#)

Figure 3. Rutgers Libraries' diversity homepage with DEI links.

Of the many types, a common organizational traversal is what Lemke terms cohesive, in which "each element is an instance of some general category, and therefore with some thematic and/or visual similarities to the others, and as we catenate them we are cumulating toward an exhaustive exploration of the category".²⁶ The links on the Rutgers University Libraries' diversity page allow users to traverse the library's DEI content, along with institutional DEI content, as several links direct users to diversity pages external to the library. These links serve as calls to action and require users to click for more information. Associated to DEI content via the categorical connection, these links allow users to fully explore and expand upon the information found on the library's DEI statement page, allowing users to create their own meaning of library commitment to DEI. User creation of meaning is in opposition to the library making this decision for the user, as when DEI statements are placed on pages with other content, as is the case in four UBorrow member websites.

Organization: Shared DEI Statements

Unlike the libraries that dedicated a page to DEI statements, variety exists in the page titles of the four libraries on which DEI statements share pages with other content. DEI statements are available via the *About* section of the library's website, while of these, two are further couched on *Administration* pages. The pages on which DEI statements shared space exemplify Mestre's finding that DEI content situated deeply within a website are difficult to locate.²⁷ Furthermore, the location of DEI content is not entirely intuitive, making a user's traversal to locate desired information less cohesive. Michigan State University's (MSU) DEI statement is found on the

library’s strategic plan page. Rather than in a single statement, DEI content is spread across the library’s strategic plan, including an inclusivity statement; a vision statement; and diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic direction (see figure 4). Also, unlike the pages singularly devoted to a DEI statement, MSU’s strategic plan page was comparatively static with no links to other library or institutional DEI content. The lack of links does not allow users to traverse MSU’s site for DEI content as easily due to the page’s static nature, making it difficult for users to, “construct a traversal which is more than the sum of its parts.”²⁸ In this way, MSU constructs the meaning of their commitment to DEI via the limitations and restrictions on users’ interaction opportunities with the page on which their DEI content is situated.

Mission	Core Values	
The Libraries are at the center of academic life at Michigan State University, providing expertise, collections, and infrastructure for discovery and creation. We facilitate connections that support research, teaching, and learning in our local and global communities.	User Engagement We place users at the forefront of our work. We engage with and learn from our users and adapt to meet their evolving needs.	Inclusivity We provide welcoming spaces where everyone can work, discover, and create. We advance accessibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion in our workplace and in the services and resources we provide.
Vision The Libraries promote equal access to information and spaces for all. We lead meaningful initiatives in accessibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion. We work in a culture of transparency, experimentation, and growth.	Staff Empowerment We trust each other to do our best work. We celebrate and create opportunities for growth, experimentation, and feedback. We cultivate respect, open communication, and connection.	Partnership We invest in collaborative relationships. We actively build positive connections and lead with mutual respect by sharing our expertise and valuing the contributions of our partners.
	Expertise We are leaders in our field. We use our collections, resources, dynamic skills, and knowledge to help our community. We are approachable, informed, and engaged in our work.	Stewardship We are responsible caretakers of our collections. We recognize the power of information collection and description. We consider the impact of our work on creators, researchers, and communities.
Strategic Plan Home Current Initiatives Completed Initiatives Strategic Plan 2019 (PDF)	Strategic Directions	
	 Center of Activity & Engagement ▼	
	 Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion ▲	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate a climate of safety, empathy, and respect • Create inclusive and accessible spaces and resources • Emphasize underrepresented perspectives in collections and descriptive practices • Contribute to a more diverse profession via recruitment and retention efforts 	
	 Organizational Vitality ▼	

Figure 4. Michigan State University Libraries’ diversity content as part of strategic plan.

Organization: Homepage Links

Homepage links to DEI statements were present on seven (58%) library homepages. When present, homepage links were located at two locations: in the menu or page footers. Additionally, two levels of clarity existed regarding homepage links, as some sites contained an explicitly labeled link, while others required a two-step process to access the DEI link. For example, the

University of Iowa and Penn State University Libraries each had a clearly labeled link to their DEI statement available via a single click on their library homepages. Contrastingly, Michigan, Maryland, Nebraska, Ohio State, and Rutgers all required users to first navigate a menu bar to find a link to the library’s DEI statement. This two-step process requires more time and effort, whereas direct links require one less step. However, the direct link’s location on the University of Iowa’s library homepage is located in the footer (see figure 5) and Penn State University’s direct DEI link is located near the bottom of the page, requiring users to scroll through entire pages. Although requiring an extra step, libraries with a menu link at the top of the homepage, such as the Ohio State University (see figure 6) do not require scrolling. A tradeoff exists between page location and number of steps to locate a link to the library’s DEI statement when a homepage link is present. Regardless of the homepage location, the presence of links to DEI statements provides relatively easy access, making a user’s traversal to these statements relatively effortless and straightforward.

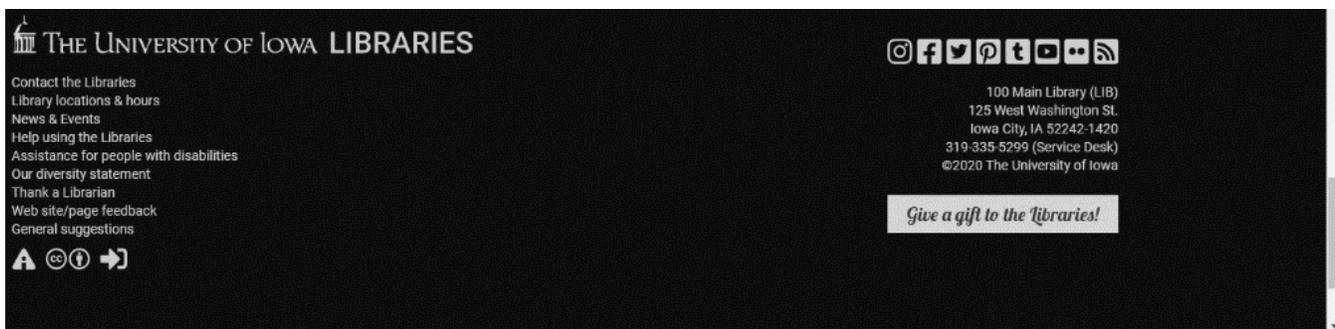


Figure 5. University of Iowa Libraries’ homepage DEI statement footer link.

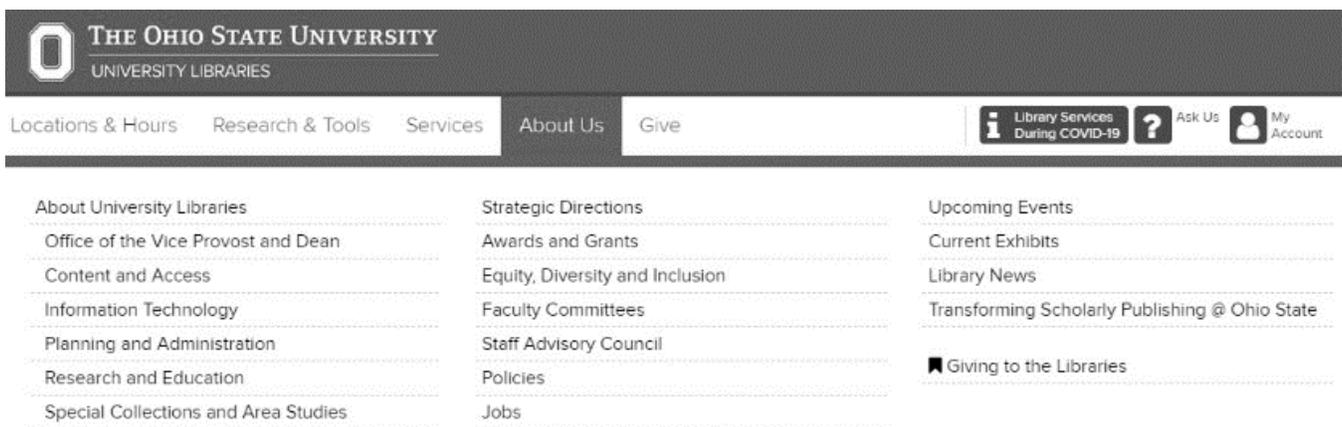


Figure 6. The Ohio State University Libraries’ homepage DEI statement menu link.

Presentation Aspect of DEI Statements

Lemke defines presentational meanings as those that present some state of affairs, which are construed from connections among processes, relations, events, participants, and circumstances and is significant for institutional purposes.²⁹ Users see the product of these actions that result in public DEI statements. The discussions, meetings, efforts, and decisions that contribute to DEI statements on library websites are concealed. The presence of DEI statements represents the hidden work necessary for their creation, making DEI statement content the library’s presentation of commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Presentation: Vague language and diversity conceptualizations

Examining the content of the 12/13 libraries with an explicit DEI statement revealed these statements are frequently vague. Many statements do not include specific language identifying what diverse means or who is in-/excluded. For example, Rutgers University Libraries' DEI statement states, "the libraries advance and promote diversity in all its forms" without describing, defining, or providing diversity examples.³⁰ Additionally, Rutgers Libraries endeavors "to create a *welcoming workplace that reflects and supports the many populations and programs of the university with which we engage [emphasis original]*."³¹ Again, no definition indicates who the many populations includes. Similarly, vague language produced an inconsistency regarding to whom DEI statements were directed, with many, but not all, statements including faculty and staff. Indiana University's statement represents the later, stating, "IU Libraries esteems **DIVERSITY** of all kinds [...] to support students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and foster a global, diverse inclusive community... In addition, the Libraries commits to diversifying its own staff to reflect a diversity of perspectives and backgrounds [emphasis original]."³² Including library faculty and staff acknowledges the potential significance of having a diverse and representative workforce, but still vaguely addresses the issue.

Unlike many DEI statements which vaguely conceptualize diversity, the University of Maryland Libraries includes in its definition of diversity "race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, cognitive or physical disability; and learning styles" while noting diversity is not limited to these categories.³³ Similarly, the University of Iowa Libraries "welcomes and serves all, including people of color from all nations, immigrants, people with disabilities, LGBTQ, and the most vulnerable in our community."³⁴ While still broad, and with language to cover additional conceptions of diversity, these statements' explicit mention of various groups is unique among UBorrow members' DEI statements.

Presentation: Library-focused Language

Continuing the broad conceptualizations of diversity, the University of Chicago Libraries' statement includes an inward focus, which asks library users to consider their own positions and backgrounds: "We encourage open and honest discussion, reflect on our assumptions, and actively seek viewpoints beyond our own ... and respect the uniqueness that we each bring to our shared endeavors."³⁵ This statement asks library users to actively challenge their own assumptions, values, beliefs, and views. However, the statement does not include active language regarding the necessity to prepare for challenging and difficult conversations and interactions. Furthermore, the general conceptualization of these interactions with diversity makes it difficult for individuals to prepare for concrete situations in which one may encounter challenging, uncomfortable, or difficult conditions.

Utilizing Lemke's presentational aspect of communication, which considers processes, relations, events, participants, and circumstances to create and present a state of affairs, demonstrates that UBorrow member libraries are vague in their DEI statements, which the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) exemplifies in their recognition of "diversity as a constantly changing concept. It [diversity] is purposefully defined broadly as encompassing, but not limited to, individuals' social, cultural, mental and physical differences."³⁶ DEI statements, as representative of academic libraries, present these institutions as attuned to larger social issues and the difficulties of making sweeping, definitive statements regarding diversity, when the term itself is, as the UIUC statement indicates, evolving and contested. The challenges this creates for library

administrators, and the hidden work that contributes to the creation and presentation of DEI statements, is invisible in the end product, yet informs the content of these public statements.

Orientational Aspect of DEI Statements

Orientational meanings establish relations between those who are communicating. These meanings communicate point of view, attitudes, and values.³⁷ DEI statements demonstrate libraries' willingness to engage with and address DEI issues, as well as, in some cases, combating racism and discrimination. Analyzing the content of these statements produces insights into how statements orient libraries to their audiences.

The vague and general language of many library DEI statements creates a sense of detachment between libraries and users. Conceptualizing diversity using vague language in an exchange between library users and a library DEI statement orients the library in an abstract, immaterial way. Using vague, broad, and ill-defined language makes no concrete demands of users. Additionally, many DEI statements are written in library-centered language, which positions the libraries at the center and users as peripheral. For example, the University of Nebraska's statement begins, "The University Libraries creates and fosters inclusive environments for teaching, learning, scholarship, creative expression and civic engagement."³⁸ In this instance, the onus is on the libraries and what they can do to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The statement continues, "Libraries staff members are empowered to provide an array of library services, collections, and spaces to meet the diverse needs of students, faculty, and researchers."³⁹ Again, the library self-promulgates their efforts to address DEI issues and ignores users' contributions to positive, inclusive, and equitable environments. The University of Nebraska Libraries' statement is not unique in the use of library-centered language, as such language is common across UBBorrow members' DEI statements. Less vague and user-centered language would make library DEI statements more humanizing, valuable, and contribute to the inclusive environments these statements espouse.

Orientation: Anti-racism and Social Justice Language

Some libraries' DEI statements make explicit mention of larger social issues and actively position themselves as social justice advocates, particularly anti-racism. The University of Wisconsin – Madison Libraries are "dedicated to the principles and practices of social justice, diversity and equality and ... commit ourselves to doing our part to end the many forms of discrimination that plague our society."⁴⁰ The Penn State University Libraries' statement includes a commitment to "disrupting racism, hate and bias whenever and wherever we encounter it."⁴¹ The University of Michigan Library "actively work[s] to ensure that tenets of diversity and antiracism influence all aspects of our work."⁴² These statements present the libraries as cognizant, responsible, and socially aware entities.

In these statements, the libraries' employment of social justice discourse demonstrates non-neutrality. The University of Wisconsin – Madison Libraries' statement recognizes its place within society and the continual legacy of discrimination which tangibly affects current students. Identifying social discrimination as a "plague" implies a solution via targeted, collective efforts to "further and enable the opportunities for education, benefit the good of the public and inform citizens."⁴³ Similarly, the Ohio State University Libraries are guided by priorities "which facilitate, celebrate and honor diversity, inclusion, access and social justice."⁴⁴ Embracing an active stance against social discrimination and positing the libraries as proponents of social justice utilizes the libraries' DEI statement as a tool to combat these injustices. Semantically, DEI statement text

offers information to users. Statement content demonstrates libraries' willingness to address DEI issues institutionally and within society. The text demonstrates the libraries' desire to combat injustice and the importance they place in doing so. Additionally, in linking DEI statements to social justice issues, libraries make demands of users. While still employing library-centered language, these statements provide a call to action via their direct acknowledgement that the libraries' actions are a part of larger, collective efforts in the continual struggle against social injustices.

Lack of Explicit DEI Statements

As the analysis shows, the ways in which academic libraries organize, present, and orient themselves via their DEI statements contributes to the construction of institutional value of, and commitment to, diversity, equity, inclusion. But what about libraries who do not have an explicit DEI statement? In the United States context, given the attention to diversity, through Black Lives Matter and other social movements advocating for social justice, it is surprising that four UBBorrow members do not have explicitly labeled DEI statements on their websites. Orientationally, the absence of an explicit DEI statement suggests a lack of concern and consideration on behalf of libraries, as well as seemingly being out of touch with broader social contexts in which racial disparities persist. A clear DEI statement, however, is a single piece of a library's online presence. Academic libraries can organize and present DEI content on their websites in other ways, as all UBBorrow members did, even if an explicit statement was lacking.

For example, the Purdue University Libraries have a Diversity, Inclusion, Racism and Anti-racism Resources library guide, which acts as a one-stop shop for DEI-related material. Additionally, this guide contains a statement from the Dean of Libraries, dated June 2, 2020, condemning and making a collective call to action to address systemic racism. Given this statement, while acknowledging the bureaucratic mechanisms in place that may slow the creation of an explicit DEI statement, the question remains: if "enough is enough" as the statement claims, why have the Purdue Libraries not taken swift action to expedite the bureaucratic process? Purdue University Libraries are working behind the scenes and have created a Council on Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, as well as creating a new strategic plan in which "EDI [equity, diversity and inclusion] is much more prominent in the current draft of that plan than in previous ones."⁴⁵

Similarly, Northwestern University does not, as of this writing, have an explicit DEI statement. However, minimal diversity language is present in a public-facing welcome message on the library's *About* page stating, "Your library serves the diversity of the Northwestern community."⁴⁶ Furthermore, minimal diversity language appears in the internal Strategic Plan, 2019–2021, which includes a commitment to "responding to the vibrant diversity of our campus community."⁴⁷ Additionally, recent conversations regarding racism, diversity, and social justice among library leadership have spurred the creation of a formal EDI program at the institutional level.⁴⁸ Examining the situation at Northwestern University revealed a look into the hidden work required to create and present DEI content and an explicit DEI statement, demonstrating the institutional significance of the presentational aspect of communication.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The descriptive analysis presented in this study provides a foundation for closer analysis and future research, with potential avenues suggested below. This analysis also illustrates issues with the way in which DEI statements are presented on academic library websites, which, given the pervasive whiteness of academic librarianship, affects academic librarians, staff, and the students

they serve. Following Lemke's treatment of organizational meanings as primarily instrumental, the following section discusses presentational and orientational implications of DEI statement content.⁴⁹

Academic libraries are an integral component of the institutions within which they are situated. Their physical and digital spaces, services, and resources are critical to students' academic success and faculty research. Academic libraries also contribute to larger institutional DEI initiatives. While an examination of institutional DEI statements is beyond the scope of this study, institutional mission and vision statements also address diversity, equity, and inclusion. Although many institutions have implemented specific diversity statements, Wilson, Meyer, and McNeal identified diversity content on institutional websites as being limited.⁵⁰ Given the changing demographics of higher education in the United States, the significance of DEI to academic institutions and libraries will continually increase. If the purpose of mission and diversity statements is to reflect institutional priorities, as Wilson and colleagues argue, the presence, or lack thereof, and content of these statements indicates the extent to which institutions value diversity, equity, and inclusion.⁵¹

Presentational Implications of DEI Statements

In the context of the present study, that all UBBorrow member libraries' websites engaged in some ways with DEI content demonstrates the value they place on diversity, equity and inclusion. However, that only 12/13 of the 16 sites contained explicitly titled DEI statements demonstrates more concerted effort is required if these libraries are to truly demonstrate their commitment. Despite other DEI language, Northwestern University, a member of the 2020 ACRL Diversity Alliance, does not have an explicit, public-facing DEI statement, which demonstrates the many ways academic libraries are involved with diversity initiatives. While academic libraries may have internal policies that guide practice, that these policies, if they exist, are not public does not contribute to the construction and dissemination of the libraries' message indicating their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The lack of a publicly facing statement, whether intentional or not, contributes to the message that the library is not fully committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In this vein, further exploration of diversity content and statements, at the institutional and library levels, is necessary to expand upon the findings of the present study regarding the messages DEI statements send. Qualitative studies could investigate the working cultures of academic libraries and explore internal mechanisms that contribute to the creation of public facing statements and how these mechanisms operate. Lemke argues that presentational meanings are typically uncritical due to the presupposition of institutional hierarchies and roles, which minimize threats to the status quo, making this avenue especially fruitful from a critical or decolonizing framework.⁵² Other opportunities for further research include quantitative content analysis of diversity statements, which could reveal specific words, terms, and phrases that institutions and academic libraries use to shed light on how these entities conceptualize DEI. Research examining users' perspectives of academic library DEI content is necessary to explore the ways in which libraries' messages are received.

Oriental Implications of DEI Statements

Examining UBBorrow members' DEI statements revealed the frequent employment of library-centered language. Framing the statements in this way places responsibility to create inclusive, equitable and welcoming environments on academic libraries, librarians, and staff. If the onus is

on academic libraries, as this DEI statement language suggests, those who staff libraries are required to appropriately serve diverse students. As such, practical considerations of staff training regarding cultural competence is of paramount importance, which the University of Michigan recognizes as they “encourage all library staff to participate in diversity-focused professional development and training activities.”⁵³ While training and professional development opportunities are of limited utility, as cultural competence, cultural humility, and a diversity mindset cannot be acquired in one-off sessions, setting a pervasive atmosphere establishes institutional library value of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Furthermore, hiring and retaining staff representative of student demographics is critical as doing so is one way academic libraries can demonstrate evidence of their values placed on diversity.

That librarianship has traditionally been a white profession, as 86.7% of ALA members self-identified as white as of 2017 and 86.1% of higher education credentialed librarians were white as of 2009–2010, exacerbates the need for representative library staff.⁵⁴ However, recruiting and hiring diverse staff is challenging as the number of visible minorities in academic librarianship has remained stagnant.⁵⁵ Retaining academic librarians and staff of color is a separate challenge, as institutional and library environments, expectations and research output are all explicit barriers, while internal pressure and time management constraints are implicit barriers.⁵⁶ Academic librarians and staff of color are subject to racial microaggressions perpetrated by unaware non-minority colleagues, an issue that permeates higher education, particularly at historically white institutions (HWIs).⁵⁷ These environments contribute to individual stress and fatigue for faculty of color.⁵⁸ A history of what Mehra and Gray label White-IST trends in LIS, an amalgamation of practices that symbolize, “racist connotations and racism in LIS that is part of its historical evolution and development in the United States” affects librarians and staff of color.⁵⁹

At the societal level, hate crimes are a continual issue in the United States.⁶⁰ Academic library DEI statements were not created to directly address grand social issues. However, some DEI statements included a social justice call to action. While not all DEI statements contained such language, those that did not still made a commitment to supporting diversity. Academic libraries’ DEI statements identify the scope of available services and demonstrate libraries’ collective attempt to provide equitable spaces for all campus community members. While these statements occasionally align with institutional diversity statements, institutional responses to bias and discrimination provide insight into other ways institutions craft an identity.⁶¹ Especially at HWIs, these responses typically include demonstrating a professed commitment to DEI, acknowledging actions to prevent future instances, establishing a protocol in the event an incident occurs; and addressing the issue and removing the institution from the perpetrators’ actions.⁶² Academic library DEI statements that simply state a commitment to diversity and inclusion without actively promoting change, which is lacking in the vague, library-centric language common to these statements, is a typical, though not emphatic, stance. This passive stance demonstrates the need for critical analysis of orientational meanings. Such critical analysis allows for the examination of scrutinization of the actors and processes involved in DEI statement creation, presentation, and messaging. Such an examination offers an avenue to hold institutions accountable for their words and DEI statements. Future research that examines academic libraries’ responses to specific incidents of bias and discrimination could provide further insight into internal processes that lead to the public display of academic libraries as change agents. Additional research could examine individual academic librarians and staff to interrogate the congruences or dissimilarities of individual and institutional practices regarding engagement with DEI initiatives.

CONCLUSION

Examination of UBorrow members' websites revealed that 12/13 of 16 sites contained explicitly labeled DEI statements. Although not all members' sites contained an explicit statement, every library engaged with DEI content in some way. Among the 12/13 sites that contained an explicit DEI statement, distinctions existed regarding statement organization. Eight/nine libraries dedicated an entire page to their DEI statement, while four members' statements shared a page with other content. Organizationally, the pages containing DEI statements were similar with text-heavy pages common across the websites. Presentationally, DEI statements serve as publicly facing representations of university libraries. The most telling insight into the presentational aspect of communication was revealed in an analysis of the sites that did not contain explicit DEI statements, as this analysis examined the hidden work that is necessary in DEI statement creation. Orientationally, vague and library-centric language distances academic libraries and positions them as abstract entities. Those libraries whose DEI statements employed social justice language made more concrete demands of users.

While explicit DEI statements comprise only a portion of academic library DEI content, an analysis of these statements revealed the ways in which they contribute to academic libraries' construction of value of, and commitment to, diversity, equity, and inclusion. This analysis demonstrated how the presence, or lack thereof, of DEI statements positions libraries as conscious entities operating within institutional and social contexts that both restrain and encourage promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion. That the University of Minnesota Libraries updated their homepage to include a link to a newly constructed DEI statement during the months between the first and second examination of UBorrow consortium members' websites in this study indicates the significance and value institutions place on DEI initiatives. Academic libraries, as entities that operate within institutions in the social context of historical racism, discrimination, and marginalization in the United States, are not immune to the consequences of these enduring legacies. Despite current and ongoing efforts, this analysis revealed that much work and dedication is yet required in the continual engagement with DEI initiatives.

APPENDIX A: UBORROW MEMBER INSTITUTIONS

University of Chicago

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Indiana University

University of Iowa

University of Maryland

University of Michigan

Michigan State University

University of Minnesota

University of Nebraska – Lincoln

Northwestern University

Ohio State University

Penn State University

Purdue University

Rutgers University

University of Wisconsin – Madison

Center for Research Libraries

APPENDIX B: URLS FOR DEI PAGES FROM UBORROW CONSORTIUM WEBSITES

University of Chicago: <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/about/thelibrary/>

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign:
<https://www.library.illinois.edu/about/administration-overview/>

Indiana University: <https://libraries.indiana.edu/administration#panel-about>

University of Iowa: <https://www.lib.uiowa.edu/about/diversity-equity-inclusion/>

University of Maryland: <https://www.lib.umd.edu/about/deans-office/diversity>

University of Michigan: <https://www.lib.umich.edu/about-us/about-library/diversity-equity-inclusion-and-accessibility>

Michigan State University: <https://lib.msu.edu/strategic-plan/>

University of Minnesota: <https://www.lib.umn.edu/about/inclusion>

University of Nebraska – Lincoln: <https://libraries.unl.edu/diversity>

Ohio State University: <https://library.osu.edu/equity-diversity-inclusion>

Penn State University: <https://libraries.psu.edu/about/diversity>

Rutgers University: <https://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/diversity>

University of Wisconsin – Madison: <https://www.library.wisc.edu/diversity/>

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