Moving from Vision to Strategy: Assessing Strategic Plans for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

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Equity. Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in Academic Libraries

Academic leaders have increasingly asserted that equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility are strategic priorities and key values in recent years. However, as was found in the 2019 Ithaka S+R national survey of library directors, few library leaders feel confident in existing strategies for achieving organizational goals related to improving equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility for their employees, services, and collections.

To what extent have equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility priorities been included - and more importantly, operationalized - in academic library strategic plans? While many libraries include EDIA priorities, very few comparatively have operationalized and measured progress on these priorities.

For more on findings from this analysis, see: sr.ithaka.org/blog/measuring-what-matters/.

Methods

The strategic plans of 74 ARL member institutions were analyzed using a mixed methods approach as described below.

Quantitative analysis
- Analyzed text based on a simplified version of meaning extraction method (Chung and Pennebaker, 2008)
- Searched text for 16 keywords related to equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and assessment
- Rolled up these keywords into the themes of equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility

Qualitative analysis
- Content analysis to determine common themes across the strategic plans

Diversity

86% of strategic plans included the theme diversity.

Internally-focused (personnel and user) strategies
- Recruiting and hiring to increase diversity
- Retaining employees
- Library instruction and services for a diverse group of users
- Increased capacity of special collections that support diversity initiatives

Campus community strategies
- Events and programming related to diversity within the library
- Collaborations with student centers or groups representing students of color

Local, regional, national, and international strategies
- Collaborations with non-campus communities

Accessibility

66% of strategic plans included the theme accessibility.

Website accessibility
- Compatibility with screen readers
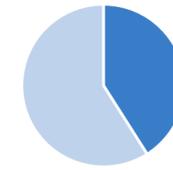- HathiTrust Print Disability Policy and Services compliance

Physical library accessibility
- Universal design principles
- Safety, accessibility, and service standard compliance

Discovery of scholarly resources
- Equal access to collections both digitally and in person
- Website and physical library accessibility contributions

Equity and Inclusion

41% and 65% of strategic plans included the themes equity and inclusion respectively.

Most commonly used in general statements about valuing or promoting equity and inclusion or descriptions of the library as equitable and/or inclusive.

Few plans included strategies to improve these. Those that did discussed:

- Equity of access to resources
- Allowing all voices to be heard
- Transparency related to committees and working groups
- Ensuring resources, services, and spaces suit the needs of faculty, staff, and students
- Creating inclusive spaces, programming, and meetings

Assessment

While 72% of strategic plans included the theme assessment, only **16%** specifically discuss assessing EDIA.

Approaches to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility assessment:

- Surveys and focus groups to assess organizational culture and employee engagement
  - Internally developed instruments
  - Externally developed instrument (e.g. ClimateQual)
- Benchmarking with peers
- Program evaluation of an internship
- Tracking hiring data
- Measuring compliance on website accessibility
- Developing an inventory of activities related to diversity and inclusion