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### Hidden science superstars: Making diversity visible to increase inclusion

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Mae Evans, Irene M. H. Herold, and Zachary Sharrow

# Hidden science superstars

## Making diversity visible to increase inclusion

Issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are at the forefront of conversations in many academic and research libraries. In this article, we discuss our efforts to increase representation on our campus and in our library.

### Perspectives on EDI—Irene M. H. Herold

No matter where I have worked across the United States, and I mean literally across the United States, from Washington State to Illinois to New Hampshire to Hawaii to Ohio, I have repeatedly heard the refrain that it is difficult to recruit for diversity. It has been well documented that the pipeline for diverse librarians is narrow due to various historical and social/cultural reasons.<sup>1</sup> While this speaks to librarian diversity, or rather lack thereof, we also want to reflect the diversity of our campuses. The question remains: What have we as a profession and individual libraries been doing to be welcoming and inclusive?

ACRL issued a statement reaffirming its commitment to EDI, and access to information for everyone during my term as association president<sup>2</sup> and the ACRL Diversity Alliance was also launched.<sup>3</sup> Prior to my term in office, the association had a long history of commitment to EDI issues. The ACRL Diversity Committee, renamed so from the Racial and Ethnic Diversity Committee, was created by the Board of Directors in 1990.<sup>4</sup> In 2012, the Board approved “Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Librar-

ies” to help members and their libraries with these important issues.<sup>5</sup> ALA as a whole has created a diversity advocacy page with links to resources, events, and divisional pages,<sup>6</sup> in addition to having a history of successful mentoring and diversity scholarship programs.<sup>7</sup> These efforts are the results of the combined work of multiple members and committees devoted to making a difference in the profession.

Therefore, it appears the profession writ large, at least from my perspective as a former ACRL president, has engaged in the question of what we as a profession can do in the area of EDI. What remains then is to discover what individual libraries and librarians are doing to be welcoming and inclusive. There are many works that help us to understand what we have not done well and how to improve, including from Rowman and Littlefield, the forthcoming *In Our Own Voices, Redux: The Faces of Librarianship Today* edited by Teresa Y. Neely and Jorge R. López-McKnight.<sup>8</sup> The disturbing reality is that twenty years after the original volume, *In Our Own Voices: The Changing Face of Librarianship*, not enough has significantly changed.<sup>9</sup>

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When I arrived in my position at The College of Wooster in July 2017, I was struck by how lovely the libraries are and was thrilled to be at an institution that demonstrates it values diversity and inclusion. This was made evident by the Center for Diversity and Inclusion<sup>10</sup> and recruitment practices that train hiring committee chairs in ways to diversify pools and be inclusive. The overt and explicit conversations and emphasis are refreshing and align with my social justice values as a librarian.

Then I looked at the visual presentation of the libraries' spaces. At the entrance to the Andrews Library, built in 1962, are two statues. One is of Abraham Lincoln and the other is of William Moore McCulloch, a civil rights activist.<sup>11</sup> At the entrance to the Gault Library for Independent Study, built in 1995, is the portrait of Flo K. Gault for whom the library is named. Both Gault and McCulloch are alumni of The College of Wooster. While none of these statues represent people of color, at least they recall abolition of slavery, civil rights, and inclusion of women in higher education. Then I walked into the Timken Science Library's reading room, built in 1900 and restored in 1998. The restoration created a beautiful space, known by students as the "pin drop" library, for silent study. It has a majestic reading room with a soffit listing the names of celebrated males such as Darwin, Galileo, Kant, Moses, Milton, Cicero, Newton, etc., and a few male busts.

There is nary a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) female represented in the main reading room nor in the library, except for a statue of Nike on the circulation desk, a portrait of Annie B. Irish—the first female faculty at the college who taught German language and literature in the stairway leading to the reading room, and the occasional inclusion of a woman in various historic photographs on the obverse face of walls from the reading room.

Given that the college Fast Facts states there are 54% women, 46% men, 20% U.S. students of color, and 13% international

students on campus, the disconnect between images and text present in Timken Library and the student body was striking.<sup>12</sup> Rather than ignore this disparity, I approached Zachary Sharrow, science librarian, and Mae Evans, science library associate, to ask if they would be interested in adding under-represented groups in STEM to Timken's visual displays.

### **Harnessing community energy to make diversity visible—Mae Evans and Zachary Sharrow**

When our College Librarian Irene M. H. Herold approached us with the idea for this important project, we immediately embraced the request. After she suggested engaging the campus community in making the decision of who to include, we drafted a proposal that was shared with the provost and the staff of the Center for Diversity and Inclusion. After review, the concept received positive endorsement from all parties. The center agreed to promote nominations to various campus student groups that they support. Fortunately, Sharrow was working with a First Year Seminar focused on "Hidden Figures" in science, leading to an unexpected curricular connection when the instructor adopted submitting a nomination as a class assignment.

We created a LibGuide with the details of the program as well as information on selected library resources highlighting diversity in science that could help inspire nominations. News of the initiative was disseminated to campus via e-mail, posters, and word of mouth, and was featured with a positive article in the student newspaper, *The Wooster Voice*.<sup>13</sup> Participation in the nomination phase topped 44 unique nominations (from 65 submitted), which we narrowed to 12 finalists. Voting on the finalists generated broad enthusiasm with 332 ballots cast. For a student population of 2,000 and 171 faculty that suggests a campus participation rate of 15 percent, presuming no one voted more than once.

From a chance comment during a meeting with the Ohio state librarian and her associate state librarians, we learned about the Open Grant, a pass through of LSTA funds via the state library. The grant has a category for funding initiatives that engage community involvement.<sup>14</sup> Our proposal discussed not only our broad campus engagement and integration with a First Year Seminar class, but also that the library would be facilitating a justice dialogue related to the project during the college's Martin Luther King (MLK) Day commemoration.<sup>15</sup> The campus-wide commemoration aims to serve as a starting point for continuing conversations, not just a "one and done" approach. As we noted in our grant application, "The Hidden Science Superstars program aligns with the College of Wooster's strategic plan, which includes EDI as an objective and states that "one of our highest responsibilities is to ensure that all members of our community know that they are welcomed and respected."

We were delighted to learn in December 2017 that our grant proposal was approved. Therefore, we will be able to add two images, two sculptural busts, and more materials for underrepresented STEM scientists to the Timken Science Library.

After voting concluded, we received permission to display the winning scientists' images in the library as well as permission to use two of the winners' images to create sculptural busts. We relied on universities and organizations associated with the two winners whose images do not fall within the public domain to gain contact information for their families and to find images of each individual. Although finding the appropriate parties to contact for permission was complex, everyone we communicated with about the displays has been delighted to hear how we plan to memorialize these inspiring individuals.

As part of the campus MLK Day events, we held a social justice panel featuring three students and three faculty, which took the form of a wide-ranging discussion centered on issues of representation and recognition

inspired by the Hidden Science Superstars initiative. The packed session with more than 119 attendees generated a lively conversation not only about underrepresented individuals in STEM fields, but also how to address issues of EDI in the curriculum.

The busts and portraits were not completed by the end of the academic year, but during the spring semester, we held an event to reveal the results of the voting. This event featured remarks from the college president and its provost, both women from STEM disciplines, as well as a short video biography of each honoree, created from interviews with the students and faculty who nominated them.<sup>16</sup> One attendee was moved to provide funds for an additional bust, donated in honor of Donna Jacobs, the College of Wooster's first science librarian. We will hold a second event in fall 2018, when the busts and images are installed.

## Conclusion/next steps

We already have had students and other campus members asking if we will be doing this again. The excitement the Hidden Science Superstars initiative has generated has exceeded our expectations. While we could have just selected images to add on our own, by engaging the campus community we are making a much broader statement about our commitment to diversity and inclusion. This is just one way in which an individual library is evolving to reflect the diversity of its student, faculty, and staff; being inclusive; and delivering on our mission of "cultivating an environment where students, faculty, and staff, as a diverse community of learners, discover, create, communicate, and preserve knowledge and insight."

## Notes

1. Shaundra Walker, "Critical Race Theory and the Recruitment, Retention, and Promotion of a Librarian of Color: A Counterstory," in Rebecca Hankins and Miguel Juárez, editors, *Where are All the Librarians of Color? The Experiences of People of Color in Academia* (Library Juice Press, 2015), 135–60.

*(continues on page 386)*

gate counters show the growth in use our library has experienced, as well as noticeable spikes in activity on Thursdays. When Popcorn Day was introduced during the 2011–12 academic year, the library saw an average of 115 people come through the library per day, with an average of 160 people on Thursdays due to Popcorn Day. Six years later, the library now sees an average of 305 people each day, and an average of 377 on Popcorn Day. We believe that our internal outreach efforts, including Popcorn Day, were a contributing factor to the increased use of the library space.

### The evolution of Popcorn Day

Popcorn Day has evolved in that it has been a way for the library to participate in other college-wide initiatives. For example, during Diversity Week, the library offers several popcorn toppings from various countries, including snacks and spices from across the globe. The idea for offering popcorn toppings came

from a regular Popcorn Day attendee, and the library adopted the concept as “Magical Mix-Ins,” which we now offer twice a year, including during Diversity Week.

### Conclusion

The library’s weekly Popcorn Day outreach event has established the library as a fun and inclusive environment on the COM campus. It is our most popular outreach activity, and encourages use of the library space, as well as engagement between the library team and all of its users.<sup>2</sup>

### Notes

1. Special thanks to everyone who enjoys Popcorn Day as enthusiastically as the persons included in our photos.
2. Visit us on Instagram to view more pictures of Popcorn Day and other library outreach activities at <http://www.instagram.com/ucfcomhsl>. *✍*

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*(“Hidden science superstars” continues from page 382)*

2. See [www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2017/01/acrl-board-directors-affirms-commitment-equity-diversity-inclusion-access](http://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2017/01/acrl-board-directors-affirms-commitment-equity-diversity-inclusion-access).

3. See [www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2016/10/acrl-diversity-alliance-launches](http://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2016/10/acrl-diversity-alliance-launches).

4. See [www.ala.org/acrl/aboutacrl/directoryofleadership/committees/acr-raed](http://www.ala.org/acrl/aboutacrl/directoryofleadership/committees/acr-raed).

5. See [www.ala.org/acrl/standards/diversity](http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/diversity).

6. See [www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity](http://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity).

7. See [www.ala.org/acrl/membership/mentoring/joseymentoring/mentorprogram](http://www.ala.org/acrl/membership/mentoring/joseymentoring/mentorprogram) for example.

8. I was privileged to be invited to review an advance copy and provide a cover blurb. It will be available in 2018.

9. Teresa Y. Neely and Khafre K. Abif, eds. *In Our Own Voices: The Changing Face of Librarianship* (Lanham, M.D.: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1996).

10. See <https://www.wooster.edu/students/diversity/>.

11. You can read more about McCulloch and the statue at [www.the-daily-record.com/news/20170307/mcculloch-statue-dedicated-at-college-of-wooster](http://www.the-daily-record.com/news/20170307/mcculloch-statue-dedicated-at-college-of-wooster).

12. See <https://www.wooster.edu/about/facts/>.

13. For the LibGuide see <http://libguides.wooster.edu/science-superstars>. *The Wooster Voice* article is at <http://thewoostervoicespaces.wooster.edu/2017/09/29/timken-library-seeks-to-celebrate-underrepresented-figures-in-science/>.

14. See <https://library.ohio.gov/documents/open-rfp/>.

15. See <https://www.wooster.edu/students/diversity/msa/mlk/dialogues/>.

16. See <https://www.wooster.edu/about/leadership/president/> and <https://www.wooster.edu/bios/cnewton/>. *✍*