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Policy Matters: DEI Evaluation of an Academic Library's Policies

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ABSTRACT: Why does policy matter, and how can libraries reform their policies to create a more equitable library for library workers and library users? The authors discuss their experience in reviewing the policies of their library with a DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) lens. The authors describe how they initiated and developed this project, the factors that they considered in forming their evaluation rubric, and what they learned from the process.

Keywords: anti-racism, policy, inclusion, equity, academic libraries



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Introduction

Social justice and equity activism, such as the movements led by the Black Lives Matter network, has increasingly challenged dominant ideologies and asked more of the hollow diversity initiatives within academia. As the white supremacist ideologies underpinning universities and libraries have become clearer to library workers concerned with racial equity, more libraries are challenging their status quo structures and demanding inclusivity and equity for the communities we serve. This push for inclusive and equitable workplaces has resulted in the formation of diversity committees tasked with actualizing diversity values into tangible change across institutions (Fiedler et al., 2020a). After affirming their commitment to diversity, “academic libraries must critically evaluate policies [...] to truly create a just society and ensure the diversity, equity, and inclusion that we hold as core professional values” (Ciszek, 2020, p. 5). The Northern Illinois University (NIU) Libraries, serving a public research institution in northern Illinois, is committed to the hard work necessary to evaluate its structures and enact policies informed by a lens of access, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). To this end, in 2020, NIU Libraries developed the Libraries Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (LDEI) Committee. As an initial task, this committee identified the need for a comprehensive policy review.

The NIU LDEI Policy Review Task Force’s assigned mission was to review policies related to access services and building use to ensure that those policies did not provide barriers to accessibility, equity, and inclusion. The Task Force did not examine collection development policies to limit the scope of the project to an amount manageable within the allotted time. The Task Force met over the course of a year to:

1. make policy format recommendations,
2. construct a rubric for the evaluation of library policies, and
3. review existing library policies.

The resulting findings are meant to serve as a starting place for the University Libraries to make meaningful policy changes that increase equity, are more inclusive, and honor the complex identities of our workers, patrons, and broader community.

Instead of keeping this work strictly within the committee, The LDEI Committee invited all library workers to join the Policy Review Task Force, which had the goal of evaluating current University Libraries policies using the lens of DEI. The resulting group included five library workers from a variety of library departments and with diverse identities, including the areas of race, sexuality, gender identity, and neurodivergence.

The following case study both demonstrates our process for critical policy review and reports on the findings of our review to add to the body of literature that demonstrates the ways in which libraries can be places of oppression for the communities they intend to serve. More importantly, in sharing this work we offer a process that other institutions may adapt to their local needs to move libraries

toward inclusion in concrete ways that put DEI ideals into action.

Literature Review

To guide the policy review, the Task Force collected case studies related to policy revision focused on DEI.¹ When the Task Force began its work, reviewing the available literature turned up few useful examples of DEI-focused policy review processes, highlighting the need to share NIU's work once completed. In early 2022, only some academic libraries had begun to tackle policy revision (Kathryn A. Martin Library, 2021). Public libraries, on the other hand, have been at the forefront of policy revisions to increase access and equity. For example, several public libraries found that going fine and security gate free eliminated unequal barriers to access materials and services (Lipinski & Saunders, 2021). Academic libraries can look to their public counterparts for opportunities to progress their DEI goals.

Following the American Civil Rights Movement and resultant case law, higher education institutions slowly adopted diversity as a core value, although these institutions have fallen short of enacting universally ideal change. The American Library Association (ALA) did not incorporate equity and inclusion into their definition of diversity and commit to DEI in their strategic planning until the mid-2000's (Ciszek, 2020). Around the same time, some academic libraries initiated diversity efforts on the committee level. For example, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) Libraries created their UL Diversity Committee in 2007 for several initiatives (Duffus et al., 2016). UNCG Libraries began with staff training around topics of diversity such as programs that supported patron identities related to race, ethnicity, disability, and LGBTQ affiliation and later evolved to support external programs such as the creation of a grant-funded system with other North Carolina academic libraries to support ethnically diverse MLIS students. UNCG's UL Diversity Committee also created a one-year term appointment Diversity Resident Librarian position for early-career librarians from diverse backgrounds. These efforts intensified shortly after the 2016 election of Donald Trump to the presidency. Around this time, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) formed an Inclusion and Equity Committee that engaged in social justice work within the university library (Fiedler et al., 2020b) and Stony Brook University Libraries formed their Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity Committee (EIDC) to support the development of collections, spaces, policies, and staff training which would increase diversity and inclusion. These examples demonstrate the shift from conceptualizing diversity as a value in the academic library to operationalizing it. This also marks the period in which libraries expanded diversity initiatives to include equity, inclusion, and social justice.

¹ This article will be using familiar words to indicate a larger topic. Through political and business actions, these words have lost some impact and meaning. In short, the following words are used collectively under "DEI" to indicate a desire for functional change and social justice.

- Diversity: the quality of accurately representing multiple different backgrounds and demographics, in at least a similar proportion to the general population, with the goal of recapturing traditionally marginalized voices
- Equity: the quality of correcting the scales of marginalization so that traditionally marginalized groups have similar opportunities provided and restitution for opportunities denied
- Inclusion: the quality of maintaining a welcoming culture that successfully invites, welcomes, and retains people and perspectives of diverse backgrounds

No unifying core text exists (or even could exist) that provides a clear road map on creating policies that respect all aspects of DEI topics. Similarly, few studies exist to guide the review of library policy through a DEI lens. However, the Policy Review Task Force drew from a few available resources in formulating our review procedures. A 2017 article from Branum and Masland in *OLA Quarterly*, the official publication of the Oregon Library Association, focuses on identifying “how our policies or space might be upholding white, heteronormative cultural values, and then we create action plans to address those issues” (p. 32). They discuss broad plans for enacting change across services and guiding documents, including reviewing the library’s mission statement for anti-racist language, conducting a climate assessment study, assessing services through a social justice lens, and integrating diversity initiatives into strategic planning.

Other literature provided specific processes for enacting inclusion work. The Nelson Poynter Memorial Library at University of South Florida St. Petersburg completed a library website assessment that focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion of their websites’ images and videos, language and rhetoric, and content (Mann, et al., 2020). One aspect of this work was an assessment of whether library websites had images of diverse students and library staff. The demographic and identity aspects included in their assessment of diversity were: “gender, race, ethnicity, visual impairments, varied physical and neuro- abilities, and [...] economically disadvantaged students” (Mann, et al., 2020, p. 9). Following their assessment, they provided recommendations to make their website more inclusive by, for example, including photos of students with varied disabilities. Their language assessment prompted recommendations for text to be simplified and consistent across webpages. Prior to the assessment, the website used both the terms “circulation desk” and “checkout desk,” increasing opportunities for confusion for all patrons. Therefore, the team recommended reconciling language across all communication points (Mann, et al., 2020, p. 9). Finally, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Library Team conducted systematic reviews of Wisconsin libraries for inclusivity, including practical checklists for reviewing programs, facilities, services, collections, and staffing. For example, “Does the library card application form avoid a binary gender identification requirement?” (2019, p. 39). These assessment initiatives can be applied to a variety of DEI initiatives by adapting relevant pieces to meet local needs.

We specifically used these and other pieces of literature to make our own recommendations for change as well as to refine the terminology we used in the rubric. Since our policy review, the boards of ALA, and partner organizations formally approved their *Cultural Proficiencies for Racial Equity: A Framework*, which includes a call to libraries to “assess policies and procedures through a lens of racial equity to identify if and how they are causing harm to BIPOC patrons and employees” (American Library Association et al., p. 8). Our process provides an example of this work that we hope others can adapt for their own institutions.

Process

The policy review process took place over 11 months and the Task Force completed work in four stages as shown in Figure 1: (1) forming the Task Force, (2) creating a document to guide policy format recommendations, (3) drafting the policy review rubric, and (4) evaluating the selected policies.

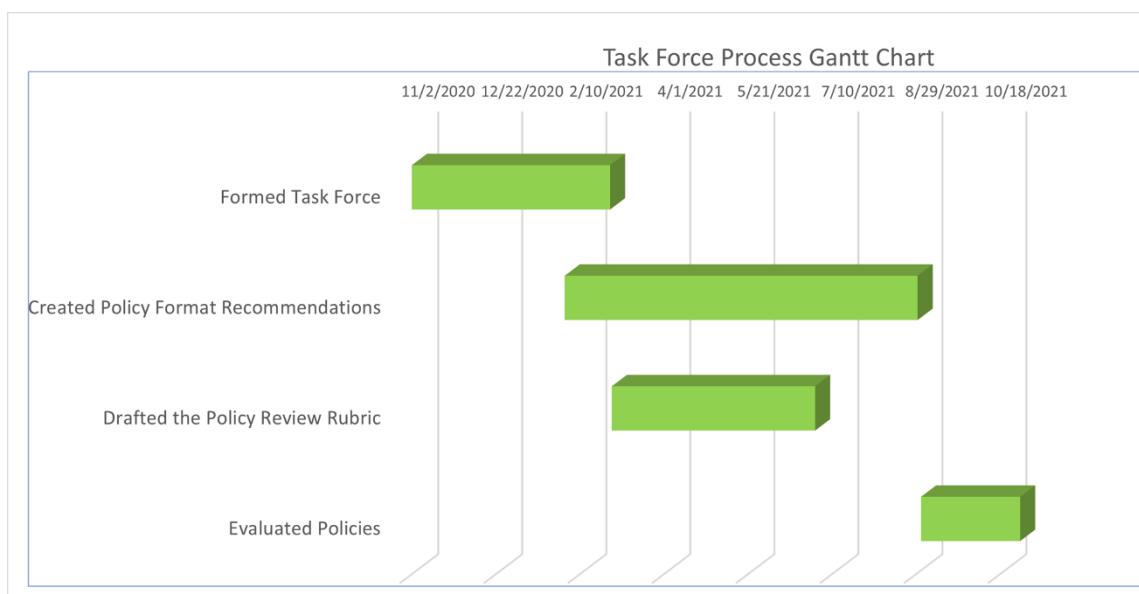


Figure 1 Description/Alt text: Gantt chart showing the overlapping time blocks in which the Task Force worked on four tasks over the following periods: formed the Task Force (November 2020-February 2021), created policy format recommendations (February-August 2022), drafted the policy review rubric (March-June 2022), and evaluated policies (September-October 2022).

Forming the task force

In November 2020, the NIU Libraries DEI Committee put out a call to all library workers encouraging them to join the Policy Review Task Force, with an explicit encouragement of “[...] members of diverse groups, to join and provide a well-rounded array of perspectives” (personal communication, November 4, 2020). Five library workers answered that call, and while our representation was diverse in some areas such as race, sexuality, gender identity, neurodivergence, age, family structure, and citizenship status, the Task Force was majority white. We acknowledged this and the fact that we could not possibly represent the many different identities that exist in the communities we serve. Thus, we knew we would need to intentionally consider the impact of policies on individuals that were outside of our own identities. Furthermore, we acknowledged early during the process that we would need to produce a useful framework for continued work rather than a “one time fix.” Five members of a Task Force in the early 2020s cannot eliminate any and all potential biases in policy but can create a process for continued revision and reevaluation.

Creating policy format recommendations

The Task Force reviewed 38 policies in total, including all library policies except those pertaining to collection development. First, we each read the 38 policies to get a sense of what methods the policies might employ to discriminate against various groups of people. We believed this review would allow us to develop a rubric to formally evaluate the policies. When the Task Force reconvened to discuss our findings, distinct challenges emerged. Some policies were restrictive to low socio-economic groups and to patrons with children. There were altogether too many

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policies, and a substantial number appeared to originate from reactions to specific past events or incidents. Notably, the “Escalator Orientation and Mobility Training Policy” was only a few lines long and referenced an event that happened only once. The policies lacked a consistent format and often appeared as PDFs or Microsoft Word documents, which are not as accessible as dynamic HTML webpages. More than half (24) of the policies either had no review date or had not been reviewed prior to 2015. When those policies had been reviewed, the time between reviews ranged from three to 35 years. Much of the information in the policies was obsolete, including outdated and broken links, incorrect contact information, and references to locations and services that no longer existed. The Task Force also recognized that library jargon, initialism, acronyms, and high reading levels presented a substantial barrier for patrons to understand and use the policies that applied to them.

In addition to the issue of poorly built policies, the Task Force attempted to find strategies to mitigate unequal application of policies based on individual bias and interpretation. Most troublesome are policies that require staff to evaluate issues of behavior. For instance, it is impossible to reduce the impact of personal judgment in perpetuating racialized discrimination. Edward W. Morris (2005) describes the loudness of Black girls in particular in a high school environment in “Ladies’ or ‘Loudies’?”: “the most common description and criticism of African American girls by all teachers at Matthews was that they were too ‘loud’” (p. 505). Therefore, the Task Force sought to remove policies based on issues contingent on staff judgement. The Task Force also made several recommendations having to do with redressing infractions.

After hours and weeks of contentious discussion, the Task Force created a policy writing guidelines document ([Appendix A: NIU Libraries’ Policy Recommendations](#)). Most recommendations fit into five categories:

1. **Policy review:** Policies should be reviewed on a regular schedule (ALA, 2007).
2. **Format and Style:** Policies should follow the consistent format and style established by the NIU Policy Library’s University Policy Writing Template, (NIU Policy Library, n.d.), avoid jargon, and be written at an 8th grade reading level (Plain Language Action and Information Network, n.d.).
3. **Guidelines for creating new policies:** Policies should only be created if absolutely necessary, should defer to existing policies in the NIU Policy Library (NIU, n.d.), if possible, and should incorporate external feedback into the process of review.
4. **Penalties:** Policies should outline appropriate penalties where applicable, but penalties should be corrective instead of punitive. Additionally, campus or city police should only be a resource sought in cases of imminent harm, as non-police resources might be more appropriate for specific situations (Robinson, 2019).
5. **Exceptions and exceptional circumstances:** Where exceptions are made, exceptions should follow the intent of the policy, include input from more

than one library worker, and be documented to inform future updates to those policies (Jaeger, 2013).

6. **Intended groups of effect:** Policies should identify what classification of library user the policy affects. Furthermore, those groups should not be defined by personal characteristics, but instead by library-related classifications (“student,” “staff,” “patron,” “faculty,” etc.)

Drafting the rubric

The Task Force needed to create a qualitative method to evaluate and rank the severity of policy issues. This would allow us to focus on correcting the most egregiously offending policies first, as well as provide quantitative rationale for requesting changes. The Task Force built a template rubric ([Appendix B: DEI Policy Review Rubric](#)). The resulting rubric consisted of four sections:

- Part 1: administrative information about the responsibility for and the last updates of the policy,
- Part 2: yes/no questions about whether the policy fulfills the basic requirements agreed upon from the policy format recommendations,
- Part 3: a series of 11 Likert scale statements about discrimination against distinct groups, and
- Part 4: a closing section to voice overall conclusions and concerns.

The relationship between the policy format recommendations document and the rubric is direct. For example, in the Policy Recommendations document, we write, “the task force recommends that the policies be transitioned to dynamic text on webpages.” The related section in the rubric reads, “Is the policy available as web page body text?” One of the challenges in designing the rubric, however, was determining whether the policy fulfills the requirements agreed upon by the policy format recommendations document ([Appendix A: NIU Libraries’ Policy Recommendations](#)). Take, for example, the question “Does the policy include jargon?” This is a highly subjective question since we each perceive different terms to be examples of library jargon (such as the question of whether “circulation desk” is in common enough use to count as jargon or not).

The largest section of the rubric contains the 11 Likert scale statements. Instead of asking generalized questions about whether the policy discriminates against “anyone,” the Task Force designed questions prompting the reviewer to consider how each policy could target various groups of people who commonly face discrimination and marginalization. This list of identifying characteristics is not and cannot be complete. We discussed the value of universal design but decided that forcing reviewers to investigate specific known issues as well would prompt reviewers to avoid internal biases that would overlook certain issues. Rather, these 11 traits are those we have thus far identified as commonly marginalized characteristics and act as an ever-developing starting point. We also made sure to include specific areas for future reviewers to add new comments. To identify the listed marginalized traits, the Task Force borrowed from NIU’s Diversity Statement (NIU, 2022), federally protected

characteristics (Legal Information Institute, 2020), the categories used in Mann, Norton, and Breyman's (2020) DEI website assessment, and our own diverse identities. The Likert scale statements took the form of statements like "This policy discriminates against someone from [...]," to which the reviewer could respond by using the Likert scale and provided comment fields. These statements targeted the following areas:

- age group
- citizenship and/or immigration status
- neurodivergence including learning disabilities
- parental status and/or family structure
- perceived race and/or ethnicity
- perceived sexual and/or romantic orientation
- physical disabilities
- religious affiliation and/or practice
- sex and/or gender expression
- socio-economic status
- whether the penalties for the policy are excessive and/or inappropriate

The space for comments is essential for allowing reviewers to provide explanation and context to why a policy may discriminate against a group of people. The comments will help develop this rubric over time.

This rubric is not a guaranteed, fail-safe product and has several limitations. We could have missed mentioning specific identities. By creating separate questions for each group of people, the rubric prompted reviewers to think about each group individually but may not have addressed how intersecting identities could create further barriers. Also, limiting the responses to a four-point scale was challenging, as human experience defies numerical point scales. This rubric is not a static document and should be updated to accommodate new discoveries and understandings.

Evaluating policies

The Task Force split up the policies for evaluation. At least two members of the Task Force reviewed each policy, with each member reviewing 15-20 evenly distributed policies. One member of the Task Force assigned policies from an alphabetical list, rotating which members received an assignment, with some members assigned to those policies about which they had expertise. The policy reviews took approximately two months to complete.

To determine the overall ranking of each policy, the Task Force totaled the scores from each member's evaluation and then averaged them. With multiple members evaluating each policy, the Task Force completed 87 policy review rubrics. The rubrics provided quantitative data from the Likert scale questions. We reduced individual bias by asking for between two and three reviewers for each policy. For example, one statement read "This policy discriminates against neurodivergence." If the evaluator thought the policy did have some discrimination against people with neurodivergences, they would rate the policy as "Agree" or "Strongly Agree," resulting

in a score of two or one, respectively. “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree” were scored at three and four respectively. Our maximum point score per policy was 48, meaning that the policy did not discriminate against any of our targeted groups. In short, the higher the score, the “better” (or at least less discriminatory) the policy.

Finally, comments from all completed rubrics for each policy were compiled, along with the final quantitative scores, and delivered to University Libraries’ administration. This data comprised our recommendations for rewrites for all reviewed library policies. Library administration then began assigning the task of rewriting to the appropriate responsible parties.

Results and Reflection

The scores, as shown in Figure 2 below, ranged in value.

Grade	# policies	% policies
48 / 100%	10	26%
A (≥90%)	24	63%
B (80%-89%)	10	26%
C (70%-79%)	3	8%
D (65%-69%)	1	3%
F (≤64%)	0	0%

Figure 2 Description/Alt text: Chart showing the distribution of scores for NIU Libraries’ policies reviewed by Policy Review Task Force.

Of the 38 policies reviewed, 10 (or 26%) received the maximum score of 48. Using a standard four-point grading scale, 24 (or 63%) of all the policies would be in the “A” range. Using the same grading scale, 10 (or 26%) of the policies would merit a “B.” Only one policy would be on the cusp of “failing” on this grading scale, while three (or 8%) would garner a “C.” Of course, even the A-graded policies still had shortcomings. Principally, almost all policies lacked standardized formats and administrative headers. This meant that we could not evaluate the age of many of the policies.

The most endemic flaw of the NIU Libraries policies related to format. These formatting flaws stemmed from a lack of a regular updating schedule. Many of the policies used out of date file formats, with the most common being text-layered PDFs and Microsoft Word documents. While some PDFs can include screen-readable text layers, the format lacks the ability to organize information under header styles, among other issues. NIU has moved to a standard of dynamic HTML for digital materials. We had initially recommended that policies use dynamic HTML to better comply with screen reader technology but realized in the review process that HTML would also be easier to maintain and update as the text could be updated without having to depend on any one person producing a specific file format. Instead, the text could be sent to the team responsible for updating the website via already existent channels.

Related to the package format of the policies, most were written with an expected college level competency in English. The Task Force’s guidance document and rubric

recommended an eighth grade reading level target for public policies to accommodate learning disabilities, English as a second language, and ease of comprehension.

As a secondary benefit to review, the reviewing process created the opportunity for the members of the Task Force to learn through engagement in this work. It is a truism of DEI work that diverse voices bring ideas and methods that would have been neglected in the workspace. However, rather than simply including more good ideas, the Task Force discovered that vibrant argument and discussion yielded beneficial idea synthesis. For example, members of the Task Force initially disagreed on the nuance of policy fixity. Some Task Force members thought that policies should be better written to eliminate the possibility of “exceptions” that might be unevenly applied by library workers. Other Task Force members argued that exceptions are unavoidable and that strict policies themselves provide barriers for the diversity of human experience. After extended discussion, the Task Force wrote a recommendation that there be a stated documentation method for exceptional circumstances for each policy. That is, if a library worker found a policy insufficient to deal with a specific scenario, they were instructed to follow the following guidelines for permitting exceptions:

- Exceptions should have input from multiple members of the relevant department. Library workers should avoid making exceptions based on the decision of one person.
- Exceptions should be documented to influence future policy updates.

Another instance in which our diverse perspectives yielded a synthesis solution was in discussing the ways in which we could refer to or categorize our patrons. Previous policies had often referred to subsets of patrons based on non-university-derived characteristics: children, years of attendance, and so on. Some members suggested that these were useful designations and that to find other language to point to these patrons (or to avoid describing these patrons) was disingenuous. Other members believed that any reference to a group by some classification embedded bias, as this implied that policies could be for one type of person and not another. The solution that the Task Force followed was to use classifications that specifically referred to how the patron interfaced with library collections and services. Therefore, we advocated for all policies to reference specific patron designations as they were classified in our cataloging system (undergraduate, graduates, faculty, staff, alumni, community, et al.), and to avoid the application of personal identities (e.g., “parent,” “undocumented immigrant,” “senior citizen,” at al.).

All members of the Task Force agreed that having a dedicated safe space to experience and work through conflict yielded the most beneficial results for solutions to particularly thorny problems in developing our evaluative tools.

Policy topics did not appear to strongly influence the chance that the policy would be discriminatory. The 26% of policies that received higher scores, and were thus evaluated as the least discriminatory, were about spaces and services. However, those policies at the lower end, which were evaluated as the most discriminatory, were also on issues of space usage. The most notable difference between high and low-rated

policies was that higher-rated policies tended to be more tightly focused: they are about specific objects, services, or events and not about people or their behaviors. In review, policies that targeted specific behavior or groups of people tended to score lower. Approximately 16% of the policies that fell into the lowest end of the scoring curve contained excessive penalties, including fines or fees, suspension of library privileges, and being barred from other library services. For example, the Smart Classroom Reservation and Faculty Carrels policies received the lowest review scores. At first glance, both policies appear to primarily pertain to the use of library spaces. However, both policies describe in detail expected conduct within these rooms. The Task Force members who reviewed these policies determined that the descriptions of those behaviors were discriminatory, especially when pertaining to physical and mental impairments. For example, the Room Reservation Policy states, "Food [...] is not allowed. Water bottles with a pop top or a cap are permitted. The requester and the instructor will be held responsible for any damage to furniture and/or equipment in the smart classrooms." This phrasing discriminates against those who might need food to regulate medical needs, such as in some forms of diabetes. Also, the penalty for infractions, including failing to cancel reservation within a set timeframe, can "result in suspension of future room reservation privileges." The reviewers determined that this was an unreasonable penalty for failing to cancel, and therefore created an unnecessary barrier to library services that unequally impacted groups of patrons (e.g., a parent may not be able to cancel a reservation while attending to a family emergency more often than a patron with a different family status).

Some policies did not appear inherently discriminatory, but the impact or the enforcement of those policies could be. For example, the Appeals for Lost Books and Overdue Fines Policy may be discriminatory to those from lower socio-economic status (SES), as the impact of fines disproportionately impacts those from lower SES. Discussion around this policy resulted in the Task Force determining that penalties should always be restitutive or reparative, and not punitive. The library, with its tight budget, needs to recoup the loss of materials damaged by patrons but the resultant fees should only cover the cost of replacement. Task Force members documented these concerns with the "comments" fields in the rubrics. Having multiple reviewers with various life experiences proved invaluable for finding potential implicit bias. A more diverse task force would likely have an even stronger ability to identify these issues.

The policy review process also revealed an unexpected role of policy as a point of contact with patrons. Many of the policies reviewed were woefully out of date or no longer necessary. Many policies referred to services or technologies no longer in use at NIU Libraries. The inaccuracy of the policies meant that they needed to be updated or removed; but worse, many of the older policies were severe and unfriendly in tone, potentially turning patrons away from the library altogether. Furthermore, even if current patrons were able to discern the intended use of the policy, the fact that the policy is so out of date communicates to patrons that the library is disorganized and potentially untrustworthy. The fact that a policy indicates one practice and current practices reflect something different allows for the policy to be unevenly applied, netting more opportunities for decisions based on individual bias.

Plans for Moving Forward

The Task Force completed the initial policy evaluations but had concern that the lack of a formal plan in place to ensure the continued active review of policies in the future would yield diminishing results. Without continued review, the current policies will inevitably no longer accommodate the changing standards of future years. The Task Force lacked the authority to assign the work of revising the policies to relevant parties. Instead, the Task Force presented our findings to the library administration and requested that administration support this initiative by assigning the revision work to individuals and departments as appropriate. The Task Force also recommended that policies have a regular review schedule. Even if the specific policy needs no updates, the header will be updated to reflect that at least the policy has been intentionally left in its current state.

At NIU, the library administration has begun assigning policies to the appropriate departments and staff for updating. Some have already been completed using the documents produced by the Policy Review Task Force. Figure 3 displays the difference in visual (and screen reader) readability already accomplished by simply changing formats.

Figure 3 Description/Alt text: Side-by-side comparison of previous and present versions of the NIU Libraries Gifts Policy. On the left is the previous version: a PDF document last updated February 1992. On the right is the current version: a web page with dynamic HTML, using the university standardized format and headers and last updated in July of 2022.

Some library staff have reported challenges when re-writing policies, and the specific goal of achieving an eighth grade reading level yields the greatest difficulty. However, the goal to shorten and eliminate policies has generally been met with positive attitudes from the rest of the library staff. While this attitude and vocal buy-in has been present, the adoption of the Task Force's recommendations has been difficult. As of the writing of this article, the policies marked as extraneous have been removed, but the re-writing of building and resource use policies have begun to stagnate. The Task Force continues to communicate with library administration to ensure that this effort does not fail in its last part.

This process has informed work outside of NIU Libraries. Since the time of the Task Force's work, one of the Task Force members, Sarah McHone-Chase, moved from NIU to become the Director of University Library at Aurora University (Aurora, IL). The two libraries are very different in terms of their size and operations. A valuable, though initially unanticipated, outcome of the Task Force's work has been that opportunity to bring the experience and knowledge in auditing the policies to a new environment. Discussing the recent work assisting in the diversity audit of policies offered the staff at Aurora University a unique chance to get to know more about Sarah's leadership. She was able to signify that diversity, equity, and inclusion are priorities for her at every level of the library. Aurora University has many fewer policies than NIU Libraries. Most of the policies need updating and they are in a decentralized location. From her prior work on the Task Force, Sarah has been able to articulate a vision for the policies—what policies might be needed, which can be done away with, what policies should be saying and how they should say it, and where the policies should live on the library website so that they are accessible to staff and patrons alike.

At the time of this article's writing, the Task Force has presented a workshop on this process at the 2022 Illinois Library Association (ILA) and 2023 Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) conferences. These workshops provided instructions on expanding participants' ability to identify the communities they serve and used NIU policies to practice the use of evaluation using our rubric as a model for later use at their own institutions. These sessions provided vibrant discussion that once again emphasized the need for tailored and individuated tactics in pursuit of engaging in this work. Some attendees discussed issues of admin buy-in, low staffing, and, most particularly, the low number of non-white staff members employed in each institution. The collaboration in each session demonstrated how the work to mitigate bias in library policies is an iterative, collaborative, and distinct for each group.

Recommendations

Conduct a readiness audit. Libraries interested in taking on this work should first be sure that their institutions are ready. Libraries that have not engaged in conversation about equity in their library may have a hard time getting buy-in from library policy holders. All-staff DEI trainings aimed at critical reflection is a starting point. However, libraries that have engaged in equity work or discussions may be better positioned to begin the work of a policy audit.

Communicate the project with stakeholders. Give internal (such as faculty and staff) and external (such as diversity offices) an overview of the project goals and timeline, inviting collaboration when and where possible.

Build a diverse team of volunteers who are compensated for their time. Aim for team member diversity, in terms of area of the library worked, rank, race, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexual and romantic orientation, parental status, ability, religious affiliation, and other areas of diverse identities. However, make sure that is a *volunteer* and not *voluntold* situation, and that folks are fairly compensated for their time, such as a release from other duties.

Decide what is in and out of scope. In particular, will the group be reviewing policies only, or will they also be updating policies?

Consider the diverse identities of the communities you serve. Survey your collections, student organizations, community groups, and other sources of information about the various identities your library serves, especially for those that your team might not think of as readily.

Split up the work, if appropriate, but have multiple people review the same policy. If your group splits up the policies for review it is important to have at least one other reviewer look at each policy as our lived experiences and personal identities can impact what we do and do not notice.

Allow time and space for disagreement and discussion. Conversations about individual policies may involve disagreements. Groups should expect and embrace these disagreements and take them as a sign that more discussion, and potentially additional reviewers, may be needed to work through those disagreements.

Report findings out to library stakeholders. Include stakeholders in your reporting back and be sure to include next steps.

Build-in follow up. Planning for follow-up, such as quarterly updates from those tasked with updating policies, ensures the work is implemented.

Share out. Share your process with other libraries, through presentation, publication, or informal conversation. The more we can share with each other, the better our processes can become.

Conclusion

At the onset of this article, we stated that our findings are meant to serve as a starting point for fellow university libraries to implement their own meaningful policy changes that aim to increase equity, inclusion, and accessibility, while also acknowledging and honoring the diversity of their patrons. This purpose, only possible after performing the hard work ourselves, was illustrated through our detailed process which demonstrates how we developed our policy format recommendations and created a critical rubric; the discussion behind the evaluation process including statements formed around the specific marginalized groups the policies could target; and describing the obstacles our policies revealed during revision. The Task Force's goal has almost been met. We turned a critical lens on our policies and reviewed them with an intentional mindset to facilitate a review and update to our policies so that the barriers we discovered can be reflected upon and removed. This critical review benefits our patrons, first and foremost, because it ensures our policies are not explicitly or implicitly perpetuating oppressive systems and biased ideologies. The critical review also benefits library staff involved because its focused approach to review reveals weaknesses in the institution's policy writing and brings awareness to the capacity for policies to discriminate. Our Task Force identified our institution's following policy weaknesses: inaccessible reading levels,

outdated and inaccessible formatting, negative tone, confusing language and excessive jargon, lack of consistent review, and bias against specific patron groups. Our research on university library policy review efforts revealed a large gap in the literature so we cannot offer comparisons and analysis. It would be beneficial for more university libraries of varying sizes and demographics to engage in this process and share the results of their policy review, as well as any variations on the rubric and shift in critical lens focus. It would have been insightful to compare the results of our review to other libraries to see if any trends emerged. Likewise, if more literature existed, a review article on university libraries who engaged in this process would most likely reveal patterns on library policy weaknesses. Further study on this topic could help inform libraries not only on how to rectify similar barriers at their library, but also how to avoid creating policies with DEI issues from the beginning. Continued conversation, study, and sharing of results will advocate for critical reflection, inclusion, and help dismantle oppressive systems that policies often uphold.

Now that our critical assessment is complete and we move toward the next steps, our purpose will be completely fulfilled. Discussing and sharing our work is a big part of achieving our goal, but we are also committed to following up with our administration to ensure critical review and creation of policies continues. It is also vital to not only share this important work with our colleagues at NIU Libraries, but also to share the work more widely via consortial connections and scholarly associations to demonstrate to community members they also can commit to meaningful change in their library. Our first next step, meeting with library administration to present our findings and request support, was successful. Administration agreed to our recommendations by first using their authority to assign the evaluated policies to appropriate parties and to request a reasonable timeframe for the update work to be completed. Administration also agreed that the Task Force's findings should be shared with the entire library and two group members presented our work at a monthly library-wide meeting. The inclusion at the library-wide meeting was an opportunity to demonstrate that the Libraries are committed to DEI initiatives through giving our work a platform to express the importance of critical DEI review while also giving library staff a heads up that that some folks would be called upon to support this initiative by participating in the follow-up work, which includes reviewing the Task Force's evaluations and adjusting the policies relevant to their department.

We hope that by presenting our process of critical policy evaluation and revealing our own findings, it convinces other libraries they can take on this task with the critical lens of their choice in a capacity that is manageable for their institution so that their patrons and colleagues can gain valuable insight into their policies' barriers and begin rectifying them.

Acknowledgement

The authors prepared this article in conjunction with our work at Northern Illinois University. Northern Illinois University occupies the traditional homelands of Anishinaabe peoples, also known as the Council of the Three Fires. Other Indigenous peoples who call this land home include the Sac and Fox, Kickapoo, Peoria, Miami, and Sioux. We acknowledge the presence and continued vitality of these and other

Native communities in our state and Midwest region.

Because this was a collaborative effort, we authored the article collaboratively. When forming the policy review task force, whose work is the subject of the article, we intentionally sought to recruit diverse library workers to have broad perspectives. However, we also recognized the burden that DEI work puts on marginalized groups, especially library workers of color. Since our identities impact our worldviews, the members of the Task Force acknowledge our backgrounds. Though we do represent diverse identities--including the areas of race, sexuality, gender identity, neurodivergence, age, family structure, and citizenship status--four of the five members of the Task Force are white. We acknowledge that this has impacted our findings and reviewed policies. As with most DEI work, this indicates the continued need to hire, support, and retain more racially diverse library workers.

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