

Supporting Diversity through Collection Evaluation, Development, and Weeding: CLIPP #48, by Erica Barber, Julia Bauder, Micki Behounek, Chris Jones, Kayla Reed, and Elizabeth Rodrigues

Nicole Eva 

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Nicole Eva
University of Lethbridge

As diversity, inclusion, and equity initiatives become more prominent on many post-secondary campuses, many collections librarians' minds turn to the diversity of their collections. Evaluating these collections can be a daunting task; some libraries have collections spanning decades, if not centuries. How best to ascertain the diversity of a collection? An audit, while admirable, can feel overwhelming and somewhat impossible in an academic library; such tasks seem easier in public libraries, given the nature of the material (for example, examining character demographics or illustrations, or tackling specific collections, such as children's materials). For academic libraries, a more likely scenario is for many to turn to new acquisitions and weeding as a way to focus on improving the diversity of its resources.

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9% thought their collection diversity reflected their community “very well,” but many had worked to develop collections targeted to one or more diverse areas. Final questions asked about the existence of a diversity committee in the library and if/whether other diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives had occurred in the library. The survey is an interesting point-in-time snapshot, and it could be a useful measure in the future to see if the needle moves on any of these issues.

The majority of the book is a selection of collection policies and harmful language and diversity statements gathered by this survey. Of note for Canadian librarians is that these statements are all from U.S. libraries, however, many are still relevant and sound much like the statements issued by my own medium-sized academic library in Canada. It is beyond the scope of this review to analyze the statements themselves; they vary widely in terms of detail and intent. However, if one was to start a policy or statement from scratch, some of these sample documents provided would be a very helpful starting point.

The authors are all librarians holding various roles at Grinnell College, a private, 4-year college in Iowa which, at the time of this writing, had about 1750 students (Grinnell College n.d.). The intent of the CLIPP book series is to “provide college and small university libraries analysis and examples of library practices and procedures” (p. vii). This book achieves just that – and, I’d argue, the sample statements may also be of value to larger institutions looking for examples to follow.

I did find myself wishing for more of a “magic bullet”: a how-to, step-by-step guide on evaluating our collection so we know exactly where the gaps are in our own collection. But, of course, while the literature review does outline some evaluation projects taken on at other institutions, there is acknowledgement that such evaluation is very resource-intensive and probably not a practice that is very widespread in the academic library world. Providing examples of what has been done in the literature review (assessing a small collection, for example) and offering suggestions for how we can improve our collections in the future (as we continue to build and refine them) may be all the guidance that exists right now. Thus, the authors’ reliance on statements and policies for acquisitions and weeding strategies instead of guides for robust collection evaluation.

While the majority of this book is very practical, there are some policies provided that are thought-provoking and more philosophical in nature. Supplementary guidelines to the Collection Development Policy provided by the College of Southern Nevada stood out in terms of their aspirational and holistic nature. Far exceeding a diversity statement within a collection policy, this document extends to staff professional development and touches on the nuances of anti-racism and social justice. I was particularly struck by their comments on neutrality and censorship:

“Neutrality, as a principle, could be considered a core tenet of librarianship . . . however, in practice, neutrality can never be fully achieved because no librarian selector is fully exempt from possessing personal beliefs at some base level as a human being.” (p. 49). This is something I have personally contemplated, and I applaud the thoughtful nature by which they bore this out. They go on to articulate ways in which we can be mindful of our own biases while endeavoring to remain both reflective and neutral in our selecting.

Supporting Diversity through Collection Evaluation, Development, and Weeding: CLIPP #48 is a quick read and a practical addition to any small-or-mid-size academic library. Its value lies less, I think, in its literature review, bibliography, and accompanying survey, and more in its sample collection documents – simply due to the difficulties inherent in doing a diversity audit on the collection. That being said, in Canada, our community is likely close-knit enough that we could source these types of samples from colleagues closer to home.

REFERENCE

Grinnell College. n.d. “Grinnell at a Glance.” Accessed February 19, 2025, <https://www.grinnell.edu/about/grinnell-glance>.