Diversity standards: Cultural competency for academic librarians
Approved by the ACRL Board of Directors, April 2012

by the ACRL Racial and Ethnic Diversity Committee

Purpose and goals of the standards

The following standards were developed by the Racial and Ethnic Diversity Committee of ACRL, based on the 2001 National Association of Social Workers Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice.[1] The standards are intended to emphasize the need and obligation to serve and advocate for racial and ethnically diverse constituencies. As such, they are intended to apply to all libraries supporting academic programs at institutions of higher education.

Diversity is an essential component of any civil society. It is more than a moral imperative; it is a global necessity. Everyone can benefit from diversity, and diverse populations need to be supported so they can reach their full potential for themselves and their communities.

As visionary leaders open to change, new ideas, and global perspectives, ACRL is committed to diversity of people and ideas, as noted in its 2007 White Papers. With that regard, ACRL understands that if libraries are to continue being indispensable organizations in their campus communities, they must reflect the communities they serve and provide quality services to their increasingly diverse constituencies.

To achieve diversity in substance as well as in form, libraries have to open their arms to all perspectives and experiences. That requires competency in matters of cultural pluralism that are not intuitive and must be learned, like any other essential skill (Smith 2008, 143).

To this end, these standards provide a framework to support libraries in engaging the complexities of providing services to diverse populations, and recruiting and maintaining a diverse library workforce. The standards may also serve as a starting point from which libraries can develop local approaches and goals in the context of their organizations' mission and situation.

Definitions

Cultural competence: A congruent set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that enable a person or group to work effectively in crosscultural situations; the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each (National Association of Social Workers, 2001).

Culture: Customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; a set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization.

Diversity: State or fact of being diverse; different characteristics and experiences that define individuals.

Globalization: The process of integrating regions via communications and economics.

Multiethnic/multicultural: Existence of, and interest in, many cultures within a society rather than in only a mainstream culture.

Multiculturalism: The policy or practice of giving equal attention or representation to

the cultural needs and contributions of all the groups in a society.

Outcome: An anticipated or desired result.

Standards

Standard 1. Cultural awareness of self and others

Librarians and library staff shall develop an understanding of their own personal and cultural values and beliefs as a first step in appreciating the importance of multicultural identities in the lives of the people they work with and serve.

Standard 2. Cross-cultural knowledge and skills

Librarians and library staff shall have and continue to develop specialized knowledge and understanding about the history, traditions, values, and artistic expressions of colleagues, co-workers, and major constituencies served.

Standard 3. Organizational and professional values

Librarians and library staff shall develop and support organizational and professional values dedicated to culturally competent service.

Standard 4. Development of collections, programs, and services

Librarians and library staff shall develop collections and provide programs and services that are inclusive of the needs of all persons in the community the library serves.

Standard 5. Service delivery

Librarians and library staff shall be knowledgeable about and skillful in the use and provision of information services available in the community and broader society, and shall be able to make appropriate referrals for their diverse constituencies.

Standard 6. Language diversity

Librarians and library staff shall support the preservation and promotion of linguistic diversity, and work to foster a climate of inclusion aimed at eliminating discrimination and oppression based on linguistic or other diversities.

Standard 7. Workforce diversity

Librarians and library staff shall support and advocate for recruitment, admissions, hiring, and retention efforts in libraries, library associations, and LIS programs to increase diversity and ensure continued diversity in the profession.

Standard 8. Organizational dynamics

Librarians and library staff shall participate in and facilitate the development of organizational dynamics that enable individuals, groups, and organizations to continually develop and exercise cultural competence.

Standard 9. Cross-cultural leadership

Library leaders shall influence, support, and encourage the creation of proactive processes that increase diversity skills; empower colleagues, co-workers, and constituents from diverse backgrounds; share

information about diverse populations; and advocate for their concerns.

Standard 10. Professional education and continuous learning

Librarians and library staff shall advocate for and participate in educational and training programs that help advance cultural competence within the profession.

Standard 11. Research

Research shall be inclusive and respectful of non-Western thought and traditional knowledge reflecting the value of cultural ways of knowing.

Explanation of the standards

Standard 1. Cultural awareness of self and others

Librarians and library staff shall develop an understanding of their own personal and cultural values and beliefs as a first step in appreciating the importance of multicultural identities in the lives of the people they work with and serve.

Interpretation

Cultural competence requires that librarians and library staff examine their own cultural backgrounds and identities to increase awareness of personal assumptions, values, and biases. The individual's self-awareness of their own cultural identities is as fundamental to service as the informed assumptions about constituents', colleagues', and co-workers' cultural backgrounds and experiences in the United States. This awareness of personal values, beliefs, and biases informs services to constituents; influences collection development, cataloging practices, program delivery, and library assessment; and influences relationships with colleagues and co-workers. Cultural competence includes knowing and acknowledging how fears, ignorance, and the "-isms" (racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, ageism, able-bodiedism, and classism) have influenced their attitudes, beliefs, and feelings.

Librarians and library staff need to be able to move from being culturally aware of their own heritage to becoming culturally aware of the heritage of others. They can value and celebrate differences in others rather than maintain an ethnocentric stance and can demonstrate comfort with differences between themselves and others. They have an awareness of personal and professional limitations that may warrant the referral of a constituent to another person, office, or center that can best meet their needs. Self-awareness also helps in understanding the process of cultural identity formation and helps guard against stereotyping. As one develops the diversity within one's own group, one can be more open to the diversity within other groups. Cultural competence also requires librarians and library staff to appreciate how one needs to move from cultural awareness to cultural sensitivity before achieving cultural competence and to evaluate growth and development throughout these different levels of cultural competence in practice. Self-awareness becomes the basis for professional development and should be supported by supervisors, library administrators, and the organization.

Culturally competent librarians and library staff shall:

• Examine their social identities and cultural heritage to increase awareness of their own assumptions, values, biases, and prejudices and how these influence interactions with constituents, colleagues, and co-workers.

• Identify and acknowledge how fears, ignorance, and the "-isms" have influenced their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

• Develop and employ strategies to identify and change detrimental attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

• Recognize when personal and professional limitations warrant the referral of a constituent to another resource and skillfully execute such referrals.

• Recognize that normative behavior in one context may not be understood or valued in another context.

• Acknowledge the ways in which membership in various social groups influences

worldview, what privileges one is afforded, and the potential to be a target of discriminatory attitudes and behaviors.

Standard 2. Crosscultural knowledge and skills

Librarians and library staff shall have and continue to develop specialized knowledge and understanding about the history, traditions, values, and artistic expressions of colleagues, co-workers, and major constituent groups served.

Interpretation

Cultural competence is not static, and requires frequent relearning and unlearning about diversity. Librarians and library staff need to take every opportunity to expand their cultural knowledge and expertise by expanding their understanding of the following areas: the impact of culture on behavior, attitudes, and values; the help-seeking behaviors of diverse colleagues, co-workers, and constituent groups; the role of language, speech patterns, and communication styles of colleagues, co-workers, and various constituent groups in the communities served; the resources (agencies, people, informal helping networks, and research) that can be used on behalf of diverse colleagues, co-workers, and constituent groups. It is important to not presume a particular group has the same set of values or beliefs as one's own.

Culturally competent librarians and library staff shall:
• Work with a wide range of people who are culturally different and similar to themselves and establish avenues for learning about the cultures of these colleagues, co-workers, and constituents.
• Assess the meaning of culture for individual colleagues, co-workers, and constituents; encourage open discussion of differences; and respond to culturally biased cues.
• Integrate the information gained from a culturally competent assessment into appropriate and effective services.

• Select and develop appropriate methods, skills, and approaches that are attuned to colleagues', co-workers', and constituents' cultural, bicultural, or marginal experiences in their environments.
• Demonstrate advocacy and empowerment skills in work with constituents, librarians, and library staff and administrators, recognizing and combating the "-isms", stereotypes, and myths held by individuals and organizations.
• Identify service delivery systems or models that are appropriate to the targeted constituent groups.
• Consult with supervisors and colleagues for feedback and monitoring of performance and to identify features of their own professional style that impede or enhance their culturally competent practice.
• Evaluate the validity and applicability of new techniques, research, and knowledge for work with diverse colleagues, co-workers, and constituent groups.

Standard 3. Organizational and professional values

Librarians and library staff shall develop and support organizational and professional values dedicated to culturally competent practice.

Interpretation

Organizational and professional values are the norms and guidelines that shape expectations for acceptable behavior and provide standards for both individual and group action. Establishing organizational and professional values that reflect cultural competence is an essential step in putting those values into practice.

Cultural competency can thrive within an organization only if a guiding framework for its development is thoroughly developed and clearly communicated to organization members. Because cultural competence is a critical component of user-focused service in particular, it is essential that its importance within the profession is evident across all organizational levels of a library. Thus cultural

competency standards must be incorporated into each area of library infrastructure, from public service to policymaking, administration, and managerial practice.

For administrators, developing such framework entails multiple strategies, including, but not limited to:
- Defining and prioritizing a set of core values and principles demonstrating a multifaceted commitment to diversity-minded service for employees to follow.
- Creating and maintaining services that are guided by an awareness of current and emerging demographic and sociocultural trends in the constituencies served by the library.
- Creating and maintaining a workplace climate that demonstrates commitment to cultural pluralism.
- Including cultural competency requirements in employee performance review and assessment procedures.
- Implementing recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts that ensure diversity within the profession.
- Creating or providing access to employee educational and training programs that advance cultural competency within the organization.
- Creating and providing services responsive to people of varying ethnic, racial, religious, or social backgrounds.

Regular assessment of cultural competence goals, moreover, is an essential factor in their ongoing relevancy and effectiveness. Informed decisions regarding culturally sensitive services can be made through consistent review of competence standards within the context of organizational values as a whole. Because cultural competency standards are only as good as their effects can be measured, it is important that the profession put into place opportunities for training in diversity recognition and outcomes-based evaluation of culturally sensitive practice.

The library profession should be encouraged to take steps to ensure that cultural competence is a fundamental organizational value, and to foster research and scholarship on culturally competent practices among library professionals as a means of commitment to one another and the diverse communities served.

Standard 4. Development of collections, programs, and services

Librarians and library staff shall develop collections and provide programs and services that are inclusive of the needs of all persons in the community the library serves.

Interpretation
Widespread changes in the linguistic and cultural fabric of library populations, coupled with the increasing sophistication of information technology, both require and make possible new approaches to the development of library collections and the provision of inclusive community-wide services. Upholding a commitment to cultural competence requires ensuring equitable access to collections and library services that are mindful of these changes.

Librarians and library staff need to learn how to detect and prevent exclusion of diverse constituents from service opportunities and seek to create opportunities for constituents, matching their needs with culturally competent services or adapting services to better meet the culturally unique needs of constituents. Furthermore, they need to foster policies and procedures that help ensure access to collections that reflect varying cultural beliefs.

For those responsible for the development and management of library collections and/or the provision of library programs and services, this specifically involves:
- Providing an equitable basis for purchasing materials and providing programs and services.
- Ensuring that consideration of the needs of historically oppressed, underrepresented, and underserved groups is integral to collection development and management and the

provision of programs and services. Regularly assessing the adequacy of existing collections, programs, and services to ensure they are reflective of the diversity of the library's constituent populations.

• Regularly reviewing the current and emergent demographic trends for the library's constituent populations to inform collection development and management and the provision of programs and services.

• Providing increased accessibility through cataloging by allowing natural language words and advocating for changes in the LOC headings.

• Creating and advocating for the creation of programs and services that are reflective of the cultural heritage, cultural backgrounds, and social identities of the library's constituent populations.

• Including constituents as major stakeholders in decision-making and advisory entities and the planning, development, and evaluation of collections, programs, and services.

Standard 5. Service delivery

Librarians and library staff shall be knowledgeable about and skillful in the use and provision of information services available in the community and broader society, and be able to make appropriate referrals for their diverse constituents.

Interpretation

Libraries need to promote cultural competence by supporting the evaluation of culturally competent service delivery models, and by setting standards for cultural competence within these settings. Culturally competent librarians and library staff need to be aware of and vigilant about the dynamics that result from cultural differences and similarities between and among librarians and library staff and constituents. This includes monitoring cultural competence among library employees through such means as supervision, in-service training, performance evaluations, and feedback from constituents.

Librarians and library staff must seek to create relevant and appropriate services for constituents, matching their needs with culturally competent service delivery systems, or adapting services to better meet the culturally unique needs of constituencies. They must develop and promote policies and procedures that help ensure access to services and resources that accommodate varying cultural beliefs. Furthermore, they need to detect and strive to prevent exclusion of diverse constituencies from accessing and using library services.

Direct practitioners, policymakers, or administrators shall:

• Promote free and open access to information for all constituents through support and advocacy of the Library Bill of Rights.

• Create, implement, and evaluate service delivery systems or models that are relevant and appropriate to the targeted constituent populations or advocate for the creation of such services.

• Develop instructional methods, practices, and resources that are widely accessible and reflective of the broad diversity of learning styles, language abilities, developmental skills, and cultural perspectives represented in the learning community.

• Review current and emerging demographic trends for the library's constituent populations to determine service needs.

• Actively recruit multiethnic/multicultural staff and include cultural competence requirements in job descriptions and performance and promotion measures.

• Develop staffing plans that reflect the organization and the targeted constituent population (for example, hiring, position descriptions, performance evaluations, training).

• Employ effective strategies for confronting librarian and library staff remarks, attitudes, and behaviors that insult, devalue, or demean constituents or their culture.

Standard 6. Language diversity

Librarians and library staff shall support the preservation and promotion of linguistic diversity, and work to foster a climate of in-

clusion aimed at eliminating discrimination and oppression based on linguistic or other diversities.

Interpretation

Linguistic restrictions and prohibitions, such as the English-only concept, have been used throughout American history as the dominant culture's method of dealing with perceived threats to linguistic, and thus cultural, homogeneity.

Demographics in the United States have changed dramatically in the last ten years, and will continue to transform society. This change has affected our interaction with each other as colleagues, co-workers, and as information service providers striving to serve our diverse populations and to collaborate in our multiethnic/multicultural library workplaces. Among all the parameters affecting these interactions, language diversity—the vocal, audible aspect of diversity—poses challenges to librarians, library staff, and library administrators.

Language as a means of communication encompasses all languages spoken by librarians, library staff and constituents, and also includes the needs of the disabled (sign language) and those with speech and/or hearing difficulties.

The following guidelines serve as incentives towards equity and understanding in interactions and communications with each other. Librarians and library staff shall seek to:

• Provide and advocate for the provision of information, reference, referrals, instruction, collection management, and other services in the language appropriate to their constituencies, including the use of interpreters.

• Master reference interviewing techniques that reflect an understanding of the role of language in the client's culture.

• Acknowledge the efforts of English-language learners or the constituent with speech impediments. Patient listening is necessary. Consider alternative ways (technology or writing) to communicate with the constituent.

• Review the current and emergent demographic trends for the library's constituent populations to determine the need for the provision of interpretation and translation services.

• Collection managers should be attentive to represent the linguistic needs of library constituents, and assure that library resources in print or electronic formats are available, especially to support the academic curricula reflecting all diversity issues, including those of visually disabled constituents.

• Clear signage, perhaps in more than one language appropriate to the library's constituencies, should be used prominently. Translation of guides to the library and other important documents should also be considered.

• A guide and/or directory containing the language (including sign language) proficiency of the library's staff who would be willing to be called as interpreters should be created.

Standard 7. Workforce diversity

Librarians and library staff shall support and advocate for recruitment, admissions, hiring, and retention efforts in libraries, library associations, and LIS programs that increase diversity and ensure continued diversity in the profession.

Interpretation

Diversity in the workplace benefits the library's constituents and the community, the library organization, and the community. In a diverse library workforce, library users can find someone to relate to, and get services that are sensitive to their needs and preferences. Diversity also improves staff performance and overall library success.

Diversity also benefits library and information schools, improving the quality of learning as students explore different perspectives and reduce prejudice, and fostering deeper thinking (Kim and Sin 2008).

Diversity is one of ALA's five key action areas to ensure high-quality library services to all constituents. Within that mission is the need to recruit underrepresented

groups and individuals with disabilities to the profession.

It is this diversity that contributes a deeper level of understanding and competence to our daily work. ALA envisions a richly, diverse workforce providing a high level of service to the membership in an environment where respect, appreciation, equity, and inclusion are core values (ALA 2003, 1).

The culturally competent organization shall:

• Develop an action plan to actively recruit and retain staff and librarians. Librarians should go beyond the traditional avenues to advertise positions to create and develop formal and informal ways to reach individuals that represent the constituents served.

• Obtain statistics about underrepresented personnel (students, staff, librarians) in the organization, review information, and work to understand the lacking numbers and personnel in the organization.

• Develop and implement human resource and other organizational policies, procedures, and practices that support staff diversity.

• Develop and implement organizational policies, procedures, and practices that effectively address the dynamics of a diverse workforce

• Review recruitment, hiring, and promotion policies, procedures, and practices to remedy inadvertent exclusion of or discrimination toward underrepresented, underserved, and historically oppressed groups.

• Implement safeguards against exclusion of or discrimination toward underrepresented, underserved, and historically oppressed groups in the workplace, and take corrective action when inequities are discovered.

Standard 8. Organizational dynamics

Librarians and library staff shall participate in and facilitate the development of organizational dynamics that enable individuals, groups, and organizations to continually develop and exercise cultural competence.

Interpretation

Cultural competence can be conceptualized both at the individual and organizational levels. It is also important to view cultural competence in terms of the interplay between individuals and the organizations within which they work. The term *organizational dynamics* describes both the components of an organization—such as its structure, culture, strategies, change, and other processes, policies, and practices—and the organization's pattern of activity, change, and growth as it responds to both internal and external forces. Individuals, and the groups with which they work, shape, and influence the organizational dynamics. Organizational dynamics also shape and influence individual and group behavior and attitudes.

Organizational dynamics can impede or foster culturally competent behavior and attitudes.

Every academic library has an established culture for achieving organizational goals, performance expectations, and methods of communication. Within that culture reside formal and informal rules of interaction, frequently referred to as "values and norms," that are established by the organization and its work groups. An organization's culture influences the behavior of its employees and guides how they view and accept difference in style and opinion (Smith 2008, 143).

Libraries, library organizations, and their employees must make a deliberate choice to create and maintain organizational dynamics that foster culturally competent behavior and attitudes. This means making a commitment to continually practice cultural competence in day-to-day operations at all levels of the organization.

The culturally competent organization shall:

• Identify and use applicable theories, methods, frameworks, and models for developing and sustaining multicultural organizations.

• Regularly review and adapt its structures, strategies, policies, practices, and

processes to foster an inclusive environment, including identifying and taking steps to address inequity and exclusion (intentional or inadvertent).

• Strive to create structures, strategies, policies, practices, and processes that equitably integrate the values, norms, and behavioral standards of diverse groups, including dominant and nondominant groups.

• Seek outside assistance when needed from campus and community professionals trained in addressing social justice and diversity issues.

• Through its structures, strategies, policies, practices, and change processes:

- Support the expansion of cross-cultural knowledge and skills at the individual, group, and organizational level.

- Strive to increase individual, group, and organizational capacity to work with and serve a variety of people and groups.

- Create opportunities and venues for sharing information and learning regarding cultural competence.

- Empower all employees to fully participate in the life of the organization; have their voices heard and their perspectives and experiences valued.

- Establish organizational norms that foster openness to and respect for discussing issues of cultural competence, including situations where exclusionary and/or insensitive attitudes and behaviors were experienced.

- Recognize the dynamics inherent to intercultural interactions, including the effect that dominant and nondominant status has on group dynamics and interpersonal interaction.

- Acknowledge cultural competence as an ongoing learning process integral and central to supervision, evaluation, training, hiring, promotion, and human resource management.

- Infuse cultural competence into the enactment of the mission, values, and goals of the organization.

- Foster a workplace climate and organizational culture, through formal and informal means, that actively addresses challenges associated with diversity.

- Foster a workplace climate and organizational culture, through formal and informal means, that leverages, maximizes, and celebrates the benefits of a diverse workforce.

Standard 9. Cross-cultural leadership

Library leaders shall influence, support, and encourage the creation of proactive processes that increase diversity skills; empower colleagues, co-workers, and constituents from diverse backgrounds; share information about diverse populations; and advocate for their concerns.

Interpretation

Successful leaders will help to foster diversity skills among fellow leaders, library faculty, and staff. Diversity skills are defined as sensitivity to diversity, multiethnic/multicultural leadership, acceptance and valuation, cultural competence, and ability to deal with ambiguity. Crosscultural leadership helps to fulfill the organizational mission (Northouse 2006, 3; Rank and Hutchison 2000).

Culturally competent leaders shall:

• Foster sensitivity, openness, and a spirit of inquiry to other world views and cultural orientations.

• Model culturally competent attitudes and behavior.

• Support diversity skills training and diversity education—including the exploration of social justice, privilege and oppression, and fear and anger around cultural diversity issues—in a safe environment that allows for discussion and reflection (Van Soest and Garcia 2008).

• Encourage and seek out leadership qualities within library faculty and staff from a variety of cultural backgrounds and support their development and retention in the profession.

• Develop and support a multiethnic/multicultural workforce to meet the needs of the constituency.

• Create opportunities for crosscultural communities and skill development of staff.

• Support continuing education of staff to be culturally competent.

Culturally competent organizations shall:

•Provide leadership opportunities to library faculty and staff from a variety of cultural backgrounds and support them in developing leadership skills.

•Foster a workplace climate and organizational culture that is open to a variety of leadership styles.

Standard 10. Professional education and continuous learning

Librarians and library staff shall advocate for and participate in educational and training programs that help advance cultural competence within the profession.

Interpretation

Cultural competence is a vital link between the theoretical and practical knowledge base that defines librarianship. The practicing librarian should stay abreast of current educational trends and training methods needed to stay ahead of changes in professional practice, which includes the evolving needs of diverse populations. Diversity needs to be addressed in library education curricula and needs to be viewed as central to faculty and staff appointments and research agendas.

Several entities need to address educational and training programs:

• The library profession should take steps to ensure cultural competence as an integral part of LIS education, training and practice, and to increase research and scholarship on culturally competent practice among library professionals. Relevant venues include master's and doctoral programs in library and information science as well as post-master's training, continuing education, and meetings of the profession.

• Academic library administrators should be encouraged to provide culturally competent in-service training and opportunities for continuing education for library faculty and staff.

• ACRL should contribute to the ongoing education and training needs for all librarians and library staff, with particular emphasis on promoting culturally competent practice in continuing education offerings in terms of content, faculty, and auspice.

Standard 11. Research

Research shall be inclusive and respectful of non-Western thought and traditional knowledge reflecting the value of cultural ways of knowing.

Interpretation

Cultural competence requires acknowledgment of Western cultural bias, and respectful inquiry of other systems of thought, including sources of traditional knowledge.

Categories of traditional knowledge could include: agricultural knowledge; scientific knowledge; technical knowledge; ecological knowledge; medicinal knowledge, including related medicines and remedies; biodiversity-related knowledge; "expressions of folklore" in the form of music, dance, song, handicrafts, designs, stories and artwork; elements of languages, such as names, geographical indications and symbols; and movable cultural properties (ALA Traditional Cultural Expression Taskforce 2010).

Culturally competent researchers shall:

• Reflect on and acknowledge their ethnocentrisms and biases.

• Recognize others' ethnocentric tendencies and biases.

• Foster sensitivity, openness, and a spirit of inquiry to others' world views and cultural orientations.

Culturally competent organizations shall:

• Support and encourage research opportunities to explore the gaps in critical knowledge in the profession.

• Assist librarians and library staff in identifying and applying for funding, including providing time, resources, and supportive recommendations.

- Provide funding when possible.
- Assist in establishing and maintaining networks of professionals that will encourage idea development.
- Ensure that research on cultural competency, diversity issues, and related topics is valued in retention, promotion, and tenure processes.

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Notes

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