



JOURNAL OF NEW LIBRARIANSHIP

Vol. 10, No. 2, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.33011/newlibs/19/3>

Book Review

Review of *Creating an Inclusive Library: Approaches for Increasing Engagement and Use with Students of Color*

Carlos Grooms, MLS, *North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University*

ABSTRACT

Review of *Creating an inclusive Library: Approaches for increasing engagement and use with students of color*, edited by Ngoc-Yen Tran, Michael J. Aguilar II, and Adriana Poo. Association of College and Research Libraries, 2024. 456 pp. ISBN 979-8-89255-621-7.

KEYWORDS

Culturally relevant practices, library programming, political backlash

SUGGESTED CITATION

Grooms, C. (2025). Review of *Creating an inclusive library: Approaches for increasing engagement and use with students of color*, N.Y. Tran, M.J. Aguilar, & A. Poo (Eds.). *Journal of New Librarianship*, 10(2), 41–45. <https://doi.org/10.33011/newlibs/19/3>

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.



Introduction

Academic libraries have long functioned as centers of access, learning, and belonging. In recent years, however, librarians and other higher education professionals have found themselves working under increasing pressure due to political unrest and reactionary legislation that seeks to curtail diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts (Blake, n.d.). From the aftermath of the George Floyd protests to the legislative rollbacks of DEI offices and initiatives in several U.S. states, many institutions are grappling with how to continue equity-focused work without institutional protection or public support (Brannon et al., 2018).

It is within this uncertain and shifting political climate that the book *Creating an Inclusive Library: Approaches for Increasing Engagement and Use with Students of Color* becomes most relevant and urgent. Edited by Ngoc-Yen Tran, Michael J. Aguilar II, and Adriana Poo, the volume brings together librarians, archivists, and library staff from across the country who have developed programming, collections, partnerships, and pedagogies that intentionally center students of color. As the editor's note in their introduction, the work of inclusion and anti-racism often persists despite institutional resistance. The book aims to provide inspiration and strategies for those who are able—and those who are not currently able—to engage in this work openly.

Summary of Contents and Themes

The book is structured around six thematic sections that align with the various dimensions of inclusive library practice:

1. *Welcoming and Sense of Belonging*: These chapters examine how libraries can create spaces and programming that affirm students' identities and foster a sense of belonging. A notable example is Chapter 1's case study on integrating library instruction into a summer bridge program at SUNY Geneseo, which emphasizes relationship-building, asset-based pedagogy, and culturally responsive instruction.
2. *Culturally Relevant Practices*: This section illustrates how libraries can adapt pedagogical and programmatic approaches to reflect the cultural experiences of students of color. Whether through metaphor-based antiracist pedagogy (Chapter 5) or archival walking tours aligned with cultural heritage months (Chapter 7), contributors argue that relevance increases resonance.
3. *Building Representation and Inclusion*: Chapters in this section demonstrate how collection development, cataloging, and resource curation can better reflect the experiences of BIPOC communities. Chapter 9's Reading Resilience Project, for example, empowers students to suggest materials, thereby centering their voices in the development of the collection.

4. *Collaborations and Co-Creation*: This section showcases participatory practices that elevate student agency and foster co-design, ranging from Wikipedia edit-a-thons to zine workshops. The emphasis here is on breaking down hierarchical models of knowledge production and library service.
5. *Community Building and Engagement*: These chapters examine the library's role in addressing systemic racism and promoting broader campus transformation. A panel series on racial equity, ethnic studies library models, and regional partnerships provides scalable examples.
6. *Fostering Diverse Student Employees*: The final section outlines pathways for developing inclusive student employment programs, including internships in IT and peer consulting roles that foster the development of transferable skills and professional confidence.

Across all sections, the editors have made a point to include author positionality statements, encouraging transparency about how identities shape practice. This aligns with current scholarly discourse on reflexivity in librarianship, thereby enhancing the book's credibility and ethical grounding (Klein & Lenart, 2020).

Strengths

The greatest strength of *Creating an Inclusive Library* lies in its thematic organization and range of perspectives. The volume does not present a monolithic approach to DEI work but rather highlights multiple pathways for increasing engagement and use among students of color. The inclusion of detailed case studies, project assessments, and pedagogical reflections allows practitioners to see themselves in the work and consider adaptations for their own contexts.

Timing is another critical strength. Given the wave of anti-DEI legislation across the United States, the strategies shared in this book are exceptionally vital for professionals working under scrutiny or institutional constraint. These projects, many of which were born from or accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial reckoning of 2020, underscore that change is indeed possible—even during times of disruption.

The use of organizing themes such as “sense of belonging” and “co-creation” serves not only as a structural device but also as a conceptual roadmap for libraries looking to assess and reimagine their practices. The editors' decision to include a positionality statement in each chapter exemplifies an ethic of transparency and accountability that is rarely found in edited volumes.

Limitations

One notable limitation of the collection is the lack of representation from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Given the centrality of antiracist work and the large

population of Black students and faculty at HBCUs, the absence of these institutions as contributors is a missed opportunity. Their inclusion could have offered richer insights into longstanding models of inclusive practice, especially in institutions where students of color are the majority (*Jones et al., 2022*).

Conclusion

Creating an Inclusive Library is a timely and essential contribution to the growing body of literature on equity and inclusion in academic librarianship. In an era when DEI initiatives are being systematically challenged and, in some cases, dismantled by political pressure, this book offers a courageous and practical roadmap for continuing this vital work. By amplifying strategies for student engagement that are culturally relevant, collaboratively designed, and grounded in anti-racist principles, the editors and contributors collectively affirm that libraries remain crucial spaces for belonging, resistance, and transformation.

While the absence of HBCU representation signals an area for future expansion, the book nonetheless succeeds in illuminating a range of inclusive practices that can inspire and guide library professionals working across diverse institutional contexts. At its heart, *Creating an Inclusive Library* reminds readers that the work of equity is not always institutionally sanctioned, but it is always professionally necessary. For librarians committed to fostering justice and inclusion, especially in increasingly constrained environments, this volume offers both moral clarity and practical direction.

References

- Blake, J. (2025, March 21). Congress eyes more control over colleges. *Inside Higher Ed*.
<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/politics-elections/2025/03/21/congress-eyeing-more-control-over-colleges>
- Brannon, T. N., Carter, E. R., Murdock-Perriera, L. A., & Higginbotham, G. D. (2018). From backlash to inclusion for all: Instituting diversity efforts to maximize benefits across group lines. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 12(1), 57–90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12040>
- Jones, J. L., Jones, L. L., Jones, J. L., & Jones, L. L. (2022). *A space is a terrible thing to waste: HBCU role in fostering diversity, inclusion, equity, belonging, and liberation*. IGI Global Scientific Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-4023-0.ch013>
- Klein, S., & Lenart, B. (2020). In search of shifting and emergent librarian identities: A philosophical approach to the librarian identity problem. *Partnership: Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research / Partnership: Revue Canadienne de La Pratique et de La Recherche En Bibliothéconomie et Sciences de l'information*, 15(1), 1–27.
<https://doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v15i1.5113>