Task Force on Diversity & Inclusion

May 11, 2016

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Prologue

Charge of the Task Force

The charge of the School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion at Simmons College is to advise Dean Abels on providing a safe, inclusive, and anti-oppressive environment for all students, staff, and faculty of SLIS, including the Children's Literature, Computer Science, and Library and Information Science degrees and programs. Our working definition of diversity takes into account the intersectionality of social and cultural identities, such as race and ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religious affiliations, political identities and age, among others. Inclusion is representative of the intentional engagement we all create to understand these identities within our educational and institutional environment. Furthermore, the Task Force aligns its values and vision with that of the College.

> Our values: "We honor the inherent humanity, dignity and worth of each member of our community.
>
> Our vision: "Simmons College will be a welcoming, vibrant, inclusive community that appreciates, values, and respects the humanity, dignity, diversity, and contributions of all its members. We are committed to engage one another to address the dynamic, evolving issues of our community and our world."

During the spring of the 2016 school year we explored ways in which diversity and inclusion initiatives across the SLIS could be improved by:

- building on the ongoing efforts of students who have been engaging with Dean Abels since spring 2015;

- organizing two listening sessions to support students, staff, and faculty and encourage them to share their concerns, experiences, and ideas;

- developing a grievance process for students, staff, and faculty to discuss concerns related to diversity and inclusion at SLIS;

- advocating to increase diversity of the student body by being a part of the search process for the Dean's Diversity Fellow and working closely with the Admissions office

- promoting increased attention to diversity and inclusion within the SLIS curriculum; and

- communicating with the SLIS community regarding the Task Force's efforts.

Task Force Members
Kazia Berkley-Cramer, Children's Literature and MSLIS dual degree Master's program (chair)
Dr. Janet Ceja, Assistant Professor (chair)
Jillianna Farietta, Computer Science Undergraduate Major (chair)
Joyce Gabiola, MSLIS degree student, Archives Management Concentration
Dr. Laura Saunders, Assistant Professor
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Priorities

One of our priorities was to hold listening sessions to observe and take note of student, faculty, and staff concerns about diversity and inclusion at SLIS. Listening deeply to the local SLIS community helped bring new concerns, questions, and ideas to the Task Force and to focus our efforts in developing a set of recommendations. This listening process worked alongside existing efforts in place at SLIS and the student-led initiatives to build and foster an inclusive learning environment.

Another priority involved working on the design of a feedback tool where students can submit suggestions and grievances concerning diversity and inclusion. Throughout the semester the Task Force received email correspondence from students that was especially suitable for this tool; emails ranged from concerns about culturally-insensitive Simmons-wide marketing to classroom grievances to ideas about diversity training. The status of the tool is currently in beta mode and can be found here: D&I Action Box.[1] Additionally, the Task Force presented ideas to the SLIS Curriculum Committee on how to work toward integrating and assessing diversity in the curriculum.

The Task Force will continue to work closely with Dean Abels and the 2016-17 Dean's Fellow on Diversity and Inclusion to identify and implement recommendations for building an inclusive environment at SLIS. The Task Force will also identify ways to keep the SLIS community informed of its efforts and abreast of new initiatives.

Campus Climate

Our priorities were shaped by the campus climate at the College and in particular by allegations that SLIS students have encountered microaggressions in the educational environment. The term microaggression hails from the 1970s and is broadly understood as an offensive comment or action unconsciously or unintentionally communicating hostile, negative messages, insults, or stereotypes about non-dominant or marginalized groups.[2] Because individuals were unable to identify any campus resources to safely address their experiences, a Tumblr site was launched in July 2014 titled "Simmons SLIS microaggressions" to document "sexist, classist, racist, transphobic/cissexist, transmisogynist, ableist, anti-Semitic, ageist, homophobic, etc. experiences at SLIS."[3] In January 2016 a Twitter site was launched in association with the Tumblr site. These sites mimic the LIS-wide sites titled "Microaggresions in Librarianship" on Tumblr, and the "LIS Microaggressions" on Twitter, which seek to document the pervasiveness of this phenomenon in the library and information science professions. Unlike the latter sites, however, the creators and contributors of microaggressions at SLIS are anonymous. These documented experiences function not only to create important and immediate awareness about microaggressions occurring at SLIS, but also to, as perceived by some, police the educational environment.

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[1] See: https://simmons.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/preview/SV_eS6s9EVmnswGeSV

[2] Merriam-Webster, http://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/microaggression-words-were-watching

[3] Microaggressions at Simmons College SLIS, https://twitter.com/SLISMicroaggs

Some SLIS professors let the Task Force know that they feel inhibited from trying to engage in topics about diversity in the classroom, because they lack training and are afraid of retribution on these sites. At least one instructor has been identified as a microaggressor. The lack of context and anonymity attached to the social media messages have thus inhibited some professors from engaging in dialogue on topics surrounding diversity. Moreover, students are not the only ones subject to microaggressions. Professors have also encountered microaggressions and in both cases there is no official mechanism to support these individuals. Overall, professors who spoke to members of the Task Force were supportive of diversity and inclusion initiatives and they wanted to see more training opportunities to strengthen their pedagogical practice.

There is a desire among the SLIS community to build respectful and positive campus experiences where people are empowered to take responsibility for their actions. This desire has been especially visible in the last few years among SLIS students, faculty, and the administration who have worked to raise awareness about social inequities on campus and to enact positive change. In 2014, faculty and members of the administration engaged in developing programming and training to raise awareness about diversity and inclusion. More recently the Lee & Low and Friends scholarship was launched to increase diversity in children's literature. During the 2015-16 school year, students advocated for, created, and led breakout sessions each semester on diversity and social justice in LIS during the new student orientations. Students also organized an LIS education forum entitled Diversity, Equity, Race, Accessibility, and Identity in LIS (DERAIL) "to address the need for critical discussions of the intersections between social justice issues and our roles as students and information professionals."[4] Undergraduate student activists led a sit-in demonstration toward the end of the Fall 2015 semester to denounce institutional inequities confronted by students of color. The student organization that led this effort, the Black Student Organization, noted the "tokenizing [of] students of color" and "microaggressions and misinformation in class" as representative of the treatment they faced at the College.[5] During the student sit-in Simmons College President Helen Drinan and Provost Katie Conboy met in public with three undergraduate student leaders who delivered a list of demands. These demands were based on a list that had been compiled decades earlier by the Black Student Organization. That the list of demands had not changed radically was evidence that these issues remained invisible to the College's administration. Since then, a series of Community Forums (previously known as Community Meetings) have been held to discuss the list of ten demands; additionally, the College administration has sent official emails concerning how each demand is being addressed.

These initiatives have helped to highlight issues of oppression and structural racism at SLIS and the College, and has spurred the activities of this Task Force. As such, the Task Force will continue to engage with students, faculty, and staff to advise the Dean with regard to opening the lines of communication, identifying opportunities to work against oppression, and promoting education to the SLIS community.

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[4] DERAIL Forum, http://www.simmons.edu/events/school/slis/2016/march/26/derail

[5] Students of Color Demand Action from Administration, https://simmonsvoice.com/2015/11/18/students-of-color-demand-action-from-administration/

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Listening Sessions

Listening Sessions were one way to make student grievances visible and to provide context to the experiences that students, staff, and faculty face on campus. It was an attempt to engage in restorative action through listening and an ethics of care; that is, at the most basic level, acknowledging our communal interdependence by responding visibly to the concerns of others.

Two listening sessions were held on campus; the first session took place on March 23 and was attended by 9 community members. Five were students, 3 were faculty, and 1 was a member of the administration. During the second session held on April 11, there were a total of 10 community members. There were 5 students, 2 faculty members, 1 staff and adjunct, 1 librarian and adjunct, and 1 alumnus. (These numbers do not include members of the Task Force.)

The first listening session brought forward several concerns such as: microaggressions in online courses directed toward students with disabilities and raising awareness of differently-abled persons within a professional context; how professors feel ill-equipped to address diversity issues and how they would like to see professional training opportunities; ideas for weaving diversity into the SLIS curricula by way of local resources (e.g., professors with expertise in other departments) and standard processes (e.g., developing school-wide learning outcomes); making diversity demographic data available for targeted student recruitment; and building relationships with alumni of color by bringing them to campus for networking opportunities.

The second listening session brought forward new concerns such as: the status of the gender neutral bathrooms; recruitment efforts for more faculty of color; resistance to curricula changes by professors and the topic of academic freedom; defining diversity and integrating this definition into the curricula; questions concerning the offering of diversity training opportunities; developing a code of behavior for faculty and more generally the whole community regarding microaggressions; student grievances about classroom experiences; students who want the Task Force to "speak" for them; and hopelessness in administrative change that was illustrated through jokes and cavalier threats bordering on (although not to be taken as specifically serious) personal violence toward professors.

In the future, listening sessions should be followed by talking circles where the Task Force grapples more critically with the topics posed at the listening sessions. In other words, listening sessions should lead up to sessions in which the community engages in meaningful and transformative dialogue. To do this, members of the Task Force should be professionally trained and prepared to engage with these issues. Additionally, these sessions should take place in both physical and virtual environments in order to engage with the experiences of distance learners. Finally, the sessions should be scheduled at least three months ahead of time to ensure that more community members attend; the Task Force was limited in its ability to organize more sessions due to the short timeframe.

Recommendations

Communicating about Diversity and Inclusion

Recommendation 1: Develop robust and integrated modes of communication to convey diversity and inclusion activities, initiatives, etc. across SLIS and Simmons through SLIS's various communication channels: website, blogs, social media, town hall meetings, etc.

- **Impact**
  Reach various constituencies, including alumni, through different communication venues in order to create transparency and visibility of diversity and inclusion at SLIS
- **Timeline**
  Implement during the 2016-17 school year
- **Action Steps**
  Task Force email address (inclusion@simmons.edu); identifying Dean's Diversity & Inclusion Fellow; D&I Action Box
- **Resources required**
  Time: Dean, staff, faculty, Dean's Fellow for Diversity and Inclusion, and SLIS student leaders to participate in a general meeting, new student orientation, faculty retreat, etc. to convey the importance of coordinated efforts in communicating and achieving D&I goal
- **Additional resources**
  Simmons-wide diversity hashtag: #SimmonsDiverse

Recommendation 2: Communicate and foster diversity and inclusion before potential students, faculty, and staff arrive on campus via website, marketing materials, job descriptions, faculty/staff search processes, new student orientation, etc.

- **Impact**
  Before becoming part of SLIS, potential students, faculty, and staff will be aware of the importance of diversity and inclusion in all areas of SLIS— that it's not ancillary to its business operations, culture, and curriculum, but integral and authentically valued
- **Timeline**
  As soon as possible and ongoing
- **Action Steps**
  New student orientation breakout sessions on diversity and social justice in LIS, gender pronoun cards
- **Resources required**
  Time: Dean, staff, faculty, and students at information sessions, tours, tabling at events, conference presentations, Communications, Marketing,   Admissions

Recommendation 3: Explicitly communicate to SLIS students that structural oppression operates throughout the library and information science professions— in information, technology, pedagogy, services, and in our interactions with colleagues, patrons, clients, and communities; diversity and inclusion is not limited to recruitment and retention of professionals

- **Impact**

Awareness that information services and systems are rooted in bias based on race, gender, dis/ability, etc.; help foster an inclusive, anti-oppressive environment; help integrate diversity and inclusion in the curriculum; help reduce the amount of microaggressions; enable students to competently build and sustain an equitable environment at SLIS and in their future professional environments

- **Timeline**
  Implement during the 2016-17 school year
- **Action Steps**
  Diversity programming by faculty and administration
- **Resources required**
  Dean, staff, faculty, Task Force for Diversity and Inclusion, Communications

Learning about Diversity and Inclusion

Recommendation 1: *Increase formal and informal learning and training opportunities on issues of diversity and inclusion, microaggressions, intersectionality, and power for faculty, staff, and students*

- **Impact**
  Demonstrate commitment and visibility of diversity and inclusion at SLIS; empower the SLIS community through local and national outlets that promote formal and informal learning and engagement
- **Timeline**
  Implement during the 2016-17 school year
- **Resources required**
  Time to organize and integrate Simmons administration, DIAC, and student group event planning efforts
- **Additional resources**
  National Diversity in Libraries Conference (held at UCLA, Aug 10-13, 2016); Bystander Training by Simmons School of Nursing and Health Sciences Assistant Dean, Jodi Delibertis; Anti-racism trainings by Community Change, Inc.; Discussion on white privilege (per Beatley Library's initiative)

Recommendation 2: *Advocate for "inclusive excellence" in SLIS curricula, face-to-face and online, by offering incentives to professors who weave diversity into their courses*

- **Impact**
  Diversity topics can reach more students and professors can feel empowered to participate in diversity training and curriculum initiatives
- **Timeline**
  Begin to implement during the 2016-17 school year
- **Resources required**
  Administrative funding to support the incentivizing process through creative measures; for instance, conference travel funding for professors who attend diversity trainings and use the information learned to substantially re-design their courses.
- **Additional Resources**
  Association of American Colleges & Universities on inclusive excellence: http://aacu.org/making-excellence-inclusive; Example of Inclusive Excellence Framework at RIT: http://www.rit.edu/diversity/inclusive-excellence-framework

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Recommendation 3: Coordinate with the Assessment Committee and Curriculum Committee to advocate for a "diversity audit" of the SLIS curriculum in order to identify existing attention to diversity and inclusion opportunities for further integration

- **Impact**
  Provide a holistic view of the curriculum which will highlight strengths and weaknesses in addressing D&I topics across the program, within the core, and within concentrations
- **Timeline**
  Implement during the 2016-17 school year
- **Action Steps**
  The Task Force is working with the Curriculum Committee to conduct a diversity audit of the curriculum
- **Resources required**
  Faculty and staff time to conduct the audit

Researching about Diversity and Inclusion

Recommendation 1: Communicate diversity demographic data about SLIS student body, staff, faculty, and adjuncts on SLIS diversity webpage

- **Impact**
  Create a culture of transparency; open data for student, staff, faculty, and adjunct recruitment and the development of retention mechanisms SLIS-wide and in higher education in general
- **Timeline**
  Begin during the 2016 fall semester
- **Resources required**
  Dean, Assistant Dean for Student and Alumni Affairs, Diversity and Inclusion Fellow, and Website Coordinator time to gather, interpret, and make statistics accessible on the SLIS diversity webpage
- **Additional resources**
  Demographic data about Simmons students can be found here: https://sites.google.com/a/simmons.edu/data-share-simmons/demographic-data?pli=1

Recommendation 2: Design and administer a diversity and inclusion climate survey every two years to study, track, and continuously assess the status of the SLIS

- **Impact**
  Systematically gather, assess, and respond to SLIS community experiences relating to diversity; understand the status and success of newly developed diversity and inclusion initiatives
- **Timeline**
  Begin developing during the 2016-2017 school year
- **Resources required**
  Assistant Dean for Student and Alumni Affairs, Diversity and Inclusion Fellow, and Task Force to design and administer survey
- **Additional resources**
  Simmons School of Social Work Diversity Climate Survey; University of Minnesota Duluth, Campus Climate Surveys; UC Berkley, Campus Climate

Surveys; Cornell University, Campus Climate Surveys; UMD, College of Information Studies Diversity Climate Assessment Report