

The Evaluation of a Diversity Program at an Academic Library

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Introduction

Appreciation for diversity and tolerance of differences do not happen automatically, but require active engagement in thinking and learning. Promoting diversity has been part of the mission of the Texas A&M University Libraries for many years. In November 1999, the Libraries administration approved a proposal for a Cultural Awareness Program implemented by the Libraries' Personnel Department. Numerous campus student organizations were invited to the Libraries to do cultural presentations on their countries, which included features such as music, education, government, and clothing. A thematic approach on achieving togetherness through an emerging program, RISE (Reach Out, Inspire, Support, Educate), was adopted by the Libraries' Personnel Department in February, 2002.

Staff participation in these programs prompted the Libraries' dean to establish a full-time position for special events and diversity programs. In March, 2002, the position of Public Relations Associate for Diversity Programs and Events Coordinator was created, and filled by a current staff member in the library. This position has the responsibility for planning and coordinating the University Libraries' diversity program, and for developing collaborative relationships between the Libraries, campus, and partners in the local community. The intent of the Diversity Program was to ensure that the activities and practices are timely, attainable, measurable, realistic, and strategic. A budget of \$10,000 per year was allocated for diversity programs for library employees.

In September 2003, the Diversity Program Coordinating Committee was established, with seven members who were faculty and staff appointed by the dean. The Public Relations Associate for Diversity Programs served as ex-officio member of the Committee. Members serve for staggered terms of one to three years. This committee was charged with to developing guidelines on the nature and content of diversity programs for the library; developing and presenting a program of 10 to 12 diversity-related events for library faculty and staff, and focused on one or two clear themes each year; and identifying other quality

diversity-related programs at the university or in the community and communicating information about those programs to library faculty and staff.

Meaningful involvement in diversity-related activities is a part of the university's evaluation process. Libraries faculty and staff are encouraged to participate during the academic year in at least three diversity-related events which increase their knowledge of, appreciation for, or sensitivity to diversity issues in the workplace. Events presented by the Libraries' Diversity Program Coordinating Committee or events elsewhere on campus or in the community that have been identified by the committee will qualify. Supervisors have flexibility in granting work time and in making schedule adjustments so that employees can participate in diversity events. Supervisors also have flexibility in approving individual requests from their employees to participate in other activities or events that are consistent with the Libraries' guidelines. To accommodate supervisors and staff who are unable or do not wish to allocate work time to programming activities, a minimum of 25% of all programming activity is scheduled for the lunch hour, after 6PM, or weekends. Programs scheduled during these times are voluntary, and will not be part of the compensated work week. Seventy-five percent of the programming activities are scheduled for work time.

Through a variety of diversity programs, the Libraries aim to meet the following goals:

Communication

- By promoting and recognizing diversity among staff, students, and patrons within the University Libraries
- By eliminating fear based on differences
- By encouraging openness and cooperation among the diverse staff of the Libraries and the campus community

Education

- By opening avenues of communication and interaction among library staff and campus community
- By discouraging the stereotype that differences among people are negative
- By fostering an atmosphere that is non-threatening and open to change while offering people the opportunity to experience diversity
- By providing programs that encourage library employees to discuss and value their difference
- By preparing library staff to work with an increasingly diverse and global population

Celebration

- By sponsoring events at which individuals throughout the campus can share their cultures, foster a sense of community and enjoy the camaraderie.

In the past three and half years, the Committee has sponsored or organized about 150 programs or events. Because no formal assessment had been made in the program's nearly four years of existence, the members of the Diversity Program Coordinating Committee conducted a survey of the Libraries' staff and faculty. The Committee wanted to assess the Libraries employees' perceptions of the diversity programs thus far, their thoughts regarding the effectiveness of different types of programs, and their opinions

about future diversity activities. Responses to the survey would be used to provide the Committee with guidance regarding future diversity activities.

Results

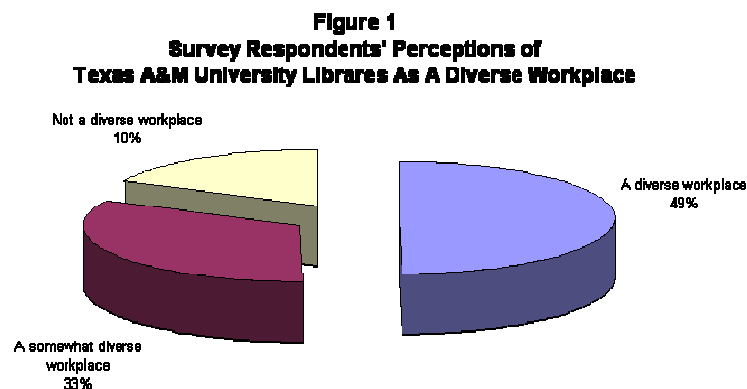
The Committee used Survey Monkey to send out the survey on Monday, October 23, 2006, to all the Libraries' employees (excluding student workers). Staff had two weeks to complete the survey. By the following Monday (October 30), 76 staff members had already responded to the survey. Reminders were sent to encourage everyone to participate. On the morning of November 6, the last day that Survey Monkey would accept responses, 100 people had submitted their input. In hopes of a higher response rate, an additional reminder was sent. By the closing hour of the survey (midnight of November 6), 119 of 251 employees had taken the time to complete the survey, yielding a total response rate of 47.4%.

Demographic Information

By ethnicity, the 119 respondents are as follows: 66.4% (79) reported as Caucasians, followed by 14.3% (17) Hispanic or Latino, 10.9% (13) African American, 3.4% (4) Asian. Six (5.0%) did not specify their ethnicity. The Libraries' total employee breakdown by ethnicity are as follows: 71% Caucasians, 14.9% Hispanic or Latino, 9.6% African American, 4.5% Asian. The Libraries' diverse workforce is generally in line with population data. According to 2000 Census data, about 25% of Americans were nonwhite, with African American making up 12.3% of the population, Hispanics, 12.5% of the population, and Asian Pacific Islanders, 3.7% of the population.

Workplace Environment

Figure 1 shows whether the participants perceive the Libraries as a diverse workplace.



Based on their personal experience, 41.2% (49) respondents felt personally discriminated against or harassed in the Libraries. When asked what they believed was the primary reason for this, race and ethnicity were cited as the primary reason by 28.6% (14) respondents, followed closely by position and rank, expressed by 24.5% (12). A respondent group of 14.3% (7) felt their religious beliefs were the primary reason for their perception. Another respondent group of 8.2% (4) felt they were discriminated against or harassed because of their gender. The perception of discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation, economic status, age, and physical disability was reported by 10.2% (5) of respondents. Another 14.2% (7) believed the discrimination or harassment they experienced was based on factors not listed in the survey questions, such as their level of education, learning disability, or accent.

Diversity Programs Participation

Almost ninety-one percent (108) of the respondents had attended the diversity programs sponsored by the Libraries' Diversity Program Coordinating Committee, while 39.8% (43) had attended more than ten programs in the previous five years. Over half of respondents (55.1%, 59) felt very positive about the programs, 43.9% (47) considered the programs were somewhat informative, educational, and helpful to raise their awareness of diversity, and one respondent (0.9%) did not feel the programs were serving any purpose.

Only 9.2% (11) of the survey participants had never attended any of the diversity programs sponsored by the Libraries. The main reason for this, according to 61.9% of the responses, was conflicts with work schedules.

Most Favored and Preferred form of Diversity Programs

To find out what type of diversity programs had been most attractive to employees, we asked respondents to list up to three of the most memorable or inspiring diversity programs that they had attended, either within the Libraries or outside the Libraries, and 59.6% (71) provided their top three choices. The four programs favored were:

- A panel discussion of graduate students from various cultures talking about their experiences at Texas A&M;
- A panel discussion on "Walk a Mile in My Shoes" with library staff members who talked about their personal disabilities and health problems, and how people reacted to them;
- A presentation by a nationally known motivational speaker Dr. Rick Rigsby, on Fostering a Community of Respect Through Diversity;
- Annual luncheons with culturally diverse menus.

To find out what kind of activities would motivate employees to participate in future diversity programs, the survey listed several choices. Almost two-thirds of the respondents (81) revealed that inviting speakers or panel groups to discuss diversity issues would be a way to ensure higher turnout rates from library employees. Over half of the respondents (62) also liked the idea of viewing documentary or cinematic movies with discussion afterwards when possible. Creating a "Getting to Know You" series to encourage discussion of individual differences and develop an attitude of learning from others received support from 38.7% (46) respondents. The idea of forming a reading group on a suggested topic generated the least enthusiasm from the respondents, with 17.6% (21) respondents recognizing that choice.

Impact of the Diversity Program

Since September 2003, the Libraries' Diversity Program Coordinating Committee has worked to find programs or speakers to meet employees' needs in terms of diversity awareness. Did those programs help employees make some positive behavior change towards others or themselves? Did the employees notice any positive changes in the working environment due to the diversity initiative implemented by the Libraries administration? Figures 2 - 4 illustrate the answers.

Figure 2
Survey Respondents' Perceptions of
Himself/Herself Has Made Positive Behavior Changes Towards Others as a
Result of Attending Diversity Programs

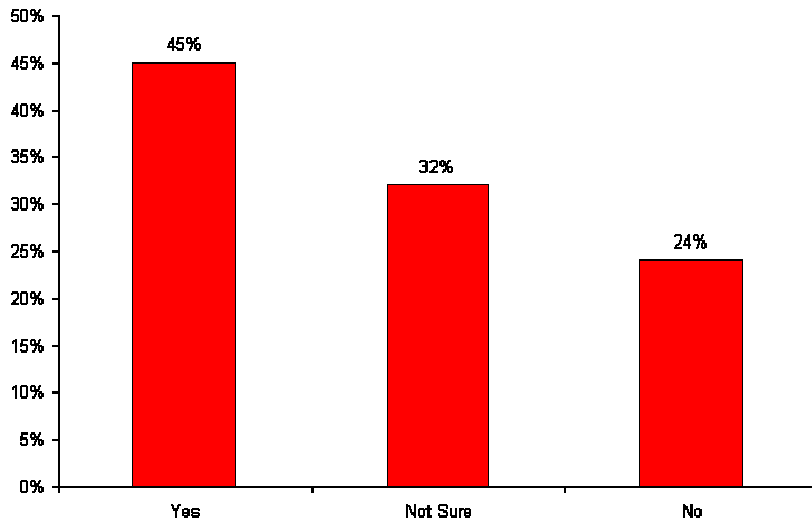


Figure 3
Participants Perceived Their Colleagues Made Positive Behavior Changes

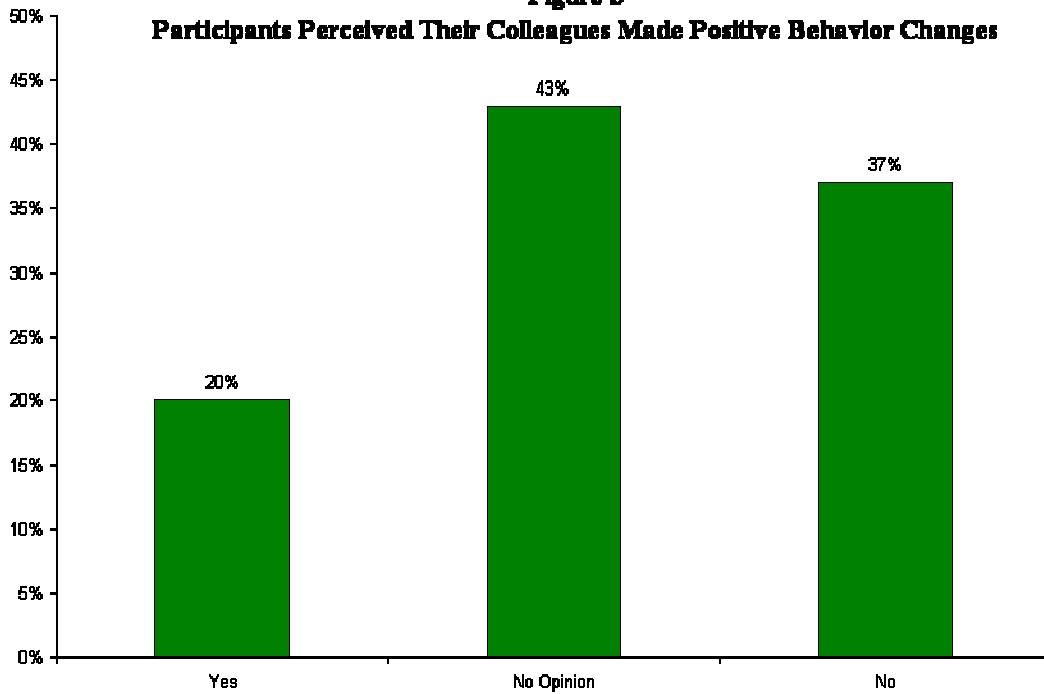
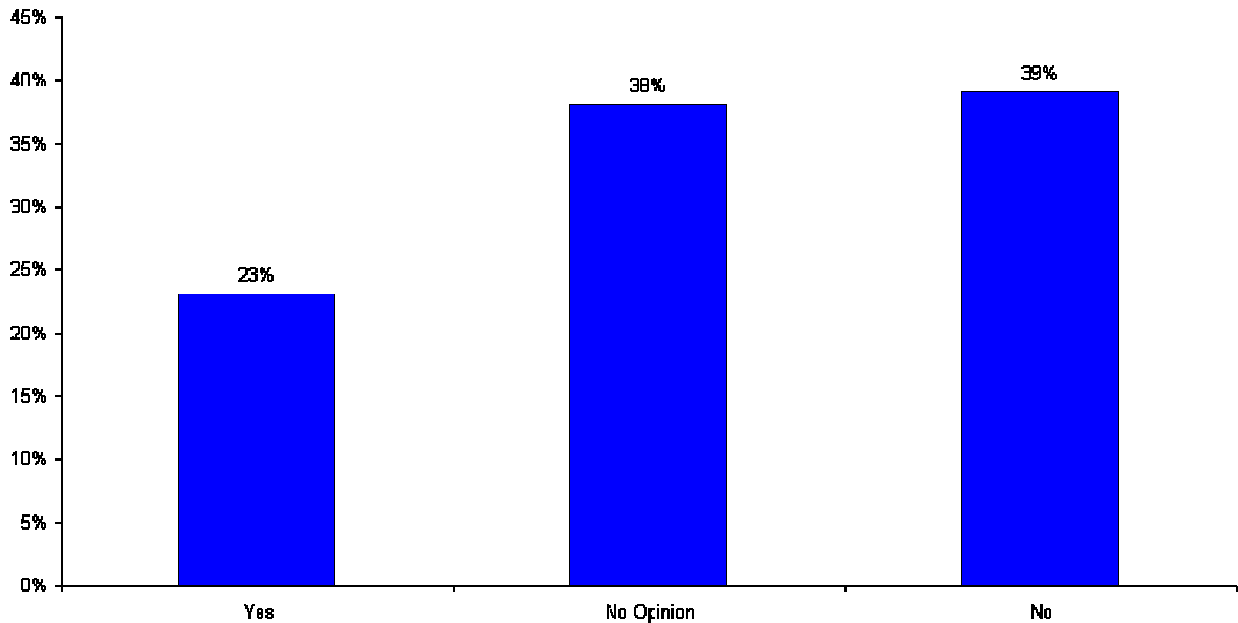


Figure 4
Survey Respondents' Perception of Positive Changes in the Working Environment



Areas Needing Improvement

When asked which area needed most improvement, the answer “fostering a working environment where all employees are valued for their uniqueness and personal contributions” was chosen by 58.8% (70) of the respondents. Hiring and retaining a diverse workforce as the key area for improvement was selected by 16.8% (20) of the respondents.

Though the survey was not intended to assess the diversity climate in the Libraries, it aimed to gather opinions of library employees on what initiatives and programs the diversity committee should offer to positively affect the diversity climate in the Libraries. Half the respondents (60) agreed that promoting more events and programs that recognize and inform the staff about gender or age differences in the workplace could positively affect the diversity climate, while 39% (46) thought this effort might somewhat affect the climate. Only 11% (13) respondents did not believe this would make any changes.

Satisfaction with and Suggestions to the Diversity Program Coordinating Committee

Almost 50% of the respondents (58) were satisfied with the Diversity Program Coordinating Committee's effort to enhance diversity awareness within the Library, another 42% (50) were somewhat satisfied with the committee's effort, and 9.2% (11) respondents were not satisfied with the committee's effort.

The Diversity Program Coordinating Committee continues to send diversity-related information, announcements, and events to Libraries employees. Information such as calendars of different religious holidays is sent on a monthly basis. The survey reports 29.4% (35) of the respondents always find time to read the links sent out by the committee, 63.9% (76) occasionally read the links, and 6.7% (8) never opened the link provided. For those 111 individuals who read the information provided, 46.8% (52) believed the information was very educational, 50.5% (56) felt the links were somewhat informative and educational, and 2.7% (3) did not find those links helpful at all.

Most respondents (80.7%) liked the idea of having the Diversity Committee use display cases located throughout Libraries' floors to present different themes on a regular basis, with information on the objects displayed.

The Libraries' annual Taste of Diversity potluck luncheon continues to receive support and appreciation from library employees, as was evidenced by 85.7% of the respondents who want this event to continue. This activity is considered an effective, enjoyable means for social interaction and communication among staff members. Suggestions were made to have a brief introduction under each dish, together with a recipe, so that everyone would know its cultural significance and occasions on which the dish is served. The luncheon also serves as an opportunity to learn more about the traditions and celebrations of other cultures.

An overwhelming number or percentage of the respondents, 93% (111) would like to see the [Libraries' diversity website](#) include information such as calendars and featured diversity events taking place on campus, at other universities, and throughout the state. Survey findings show 87% (104) also agreed Diversity Resource Guides should be included in the website, while 72% (86) believe that the committee should provide Internet links relating to diversity. Several respondents offered constructive suggestions for other information to be included in the libraries' diversity website, such as information on diversity

training, links to other university libraries' diversity websites, and a list of the events and programs sponsored by the Texas A&M Libraries' Diversity Program Coordinating Committee.

Comments from the Respondents

The survey concluded with an invitation for suggestions on how the Libraries may move forward to improve the working environment for people of diverse backgrounds so that users and staff can feel supported, welcomed, and able to find the resources they need to ensure personal growth, social and economic mobility, and life-long education. Over one third, 37.8% (45) respondents offered their input. Several echoed the essence of the following sentiment: For any program like this to be effective, the active support and compliance of the Libraries' leadership is essential. Actions speak louder than words. Respondents would like to see more presence of the administration or managers in the diversity programs or activities. One respondent wrote that diversity should be about teaching the majority about the minorities that surround them, not programs that teach the majority about the majority, such as Christianity. Because we see that everywhere, everyday, the respondent suggested having more programs on Hinduism and Islam. Another suggested having a more in-depth survey about what Libraries' faculty and staff feel are important diversity issues. Do they feel validated, supported, welcomed, find resources they need to ensure personal growth, etc.? Is the climate accepting? Then take that data and use it to design diversity programming within the Libraries. Another idea expressed was that people would get the most out of individual testimonials from personal experience, because it personalizes the situations.

Future Directions

The survey responses provided committee members with concrete information for future program planning. We took participants' suggestions and comments seriously and incorporated them into our remaining programs for the year. The survey results were shared with the Libraries' administrators and made available to all the staff and faculty members of the Libraries.

Knowing that panel discussions were an effective format for diversity programs, we scheduled a "Culture Shock – Coming to America" presentation. The panel consisted of seven international students from various cultures. The panelists shared information on their respective cultures and what it was like to step into an entirely different culture. They described their first day on the Texas A&M campus, shared the most difficult, frustrating challenges they faced upon arrival, and talked about how they overcame obstacles and difficulties after arriving in the US and on campus. They offered suggestions on how the Libraries could help international students when they first visited one of the Libraries, and how library staff members could make the academic experience at Texas A&M welcoming, rewarding, and successful for international students. The session was well-attended by Libraries faculty and staff, who were absorbed in the presentation and asked many questions. The students enthusiastically shared their experiences. The audience responded with many questions and a desire to assist the students during the first few weeks of their settling in process in the future.

Realizing that over half the respondents supported the idea of viewing documentary or cinematic movies, the committee began hosting a series of programs called "Popcorn and a Movie". The first year's themes were "World Religions and International Cultures,"

beginning with selected films in a series entitled *The Long Search*, in which Ronald Eyre explores religious beliefs and experiences of various peoples throughout the world.

At the most recent "A Taste of Diversity luncheon," the Committee provided place cards for employees to include the following information about each dish: name of the dish, country or culture of the dish, special significance of the dish, and name of preparer of the dish. This information let everyone know its cultural significance and occasions on which the dish is served. The recipes were included in the Diversity Cook Book created by two of our talented library staff members, and the book was distributed to those who were interested. During the luncheon, there was entertainment, a spicy sampling of international music with a cultural "fancy feet" dance by volunteers. The Committee also set up tables of artifacts from different countries for participants to appreciate and enjoy. The 6th annual cultural luncheon was organized and presented in accordance with the suggestions received from the survey respondents.

We are working on building a bibliography of titles related to diversity issues that were suggested by employees, which will be linked on the [diversity webpage](#). As suggested by one of the participants, we plan to conduct a more in-depth survey to identify diversity issues perceived by Libraries employees. The data gathered will help the Committee define the diversity themes for coming years.

Conclusion

"Diversity is a journey of learning. It is everyone's responsibility. The real challenge in achieving diversity is not bridging geographical, but cultural distance," explains Colleen Cook, dean of the Texas A&M Libraries. The Diversity Committee at the Texas A&M Libraries is working hard to bridge this gap. Our ultimate goal through providing various programs is to help the Libraries faculty and staff develop interest or appreciation, expand our base of knowledge and experience, and suspend judgment. Love nicely sums up the effort this way: "Constructing and implementing diversity initiatives involves continuous experimentation, assessment, modification, and innovation. Assessment of diversity is an ongoing lifetime process of improvement" [1].

References

1. Johnnieque B. Love, "The Assessment of Diversity Initiatives in Academic Libraries," in *Diversity Now: People, Collections, and Services in Academic Libraries*, edited by Teresa Y. Neely and Kuang-Hwei (Janet) Lee-Smeltzer. New York: Haworth. 2001