

Feature

A Tale of Two Audits

Enhancing Diversity in Academic Library Collections

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Abstract

This paper discusses two collection diversity audit projects undertaken by a mid-size university library. For the first project, we evaluated our leisure collection based on the characteristics of the main characters in the books, with the goal of adapting the process for our main collections. For the second project, librarians created a flexible spreadsheet that was used to track diversity metrics for new book orders. This article discusses why the first project did not work well for us, but taught us some valuable lessons about conducting a collection diversity audit, and how the second project better matched our needs.

Introduction

While many academic libraries favor improving the diversity of thought and perspectives in their book collections, there is far less synchronicity in how best to accomplish that goal. This article examines two specific diversity audit projects undertaken by the librarians at a university library in pursuit of a more diverse collection. Success—unfortunately, but perhaps not unexpectedly—varied.

Salisbury University (SU), located in Maryland, is a mid-size public, regional, comprehensive university that serves approximately 7,000 primarily undergraduate students. It is one of twelve universities comprising the University System of Maryland (USM). Those universities, plus an additional five institutions, make up the USMAI library consortium. Our university consistently prioritizes diversity and inclusion in special projects and daily work. The "Salisbury Seven," pledge statements that guide institutional strategic planning, include "a continual commitment to inclusion, diversity, opportunity and equity."¹ SU Libraries also operate under our own Diversity and Inclusion Plan (<https://www.salisbury.edu/libraries/about/plans/diversity-inclusion-plan.aspx>), which includes a goal of diversifying collections.

Project 1 targeted our leisure collection as a smaller, more manageable subset of the circulating collection. Ten distinct categories regarding identity were considered for each title reviewed, and fourteen members of the libraries' staff participated; all in all, it was quite an undertaking. Project 2, born out of dissatisfaction with the results of the first audit, was designed to be more targeted and useful for individual liaison areas. We created a spreadsheet with a bank of identities from which auditors could select categories relevant to their specific liaison disciplines and apply them to titles as they were purchased, rather than to existing collections. Although neither approach was

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perfect, we found more value in the results of the second project, owing in no small part to the more targeted, localized approach.

Literature Review

A literature review, conducted prior to Project 1 in 2020, was used to inform our choices on that project. An update to the review was conducted in 2024 and covered materials published since the prior review, focusing only on academic libraries. The questions and methods discussed remained broadly the same between the two review periods: What goals can diversity audits serve, and what audit methods are most effective in different contexts?

Twenty-one case studies, one literature review, and one working group report were identified that dealt with conducting collection diversity audits. The literature review and eighteen of the case studies focused on academic libraries. The remaining three case studies focused on public or school libraries, and the working group report included recommendations for multiple types of libraries. Of the eighteen academic-focused case studies, eleven looked at print monographs, three at periodicals, one at all monograph formats, one at films, one at play scripts, and one at all recently purchased materials. Table 1 includes a summary of which papers fell into each category.

A wide variety of possible methods of conducting a diversity audit were identified in the literature:

- List checking: Compare library holdings against a bibliography of suggested titles, compiled by a vendor or other outside agency, against a list of award-winning books or against a self-compiled list.
- Creator analysis: Research creator identities and compare holdings by diverse creators against total holdings.
- Content analysis: Using a rubric, assign diversity codes to items based on their content and evaluate diverse holdings against total holdings.
- Order analysis: Using a rubric, assign diversity codes to items as they are ordered and evaluate diverse orders against total orders.
- Peer comparison: Compare library holdings against the holdings of peer institutions.
- Circulation statistics: Examine usage by patron group or examine what materials are being used.
- Subject analysis: Compare holdings with a given set of subject headings against total holdings.
- Citation analysis: Examine theses, etc., to see whether the library holds cited material (often periodicals focused).
- White's Brief Test of Collection Strength: A subject-based variant of list checking, which also assigns a *Conspectus* level.
- ILL analysis: Review ILL patterns to see where holdings might be weak.
- Search analysis: Review search terms to see what subjects or topics patrons are looking for.
- Patron research: Conduct focus groups, surveys, or other user studies to determine if the collection is meeting patrons' needs around diversity.
- Vendor audit: Contract out to specific vendors who will conduct an audit using their own criteria.

The literature also identified a wide number of possible axes of diversity to consider:

- Race and ethnicity: Indigenous Peoples/Native American/First Nations; African American; Asian American; Latinx; Asian; African; Middle Eastern; Pacific Islander; biracial; etc.
- Gender: Women, trans, nonbinary, intersex, etc.

- Sexual orientation/sexuality: Gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, etc.
- Culture and national origin, including multiculturalism
- Religion: Atheist, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Wiccan, etc.
- Health and disability: Allergies, serious physical illness, chronic illness, impaired hearing or sight, loss of limbs, limited mobility, use of aids, neurodivergence, mental illness, learning disorders, etc.
- Socioeconomic status/class
- Immigrant and refugee status
- Intersectionality
- Type of publisher, e.g., small publishers that don't usually sell to libraries
- Politics
- Age
- Body shape
- Language
- Family structures: Same-sex parents, interracial, blended, adoption, foster care, etc.
- Veteran status
- Incarceration
- #OwnVoices: A shorthand denoting authors who share at least one identity with a character or subject in their work
- Unusual forms of publication

Table 1. Summary of Materials Reviewed

Citation	Type of Literature	Type of Library	Materials Reviewed (Academic Case Studies Only)	Type of Audit
Aloziem and Parkhurst-Strout (2021) ²	Case study (workshop presentation)	Public or school	NA	Content analysis
Bradley-Ridout et al. (2023) ³	Case study	Academic	Print monographs	List checking (self-compiled)
Calderon (2024) ⁴	Case study	Academic	Print monographs	Creator analysis
Carmack (2021) ⁵	Working group report	Multiple types	NA	List checking (award winners); creator analysis; order analysis; vendor audit
Ciszek and Young (2010) ⁶	Literature review	Academic	NA	List checking (suggested titles and self-compiled); order analysis; peer comparison; circulation statistics; subject analysis; search analysis; patron research
Emerson and Lehman (2022) ⁷	Case study	Academic	Print monographs	Creator analysis
Graziano (2016) ⁸	Case study	Academic	Periodicals	Citation analysis
Herrera (2016) ⁹	Case study	Academic	Print monographs	Circulation statistics
Jensen (2017) ¹⁰ and Jensen (2017) ¹¹	Case study	Public or school	NA	Creator analysis; order analysis; content analysis
Kristick (2019) ¹²	Case study	Academic	Print monographs	List checking (award winners); peer comparison

Citation	Type of Literature	Type of Library	Materials Reviewed (Academic Case Studies Only)	Type of Audit
LaFond et al. (2000) ¹³	Case study	Academic	Periodicals	List checking (suggested titles)
Manuell et al. (2019) ¹⁴	Case study	Academic	Print monographs	Creator analysis
Monroe-Gulick and Morris (2023) ¹⁵	Case study	Academic	All monograph formats	List checking (award winners)
Mortensen (2019) ¹⁶	Case study	Public or school	NA	Creator analysis; content analysis
Phelps (2021) ¹⁷	Case study	Academic	Print monographs	List checking (suggested titles); peer comparison; White's Brief Test of Collection Strength
Proctor (2020) ¹⁸	Case study	Academic	Print monographs	List checking (award winners); peer comparison
Shaffer (2013) ¹⁹	Case study	Academic	Print monographs	Subject analysis
Shotick (2024) ²⁰	Case study	Academic	Print monographs	Creator analysis
Springmier et al. (2024) ²¹	Case study	Academic	All recently purchased materials	Creator analysis; content analysis
Stone (2020) ²²	Case study	Academic	Play scripts	Creator analysis
Tillay and Chapman (2019) ²³	Case study	Academic	Film	Creator analysis
University of West Florida, University Libraries (2021) ²⁴	Case study	Academic	Print monographs	List checking (suggested titles and award winners); content analysis; order analysis; peer comparison; circulation statistics; citation analysis; White's Brief Test of Collection Strength; ILL analysis
Vega García (2000) ²⁵	Case study	Academic	Periodicals	List checking (suggested titles)

NA, not applicable.

One theme that shows up across studies concerns scope: should an audit evaluate an entire existing collection, aim for a representative sample of a collection, or assess only new acquisitions? Whole-collection audits provide a baseline measure of representation across decades of collecting,^{15,19} whereas audits of recent purchases serve as a forward-looking barometer of whether current practices are building inclusivity.²¹ For example, Springmier et al.²¹ framed their analysis in terms of course alignment and future curricular support, whereas Monroe-Gulick and Morris¹⁵ and Phelps¹⁷ probed whether existing holdings, including at the consortial level, adequately reflect underrepresented voices. The former assumes an ongoing commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion work; the latter highlights one-time corrective action. Our own work found this distinction especially resonant, since one challenge we confronted was defining whether our audit's intent was more corrective or forward-thinking. The two projects we conducted straddled this distinction.

As mentioned above, the literature identifies numerous methodological approaches to conducting diversity audits in academic libraries, each with specific strengths and limitations. Below we will discuss in further detail the most commonly used methods.

List Checking

By far the most common methodological approach used by academic libraries is some form of list checking, where the library's holdings are compared to a list of books to determine the percentage of the listed books held. The literature shows that the lists used for such projects tend to fall into three broad categories, which we have termed "suggested titles," "award-winners," and "self-compiled." "Suggested title" lists are generally some sort of bibliography compiled by either experts in a field or by publishers, often with the intended goal of identifying either top titles or all titles in a given area, such as Resources for College Libraries (RCL) core titles or the Alternative Press Index. "Award-winner" lists are the list of books that have won a given award, such as the Stonewall Book Award or the Latino Book Awards. "Self-compiled" lists are compiled by the people doing the audit, such as by drawing on local expertise or conducting literature reviews for recommendations. Generally speaking, the goal with list checking is to find that the library holds a certain percentage of the books on the lists, with the goal percentage chosen by the library.

Ciszek and Young⁶ described list checking as a "foundational" form of quantitative assessment, but also emphasized drawbacks: lists are rarely current, are often limited to certain categories like race and gender, and at times are arbitrary or poorly standardized. An advantage of list checking is that it inherently requires a finite number of titles be checked (only items on the list), which can feel less overwhelming than other forms of audits where the auditors must decide what sample size is sufficient. List checking also has a convenient, built-in method of improving the collection's diversity if the library falls short of their goal: the desired number of titles can be ordered from among the non-held titles on the list.

In an example of early diversity audit work, Vega García²⁵ used lists of African American and Latino periodicals to expose disparities, showing strong support for Black studies but significant neglect of Latino scholarship. More recent list-based audits^{17,24} compared holdings to core lists such as RCL, but acknowledged limitations including disciplinary bias (heavier in the humanities), the subjectivity of deciding what percentage of coverage is "enough," and the arbitrariness introduced by having to choose which lists to include and exclude.

The three categories of lists also each introduce their own complexities to such audits.

For "suggested titles" audits, identifying adequate lists can be difficult because lists for the desired topic may not exist or may be out of date⁶: for instance, when Phelps¹⁷ was conducting their audit in 2018 or later (the precise timeframe is not specified in the paper), they ended up relying on three lists that were last updated in 1995, 1999, and 2013, respectively.

"Award-winner" audits^{5,12,15} assume that award-winning titles indicate both quality and representation; yet several authors questioned this assumption, noting that award criteria reflect subjective judgments and may not align with local curricular needs. Still, some approaches implicitly equated equity with achieving 100% ownership of award winners, a problematic assumption when awards cover genres like popular fiction that may not align with an academic mission.

"Self-compiled" lists allow libraries the flexibility to create a list that is up-to-date and fits the library's needs, but negates most of the main benefits of list checking, namely the time savings of using a pre-existing list and the comfort of being able to draw on the presumed expertise and authority of the list creators rather than having to make the decisions yourself. For example, Bradley-Ridout et al.³ built what they named a "reverse diversity audit," which was a self-compiled list related to their dermatology collection for titles covering diverse skin tones. This method was more targeted and efficient than other forms of list checking but sacrificed comparability

across institutions. Self-compiled lists seem to be primarily useful for niche content areas or mini collections tailored explicitly to a local population or academic discipline.

Peer Comparison

Another relatively common audit method used by academic libraries is peer comparison, where the holdings of the library are compared to holdings of selected peer libraries. Peer comparison can be used to show where a library's collection is stronger or weaker than their peers' collections,^{6,17} but it appears that it is difficult to draw any actionable conclusions from peer comparison, given that none of the case studies that conducted peer comparison discussed taking any action based on that assessment. Additionally, using Library of Congress Classification to define which parts of the collection are being compared is complicated for diversity-related topics given that such topics are generally multidisciplinary and therefore scattered across the classification ranges.⁶ Peer comparison, then, appears most powerful for advocacy (e.g., justifying budgets, persuading administrators) but limited for nuanced diversity evaluation.

Content Analysis

Content analysis audits are particularly popular in public and school libraries due to their high suitability for fictional titles; all three of the public or school library case studies used some form of content analysis, whereas only two of the eighteen academic libraries reported using content analysis. In content analysis, either the whole collection or a subset of the collection is evaluated based on a rubric that looks at the contents of the materials (as opposed to the characteristics of the author). The results from the rubric are then tallied to determine what percentage of the collection meets the rubric criteria. For fictional titles, the most common form of rubric looks at the identity of the protagonist or main character(s). Jensen's YA audit, based in a public library, remains a touchstone: she tallied author and character identities across 700 YA books, benchmarking against census data and local demographics.^{10,11} Her work showed the feasibility of such audits on a small scale.

In an academic setting, Springmier et al. adopted a content-based audit but framed it within a larger organizational learning process. Their rubric asked a series of yes/no questions on the subject of the book such as "Is the book about non-Western or Global South issues or topics?" or "Is the book's perspective cross-cultural?" and on the methodology used within the book such as "Does the book use anti-racist or restorative methodology?"²¹ The University of West Florida, University Libraries assigned codes such as "African/African American," "LGBTQ+/Sexuality," or "Poverty/Homelessness/Socioeconomic Status" based on the "main topic(s), theme(s), location(s), character(s) etc." of their books.²⁴

Content analysis audits are highly customizable, allowing libraries to focus in on the specific forms of diversity they want to evaluate without being dependent on whether literature or bibliographies exist on the topic, but they are very labor intensive to both set up and conduct because the rubric must be developed and then each book must be individually scored. Content analyses can also provide clear diversity goals, such as having a certain percentage of titles fit in a given category. One thing that content analysis audits generally don't evaluate, though, is the quality or diversity of the diverse representation itself: representation may lean into stereotypes—including negative stereotypes—or be limited to popular topics;^{10,11} for instance, as the University of West Florida, University Libraries²⁴ notes, "not all "Jewish" books should be about the Holocaust [and] not all "African American" books should be about slavery."²⁴ Another potential drawback is that if multiple people are participating in the audit, inconsistency in the application of the codes can be a barrier to

accurate results, with normal inter-coder differences amplified by the inherent subjectivity of what falls under many categories.^{6,24}

Creator Analysis

Another rubric-based audit method is creator analysis. Like content analyses, books are scored on the rubric and then percentages are calculated; however, instead of the content of the book being evaluated for diverse perspectives or characters, the identities of the author(s) are evaluated. Frequently, the libraries using this audit method wanted to have the demographic spread of their creators match either local or national demographics²²; however, some libraries wanted the data as a base point to see if future collecting was more diverse.²⁰ As with content analysis, creator analysis audits are highly customizable but very labor intensive. Researching authors' race, gender, or sexuality is time-intensive, often ambiguous, and can replicate the biases it seeks to challenge. Many studies stressed the ethical risks of "assigning" identities without clear self-identification, while also acknowledging that ignoring identity data reproduces invisibility.⁷ Still, creator analysis offered valuable insights: Stone traced significant gains in representation of playwrights of color and female playwrights, even if parity remains elusive.²² Tillay and Chapman demonstrated how metadata harvesting and scripting could automate diversity checks (first for women directors, but adaptable to other axes).²³ Regardless of method, study authors consistently cautioned that findings depend on how "diversity" is defined and on who has the authority to label creators.

Order Analysis

While the majority of analyses are run against the library's existing collections, some audits look at newly purchased materials instead of the existing collections. This sort of analysis most often involves content analysis and/or creator analysis. Order audits are often intended to allow libraries to track whether their purchasing is getting more diverse over time (see, for example, Jensen). Ciszek and Young⁶ described assigning "diversity codes" to order records, but they found data unreliable due to inconsistent application by different selectors.⁶ They concluded the method could only work with substantial training and shared standards. Jensen suggested auditing every order against the same rubrics used for shelf audits to create an ongoing, rather than retrospective, accountability mechanism.^{10,11} Carmack⁵ emphasized order review as an opportunity to ask targeted questions—about authorship, portrayals, and subject coverage—at the moment of selecting materials.⁵ The University of West Florida University Libraries piloted multi-year order audits using diversity codes but found the process subjective and burdensome.²⁴ The consensus across these projects is that order analysis can indeed make diversity intentional, but only if grounded in clear, consistently applied definitions—otherwise, its results are misleading.

Conclusions from the Literature

Taken together, this literature demonstrates both the flexibility and challenges of collection diversity audits. Each method provides insight, but none is universally adequate. A recurring caution, emphasized by Ciszek and Young⁶ and echoed across many later audits, is that libraries must clearly articulate their working definition of diversity at the outset. Without this, audits risk being misaligned with institutional goals, too narrow in scope, or uninterpretable. What emerges most strongly from the literature is that diversity audits are not plug-and-play tools: they require institutions to define their goals—diagnostic, prospective, advocacy-driven, or accountability-based—before determining the method. Our projects build on these lessons. The literature illustrates the risk of attempting to assess diversity without a clearly established purpose, a

challenge we ourselves encountered. In particular, we were struck by how often studies noted the mismatch between method and goal: award-based audits assuming completeness equals equity, or creator analyses constrained by the data available. These insights informed our approach and particularly our recognition that goal-setting, rather than methodological selection alone, is foundational for effective auditing.

Project 1: Leisure Collection Audit

In 2016, SU Libraries established a committee whose primary focus was on diversity, equity, and inclusion-related issues. As part of its initial work, the committee created a three-year plan, broken into three main sections: collections, support for patrons, and supporting staff. While the collections goals included promoting diverse titles in our collection via exhibits, events, and the like, analyzing the diversity of our existing collections was not included due to the daunting scale of such a project. The idea of doing a diversity audit continued to pop up for the committee, the collection development team, and the librarian liaisons for several years.

In 2021, the collection development team decided that we would conduct an exploratory audit of the leisure collection using content analysis as described by Jensen.^{10,11} Content analysis, as mentioned above, utilizes a rubric to assign diversity codes based on content to titles in order to evaluate diverse holdings against total holdings. This method was chosen because we wanted to focus on the diversity of the content of our existing collections. An author-focused audit does not evaluate this; a diversity of voices does not necessarily equate to diversity of content. We also felt that list checking and peer comparison methods were not comprehensive enough and, particularly for peer comparison, too susceptible to societal biases to be a trustworthy metric. While those methods can tell you if you have the top content for a given dimension, they fall short in assessing how much other content you have and how the collection is balanced. These approaches also tend to focus on only one dimension of diversity, limiting their use for our desired multifaceted assessment.

After the initial meeting, a call went out to the entire library staff for volunteers to analyze the leisure collection. At the time, the leisure collection numbered 655 titles. The title list was randomized so that if not everyone was able to complete their work, we would still have a representative sample analyzed. Fifty titles were assigned to each participant. The volunteers collectively determined the categories for the rubric, which were then laid out in a spreadsheet (see Figures 1 and 2). Though most categories were broken down further into specific examples, the larger categories decided on were race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, disability, immigrant status, body type, national origin, religion, age, #ownvoices, and space for additional comments. Although we understood we could not be exhaustive in our categories, we wanted to be as exhaustive as feasible in our evaluation. Categories were chosen based on those which were felt to be most commonly discussed in the literature and discourse as being of concern for diversity.

Each participant was allowed complete control over how they sought out the information for their titles. Many participants used multiple avenues, such as book review sites like Goodreads, promotional materials like book summaries and jacket information, interviews of the author, publisher websites, Google searches (book title AND "LGBTQ," for example), examining the physical book, and social media. Most participants found that the majority of the work could be done on their office computer without the physical book in hand. Ultimately, 487 books (74% of the collection) were reviewed.

After the first stage was completed, participants were also asked to review the list to identify any books they personally had read and fill out the rubric for those titles. Our intention was to see how

A Tale of Two Audits

Figure 1. All of the columns of the leisure audit rubric.

A	B	AD	AE	AF	AG	AH	AI	AJ	AK
1	Leisure Collection Diversity Audit								
2									
3		immigrant		body type	national origin	religion		age	
4	Title	Call No.	refugee	child of ir:	other	describe	describe	describe	child (0-12)
296	First, we make the beast beautiful : a new journey through anxiety	RC531.W49 2018							
		PS3554.O695 C56							
297	Cloud chamber : a novel	1997		x		Irish			x
		PN6728.S26 G393							x
298	The Sandman Omnibus Volume Two	2013							
		PN6728.C58 M55							
299	Civil war : a Marvel Comics presentation	2007							
300	No small plans	NA9127.C4 L8 2017							x
		HD6067.2.U6 M66							
301	The radium girls : the dark story of America's shining women	2017		x					x
302	Educated : a memoir	CT3262.I2 W47 2018							x
		PS3604.A5233 P53							x
303	Plain bad heroines : a novel	2020							
		PS3553.H3469 P47							x

Figure 2. A small portion of the filled-out leisure audit rubric.

accurate the audit methodology and results were when compared with the review of someone already familiar with a title. However, too few books were reviewed at this stage to allow for any sort of validation.

After the reviews were completed, the Collection Development Coordinator analyzed the results, compiling the numbers for the predefined categories and analyzing the responses in the "other" and free response categories. The Collection Development Coordinator then assembled a report with a summary of the process and graphical and table presentations of the numerical results. A copy of the report is available on request.

Project 2: Diversity Purchasing Spreadsheet

The second project, titled the Diversity Purchasing Spreadsheet (hereafter referred to as The Spreadsheet), began after the completion of the Leisure Collection Audit, as library liaisons sought to explore diversity and inclusion concerns within their liaison collection development practices. The long-term goal was to apply lessons learned from the initial Leisure Collection Audit to implement incremental changes, ultimately contributing to the development of a more diverse and inclusive library collection.

We created a master list of diversity and inclusion categories and used an Excel macro to allow for multiple selections within each category. The Spreadsheet was deliberately designed for future sharing with other liaisons, providing data that were both sufficiently detailed for analyzing trends and flexible enough to support varied applications across liaison disciplines. The master list encompassed eight diversity categories, although not all of them were used in the first iteration of this project. Unlike Project 1, which attempted a comprehensive scope, The Spreadsheet emphasized a more targeted approach intended to be focused and sustainable for all librarian liaisons, thus making the data more feasible to analyze, fitting it within existing collection development workflows, and making more corrective action possible.

In this initial pilot, The Spreadsheet was used to track author diversity in liaison book purchases made over the 2023–24 academic year, focusing on five key areas: race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, and intersectionality in STEM. The race/ethnicity and gender categories were analyzed at a “micro” level, assigning specific categorizations of race or ethnicity. For example, the race/ethnicity category included tags for African, Black/African American, East Asian, Hispanic/Latinx, Indigenous/Native, Middle Eastern/Arab, Pacific Islander, South Asian, and Other. The remaining three categories were tracked at a broader “macro” level, with a simple yes/no determination. For example, any identified author disability would simply be marked “yes,” rather than trying to categorize the specifics of the disability.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Title	Author	Fund	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Disability?	Queer?	Intersectional?
How data happened : a history from the age of reason to the age of algorithms	Chris Wiggins and Matthew L. Jones	Comp Sci			N	N	N
I feel no peace : Rohingya fleeing over seas & rivers	Kaamil Ahmed	Geography	Middle Eastern/Arab		N	N	N
Invisible Friends: How Microbes Shape our Lives and the World around us	Robinson, Jake	Biology			N	N	N
Invisible labour in modern science	JENNY BANGHAM; XAN CHACKO AND JUDITH KAPLAN	Diversity	South Asian	Underrepresented in field	N	N	Y
Jungle: How Tropical Forests Shaped the World—and Us	Roberts, Patrick	Geography			N	N	N
Last Politician: Inside Joe Biden's White House and the Struggle for America's future	Foer, Franklin	Poli Sci			N	N	N
Less heat, more light : a guided tour of weather, climate, and climate change	John Aber	Geography			N	N	N
Lethal seas	Ingleton, Sally	Geography		Underrepresented in field	N	N	N
Life sculpted : tales of the animals, plants, and fungi that drill, break, and scrape to shape the earth	Anthony J. Martin	Geography			N	N	N
Maggots, murder, and men : memories and reflections of a forensic entomologist	Zakaria Erzinciooglu	Biology	Middle Eastern/Arab		N	N	N
Making space for women : stories from trailblazing women of NASA's Johnson Space Center	Jennifer M. Ross-Nazzal	Diversity		Underrepresented in field	N	N	N
MANY VOICES OF MODERN PHYSICS: WRITTEN COMMUNICATION PRACTICES OF KEY DISCOVERIES.	Alan G. Gross and Joseph E. Harmon	Biology			N	N	N
MCAT mnemonics : 2024-2025	Cambridge	Biology			N	N	N
Meme Wars: The untold story of the online battles upending democracy in America	Donovan, Joan	Poli Sci			N	N	N
Modern particle physics	Mark Thomson	Physics			N	N	N
MORE THAN A GLITCH: CONFRONTING RACE, GENDER, AND ABILITY BIAS IN TECH.	Meredith Broussard	Biology	Black/African-American	Underrepresented in field	N	N	Y
Most Delicious Poison: The Story of Nature's Toxins - From Spices to Vices	Whiteman, Noah	Biology			N	Y	N
Never Suck a Dead Man's Hand: Curious Adventures of a CSI	Kollman, Dana	Biology		Underrepresented in field	N	N	N

Figure 3. A snippet of the Diversity Purchasing Spreadsheet showing analysis of race/ethnicity, gender, disability, queer, and intersectional in STEM fields.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
Disability	Gender		Global Region		Immigrant Status		Mental Health		Race/Ethnicity		Religion		Sexual Orientation	
Autism	Intersex		Australia and New Zealand		Citizen		Anxiety		African		Buddhist		Asexual	
Blind/Vision impaired	Nonbinary		Canada and US		Immigrant		Bipolar Disorder		Black/African-American		Hindu		Bisexual	
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	Trans man		Caribbean		Refugee		Conduct/Dissocial disorders		East Asian		Indigenous religion		Gay	
Learning disability/ADHD	Trans woman		Central Asia		Second generation		Depression		Hispanic/Latinx		Jewish		Lesbian	
Mental health	Underrepresented in field		East Asia		Undocumented		Eating disorders		Indigenous/Native		Minority Christian		Pansexual	
Neurodivergent	Other		Eastern Europe		Other		Neurodevelopmental disorders		Middle Eastern/Arab		Muslim		Queer	
Physical/Mobility disability			Mexico and Central America				PTSD		Pacific Islander		Pagan			
Other			North Africa and Middle East				Schizophrenia		South Asian		Underrepresented religion			
			Pacific Islands/Oceania				Other		Other		Other			
			Russia											
			South America											
			South/Southeast Asia											
			Sub-Saharan Africa											
			Western Europe											
			Other											

Figure 4. Macro-enabled master list of potential areas of assessment in diversity and inclusion liaison areas.

Due to the nature of the liaison areas tracked in this pilot year, this project focused on author diversity rather than book content. However, based on the varying needs of other liaison areas, The Spreadsheet is versatile enough to be adapted to both authorship and content analysis. Content analysis might be especially useful in the social sciences, particularly for liaisons evaluating whether marginalized groups are represented in their own voices. Additionally, The Spreadsheet can be adapted to assess diversity and inclusion in other library projects, such as evaluating the materials represented in social media posts or book displays.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Project 1

Ultimately, the method used for the leisure collection audit did not accomplish what we were hoping it would, and the audit itself proved not particularly useful for us.

We had been hoping to be able to use this method to review our general academic collections, but the leisure audit revealed that this method of diversity analysis does not work well with most nonfiction books and therefore would not work well to assess most academic-focused collections (literature could be an exception, if the goal is to diversify the types of stories told). This method of analysis focuses almost exclusively on the “main character(s)” and is not flexible enough to account for nonfiction works that do not have a main character. For those interested in doing a content analysis of their nonfiction collections, consider instead using Springmier et al.’s²¹ approach of creating a rubric with yes/no questions tailored to the content being assessed.

After completing the audit and analysis, the main reaction among the librarians was a sense of “So what?” This highlighted that while we had articulated and met our goal of figuring out if this type of analysis might work for our general academic collections, we had not taken the time to articulate how we were defining “a diverse collection”—for instance, were there specific percentages we wanted to hit? If so, how were we determining those percentages? Did we want to aim for national demographics? Regional? Institutional?—or what we wanted to do with the data once available. As a result, we were ambitiously broad and unfocused in our data collection, the Collection Development Coordinator struggled over how to present the data in the report because there were no specific questions to answer, and we had no idea what action we should take in response to the report. While the intention had been to set goals and to define criteria for “diverse enough” after the fact, this never happened. We delayed the decision in the first place because we were unsure of what questions we wanted the data to answer, and more time and data did not help bring clarity or fresh

ideas, so the matter ended up being dropped with a resounding conclusion that we had no idea how the data could be useful.

Based on this experience, we recommend undertaking an audit only if the audit will help you answer specific questions with actionable outcomes, defined in advance. For instance, are you seeking to determine whether your collections are "diverse enough" in this moment in time or are you looking to track the diversity of your collection over time? How would you define "diverse enough" or "a more diverse collection" for yourselves? What would signify a need to improve? How do you anticipate making those improvements?

In addition to the lessons learned from the audit's outcomes, we also learned some things from the process that are applicable across this sort of diversity work.

First, be alert for the unintentional introduction of biases, even from those well-educated on a given topic. For instance, we realized after the fact that we had erred regarding our gender categories, using the labels "men," "women," "trans men," "trans women," and "non-binary," when what we actually meant was "cis men," "cis women," "trans men," "trans women," and "non-binary." A careful, critical review specifically looking for this sort of error prior to finalizing any given category list or document is warranted.

Second, we recommend defining the terms being used in the audit. People have different levels of familiarity with the different areas of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work, so terms which are clear for one person may not be clear for another. For instance, we originally used the term "ace" (a common abbreviation in the LGBTQ+ community for "asexual") as a sexuality subcategory, but it turned out that not everyone on our team was familiar with the term in that context and therefore didn't initially know what was meant. We did not provide definitions, so one of the librarians had to overcome the barrier of admitting ignorance to seek clarification on the term's intended meaning. Having established definitions may also help reduce miscategorizations; in our audit, errors in categorization were more common in relation to marginalized identities. In general, developing a shared DEI-related vocabulary, such as that recommended by Puente and Aiko Moore,²⁶ would lend itself well to an audit of this nature.

Third, consider whether predefined lists of categories, open-ended responses (with post hoc categorization), or a mix of the two (such as predefined categories plus an open-ended "other" category) would be most useful. Predefined categories make the subsequent analysis easier but run the risk of accidentally excluding certain populations. For instance, we built our "ages" category from a normal human lifespan and did not allow open-ended responses, which meant there was no way to accurately categorize fantasy characters with nonhuman lifespans, such as immortal characters. On the other hand, open-ended responses ensure that nothing gets left out and allow for more nuance but are more difficult to analyze because they are not precategorized. Using a mixed approach mitigates the risk of accidentally excluding certain populations and reduces the number of open-ended responses that must be categorized but still requires the complexity of coding open-ended responses. None of these approaches is inherently superior; it's mostly a question of how and when it makes sense to categorize your specific data.

Project 2

As with Project 1, the process of categorizing diversity presented inherent limitations. To assess each author, the project relied on information available through Google searches and details provided within the books themselves. This method often required making categorization decisions

based on limited publicly available information such as names or photographs without direct input from the authors. As a result, the tracking of diverse purchases is imprecise and incomplete, reflecting the broader difficulties of accurately ascribing labels to diverse identities.

Assessing diversity over a yearlong budget cycle presents significant limitations, as it provides only a snapshot rather than a comprehensive view of long-term trends and patterns. This brief time may not capture fluctuations in author diversity, discipline trends, or the impact of evolving acquisition policies. To truly make the project useful, liaison purchasing trends should be assessed over a multiyear period.

Because Project 1 was completed first, various diversity categories were adjusted for Project 2. For example, in the race/ethnicity category, a Middle Eastern/Arab option was added, and some diversity dimensions used a simple yes/no rather than a detailed categorization.

Despite these limitations, the primary aim of The Spreadsheet was to identify broad purchasing trends within specific liaison areas to better understand the overall diversity represented in the library's collection and to highlight specific populations that could be better represented within the SU, USM schools, and USMAl library consortium context. By providing a snapshot of author diversity in book purchases, the project aimed to inform future collection development strategies, make individual liaisons aware of the level to which they included historically underrepresented authors in their liaison purchasing, and encourage liaisons to seek book purchases that better represent an inclusive collection. For example, The Spreadsheet showed relatively balanced purchasing trends for gender even within STEM areas typically dominated by men, such as physics. However, in all STEM areas there were precious few books purchased that were written by Black or African American authors. While authors of both East Asian and South Asian ethnicity appeared in most STEM disciplines, most of these authors were US-based men, highlighting a need to investigate intersectional authors and authors living and working in The Global South. The Spreadsheet also revealed a need for more research resources beyond the male-female sex binary, particularly in the biological sciences.

This hyperlocal purchasing audit will help inform research into potential additions to the SU Libraries collection and inform purchasing decisions for the next year of library purchasing. It enables us to fill gaps "on the go" by making minute, specific changes in purchasing patterns—which is helpful for ever-shrinking budgets—rather than enabling sweeping changes made through large purchases based on a comprehensive, overarching understanding of the collection. The Spreadsheet provided some insight on which diversity categories were less useful for STEM liaison areas, such as disability status, which was difficult to ascertain from Google searches. Furthermore, The Spreadsheet provides concrete data to aid library staff in selecting new items for book displays and other collection promotions.

Conclusion

Neither of these audits' approaches solve the issue of diversifying collections completely. Given that this is an impossible goal to accomplish in any one project, we did find value in both audits—in learning what works and what does not if nothing else. Project 1 failed to prove a good fit for the predominantly nonfiction collection of an academic library, but it did provide good learning opportunities regarding project planning, setting clear goals, the critical importance of clear definitions, and guiding us toward a more focused approach. Project 2 provided that more focused approach. The Spreadsheet allows for more customization, from year to year, as well as between liaisons and their subject-specific needs. Due to the very nature of the customization, however, it

would likely be unsuitable for a wide-sweeping collection audit. SU Libraries intends to continue Project 2 on an ongoing basis, seeking broader adoption from other liaison librarians than the initial pilot reported here.

Methods of content assessment for academic collections is an underexplored area; it would be interesting to see more academic libraries creating their own non-identity-based rubrics for evaluating the contents of their collections, or possibly even coming up with novel approaches to content analysis.

This work demonstrates the value of practical, scalable tools for assessing library collections and acquisitions in ways that are responsive to local needs. While no single project can fully capture the multifaceted nature of diversity, our experience shows that incremental, sustainable practices can bring diversity considerations into the everyday workflow of liaison librarianship. More broadly, our findings reinforce the idea that diversity audits are not one-time exercises but ongoing commitments that require thoughtful design, community input, and professional reflection.

Overall, we recommend sticking to something more focused, whatever the chosen method, rather than attempting to get everything all at once. In order to achieve a more comprehensive picture of the diversity of the collection, the more focused approach does require consistent commitment over several years from those responsible for the collection, rather than commitment to a one-time project, but it is more likely to result in actionable results.

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