

## University Libraries Joins

Diversity  
ALL



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ARTICLE BY

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inclusion is what  
we choose to do  
about it."*

**Annie Bélanger**  
Dean of University Libraries



One of the overarching values of libraries is making information accessible to all people. The American Library Association (ALA) has a code of ethics used by librarians and library professionals. The first principle listed in that code is: “We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.”

In keeping with that value, the faculty and staff of Grand Valley State University Libraries have long been committed to

diversity and inclusion. In 2018, University Libraries put that commitment into action by joining the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Diversity Alliance. The alliance includes academic libraries committed to increasing opportunities for professionally underrepresented groups. When the alliance was founded, it was made up of four members; as of January 2018, that number has grown to 28.

The purpose of the alliance is to increase the number of qualified academic librarians from underrepresented groups by creating opportunities for skill development and

leadership early in their career. Long term, the alliance hopes to significantly increase the numbers of underrepresented minorities working in academic libraries by 2050. “Diversity is a reality and inclusion is what we choose to do about it,” Dean of University Libraries Annie Bélanger commented. She considers the alliance “a very proactive way for us to join with our professional community to advance the goals of the University and of the Libraries in broadening our pathways into the profession.”

According to the 2017 membership demographics of the ALA, around 86.7%

of its members identify as white, only a very small change from 87.1% in 2014. Because of this, many libraries are staffed by people who do not match the demographics of the populations they serve. Because of that, diversity is listed as a key action area. ACRL echoes this commitment with their Standards of Diversity. One of the standards is workforce diversity, calling for librarians and library staff to support efforts to increase diversity in the profession.

Each university library that joins the alliance commits to creating at least one residency program. These programs are designed to give recent graduates of library science master's programs experience in a professional academic environment. The libraries who join the alliance also support each other. They work together to share ideas and best practices and to create rich professional development opportunities for the residents.

University Libraries is creating residency programs for two individuals who will serve as visiting faculty librarians. One resident will join the libraries in summer of 2018, with another resident beginning either fall of 2018 or summer of 2019.

Each residency will include a rotation through various departments of University Libraries to expose the residents to multiple specialty areas within the library profession, as well as an area of focus. This will give them a more in-depth experience in a specific area and will help fill a current need of the University Libraries. The residencies will also include opportunities for scholarly activity, service to the profession, and professional development outside of the University Libraries in collaboration with other regional ACRL Diversity Alliance participants.

Dean Bélanger commented on the experience the residency offers, "The research shows that not only is it hard to enter the profession, but that first job greatly impacts whether professionals are retained. [The diversity alliance provides] that opportunity for someone who faces more barriers to entering the profession to come to the table, to have voice, to have mentors who care that they do have voice, that they do have power, that they are exposed to leadership opportunities."

Grand Valley will immediately benefit by having the participation of residents who have recently learned about the latest standards and trends, having recently graduated from their masters' program. Having residents on staff will also allow University Libraries to take on new projects and initiatives that library faculty and staff do not currently have time to take on.

Participation in the alliance fits well with University Libraries mission, vision, and values for 2016-2021, especially the library's value of inclusiveness. The desired outcome being a diverse and inclusive Grand Valley. Dean Bélanger says, "For me, it is actually having the commitment and walking our talk that really is exciting."

For more on diversity within academic libraries visit:  
**[www.ala.org/acrl/standards/diversity](http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/diversity)**

# Gi-Gikinomaage-Min: We Are All Teachers

Documenting the experiences of underrepresented communities and ensuring diverse archival collections can be challenging for libraries. A recently published article by Grand Valley State University faculty describes an interdepartmental collaboration to co-create and preserve a digital collection documenting an element of local Native American history. The process they used can serve as a model for other institutions.

Melanie Shell-Weiss, current Chair of the Liberal Studies Department and former Director of the Kutsche Office of Local History; Annie Benefiel, University Libraries Archivist for Collection Management; and Kimberly McKee, current Director of the Kutsche Office and Assistant Professor in the Liberal Studies Department, co-authored: “We are all teachers: A collaborative approach to digital collection development.” The article describes the collaboration between three entities—the Kutsche Office, University Libraries, and the Native American Advisory Board, which falls under the Office of Inclusion and Equity—to document the urban experience of Native Americans in Grand Rapids.

“The project reflects the importance of working intentionally to build collections that reflect the rich histories and diversity of the local community,” said McKee.

The project is entitled Gi-gikinomaage-min, translated from Anishinaabemowin as “We are all teachers.” Starting in 2014, the project will continue through 2019 at least. Currently, 430 materials have been digitized and are available in the University Archives digital collection. The project also includes

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the recordings and transcriptions of new oral histories.

One of the guiding principles of the project is to ensure Native American control over the newly created content. As an archivist, Benefiel serves as an advisor on best practices to support the future of the collection rather than shaping actual content. Because these materials are being created responsibly and in good-faith, Benefiel hopes they will be valuable to researchers into the future and, most importantly, give voice to the local Native American experience.

Shell-Weiss remarked on the strong institutional support that has made this project possible. “Grand Valley has viewed this project as an extension of our core mission, and this work is centrally important to us as a teaching institution.”

Shell-Weiss, M., Benefiel, A., & McKee, K. (2017). We are all teachers: A collaborative approach to digital collection development. *Collection Management*, 42(3-4), 317-337.

View the collection at:  
<https://digitalcollections.library.gvsu.edu/collections/show/2>



## Valeria Long: Always Learning

In her eighteen years at Grand Valley State University, Valeria Long has worked at the Van Andel Research Institute, the Steelcase Library, and the Frey Foundation Learning Center, where she is currently the liaison librarian to nursing, public health, and the diagnostic and treatment sciences.

Long likes being at the center of the action, so it makes sense that she works with the health sciences; these programs are growing rapidly and it is critical to educate students to make informed decisions.

“I tell students that someday soon, they’re going to be medical professionals and I might be their patient! So I have a personal investment to teach students what good information looks like and how to find it. It’s important and exciting work,” Long explained.

In 2016, Long was recognized by University Libraries colleagues with the Library Excellence Award, which is awarded to a faculty or staff member who goes above and beyond their job description. Her colleagues mentioned that she “is a strong advocate for students and a champion for the Libraries. She mentors colleagues, demonstrates leadership at all levels, and is a friend to all.” The following year, Long was recognized by health science librarians from across the state with the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Michigan Health Sciences Libraries Association.

Her favorite part of the job? “Working with students and witnessing those a-ha moments when they learn something new. Librarians are always learning, and that’s always been a draw for me. We’re geeks that way.”

Valeria retired in March of 2018. Happy trails, Val!