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Representation in Collections: An MLIS student research project to increase diversity in an academic library's collections

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Representation in Collections

An MLIS student research project to increase the diversity in an academic library's collections

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Goals

1. Assess collections and determine the current level of diversity
2. Recommend methods for improvement
3. Articulate strategies for maintaining diversity in collections going forward

First challenge:

Each type of material held by the library requires its own assessment method

Defining "diversity"

“ . . . The mix of individual characteristics (for example, race, gender, social class, and ability) present in groups, organizations, or societies. ”

— Morales, Knowles & Bourg, 2014
Libraries and the Academy

e-journals

1

Pull all active scholarly e-journals classified under the "Ethnic Studies, Gender, and Lifestyle" subject areas on Ulrichsweb into Excel spreadsheet format

2

Obtain complete list of GVSU's e-journal holdings in Excel spreadsheet format

3

Import both spreadsheets into OpenRefine

4

Eliminate duplicate entries in both lists

5

Cross-reference using eISSN to compare lists

Search criteria:

Status:("Active")
Serial Type:("Journal")
Content Type:
("Academic / Scholarly")
Subject Areas:("Ethnic Studies, Gender, and Lifestyle")
Key Feature:(+"Refereed / Peer-reviewed")
Language of Text:
("English")

Using the data

Questions to ask:

- Is the library curating a diverse selection of journals (i.e., how many journals does the library provide of the currently available titles in subject areas like Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies)?
- Are these holdings proportionate to university program sizes (i.e., number of student majors/minors, class enrollment, etc.)?

Example results

534 total diverse journal titles
- 272 (51%) available
- 262 (49%) not available

72 majors + 163 minors = 235 students
235 of 23,673 = ~0.99%

272 diverse journals out of 30,002 e-journal titles = ~0.90%

↳ Roughly 20 more journals should be added

Major/Minor	# of Students	% of Students	% of Journals
East Asian Studies	12	7.36%	25.37%
LGBTQ	19	11.66%	5.15%

Challenges and pitfalls

Journals:

- Ulrichsweb is not an infallible source of journals
- Many journal titles cover multiple subject areas
- No metric is perfect for calculating program proportionality; all have inherent issues

Be mindful of differing opinions within communities:

“ If the library is interested in combating inequality they should hire . . . an expert in such matters . . . instead of calling on [faculty] to do additional unpaid labor. ”

General:

- Different media types will require customized, tailored assessment methods
- When pursuing initiatives like faculty surveys, interviews, etc., be mindful of the demands on diverse community members' time

VS.

“ I wouldn't describe the library as part of the problem, but it isn't quite positioned to be part of the solution beyond what it's doing already. ”