# University Libraries Joins Diversity Alliance

## By Samantha Minnis, Evening Operations and User Services Manager

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.”