

Making a Change Through Committee Service

By the summer of 2020, still at the beginning of a pandemic, East Carolina University's Academic Library Services (ALS) fully transitioned to remote work for a majority of its employees. During a tumultuous and unprecedented time period, the Staff Development Committee developed ways to be impactful within their library. The committee met 15 times from July 2020 to May 2021 to accomplish their goals within the given academic timeframe. We committed to providing opportunities for genuine connection and discussion. A seemingly ever-increasing amount of virtual professional development opportunities with the in-person world of academia at a near standstill set the stage for success with wholly virtual presentations and programs. The committee took the initiative to create multiple virtual opportunities for library employees to participate in, focusing on professional development and discourse centered on timely matters such as equity, diversity, and actionable antiracism over the course of the year.

Mini-grant

The Office for Equity and Diversity at East Carolina University offered six anti-racist action-oriented mini-grants for use on campus. Our 8-page proposal included a program description, statement of need, proposed timeline, itemized budget, intended outcomes, and a letter of support from our Library Director. We also provided documentation to ensure allocation of matching funds.

Our mini-grant proposal focused on improving education, and genuinely examining, reviewing, and engaging library employees on the pervasive topics of racism and injustice through participation in a targeted virtual workshop series. We acknowledged existing institutional, individualized, and societal biases, and emphasized how integral library employees are, with uniquely multi-faceted opportunities for consistent interaction with ECU's employees, students, and community members. These particular training workshops, along with subsequent discussions and actions, are absolutely vital. There was a steep turnaround, as we decided to apply for the grant at our September 9th meeting, our proposal was submitted by the September 18th deadline, and we were informed that we were one of six recipients on October 5th; our hard work and perseverance paid off.

Thirteen ALS employees signed up to participate in the Library Journal workshop series "Equity in Action: Fostering an Antiracist Library Culture." The funding that we received via the grant went towards paying for workshop registration for ALS participants. The three-part workshop series occurred on September 29, 2020, October 6, 2020, and October 13, 2020. Each session was two hours long and featured different topics and speakers that contributed to the overall theme. Throughout the series, there was content from eight featured speakers. The topics covered all related to the library environment and included actionable suggestions

such as conducting an equity audit, cultivating antiracist and antibias hiring practices, reassessing core values, and making implicit biases explicit.

In addition to the live virtual workshop sessions, participants were able to access additional recordings and related instructional materials for 6 months via the digital platform. At the conclusion of the workshop series, several committee participants collaboratively presented on their experiences and takeaways to ALS on October 29, 2020. We each shared the most impactful, poignant moments to the library, and ended with several reflective questions posed at the larger group of attendees for contemplation and discussion.

ALS Library Reading Group

As a committee, we initiated and promoted a Library Reading Group as an effort to create opportunities for critical, timely discussions and promote interdepartmental interaction and participation. We chose *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi for our first selection. Prior to meeting, we created a Teams channel specifically for the reading group in order to schedule monthly meetings and post relevant discussion questions. We were also able to procure ten copies of the book for employee use within the reading group. We split up the first book into four separate discussions to honor the depth of content and allow for sufficient discussion. Participation ranged from seven employees to twelve employees at each virtual meeting.

Connection to Community and Collaboration

Purple Pantry is an on-campus resource that aids food insecure students. To promote knowledge of this invaluable resource and share on their current initiatives, The Staff Development Committee developed questions for the Coordinator of Purple Pantry and recorded a podcast-style interview. This was compiled along with relevant infographics and monetary donation links into an Adobe Spark Page to share out more widely to the library community and beyond.

Donations of shelf-stable food and hygiene items are critical to support the mission of Purple Pantry and to best serve our students in need. The Staff Development Committee collaborated with the library's Stewardship Committee to develop and promote a food drive department competition that was held in December 2020. ALS employees donated nearly 300 items to benefit Purple Pantry.

The Groundwater Approach

The Staff Development Committee promoted and participated in the "Racial Equity: The Groundwater Approach" training held by the Racial Equity Institute (REI) on January 20, 2020. ALS had at least 6 employees sign up to participate, and a few others had recently completed a similar REI training. We further participated by sharing an abbreviated overview of the topics and themes covered, along with our takeaways and experiences during the library forum that occurred the following day. Each committee member shared the most resonant, vital content from the training that stood out to them.

Featured guest speakers Toya Jacobs and Amy Waters from the Office for Equity and Diversity enhanced our presentation with further education and discussion. We recorded the library forum and shared out to ALS additionally for those employees who were unable to attend.

Conference Presentation

Three committee employees, Amy Curtis, Colise Hunt, and Ashley Moore, collaboratively presented at the virtual LAUNC-CH Conference on March 8, 2021. Our presentation, "Creating Space for Equity Education in the Library," detailed the Staff Development Committee's year full of recent virtual library activities and initiatives intended to connect and engage employees. We shared on the evident need for equity discussion and action in our space, and what we accomplished via the committee to begin to address those ideas. Providing safe-spaces and creating several virtual opportunities for open communication and equity education were integral to our approach.

Staff Development Day

While not a new event, our committee paved the way by successfully holding the first entirely virtual Staff Development Day on March 9, 2021. We planned nearly 6 hours of virtual professional development and networking, along with an hour-long lunch break and a couple additional screen breaks. Our chosen theme for the day was "Turning the Page: 2021," which felt aptly chosen and appropriate to our mission. Participation varied based on availability throughout the day, but most sessions had nearly or just over 60 ALS employees in attendance.

We invited two featured speakers for the day, Elaina Norlin and Dr. Kanna Bright, and developed opportunities for ALS employees to present to colleagues and interact virtually. Elaina Norlin challenged us to address existing challenges within our organization in virtual breakout rooms following her presentation "Does the ECU Library System have a "Future Proof" Learning Organization?" We are still in the planning stages of a follow-up visit to present further to ALS in the near future. Dr. Bright spoke on "The Role of Privilege in Developing and Sustaining Anti-Racist and Anti-Bias Workplaces." She used the metaphor of a privilege layer cake to speak candidly about elements of equity, racism, and bias in an engaging manner.

Lightning Talk sessions on a variety of topics allowed colleagues the opportunity to share their recent research and projects with one another. Each individual talk was 5-10 minutes in length; long enough to inform the audience and pique their interest, but not too lengthy at the end of a professional development day chock-full of virtual presentations.

The committee delivered lunch orders to employees who opted to attend the day of virtual presentations from their offices in the library building. We also selected a special gift to order for all ALS employees, customized water tumblers, and put together appreciation gift bags to distribute following Staff Development Day. We mailed special appreciation gifts from the committee to our featured speakers as well. We met more frequently than monthly leading up to Staff Development Day in order to hold tech dress rehearsals, adequately prepare and practice technical con-

siderations, and to assemble the gift bags. Finally, we created and shared a post-survey after the event for feedback to consider when planning future events.

Speakers

In September 2020, we actively promoted a ComPsych presentation “Stress: A Way of Life, or a Fact of Life?” And held a subsequent virtual discussion meeting open to all ALS participants. In March 2021, The Staff Development Committee invited Lauren Thorn, the Associate Dean of Students, to virtually present to “ALS on Coping and Self-Care Amidst a Pandemic.” We recorded the session and shared it out to ALS afterwards. 23 ALS employees attended the presentation, and we re-

ceived a lot of positive feedback from employees afterwards.

The Staff Development Committee made the most of existing opportunities that arose throughout the year and challenged themselves to take direct action and create safe virtual spaces for education and reflection. We exceeded our set goals for the year and continued to share and develop ideas to virtually connect and boost morale. Our virtual events and presentations were moderately attended, and we scheduled them at different times to accommodate various work schedules. Important conversations took place and employees who don't typically have the opportunity to connect were able to virtually within our created spaces. However, many events had the same few employees in atten-

dance. Mandatory participation, or even additional supervisory support would have increased employee participation and the reach and benefit of our initiatives overall. The virtual discussions and presentations were convenient and safe, which was our primary goal, but they were a bit lacking with the loss of the organic energy and participation that occurs with in-person meetings. In the future, we will strategize further to increase employee engagement and participation. We did the best we could to offer a variety of informative, relevant opportunities during a unique time of collective experience and trauma. We will continue to strive for a more equitable, inclusive environment and workplace to benefit all.

Submission Requirements for North Carolina Libraries

Electronic articles can be submitted online at: <http://www.ncl.ecu.edu>

- » To submit you must login; if needed you can register using the link in the header.
- » We use the *Chicago Manual of Style* (16th edition, 2010).
- » We have a rolling deadline; articles are juried when received.
- » Publication of approved articles is in about 3-9 months depending on space available.
- » For additional information, contact Ralph Scott at: scottr@ecu.edu