

Ledding Library 2021 Diversity Audit

Background

In late 2020 the Collections Team of the library-wide DEI Committee agreed to launch a diversity audit to assess the current collection for its representation of diverse groups and populations. We wanted an answer to the question, “Who are our books about?” Diversity audits can be used to collect data on any number of factors, including workplace demographics, services and programs, and collections. In an audit of collections, titles are typically reviewed one by one to determine which, if any, groups they represent. This was the project that the team undertook, ultimately auditing 2799 titles in the collection, and an additional 258 as part of a pilot project. To complete such an extensive review, it took nine library staff members (a mix of librarians, LA1s, and an LA2) seven months, from March-October 2021, to complete the audit.

Purpose

We wanted to take the diversity “temperature” of the current collection. Audits are often used to compare the diversity of a collection against the diversity of the community to evaluate whether it is reflective of the people served. Demographic data for Milwaukie can be found below. We also wanted to identify gaps in our collection where we could be doing more to find and purchase diverse titles beyond representation of the Milwaukie population - after all, diverse books are for everybody. Ultimately, we are striving to provide a collection that elevates marginalized voices and provides a variety of perspectives for all our users. The first step in that direction was to have an accurate picture of our current collection and understand our starting point.

Milwaukie 2020 Census Data

Below are selected statistics of the Milwaukie population from the 2020 Census reflecting areas we assessed in our diversity audit. Additional demographic information can be found here:

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/milwaukiecityoregon/RHI225219>

Race and Hispanic Origin	
White alone, percent	88.5%
Black or African American alone, percent	1.0%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent	0.3%
Asian alone, percent	3.4%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent	0.2%
Two or More Races, percent	3.7%
Hispanic or Latino, percent	9.2%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent	83.1%

Health	
With a disability, under age 65 years, percent, 2015-2019	9.3%
Persons without health insurance, under age 65 years, percent	7.0%

Income & Poverty	
Median household income (in 2019 dollars), 2015-2019	\$61,902
Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2019 dollars), 2015-2019	\$34,337
Persons in poverty, percent	11.2%

Collections Audited

We selected three collections to audit - Adult New Fiction, Children's Picture Books, and Children's Graphic Novels. Additionally, one of the Children's Librarians ran a pilot review of the Children's New Picture Books to test the data gathering form and to have a point of comparison against the general picture book collection. These areas were selected based on their high interest and visibility to the community and because of their manageable size (in the case of Adult New Fiction and Children's Graphic Novels) or ease of evaluation (in the case of the Children's Picture Books). Even among these smaller collections, we did not have the resources to review every item, opting instead to review a percentage of them and extrapolate the results out to the broader collection. The table below shows a breakdown of the number of items audited.

Collection	Number of items	Percentage of collection
Children's New Picture Books (pilot)	258	100%
Adult New Fiction	573	100%
Children's Picture Books	1314	25%
Children's Graphic Novels	912	50%

Criteria

For the New Children's Picture Book pilot the criteria was divided into five broad categories - Race/Ethnicity, LGBTQIA+, Religion, Economic Welfare, and Health. Each of these contained several sub-categories. For example, under Race/Ethnicity we identified whether characters in the book were White, Black, Latino, Asian, etc. We also included a general summary question, measuring whether a title was diverse. We determined that a title would be considered diverse if the main character (or a group of people, if no main character) or a supporting character with a substantial role in the book matched any of the criteria for diversity.

After the pilot we included two additional measures - the diversity of the main character, and whether a title needed to be reviewed for inaccurate or harmful stereotypes. The full questionnaire can be found in the attached PDF.

Due to the additional time and research it would have required, we did not include an item for the identity of the author. We also did not identify *how* we knew an item was diverse, as this would be overly time-consuming and would not affect the outcome of the audit.

Process

Before we began the audit in earnest, we did a small test run, selecting five books from each of the three collections to evaluate together as a group. This ensured that we were on the same page when deciding whether a book met any of the qualifications for diversity. Although there were some slight variations in how individuals marked each item, there was enough consensus and a general understanding of the criteria that we felt confident moving forward with the audit.

We ran a WorkFlows report listing all items in the three selected collections to identify which titles to evaluate. All items on the list were reviewed for the Adult New Fiction collection. Every other item was highlighted for review on the Children's Graphic Novels list, and every fourth for the Children's Picture Books. If a title came up on the list more than once because we own multiple copies, we reviewed it each time to accurately reflect its weight in the collection.

Tools

We opted to use a Google Form for data collection because it provided an easy access point for everyone working on the audit. Google Forms has the added benefit of creating simple graphs from the responses without any additional data manipulation on our part.

To evaluate an item, we used an assortment of information sources to assess a book's content and diversity. Two of the most useful tools were the catalog record for the item and the physical book itself. From the catalog record we evaluated subject terms, the item summary, and reviews, when available. When the physical book was available, we examined the cover art, interior art (particularly for picture books and graphic novels), book blurb, and CIP data. Additional sources of information, if there were lingering questions about the diversity of a book, included GoodReads, FirstSearch/WorldCat, and reviews in Baker & Taylor or Ingram. The most helpful review source was Kirkus, which often explicitly identifies diverse settings and characters.

If none of our diversity criteria was mentioned in any of our information sources, we entered N/A for most items, and "white" as the default response for race. It should be noted however, that many children's books have non-human characters that can make factors like race or sexuality not applicable, although they may have overt themes of diversity throughout the book.

Each person completing the audit had a different technique and preferences for how to evaluate a book, and often the strategy would differ from item to item depending on the item's availability on the shelf, the information (or lack) in the catalog record, the availability of reviews, etc.

Results

A full summary of results can be found in the attached PowerPoint document. Below is a breakdown of the general diversity and main character diversity of the collections, including the pilot study.

	Diversity	Main Character Diversity
Children's New Picture Books (pilot)	40.7%	N/A
Adult New Fiction	36.8%	31.4%
Children's Picture Books	24.4%	15.6%
Children's Graphic Novels	35.9%	21.2%

The import of these numbers is still being evaluated, but at first look there are some promising trends. Comparing the diversity of the New Children's Picture Books against the larger collection of Children's Picture Books, there is an increase of 16.3%, indicating an encouraging trend toward publishing and purchasing diverse titles in recent years. Additionally, the close match between general diversity and main character diversity in the Adult New Fiction indicates that diverse voices are being spotlighted and not just limited to background characters.

When beginning this audit, we were interested in how the diversity of our collection compared with the demographics of the Milwaukie community. Below are the race/ethnicity, disability, and poverty data from the 2020 Census as compared to our collections' results. These are rough comparisons, as our measures did not always have a one-to-one correspondence with the Census data, and our data included many additional categories.

Race and Hispanic Origin	Milwaukie	Adult New Fiction	Children's Picture Books	Children's Graphic Novels
White alone, percent	88.5%	67.9%	40%	59.6%
Black or African American alone, percent	1.0%	11.2%	6.2%	8.9%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent	0.3%	1.9%	1%	0.4%
Asian alone, percent	3.4%	5.4%	3.1%	7.2%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent	0.2%	0.5%	0.1%	0.1%
Two or More Races, percent	3.7%	1.9%	1.1%	1.2%
Hispanic or Latino, percent	9.2%	2.4%	2.1%	1.9%

Health				
With a disability, under age 65 years, percent, 2015-2019	9.3%	1.4%	0.5%	1%
Income & Poverty				
Persons in poverty, percent	11.2%	3.3%	1.4%	1.4%

There are a few key areas in which we are underrepresenting the Milwaukee population - Hispanic/Latino persons, persons of two or more races, persons with disabilities, and persons in poverty. These will likely become areas of focus moving forward with collection development.

Looking Ahead

Whether this is just the first diversity audit in an ongoing cycle, or a one-time project remains to be seen. In future diversity audits we may evaluate the same three collections to track changes across time, or focus on different collections to understand the strengths and weaknesses across the library. One factor that may influence our decision to continue with in-house audits is the recent LINCC-wide diversity audit purchased through Ingram. The data from the Ingram audit is less detailed and does not provide as much library-specific data, but the trade-off of staff time might make this a more reasonable path going forward.

Since the audit, the Collections Team has taken the diversity audit lens and applied it to the ways in which we promote and highlight our resources. We have done diversity audits of book lists, been more intentional about creating and stocking diverse displays, and have focused on spotlighting diverse titles on the shelves when room allows.

Completing the diversity audit was a challenging and eye-opening experience. While there are clearly gaps in the collection that need to be addressed, the data from the newer collections shows promise for an increasingly diverse library. What we took from the experience is that we can and should improve our purchasing and weeding practices to continue to diversify the collection and allow marginalized voices to take up space on our shelves. It is with renewed enthusiasm that we will strive toward building a collection that allows all our patrons to see themselves in our books, as well as a true reflection of the wonderfully diverse community and world we share.

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