

Orbis Cascade Alliance: LGBTQ+ Training Series and Diverse Collections

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EMILY MOXLEY (she/her/hers) is the current Head of Library Access Services at Barber Library at Central Oregon Community College (COCC), a position she began in February 2021. Prior to moving to Oregon to begin her career at COCC, she was the Library Circulation Coordinator in the Douglas Campus Library of Cochise College, a library and institution situated on the Arizona-Mexico border. She received her MLIS from the University of Arizona in 2018. Her current and past positions allow her to work closely with all levels of library staff and patrons, and has not only molded her into the professional she is today, but more importantly, has made her even more passionate about every level of library work and access services. The core of her librarianship is centered around DEI and social justice initiatives.

In the face of record-breaking book challenges and loud cries for book banning and removals, primarily aimed at LGBTQ+ and BIPOC stories, voices, and books, attention to these topics is paramount. The American Library Association (2023) cites that censorship efforts “surged 65 percent in 2023 compared to 2022, reaching the highest levels ever documented by the Office for Intellectual Freedom in more than 20 years of tracking: 4,240 unique book titles were targeted for removal from schools and libraries.” Specifically, 47 percent of these targeted titles were LGBTQ+ and BIPOC stories, voices, and books (American Library Association, 2023).

In response, this year the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Standing Group from the Orbis Cascade Alliance, a library consortium serving academic libraries in the Pacific Northwest, hosted four trainings centered on LGBTQ+ voices and representation within the academic library sphere. The four trainings held throughout the academic year were:

- *Trans and Gender Diverse Inclusion for Libraries*, facilitated by Stephen Krueger on March 5
- *LGBTQ+ Stories in Library Collections*, facilitated by Carson Williams on April 17
- *Understanding Your Institution’s Policies as a Pathway for LGBTQ+ Support* on May 22 and led by Reed Garber-Pearson and Maggie Faber
- *Grabbing Tea: Queer Conversations on Identity and Libraries* held on June 18 with the collaborative authors of the *Grabbing Tea* publications (Smith-Cruz & Howard, 2022)

The DEI Standing Group is part of the Orbis Cascade Alliance’s Diversity and User Experience (DUX) program and was officially formed almost two years ago upon the

recommendation of the Equity Exploratory Committee, which was formed in 2021 to support the Alliance's new vision statement of "advancing transformative learning and research and creating equity in higher education ..." (Watstein & Mullins, 2019). The Equity Exploratory Committee was composed of eight members: three Alliance Council members, three member institution staff members, and two Alliance staff members, one of whom was the Executive Director. The charge of the Committee was to "... foster a shared understanding among Council Alliance staff, and member institutions of the national conversation about equity in higher education, and to promote clarity regarding opportunities for the Alliance in that conversation" (Watstein & Mullins, 2019). The DEI Standing Group meets biweekly, and conversations brainstorming and considering potential trainers for this year's training series happened in those meetings. Once the core list of potential trainers had been compiled, DUX Program Manager Amy Coughenour reached out to the potential trainers individually on behalf of the Standing Group. All trainers were compensated for their time, knowledge, and expertise.

Within our first year, the DEI Standing Group has provided vital training to the Alliance community, with the initial priority on quality antiracism training. Continuing the conversation from our successful inaugural year of antiracism training was crucial, while also acknowledging the targeting of the LGBTQ+ community in the form of at least 527 proposed anti-LGBTQ+ legislation (American Civil Liberties Union, 2024) and amplified efforts to censor library books and resources, of which Oregon has experienced 12 censorship attempts of 90 titles (American Library Association, 2023). It became clear that the DEI Standing Group's training series needed to highlight the urgency of these current events, and set the stage for the intersectional intent to the training series.

The DEI Standing Group also considered previous training evaluation feedback, in which there was both interest in the topic and strong requests for having types of training that impart actionable tools and strategies that can be applied by participants in their own departments and libraries, and that also aligned the training series with the DEI Key Terms and Concepts cornerstone project, which came from the recommendation of the Equity Exploratory Committee (Orbis Cascade Alliance, 2023). From this recommendation, the DEI Standing Group was tasked with developing working definitions of key concepts, in order to cultivate a relevant and shared terminology that is intended to be used within the Alliance and its member institutions that are centered around diversity, equity, and inclusion (Watstein & Mullins, 2019). The intent of the DEI Key Terms and Concepts project is to grow with each year, based on the theme of the training for the year. This year, the project expanded to add a new section on Gender & Sexuality, which is a rich, detailed, and extensive list compiled and drafted by Nicole Gustavsen, STEM Librarian at Gonzaga University.

The DEI Standing Group's LGBTQ+ Training series includes four pieces that together work towards equitable and inclusive developments in libraries, and also, to not be quiet in the face of injustice. The hope with this series is to provide the Alliance community with tools that they can use to bring about positive change in their own libraries.

For the two years that the DEI Standing Group has been active within the Orbis Cascade Alliance, we have been lucky to experience presenters of quality, expertise, knowledge, and experience. For the purpose of this article, Carson Williams' *LGBTQ+ Stories in Library Collections* training will be discussed.

During this training, Williams, who is a Collection Development Librarian at Cornell University, spoke frankly about the censorship onslaught, efforts to silence, and overall dangerous conditions that the LGBTQ+ community, particularly the trans community, is

facing. In the anonymous post-training evaluation survey, many participants echoed how Williams' training put the current attacks on the trans community into real perspective, and how important it is now, more than ever, for libraries to be welcoming and safe spaces and havens for all, especially vulnerable populations. Hearing directly from a member of the community, especially one within the academic library sphere, really puts the threat into context; these issues are not just "public or school library problems." If it is happening in those spaces, it can happen anywhere.

During his training, Williams provided the following three main takeaways that any librarian can incorporate into their libraries, spaces, collections, and work, especially those who reside in a "safe" state such as Oregon:

- Draft LGBTQ+ topical LibGuides that can be accessed by patrons in search of not only LGBTQ+ materials, but also community resources.
- Start purchasing and adding the items that are being banned and removed from other states' and institutions' collections; make the additions available and prioritize lending them via the interlibrary loan network to patrons in locations where access is threatened or nonexistent.
- Promote, promote, promote. If you are lucky enough to be a librarian or library worker in a library that has a LGBTQ+, BIPOC, antiracist, DEI-centered collection, promote it and promote it loudly (Williams, 2024).

The struggle and fight for DEI initiatives, training, and support is amping up in urgency, especially in light of anti-DEI pressure and efforts across higher learning institutions and states. As of June 28, 2024, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* has followed anti-DEI measures, including the removal of DEI offices and programming across 164 colleges in 23 states (Gretzinger et al., 2024). However, hope and the fight persist. Not all change is loud. Sometimes it is quieter: brick by brick, step by step, by paying attention, being open to engage, having a desire to listen and understand, and supporting communities under attack. It can be as simple, but still as powerful, as asking and using someone's preferred pronouns correctly, participating in SafeZone or other DEI-centered training or workshops, seeking out training or opportunities for learning outside of institutional offerings, and asking for DEI-centered training. It can include reading LGBTQ+ authors, especially BIPOC and trans authors, and promoting the authors and titles in displays and recommendations to patrons.

For those seeking and searching for training opportunities, the American Library Association and *Library Journal* have been increasing their DEI-centered training offerings, and the Oregon Library Association's (n.d.) EDI Antiracism Committee offers not only the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Antiracism Toolkit, but also training resources, and a podcast that is available on Spotify. The DEI Standing Group post-event surveys include a question for participants to share feedback for topics and/or types of training that would be of interest to the Orbis Cascade Alliance that has been used to help identify next steps.

Outside of the Orbis Cascade Alliance, American Library Association, Oregon Library Association, and *Library Journal*, when searching for training opportunities, explore both broadening and narrowing search strategies. Broadening search phrases helps identify training opportunities with more generalized titles and descriptions, which may be used in response

to censorship actions. Narrowing searches to incorporate specific outcomes or needs helps identify options to meet functional areas, such as collection development, policies, outreach, and more. Aim to identify trainers and speakers with lived experiences through affinity groups, professional networks, speaker organizations, and conferences or events.

Reaching out and connecting with others in your department or library can also be a boon. Collaborative discussions and for determining training themes and identifying potential trainers and speakers is helpful to bring in multiple perspectives, share research strategies, strengthen communications, and increase the odds that the training will be supported from a budgetary level, especially if there is a unified call for participation.

All these practices cultivate a space where patrons and colleagues feel safe, seen, and protected. Libraries are the last free spaces where people can come as they are and be supported. The need for and the fight to protect diverse collections affects us all. We, as a profession, must protect these sacred spaces for our most vulnerable populations, colleagues, and patrons.

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