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Emily Ford

Portland State University, forder@pdx.edu

Wendi Arant Kaspar

Texas A&M University

Peggy Seiden

Swarthmore College

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Citation Details

Ford, E., Kaspar, W. and Seiden, P. (2017). Diversity of ACRL Publications, Editorial Board Demographics: A Report from ACRL's Publications Coordinating Committee. *College & Research Libraries News*, 78(10), 548.

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College & Research Libraries News, Vol 78, No 10 (2017)

Emily Ford, Wendi Arant Kaspar, and Peggy Seiden

Diversity of ACRL publications, editorial board demographics

A report from ACRL's Publications Coordinating Committee

Emily Ford was 2016–17 chair of ACRL's Publications Coordinating Committee, email: forder@pdx.edu, (<mailto:forder%40pdx.edu?subject=>) Wendi Arant Kaspar is C&RL editor and policy sciences librarian at the Texas A&M University Policy Sciences and Economics Library, email: warant@tamu.edu (<mailto:warant%40tamu.edu?subject=>), and Peggy Seiden is chair of the Choice Editorial Board, email: pseiden1@swarthmore.edu (<mailto:pseiden1%40swarthmore.edu?subject=>)

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Two weeks prior to the 2017 ALA Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida, a hate-inspired mass murder occurred at the city's Pulse night club. As a response to this horrific event, many meetings, discussions, and programs in Orlando refocused to the discuss diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts of ALA. The shock and horror of this tragedy gave more immediacy to initiatives already underway in ALA, and it inspired ACRL's Publications Coordinating Committee (PCC) to make efforts to better integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion into the committee's 2016 to 2017 work plan. This was but one small way for the ACRL publications to contribute to a positive environment, and to denounce the kind of hateful thoughts and heinous actions taken by many individuals in our country who continue to marginalize and oppress people and their communities.

During our Orlando meeting, we discussed how PCC might support and improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in ACRL publications. One of the major tasks with which PCC is charged is to oversee editor and editorial board appointments to ACRL publications. We knew logically that having diverse editorial boards was one way to visibly improve equity and inclusion at ACRL publications, but the demographic make-up of the editorial boards was not known. This was information that has never been solicited from board members, and has not been systematically considered in their appointments. Logically, our first step was to find out just how diverse the editorial boards were, so we developed a survey and gathered demographic data from ACRL's nine editorial boards/committees.¹ Our aim was to understand the demographic

composition of editorial boards, compare findings to ACRL and ALA membership in general, and to provide suggestions on how to proceed with respect to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

This report shares our findings with the ACRL community, and offers suggestions for moving forward. None of our findings surprise us, but we realize that in order to improve, we need to have a baseline—evidence of where we are now. Further, we believe that sharing what we learned with the ACRL community is in line with our values, and that it will help to promote discussions of diversity, equity, and inclusion among other ACRL committees and sections.²

The survey

We developed a survey instrument to capture demographics of the editorial board members. It asked for the following measures:

- Age,
- Gender,
- Race/ethnicity,
- Geographic location (city, town, etc.),
- Professional affiliation,
- Institutional affiliation type,
- Length of experience in profession,
- Faculty status,
- Tenure status, and
- Years of service on an editorial board.

As we developed the instrument, we worked to make each question as inclusive as possible. For example, when asking about gender, we included selection options for “nonbinary” and “prefer to self-describe.” For race/ethnicity, the survey allowed respondents to select more than one box.

In order to distribute the survey, we worked with publication editors and board chairs who solicited survey participation from their respective editorial boards. We gathered 62 responses, for an approximate 73% response rate.

Findings and observations

Below we detail some of our findings and observations. We compared our results with data reported by ALA’s Diversity Counts initiative. Diversity Counts uses the 2010 American Community Survey (ACS)³ to indicate the demographic makeup of the library profession. One of the challenges in comparing PCC’s survey data to other demographic data sets, is that PCC’s instrument did not perfectly match those of other surveys.

For example, gender data collected by National Center for Education Statistics and analyzed for the Diversity Counts Report, only allows binary gender reporting, and does not offer an option of “prefer not to say.” Despite these challenges, we feel that these comparisons can provide useful insights as to the under- and overrepresentation of certain demographic characteristics on ACRL editorial boards.

The findings reveal that, compared to the profession overall, both people of color and academic librarians serving at community, junior, and technical colleges are underrepresented on editorial boards. In contrast, males are over-represented on ACRL editorial boards.

Generally, ACRL editorial boards represent a broad range of ages, experience in the profession, and time served on editorial boards. The median age is 41 to 50 years old, which is not surprising given the attention we pay to the “graying of the profession.” Even with that in mind, a startling minority of respondents (2%) are 30 years old or younger. However, this falls in line with a primary criterion for nomination and appointment to some of editorial boards—individuals must show evidence of research and publication experience. Similarly, years of experience as a librarian mirrors age demographics, with the reported median years of experience being 11 to 15.

The results for race and ethnicity of the editorial boards align fairly closely with the demographics reported in the Diversity Counts data (see figure 1). For the survey of editorial boards, 88% of respondents were white, followed by 7% black or African American, 5% Asian, and 2% other. This is consistent with the numbers reported for those populations in Diversity Counts. In fact, the representation of those identifying themselves as Black/African American is better than the benchmark. However, no respondents specified they were Hispanic or Latino, or American Indian or Alaska Native. In addition, no respondents to the survey identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. It is impossible to compare this with the Diversity Counts data, since that data combines Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander with Asian.

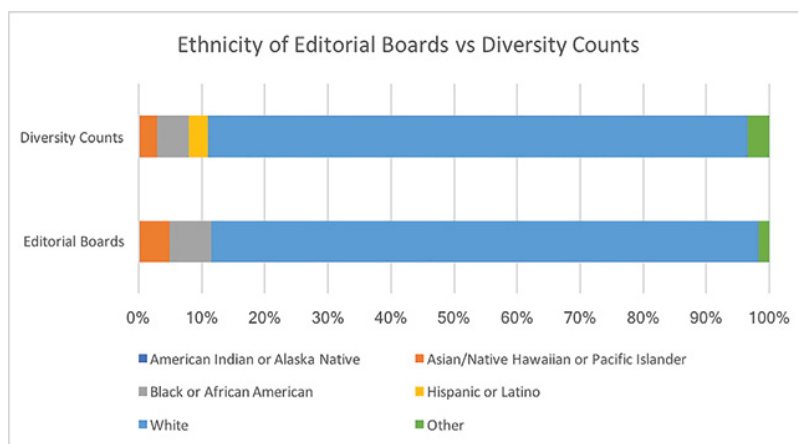


Figure 1: Ethnicity of editorial boards.

Gender is another characteristic in which editorial boards do not precisely mirror the Diversity Counts report. Females make up 74% of ACRL editorial boards, males 25%, and 2% prefer not to say. Compared with the profession, which consists of 83% females and 17% males, males are overrepresented on ACRL editorial boards. It should be noted, however, that gender representation of academic librarians may differ from librarianship in general (see figure 2).

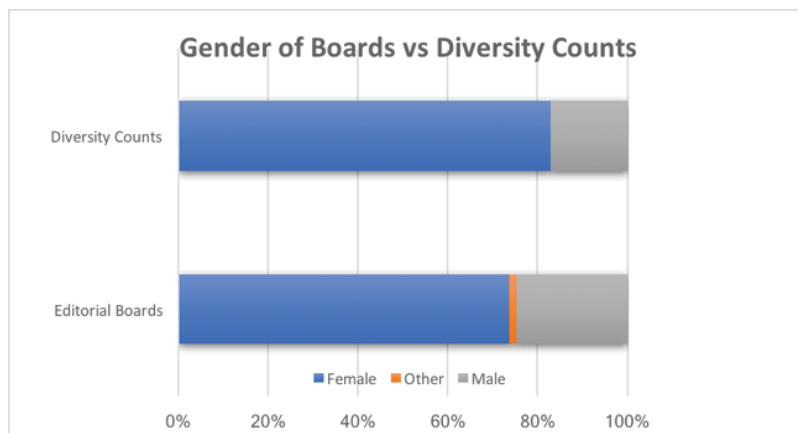


Figure 2: Gender of editorial boards.

Finally, our demographic survey asked for institutional affiliation type. A large majority (72%) of editorial boards represent academic librarians who serve at universities granting undergraduate and graduate degrees. This could be due to the significant research and publication components of their jobs. Only 15% of editorial board members are academic librarians at four-year undergraduate institutions, and a paltry 3% of editorial board members are librarians community, junior, or technical colleges. The remainder of respondents are 8% "other" and 2% faculty at LIS schools.

Reviewing the results of the survey and comparing them with the Diversity Counts data raises some additional questions. Though the Diversity Counts data was used as a benchmark, it has some shortcomings: it is out-of-date, using the 2010 ACS; it does not break out academic librarians from other librarians; and it does include all of the variables or categories that would be useful for comparison.

Recommendations

This report has been written with one basic assumption: diverse editorial boards will improve all of ACRL's publications, communication with membership, and publications' relevance to the profession at large. Less diverse editorial boards may contribute to bias in the kinds of articles, publications, and topics accepted and solicited for book and journal publications. Moreover, ACRL publications should model the commitment ACRL has made to diversity, which is articulated as a core organizational value in its strategic plan.⁴

The purpose of the demographic survey was to gain a baseline understanding of diversity and representation on ACRL editorial boards. Additionally, in reviewing this data, PCC members, editors, and committee chairs became more aware of diversity issues at ACRL publications, and have already made efforts to recruit editorial board members from a diversity of backgrounds.

We feel that this data will assist ACRL and PCC examine diversity and inclusion at ACRL publications, and create greater awareness for diversity issues among editorial boards and ACRL membership at large. Diverse editorial boards will provide a more equitable platform for underrepresented voices to be included in ACRL publications. With this in mind, there are several ways in which we can improve on these efforts. First, PCC hopes to continue gathering demographic data from editorial boards each year. Additionally, the demographic survey instrument may be expanded to include other underrepresented groups.

But diversity in publication isn't just about who serves on editorial boards. Peer reviewers are also a large part of the ACRL publishing community. Understanding the diversity of peer reviewers can contribute to making ACRL publications a more equitable and inclusive community. As such, editors from each publication have an opportunity to distribute a demographic survey to their pool of peer reviewers. Similarly, understanding the demographics of submitting authors to ACRL publications will allow us to analyze our improvements over time. This work has already begun at College & Research Libraries, with a demographic survey of the journal's peer reviewers to be discussed in the November 2017 editorial.

Based on the data, each publication and editorial board may consider actions and policy changes they can make that will allow for a diversity of voices at every step in the publication process. From policy formation by the boards to considerations in peer review, we can strive to mirror the equity we value in our publications. Moreover, PCC recommends to the ACRL Board of Directors that it review its policies, specifically policy 13.9.3, Criteria for the Selection of Editorial Board members,⁵ should include language promoting the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Conclusion

Gathering and reporting the demographic data of editorial boards was a necessary first step for PCC to move forward to create and promote diversity and inclusion in ACRL publications. As a result of the survey, editors are now more aware of diversity and inclusion as they solicit and recommend editorial board membership. Diverse and inclusive editorial boards can create a publishing environment that reduces bias in how publications are selected and approved. Finally, our publications should reflect our professional community, both in its values of diversity and inclusion and in its leadership composition.

Notes

1. ACRL publications include: *Academic Library Trends & Statistics Survey*, *College & Research Libraries*, *College & Research Libraries News*, *CHOICE*, *CLIPP Notes*, *New Publications Advisory Board*, *Publications in Librarianship*, *Rare Books & Manuscripts*, and *Resources for College Libraries*.
2. A survey data report can be accessed online at _____.
3. ALA Office for Research & Statistics, ALA Office of Diversity, and Decision Demographics. Diversity Counts, _____.
4. ACRL. ACRL Plan for Excellence, _____.
5. ACRL's *Guide to Policies and Procedures*. Chapter 13: Publications, _____.

