

# SLIS Task Force on Diversity & Inclusion



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## Charge of the Task Force

The charge of the School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion at Simmons College (hereinafter referred to as College) is to advise Dean Abels on providing a safe and inclusive environment for all students, staff, and faculty of SLIS, including the Children's Literature, Computer Science, and Library and Information Science degrees and programs. Our working definition of diversity takes into account the intersectionality of social identities, such as race and ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religious affiliations, political identities and age, among others. Inclusion is representative of the intentional engagement we all create to understand these identities within our educational and institutional environment. Furthermore, the Task Force aligns its values and vision with that of the College.

Our values: "We honor the inherent humanity, dignity and worth of each member of our community.

Our vision: "Simmons College will be a welcoming, vibrant, inclusive community that appreciates, values, and respects the humanity, dignity, diversity, and contributions of all its members. We are committed to engage one another to address the dynamic, evolving issues of our community and our world."

During the spring of the 2016 school year we explored ways in which diversity and inclusion initiatives across the SLIS could be improved by:

- supporting students, staff, and faculty in creating and sustaining a safe, inclusive, anti-oppressive environment by organizing two listening sessions;
- developing mechanisms for students, staff, and faculty to discuss concerns related to diversity and inclusion at SLIS through the development of a grievance process;
- advocating to increase diversity of the student body by being a part of the search process for the dean's diversity fellow and working closely with the Admissions office
- promoting increased attention to diversity and inclusion within the SLIS curriculum; and
- communicating with the SLIS community regarding the Task Force's efforts

### Task Force Members

Kazia Berkley-Cramer, Children's Literature and MSLIS dual degree Master's program (chair)

Dr. Janet Ceja, Assistant Professor (chair)

Jilliana Farietta, Computer Science Undergraduate Major (chair)

Joyce Gabiola, MSLIS degree student, Archives Management Concentration

Dr. Laura Saunders, Assistant Professor

Dr. Nanette Veilleux, Professor, Director of Computer Science and Informatics Program

### Priorities

One of our priorities was to hold listening sessions to observe and take note of on-campus student, faculty, and staff concerns about diversity and inclusion at SLIS. Listening deeply to the local SLIS community helped bring new concerns, questions, and ideas to the Task Force and to

focus our efforts in developing a set of recommendations. This listening process worked alongside existing efforts already in place at SLIS as well as the growing student-led initiatives to build and foster an inclusive learning environment. Other priorities involved working on the design of an information tool to which students can use to submit suggestions and grievances, as well as presenting ideas to the SLIS Curriculum Committee on how to work toward integrating and assessing diversity in the curriculum. The Task Force will continue to work closely with Dean Abels and the 2016-17 Dean's Fellow on Diversity and Inclusion to identify and implement recommendations for building an inclusive environment at SLIS. The Task Force will also be identifying ways to keep the SLIS community informed of its efforts and abreast of new initiatives.

## Campus Climate

Our priorities were shaped by the campus climate at the College and in particular allegations that SLIS students have been facing microaggressions within their educational environment. The term microaggression hails from the 1970s and is broadly understood as an offensive comment or action unconsciously or unintentionally communicating hostile, negative messages, insults, or stereotypes about non-dominant or marginalized groups.<sup>1</sup> This negative campus climate prompted individuals to launch a Tumblr site in 2014 entitled "Simmons SLIS microaggressions" to document "sexist, classist, racist, transphobic/cissexist, transmisogynist, ableist, anti-Semitic, ageist, homophobic, etc. experiences at SLIS."<sup>2</sup> In January of 2016 a Twitter site was launched in association with the Tumblr site. These local sites mimic the LIS-wide sites entitled "Microaggressions in Librarianship," on Tumblr, and the "LIS Microaggressions," on Twitter, which both seek to document the pervasiveness of this phenomenon in the library and information science professions. Unlike the latter sites, however, the creators and contributors of microaggressions at SLIS are anonymous. These social media documented experiences therefore function not only to create important and immediate awareness about microaggressions, but also to police the SLIS educational environment.

Some professors have stated that they feel inhibited from even trying to engage in conversations about diversity in the classroom, because they are afraid of retribution on these sites; not to mention that most faculty lack diversity training. Moreover, at least one instructor has been identified and targeted as a microaggressor on one of these sites.

There is a growing desire among the SLIS community to build respectful and positive campus experiences in which all can feel empowered to take responsibility for their actions. SLIS students and faculty have been working with Dean Abels to raise awareness about social inequities on campus. Some of these efforts include events such as leading a break-out session on diversity and social justice during the new student orientation. Students also organized an LIS

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/microaggression-words-were-watching>

<sup>2</sup> Microaggressions at Simmons College SLIS, <https://twitter.com/SLISMicroaggs>

education forum entitled Diversity, Equity, Race, Accessibility, and Identity in LIS (DERAIL) “to address the need for critical discussions of the intersections between social justice issues and our roles as students and information professionals.” Undergraduate student activists led a sit-in demonstration on November 17, 2015 to denounce institutional inequities confronted by students of color. The student organization that led this effort, the Black Student Organization, noted the “tokenizing [of] students of color” and “microaggressions and misinformation in class” as representative of the treatment they faced at the College.<sup>3</sup> During the student sit-in Simmons College President Helen Drinan and Provost Katie Conboy met in public with three undergraduate student leaders who delivered a list of demands. These demands were based on a list that had been compiled decades earlier by the Black Student Organization. That the list of demands had not changed radically was evidence that these issues remained invisible to the administration. Since then, a series of Community Meetings have been held to discuss the list of ten demands; additionally, communication messages have been sent widely over email concerning how each demand is being addressed by the College’s administrative team.

These student initiatives have helped to highlight issues of oppression and structural racism at SLIS and the College, and has spurred the activities of this Task Force. As such, the Task Force will continue to engage with not only students, but also faculty and staff in order to advise the Dean with regard to opening the lines of communication, identifying opportunities to work against oppression, and promoting education to the SLIS community.

## Listening Sessions

Listening Sessions were one way to make student grievances visible and to provide context to the experiences students, staff, and faculty are facing on campus. It was an attempt to engage in honest dialogical and restorative action.

Who, what, when, where, why

## Recommendations

For each recommendation we should consider addressing:

Impact

Timeline

Resources Required

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<sup>3</sup> Students of Color Demand Action from Administration, <https://simmonsvoice.com/2015/11/18/students-of-color-demand-action-from-administration/>

## Communication

***Recommendation 1: Develop robust and integrated modes of communication to convey diversity and inclusion activities, initiatives, etc. across SLIS and Simmons through various communication channels: website, blogs, social media, town hall meetings, etc.***

- **Impact**  
Reach various constituencies, including alums, through different communication venues in order to create transparency and visibility of diversity and inclusion at SLIS
- **Timeline**  
Within the next five months
- **Resources required**  
Dean, staff and student time to participate in administrative meetings that convey the importance of coordinated efforts in achieving D&I goal

***Recommendation 2: Communicate diversity statistics about SLIS student body, staff, faculty, and adjuncts***

- **Impact**  
Create a culture of transparency; open data for research purposes, such as potential student, staff, faculty, and adjunct recruitment and the development of retention mechanisms SLIS-wide and in higher education in general
- **Timeline**  
Within the next three months
- **Resources required**  
Dean and SLIS staff support (e.g., website coordinator, Admissions, etc.)

## Learning about Diversity and Inclusion

***Recommendation 1: Advocate for “inclusive excellence” in SLIS curricula, face-to-face and online, by offering incentives to professors who weave diversity into their degree program curriculum, concentrations, or tracks***

- **Impact**  
Diversity topics can reach more students and professors will feel empowered to participate in diversity training and curriculum initiatives
- **Timeline**  
Begin to implement during the 2016-17 school year
- **Resources required**  
Administrative funding to support the incentivizing process through creative measures (e.g., course buyouts for 3 redesigned courses, conference travel funding); faculty training offerings to have professors achieve “inclusive excellence” with SLIS curricula

***Recommendation 2: Coordinate with the Assessment Committee and Curriculum Committee to advocate for a “diversity audit” of the SLIS curriculum in order to identify existing attention to D&I and opportunities for further integration***

- **Impact**  
Provide a holistic view of the curriculum which will highlight strengths and weaknesses in addressing D&I topics across the program, within the core, and within concentrations.
- **Timeline**  
Implement during the 2016-17 school year
- **Resources required**  
Faculty and staff time to conduct the audit.

***Recommendation 3: Increase opportunities for formal and informal learning and training for faculty, staff, and students on issues of diversity and inclusion.***

- **Impact**  
Demonstrate commitment and visibility of diversity and inclusion at SLIS; empower the SLIS community through various forms of learning and engagement
- **Timeline**  
Implement during the 2016-17 school year
- **Resources required**  
Integration of Simmons administration, DIAC, student group event planning resources