CHANGING OUR CULTURE, CRAFTING OUR FUTURE:
Developing and Implementing Anti-racism Training for Library Employees

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2020, the University of Michigan (U-M) Library, like many others, created an anti-racism research guide in response to the mass protests that erupted following the murder of George Floyd. Despite having one of the oldest diversity councils in academic libraries (Library Diversity Council, or LDC), recent employee surveys have emphasized that racial discrimination and inequities persist within our organization. As we wrapped up the research guide, LDC looked for ways to expand on this work, and move beyond the introductory nature of many anti-racist efforts towards something more actionable that would promote organizational change. This project became the Anti-racism Toolkit. In this paper, members of the Anti-racism Toolkit subcommittee—Naomi Binnie, Jackson Huang, Shannon Moreno, and Maura Seale—will describe the background to the project, the work processes of the subcommittee, how we created the content, implementation of the toolkit, and where the project is now.

BACKGROUND

During the summer of 2020, following national protests around the murder of George Floyd, many of us were forced to stop and reflect on how we explicitly and implicitly participate in white supremacist structures, including in higher education and academic libraries. Many academic libraries in the United States began developing public-facing research guides around racism and anti-racism. At the U-M Library, a group of library employees collaborated to produce something similar. U-M Library has had an established Library Diversity Council (LDC) since 1985,[1] which actively participates in and pushes for organizational and cultural change within the library. The co-chairs of LDC at the time (Shannon Moreno and Maura Seale, two authors of this paper) joined this group as well. During the initial discussions around creating a research guide, group members expressed concern with creating yet another library research guide that duplicated the content of myriad other research guides. Through discussion, the group decided to focus on creating a guide specifically tied to the University of Michigan and southeast Michigan, where the university is located.

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The University of Michigan has historically been a site of Black student activism, from the Black Action Movement in the 1970s to Being Black at Michigan (#BBUM) more recently.[2] Black students are also underrepresented at U-M, accounting for about 5% of the student body but 14% of the state population.[3] U-M is also roughly forty miles west of Detroit, which is 78% Black, the highest proportion of any city in the United States, while southeast Michigan itself is and has historically been, one of the most residentially segregated.[4] Washtenaw County, where U-M is located, is also subject to racial inequities, Ann Arbor itself being 70% white. The anti-racism research guide[5] sought to surface these regional and institutional histories to help users of the guide better understand how racism and anti-racism play a role in their everyday lives as residents of the area and employees of U-M.

DOING THE WORK

The creation of the anti-racism research guide overlapped with a series of library-wide Brave Space Dialogues, organized and hosted by the library's Organizational Development Lead. It soon became apparent to LDC that a more targeted, more advanced, and more robust form of anti-racism training would be helpful to library employees. This was not just due to the creation of the anti-racism research guide and Brave Space Dialogues, but was also based on a 2017 employee survey, focus groups the library conducted with employees of color in 2019, and another survey of library employees conducted 2020-2021 and analyzed over the course of 2021, which several subcommittee members were involved with. Although the library is working to evaluate its policies and practices and includes diversity and anti-racism as a core value,[6] white supremacy is inextricable from both higher education and academic libraries, including at U-M. Change is slow, and not without barriers. Drawing on U-M's Five-Year DEIA Strategic Plan, LDC decided to charge a subcommittee to create an "Anti-racism Toolkit."[7] The subcommittee began with the LDC co-chairs, who then reached out to colleagues already practicing or deeply invested in anti-racist work within the library. Although there has been some turnover in the subcommittee, the members have and continue to occupy a variety of roles and statuses within U-M library: current members are Ariel Ojibway (Circulation and Access Services Information Resources Assistant), Jackson Huang (Digital Collections and Content Ingest Coordinator), Maura Seale (History Librarian), Naomi Binnie (Digital Education Librarian), Shannon Moreno (Offsite Shelving Supervisor), and Lawrence Young (Diversity and Inclusion Specialist).[8] Developing an entirely new training program for approximately 430 library employees felt somewhat daunting, so the subcommittee submitted a proposal to the library's Student Engagement Fellows program, which allowed us to hire two students to help develop the content. Brenna Goss, an undergraduate student in the Ford School of Public Policy, spent two semesters with the subcommittee, and Pratiksha Menon, a doctoral student in Communication and Media, spent over a year with the subcommittee. Both brought an interest and enthusiasm in communicating complex and uncomfortable concepts to broad audiences.

The subcommittee foregrounded the humanity of its members in doing its work, rather than productivity, which necessitated the creation of an independent timeline for the project. Throughout, we recognized that while creating the Anti-racism Toolkit is both vital and necessary work, it does not need to be done at the cost of an individual's mental health. Each of us occupy different roles within the library and have varying availability for projects outside of our core work; accordingly, participation within the subcommittee ebbed and flowed, and some folks rotated off of the subcommittee. Anti-racism work also involves emotional labor, which requires time to be done thoughtfully and thoroughly. Many of us were also involved in other DEIA and anti-racism efforts in other parts of the library, because we are actually invested in pushing for organizational and cultural change. The student fellows were likewise given time and space to read, reflect, and write content, and opportunities to check-in with library employees.[9] The subcommittee also decided early on to engage in open and honest dialogue while respecting varying experiences, perspectives, and vulnerabilities. This allowed for disagreements to move into dialogue and eventually develop into shared understanding.

CONSIDERING OUR ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

The subcommittee began with what we knew of the audience for the toolkit. The toolkit had to be useful to all library employees—librarians, staff, administrators, students—across all classifications and job duties. It had to

be accessible (and appealing) to those that were unfamiliar with anti-racism, but also offer something to active anti-racist practitioners. Generally, individuals who engage in anti-racist and DEIA work are self-selecting, but we wanted to engage all library employees in this work, including individuals who are indifferent, overly invested in notions of neutrality and colorblindness, and even hostile to any discussion of race and other social inequities within the library. Given that the library has a sizeable number of international employees, it also had to explain the particularities of racism and anti-racism in the United States.

We also knew that in order for the toolkit to be used widely within the library, it would need support from library administration. Our library is a large organization, and fairly hierarchical, with six divisions headed by Associate University Librarians, each with multiple layers of management. The subcommittee met frequently with library administration in order to help them understand the importance of the toolkit, endorse it, and ultimately, give employees time to use it. The library tends to avoid mandating training, unless U-M requires it, so the toolkit needed to balance between appealing to employees who might want to use it and being useful to library administration and managers who might want to suggest that employees in their division and direct reports use it. The modules contain challenging content, especially for those who might be new to anti-racist conversations; this content might also be triggering to those who experience racism in their workplace or broader lives. We proceeded with the expectation that anyone using the toolkit would be open to new and difficult information and decided to remind them throughout to take time to reflect and consider what they are learning. Ultimately, we realized we would need to rely on our Diversity and Inclusion Specialist and Organizational Development Lead to make space for difficult conversations sparked by the toolkit, once we had created the content.

DEVELOPING THE TOOLKIT CONTENT

The toolkit intentionally continued the focus of the anti-racism research guide on the specific context library employees live and work in; we very much wanted the toolkit to not feel like yet another generic training, but for employees to learn about the racism embedded in higher education, academic libraries, U-M, and the U-M library. To do this, but to also support learners who were perhaps new to anti-racism, the team decided to structure the toolkit as three distinct but related modules. The team developed learning outcomes for the first two modules through discussion and allowed those outcomes to shape the content and structure of those modules. The first would function as an introduction to racism and anti-racism. This was perhaps the most conventional of the modules and was created by the Student Engagement Fellows. Brenna and Pratiksha worked together to develop and structure the content of the first module following conversations with the team about the audience and organizational context. Their module includes not just histories of racism and its current manifestations in the United States, but also takes on how racism specifically manifests in workplaces like libraries and how anti-racism can benefit both employees and workplaces. Brenna and Pratiksha's work is unique in its focus on workplaces, as distinct from many other anti-racism trainings that are more generally framed as about social life; they walk the learner through topics such as professionalism, civility, and colorblindness that frequently show up in the context of work. They also developed a series of guided reflections and case studies to help learners think more concretely about the content, as well as a list of concrete actions.

The second module was collectively written by subcommittee members, drawing on our experiences with higher education and academic libraries. The module begins with a brief overview of how racial and other inequities historically and currently shape higher education and then moves to the specific case of U-M, beginning with how it has neglected the responsibilities that accompanied the gift of its land by the Council of Three Fires in the Treaty of Meigs, and then exploring racial inequities throughout its two hundred year history. Institutional racism at U-M has been the subject of a good amount of scholarly work, across multiple disciplines, and the toolkit team drew heavily on this literature to create this content.[10] The next section of the module focuses on racism in academic libraries, drawing on the LIS scholarship.[11] It begins with a brief overview of racism in libraries generally, then turns to library labor, collections, and services. The final section turns to the U-M Library specifically. Despite gaps in documentation, the library holds a good amount of internal material on the ways in which racism has and continues to impact library employees. This section begins in 1994 but connects that moment to the library's most recent employee survey, conducted from 2020-2021. As with the first module, this

module includes case studies (modeled after U-M's research integrity training and based on real incidents within the library, including the library's long colonial history with the Philippines[12]) that help learners work through and apply what they have learned to situations they might encounter. The goal of this module specifically is to counter ideas that while racism might be out there in the world, it doesn't affect the contexts in which we work. Higher education, academic libraries, the University of Michigan—these are all often perceived as either neutral, or even progressive institutions. Our work in this module is to make the case that they continue to participate in and even reproduce racial and other inequities.

Both module one and module two were reviewed not just by team members and student fellows, but also by two of the three leadership groups within the library—LDC and Staff Forum Board—whose members often include library employees frustrated and disillusioned by the lack of organizational change. The team created duplicate documents for each group and then asked for any and all feedback in those documents. Team members and student fellows then edited any content they had created based on that feedback (or indicated why they felt modifications weren't necessary). The team was very much interested in inviting library employees to participate in the creation of the toolkit, but also felt that engagement had to be structured in some way given the size of the library staff. Working with LDC and Staff Forum Board offered one form of engagement, and the third module offers another. The third anti-racism toolkit module has not been developed yet, but we are hoping that Associate University Librarians will work with their divisions to create division-specific modules that explore the role of racism and anti-racism within the specific work of that division. As with the other two modules, we are conscious that a lot of anti-racism training can be generic or feel detached from everyday work and life. Moreover, as library employees situated within specific spots within the organization, we feel like we don't necessarily have a good understanding of all of the work that occurs within the library. Finally, working to understand how racism impacts their work and how they might pursue anti-racism in their work would further engage library employees and help the toolkit feel like not another thing added on to their busy days. Throughout, the team has been very invested in breaking down how and why understanding racism and anti-racism is important to U-M Library employees—not as an abstraction, but as something we are all very much embedded in everyday, in myriad ways.

DRAWING ON INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

The subcommittee also thought carefully about the format of the toolkit. After both the Student Engagement Fellows and subcommittee members developed module content in Google Docs and Slides, which allowed us to see how the content fitted together and flowed, we moved it into the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS). We chose this for a variety of reasons. Both U-M and the library use Canvas for student online learning as well as staff training. Many library employees are already aware of Canvas, and the library's E-Learning Committee regularly provides training and support through workshops and consultations. In addition, all U-M staff can create a Canvas login so the toolkit is easily accessible to library employees, and permissions and controls can be put into place, so the toolkit remains solely for library staff use. Canvas also allows for modules to be accessed using a screen reader. However, choosing Canvas for this project is not without its downsides. Canvas is not as flashy or interactive as some other learning management systems such as Articulate Rise. This means the content is text-heavy, which could be challenging for some learners who prefer a more interactive and visual experience. Images can be added, but we chose not to rely on images due to the sensitive nature of the topics we were covering.[13] Finally, Canvas is easy to edit and anyone with the right permissions can make changes, regardless of whether the original designers are available or involved. This allows our toolkit to maintain some sustainability and longevity after the initial subcommittee is disbanded or on hiatus. A text-based toolkit based in Canvas also makes transferring content to a new learning management system straightforward, should it be required.

For both modules, there is a fair amount of content. In order to present the content without overwhelming the learner with too much cognitive input, we broke it up into sections in an attempt at scaffolding. Module one is delivered in six sections, and module two is divided into ten sections. A reflection page can be found at the end of each section. Case studies are also major components of the module content. Through the Quizzing function,

learners will determine how they might handle a difficult situation. Responses to each choice were built in so that learners can view a variety of ways of handling a difficult situation in the most anti-racist way possible, but also emphasize that there might not be a single correct answer.

IMPLEMENTATION PITFALLS

Once the content for the modules was mostly complete and had been sent to LDC and Staff Forum Board for feedback, we turned our attention more seriously to questions of implementation. The subcommittee had been initially formed to create the toolkit, and it felt important to keep our project within that scope—both because of our own limited capacity as volunteers who were taking on this work on top of our regular duties, and because of the common, insidious, and harmful institutional dynamic where those who are interested in DEIA issues (often the employees who are most affected by them due to marginalization on the basis of social identity and/or organizational role) take on a disproportionate amount of the labor without actually having the power to change institutional policy or direction, leading to limited impact and high rates of burnout.

Consequently, in determining the path forward for implementation of the toolkit, we wanted to both to ensure that its impact would be maximized and that we would not be solely—or even primarily—responsible for support once the modules were created. As we describe above, because the toolkit was created to meet an organization-wide need, successful implementation would need to have the backing of library leadership, who are not only familiar with needs across the organization but also have the power to allocate time and resources for employees to go through the modules and integrate anti-racist practices into their operational work. However, we were also aware that library administrators and leadership did not necessarily feel equipped to or have a great track record in implementing library-wide equity-related initiatives—in fact, they were supportive of our work partly because of the recognition that they needed a tool like the one we were creating for themselves as well. Not only would we rely on our Diversity and Inclusion Specialist and Organizational Development Lead to help create space for conversations generated by the toolkit, but we would also work with them to shape our conversation with and direct asks of library leadership and to support the implementation of the toolkit across the library.

In our initial meeting with administrators, we asked for them first to go through the content with the mindset of being learners, so that they could absorb the content and process what was challenging. We felt approaching the modules as learners first was important because deep engagement with the content itself was necessary before developing an institution-wide implementation strategy. We hoped that engaging with the content as learners first would also make it easier for administrators to articulate clear connections to the library's strategic plan and mission in organization-wide communications and support their department heads and unit supervisors through any challenges during implementation and integration into institutional structures such as onboarding, performance evaluations, and professional development.

The subcommittee met with the leadership team in July 2022, with the expectation that it would take them about two months to go through the modules and be ready for us to launch the toolkit, with implementation happening throughout the fall 2022 semester. However, we quickly realized that this implementation timeline was unrealistic in our expectations of leadership. In a follow-up meeting with the Diversity and Inclusion Specialist and Organizational Development Lead, they shared with the team that due to the common academic cultural norms of approaching work with a critique rather than learning mindset, the initial facilitated discussion on the module content was mostly pushback, and we agreed that it made sense for the leadership team to repeat the attempt at having a learning-oriented conversation rather than moving into implementation strategies, as initially intended. Additionally, dispersed decision-making in a large organization (including challenges caused by the lack of a Dean) and the outsourcing of DEIA-related labor to "passionate" volunteers meant that developing an implementation strategy took much longer than expected. The subcommittee needed to constantly push back against the expectation that we would be responsible for ongoing implementation and support, and rather than administrators creating tailored implementation plans and strategies for their own units, the Diversity and Inclusion Specialist and Organizational Development Lead ended up creating generally usable implementation support guidelines. For divisions with division-specific implementation plans, that work was led by a volunteer

committee rather than departmental leadership and was not able to be integrated with any central or institution-wide strategy.

Though we had hoped for an integrated institutional strategy for implementation before launching the toolkit, we ultimately decided to just launch the toolkit once we were done while doing some sustainability planning to support its future. With the tool available to all library employees, those who are interested and need the resources provided by the toolkit can access it. Supervisors, team chairs, and project leads can implement usage of the toolkit in their units, and individual employees will have additional support to integrate anti-racist practices into their particular professional domains. The subcommittee met with LDC and determined that we would work together to draft language for the Dean's Office to send to announce the launch of the toolkit, but we would work together on developing a strategy for future support and sustainability for the toolkit.

The sustainability and future of the toolkit will rest with other members of the library. The Diversity and Inclusion Specialist will take on most of the responsibility, since the content is well within the purview of that role and will also triage feedback on it once it is launched. LDC, which charged the original subcommittee, will also be responsible for review and revisions. We had envisioned module three as being co-created with divisions in order to accurately reflect the work of those divisions but have grown more aware that this places the bulk of the responsibility of developing content on division, department, and unit leadership. Given the size of the library, it is quite siloed, and due to the lack of capacity in some areas, there is a pervasive feeling among some employees that anti-racism is not "their" job, but instead that they should be handheld and led through it. However, creating module three requires the combination of both knowledge of anti-racism and employees' unique expertise around their work in order to create content that fits the needs and professional domain of their division, department, or unit. Whether or not this work we had envisioned moves forward remains to be seen.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, we hope the Anti-racism Toolkit will be useful for our colleagues and for our organization: it fills a training gap in a tailored, targeted, concrete way. However, we are also writing this after having experienced very real challenges to its implementation due to organizational priorities, structures, and dynamics that we do not have the power to alter in the short term. As library workers who are invested in bringing anti-racism to higher education and academic libraries, we are frustrated but also accustomed to the difficulty in achieving organizational and cultural change.

NOTES

1. "Library Diversity Council," University of Michigan Library, accessed February 17, 2023, https://www.lib.umich.edu/about-us/about-library/diversity-equity-inclusion-and-accessibility/library-diversity-council.
2. "The Black Action Movements," History of the William Monroe Trotter Multicultural Center, accessed February 17, 2023, https://apps.lib.umich.edu/online-exhibits/exhibits/show/history-of-the-william-monroe-/the-black-action-movements; "#BBUM (Being Black at the University of Michigan) Twitter Archives, 2013-2015," University of Michigan Library, accessed February 17, 2023, https://search.lib.umich.edu/catalog/record/990146593530106381.
3. "Data & Reports," University of Michigan Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, accessed February 17, 2023, https://diversity.umich.edu/data-reports/; United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts: Michigan," accessed February 17, 2023, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/MI.
4. Othering and Belonging Institute, University of California, Berkeley, "City Snapshot: Detroit," accessed February 17, 2023, https://belonging.berkeley.edu/city-snapshot-detroit; United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts: Ann Arbor and Detroit," accessed February 17, 2023, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/annarborcitymichigan,detroitcitymichigan,MI/PST045221.
5. University of Michigan Library, "Anti-Racism," Research Guide, accessed February 17, 2023, https://guides.lib.umich.edu/Anti-Racism.
6. "Mission and Values," University of Michigan Library, accessed February 17, 2023, https://www.lib.umich.edu/about-us/about-library/mission-and-values.
7. "Strategic Plan," University of Michigan Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, accessed February 17, 2023, https://diversity.umich.edu/strategic-plan/.
8. Former members include Marna Clowney-Robinson (Graduate Student Experience Librarian), Jeff Witt (Organizational Development Lead), and Thomas Dickens (former Diversity and Inclusion Specialist).

9.   They were also paid.

10. Matthew Johnson, *Undermining Racial Justice: How One University Embraced Inclusion and Inequality* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020); Ellen Berrey, "Why Diversity Became Orthodox in Higher Education, and How It Changed the Meaning of Race on Campus." *Critical Sociology 37*, no. 5 (2011):573–96; Ellen Berrey, *The Enigma of Diversity: The Language of Race and the Limits of Racial Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Daniel Hirschman, Ellen Berrey, and Fiona Rose-Greenland, "De-quantifying Diversity: Affirmative Action and Admissions at the University of Michigan." *Theory and Society 45*, no. 3 (June 2016): 265–301, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-016-9270-2.

11. We drew heavily on Karla J. Strand, "Disrupting Whiteness in Libraries and Librarianship: A Reading List," accessed February 17, 2023, https://www.library.wisc.edu/gwslibrarian/bibliographies/disrupting-whiteness-in-libraries/.

12. "ReConnect/ReCollect: Reparative Connections to Philippine Collections at the University of Michigan," accessed February 17, 2023, https://www.reconnect-recollect.com/.

13. We would also have to add alt-text for each instructive or related image and avoid decorative images for accessibility.