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From Siloed to Connected: Using Engagement as a Means to Improve the Culture of a Library Division

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From Siloed to Connected: Using Engagement as a Means to Improve the Culture of a Library Division



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University of Michigan

Conference on Academic Library Management

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This session
will be recorded

Introductions



Richard Adler (he/him)

Coordinator, Michigan
Service Hub

Loves: Gaming and
practicing yoga

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Nabeela Jaffer (she/her)

Program Manager
for Strategic Projects

Loves: Traveling, cooking,
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Rachel Vacek (she/her)

Head, Design
and Discovery

Loves: Playing board
games and baking

[@vacekrae](#)

Land Acknowledgement

The University of Michigan, named for Michigami, the world's largest freshwater system and located in the Huron River watershed, has origins through an 1817 land transfer from the **Anishinaabe, the Council of Three Fires** — the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi. These peoples were traditionally the inhabitants and stewards of this region, along with their neighbors the Seneca, Delaware, Shawnee and Wyandot nations.

Learn more about the [Federally Recognized Tribes in Michigan](#) and the [Indigenous Peoples of Michigan Research Guide](#).

Please also consider exploring the [Land Reparations & Indigenous Solidarity Toolkit](#) and making a donation to the [Indian Land Tenure Foundation](#) or another [Indigenous-led nonprofit](#).



Map of Michigan showing locations of the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples.

Outline

Introductions

Context

Background

Activities

Successes

Challenges

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Context

About U-M and the Library

University of Michigan

- Located in Ann Arbor, Michigan
- ~49K students
- U-M has 19 colleges and offers degree programs in ~250 disciplines

U-M Library

- ~420 library employees
- 7 divisions, plus HathiTrust
 - Deans' Office
 - Collections
 - Learning and Teaching
 - Library Information Technology
 - Michigan Publishing
 - Operations
 - Research



Photograph of the Hatcher Library with a bit of snow

About the U-M Library's culture

- Multiple communities of practice and interest groups
- [Library Diversity Council](#)
- Librarians' Forum and Staff Forum Boards
- Librarians joined a Union to secure collective bargaining rights with university administration
- Local, hybrid, and remote working options
- Multiple types of spaces and tools for individual and collaborative work
- Library employee climate surveys
- Regular brave space discussions about challenges and issues

About the Library IT (LIT) division

- 5 departments, with 56 people total
 - [Design and Discovery](#) (D&D)
 - [Digital Library Applications](#) (DLA)
 - [Automation, Indexing and Metadata](#) (AIM)
 - [Digital Content and Collections](#) (DCC)
 - [Architecture and Engineering](#) (A&E)
 - Plus an Associate University Librarian for LIT + Administrative Assistant
- Multiple teams to support work environment and culture
 - Culture, Tools, Technology Steering, DEIA, Design System
- Conducted short climate surveys in the past

Background

Background

- In 2016, multiple issues were surfacing within LIT
 - People taking on more work than they could handle
 - Desire for more structure in project management
 - Not enough communication about goals/direction
 - Lack of transparency on how decisions are made
 - Need for more training opportunities
 - Lack of tools to support IT tickets, project management, and documentation
 - UX and web accessibility weren't being incorporated early into projects
 - General unhappiness with the siloed culture
- Efforts to address these issues had mostly been done individually
- Jeff Witt (Organizational Development Lead) facilitated conversations w/LIT
- A culture team was created to address the issues that it could
 - Some issues would continue to be addressed by the AUL and/or Department Heads

Culture

Sexual Orientation

Traditions

Values

Customs

Education

Socio-
Economic Status

Language

Food and Drink

Generations

Nationality

Religion

Age

Work Habits

Ethnicity

Gender

Attitudes

Race

Experiences

Health and Wellness

Fish, Water, Groundwater

Fish: Workplace Climate

Climate is about how people inside the organization are experiencing the work environment at any given moment. Climate can shift from time to time and can be widely different from person to person.

Focus = Health of the Fish

Water: Organizational Culture

Culture is about an organization's identity. It includes the systems, processes, values, outputs, norms, tools, language, traditions, etc. It's about how we do things in the organization.

Focus = Health of the Water

Groundwater

Groundwater is the multiple sources of water that make up or flow into the water of an organization. An organization has less control of the health of this water, but can find ways to influence it.

Focus = Culture Enhancing or Contaminating Influences

LIT Culture Team Charge

- Work with LIT in understanding its culture
- Identify areas within LIT's culture that would benefit from discussion and enhanced understanding
- Plan programming to help enhance and support LIT's culture
- Collaborate with other teams within LIT
- Partner on maintaining documentation central to the division
- Advocate for adoption of recommended norms or practices

Zoom Poll

Do you have a group in your library that specifically focuses on your library culture?

Culture Team Activities

Activities: Socializing

- Social gatherings
 - Pre-pandemic:
 - Bowling nights, summer outings with food and live music
 - Pandemic times:
 - Online games/trivia, themed discussions, costume wearing (Halloween), themed Zoom backgrounds, and unstructured conversations.
- Coffee breaks
 - Unstructured, informal get togethers

Activities: Learning from one another

- Workshops
 - Topics: UX and Analytics, website redesign, user behavior, and usability testing
- Informal knowledge sharing
 - Do It Yourself Keyboards:
 - Colleagues did a show-and-tell of their own computer keyboards
 - Book Artistry:
 - Colleagues provided an intro to bookbinding and other book arts
 - Productivity Battles:
 - Colleagues discussed identifying negativity and bias in productivity culture
 - Conference Sharing:
 - Colleagues shared interesting sessions and ideas from the previous year

Activities: Learning from one another

- Programming Practice
 - Sessions to give programmers opportunities to practice basic skills on simple exercises
 - Work together or individually
 - Write code and then talk about it
 - Focus on techniques or topics, not on edge cases or legacy code
- Reading Club
 - Monthly discussions of previously shared articles or books, usually on diversity and anti-racism topics within IT
 - Later expanded to include general technology-related topics as well

Activities: Learning from one another

- LIT DEIA Series
 - Goal to increase our understanding of what anti-racism means and how racism and white supremacy appear on the job, particularly in IT work
 - A series of three interactive workshops:
 - Allyship in Action
 - Moving Beyond Diversity Toward Racial Equity
 - Bystander Intervention
 - Partnered with LIT's Reading Club to explore these topics through related, but separate, events
 - Also partnered with Thomas Dickens, the Library's Diversity and Inclusion Specialist
- These efforts led to the creation of LIT's DEIA Team

Activities: Learning from other institutions

- Digital Preservation Projects across Michigan
 - Two presentations about statewide initiatives to establish systems and methods for digital preservation for large and small cultural institutions
 - Guest speakers: [Matt Schultz](#), Director of Digital Curation and Preservation, Educopia Institute, and [Paul Gallagher](#), Associate Dean for Resources and Digital Strategies, Western Michigan University Libraries
- Trans-Inclusive Design
 - How systems can be designed to respect, honor, and accurately reflect diversity of gender identities and expressions
 - Guest speaker: [Erin White](#), Head of Digital Engagement, Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries

Activities: Normalizing good work habits

- **Movie & Documentation Fridays**
 - A summer program, reserving a room with a large screen to show a movie in the background while participants worked on project documentation
- **“Doc It to Me”**
 - A half-day event for creating/updating documentation, working individually or in teams
- **Onboarding and Buddy Program**
 - Revisited the division’s onboarding documentation
 - Created documentation about LIT’s Buddy Program where a mentor/buddy is matched with a new employee to help them navigate the division’s systems, tools, and culture
- **Assessment**
 - Regularly run surveys asking for feedback on Culture Team programming and impact

Padlet

What types of activities do you/could you offer to enhance your library culture?

<https://padlet.com/vacekrae/ebwdh1oqvipny1cv>

Successes

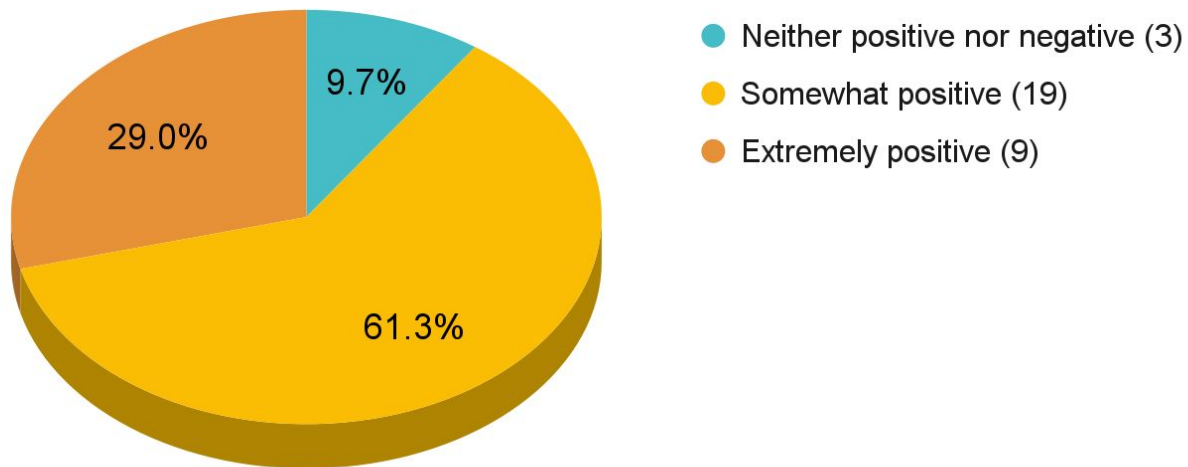
Culture Team Impact

In a FY21 survey of LIT employees that focused on events and Culture Team impact, 33 of 56 people responded:

- Social
 - 77% said we offered just the right amount of social events
- Informational
 - 74% said we offered just the right amount of informational events
 - 20% wanted more of them
- Instructional
 - 60% said we offered just the right amount of instructional events
 - 33% wanted more of them

Culture Team Impact

How would you describe the impact of the Culture Team's work?



Feedback

I see that LIT is driven to make it a better place for everyone.

In general, I like that the Culture Team touches a lot of areas within LIT, which means its work being done by everyone in the division.

I appreciate the time the group spends on ensuring [the division] stays connected, which I'm sure is difficult to do in a remote setting.

The culture team's efforts to sponsor events that bring us all together is great.

Social events and Diversity Reading Club events give a boost to my morale because I enjoy interacting with colleagues.

Events like [the UX Workshops], where we are able to connect and engage with our colleagues, and even more importantly, appreciate what they bring to the organization, are always positive for the culture.

I think some of the discussions at the Reading Club have been enlightening.

The LIT DEIA Team

- Our Anti-Racism series in 2021 was successful up to a point
- Help from Library HR
- Library Diversity Council
- DEIA issues can be as complicated as they are important
- Culture Team members and many others in the division felt LIT needed a team with more expertise and personal experience
- Creation of the DEIA Team

Challenges

Challenges

Unclear Scope

Who is responsible for responding to change in the division?

Lack of

Clarity around expectations of working with other team

Lack of

Clarity about authority

Diversified needs

Of a division with a variety of roles like Devs, Designers, Managers & Librarians

Multiple changes in division leadership

led to making assumptions about support and advocacy

Challenges caused by the Pandemic

- Shift gears to offering remote only meetups
- Freeze on funding
- Zoom fatigue
- Increased siloed behaviors
- Lack of engagement, inspiration, enthusiasm
- Burnout and exhaustion from everything going on in the world
- No food at events

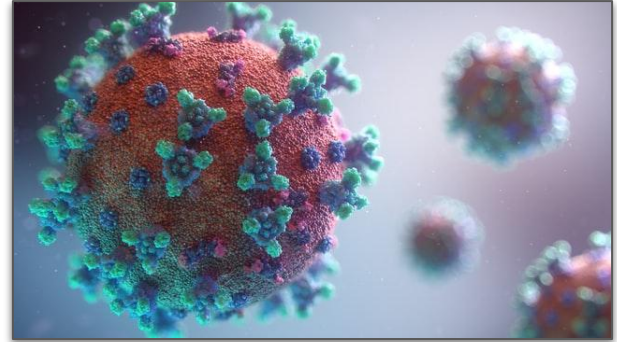


Photo of a virus by [Fusion Medical Animation](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Takeaways

Takeaways

Take the time that's necessary to assess needs, listen to colleagues, understand issues before building programming or other solutions

Keep communication lines open

Leverage new connections with colleagues and find opportunities to work together

Conduct assessment and communicate results and action plans

Takeaways

Recognize when something isn't working and be willing to review and or discontinue it

Get buy-in and support from leadership

Define and regularly revisit the charge and the scope of your team

Recognize that working in silos might not be the core issue; it could be about forming connections

Padlet

What is a next step you or your team could take to improve the equity, engagement, and overall health of your library culture?

<https://padlet.com/vacekrae/jhjlspipaqe2ca9>

Q&A

Thank you!

More questions? Contact us!

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Recommend Resources

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