

## Diversity Plans for Academic Libraries: An Example from the University of Montana

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### Introduction

In 2009, the provost at the University of Montana (UM) convened a task force to revise the university's diversity plan. The initial plan, drafted in accordance with a directive from the state Board of Regents to "develop and carry out a plan to increase racial and cultural diversity in three key areas: student population, workforce and curriculum," was created in 1991 and was supposed to have a shelf life of ten years.<sup>1</sup> Nearly two decades later, the recently hired provost saw the need for an immediate revision of the plan. By 2010 the task force had completely overhauled the university's diversity plan and drafted a document that was endorsed by the administration and by the student, faculty, and staff senates.

The plan included four strategic choices with corresponding goals and action items. The first strategic choice directed the university to "Enhance the campus culture of understanding, respect, support, and advancement of diversity," and the corresponding goal (1.1) was to "provide leadership and support for continuous improvement of diversity."<sup>2</sup> Both the strategic choice and this first goal were intended to shape a culture of diversity. Rather than strictly focusing on demographics and the recruitment and retention of diverse students and faculty (which were also addressed in the plan), the first strategic choice and its goals focused on the institutional culture in order to better support an environment in which diverse students and faculty could succeed. The first two action items specific to goal 1.1 immediately established that efforts at creating a culture of diversity at UM would be the responsibility of both the central administration and the various subsidiary units of the institution. Action item 1.1.2, in particular, directed the institution to "Create at the college and school levels, the executive office level, and in subunits as appropriate and practicable, diversity action plans and annually report on progress toward meeting diversity goals."<sup>3</sup>

At least one unit, the School of Law, had a diversity plan in place. But other colleges and schools, including the Mansfield Library, were committed under the new institutional diversity

plan to create plans for their own units. In the summer of 2011, under the direction of an interim Dean, the Mansfield Library began the process of drafting our first diversity plan. The library has a history of focusing on diversity initiatives but had never drafted a formal plan that could strategically guide library decisions and actions. The institutional diversity plan, with its explicit direction to the units, provided an opportunity for the library to think strategically about new initiatives while also prompting us to codify many of our existing initiatives, particularly in the areas of human resources, library displays, and outreach and collaboration. This article will detail the process the library undertook to draft and implement that plan, addressing a gap in the literature on diversity plans in academic libraries. While academic libraries of varying sizes have implemented diversity plans, and while there is varied literature about the importance of diversity and diversity plans in academic libraries, there are few resources detailing the step-by-step development of a plan, from planning through adoption and implementation, that libraries without diversity plans can use to craft documents that work for the library and for the institution. This article focuses on the process of developing and implementing an academic library diversity plan from forming a working committee to securing endorsement of the plan. While the planning and implementation process described here details the development of the plan at UM, this article serves as a model for other academic librarians and library personnel seeking to create a plan for their institutions.

### Literature Review and Association Plans

Though diversity has long been a concern of academic libraries, scholarly articles on the creation of diversity-specific plans for libraries are not well addressed in the literature. A search of the literature for diversity and academic libraries between 2000 and 2014 returns 475 results, of which nearly half are book reviews. Much of what is written focuses on diversity in recruitment, services, and collection development. In the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it became clear that diversity would be a major priority for organizations, including academic libraries, interested in moving into the future and the importance of diversity in strategic planning was laid out by several authors.<sup>4</sup> The importance of leadership and financial support is noted in several articles and the need for assessment is a common theme.<sup>5</sup> Hanna, Cooper, and Crumrin write about creating a diversity council and the initiatives and programming that came from their strategic plan for diversity, but provide no detailed information on the creation of the actual diversity plan.<sup>6</sup> Grob notes the development of a diversity action plan for the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of ACRL but her article, while providing more details in plan

development than others, nonetheless is not directed towards academic libraries and is not explicitly written as a template for those wishing to create their own plans.<sup>7</sup>

Jody Gray, the Diversity Outreach Librarian at the University of Minnesota Libraries, addresses the importance of diversity plans, creating a framework for building a diversity plan housed on the American Library Association website.<sup>8</sup> This framework and the accompanying information provide librarians and library personnel with solid resources available for structuring a diversity plan. Gray also maintains a blog, Diversity Resources for Academic Libraries, where she links to information about environmental scans, diversity committees and plans at various academic libraries, and provides access to a toolkit including activity grids and logic models that libraries can use to address diversity plans and initiatives.<sup>9</sup>

Charlene Maxey-Harris and Toni Anaya developed the *Diversity Plans and Programs ARL SPEC Kit 319* in 2010. An excellent resource, it is the most useful and comprehensive resource for academic librarians interested in developing diversity plans. Maxey-Harris and Anaya have gathered together the diversity plans from a variety of public and private academic libraries, and many more exist and are easily located via web searches for academic libraries and diversity. The authors note in their SPEC survey on diversity plans and programs that

“a diversity plan may include a statement of diversity values or goals, a description of strategies for recruiting ethnically/culturally diverse staff to the library and retaining them once they are hired, an outline of programs that promote ethnic/cultural sensitivity in the workplace, results from a work climate assessment, and other similar elements. It may be a stand alone document or part of a broader document, such as a library strategic plan on an institution-wide diversity plan.”<sup>10</sup>

In 2012 the Association of College and Research Libraries created their Standards on Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries. These standards focus on cultural competency, which is

“a set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that enable a person or group to work effectively in cross-cultural situations; the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes,

affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each.”

They “provide a framework to support libraries in engaging the complexities of providing services to diverse populations, and recruiting and maintaining a diverse library workforce. The standards may also serve as a starting point from which libraries can develop local approaches and goals in the context of their organizations’ mission and situation.”<sup>11</sup> The American Library Association’s Staff Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan was developed in 2003 and was used to inform the drafting of the ACRL Standards. Incorporating seven goals to advance diversity at the ALA, this plan lists various action items and the parties responsible for implementing them. Over a decade old in 2014, the version available via the ALA’s website lists no status updates on any of the listed goals.<sup>12</sup> Though action may be in progress on each of the goals, this example provides a reminder that communicating about the progress of the plan is important. Consistently reporting out on action items, including those action items which cannot be achieved for one reason or another, maintains open lines of communication and highlights important steps made towards implementing initiatives.

### Beginning the Process

In the summer of 2011 the librarian in charge of coordinating the library’s diversity efforts put together a small working group charged with drafting a diversity plan for the library. Before it could be completely populated with librarians and staff, the role of this working group within the library needed to be carefully explained to the management groups of the library. There was some amount of initial confusion internally, including questions about why a diversity-specific plan was being drafted and about how the new group would differ from a previous iteration of the library’s diversity committee, which had existed to plan and implement diversity related displays and events. In addressing the first question, our library had two strong advantages: 1) a directive from the University to create a unit-specific plan and 2) an interim Dean who understood and strongly supported diversity.

Responding to the second question was a bit more complicated. Although the library’s previous diversity committee had not been active for several years, it was never formally dissolved and there was some confusion about if or how a new working group would interact with the previous committee. In the summer of 2010 the librarian charged with coordinating diversity initiatives, who had served as chair of the original diversity committee, recommended

that it serve on an *ad hoc* basis to address specific exhibits, displays, or diversity initiatives as they arose. As a result, there was some initial confusion about whether or not the original diversity committee would be reconvened to draft the library's diversity plan. The diversity coordinator recommended that an entirely new working group be formed in order to draft a plan. She made this decision to address various concerns: in order to draft a plan in a timely fashion the library needed a working group that could meet regularly and frequently in order to produce a document in a timely manner; because drafting the plan would take several months at least, the diversity coordinator was hesitant to call together the original committee, which had agreed to serve to help with displays and exhibits but which had not discussed longer term commitments; and at least one member of the original committee was a university employee not associated with the library, while another was no longer employed at the library. For these reasons the diversity coordinator recommended that the new working group be formed with the sole purpose of drafting a plan for the library. Once drafted, the group would disband and a new diversity committee would be formed internally with a charge of administering the plan during its lifespan.

The working group was made up of six individuals: four librarians, one chosen for her work with diverse populations, the librarian responsible for assessment coordination at the library, the librarian at the University's two-year campus library, and the diversity coordinator, who served as chair; and two staff members chosen from an open call and representing the technical services side of the library. All working group members were committed to advancing the culture of diversity in the library and on campus and dedicated to creating the plan in a timely fashion. Working group membership was finalized in late summer of 2011. We had initially hoped to have a draft of the plan available for review by the entire library by the fall semester of 2011, but due to the late formation of the working group and the amount of work necessary to draft a plan we were not able to share a draft until February 2012.

### Drafting the Plan

Our first step was to consult the ACRL Diversity Standards, which had been released in draft version earlier in the spring of 2011.<sup>13</sup> These provided us with useful definitions and standards that we used to begin thinking about the role of diversity in academic libraries. This and other readings, including related professional, library, university, and state documents, were kept in a folder accessible by all working group members. Members were asked to read through all of the documents and begin thinking about the directions for our library. The ARL SPEC Kit

319 was also extremely useful, particularly in terms of providing examples of the diversity plans of other academic libraries.<sup>14</sup> These sample plans, gathered into one collection, proved invaluable for the working group, who were able to peruse them for common threads and for particularly interesting action items that could be adapted to our library.

With the committee in place and preliminary reading underway, we began to outline the steps that would give us a workable plan with a set timeline. We developed the following set of steps for our drafting process:

1. Develop a diversity mission for the library.
2. Develop a diversity definition.
3. Develop a narrative setting the plan in professional context (referencing the ALA Bill of Rights, Code of Ethics, IFLA documents, etc.); University context (referencing the academic strategic plan and university diversity plan); place context (referencing relevant Montana state and Board of Regents policies); and human rights context (referencing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights).
4. Develop strategic choices, goals, and action items.
5. Determine a timeline for implementation and review.
6. Share with all library personnel for review.
7. Share with library faculty and Dean for review and endorsement.

It was very important for the working group to create a plan that was not just comprised of a list of action items and goals but that also situated diversity in the scope of the library, the university, the profession, and human rights. We spent significant time considering how to draft a plan that would communicate to library personnel and to faculty, staff, and students that the library values diversity and is committed to the principles of diversity. We were fortunate in the development of both our mission statement and definition of diversity, as both the library and the university had documents that we could adapt easily for our plan. For our mission statement, we turned to an internal document. In 2010 the library faculty had been asked by the interim Dean to develop “core principles” that spoke to the heart of who we are as a library. “Diversity” was one of the principles faculty adopted, detailing what diversity means for our library in the following statement:

“The Mansfield Libraries support The University of Montana’s strong commitment to creating a vibrant and welcoming culture that expects and respects diversity. Our patron base includes the students, faculty, and staff at UM as well as community members of all backgrounds. We support diversity through our collections, services, instruction, and physical and virtual environments in recognition of our unique responsibility to and long history of upholding equal access, intellectual freedom, and freedom of expression.”<sup>15</sup>

When considering the diversity mission of our library, we found that this core principle statement worked well as a mission statement, as it aligned our mission with the university’s commitment to diversity while also detailing how specifically – through collections, services, instruction, and environment – the library supports diversity on campus. We chose to adopt the entire principle, as written, as our mission statement on diversity.

The university’s definition of diversity, taken from their diversity plan, was extremely useful as well. It extends the definition of diversity beyond the sphere of legally protected classes and includes “ideas and perspectives” as an aspect of diversity that it values – an aspect particularly in line with library values. The university, in their diversity plan, also notes “The definition of diversity does not limit but provides a context for this Plan.”<sup>16</sup> Our library adopted the university’s definition wholesale. Incorporating both existing mission and definition statements into the plan helped us align the plan with the larger university and library commitments to diversity, helped situate us in the language our own institution was using, and provided us ready-made building blocks for starting to think about action items.

The chair of the working group began drafting a narrative that would provide context for the plan while each member of the committee began developing a list of action items. We wanted our plan to mirror the university’s diversity plan, and chose to use their language of strategic choices as big picture philosophies, goals as broad ways in which we will address each choice, and action items as concrete ways of achieving specific goals. We decided to start with action items rather than strategic choices or goals. Doing this allowed us to think of actual, measurable steps that we wanted to accomplish. Our plan was to gather all of our action items, see where there was overlap, decide which ones we wanted to (or could reasonably) include in the plan, and then group those into goals and strategic choices. This strategy worked well for us as it put our initial focus not on the principles of diversity, or on what our ultimate goals were, but on which actionable steps we could commit to taking in order to actually begin addressing diversity in our library. This focus on the steps that we wanted to take (or that we were taking, but that had never been codified) provided us with solid footing for the creation of a plan that

was ultimately about action and progress rather than about diversity as an aspiration. While aspects of our plan were certainly, and deliberately, aspirational, we did not want to lose sight of the small steps that would bring about change.

The action items were developed from four sources: the UM Diversity Plan; best practices that we discovered in our own research; the ACRL Diversity Standards, which include other libraries' diversity plans; and things that we were already doing at the Mansfield Library. We compared lists of action items and prioritized them according to what we reasonably wanted to accomplish in the time period we set for plan – three years. There was significant overlap in the action items that work group members brought to the table, and we were able to fairly quickly combine some, reword others, and set the rest aside for later plans. We included several actions that were already underway at the library that we wanted to recognize and build upon. This was a deliberate decision that brought together many disparate elements of the library's efforts to promote diversity in the building and on campus. For example, the library regularly created displays that highlighted campus diversity events, including the International Culture and Food Festival and the Kyi-Yo Pow-Wow, both large student-organized events. We committed to continuing our complementary displays around these events and codified that in the plan. We also included initiatives that we wanted to not only codify, but build upon. For example, we regularly host orientation tours for new international students. We wanted to expand these tours into a meet and greet event for international students, Native American students, and students with disabilities and wrote an action item that detailed this as something we were committed to growing. In this way, we were able to highlight the good work the library was already doing but that had not ever been formally codified in library documents. This practice was also a good way to bring attention to the work that units and individuals were doing in the library, helping to establish that diversity as communicated in this new plan is something that the library has been committed to for years. We were careful to note in all communication that the inclusion of action items already underway was not an indication that they were being done badly, but rather quite the opposite – that these were things that we wanted to highlight as practices worth institutionalizing and sustaining.

The chair saved all action items brought forward by working group members, and actions not incorporated into this iteration of the plan will be revisited when we revise the plan in 2015. Action items were then grouped into common goals, which were then nestled under strategic choices. Because the plan set the course of diversity for the entire library, the action items, goals, and strategic choices necessarily involved many people beyond the work group. Upon the completion of the first draft, the working group invited individuals whose units or

offices would be responsible for major strategic choices to meet with us to share their opinions of the goals and action items under each choice. We had productive meetings with representatives from information technology and human resources, who both pointed out the strengths, weaknesses, and omissions in the goals and actions under their respective choices. For example, the library's IT staff helped us clarify some of the technical language in the plan and suggested we collapse two action items dealing with creating links to the webpages of external diversity offices on campus into one action item that called for the development of a diversity page on the library's website with the links included on that page. Such suggestions not only strengthened the plan, but also allowed the working group to build support among key staff members in the library before introducing it to library personnel at large. After successful meetings the draft was revised based on their feedback and then shared with the entire library at an all-library meeting. All library employees were invited to send comments, questions, or suggestions about the plan to the chair or to any other working group members. After the meeting the chair of the working group sent a follow-up email encouraging people to send in comments via email or through campus mail.

Library employees were active in responding to the plan. The chair made it a priority to engage with each person who provided comments, questions, or suggestions about the plan. Feedback was shared with the work group, who carefully reviewed all comments and used them to edit the plan once more. In many cases, library employees offered rewording suggestions that greatly strengthened or clarified action items or goals. For example, many people suggested that we more carefully define some of the language we used in the plan, noting that terms such as "universal design" and "built environment" were not familiar to them. In other cases comments identified areas not initially addressed in the plan but added upon receipt of the comments. For example, an action item that called for the production of a piece of art depicting the word "library" in Native Montana languages was changed to include additional languages in order to recognize our large international student population. In some cases, feedback offered us opportunities to discuss Montana's unique cultures and the library's role on campus and in the state. We were able to open conversations about the variety of Native cultures in Montana and share our commitment to focus on the Native American cultures in Montana based on our understanding of our place in Indian Country as well as on university and state commitments to provide access to education to Native American students. We were very concerned with being reflective of place in our plan, and the specific focus on Montana's tribal nations did three things: 1) signaled to Native students that the library recognizes and acknowledges the various tribal cultures in the state, 2) communicates to non-Native students

that there is a wide variety of unique cultures right here in Montana, and 3) highlights to visitors that “diversity” does in fact exist in Montana. We were also gratified to receive a comment praising our efforts to include a focus on Native American cultural awareness.

Not all comments could be implemented, but we were very deliberate in engaging all library personnel who provided feedback, responding individually to everyone who contacted us. Upon reviewing and incorporating the comments, we sent the plan to the Dean of Libraries and then to the library faculty, who as part of the University’s system of shared governance have voting rights on internal policies, for official endorsement. The diversity plan was unanimously endorsed in March of 2012, and the final draft was announced to the library and placed on the library’s website. The task force disbanded as a new diversity committee, charged with administering the plan over the next three years, was put in place.

### Implementing the Plan

The new iteration of the library’s diversity committee was solely charged with administering the plan. It was populated by an open call to all interested library personnel and ultimately comprised of three faculty members, including the diversity coordinator, who serves as chair, and three staff members from various departments in the library. The work of this committee in the first year of the plan was to prioritize action items for implementation on a year-by-year basis. Committee members were asked to share their top priorities among the action items and as a group we narrowed individual choices into a set of action items that we would pursue over the next twelve months. The chosen action items ranged from small and simple actions such as assigning a liaison librarian to the Disability Services for Students and TRiO Student Support Services offices, to larger and more ambitious actions such as conducting an internal climate survey. Those action items that could be simply assigned and completed were, based on the interests and expertise of individual members of the committee. Others, such as conducting a climate survey, required approval from the Dean and the formation of other committees charged with making progress towards specific action items. Still others, such as providing a wheelchair for use by patrons as needed, had to be abandoned due to liability issues of which the work group drafting the plan had not been aware.

In administering the plan, it became clear that the diversity committee would not be in charge of actually implementing each action item. Some, such as the creation of an eAccessibility policy or the administration of a climate survey, were clearly the responsibilities of specialists within the library. In these instances the diversity committee was able to provide

support to these individuals, either through help drafting policy or administering surveys, or simply by advocating for these actions with library administration. Because the plan welcomed and incorporated feedback from all library personnel willing to provide it, and was then endorsed by the faculty, the action items and goals within could be implemented without extra layers of approval. This meant that, for example, creating multilingual signage was not up for debate or consideration – it was an endorsed action item and could be implemented. In this way we bypassed a lot of the bottlenecks that can hinder progress by requiring that items go through multiple layers of approval on a situation-by-situation basis. Because the plan had been shared and endorsed, the diversity committee was free to prioritize actions as they saw fit and begin work on implementing them.

Of course, one of the challenges in implementing some of the action items was securing funding. It became apparent quickly after the formation of the committee that a budget would be necessary to carry out the action items. In fact, this was something that the work group drafting the plan had considered from the start. The work group included an action item that committed the library to identifying “funding opportunities to address short- and long-term diversity initiatives.”<sup>17</sup> Funding opportunities could come in many forms, including grants, line items in the budget, or gifts. In the first year of the plan the diversity committee chair was able to successfully argue that a line item should be dedicated to support the work of implementing the action items in the plan. Library administration assigned a modest but much appreciated budget to the committee who then used it to meet the objectives of the prioritized action items.

After the first year of the diversity plan, the committee prepared an annual report that was shared with the library administration and all library personnel. The diversity committee, along with ancillary committees, task forces, and individuals, made tremendous progress towards achieving many of the prioritized action items. A few of the actions accomplished just in the first year of the plan include:

- Highlight regional and historical linguistic diversity in signage by creating select trilingual signs in English, Salish, and perhaps Kootenai.
- Work with Archives & Special Collections to choose, print, mount, and display permanently archival photographs representing diversity at UM.
- Include a statement of library commitment to diversity and cultural competency in faculty and professional job descriptions and postings. Include the ability to work with a diverse population and/or cultural competency as qualifications for all jobs.

- Conduct an external diversity survey and embed findings into service planning and future iterations of the diversity plan.

These are just a few of the actions completed by the summer of 2013. Many more are underway. In the summer of 2013 the diversity committee met to prioritize new action items, secure continued funding, and work to achieve progress towards creating a library that values and reflects diversity. Already in 2014 diversity has been included in the library strategic plan, the eAccessibility policy is being updated, and a call for student artists to create a diversity-themed piece is underway. In the next year and a half the committee will likely make continued progress towards meeting the action items, and in the summer of 2015 the plan will be completely revisited and revised with new action items to ensure progress into the future.

## Conclusion

This article details the process librarians and library staff members at the Mansfield Library undertook to create a diversity plan. It addresses a gap in the literature concerning the detailed development of diversity plans for academic libraries. Our goal was to create a plan that provided us with strategic direction on diversity issues, helped us codify diversity initiatives that were currently underway but not reflected in library documents, and develop strategies for continuing to promote diversity through the library.

The steps undertaken by our library can be adapted by libraries interested in developing diversity plans but unsure of where to begin. All of the stages described here - forming a working group, choosing a mission statement, drafting action items, soliciting and incorporating feedback, and securing endorsement - can be adjusted to the specific purposes of library personnel at other institutions. While we had a mandate from our university to create this plan, we encourage other libraries to begin developing their plans even without a larger university directive. Crafting a diversity plan for academic libraries helps direct decision making in the library and highlights the library's commitment to diversity. Such plans can showcase the values of the library and serve as roadmaps for the development and implementation of diversity initiatives.

In the summer of 2015 the library will undergo a systematic review of the diversity plan and rewrite it with an eye towards the next three years. We will likely undergo a similar process as the one described here. After reviewing our progress towards accomplishing action items, we

will review action items not included in the first iteration of the plan and also consult the feedback we received from our external diversity survey. In hindsight, it might have been better for our initial plan development if we had had the data from external surveys or environmental scans, but working under a deadline prevented us from taking this into account as we developed our initial plan. Libraries who have survey data should certainly carefully consider and incorporate such data into their plan development.

Action items, strategic choices, and goals will be removed, revised, or revisioned as we move forward into the future with our diversity plan. As we consider our progress and look forward to new opportunities, we will also be able to see those places where implementation or reporting need to be strengthened. We crafted our diversity plan as a living document and encourage other libraries to do the same. The careful creation of a plan can result in a document that can guide the library as it implements diversity initiatives while leaving room for the inevitable growth that comes with trying to create a culture of diversity.

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**Published:** February 2015

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<sup>2</sup> "Diversity Plan: University of Montana," Equal Opportunity & Affirmative Action Office. Accessed January 14, 2014. <http://www.umt.edu/eo/diversity/diversityplan.php>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>6</sup> Kathleen A. Hanna, Mindy M. Cooper, and Robin A. Crumrin. *Diversity programming and outreach for academic libraries*. Oxford: Chandos, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Julie Grob, "RBM, Special Collections, and the Challenge of Diversity: The Road to the Diversity Action Plan. *RMB* 4 no. 2 (2003) 74-108.

<sup>8</sup> "Strategic Planning for Diversity," American Library Association, Accessed January 31, 2014. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity/workplace/diversityplanning>

<sup>9</sup> Jody Gray, "Diversity resources for Academic Libraries Blog," <http://diversitylibraries.blogspot.com/>. Accessed January 31, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Charlene Maxey-Harris and Toni Anaya, *SPEC Kit 319: Diversity Plans and Programs*, series ed. Lee Ann George. Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 2010, 18.

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<sup>11</sup> “Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries (2012),” Association of College & Research Libraries. Accessed January 14, 2014.

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<sup>14</sup> Maxey-Harris and Toni Anaya, *SPEC Kit 319: Diversity Plans and Programs*.

<sup>15</sup> “Mansfield Libraries Diversity Plan 2012-2015,” Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library. Accessed January 14, 2014. <http://www.lib.umt.edu/files/MLDiversityPlan.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Equal Opportunity & Affirmative Action Office. “Diversity Plan: University of Montana.”

<sup>17</sup> Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library “Mansfield Libraries Diversity Plan 2012-2015”