

Check(Out) Your Privilege or: How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Putting on a Diversity Event

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The University of Oregon Libraries' well-established Library Diversity Committee adopted a newly energized tone when a new Dean of Libraries joined the institution and assumed the responsibility of chairing the committee. Inspired by the sense of urgency in her leadership, our committee recognized the need to move conversations surrounding diversity into action which, ultimately, resulted in a public program focused on privilege. Mia McKenzie (2014), Lambda Literary Award-winning author and creator, Director, and Editor-in-Chief of Black Girl Dangerous Press, said this of privilege: "The bottom line here is that if you acknowledge your privilege and then just go ahead and do the same things anyhow, you have done absolutely zero things differently from people who don't acknowledge privilege at all. Because the outcome is exactly the same...I suggest we stop talking about 'acknowledging' it, and start focusing seriously on 'pushing back against it.'" To this end, the Diversity Team chose to put on a "stacks crawl" - traditionally defined as a staff-guided tour of a Library's stacks and facilities designed to acquaint patrons with the library, its physical spaces, programs, services, and collections - as a means of familiarizing our community (and ourselves) with the library's resources on diversity and privilege. Our committee quickly agreed that white privilege was essential to the discussion, as we understood this topic to be a polarizing one, and as the student population of the University of Oregon in the fall of 2016 identified themselves as 59.87% white (University of Oregon n.d.), while the makeup of the overall population of the area surrounding Eugene was reported at 85.8% white according to the latest available census (United States Census Bureau n.d.). The initial concept of the event generated excitement among the members, and over the course of

several months, evolved into a powerful and timely public program, *Check(Out) Your Privilege: Library Stacks Crawl and Facilitated Diversity Discussion*, held on November 2, 2016. This chapter will discuss the ways this idea evolved, the strategies employed to bring it to fruition, and the lessons learned.

The Nucleus of the Idea

Discussions about putting on a diversity event began in January 2016. While the practical components of the event continually evolved, we settled on two objectives that remained unchanged. The event was intended to: 1) raise awareness of issues related to privilege, and allow attendees to discuss these issues in a safe, open space and 2) raise awareness of the library collections (specifically as they relate to privilege), and allow attendees to interact with the collections. In order to efficiently manage the logistics of the event, and provide staffing on the day of the event, a sub-committee, the Stacks Crawl Working Group, was formed. This group was comprised of three co-leads, Damon Campbell, Lydia Harlan, and Rachel Lilley, as well as four additional library staff. We were given a \$1000 budget to cover marketing and catering costs.

Originally, we imagined the event as a series of stacks crawls, each covering an area of privilege. The crawls would be held in branch libraries around campus, and the series would close with a panel discussion in the main library after the last crawl. As we worked through the details of how this would work logistically, however, we realized the idea of a multi-day event was too unwieldy, as it would be difficult for the Stacks Crawl Working Group to maintain both the working capacity and enthusiasm required for such a program. Further, we eventually ruled out the idea of holding discussions in the stacks, as these had the potential to disrupt the study and work of patrons and staff, and might inhibit an in-depth discussion of the resources and

issues at hand. In addition, we wanted to partner with campus and community experts in different areas of research to help us deepen our understanding of privilege, and felt that active discussions with these experts would not be easily accomplished while exploring the stacks. Rather, we felt a sit-down discussion, inspired by the idea of a traditional stacks crawl, would make for a more productive and focused discussion, and would allow attendees to more freely share their experiences on the emotionally and politically charged topic of privilege. We decided to host the “crawls” and panel on the same day, with each “crawl” presented as a breakout session in a separate room in the main library building. Attendees, library facilitators, and expert panelists would break into groups, proceed to their designated rooms, discuss the available information resources and their experiences with their chosen area of privilege. The concluding panel would bring all the attendees back together in the main room, and would give them an opportunity to share what they’d learned, any experiences they’d had in confronting privilege, and workshop dialogues for dealing with privilege in the real world. We created a scope statement to track the goals and scope of the event, and we referred to this document often in the course of our planning to ensure we remained on task.

The ultimate timing of the event was the result of a few factors, including: the academic calendar, faculty and staff professional development schedules, and the then-upcoming presidential election. Hosting the event during the academic year would ensure that most of the campus community would have the opportunity to join us. Equitable access to the event was paramount; we wanted to give as many people the opportunity to attend as possible, while recognizing that the topic we’d chosen could be seen as a divisive one. Hosting an event about an issue like privilege during a difficult political season ran the risk of creating polarizing conversation and alienating some members of the campus community. Yet it also provided an

opportunity we felt we could not ignore: the opportunity for an engaged and moderated discussion about privilege in a safe space. In order to further maximize attendance, we decided to host the event in the early afternoon, as we received suggestions that attendees and participants would likely be more able to take an afternoon away from work versus the morning. Additionally, hosting the event in the afternoon allowed the planning committee to deal with any last minute preparations or issues that arose in the morning to ensure the event's success. These revisions to the structure and timing of the event were concluded by March 2016, and were approved by both the Dean of Libraries and the Division of Equity and Inclusion.

Not an Exact Science

We turned our attention back to content, and selected five facets of privilege to be highlighted: cisgender (a term used to describe someone whose personal gender identity and biological sex match) privilege, economic privilege, male privilege, straight privilege, and white privilege. A Stacks Crawl Working Group Member was assigned to each area of privilege as a library facilitator, and they accepted a range of responsibilities.

1. Library Resources. Library Facilitators researched their chosen area of privilege, selected relevant information resources from the consortial library catalog, and made physical items available for the event. In the months following the event, library facilitators transformed their extensive resource lists into LibGuides, which are now available on the UO Libraries website.
2. Breakout Session Questions. Leaders of the Stacks Crawl Working Group formed a shared set of questions for use during the breakout sessions, but library facilitators were encouraged to modify these or create their own in order to facilitate discussion of their facet of privilege.

3. Breakout Session Rooms. Leaders of the Stacks Crawl Working Group identified the five rooms in the library that would be used for breakout sessions, and assigned a room to each facilitator. Library facilitators were responsible for personally booking these rooms once the rooms had been assigned to them.
4. Experts. Most significantly, library facilitators were charged with identifying and booking panelists from the university community to serve as topic experts for the breakout sessions and/or closing panel.

Our campus and community topic experts/panelists were charged with bringing a wealth of knowledge about their area of privilege to the event, assisting in the facilitation of discussions during breakout sessions, and responding to questions during the panel if they also served as panelists. We provided our scope statement to our panelists, explained the impetus behind the event, and how the logistics of the discussions and panel would operate. With a panel of five experts and no obvious leading area of privilege, it was suggested that we recruit a moderator for the panel discussion. Dr. Sari Pascoe, Assistant Vice President for Campus and Community Engagement, Office of the Vice President for Equity and Inclusion, agreed to take on this crucial role in event.

Intended audience and audience size were critical considerations in the course of planning the event. We represent a university library, and one of our event goals was to highlight the information resources to which we provide access. The university community (students, staff, faculty, etc.), as a major constituent group, was our primary audience. However, the wider Eugene community also utilizes campus facilities, especially the library, and we wanted to include them in the discussion. The size of our potential audience presented a challenge; such a program could appeal to, and conceivably draw, a large crowd of attendees, but we had no real

way of knowing how many people would actually attend. To that end, the space we opted to use for our opening remarks and closing panel lent itself to a flexible number of attendees. In order to know how much refreshment to order from catering, we had to make an educated guess, so we planned for approximately fifty attendees from the university community and Eugene area. We tried to ensure a selection of snacks and beverages that would provide options for multiple palates and dietary restrictions, and our final catering bill came to \$300.

By August 2016, the Stacks Crawl Working Group had begun brainstorming on our marketing efforts. During a meeting with the Library's Communications and Marketing Team, we came up with the idea of an activity station where people could create DIY buttons out of old magazines to represent the area of privilege with which they most closely identified or wanted to learn more about. This activity station would be available during the welcome portion of the event, to be used as an ice-breaker. The concept was for people to literally "tag their privilege" by pinning a button on themselves. We liked this idea in particular because we thought it would blend seamlessly into social media promotion. We borrowed a button-making machine from another department, purchased button-making supplies totaling \$43.00, and mocked up a few dozen buttons as examples for the event activity. These sample buttons were used in the poster design and in the social media campaign. Throughout the next few months, we remained in touch with the marketing team to attempt to crystallize our marketing vision regarding the layout and placement of posters, and promotion via social media. In all, the marketing department produced and printed our posters, helped develop the idea of the button making station, and shared information about the event via social media. Leaders of the Stacks Crawl Working Group distributed the posters to several UO departments, placed posters in strategic locations

throughout campus and beyond, and continued to raise awareness of the event through an email campaign via UO-based listservs.

Our final plan for the event offered an introduction to the concept of privilege using DIY buttons, a breakout session on each area of privilege selected, a chance to interact with the collections related to those areas, and closed with a participatory panel discussion on all areas of privilege. Throughout September and October, the Stacks Crawl Working Group members focused on finalizing resources and confirming panelists, and kept track of individual progress on a logistics spreadsheet. At this point in the process, our goals were to confirm that all of the major planning points of the event were complete, and to track on and resolve any outstanding details. We finalized our catering order, reserved spaces for breakout discussions, and confirmed panelist attendance. As October 2016 came to a close, we scheduled a final check-in with our moderator, expert panelists, and library facilitators to make sure that the intended direction and flow of the event was clear to all participants, and that all understood their responsibilities. Once these were confirmed, the group entered a holding pattern, in which we remained ready to respond to last-minute changes. While there were hiccups in some areas of the work, we felt largely confident that we would indeed hold the event and sincerely hoped that people would show up.

Schematics of Privilege

Despite having involved the Library Communications and Marketing team in the planning process several months in advance of the event, we found ourselves scrambling in the final few weeks of preparation. This had less to do with any failing on the part of our promotional team, and more to do with recent reductions in staffing and a lack of clarity regarding roles and expectations.

The morning of the event dawned unseasonably pleasant, and though we worried this would negatively impact attendance, we had 45 participants. The day before the event, the co-facilitator for the Straight Privilege break out session, Dr. CJ Pascoe, Associate Professor of Sociology, notified us that she would be unable to attend. This compounded our anxiety. In a bit of a dither, the facilitator of that session, Rachel Lilley, emailed the other two co-organizers, and the dean, who was scheduled to provide opening remarks and introduce all the facilitators. Rachel, however, forgot one key distinction: two Dr. Pascoes (no relation) had been invited to the event, one a co-facilitator, the other the moderator of the panel discussion at the end of the event. Needless to say, what began as a relatively minor inconvenience nearly ballooned into outright panic, with several frantic emails from the dean received before the matter was clarified. With that glitch behind us, we refocused on last-minute preparations.

Light refreshments – sweet and savory snacks, coffee, tea, cider, and water – were provided for attendees during the welcome and introductions, and were available for attendees to revisit when they reconvened for the concluding panel discussion. The button-making station was highlighted and explained at the beginning of the event, and attendees were given time to visit the station. While at the station they were invited to either choose a pre-made button, or create one themselves.

Our dean provided a brief introduction of the library facilitators and topic experts/panelists, and attendees were then invited to join the facilitator of the discussion of the privilege with which they most identified and/or wanted to learn more about. Groups were given five minutes to make their way to one of five assigned rooms in the library, the idea being to introduce attendees not only to new sources, but new spaces within the library. During their breakout sessions, library facilitators and topic experts highlighted resources – both physical and

digital – available for further exploration and research, providing printed copies of a list of additional references. Library facilitators also moderated the discussion using a set of questions written to facilitate engagement and advance the discussion. Groups were given twenty minutes for this portion of the event, and a break of approximately ten minutes was scheduled between the end of the breakout sessions and the panel to allow attendees to return to the main meeting area and get settled. Overall, library facilitators reported that their discussions were fruitful and engaged; none of the attendees were combative or defensive, but rather came to their groups with thoughtful questions and comments (e.g. about the definition of privilege, how it has manifested in their lives, and methods they've used to address it).

A more comprehensive introduction of the panelists was provided just before the concluding panel session by the panel moderator. The panelists, most of whom had also served as breakout session topic experts, discussed their backgrounds and expertise, and both defined and spoke to the harm done by their respective areas of privilege/the privilege they “represented”. Attendees were given the opportunity to ask questions of the panelists. Questions asked of the panelists, and comments made by attendees, were similar to those presented in the smaller groups. Attendees wanted to know how to address and mitigate specific privileges in the real world, and panelists discussed ways in which interactions could be approached. At the conclusion of the question and answer period, attendees were again given the opportunity to visit the “Tag Your Privilege” button-making station and engage in one-on-one conversations with the panelists and/or members of their breakout session.

We Didn't Bomb

After months of anxiety over preparations, we were rewarded with a reasonably well-attended, well-run event. We anticipated and planned catering for fifty people, and forty-five

attended, hitting close to our measured expectations. Attendees were engaged, participated in multiple components, and nearly everyone stayed for the entire two-hour event. Our panelists were pleased and are more than willing to do something similar with UO Libraries in the future.

While it was tempting to end the project on its highest note, we decided to jump right into the Plus Delta analysis while our memories were still fresh. In the hopes that our experience will inspire similar events at other libraries, we offer a summation of what worked for us, what didn't, and what we'd do differently if we knew then what we know now.

1. Audience. First and foremost, have an audience in mind. Ours was “everyone in the UO community” because we wanted to be inclusive, but in retrospect this may have been too broad. If you can narrow the scope, you can better tailor your marketing efforts to the audience.
2. Treats. University catering provided coffee, dessert, and non-dessert samplings for the afternoon affair. A welcoming atmosphere is conducive to collaboration among strangers, especially when the topics may be emotionally intense for some. Also, you can advertise the treats. This particular event was our own invention, and not a standardized, mainstream, easily-communicated idea that lent itself to advertisement. Everybody understands treats.
3. Breakout Sessions. We liked having breakout discussion sessions to introduce attendees to the subject matter and get people talking. This portion of the event could be scalable, as an ongoing lunchtime discussion, for example. Some library facilitators were happy to have topic area experts to call upon during these sessions, and some facilitators felt comfortable leading the discussions on their own. Our library facilitators prepared questions, which some relied upon, and

some kept in their pockets. Were we to do this again, we'd book less time for introductions and more time for discussion. We wish we'd had more time for the breakout sessions in their entirety, but this was already a two-hour event. As the event was comprised of several stages, the breakout sessions were limited to twenty minutes so that the groups would have time to make their way to the discussion rooms and back to the main room in time for the next stage. Traveling to different spaces around the library was part of the idea behind the "crawl" feature of the event and therefore, in our minds, necessary to the core purpose. We liked having separate rooms for the mini-discussions, for their many benefits: they facilitated an intimate discussion, participants were not distracted by other groups, venturing to the separate rooms brought people farther into the library where they could see more of our facility, and rooms were stocked with pre-selected resource material germane to the topic. We were prepared for latecomers by staffing the main event gathering room with a facilitator who directed participants to the appropriate room. This ended up being a wise use of resources, as some panelists surprised us with an early arrival. The library facilitator was available to welcome them and offer refreshments while they waited. Again, have treats.

4. Facilitator. Our dean encouraged us to invite an experienced facilitator to lead the group panel discussion, and we found that to be a worthwhile recommendation. Thankfully, our participatory audience stayed on track, but we felt assured our facilitator would keep the discussion from straying too far off topic or becoming

unnecessarily combative. She also kept things moving, which was important, given how much time was allotted for the panel.

5. LibGuides. Library facilitators pooled their resource lists to create LibGuides after the event as part of the library's Diversity and Inclusion website upgrade project. In our case, we were unable to make these in advance of the event, but if you can, they are a desirable outcome useful to the community.
6. Button-maker. The button-making station was a welcome diversion for both the participants and planners. We selected images from popular magazines, created prototypes, and labeled the experience a team-building exercise. At the event itself the buttons served as an ice-breaker, participatory activity, and keepsake. Pre-made buttons provided visuals for the poster, discussed in point seven.
7. Promotion. Communications and marketing staff were integral to the success of our event, and we recommend engaging them early and often. Advertise. Those. Treats. Our communications and marketing team suggested collaborating with professors to increase the student audience at the event by requiring attendance for class. This idea came too late in the project for us to implement, but it is something we would explore were we to put on a similar event. Our marketing team was able to create a poster, which we distributed around campus and spaces beyond, like the public library. The poster was also used to promote the event on the UO Libraries website, as well as across social media platforms.

In essence, we were gratified by our choice to invest so much of our time and resources into planning this event because it was well-received and ran relatively smoothly - or at least appeared that way. We completely subscribed to the old axiom "an ounce of prevention is worth

a pound of cure” and it was worth it. At the same time, have fun. People are supposed to enjoy this. You can have fun with serious topics.

Conclusion

We learned a great deal in the course of putting on this event. None of us had ever done something like this before, and we were thrilled and a little bit frightened to try it. As the planning progressed, the shape of our event began to look less like the original stacks crawl we initially envisioned, but an intellectual successor that remained true to our original stated objectives, i.e. to provide a space to talk about privilege and to draw the connection to the library’s resources on this topic. Our advice is that everyone is learning, so don’t let the fear of mistakes get in the way of doing it at all. Give yourself permission to put on a diversity event in your library. Librarians don’t have to be experts in everything, one just needs to know how to gather quality resources, which is what it took to pull off this event. We held *Check(Out) Your Privilege: Library Stacks Crawl and Facilitated Diversity Discussion* a week before the November 2016 election. Our biggest takeaway is that at a certain point you have to let go of perfection and fear because unpredictable things happen. Begin anyway.

References:

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