

RARE BOOK SCHOOL

Inclusive Excellence Plan

Introduction

Rare Book School (RBS) is committed to strengthening global communities of the book and advancing the study of cultural heritage. Diversity is a central component of our curriculum, and strengthens the intellectual and social life of our School. Since 2015, strategic RBS programs and initiatives, funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, have challenged the School to increase the diversity of its course offerings through the Global Book Histories Initiative and to address the historic and entrenched insularity of the rare-book professions – both at RBS and in the field more broadly – through fellowship programs seeking to advance the professional development of early- and mid-career cultural heritage professionals who identify with historically excluded racial and ethnic communities, as well as professionals who identify as LGBTQ+, professionals who come from low-income backgrounds, or professionals with disabilities. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Society of Fellows in Critical Bibliography, a program of RBS, shares with the School the goal of promoting inclusivity and diversity in the fields of bibliography and book history.

Although we recognize the School's recent initiatives to increase diversity at RBS, there is yet more work to do. Efforts to increase diversity are incomplete without a simultaneous commitment to inclusive excellence. To foster an inclusive, respectful, and welcoming environment that embraces a richly diverse representation of human attributes, perspectives, and disciplines requires holistic effort across the organization. Only through tangible, measurable steps may we fully implement the change we seek, matching the values we have articulated with concrete actions.

Recognizing that organizational excellence cannot be achieved without genuine attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion, Rare Book School has adopted the Inclusive Excellence framework to align and support its efforts to sustain an inclusive environment. A primary advantage of this approach is its emphasis on concrete actions and accountability. A designated task force for inclusive excellence at RBS began with a study of diversity and inclusion in the cultural heritage field before assessing organizational culture and belonging at Rare Book School. A series of carefully targeted focus group exercises with the entire staff explored the School's current environment and prioritized actions that the organization could take to promote diversity and inclusion more consistently throughout the RBS community. As RBS reviews its progress toward these goals annually, it will necessarily calibrate its priorities to identify new objectives in order to sustain a more inclusive community of learning.

Self-Assessment

An honest assessment of Rare Book School's history must confront the fact that the School's programs were built on Western- and Anglo-centric notions of the book and that the systems and structures supporting its work were put in place without intentional consideration of inclusivity and accessibility. Now, the School's Inclusive Excellence process has made clear that to deepen our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, RBS should not only look at its course offerings and fellowship opportunities, but also reexamine its recruitment and admissions processes to support the most inclusive learning experience possible. In addition to encouraging its staff and faculty members to promote the values of inclusion and diversity, RBS needs to empower them through training opportunities and coordinated, positive actions. Transparent communication both internally and with the wider public needs to acknowledge RBS's goals with regard to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and to be accountable for results through updates on progress and challenges. Finally, it is clear that RBS must fully invest in these efforts through the time of its staff, budget allocations, and fundraising efforts.

The action plan resulting from this process centers on three broad areas for improvement. Under the category of Equitable Access, RBS will focus on equitable access to Rare Book School courses, programs, and other opportunities for applicants from all backgrounds, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, or disability. The second area, Inclusive and Diverse Work Environment, prompts the School to create and sustain an inclusive environment for all RBS students, faculty, and staff, with an emphasis on community. Finally, RBS seeks to partner with its faculty members to create a more inclusive learning experience as part of its goal relating to Inclusive Learning Experience. The goals included below are ambitious, but achievable. In some cases, these actions build on planning or initiatives already undertaken by the School, but force us to articulate our intentions and hold ourselves accountable for concrete results.

It will be helpful to delineate how we define key concepts used throughout the plan that follows (largely based on the understandings helpfully articulated by the University of Virginia). Diversity refers to the full spectrum of human attributes, perspectives, identities, and experiences. Inclusion is the intentional process of building community well-being and belonging for diverse participants. Equity calls for equal access and the fair and just treatment of all members of a community, with particular focus on justice for historically excluded or underserved groups in a particular context.

Inclusive Excellence Plan Goals and Objectives

AREA 1: ENSURING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO RBS PROGRAMS

Focus on equitable access to RBS courses, programs, and other opportunities for applicants from all backgrounds, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, or disability.

Goal 1. Consult with ADA expert to assess RBS's ability to accommodate people with disabilities at RBS events and in the School's (virtual & physical) spaces

Objective 1. Identify resources for sign-language translators for events and classes to provide as requested

Objective 2. Provide closed-captioning options for virtual events

Objective 3. Make available lactation space and accommodations for pregnant attendees

Objective 4. Publish a statement on the RBS website of accommodations possible, restrictions or requirements for specific courses as relevant

Objective 5. Create a resource guide for "Accessible Cville" to be included in student materials

Goal 2. Review public-facing RBS website and publications to ensure content is accessible and inclusive for all users

Objective 1. Make RBS textual and visual website content more user-friendly for use on multiple platforms, including from mobile devices

Objective 2. Investigate and scope out the feasibility of updates to website framework to improve accessibility and readability for people with disabilities (e.g. limited vision)

Objective 3. Investigate and scope out the feasibility of updates to course application system (Salesforce database) for increased accessibility

Objective 4. Provide technological support and information about available tech support on the website

Goal 3. Review demographic data as a diagnostic tool to identify if certain groups are disproportionately not being accepted into RBS programs or declining spots in programs

Objective 1. Take advice from external experts regarding how best to request such demographic information

Objective 2. Implement form and gather data from course applicants

Objective 3. Review data to identify trends and understand them in the context of other factors affecting one's admission to RBS programs

Goal 4. Make application and admissions process more transparent for first-time applicants unfamiliar with the School

Objective 1. Provide sample personal statements, as well as more guiding questions in the course application

Objective 2. Make available clear, upfront information regarding course costs, schedules, and expectations

Objective 3. Clearly identify courses offered at different levels: introductory, intermediate, advanced

Objective 4. Provide a class by class clear explanation of selection criteria used by faculty in admitting students to class

Goal 5. Broaden outreach to targeted communities: HBCUs, Hispanic-serving institutions, tribal libraries, archive and museum associations, and communities of practice

Objective 1. Expand social media reach to more diverse audiences

Objective 2. Build relationships with key individuals

Objective 3. Send RBS staff to key conferences as relevant

Goal 6. Increase opportunities for access to RBS programs for applicants from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and/or from lower economic backgrounds

Objective 1. Establish fund to support students with economic need with aid for tuition, housing, and travel; solicit donations for the funds

Objective 2. Establish scholarship to support students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds with funds for tuition, housing, and travel; solicit donations for the funds

Goal 7. Promote RBS's diverse collections materials to give evidence of commitment to a true global history of the book

Objective 1. Continue promotion of multicultural collections via RBS social media channels

Objective 2. Highlight new acquisitions of multicultural collections in newsletters

Objective 3. Feature multicultural collections and use in teaching as components of annual reports

AREA 2: INCREASE AND SUSTAIN STAFF CAPACITY BY SUPPORTING AN INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Goal 1. Building staff capacity and sustaining a welcoming and inclusive workspace

Objective 1. Communicate white paper/plan and goals with all staff with clear roles and timelines

Objective 2. Empower staff through mandatory implicit bias and cultural competency training for all staff

Objective 3. Provide an expectation of (and time provided for) additional professional development requirements once annually, tracked in performance reviews

Goal 2. Clear communication among staff at all levels regarding progress on goals, events, and other developments affecting the School

Objective 1. Hold meeting with all staff to share goals and roles and implement action plan

Objective 2. Hold round of regular (fortnightly, then monthly) all-staff meetings, featuring work of each department in turn

Objective 3. Alternate schedule of subsequent meetings so that at least once per quarter the entire staff engages with information pertaining to diversity and inclusive excellence; any staff member may propose topics for consideration

Goal 3. Establish a clear pipeline for accountability for and transparency of these goals, both internally and externally

Objective 1. Report on progress regularly to the RBS Board of Directors

Objective 2. Create a website landing page to articulate RBS's commitment to inclusive excellence, including its values, goals, progress, and highlights on courses in development

Objective 3. Create internal resource page for RBS staff to access information about standards and preferred vocabulary, progress updates, resources for training, &c.

AREA 3: PARTNER WITH RBS FACULTY TO CREATE MORE INCLUSIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Goal 1. Communicate plans and goals to faculty to create or strengthen a shared commitment to core values of diversity, equity, and inclusion

Objective 1. Share white paper/statement of commitment and goals

Objective 2. Survey faculty regarding their familiarity with diversity, equity & inclusion efforts and/or consider faculty forum on these topics

Objective 3. Share resources and encourage participation in cultural competencies/implicit bias training: appoint RBS team to identify and adapt or create resources to share with faculty

Goal 2. Support faculty in creating more diverse and inclusive courses

Objective 1. Share resource guide for inclusive pedagogy and teaching with inclusive and multicultural collections

Objective 2. Host biannual drop-in webinars highlighting new collection acquisitions of interest

Objective 3. Investigate feasibility of fund to support course development for instructors interested in revamping course plans to be more diverse and inclusive

Objective 4. Continue commitment to ongoing diversification of teaching collections so that instructors have a greater variety of diverse materials available to show to students

Objective 5. Develop and post to website a collections development, management, and description policy, including diverse and inclusive materials that may be used in teaching

Objective 6. Provide updates to nametags, name tents, and course materials using students' preferred pronouns

Goal 3. Recruitment and retention of diverse and inclusive faculty

Objective 1. As faculty retire, consider diversity and inclusion among desiderata in bringing on new instructors (not just demographic representation or global focus, but also native speakers, openness to include diverse materials in traditional canon)

Objective 2. Consider diversity in instruction not only in terms of native speakers or members of a community teaching a subject-specific course, but also considering diversity among instructors in ALL classes, including traditional bibliography and book history

Objective 3. Create a pipeline of experts equipped to teach through shorter courses, lectures, and fellowships, assistantships

Objective 4. Create a webform, posted to the RBS website, to receive suggestions from public for prospective instructors of RBS classes

Objective 5. Create criteria for assessing excellence in instructors coming from non-academic backgrounds

Objective 6. Feature new courses on website, newsletters, and other promotional materials

Goal 4. Review open course evaluation system to ensure equitable treatment of faculty

Objective 1. Review practice of publishing course evaluations to the website and, if needed, suggest revisions to methods used