Diversity and equity in publishing: Triangle Scholarly Communication Institute

Discussion published by Catherine Cocks on Wednesday, December 18, 2019
A post from Feeding the Elephant: A Forum for Scholarly Communications

The theme of the 2019 Triangle Scholarly Communication Institute was equity in scholarly communications. In addition to the summary on the website, check out #TriangleSCI on Twitter. I had the chance to talk about this year’s event with Niccole Leilanionapae’aina Coggins, who’s the editorial, design, and production coordinator and assistant project editor at the University of Virginia Press. She is a member of a team developing three toolkits for advancing equity in scholarly publishing. (Check out the projects pursued by the other teams, too.)

Niccole said the need for these toolkits became obvious after people of color in publishing testified anonymously (here and here) about the racism they faced on the job. These testimonials were posted about the time that a major initiative to diversify the academic publishing workforce, the Mellon Foundation’s University Press Diversity Fellowship, was renewed. The intention of the program (first funded in 2016 with four presses and extended to four more in 2018) was to address the whiteness of university press staffs by building a pipeline bringing people of color into the enterprise. But bringing them in clearly isn’t enough. We need to make sure the workplaces they enter are respectful and offer plentiful opportunities to build careers.

Niccole’s team intends to contribute to making scholarly publishing more hospitable for professionals of color by offering advice and tools to three groups: organizations, the POCs themselves, and their allies. Inspired by the American Alliance of Museum’s guides for Gender Transition and Transgender Inclusion in the Museum Workplace: A Toolkit for Trans Individuals, Institutions, and Coworkers, Niccole’s team opted on an antiracism framework while acknowledging the need for similar guides that cover gender, LGTBQ+, ability, and so forth.

Each toolkit is designed for a distinct purpose and/or user, addressing the many levels at which we need to operate to promote equity. The one for organizations will address issues of systemic or structural bias and offer a series of best practices and tools for broadening recruiting and hiring, mitigating implicit bias, improving mentorship and retention practices, and creating affinity groups. Given the legal and organizational policies that already govern many of these practices, the team is reaching out to HR professionals and others in developing this kit. Look for it in May 2020.

The allies toolkit provides advice on how colleagues can intervene in difficult situations precipitated by implicit or overt bias, tools for promoting changes in policies that disadvantage people of color, and ideas for building mentoring relationships. Drafted at the 2019 Institute in October, this toolkit is due out in February 2020.

The professionals of color toolkit offers tools for handling racism in the workplace in its many forms, from microaggressions and implicit bias to the use of offensive language and demeaning assumptions. It will be available in April 2020.
Do you have strategies that are effective for addressing bias in your workplace? What are some specific habits we can practice to help us be better colleagues?