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### An Insider's Framework of Inclusive Excellence

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or a ball to bounce or balance on. Pionke and his team at UIUC termed these spaces “reflection rooms.”

In conjunction with reflection rooms, the team developed “tranquility kits” that can be checked out for a month at a time to students so that they can try different self-regulation devices. The kits include noise-canceling headphones, various fidget toys, stress balls, all-spectrum therapy lights, and exercise bands with instructions for use. As a result of surveys, UIUC installed Alexa devices in the rooms so that patrons can control the brightness and color of the lights along with using meditation apps and soothing sounds.

## HOW TO GET STARTED

The most important thing going forward is that library professionals educate themselves about this topic and work to make their spaces, education, online platforms, marketing, and services more accessible to people with disabilities of all types. “The reality is that if we embrace accessibility, we make it better for everyone. And you do this one bite at a time,” says Pionke. If you are a large library or organization, you can partner with a company such as EBSCO Information

## LINKS TO THE SOURCES

### **CDC: Disability Impacts All of Us**

[cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html](https://cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html)

### **Library Journal: JJ Pionke | Movers and Shakers 2020—Advocates**

[libraryjournal.com/story/jj-pionke-movers-shakers-2020%E2%80%93advocates](https://libraryjournal.com/story/jj-pionke-movers-shakers-2020%E2%80%93advocates)

**Pionke, JJ. “Toward Holistic Accessibility Narratives from Functionally Diverse Patrons.” *Reference and User Services Quarterly*, vol. 57, no.1, 2017, pp. 48–56**  
[journals.ala.org/index.php/rusq/article/view/6442](https://journals.ala.org/index.php/rusq/article/view/6442)

**Holer, Sara, and Lannon, Amber. “The Development of Multiuse Meditation Rooms.” *Student Wellness & Academic Libraries: Case Studies and Activities for Promoting Health and Success*, Association of College and Research Libraries, 2020, pp. 151–168**  
[alastore.ala.org/content/student-wellness-and-academic-libraries-case-studies-and-activities-promoting-health-and](https://alastore.ala.org/content/student-wellness-and-academic-libraries-case-studies-and-activities-promoting-health-and)

Services or a consortium network such as the Library Accessibility Alliance that has the ability to work for contracts of participation that require accessibility. If you are a small library or organization, you can start by making your website

design inclusive and accessible, redesigning your furniture types or placement, or making your signage easier to read by changing fonts or letter size. Pionke suggests, “Pick one thing, work to make it better, and then move on to another.”

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DOM BORTRUEX

# An Insider’s Framework of Inclusive Excellence

Over the past few years, there has been an increase in libraries recruiting positions such as EDI (equity, diversity, and inclusion) librarian, librarian for inclusion, and director of diversity, equity, inclusion, and organizational excellence. The positions are often vague about the job responsibilities but specific about the expectations of promoting EDI—whether in collections, hiring, or culture. To understand

the responsibilities of these librarians, I contacted Ione Damasco (who uses they/them pronouns) to discuss their role as associate dean for inclusive excellence, engagement, and operations at the University of Dayton.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Damasco has gathered immense diverse experience in academic libraries. They shifted from a cataloging background

in technical services to their current role due to their passion, identities, and growing experience with EDI in libraries. During a time of change in the library, Damasco saw an opportunity to support EDI beyond volunteering on diversity committees. They talked to their dean about evolving the position of associate dean of collections and operations to include EDI as a framework for the position rather than an extra opportunity or trend. This proposed change came at a time of reorganization and right before the launch of a diversity strategic plan. Taking advantage of this opportunity for change, Damasco became

associate dean for inclusive excellence, engagement, and operations.

Combining library outreach and engagement, operations, and strategic planning, Damasco's role empowers them to pursue EDI initiatives and challenge deeply embedded, problematic processes throughout the library. A key part of Damasco's work is developing, guiding, and tracking the implementation of the diversity plan and ensuring that it is measurable and achievable. As chairperson of the Diversity and Inclusion

## *During a time of change in the library, Damasco saw an opportunity to support EDI. ...*

Team, Damasco supports the diversity plan and provides professional development and EDI-related activities such as film screenings and guest speakers. The team has expanded through developing external partnerships and practicing an inclusionary framework of excellence.

This framework of excellence and inclusion is fundamental to Damasco's work. Constantly, Damasco asks, "What are we doing to include people and make sure they belong as an active part of the community?" This question guides all aspects of Damasco's work, and it is evident in the library's collection development policies. For example, there is a collection budget to allocate designated funds to purchase EDI materials and support EDI partners such as the Multicultural Center and book clubs. Damasco practices active collecting through exploring how courses meet EDI and Common Academic Program (CAP) requirements, particularly the diversity and social justice component. They work with librarians and instructors to purchase related materials for this interdisciplinary approach.

Inclusive excellence does not end at collection development. Damasco supports the library in ensuring metadata and bibliographic descriptions are inclusive and current. Their approach is, "Do it thoughtfully, and do it well. Be mindful, and prioritize people's well-being." This includes using alternative terms and vocabularies, intentionally choosing descriptive language, and partnering with IT to reconfigure displays of problematic terms. Through evaluating metadata, the library can identify collection gaps related to content creators and subjects.

### CHALLENGES

Despite victories in developing and implementing strategic plans and EDI initiatives, Damasco has faced obstacles and stress. Time and resources remain a top challenge. Reflecting on the challenges of the job, Damasco states, "There's never enough people, time, or money. There is no endgame. Inclusive excellence is a constant process of learning and growing." There are also ongoing challenges and conversations about deeply embedded problematic processes and histories and their long-term impact. Damasco claims, "To be partners in how society moves forward, we must ask hard questions which haven't been asked, and inspire people to rethink exclusion and inclusion."

### ADVICE

Damasco says, "You can't be excellent without being inclusive. Inclusion should be an expectation, not an invitation." The ongoing work of inclusion becomes more successful when it is supported with decision-making power and accountability.



lone Damasco

Photo by Ryan O'Grady

Damasco emphasizes the importance of connecting EDI initiatives to the institution's values and strategic plan. They advise, "If a library is thinking about EDI positions, it needs to empower the position with clear support structures." They recommend being realistic about expectations without losing sight of the mission. With so many challenges, it is vital to identify a focus, implement the framework of excellence, and maintain a sense of excitement.

*'You can't be excellent without being inclusive. Inclusion should be an expectation, not an invitation.'*

Every institution faces its own challenges, particularly related to EDI. Damasco's call for excellence and inclusion is an encouraging reminder to librarians that they can support the university and be partners in moving society forward.

Dom Bortruex is the manager of the Monographic FastCat Unit at Yale University. He leads workshops on cataloging, metadata, and automation. Bortruex participates in DiversAbility at Yale, the LGBTQ+ Affinity Group, and ALA. Send your comments about this article to [itletters@infotoday.com](mailto:itletters@infotoday.com) or tweet us (@ITINewsBreaks).