Constructing the Narrative

Best Practices in Resource Selection for Building Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Theological Collections

> *The high purpose of book selection is to provide the right book for the right reader at the right time.*
>
> – Francis K.W. Drury (1930, 1)

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*L*IBRARY COLLECTIONS ARE CONSIDERED THE HEART OF THE UNIVERSITY (FIELD-house and Marshall 2012; Oakleaf 2010). They are one of the deciding factors for graduate students choosing an academic institution (Kallio 1995). In addition, research indicates that library collections help universities attract and retain researchers, increase research funding, and foster the value of scholarship and knowledge creation (Research Libraries UK and Research Information Network 2011; Tenopir, Volentine, and King 2012). Collection development librarians have an immense responsibility: to ensure that the collections they develop are relevant, current, and meet the needs of their users. A large part of this responsibility is based on the choice of a collection development librarian. Therefore, how we develop library collections is of utmost importance.

This is especially relevant when we consider the need to represent marginalized communities and their voices, which have not always been visible in our collections. Historically, many collections have represented the view of the dominant culture, or what some authors call the "culture of whiteness" (Brook, Ellenwood, and Lazzaro 2015, 247). As a result, the voices of underrepresented groups are not always included in the library collections. The diversity, equity, and inclusion framework (further DEI, also known as EDI, EDI-D) allows collection development librarians to "re-examine and re-calibrate their collection practices," especially taking into consideration increasingly diverse campuses (Estelle-Holmer, Limpitlaw, and Spomer 2021, 81). According to Cruz (2019, 220), "diversity is a cornerstone of the library profession." Bringing awareness of the diversity issues in academic libraries "provides tools for the social justice work" (Brook, Ellenwood, and Lazzaro 2015, 276). In addition, it is important for theological libraries to also acknowledge how they might have contributed to the current problem: "To truly embrace our social responsibility for promoting social justice, librarians and library leaders must also acknowledge the ways in which library practices frequently contribute to inequity, marginalization, and injustices; and commit to transforming our practices and standards in ways that leverage the power, expertise, and responsibility of academic librarians and libraries as forces for social justice" (Morales, Knowles, and Bourg 2014, 448).

To meet the needs of a diverse student population and faculty, as well as to ensure the effective use of library collections, it is vital to address this issue on the collection development level, including through collection development policies and strategies, and collection management, evaluation, and stewardship. Developing diversity plans or a diversity statement for the library can help formalize the commitment to DEI (Gujilde 2021; Herrera 2016). It must be done with particular focus and intentionality (Blume and Roylance 2020) since academic librarians have a duty to call attention to the underrepresented voices (Wagner and Crowley 2020): "Decolonizing academic library collections describes the work necessary to combat a traditionally Eurocentric focus by focusing on intentionally acquiring materials" (Blume and Roylance 2020, "Introduction").

This chapter, therefore, will address best practices in resource selection in theological libraries, with special attention given to selection strategies in small theological libraries, which often have limited resources and rely on internal and external partnerships to

increase collection access and value. While small academic theological libraries are often at a disadvantage due to budget restrictions and possible space limitations, they provide a unique contribution to the community at large through their distinctive collections. Before diving into specific strategies, it is important to highlight several foundational approaches that can inform diversity and inclusion in collection development strategies. These approaches should be included in the collection development policies, even though they do not explicitly use DEI language.

Foundational Approaches for the Adoption of DEI Practices in Collection Development

Before we proceed, it is essential to define DEI in the context of collection development (Ciszek and Young 2010). A DEI framework covers a broad social justice approach to collection development that has diversity, equity, and inclusion as its central foundational values. It "consider[s] and affirm[s] the role of multiple identities with relationship to various social contexts and interlocking systems of power, privilege, and oppression" (Özturgut 2017, 87). Here are the definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion, according to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC):

> a) Diversity is "differences in race, colour, place of origin, religion, immigrant and newcomer status, ethnic origin, ability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and age";
> b) Equity is "the removal of systemic barriers and biases enabling all individuals to have equal opportunity to access and benefit from the program";
> c) Inclusion is "the practice of ensuring that all individuals are valued and respected for their contributions and are equally supported" (2021, under "What is 'EDI'?").

See a list of recommended resources on topics related to DEI at *atla.libguides.com/DEI*.

Even though the DEI framework has not been widely discussed in the LIS literature on collection development, we can apply these principles to the way we develop our library collections. Thus, when it comes to collection development, DEI means building library col-

lections with the consistent consideration of multiple voices from the community, taking into account race, colour, ethnic origin, immigration status, social status, theological views, sex, sexual orientation, gender expression, age, and physical and learning abilities, etc., by providing equitable access and representation of these voices in order to include users' needs as the focal point of the collection. In addition, DEI-informed collections should draw on different theological traditions and the lived experience of people and groups from different faith backgrounds, with particular attention to global issues (Estelle-Holmer, Limpitlaw, and Spomer 2021). Integration of DEI practices, in turn, will further encourage exploration of the DEI-related topics in the local communities of inquiry. Several essential factors or foundational approaches that can help us adopt DEI practices in our collection development strategies include curriculum alignment, a user-centred approach to collection development, and community engagement.

Curriculum Alignment

Curriculum alignment is often a central piece of collection development policies. It allows librarians responsible for collections to identify new programs, create a plan for existing programs and research centres, and ensure the collection they are building meets the needs of all the programs offered by the institution. The degree levels of new and existing programs are essential considerations, since graduate programs require advanced academic resources to meet the needs of their students and researchers. Curriculum alignment can help us identify relevant DEI themes for each program, including but not limited to the following: BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of colour) theology, eco-theology, LGBTQIA2+ issues, Indigenous approaches to theology, theology of disabled bodies, etc. Curriculum alignment can serve as a guide to help us think about important DEI issues and identify areas of a collection that are multidisciplinary and multifaceted. To facilitate curriculum alignment with the DEI principles in mind, please see table 1.

Table 1 — Curriculum Alignment Matrix

Faculty	Dept./ Prog.	Prog. levels	DEI topics	Major book publishers	Major journals	Major series
e.g., Theology	e.g., Pastoral theology	e.g., DMin, MDiv	e.g., BIPOC authors	e.g., Wipf & Stock	e.g., *Liberation Theology*	e.g., African Theo. Studies

User-centered Approach to Collection Development

"Libraries exist for their users" (Nixon, Freeman, and Ward 2011, 1). Anticipating the needs of current and future library users is one of the most important tasks of a librarian responsible for collections. It requires being in sync with the existing library patrons and understanding and anticipating their needs. This task can be quite difficult because we, as librarians, "often serve a large and diverse community of users" (Agee 2007, 1). As Agee points out, "to have a collection of value to library users, it is necessary to know who those users are." It is less challenging in small academic libraries because it is easier to know students by name and know their research interests. Attending research seminars to hear students' presentations on their doctoral or master's thesis proposals is one helpful strategy to adopt a user-centered approach to collection development. In addition, if a librarian who does collection development also is involved in information literacy instruction and reference, they have additional opportunities to get to know students and their topics of inquiry.

Liaison with the faculty members is crucial to understanding library users' unique characteristics—including faculty and student cultural backgrounds, theological traditions, demographics, research interests, research projects, and more—which in turn can help facilitate DEI-informed collections. Users, thus, drive the diversity of the collections.

To know library users, many librarians create community analysis studies, including surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc. These methods can help identify and better understand the needs of the underrepresented library users and adjust library collection strategies accordingly. Statistics provided by the university or college administration can help establish the percentage of students with disability,

international students, or those students who identify as BIPOC and/ or LGTBQIA2+. While the acquisition of the materials related to DEI should not depend on the statistical data, its analysis can help to connect to the community of local library users and encourage budget allocation to specific themes. According to Gujilde (2021), this creates a stronger sense of belonging among the members of academic communities and libraries.

Here is an example of a tool that can be used to understand library users when it comes to DEI (table 2). It presents a non-exhaustive list that can help establish some general considerations for community analysis and understanding how users' needs can be met.

However, it is also important to highlight that DEI-related material is relevant not only to the populations it seeks to represent but to the entire student body and faculty. It "prepare[s] students for their entry into the real world" (Vega García 2000, 319).

Table 2 — Understanding Library Users: Community Analysis (adapted from Agee 2007)

Population groups (Who)	Resources consideration (What)
BIPOC users	Acquisition of resources by BIPOC authors and/or related to BIPOC theological themes
Non-native English speakers	Bilingual or foreign-language resources
Users with disability	Large print books, availability of oral readers and other technologies
LGBTQIA2+ users	Acquisition of resources by LGBTQIA2+ authors and/or related to LGBTQIA2+ themes;

Community Engagement Strategies

The main objective of academic library collections is to "meet the information needs of local library users" (Agee 2007, 1). While maintaining this focus on the local library community of students, facul-

ty, and other researchers, it is also important to create partnerships with external communities that might advocate and support DEI-related issues outside campuses, such as research institutes, non-profit organizations, and other partner institutions. Establishing liaison with the community at large can help foster potential library donations (discussed below) as well as help determine how the library can serve members of said community.

Now that we have touched on several foundational approaches to adapt DEI-informed practices to collection development, I would like to discuss specific strategies used by librarians to make their library collections more diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

Collection Development Strategies

Collection development strategies are constantly evolving as new technologies and products become available. The strategies discussed below can be applied to developing monograph collections, which constitutes 80–90% of collection development decisions. These strategies can be adapted to the context of the specific library, taking into account its size, budget, subject coverage, student and faculty population, and the community at large. Table 3 (over) focuses on different components of collection development thought processes, assumptions, and solutions related to DEI.

According to Johnson (2004), experience and intuition play an important role in selecting resources. However, knowing specific tools and collection development strategies is essential for success. In addition, Young (2006) states that librarians need to be equipped with tools and methods to track the diversity of their acquisitions.

Recommendations by Faculty and Students

Recommendations made by faculty and students are an essential part of overall collection development strategies. Indeed, recommendations are vital because they ensure that the collection remains relevant to the users. Some faculty members are committed to recommending resources in their field on a regular basis. This should be encouraged because some faculty and students might feel uncomfortable asking a librarian to spend part of their library bud-

Table 3 — DEI in Collection Development (inspired by Sullivan 2020)

Aspect of collection development	False assumptions	Impacts	Solution
DEI-related content (BIPOC theo., eco-theology, LGTBQIA2+ issues, theo. of disabled bodies, etc.)	· If my institution does not have diverse population groups, I do not need to purchase DEI-related content. · There are no researchers in my institution who work on these topics; therefore, I do not need to purchase DEI-related content.	· Strong disconnect and no sense of belonging among library users. · No historical record for future researchers & students about theological issues related to DEI. · Significant gaps in the collection.	· Creating a stronger sense of community and belonging among library users. · Comprehensive collection without significant topical gaps.
Format (print, electronic)	· Everyone always prefers only one format (either print or electronic). · Because my institution does not offer distance programs, I don't require resources in electronic format.	· Limited access to the print collection for groups who are unable to come and study on campus (single parents, people with disability, etc.). · Technology barriers for electronic access.	· Identifying the needs of different groups. · Creating alternative programs for people who have tech-related barriers to access. · Purchasing multiple formats for core resources.

Table 3 — DEI in Collection Development (inspired by Sullivan 2020)

Aspect of collection development	False assumptions	Impacts	Solution
Languages	· Collection development in other languages is unnecessary. · Not many people in my institution currently speak other languages.	· Monoculturalism. · Lack of culturally diverse collections.	· Incorporating culturally diverse resources in other languages. · Identifying core resources for theology in other languages based on programs of study & focus.
Content level	· There is no place for popular sources in an academic library. · All students should be using the same content-level sources in their studies.	· Lack of denominational "popular" sources can make collection irrelevant for students in pastoral ministry. · Students of different cognitive abilities can feel overwhelmed by the lack of diversity in content level.	· Ensure the needs of students who work in pastoral ministry or pastoral theology are met by ordering "popular" religious content when applicable. · Create equitable collections with varied content levels, incl. general & adv. academic literature, to meet needs of students of different abilities.

get on resources for their research. It is crucial, however, to consider that faculty recommendations are usually not done systematically throughout the institution (Whipple 2006). This can result in uneven collections, which might require additional intervention as well as the development of a systematic process for faculty input to ensure equal representation of all voices across the collection. It can take the form of a communication plan between liaison/collection development librarians and the faculty members or of an ongoing communication to help faculty review collections in their research areas and make recommendations to fill any gaps they have identified in the collection.

Syllabi

USING COURSE SYLLABI TO IDENTIFY CORE TEXTS FOR EACH COURSE IS AN ESSENTIAL TOOL and strategy for collection development. This can further ensure that all course-recommended readings are equally represented in the library collection and that the library provides students with equitable access to these core texts.

Selection through Automated Acquisition Providers

EBSCO's GOBI acquisition platform is one of the most widely used providers of library resources in North America. Other vendors include Midwest Library Service, Coutts Library Services, Harrassowitz, etc. Using providers' platforms allows librarians to have convenient and easy access to many publishers and subjects as well as a practical, hands-on method for ordering resources. It also provides the ability to set up approval plans, which might be somewhat challenging to small academic libraries with budget limitations. When setting a library profile with a library provider, a librarian will consider classification ranges for the subject parameters represented in the curriculum. In addition, it is important to consider non-subject parameters that may include many DEI-inspired criteria, such as different languages, content level (popular, basic studies, general academic, advanced academic, professional), place of publication, non-book format, topical aspects (e.g., religion, social work), and interdisciplinary topics (e.g., Black studies, Hispanic studies, gerontology, LGBTQIA2+ studies, Indigenous studies, women's studies). These

interdisciplinary topics in the ordering profiles are essential to consider. In addition, it is important to have a list of publishers for the library's ordering profile. Including smaller theological publishers that focus on specific DEI-related themes can increase the visibility of these themes in the collection and diversify it so that it encompasses a variety of voices.

Periodical Lists / Book Reviews / Publishers' Catalogues

Additional layers of collection development strategies can come from periodical lists, book reviews, and publishers' catalogues. While automated acquisition platforms provide a comprehensive picture of new publications and are very convenient to use, they might not always be enough. In some cases, when the resource is produced by small presses, religious communities, or other independent publishers, or when the book is self-published, it might not be included in the automated platform. Thus, for example, some publishers important to consider for literature on pastoral ministry are: Novalis, Westminster John Knox, Fortress Press, Eerdmans, InterVarsity Press (IVP), among others. Furthermore, some subject areas, such as canon law, require special collection development strategies due to their specificity and unique content. In these cases, reviewing the most recent periodical issues to find the "Books received" section can be beneficial. It will often contain a list of books related to the topic of a periodical issue, identify new publications, and provide book reviews. Additional book reviews from sources like *Review of Biblical Literature*, *Religious Studies Review*, *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, and *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* can help make a decision. However, reading book reviews is often a time-consuming task and may not always be feasible. In addition, by the time book reviews appear, a significant amount of time has passed. Consequently, it is also helpful to check Amazon lists for theology (sorting by date of publication) and publishers' catalogues (print or online). Roy (2017) also suggests following publishers and award-winning authors on social media for announcements of new publications. Meeting publishers at conferences, such as Atla Annual, can help librarians enlarge the librarian's circle of small publishers and help the library learn about their new titles. Although libraries can request catalogues from publishers to review them for new titles, this practice should only serve as a supplementary strategy since subject-based selection through

periodical lists and service-providers, like GOBI, can provide better subject coverage.

It is important to highlight, as Little (2013) points out, that many small presses, including religious community publishers in ministry and pastoral theology, will be affiliated with a certain denomination. They can be considered "biased" towards one denomination; however, as Little states, these sources "capture contemporary Christian thought and practice, and reveal contemporary attitudes towards important social questions" (119), and are therefore important for theological collections. They also provide a unique character for local collections and can benefit collaboration between institutions from different faith traditions.

Approval Plans and Standing Orders

When it comes to placing orders on platforms like GOBI, large academic libraries often rely on approval plans—automatic purchases of monographs based on the criteria specified by a librarian, such as subject areas, publishers, publication format, languages, and more. Approval plans can help librarians save time, especially if they are committed to building comprehensive collections in specific subject areas. They can also be a convenient way to add DEI-related topics to their collections. Due to budget limitations, small academic libraries do not normally rely on approval plans. However, standing orders for monographic series can help librarians save time on the selection process and ensure orders are coming in continuously while the librarian locates harder-to-find materials. Reference works can be part of standing orders, especially in the case of multi-volume works. Special attention needs to be paid to Bible dictionaries, encyclopaedias, handbooks, concordances, Bible commentaries in different faith traditions, and language dictionaries (including Hebrew, Latin, and Classical Greek).

Selection of Resources by Specific Criteria

Language

Libraries will often collect resources in other languages, especially if they have a bilingual student population or if their institution offers

advanced degrees in theology. As a librarian from a bilingual university in Canada, I have to acknowledge that collecting for a bilingual institution can sometimes be challenging, especially taking into account the lack of resources in specific areas in some languages. Very often, francophone students who do not speak English are not able to translate material for themselves and require additional support with locating sources. In addition, it is important to consider which programs are unilingual and which programs are bilingual within the university to provide adequate support. It is also important to ensure that budget is allocated accordingly when taking into account the language of the resource. Many institutions with advanced degrees in theology develop collections in such European languages as French, German, Italian, Greek, and Spanish. This helps to ensure that important works in theology from other continents are accessible. Some institutions also develop special collections in Indigeneous languages to preserve the resources of specific Indigenous peoples. Thus, for example, the library of Saint Paul University collects and preserves resources in various Indigenous languages, including Cree, Slave, Anishinini, Dene, Inuktitut, as well as a few others. The collection includes two manuscript dictionaries: one Cree-French and the other Slave-French, both complied by Oblate missionaries. Other works in the collection in Indigenous languages include missals, prayer books, grammar manuals, etc.

The challenge of collecting in other languages is often related to the language expertise of the collection development librarian. This can be addressed through internal and external partnerships. Thus, for example, Saint Paul University Library partners with the Indigenous center on campus. In addition, some professors might be willing to help with the languages as well, especially when it comes to languages that do not use the Latin alphabet (such as Arabic, Cyrillic, Georgian, or Greek).

Format (print/electronic)

Deciding on the format of a resource requires careful consideration of the user demographics. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many libraries have switched to acquiring material in electronic format when possible. This, however, comes with a cost, since unlimited licences for e-books are usually three to five times more expensive than paper copies. Nevertheless, the electronic format can provide more equitable access to students and faculty, especially when tak-

ing distance students into consideration. But it is also essential to recognize and acknowledge that electronic content might be limited in some disciplines.

ILLs and Other Borrowing Requests

Interlibrary loans (ILLs) and other borrowing request data (e.g., requests made in the discovery layer tool) can be an important tool for collection development. Analysis of ILL requests can inform a collection development librarian of the gaps in the collection. It is crucial to look for systematic gaps related to DEI themes. While other strategies focus on the "just-in-case" acquisition mode, this strategy can be characterized as a "just-in-time" inventory model (Nixon, Freeman, and Ward 2011). If the budget allows, this strategy can be used to fill those gaps and reflect on whether collection development should be adjusted in the future. However, if a library has a limited budget, relying on ILLs and other borrowing opportunities is beneficial, especially for out-of-print resources or resources in other languages.

Evaluation of Collection Use by Library Users

Reviewing borrowing data for both print and electronic resources can indicate how the users are using the collection, what resources are being circulated, and how these trends can further inform the collection development decisions.

Adding Open Access Books and Journals to the Collection

Adding open access books (such as the ones published by Atla Open Press) and open access journals can enrich library collections by making these resources visible to diverse users in the library catalogue. See, for example, the Open Access Digital Theological Library (*oadtl.org/open-access-journals*) and Directory of Open Access Journals (*doaj.org*).

Donations

Donations can be an important tool for growing a library collection, especially when the library budget is limited and there is a high need to fill the gaps in the collection. Specific donations can also provide critical DEI-related materials and help diversify the collection since donors usually offer subject-based donations. However, it is important to remember that donations also require additional human and financial resources for sorting, checking, and cataloguing. In addition, institutions provide certain kinds of tax receipts for donations, when applicable. In the US, libraries cannot assign a value to a donation. Donations that are not accepted can be redistributed to students or sent to organizations such as Better World Books.

Cross-checking with Other Local Collections and Consortia

Local library communities can be an essential resource for library users if a library has budget limitations. Small academic libraries, especially, can rely on community partnerships. Before purchasing a resource, it can be beneficial to check if other local libraries already own it. However, this strategy has its limitations: inconvenience to the users, potential gaps in the collections, and possible future weeding of those materials that are beyond our control.

Special Considerations for Selecting Databases and Periodicals

New periodicals and databases can provide enormous value to library users. Faculty often recommend journals for subscriptions. Reviewing faculty publications can also inform the decision about journal subscriptions. To stay on top of new journal titles, it is important to check existing database indexes, the Directory of Open Access Journals, and publishers' announcements. Subscribing to the vendors' email lists is another way to receive news about new journals or databases. Requesting trials for databases can provide use data to help a librarian decide whether there is interest from library users.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of some collection development strategies that libraries can use to diversify their collections. It is important to note that these strategies can be applied to building current collections as well as filling the DEI-related gaps in the existing collections (Bowers, Crowe, and Keeran 2017). For retrospective collection development, such providers as AbeBooks, Alibris, or Better World Books can be helpful.

As Carrigan (1988, 22) stated, "the essence of collection development is choice." This makes the job of a collection development librarian unique because with every choice comes power and responsibility. It is the power to construct the narrative of your library and an impact "on who and what is represented in the scholarly and cultural record" (Morales, Knowles, and Bourg 2014, 445–46). The same power to make decisions about what resources to order that was often used to censor specific topics in the past can now increase the visibility of marginalized voices and communities.

Collection development does not happen in a vacuum (Uplaonkar and Kalikadevi, 2018). Librarians have to ensure that "their personal experiences, perspectives, and biases do not consciously or unconsciously influence" (Johnson 2004, 127) their decision to include or exclude certain themes from the collections. Collection development librarians "must approach collection development from a certain personal and emotional distance and employ analytical skills and sound judgement" (Little 2013, 123). This is a responsibility to all current and future library users who will rely on these collections to tell their stories, inquire about their past, and contribute to scholarship in their field of study. Through diverse collections, the readers can experience a more profound sense of belonging and connection. Therefore, library collections require a holistic vision to create usable library collections. Including multiple voices and perspectives in the collection ensures that diverse, equitable, and inclusive collections will meet the needs of all the library stakeholders and can remain sustainable for future users. This is the responsible stewardship to which we as theological librarians are called. Being open to the "creative potential of difference" can help librarians not only to transform library collections, but also to "transform academic libraries" as a whole (Brook, Ellenwood, and Lazzaro 2015, 277).

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