

Inclusivity in Action: An Introduction to the 2024 FIP Conference

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Abstract

This introduction to the 2024 Forum for Information Professionals (FIP) Extended Abstracts discusses the conference's theme of access and acceptance in libraries and provides an overview of the conference presentations.

Keywords: academic conference, accessibility, belonging, inclusivity

The 2024 Forum for Information Professionals (FIP) Conference, titled “All Inclusive” Library Style: Access and Acceptance in 2024, took place this year on March 1st. Per its legacy, it was once again a gathering place for LIS students and faculty as well as working information professionals to enjoy timely presentations and challenging discussions. While building inclusivity into programs and spaces is an oft-stated goal of information organizations, this year’s presentations showed that many of our places of work and learning still have a long way to go toward ensuring that everyone feels seen and heard when accessing our resources. Not only were we challenged this year to confront our blind-spots when designing inclusive spaces, policies, and programs, we were also delighted by practical examples of access, acceptance, and inclusivity in action.

This year's conference began with keynote presenter Heather Hill discussing what it means to belong at the library. Heather asked participants to consider not just permission and access, but also representation and comfort for those who are using (and providing) library services and spaces. These questions were echoed in this year's student presentations, many of which asked questions around who is permitted, represented, safe, able and welcome to speak in library spaces.

Bridget Melnyk's presentation "Adapting Public Library Classification and Catalogues to Serve Diverse Communities" presented a literature review centred on how existing classification systems and platforms can be harnessed to better include and serve our ever-changing communities. Alyssa De'Ath, Sean Gleason, Monica Maddaford and Ash Ridsdale's presentation on "Policing and Carcerality in Public Libraries" likewise asked us to consider how we structurally permit or restrict certain uses and access in our library spaces—do we reinforce or challenge elements of the police state in communities?

Presentations by Jessica Casas on "Self-Censorship of East Texas School Librarians" and Ayesha Karunawardhana on "The Dramatic Surge in Censorship and its Impediment to Intellectual Freedom" asked participants to consider not just who is permitted in library spaces, but what ideas are allowed or challenged in those environments and communities. What impacts flow from libraries restricting the free exchange of ideas, thoughts and discussions? The presenters also recognized the well-being challenges faced by library workers resulting from attacks on intellectual freedom as well as potential solutions to addressing these complex issues.

Alyssa De'Ath and Lia Rogers' presentation on an "Intersectional Feminist Archive with Edmonton Archives" discussed their approach in creating a digital archive that honours and demonstrates intersectional feminist values, suggesting that such approaches can improve the inclusivity of libraries and the services they provide.

And finally, the conference wrapped up with a presentation on a "Vanderpump Rules LibGuide," presented by Lia Rogers. This presentation reminded us of the value of having a wide variety of content types and categories in our libraries' collections and of how content can meet a variety of patron needs, including those of fun and enjoyment.

This year's Forum of Information Professionals highlighted ongoing challenges and barriers to access and acceptance in libraries. But the presentations also framed opportunities for improving inclusivity, in turn contributing to the important goal of creating library spaces where everyone feels they belong. As co-chairs of the planning committee, we are grateful to all of the volunteers, presenters and attendees who came together to consider these issues around improving library services for all.