

Diversity in the Collection 2005 Evaluation Project

As part of the collection evaluation, we wished to take a broad overview of all our collections from the point of view of specific population groups. The library profession is traditionally and statistically white, female, middle-aged, able-bodied, heterosexual, and English-speaking. Concerned that there are population groups we may be ignoring or neglecting, we are attempting to look carefully at our collections for bias. We seek to increase awareness and also to see that OPPL's collections represent genuine diversity and not simply offer token titles.

A committee was formed to look at this. We struggled with numerous issues in this charge. It is difficult to discuss needs of a population group without overly generalizing. We are very conscious of the fact that this is an enormous task, and that it is quite presumptuous to believe that we can actually make a judgment such as this, particularly since the committee does not personally represent all of the population groups chosen. We have decided to take a first step, one that will emphasize questions and concerns. What populations make up Oak Park's diverse community? How do we judge a collection's effectiveness in reflecting or serving a particular group of people? What are we missing or forgetting? How can we make this an on-going process?

We have begun the process by targeting nine groups of people for consideration: African-Americans; Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender persons; Latinos; Asian-Americans; people with disabilities; senior citizens; poor people; and men. We have chosen key parts of the OPPL collection to examine. For each location, we are looking at adult print and audiovisual materials, children's print and audiovisual materials, and the young adult collection.

For each category of materials, we are asking the following questions:

- Is this collection welcoming to people within the population group? Does it reflect them? Are there materials by authors (or directors, actors, musicians, etc.) who belong to this group? Are there titles, subjects, and content that represent the population group?
- What issues, concerns, or trends are particularly important or relevant to people within this population group? Do we have materials on these subjects?
- Is the age of this collection an issue? Are there outdated and offensive references, illustrations, use of language?
- Is there a canon of literature to use as a measuring stick for this collection? Are there any helpful checklists? How does this collection measure up?
- What are our goals and aspirations for this collection? What should it be?

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