

What is Diversity? A Conversation Maha Kumaran (University of Saskatchewan); Aditi Gupta (University of Victoria)

Despite many diversity mandates, the library profession has not made any meaningful commitment to foster diversity (Neely & Peterson, 2007; Subramaniam et al., 2012; Jaeger et al., 2014). The 8Rs Redux study (2015), the only most comprehensive report on academic librarians from the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL), highlights two major issues relevant to this project: insufficient efforts by the library profession to diversify, and inadequacies of internal candidates' leadership abilities. Neither CARL nor the recently constituted Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA) have diversity statements or policies. The Canadian academic library governance model does not have a structure or processes in place to foster and practice diversity. Very few Canadian studies in the last two decades have focused on different dimensions of diversity in academic libraries (Dali & Nadia, 2017; De Long, 2013; Kumaran, 2012; Kumaran & Cai, 2015, Lee & Kumaran, 2014; Lee, 2011). Research and anecdotal evidence urge Canadian libraries to recruit more minority, Aboriginal and disabled librarians (Ingles et al 2005; DeLong, Sorensen, & Williamson, 2015; Kumaran, 2012; Kumaran & Cai, 2015) and address the diversity gap in libraries. However, diversifying efforts often stop at staff, librarian, collection, and service levels. To be truly diverse, Canadian academic librarianship needs to have more conversations and a systematic effort towards initiating, fostering, and practicing diversity.

We invite all interested librarians to participate in our philosophical panel discussion and to engage in meaningful conversations about diversity. First diversity means many things to many people. We encourage the idea of inclusive diversity – diversity in many different ways (gender, sexual orientation, age, and ethnicity), and diversity in many areas associated with librarianship (collections, services, recruitment, and leadership), so we will start with a broad question:

“What is diversity?”

Led by Kumaran and Gupta, other ensuing discussions may focus on why diversity is important (what it will do for librarianship or how it will enhance academic librarianship), how can academic librarianship can go about achieving diversity (a systematic process), and finally, how to practice diversity (operationalizing).