
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Yasmine Abou-El-Kheir, Committee Chair

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Yasmine Abou-El-Kheir, Chicago Theological Seminary, Chair
- Daniel (Bonggun) Baek, Vancouver School of Theology
- Evan E. Boyd, United Lutheran Seminary
- David Kriegh, Saint Mary's College of California
- Alice Song, Fuller Theological Seminary
- Donna Wells, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
- Gillian Harrison Cain, Staff Liaison

YEAR IN REVIEW

The 2019–20 year for the Atla Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee was spent building and expanding upon the groundwork from previous years. The committee continued to contribute to the DEI Series on the Atla blog. Six blog posts were written this year highlighting different diversity, equity, and inclusion themes and how members can bolster their collection and meet the needs of various constituencies in their institutions. These themes covered the following topics:

- “Transgender Day of Remembrance, November 20” by Evan Boyd.
- A guest post by Tomoko Shida, the recipient of the 2019 Atla Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Scholarship, on “‘Hospitality’ in Archival Collections Related to the Study of Religion.”
- Reflections by all DEI Committee members on the meaning of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- “African Americans and the Ballot Box: Countering Disinformation Campaigns with Social Media Literacy” by Yasmine Abou-El-Kheir.
- A guest blog post by Sheryl Stahl, director of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, discussing “Yom ha-Shoah (Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Day).”

- “Asian Pacific American Heritage Month (APAHM): A Rich Mosaic” by Daniel (Bonggun) Baek.

In 2020, the Atla Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Scholarship received 15 applications from eligible candidates from ALA-accredited programs in the United States and Canada. The 2020 recipient is Ezra Jiseok Choe, an MLIS student at the University of California, Los Angeles. As a Korean-American Catholic, he brings a Thomistic understanding of the role of diversity in all things, holding a particular interest in exploring how this is put into practice through librarianship. He sees this scholarship as an opening to a productive partnership with Atla, helping him to realize his goal of becoming a theological librarian, bolstering the encouragement of his peers at Biola, where he currently works as a library assistant.

A request was submitted to the Atla board to consider awarding a secondary scholarship to Marian Ekweogwu, a lapsed Nigerian Catholic who identifies as a non-binary queer person. The request was approved, and a second Atla Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Scholarship will be awarded. Marian is a student at UIUC’s School of Information Sciences and is currently enrolled in the Theological Librarianship class with Carisse Berryhill. In the fifteen years between their undergraduate education and entering library school, they served in a variety of roles: an investigator of police brutality for the Civilian Complaint Review Board in New York City, a barista for a queer-run café, and a ranger for the Bureau of Land Management. In these diverse responsibilities, they put their thoughts on diversity into practice, encouraging the underserved and marginalized to take a greater role in their community. They hope that this scholarship will permit them to attend and present at upcoming Atla conferences.

The DEI Committee is currently working on a DEI LibGuide hosted by Atla that will offer members resources and toolkits for facilitating conversations around DEI issues as well as current best practices and policies for libraries. Information on the legal frameworks governing DEI as well as existing DEI policies for higher education and libraries in particular will be shared. The DEI LibGuide is anticipated to become available for members in Fall 2020.

In the wake of the wave of protests following the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arberry, and Breonna Taylor, the DEI Committee approached the Atla Board to issue a formal statement. The Atla Board passed a resolution on June 5, 2020, acknowledging the tragedy of racism and xenophobia as problems that conflict with Atla’s

core purpose “[t]o promote worldwide scholarly communication in religion and theology by advancing the work of libraries and related information providers” by marginalizing some voices and perspectives. The resolution further affirmed Atla’s Organizational End 3.1 and commitment to ongoing training so that “[l]ibrarians and information providers demonstrate competencies in diversity, inclusion, equity, and antiracism.”

For the 2020 Atla Annual in Detroit, the DEI committee planned to offer members a pre-conference excursion to the Arab-American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. A guided tour followed by dinner at a local Lebanese restaurant was planned. Also scheduled for the conference was a workshop facilitated by the Michigan Roundtable on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on best practices, standards, and practical guidelines. The one-hour session was going to touch on areas of bias, communication, and cultural awareness. Unfortunately, the reality of COVID-19 meant that both the excursion and workshop needed to be cancelled.

This coming year, the DEI Committee will continue its work developing a survey of Atla members on existing DEI practices and needs within their libraries and institutions more generally.