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HOPKINS PRESS

Learning about Publishing through a Lens of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access

JHUP Internship 2022–2023

The Johns Hopkins University Press internship program for the 2022–2023 academic year focused on the business of publishing through a lens of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA). As interns, we were able to meet and shadow staff from all areas of the Press—from Books to Journals to Project MUSE—which made for a very organic experience of the world of publishing and, more specifically, of the wonderful, supportive environment that exists at Hopkins Press. We were able to see the responsibilities of each division, the ways in which the different parts of the Press intersect, and, with the focus of the internship in mind, how DEIA was already being incorporated into the day-to-day workplace, along with how it could be better applied to publishing as a whole.

Some of the most striking things that we learned about publishing were [how inaccessible the field could be to diverse voices](#), that a large majority of those being published did not openly identify as members of any marginalized groups, and that, as a result, BIPOC and members of the LGBTQIA+ communities might not be able to find stories that they could identify with on shelves.

After learning this, we reached out to independent booksellers across the country in order to gain some insight into how they find and sell books. We asked booksellers how they learned about new and backlist books written by diverse authors and whether they created displays or offered collections of books by authors from certain under-represented demographics or for annual celebrations such as Black History Month and International Women’s Day. We also asked bookstores how they went about selecting books for their displays, including where they may have learned about the books—whether it was from reviews, metadata, catalogs, sales reps, or

elsewhere. Lastly, we asked booksellers if they struggled to locate books written by diverse authors and what would make finding these stories easier.

This also led us to explore the methods that are currently available for readers themselves to find books about specific topics such as religion, history, or anti-racism, or books about transgender youth.

Book Industry Standards and Communications codes, or [BISAC](#) codes, are used in the world of publishing to classify books. When assigning codes to books, books are first given a heading—such as philosophy, nature, social science, or even true crime. Next, publishers get a little more specific by deciding on a term that best describes the book’s subject matter. For books that touch on multiple topics, publishers can select more codes, with three recommended for any given book.

There are fifty-four sections of codes with over five thousand total options. Despite the thousands of choices publishers currently have to describe books, we realized that there are *still* categories missing. There are no codes available for some subjects, which can make discoverability difficult for bookstores and readers.

For example, Taylor noticed that, while there are over fifteen codes within social science useful for finding books with a DEIA focus, there are none to aid readers looking to learn about the intersections of elements of DEIA—areas where, say, Black Studies and Women’s Studies might meet.

Aliza looked at codes in the Fiction, Poetry, and Literary Collections sections. She noticed that there is a great variety of codes and subcodes for each section but also saw that codes present in some sections are glaringly absent from other sections. For example, there are no subcodes in the Fiction section under Asian American, Hispanic & Latino, or Middle Eastern & Arab American, even though similar subcategories exist in the Poetry and Literary Collections sections. For example, there is FICTION / Asian American, but not FICTION / Asian American / Historical or FICTION / Asian American / Fantasy. In Fiction, there is a subcategory for Own Voices that does not exist within the Poetry section; Poetry, meanwhile, lacks subcategories within the African, Asian, and Middle Eastern sections. Literary Collections also lacks subcategories under African, which is isolated to one code.

Fatihah noticed that the history section of codes offers categories for a wide range of regions, as well as specific moments in time and different conflicts. However, we also saw that some regions have a wider array of codes available than others. For example, developed countries such as the United States, Canada, and Russia have multiple codes available for the different periods of their respective histories. On the other hand, however, entire regions such as South Asia are limited to two broad codes.

Fatihah also observed that in the political science section of codes, while there are no significant issues with diversity, DEIA could be better promoted by adding a history section of codes. This would allow for the attribution of specific ideologies and geopolitical strategies to moments in time, such as Nazi Germany or the U.S. occupation in Afghanistan. By not including a history category in this section, there is the possibility of some erasure of certain stories and the reduction of their historical importance.

Ashlyn noticed that in the art section of codes, there is great diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, and there is even a specific code for women artists, but there are no codes specific to transgender or non-binary people, or those of many other identities. These stories could be beneficial to youth struggling to come to terms with their own identities in a society wrought with phobias and intolerance. She also noticed that in the Religion section of codes, there is no code for religious-related trauma, which has become an increasingly interesting area of study in recent years and one in which more information could be extremely beneficial to certain individuals. Lastly, Ashlyn noticed that in the artificial intelligence section of codes, there are only four codes available. Since AI is relatively new to our society, this makes sense, but we believe it is important to keep BISAC codes up to date to best classify stories that are available and desired by readers.

We knew that we wanted to create something that would not only be representative of our experience while at the Press, but, moreover, something that would incorporate both our knowledge and DEIA principles and be relevant to the world of publishing. For this reason, we decided to dedicate our project to developing new BISAC codes that would advance inclusion and access in publishing, provide a space for voices that are not currently being heard, and make a difference that will last well beyond our time as interns for Hopkins Press. While BISAC codes are updated annually, the process of introducing new codes can be complex and requires evidence that a code is relevant and necessary to publishing and that there are books that could benefit from being listed under a new code. For example, we think that FICTION / Asian American / Fantasy and ART / Transgender & Gender Non-Conforming, broken out under ART / LGBTQ+ Artists, would be beneficial codes to aid discovery. We hope that the codes we submit to the Book Industry Study Group (BISG) are accepted as new BISACs.

Through this internship we not only learned about the business of publishing, we also learned how we, as interns, might have some influence on the future of the industry.

JHUP Internship Cohort 2022–2023

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