

Doing more than tinkering at the margins

In previous issues, we have considered the question “How should academic libraries and academic librarians think about – and engage with, student success?” Contributing to the national conversation on student learning and engagement, our authors explored this question from a variety of angles. On our campuses, we have seen how challenging it is to look comprehensively and critically at student success. In our libraries, we have planned, developed, and launched student success initiatives, interventions and supports to effectively address barriers to student success. We have started to see our potential to contribute to campus investments in moving the needle on college and university student success and retention. Indeed, many of our efforts are making a demonstrable difference in student success.

Student success headlines continue to grab our attention, but today, months into the COVID-19 pandemic, with national and global attention focused on Black Lives Matter, our attention has shifted to other related and equally important questions. “How should we think about college and university affordability?” “How should academic libraries and academic librarians think about – and contribute to – access and affordability initiatives on our campuses?” Today, higher education administrators, faculty and staff alike recognize that our ability to make real sustainable increases in student success directly correlates to our commitment to, and investment in, addressing college and university affordability issues.

Access and affordability have become acute issues for many of our students, even at public institutions. In this special issue, we turn our attention to how academic libraries and academic librarians are thinking about, engaging with and addressing access and affordability issues on their campuses. In their September 2019 “Call for Proposals” for this issue, Guest Editors Lydia Bello and Chris Granatino encouraged topics that fall in the main categories of social justice, the student experience, library administrative decisions or priorities, open education initiatives and strategic partnerships. Many of the articles in this issue are case studies, reflecting current initiatives and demonstrating the range of existing initiatives that advance affordability. Many contain recent reviews, which are very helpful to quickly get an overview of the topic. Informative and useful, the articles that follow can act as instructive examples for busy practitioners who might encounter similar problems or challenges.

Intentional and sustained attention are needed to improve access and affordability on our campuses. Inevitably, novel approaches will be developed, new initiatives will be created and existing initiatives will evolve. The articles in this issue demonstrate that academic libraries and librarians are doing more than tinkering at the margins. We look forward to future contributions to the journal on this important topic and suggest that research articles, in-depth literature reviews and analyses of policies and practices are needed.

Sarah Barbara Watstein

*Lemieux Library and McGoldrick Learning Commons,
Seattle University, WA, USA, and*

Elizabeth Johns

Goucher College Library, Goucher College, Baltimore, Maryland, USA

