

Comics Scholarship, Academic Libraries, and Social Justice

Building Capacity for Research and Teaching with Comics
IMLS Forum Grant LG-250164-OLS-21
San Diego State University
White Paper

SDSU | University Library



The views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

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About this White Paper

This White Paper summarizes and discusses data gathered at three local and national forums that examined librarian and college-level disciplinary faculty needs and perceptions of using comics in higher education. In part, this project explores how well libraries are meeting the needs of their comics communities. Included was an examination of using comics for the study of social justice and social issues, and the role of academic libraries in providing support for scholarly engagement with comics that address those issues.

Funding for this project was provided from a two-year grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

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About the Grant Project

This two-year [Institute of Museum and Library Services \(IMLS\)](#)¹ grant-funded project examined librarian and higher ed disciplinary faculty needs and perceptions of using comics in higher education, particularly for the study of social issues; the role of academic libraries in providing support for scholarly engagement with comics; and how well libraries meet the needs of their comics communities, particularly with respect to social justice in comics.

Although grappling with its own disparity-perpetuating past, the comics medium has long presented a way to engage with timely social issues, including racial injustice, wealth inequality, immigration, food insecurity, climate justice, health care, and equality for all. Comics collections in libraries, public to higher-ed, provide their communities with valuable primary sources to bring communities together and productively discuss pressing and challenging social issues. Questions we sought to answer in this grant project included: How well are libraries meeting the needs of our communities who wish to engage with comics? Do librarians have the resources necessary to support growing comics collections? How can we increase outreach efforts on the use of comics in higher education settings?

Managed by San Diego State University (SDSU), this two-year (2021-23) IMLS National Leadership Grant convened three forums designed to: 1) establish a robust network of research libraries using comics to promote innovations in learning, scholarship, and community engagement; 2) facilitate sustainable campus and community partnerships around the use of comics; 3) explore opportunities to promote the teaching of social justice issues through comics and the ways in which research libraries can support those efforts; and, 4) suggest a model for research-based engagement with comics and community partners that can be adapted for use in other regions of the country.

The forums helped identify and articulate the needs of libraries and the scholars who use them, as pertains to comics research and teaching.

¹ National Leadership Grants for Libraries Program (NLG-L) Forum Grant
<https://www.imls.gov/grants/available/national-leadership-grants-libraries>

Brief Summary of Forums

Our grant project held 3 forum discussions. All 3 forums were held online via Zoom. We included a pre-forum survey to help guide our forum conversations. Participants were invited who work closely with comics or who have a demonstrable interest in doing so.

Forum 1: April 29, 2022: San Diego Area Librarians

Forum 2: September 30, 2022: Academic Librarians Nationwide

Forum 3: November 4, 2022: Higher Ed Disciplinary Faculty Nationwide

Participants

We used a number of methods to identify potential participants. For local San Diego area librarians, we relied on personal knowledge, K-12 staff directories, and assistance from public librarians to identify the best-suited participants. For Forums 2 and 3, we created a list of Universities that had a comics presence either by reputation or that we were able to identify through Internet searching. We searched for academic libraries with librarians assigned to work with comics, libguides, collection pages, special collections finding aids, or evidence of work being done with comics, such as exhibits, news articles etc. Additionally, we searched for librarians who have published about comics. For disciplinary faculty, we looked at class schedules, staff directories in various academic departments, leadership at professional organizations related to comics, recent academic panel presentations at large comic book conventions, and faculty publications about comics. Lastly, we coded our attendees by geographic regions (as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau) to make sure we included schools from across the nation.

Regions

Midwest/East North Central: IN, IL, MI, OH, WI

Midwest/West North Central: IA, NE, KS, ND, MN, SD, MO

Northeast/Middle Atlantic: NJ, NY, PA

Northeast/New England: CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT

South/East South Central: AL, KY, MS, TN

South/South Atlantic: DE, DC, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, WV

South/West South Central: AR, LA, OK, TX

West/Mountain: AZ, CO, ID, NM, MT, UT, NV, WY

West/Pacific: AK, CA, HI, OR, WA

Forum 1: San Diego Area Librarians

April 29, 2022 10-12 PST on Zoom

50 Potential Participants were invited

19 San Diego librarians agreed to participate, including the librarian grant PI. Of those, 18 librarians attended the forum (one public librarian had to cancel) and 15 librarians completed the pre-forum survey. Four (4) librarians in attendance for the forum did not complete the survey and the one (1) librarian who was unable to attend the forum did complete the survey. Both PIs and both grant advisors also participated in the forum.

- Non-Profit and ALA = 1
- K-12 = 2

- Public Library = 9
- 2 Year College = 1
- 4+ Year University = 6

Forum 2: Academic Librarians Nationwide

September 30, 2022 10-12 PST on Zoom

62 Potential Participants were invited

29 academic librarians (including the 2 grant team members who are librarian or museum professionals) agreed to participate. Of those, 25 librarians attended the forum (4 librarians had to cancel) and 25 librarians completed the pre-survey. Five (5) librarians in attendance for the forum did not complete the survey and 4 librarians who were unable to attend the forum did complete the survey. Both PIs and both grant advisors also participated in the forum.

- Midwest/East North Central = 8
- Midwest/West North Central = 4
- Northeast/Middle Atlantic = 5
- Northeast/New England = 1
- South/East South Central = 0*
- South/South Atlantic = 3
- South/West South Central = 1
- West/Mountain = 1
- West/Pacific = 6

**We tried to get a representative from all geographic regions, but unfortunately, librarians from the “South/East South Central” region needed to cancel. We should also note that Hurricane Ian hit Florida shortly before this forum and impacted participation.

Forum 3: Higher Ed Disciplinary Faculty Nationwide

November 4, 2022 10-12 PST on Zoom

78 Potential Participants were invited

43 disciplinary faculty who teach with comics, including our two disciplinary faculty members on the grant team, agreed to participate. Thirty-nine (39) followed through and did participate either by filling out the survey, attending the forum, or both. Of those, 28 attended the forum (15 had to cancel) and 33 instructors completed the pre-forum survey. Five (5) disciplinary faculty in attendance for the forum did not complete the survey and 9 disciplinary faculty who were unable to attend the forum did complete the survey. Both PIs and both grant advisors also participated in the forum. Every geographic region was represented.

- Midwest/East North Central = 5
- Midwest/West North Central = 4
- Northeast/Middle Atlantic = 5
- Northeast/New England = 1
- South/East South Central = 3
- South/South Atlantic = 10
- South/West South Central = 4
- West/Mountain = 4
- West/Pacific = 7

Disciplinary Faculty participants were from the following “home departments”:

- English = 17 (one with a joint appointment in the sciences)
- History = 3
- Women and/or Gender Studies = 3 (one with a joint appointment in Spanish)
- Art = 2
- Education = 2
- Writing, Rhetoric and Digital Studies / Academic Writing = 2
- Classical and Mediterranean Studies = 1
- Communication = 1
- French = 1
- Humanities and Behavioral Sciences = 1
- Information Sciences = 1
- Jewish and Israel Studies = 1
- Languages and Culture = 1
- Liberal Arts = 1
- Popular Culture = 1
- Psychology = 1

Summary of Forum Discussions and Pre-Forum Survey

Forum Participants: Demographics and Institutions

The intent of our first meeting with local San Diego librarians was to build community with our local comics librarians, and to develop a model for collaboration and our nationwide forums. San Diego has an active comics community with Comic-Con International in town, along with the Comic-Con Museum, numerous small conventions, an active array of comic book shops, non-profits, afterschool programs, and a city-wide reading program (One Book, One San Diego) that has been very receptive to comics. Thus, the grant team thought the community was primed for beta-testing the forums. For this White Paper, we have combined pre-forum survey results for forums 1 and 2 - all librarians - and will primarily focus on academic libraries nationwide, including San Diego. While it was incredibly meaningful to meet with our own local K-12 and public librarians, the participant group for forum 1 was not large or geographically broad enough to draw conclusions for a national audience.

Just over seventy-four percent of our participants were librarians working in higher education settings, predominantly at 4+ year universities. Nearly 75% work in public-facing positions which included reference, instruction and outreach work. Fewer than 10% of our participants were in technical services positions, such as cataloging and metadata, and we think this is a category that may warrant future research. Catalogers, for example, are critical to the discoverability of comics in libraries.²

Approximately one third of librarian participants work in special collections, museums and archives, and just over half of all librarian participants have direct responsibility for developing the comic arts collection at their libraries. It is important to note that the primary academic assignment for our librarian participants was not, in most cases, fully dedicated to work in comics. Many librarians juggle their work with comics alongside other subject specialities and assignments. While some libraries have dedicated funding for comics collections and have an easily identifiable librarian assigned to assist disciplinary faculty and students with comic arts research, this is not always the case.

By design, all of the disciplinary faculty participants were from higher education institutions and included a mix of public and private 4+ year institutions and 2-year community colleges. Nearly 88% of participants teach in the Humanities and 22% in the Social Sciences (some teach in both areas). We invited faculty we found were working with comics regardless of their subject area so we think this is likely representative of where comics work is happening in general on college campuses. Participants shared that comics classes are embedded throughout the curriculum at their institutions, with the majority of classes in English and Art. All participants said their institution offered comics classes at the undergraduate level, almost half at the Master's level and nearly a third offer comics classes at the PhD level. More than

² We encourage readers to follow the work of the American Libraries Association Graphic Novels and Comics Round Table Metadata & Cataloging Committee, who collaborates to improve standards for comics: <https://alair.ala.org/handle/11213/18620>

40% of disciplinary faculty participants said their institution does not have any structured engagement for comics, such as certificate programs, minors, majors, graduate work or a center. However, more than half say there is an informal collective of faculty who engage with comics and each other.

Comic Conventions and Conferences

Where are professionals networking and sharing their work? Comic-Con International is the most-attended convention by librarian participants (33.3% have attended). Other conventions mentioned include the Comics Studies Society (15.4%), Popular Culture Association (10.3%), International Comic Arts Forum (10.3%), San Diego Comic Fest (10.3%), with less than 10% reporting attendance at WonderCon, New York Comic Con, Graphic Medicine Conference, Massachusetts Independent Comics Expo, WorldCon, Michigan State University Comics Forum, Fan Studies and Pop Culture cons at De Paul, ICON, and C2E2 Chicago. Thirty-eight and a half percent (38.5%) attend the American Library Association's Annual Conference, which has a strong comic arts presence.³ Almost half of the librarian participants attend or present at conferences not mentioned above in the areas of librarianship and disciplinary studies where it is possible for some engagement with comics to occur.

The most-attended conference reported by disciplinary faculty is the Comics Studies Society with nearly 44% stating that they attend, followed by the Modern Language Association at almost 35%. San Diego Comic-Con and the International Comic Arts Forum tied at 21.9% reporting they attend. All other conferences dipped below 15% of disciplinary faculty stating they attend. Those conventions included: WonderCon, New York Comic Con, Graphic Medicine Conference, San Diego Comic Fest, Women in Comics Con, Black Comic Book Festival, Virtuous Con, C2E2, Angoulême International Comics Festival, and comics sections at conferences like those organized by ACLA (American Comparative Literature Association), ALA (American Literature Association), EAAS (European Association of American Studies), and MELUS/MESEA. Not surprisingly, nearly 60% attend or present at disciplinary subject-based conferences where comics are not central.

Comics Librarians and Library Collections

All librarian participants say their libraries collect comics to varying degrees. Thirty percent (30%) of librarians said their library has a special browsing location for comics that is distinct from their regular circulating bookstacks. Nearly 67% of libraries have comics in the circulating collection (whether in a browsing collection or the regular book stacks) and 64% have comics in special collections units. Approximately 15% of librarians reported only having comics in their special collections unit, nearly 13% reported only having comics in their regular circulating bookstacks, 5% only in a browsing collection, and 2.6% reported only having comics available through a digital platform. Almost 62% of librarian participants reported having comics in multiple locations throughout their library, noting that this can create a barrier to access for patrons.

³ In follow-up conversations, librarians noted a lack of funding as the number one reason for not attending ALA Annual. When faced with tight travel budgets, academic librarians working with comics felt disciplinary conferences and comics conventions were a better fit for their work and had more to offer in terms of research and collection development.

Librarians reported that their collections are strongest in fiction comics and graphic novels (~75%) and non-fiction (~50%). Only 20-30% of librarians felt their collections are strong in scholarly works, manga, single issue comic books, archival materials and ephemera, and digital comics. Less than 15% of librarians consider their collections strong in original comic art, single panel cartoons, comic strips and minicomics.⁴ When asked the same question, disciplinary faculty responses were remarkably similar to librarians, which could indicate that faculty who use or know about their library comics collections know what is in them. However, no disciplinary faculty reported having library access to digital comics. While more investigation is needed to understand the discrepancy, we know that there are a handful of full-text comics databases available for institutional subscription and numerous repositories of public domain comics freely available on the Internet. It is possible that some disciplinary faculty participant's institutions do not subscribe to such databases, but it may also be possible that faculty are not thinking of those as "digital comics." This underscores the role librarians can play in discoverability, and indeed, librarian participants stressed the need for more digital comics and the concerns about copyright when digitizing comics. While disciplinary faculty did not discuss how they use these categories of material differently, librarians noted the challenges and expenses associated with collecting, processing, preserving and storing original art, single issue comic books ("floppies"), archival materials and ephemera, and minicomics.

Nearly 54% of librarians said they build their collections through donations, with more than 69% citing budgets as the top factor that impacts their ability to build comics collections. Thirty-eight and half (38.5%) are following an established collection development policy at their library that governs how they collect in the comic arts.

Nearly all disciplinary faculty participants said their campus libraries have comics (broadly defined) available in its collection. Half to one third of participants use their library's comics collection for their own research, for teaching, or they encourage their students to use it for independent research. Disciplinary faculty noted a desire for more digital comics and discussed the struggles of teaching online without adequate digital options, which may not be a surprise considering that this forum was held during the Covid-19 pandemic when many courses pivoted to online. A number of participants stated that their library's comics collection was too small to be impactful or that it lacks titles of interest for their needs. Others observed that their libraries tend to offer some of the more academically-focused graphic novels, such as those about race and historical events, but not serialized popular superhero comics they wanted to use for classes or research. Overall, disciplinary faculty noted that they would like to see more comics in their library collections, including more diverse selections, more comics in languages other than English, and more scholarly books about comics.

Twenty-five percent of disciplinary faculty do not know if there is a librarian at their institution assigned to assist with comics and nearly 35% say there is not. The lack

⁴ Minicomics are defined as creator-published comics, usually inexpensive to make, and distributed mostly via informal means, making them somewhat similar to zines.

of an assigned librarian subject expert in comics creates missed opportunities for comics-based research assistance (for faculty and students), collection development, collaborative exhibits and events, and library instruction tailored to comics research.

The need to justify comics as a serious medium and worthy of being included in library collections remains common at some institutions. Even when comics are welcomed into a library's collections, such acquisition is rarely done as a collection development priority and receives little to no funding for new purchases. Librarians explained that comics collection development can be difficult, requiring a considerable amount of time and a level of expertise not always experienced in other subject areas, in part because of the way our collection purchasing systems work to suggest new books, and stated they would benefit from mediated lists of suggested comics to purchase for collections that embrace issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. Librarians also emphasized the need for more flexibility in how comics are purchased. Traditional library purchasing methods are falling short. Librarians need the ability to buy comics through crowdfunding, at local comic book stores and at comic book conventions, all three of which are often difficult to make happen within the confines of institutional purchasing rules.⁵ They also suggested collaborating with groups of students and inviting them to suggest new comics purchases, which helps give students a sense of excitement and ownership over the collection. On the topic of cataloging and making comics discoverable, librarians say their institutions employ a variety of cataloging techniques, especially for single issue "floppy" comics, and think higher education could benefit from better metadata, a federated comics catalog,⁶ and a place to collect and share comics collection development policies.

Librarians view outreach efforts to demonstrate the importance of comics and that a library has a comics collection as vital to their success. They offered numerous ideas for engaging with their communities, including: public exhibits, hosting comic book exchanges, starting comics interest groups on campus, creating comics browsing collections, and starting a manga cafe with snacks where manga can be read aloud. They stress the importance of assigning a librarian to comics who can analyze the curriculum for ways to embed comics; collaborate with engaged and passionate faculty members; develop networks of faculty, staff, students, and creators; get involved in recruitment efforts for disciplinary faculty with interests in comics; and to create lesson plans for comics teaching and scholarly projects.

⁵ Two articles for further reading on crowdfunding comics and collection development: Murray, Matthew, and Mara Thacker. "What About Crowdfunded Comics?" in *Comic Books, Special Collections, and the Academic Library*, edited by Brian Flota and Kate Morris. Chicago: Association of College & Research Libraries, forthcoming. | Thacker, M., and Larsen J. (2023) Stretch goals: Launching crowdfunded comics collections in academic libraries. *Art Libraries Journal*. 9 pages in typescript. (accepted for publication on April 17, 2023)

⁶ We point to the importance of a recently unfunded grant proposal: *A Union Catalog of Comic Books*. NEH Foundations Grant Foundations grant for Humanities Collections and Reference Sources. Grant PI: Erika Dowell, Associate Director & Curator of Modern Books and Manuscripts, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Institutional Support for Engagement with Comics

Less than 44% of librarians say their institution participates in programming or creating materials for comics, such as workshops on comics creation, artist talks, scholarly symposia, children's programming, digital exhibits, curriculum guides, podcasts/videos, or book clubs and conventions. However, between 50-60% say they create physical exhibits, resource guides (libguides, for example), and that their institution teaches either disciplinary courses or library instruction sessions using comics.

A lack of funding for collections and lack of resources, such as staffing, were frequently cited as a barrier to success when engaging with comics. One third of librarians cited a low expectation of the seriousness of the comics medium as a barrier to securing support for comics at their institution. In order to enhance their institution's engagement with comics, approximately half of the librarians stated they need teaching/workshop guides, more personnel, increased budget for acquisitions, and access to guest speakers, and a third said they needed more exhibits/displays. They would also like to see more comics classes, more majors/minors/certificates, and to find ways for comic book publishers to make content available in ways that match established library access models. We note that this problem persists in digital comics and also in streaming media, where subscription-based content platforms are made available to end-users directly without institutional licensing options for libraries.

Most disciplinary faculty reported some form of institutional support to engage with comics, particularly in the area of comics course development. Approximately half of institutions represented provide funding for collections and funding to bring in guest speakers, with many participants noting the need for more comics in library collections. Approximately 40% said they receive "intangible encouragement" from administrators and colleagues, which does not always translate to having the necessary resources for success. Only a third of participants have access to funding for comics research, including course releases and internal grants. To support their efforts and enhance engagement with comics on their campuses, disciplinary faculty would like to see more personnel, more funding for collections in the library (including comic arts collections in multiple languages), more comics classes and curriculum, curriculum guides to help more faculty teach comics, the ability to host more guest speakers and comics exhibits, and more funding for research and travel.

Nearly 22% of disciplinary faculty experience no resistance to comics at their institution. However, as with librarian participants, low expectations of the "seriousness" of the medium continue to be an issue (~44% reported this issue). Approximately one third reported limited opportunities to teach with comics, limited library comics collections, and the high price of course materials. Interestingly, at the time of this forum, the contemporary U.S. culture wars (described in more detail in the Culture Wars section below, this includes state laws, book bans, public perception and more) had just started to ramp up. Only 9.4% reported encountering this type of resistance to comics on the pre-forum survey, however, conversations in

the forum indicated a steep rise in censorship (and faculty self-censorship) in using comics with intentional diversity, equity and inclusion themes.

Disciplinary faculty participants noted an overall decline in support for the humanities in higher education and perhaps also a decline in students majoring in the humanities, both of which can hamper administrators' willingness to fund efforts with comics. Librarians also noted the decline in support for the humanities and while some suggested a solution may be to focus more heavily on connecting STEM and medical fields to comics, others noted that we should do more to fight for the importance of the humanities while also working to engage STEM and medicine. Disciplinary faculty noted difficulties with getting institutional support for creative and/or interdisciplinary projects. They observed that colleges and universities are designed with distinct and divided entities, making interdisciplinarity challenging, and said that when resources are scarce, tension, competition and territorialism amongst the faculty often follows. Disciplinary faculty noted that there is sometimes a fear that interdisciplinarity will erode one's home subject area and that faculty and administrations may run away from it to protect their silos. Comics can be at risk when budgets and other resources are slim or withheld. Ideas they offered to mitigate this included building allies and community across the campus to garner lasting support, partnering with neighboring schools to create a comics consortium, and, at some institutions, it may be necessary to demonstrate the power of comics research rather than focusing on teaching and the curriculum.

Many disciplinary faculty discussed issues surrounding uncompensated labor, stating that, in order to make work with comics happen on their campuses, they have to work above and beyond for free. They said that they feel more pressure to prove themselves when working with comics in ways that they do not find true with other fields of teaching and scholarship, and that tenured, senior colleagues do not always support efforts with comics, which can feel threatening to a tenure-track faculty member's success in the tenure process. They note that while administrators recognize the value of comics to impress donors and the news media, and often call upon faculty working with comics to report on their "cool and fun" projects, funding and support for that work is much more rare, and they worry that any institutional support they do receive is tenuous at best. They also noted that when a faculty member is a comics expert, they are frequently called upon to assist other faculty in using comics for teaching and learning. While excited to do so, this essentially creates a teach the teacher model and presents comics faculty with more opportunities for uncompensated labor.

Librarians cited a lot of "passive resistance" to their efforts with comics, meaning that administrators will allow them to pursue the interest but often without any financial support, space, assigned time, staff support or other forms of assistance. They stated that they want to engage more with the curriculum, and help make it easier for non-experts to use comics in their teaching, whether that be disciplinary teaching or library instruction. Librarians shared that they are suffering from widespread burnout as a profession and are often spread far too thin in their academic assignments. They would like more academic libraries to create dedicated

Comics Librarian positions, but due to the structure of academic assignments,⁷ they feel there would need to be a formal academic program/center/major/certificate on their campuses to even start that conversation with their colleagues and administrators. They noted that all-too-often academics are called upon to prove a concept before any discussion of support will ensue, which ties directly back to the unfair, uncompensated labor models disciplinary faculty also face.

Both librarians and disciplinary faculty cited the desire for funding to incentivize colleague participation and compensate them for their time and expertise.

Influencing the Comics Industry

Disciplinary faculty and librarians both had recommendations for how the comic book publishing industry could better meet the needs of professionals working in higher education. They highlighted that, although most academics are not comics creators themselves, they are teaching the next generation of artists, writers, editors, publishers, critics and so on. While they remain uncertain about the degree to which they feel they have the power to influence the industry, they note that comics titles on social issues in recent years have been highly successful because of their use in classrooms and general academic buy-in. They want to see the continuation of diverse publications and worry that might slow due to book bans and censorship. They expressed hope that the industry will not give in to the vocal minority pushing these bans. Faculty note that one of the best ways to influence the industry is through what we do in our teaching, for example, by sharing less well-known and more diverse titles with students. A specific recommendation was to include more engaging scholarly communication in the back of certain comics titles, as was done in the single issues of *Bitch Planet* (Image Comics, 2014). They also described a need for more information from the industry that can lead to academic discussion with students surrounding production and distribution, negotiating contracts, freelancing, intellectual property rights, and creator unions. Lastly, participants encouraged smaller publishers and independent creators to get International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN) for their books. Without one, disciplinary faculty may have difficulties ordering titles from campus bookstores as textbooks for their courses, students may not be able to receive financial aid assistance to purchase the books, and libraries will need extra time and staff expertise to catalog the books.

U.S. Culture Wars

The term “culture war” has been in use since the 1870s globally and 1920s in the United States and commonly refers to topics on which there is general societal disagreement about values, moral codes and lifestyles. Many institutions of higher education say they are grappling with the erosion of intellectual freedom, book bans and the contemporary culture wars and political divide in the United States. Our forum discussions made it clear that academics feel the U.S. education system is under attack and, depending on one’s state and/or county in that state, librarians and disciplinary faculty may not have the freedom - or feel as comfortable and

⁷At many universities, librarians are assigned to subjects that correlate to academic departments and degrees offered. Where comics studies are not an official department and/or are not offered as a degree, librarians felt it was more difficult to garner the support of the library colleagues and administrators to support comics studies.

personally safe - to buy and teach inclusive graphic narratives, biographies of underrepresented people, or bring true but previously ignored histories of marginalized voices to the forefront.

Professionals at public universities described these culture wars as a scary time filled with lots of uncertainty, and said they are bracing themselves for what may come next if the political power tips or worsens in their states. There are concerns that funding may be pulled if they teach about diversity, equity and the inclusion of *all* people (indeed, we have seen that happen in multiple states since the forum conversations were held), and there are very real worries about the personal safety of disciplinary faculty and librarians. Some universities are developing policies for how to handle harassment against faculty and librarians if they are sent death threats, doxxed online, or harassed on social media or via certain mainstream media outlets. Professionals at private institutions noted that they feel mostly sheltered from these culture wars and have been fortunate enough to not be impacted in the same way as public universities.

Although there is some trepidation, many participants also expressed a healthy dose of defiance and self-defined “punk rock attitudes,” refusing to be silenced by current efforts seen to exclude the stories of black, indigenous, people of color, the LGBTQ+ community, women, and any other marginalized group of people. While some disciplinary faculty shared that they do sometimes engage in self-censorship and have eliminated titles they think could cause uncomfortable issues in their classes, others are proactively and purposefully including titles on their syllabi to ensure marginalized voices are celebrated and examined. Some disciplinary faculty described adding as many banned comics to their syllabi as possible.

Both librarians and disciplinary faculty discussed the issue of sensitive topics in the classroom and in library collections, and they challenged each other to think about the merit of content warnings. They noted that it is not just the content itself that may be challenging, but that there is an increased policing of that content by the students themselves. The combination of words and pictures can make, forgive the pun, comics more graphic to some. Topics such as genocide, sexual assault, domestic violence and suicide should be examined with compassion and care in the classroom, but most agree they should be examined. As adults, it is expected that college students will encounter some of the darker histories of the country and the world and participants believe higher education should push back on efforts to sanitize educational materials.

Comics and Social Justice

We asked participants, “What does the phrase ‘Comics and Social Justice’ mean to you?” Librarian and disciplinary faculty gave answers that can be categorized into four main topics: Representation Matters; Education and Raising Awareness; Advocacy, Action and Activism; and, Industry and Creators.

Representation Matters

Participants discussed using comics to explore, support, and share diverse identities, and to give a voice to underrepresented communities, counternarratives and

experiences that have been marginalized. They described studying comics as a way to emphasize different voices and unfamiliar perspectives and to include non-majority perspectives or often mis-represented communities. Participants also expressed interest in increasing the numbers of diverse comics creators.

Education and Raising Awareness

Participants described comics as a pedagogical tool for discussing issues of diversity, inclusion and equity and to make readers aware of the struggles with prejudice with which many marginalized people have dealt. They said comics can hold a mirror up to a society and reflect inequities and biases, bring about a general awareness of social inequities, and communicate issues of fair treatment.

Advocacy, Action and Activism

Comics were described by participants as a way to address human rights and encourage readers to act and advocate for social change. Participants saw comics as having the power to foster more empathy, combat oppression, rectify cultural wrongs, and dismantle hierarchies. They felt comics could be viewed as social criticism that could help readers challenge unequal access and social norms to create a more just, equitable, and sustainable world. One respondent stated that comics can be used to, “promote the end of racism, heterosexism, ableism, environmental racism/eco devastation, nationalism, and transphobia, as well as the establishment of new systems and structures to promote life and wellness of all beings.”

Industry and Creators

Participants also tied the phrase to the publishing industry and creators, stating that social justice has been a major theme in comics since their early production. They also noted that there is an increased ability for artists from diverse backgrounds to create comics which may be directly tied to the impact of social justice movements on comics creators and the industry. But others note that diversity continues to fall short in the industry and many share the concern that the “culture wars” could deter comics publishers from continuing to progress and including a variety of voices.

Lastly, we note that a handful of participants felt the term “social justice” was too distinct or vague to be truly meaningful. Many comics engage with social issues, but fewer explicitly advocate for social justice. Thus, it may be useful to keep terminology in mind when having conversations about the power of comics to effect social change and impact social justice.

We also asked participants what they think can be done to spotlight the importance of comics for understanding social justice issues. Both librarians and disciplinary faculty discussed creating more comics curricula, weaving social issues into the comics classes we already teach, and developing curriculum guides to help others teach with comics. Both groups shared a desire for the industry to continue and increase publishing comics on diverse social topics. Both mentioned increasing comics scholarship and critical up engagement, including publication and participation in professional conferences and conventions. Participants think

collections, exhibits and outreach efforts will help. Both groups also think academics can work to combat book challenges and bans, and work to encourage administrators and colleagues to view comics as being worthy of serious scholarship.

Librarians thought more comics programming could spotlight the important role they can play in understanding social issues. They also identified the need to enhance the discoverability of comics topics in library catalogs and the need for more professional development opportunities for librarians to learn to work with comics. Lastly, librarians explained a need for more advisory guides, reading lists and comics reviews to assist them with collection development. Specific ideas included a better integration of professional reviews of comics into library acquisition systems and more reviews of comics in general in academic journals. They mentioned the need for lists of specific comics titles that address various social issues (perhaps crowd-sourced) so they will know where best to spend limited library book funds. They see a role for collective documents about 1) publishers who have a reputation for or specialize in publishing content from diverse creators or about social issues (i.e. Red Planet Comics, Birch Bark Books, Strong Nations, Blue Corn Comics, Street Noise Books and so on); and, 2) with information about marginalized creators, noting that social justice is not always thematic but applied, for example by publishing the works of diverse creators.

White Paper Working Group's (WPWG) Observations and Suggestions for Future Projects and Research

After participating in the forum conversations and reviewing all the aggregate data from pre-forum surveys and the forum conversations, the White Paper Working Group submits the following suggestions for projects that may bolster comics education and areas that may be ripe for future research.

Forum Participants: Demographics and Institutions

- Find ways to include library catalogers in conversations about comics collections and advocate for the work of catalogers (and technical services) in the area of comics, mini-comics, and zines.
- Consider the needs/viewpoints of administrators in supporting this work. Administrators were not the target audience of our forum discussions. Librarians and disciplinary faculty might need to understand what they need to make all of our comics dreams come true - or to learn why they're resistant.
- Foster better connections with the Comics Industry (see section on recommendations for the Industry below).
 - Consider advocating through ComicsPro, Comics Professional Retail Organization. <https://comicspro.clubexpress.com/>
 - Consider Portland State University's model to hire creators to teach comics creation. <https://www.pdx.edu/comics-studies/>
- Encourage engagement from less frequently referred to academic disciplines, such as the sciences and social sciences.
- Develop ways for a range of institutions to partner, including all types of Universities (R1, R2, small liberal arts, community colleges, private/public, etc).
- Conduct outreach to local K-12 schools as this helps build future comics readers, researchers and advocates
- Educate and Connect with private collectors about the role of libraries. Private collectors often become donors of their collections.
 - Learn more about the collector marketplace through sites such as the Comic Art Fans Collector Galleries & Marketplace <https://www.comicartfans.com/>
 - Consider attending private collector events where they buy and trade with each other.
 - Host a behind-the-scenes tour of your collections to talk about donating, preservation and access.

Comic Conventions and Conferences

- Foster/Identify shared professional spaces within which to engage (i.e. librarians may wish to consider attending conferences and conventions attended disciplinary faculty and vice versa)
- Advocate for funding to allow librarians and disciplinary faculty to attend conferences in each other's fields, while paying special attention to the institutional/structural disparities of conference attendance exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which includes funding, family situation, disabilities

and chronic illnesses, phobias (taken seriously), concerns about personal safety, and state-imposed travel bans.

- Encourage conventions to better integrate education with fandom and not regulate librarianship or educators to an off-site location, mentally or physically.
- Submit panels and/or coordinate tabling and/or participate in “Creators Assemble: Comics Camaraderie, A Networking Event” at conventions and conferences about the range of findings/possibilities this grant has identified
 - Ask smaller cons if they give educators and nonprofits free tables for outreach.

Comics Librarians and Library Collections

- Create mechanisms (StoryMapJS? Database?) for libraries to redistribute - pay forward - duplicate comics or potential donors to other libraries in need or who is actively collecting in a given area.
- Develop a collection development policy for institutions to adapt/adopt with respect to collecting and preserving and publicizing/sharing/access to comics.
- Advocate for clearing cataloging backlogs, preservation and access as collections are typically only usable when findable.
 - Consider hosting “collection management days” (the Columbia University model) or “Saturday volunteer days” (the Billy Ireland model) to engage the broader community in care for the collections.
- Develop new ways to make collections available at a distance to address travel limitations, which in turn embraces disability justice, climate justice, wealth inequality and more.
 - Consider programs to preview content synchronously with researchers using overhead cameras.
 - Consider creating more avenues for special collections and archives interlibrary loan services.
 - Consider facilitating “Secure Virtual Reading Room” visits with low resolution images in a locked folder online that is only available during the virtual patron visit (Billy Ireland model). We note that a barrier to this may be in staffing, cost, and overall sustainability.
 - Consider giving access to an on-site copyrighted materials scans database for items previously scanned in special collections and archives.
- Collaborate with other local institutions on strategic consortial purchases for digital comics packages.
- Educate faculty on the budgetary realities for library materials (for example, the very high cost of digital comics for institutions), including information on how library fee-based subscription services collect data for access counts to better encourage disciplinary faculty not to download and share content, but to give students the link to the resource so the counts properly reflect use (also avoids copyright issues).
- Develop and/or publicize a workflow for how disciplinary faculty and students can request comics purchases from the library. Ensure that both special collections and traditional subject liaison librarians are given opportunities to

view these requests. This is especially important at institutions without a clearly-defined comics librarian.

- Educate potential donors (and disciplinary faculty) about donations and the total cost of stewardship, including impacts on storage space, cataloging time, and preservation supplies.
 - Consider creating a preliminary processing plan for every large donation.
 - Consider creating a video/timelapse from start to finish of how donations are handled and how much work goes into processing them.
 - Familiarize yourself with the [*Total Cost of Stewardship: Responsible Collection Building in Archives and Special Collections*](#)⁸ published by OCLC Research Library Partnership's Collection Building and Operational Impacts Working Group in March 2021.
 - Advocate for the acceptance of comic book donations on your campus. For many institutional comics collections, donations are one of the primary ways to build collections.
 - Develop communication plans that let donors know what kinds of comics you need in your collection.
 - Create a collection development policy that makes it easier to pick-and-choose the most meaningful aspects of a donor's collection for students, faculty and researchers at your institution.
 - Advocate for the resources needed to accept donations at your institution. Smaller schools, in particular, may experience barriers such as staffing, space, Barriers may include space constraints and limited staffing.
- Tease out comics collections at every University. Comics are located throughout the LC Call Number range and can be difficult to locate.
 - Consider mining your collections and creating a comics research guide ("libguide") at your institution.
 - Consider creating a browsable comics collection location.
 - Consider adding a local collection name (for example, San Diego State's "Comic Arts Collection") to tag all books in the collection that are in comic book style or about comics, both in digital and physical format.
- Collaborate on the creation of a clearing-house (online "swap meet") to share duplicate comics with other institutions and advocate with your institution to cover the cost of shipping to build your collection.
- Designate a librarian to serve as the comics librarian/liaison.
 - Consider all librarians at your institution for this role. Comics are a medium, not a discipline-specific genre so a librarian with the passion and interest to support comics may come from any subject background.
 - Consider endowments for named positions, ensuring the longevity of a comics librarian role as there are rarely guarantees on replacements when a librarian leaves or retires.
 - Stress the importance of having a person who advocates for the comics collection and strategizes for that collection's maintenance and growth.

⁸ Total Cost of Stewardship: Responsible Collection Building in Archives and Special Collections, OCLC Research Library Partnership's Collection Building and Operational Impacts Working Group (March 2021); available at <https://www.oclc.org/research/publications/2021/oclcresearch-total-cost-of-stewardship.html#:~:text=Developed%20by%20the%20OCLC%20Research,steward%20archives%20and%20special%20collections>

- Improve collection development tools for librarians who purchase comics.
 - Investigate and suggest improvements to library monographic acquisitions systems, such as GOBI.
 - Collaborate with publishers on better ways to categorize comics for librarians that are less plot-based and more theme-based for issues studied in higher education (for example, adding keyword tags for social issues).
 - Consider creating collaborative libguides to aid fellow librarians
 - Develop topical lists of comics to help librarians less-familiar with comics do collection development for higher ed curriculums (i.e. Core Collections or at least a starting point for those who don't have robust collections).
 - Develop a guide to the diversity of creators to better enable exposing students to diverse voices.(i.e. something along the lines of MariNaomi's The Cartoonists of Color, Queer Cartoonists, and Disabled Cartoonists databases
<https://cartoonistsofcolor.com/about>)
 - Develop a guide on international and vernacular language comics: how to find, order, and catalog them.

Institutional Support for Engagement with Comics

- Redefine/reframe/expand institutional understanding of comics courses as education in visual literacy, at a time when desktop icons, emojis, and the like are taking over the way we work and communicate.
 - Clearly communicate that comics are a medium, not a discipline-specific genre.
 - Collaborate on statements about the impact of comics (What does comics pedagogy teach students? What is the power of comics?)⁹
- Encourage engagement from less frequently referred to academic disciplines, such as the sciences and social sciences (also mentioned in *Forum Participants: Demographics and Institutions*).
- Communicate the value of comics.
 - Consider developing a 'comics in the library' publicity playbook.
 - Gather and communicate statistics for comics, including circulation stats, usage stats, classes taught, and more.
 - Learn to do PR work for interviews and outreach.
 - Engage with your institution's PR divisions to promote comics.
- Lobby for funding to support comics collections and initiatives.
- Develop programming about comics creation to promote an understanding of the maker process.
- Plan for the obsolescence/replacement of individual comics librarians and disciplinary faculty.
- Integrate comics knowledge into LIS programs for new librarians (and into other grad programs for new disciplinary faculty) and Investigate continuing education programs on comics librarianship and/or teaching.

⁹ *The Power of Comics and Graphic Novels: Culture, Form, and Context* (3rd edition) is set to be released in fall 2023.
<https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/power-of-comics-and-graphic-novels-9781350253902/>

- Collaborate on the creation of a libguide for students about how to break into the field.
- Develop career-plan/networking opportunities.
- Create opportunities for mentoring librarians and disciplinary faculty who are new to comics.
- Identify a group of comics librarians and disciplinary faculty who are willing to speak to classes and new professionals.
- Cultivate more acceptance of interdisciplinarity on your campus.

Influencing the Comics Industry

- Close the knowledge gap between industry and schools/libraries so that the industry better understands the role educators play in the comics market, including how educators benefit the industry and sales market.
- Familiarize industry folk with library metadata needs.¹⁰
 - Consider creating a guide that explains cataloging, ISBNs, and Subject Headings for comics creators and publishers.
- Ask crowdfunding systems to better consider the needs of libraries in their distribution models.
- Advocate for institutions to embrace crowdfunding as a valid form of collection development.
- Advocate for more small press comics to be reviewed in the collection development tools libraries use.
- Investigate and suggest improvements to library monographic acquisitions systems, such as GOBI.
- Advocate for the inclusion of more comic book publishers in library monographic acquisitions systems, such as GOBI.
- Collaborate with publishers on better ways to categorize comics for librarians that are less plot-based and more theme-based about issues studied in higher education (for example, adding keyword tags for social issues).
- Advocate for digital comic book publishers to offer institutional subscriptions and for digital platforms/databases to offer collections meaningful to a higher education curriculum.
- Advocate for more comic book publishers to allow the licensing of their titles in digital comics platforms/databases.
- Determine and communicate the ways in which the needs of libraries and education benefit the creator and publishing industries too.
- Consider creating study guides at the creator/publisher level.

U.S. Culture Wars (especially as it relates to “Comics and Social Justice”)

- Develop coordinated responses to anti-comics/anti-social-justice legislation and for specific titles that are challenged or banned.
- Educate the community about how to register their dissenting opinion when there are challenges or bans.
- Mobilize and speak at school board meetings.
- Run for school and political offices.

¹⁰ We encourage readers to follow the work of the American Libraries Association Graphic Novels and Comics Round Table Metadata & Cataloging Committee, who collaborates to improve standards for comics:
<https://alair.ala.org/handle/11213/18620>

- Collaborate with organizations such as the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom, the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, Creators Assemble!, and the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund.¹¹
- Buy and teach inclusive graphic narratives, biographies of underrepresented people, or bring true but previously ignored histories of marginalized voices to the forefront.
- Encourage the comics creation and publishing industry to continue and increase publishing comics on diverse social topics.
- Utilize comics as a pedagogical tool for discussing issues of diversity, inclusion and equity.
- Ensure that collection development policies, especially in K-12 and public libraries, proactively address comics challenges and the protocol for challenging books.
- Stay up-to-date on state laws, proposed legislation, and official responses to book bans, and be prepared to educate patrons and lawmakers on the merits of comics.¹²
- Consider providing a combination of digital and physical comics in a collection to broaden how users are able to access materials that may be challenged or banned.

¹¹ See *Standing Against Book Bans: Practical Resources and Comics, Social Justice & You* <https://www.creatorsassemble.org/>

¹² See, for example, California's letter to school districts about educational rights and requests to remove materials (<https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Book-Bans-Letter-6.1.23-1.pdf>), Ohio's proposed HB327 to ban "divisive concerts" (https://search-prod.lis.state.oh.us/solarapi/v1/general_assembly_134/bills/hb327/IN/00/hb327_00_IN?format=pdf), and Florida's CS/HB7 Individual Freedom Act, commonly known as the Stop WOKE Act (<https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Bills/billsdetail.aspx?BillId=76555>), and Parental Rights in Education Act (HB 1557), commonly referred to as the "Don't Say Gay" law (<https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/1557>).

StoryMap Directory

[Comics Collections in Academic Libraries \(U.S.\)](#) is a searchable visual map of libraries and/or librarians with strengths in comics studies using [StoryMapsJS by Knightlab](#). The map will help librarians and comics researchers find some of the major academic comics collections nationwide with the added bonus of viewing the content visually on a map of the United States.



<https://tinyurl.com/ComicsCollections>

Appendix A

Building Capacity for Research and Teaching with Comics IMLS Forum Grant LG-250164-OLS-21 San Diego State University Community Collaboration Model

Our grant team offers this **Community Collaboration Model** as a suggestion for research-based engagement with comics and community partners that can be adapted for use in other regions of the country. What decisions did we make to propel our project forward? What worked? What didn't? How can libraries throughout the country lead similar community engagement sessions for librarians in their area who work closely with comics?

We held three forum discussions: San Diego Area Librarians (our local community), Academic Librarians Nationwide, and Academic higher ed disciplinary faculty Nationwide. We used the same structure and format for each forum. This document will focus on the first forum with our own local community with noted changes we made for our forums with academic librarians nationwide and academic higher ed disciplinary faculty nationwide.

About San Diego County

San Diego County is the second most populated county in the state of California and in the top ten for most land area (4261 square miles). The county has approximately forty K-12 school districts, four 4+ year universities, and five 2-year public community college systems. The county includes the San Diego Public Library system (City of San Diego) with 36 branches, the San Diego County Library System with 33 branches, and six independent city-specific public libraries (Carlsbad, Chula Vista, Coronado, Escondido, National City, Oceanside).

Our Model: What We Did Before the Forum

Identifying Participants

For "Forum 1: San Diego Area Librarians," we invited librarians from all regions of San Diego County. In our experience, academic librarians who work with comics were easier to identify than public or K-12 librarians.

For academic librarians, we searched university websites for librarians named as a subject expert for comics and library news announcements about comics collections or exhibits that named specific librarians. In some cases, we searched the university's course catalog to identify classes that work with comics and then invited the librarian assigned to the subject area (most often found in the Humanities).

To identify public librarians, we relied on a combination of already-existing connections to help get the word out to those librarians who may be interested and "cold calling" reference services for referral to whichever librarian they thought best. For example, SDSU's Comic Arts Librarian had previously presented at a local comic book convention with three public librarians so knew to invite them, and two

librarians at SDSU have familial connections to librarians in the public library systems so we reached out to them to learn the best way to share our invitation. They were able to forward our call for participation on internal listservs, sending respondents to us.

Identifying K-12 librarians who work with or have a keen interest in comics proved more difficult. Not every school in San Diego has a librarian and it's often difficult to confirm who the correct professional may be from school staffing lists, when such lists are made publicly available. San Diego has a vibrant comics community with numerous local non-profit organizations who work with K-12 schools, and our local grant team knows a number of parents with children in the K-12 system. Because of that, we were able to partially rely on our own prior knowledge about which schools to target for inclusion. We also contacted the main county librarian listed at the Board of Education website.

We also included one representative - a recently-former librarian - from a local comics non-profit who had advanced expertise on building comics collections in our local public libraries.

In all categories, we asked invited librarians to share with us the names of any other librarians in the county they think would be a good fit for our forum discussion and were able to do a small, second round of invitations based on that feedback.

Graphic Notetaking

We hired a graphic notetaking service to attend the forum and create a graphic representation of our discussion. We tasked a graduate student with researching possible organizations for this role and requesting quotes. After viewing work samples of 4-5 finalists selected by our graduate student and comparing quotes, we chose [A Visual Approach](#). An unplanned benefit to holding forums online via Zoom is that the graphic notetaker need not be local to your area.

Invitation and General Timeline

We scheduled a 2-hour meeting on Zoom on a Friday morning from 10am - noon. As an aside, we found this time to work well for national discussions as well as it provided us with the most accessible start times for mainland locations (apologies for the 7am start time, Hawaii!).

We sent an email invitation conveying our enthusiasm and desire to create a community of librarians who work with comics. In our email, we told participants what to expect: a 2-hour forum, a general idea of who might attend, and that they could expect a Pre-Forum Survey to arrive in their email during a specific week. Since we gave ourselves a month in between the RSVP deadline and the email of the Pre-Forum Survey, we knew there would be a gap in between our communication to participants so we felt it was important to stick to a pre-planned schedule. We gave invitees two weeks to RSVP.

One week after our RSVP deadline, we sent the Pre-Forum Survey to librarians who agreed to attend the forum. We gave participants 4 weeks to complete the survey

and sent two reminders, including the day it was due. Behind the scenes, our true deadline for the survey was set for an additional week after the due date in case there were late additions. For the first forum, the deadline for completion of the survey was set 6 weeks before the actual forum itself. This gave the grant team ample time to analyze the survey results and prepare for the forum conversation.

Ten days before the forum, we emailed participants the Introductions Slide Deck. The deadline for the Introductions Slide Deck was the day of the forum.

Pre-Forum Survey

Our forum goals were: to understand what librarians are currently doing with comics; what types of collections they have; what characterizes their patron base; how they are engaging with comics and their communities; what successes and struggles folks have faced; and what they dream of being able to do with comics in libraries. To start that conversation, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire via Google Form before the forum discussion. Their answers helped guide our discussion during the forum and allowed us to see patterns to deploy in-forum activities.

Introductions Slide Deck

One of our forum goals was: “1) We think it will be valuable for comics-minded academic librarians to get to know each other! Exciting opportunities surrounding comics regularly arise and it is our hope that building a community will help us all.” We employed an icebreaker that Dr. Elizabeth Pollard (co-PI) uses in her classes and that we had successfully used in 2020 with instructors throughout the California State University system that teach with comics. The Introductions Slide Deck serves the purpose of a digital business card. Participants were given an opportunity to personalize their own slide in the deck to introduce themselves to other participants. We ask for their name, affiliation and contact information; a photo; and a page or cover from a comic of their choosing and a brief explanation of why they chose it. Then we asked participants to answer 3 questions: Why Comics? What are you hoping to discuss in this forum? Favorite comic, comics genre or superhero and why? Alternately, what comics are you reading right now? (Not everyone enjoys picking a favorite so we elected to broaden the last question to be more inclusive or varying levels of comics readership and fandom).

The Introductions Slide Deck was shared in Google Slides with our own slides serving as examples and enough template slides in the deck to accommodate all attendees. Template sample available in the Appendix D.

Our Model: What We Did During the Forum

Forum Agenda

We set a very strict timeline and it largely worked, however, we made some slight modifications for the national forums.

Agenda/Schedule for Forum 1: San Diego Librarians

10:00-10:10 Welcome/Overview/Demographics (10 minutes)

- 10:10-10:40 Introductions (30 minutes)
- 10:40-10:55 Brief report out on remaining survey results (15 minutes)
- 10:55-11:00 Short Break (5 minutes)
- 11:00-11:50 Discussion (50 minutes)
 - 11:00-11:05 Intro to Breakout Groups
 - 11:05-11:20 Work in Breakout Groups
 - 11:20-11:50 Forum-wide Discussion
- 11:50-12:00 Wrap-Up/Next Steps (10 minutes)

Welcome/Overview/Demographics

To convene the meeting, we introduced the grant team and our graphic notetaker. We then discussed the granting agency and our grant project before moving into a brief presentation about the aggregate demographics of forum attendees (type of institution, core job duties, conferences/conventions regularly attended, characterization of user base, and strengths of their institution's comics collection). We also reported their answers to the survey question: What does “comics and social justice” mean to you?

Introductions

In Forum 1, we gave each attendee 60 seconds to introduce themselves using the Introduction Slide Deck. In the corner of each slide was a timer that counted down to zero as soon as that slide was clicked. This was an engaging way to build community and get to know each other. In hindsight, we think 90 second introductions would have been better. However, this activity also took a considerable amount of time and would not have been successful in our larger group forums.

For Forums 2 and 3, we broke participants into Break-out Groups of 4-5 people each. Groups were given 10 minutes to introduce themselves and get to know each other in their small groups. We found this method more successful, allowing a few people to make meaningful connections rather than asking for surface-level hurried introductions forum-wide.

Break

Because this was only a 2-hour meeting, we still thought it wise to take a 5-minute pause in the middle for a brief break.

Brief Report Out on Remaining Survey Results

As a conversation starter, we presented an overview of the remaining Pre-Forum Survey results to participants using slides generated from Google Forms. This gave us a reasoned and data-based starting point and helped us ground small-group conversation in a shared set of data drawn from them in the aggregate.

Break-out Rooms

We analyzed the Pre-Forum Survey results and grouped questions for further discussion to create our breakout rooms. To accommodate the number of attendees while keeping the break out rooms small enough for fruitful conversation, we organized it so that multiple groups discussed the same topic. For Forum 1, we created three different topics to discuss and assigned two groups to each topic. For

the national forums, we gave each group the same set of topics and questions to explore. Upon completion of the three forums, our team preferred the method used for the national forums.

We created a Breakout Rooms Slide Deck to which all participants had edit access that included slides where they could record their notes and refer back to the Pre-Forum Survey questions assigned to their group to spark discussion.

Our Break Out Rooms were split as follows:

Forum 1: San Diego Librarians

Breakout Groups 1 and 4 were labeled “Enhancing Engagement/Programming” and were focused on Pre-Forum Survey questions 18, 20, 24, 28.

18 and 20. What synchronous (live, in-person or via web-conferencing) or asynchronous programming focused on comics do you or your institution provide?

- Tips? What’s worked and what hasn’t?
- Ideas for how best to share tips with the library community?
- What do you want to do that you can’t (and why)?

24. What do you need to enhance your institution’s engagement with comics?

- How to make this happen?
- What exists already?
- What can we work together to create?

28. What do you think can be done to spotlight the importance of comics for understanding social justice issues?

- Share/Expand on discussion from survey

Breakout Groups 2 and 5 were labeled “Resistance to Comics” and were focused on Pre-Forum Survey question 22.

22. What, if any, resistance to comics do you encounter as a librarian?

- What kinds of challenges from parents/community do you experience and how do you handle them?
- What can the profession do to mitigate these issues?
- In what ways is this amplified/impacted when we are talking about social justice-related comics?

Breakout Groups 3 and 6 were labeled “Acquisitions/Location” and were focused on Pre-Forum Survey questions 14 and 16.

14. Where are comics located at your Institution?

- What are the considerations that go into that location?
- What are the impacts of that choice (stigmatizing comics? Getting them “out there”)?
- Do these decisions have an impact for social justice around and in comics?
- Are you satisfied with their location? Where would you put them if the choice was yours alone and why?

16. What factors influence your institution’s comics acquisitions? In other words, how are decisions made about how many and what comics are

acquired by your institution?

- How does the comics publishing and distribution model impact acquisition decisions?
- How does patron demand come into this? Are patrons able to request/suggest new comics and are you able to respond positively to those requests?
- Are there ways (with the exception of more money, of course) that can help with the lack of resources? How can we collaborate to strengthen regional collections? Opportunities for consortia purchases?
- Perhaps more for librarians working under a liaison/subject speciality model - How well does your library support “off-book” specialities that may not specifically support a degree-granting program? Are comics unique in this?

Forum 2: Academic Librarians Nationwide

Based on your surveys responses, these are areas we thought you'd like to dig into further as a group:

24. What do you need to enhance your institution's engagement with comics?

- How to make this happen?
- What exists already?
- What can we work together to create?

26. Describe the themes/topics of your comics programming/materials (synchronous or asynchronous). (For example, does your programming address social issues? Are there ties to local city reading programs?)

- What are you doing to engage your communities with comics?
- What do you want to be doing and what do you need to make that happen?

28. What do you think can be done to spotlight the importance of comics for understanding social justice issues?

- Share/Expand on discussion from survey

Forum 3: Academic Instructors Nationwide

Based on your surveys responses, these are areas we thought you'd like to dig into further as a group:

Institutional Support

- What has worked and what has not? How did you get support for it or what challenges have you faced in getting support? How can your successes be replicated? How can we avoid pitfalls? What can we work together to create?

Book Challenges and Culture Wars

- How are the challenges in K-12 education filtering up to higher ed? How are we facing those challenges? What can we do to help ourselves, K-12 and libraries face them?

The Comics Industry

- How can academics influence the comics industry to be more diverse and engaged with social justice issues (broadly defined)? How can we make visible the work of diverse creators?

Academic Seriousness of the Comics Medium

- 14 of you noted a concern that comics are not taken seriously on your campus. Whether you have faced this challenge or not, what can be done to bring administrators and colleagues along?

While 15 minutes may not sound like a long period of time, we know it can feel like an eternity in a Breakout Room. We felt that 15 minutes would require participants to mostly stay on task while still allowing time for pleasantries and to build community. After the small group discussion, we came back together to discuss the topics as a larger forum group.

Our Model: What We Did After the Forum

After the forum, the PIs met to review all of our notes and capture the main ideas discussed by participants. We considered what worked and what did not to improve the subsequent forums and revised our interactive portions and agenda for future forums. We updated our grant advisors and discussed the identification of possible White Paper Working Group members to join us in drafting the White Paper.

Appendix B
Building Capacity for Research and Teaching with Comics
IMLS Forum Grant LG-250164-OLS-21
San Diego State University
Invitation to Participate Email for Librarians



Pamela Jackson and Elizabeth Pollard
San Diego State University
Co-PIs for IMLS Grant, "[Building Capacity for Research and Teaching with Comics](#)"

Dear [name],

We write to query your willingness to participate in a virtual (via Zoom) forum discussion about comics and librarianship this spring. In case we haven't met, we are Pamela Jackson (Comics Arts Curator) and Dr. Elizabeth Pollard (History Professor) at San Diego State University. We the founding co-leaders of SDSU's [Center for Comics Studies](#) and we have been awarded a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to:

1) establish a robust network of research libraries using comics to promote innovations in learning, scholarship, and community engagement; 2) facilitate sustainable campus and community partnerships around the use of comics; 3) explore opportunities to promote the teaching of social justice issues through comics and the ways in which research libraries can support those efforts; and, 4) suggest a model for research-based engagement with comics and community partners that can be adapted for use in other regions of the country. This project will foster sustainable library partnerships to support the inclusion of comics in education.

Our project includes three forum discussions (local librarians, librarians nationwide, comics scholars). We're eager to get you involved in our second forum discussion, with academic librarians from across the country who work closely with comics (or who have a demonstrable interest in doing so). The forum discussion will take place on **[DATE] from 10am - noon PST and will be hosted virtually on Zoom**. Participants will be asked to complete a short questionnaire via Google Form (to be sent out the 4th week of August) before the forum discussion. Your answers will guide our discussion and a post-survey crafted after the forum discussion will expand and clarify our conversation.

Our goals are two-fold: 1) We think it will be valuable for comics-minded academic librarians to get to know each other! Exciting opportunities surrounding comics regularly arise and it is our hope that building a community will help us all. 2) We want to understand what librarians are currently doing with comics, what types of collections they have, what characterizes their patron base, how they are engaging with comics and their communities, what successes and struggles folks have faced, and what they dream of being able to do with comics in libraries.

If you are interested in participating in the forum discussion, would you kindly let us know by responding to this email by **[DATE]**? If you are not the right librarian for this subject at your library and can recommend another librarian who might be a good fit, please let us know!

We really appreciate you time,
Pam and Beth

Appendix C
Building Capacity for Research and Teaching with Comics
IMLS Forum Grant LG-250164-OLS-21
San Diego State University
Invitation to Participate Email for Disciplinary Faculty



Pamela Jackson and Elizabeth Pollard

San Diego State University

Co-PIs for IMLS Grant, "[Building Capacity for Research and Teaching with Comics](#)"

Dear [name],

We write to query your willingness to participate in a virtual (via Zoom) forum discussion about comics, social justice and library support for comics education. In case we haven't met, we are Pamela Jackson (Comics Arts Curator) and Dr. Elizabeth Pollard (History Professor) at San Diego State University. We the founding co-directors of SDSU's [Center for Comics Studies](#) and we have been awarded a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to:

1) facilitate sustainable campus and community partnerships around the use of comics; 2) explore opportunities to promote the teaching of social justice issues through comics; 3) suggest a model for research-based engagement with comics and community partners that can be adapted for use in other regions of the country; and, 4) establish a robust network of research libraries using comics to promote innovations in learning, scholarship, and community engagement.

Our project includes three forum discussions (San Diego librarians, librarians nationwide, comics scholars). We're eager to get you involved in our third forum discussion with higher education faculty from across the country who work closely with comics (or who have a demonstrable interest in doing so). The forum discussion will take place on **Friday, Nov 4, 2022 from 10am - noon PST** and will be hosted virtually on Zoom. Participants will be asked to complete a short questionnaire (to be sent out the last week of September) before the forum discussion. Your answers will help guide our discussion in the virtual forum. You need not prepare anything to present other than a brief introduction to yourself. The forum will be a guided conversation where we can discuss our collective needs related to comics education. **The total time commitment for this forum is approximately 2.5 hours** (questionnaire and forum discussion).

If you are interested in joining us, would you kindly let us know by responding by **September 19, 2022**?

We really appreciate you time,
Pam and Beth

Appendix D
Building Capacity for Research and Teaching with Comics
IMLS Forum Grant LG-250164-OLS-21
San Diego State University
Pre-Forum Survey to Librarians

* Required

1. Name*

2. Email Address*

3. Institutional Affiliation (Name of Institution)*

4. Type of Institution*

- 2-Year Higher Education
- 4-Year Higher Education
- Other (Explain)
- Public Library
- K-12 School Library

5. If you answered "Other" to Question 4, please explain:

6. In which area(s) of librarianship are your core job responsibilities? Choose all that apply.*

- Public Services (reference and instruction)
- Curatorial/Archival (special collections)
- Cataloging
- Collection Development
- Other (Explain):

7. If you answered "Other" to Question 6, please explain:

8. Which conventions or conferences do you regularly attend and/or present at? Choose all that apply.*

- None
- San Diego Comic-Con (including Comic Arts Conference and CCEL)
- New York Comic-Con
- Comics Studies Society
- Popular Culture / American Culture Association
- American Library Association
- Other (Explain)

9. If you answered "Other" to Question 8, please explain:

10. How would you characterize your user base? Choose all that apply.*

- Early Reader
- Kids
- Young Adult
- Adult
- Older Adult

- Non-native Language Learners
- College Students
- Scholars
- Community/Fans
- Other/explain

11. If you answered "Other" to Question 10, please explain:

12. What would you consider to be the strengths of your institution's comics collection? Choose all that apply.*

- Fiction Comics and Graphic Novels
- Nonfiction Comics and Graphic Novels
- Manga
- Single Issue Comic Books (i.e. floppy comics)
- Archival Materials and Ephemera
- Original Comic Art
- Digital Comics
- Single Panel Cartoons (newspaper cartoons; editorial/political cartoons)
- Comic Strips
- Mini-Comics
- Other (Explain)

13. If you answered "Other" to Question 12, please explain:

14. Where are comics located at your Institution? Choose all that apply.*

- Comics Browsing Collection
- Regular Circulating Book Stacks
- Special Collections
- Subscription Databases/E-Books
- Other (Explain)

15. If you answered "Other" to Question 14, please explain:

16. What factors influence your institution's comics acquisitions? In other words, how are decisions made about how many and what comics are acquired by your institution? Choose all that apply.*

- Budget
- Donations
- Collection development policy for comics
- Collection turn-over (limited space; weeding)
- Standing agreement with publisher
- Online licensing
- Common Core / Standards
- No choice (titles are selected centrally)
- Other (please explain)

17. If you answered "Other" to Question 16, please explain:

18. What synchronous (live, in-person or via web-conferencing) programming focused on comics do you or your institution provide? Choose all that apply.*

- Workshops on Comics Creation
- Artist Talks
- Scholarly Symposia
- Children's Programming
- Book Clubs
- Conventions
- Teaching
- Other (Explain)

19. If you answered "Other" to Question 18, please explain:

20. What asynchronous materials for engaging comics do you, or your Institution, create? Choose all that apply.*

- Physical Exhibits
- Digital Exhibits
- Curriculum Guides
- Resource Guides (libguides, for example)
- Podcasts/videos
- Other (Explain)

21. If you answered "Other" to Question 20, please explain:

22. What, if any, resistance to comics do you encounter as a librarian? Choose all that apply.*

- Lack of administrative support
- Challenges from parents/community
- Lack of funding to purchase comics
- Lack of resources (staff, funding, etc) to create programming
- Low expectations of the "seriousness" of the medium
- Low curricular reception (faculty/teachers not invested in using comics)
- Other (Explain)

23. If you answered "Other" to Question 22, please explain:

24. What do you need to enhance your institution's engagement with comics? Choose all that apply.*

- Teaching/Workshop guides
- Access to guest speakers
- Increased budget for acquisitions
- Exhibits/Displays
- Personnel
- Other (Explain)

25. If you answered "Other" to Question 24, please explain:

26. Describe the themes/topics of your comics programming/materials (synchronous or asynchronous). (For example, does your programming address social issues? Are there ties to local city reading programs?)

27. What does the phrase "Comics and Social Justice" mean to you?

28. What do you think can be done to spotlight the importance of comics for understanding social justice issues? Dream big! We welcome general responses or details about specific comic titles that show promise for engaging social justice.

29. Do you know of a librarian who might be interested in participating in a forum focused on how libraries can promote the ways that comics address social justice issues? If so, please give us their name & contact information!

30. May we use your data (name, institution, contact info) to create a network of librarians interested in comics?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe (Ask me again later)

Appendix E
Building Capacity for Research and Teaching with Comics
IMLS Forum Grant LG-250164-OLS-21
San Diego State University
Pre-Forum Survey to Instructors

* Required

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Name (Last, First)*
2. Email Address*
3. Institutional Affiliation (Name of Institution)*
4. Type of Institution*
 - 2- Year Higher Education (e.g. community college)
 - 4+ Year Higher Education Public
 - 4+ Year Higher Education Private
 - Other (Explain)
5. If you answered "Other" to Question 4, please explain:
6. In which broad subject area do you teach using comics? Choose all that apply.*
 - Humanities
 - Social Sciences
 - Fine Art
 - Education
 - Health and Human Services
 - Professional and Media Studies
 - Science, Technology, Engineering, Math
 - Other (Explain):
7. If you answered "Other" to Question 6 or want to provide further clarification, please explain:
8. At which conventions or conferences do you regularly attend and/or present? Choose all that apply.
 - None
 - San Diego Comic-Con (including Comic Arts Conference and CCEL)
 - WonderCon
 - New York Comic-Con
 - Comics Studies Society
 - Popular Culture / American Culture Association
 - International Comic Arts Forum
 - Comics and Popular Arts Conference (CPAC)
 - Graphic Medicine
 - Mechademia (Conference on Asian Pop Culture)
 - Modern Language Association
 - Other (Explain)

9. If you answered "Other" to Question 8, please explain:

TEACHING INFORMATION

10. In which departments are comics most frequently taught on your campus?

11. At which academic levels are comics taught on your campus? Choose all that apply.

- Undergraduate
- Master's
- Ph.D.

12. What types of institutional support, if any, is provided to engage with comics? Choose all that apply.*

- Curricular approval of comics-specific classes
- Funding to purchase comics (either in the library or for personal use)
- Funding to bring in guest speakers
- Fundraising to specifically support comics efforts
- Funding for comics research (including course releases, internal grants)
- Intangible encouragement
- None
- Other (Explain)

13. If you answered "Other" to Question 12, please explain:

14. What kinds of institutional support for comics would you like to see?

15. What, if any, resistance to comics do you encounter as a faculty member? Choose all that apply.*

- Low expectations of the "seriousness" of the medium
- Limited opportunities to teach with comics
- Low student interest in taking comics courses
- Limited access to comics or high cost of course readings
- Lack of resources (staff, funding, etc) to support extracurricular comics efforts
- Culture Wars - state laws, book bans, public perception
- None
- Other (Explain)

16. If you answered "Other" to Question 15, please explain:

17. Does your institution have any of the following? Choose all that apply.*

- Certificate program in comics
- Minor in comics
- Major in comics
- Graduate work in comics
- Informal collective of faculty who engage with comics
- Formalized Center or Institute for comics
- None

18. What do you need to enhance your institution's engagement with comics? Choose all that apply.

- Teaching/Workshop guides

- Access to guest speakers
- Access to more comic arts materials in circulating collections
- Access to more comic arts materials in special collections and archives
- Exhibits/Displays
- Personnel
- Other (Explain)

19. If you answered "Other" to Question 18, please explain:

COMICS AND YOUR CAMPUS LIBRARY

20. Does your campus library have comics (broadly defined) available in its collection?*

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

21. If your campus library has a comics collection, is it in the circulating collection or in special collections?*

- Circulating
- Special Collections/Archives
- Both - in circulating and in special collections
- I don't know

22. If your campus library has a comics collection, do you use it? Check all that apply.*

- I use it for my own research
- I use it for my teaching
- I encourage students to use in their independent research
- No, I do not use the library's comics collection
- My library does not have a collection

23. If you want to elaborate on your answer in question 22, please share a few thoughts here:

24. If your campus library has a comics collection and you do NOT use it, why not? Check all that apply.

- It's too small of a collection to be impactful
- It lacks titles of interest/they don't have what I need
- There are barriers to access, such as short hours and the physical location of the comics
- I prefer to access my comics from elsewhere
- I don't really need to access them
- Other (explain):

25. If you answered "Other" to Question 24, please explain:

26. If your campus library has a comics collection, what would you consider to be its strengths? Choose all that apply.

- Fiction Comics and Graphic Novels
- Nonfiction Comics and Graphic Novels
- Single Issue Comic Books (i.e. floppy comics)
- Archival Materials and Ephemera

- Original Comic Art
- Digital Comics
- Single Panel Cartoons (newspaper cartoons; editorial/political cartoons)
- Comic Strips
- Mini-Comics
- Manga
- Alternative Comics
- Underground Comix
- Graphic Medicine
- Scholarly and Critical Works about Comics
- Other (Explain)

27. If you answered "Other" to Question 26, please explain:

28. Is there a librarian assigned at your institution to support comics research and instruction?*

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

29. If there is a librarian who supports comics at your institution, in what ways have you engaged with them? Choose all that apply.

- The librarian has taught library research skills to my comics-related classes
- The librarian has guest lectured on comics-related topics in my classes
- I have sought the help of librarians when conducting comics research
- I work with the librarian to secure materials (books, articles, databases, etc) for my comics-related classes
- I have partnered with the librarian on comics research or an exhibit
- I have partnered with the librarian to host a comics event
- I have referred students to the librarian for their own research projects
- Other (Explain)

30. If you answered "Other" to Question 29, please explain:

31. In terms of comics collections, what do you wish your library had more of?

COMICS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

32. What does the phrase "Comics and Social Justice" mean to you?

33. What do you think can be done to spotlight the importance of comics for understanding social justice issues? Dream big! We welcome general responses or details about specific comic titles that show promise for engaging social justice.

Appendix F
Building Capacity for Research and Teaching with Comics
IMLS Forum Grant LG-250164-OLS-21
San Diego State University
Introductions Slide Deck

Make a copy of the Introductions Slide Deck template here:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/18YZApEC4_150ehM51xB8cgLoAYFSuAaWcwvwnWkPN3M/edit?usp=sharing

YOUR NAME

(INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION AND CONTACT INFO)

ADD IMAGE OF COMIC PAGE OR SUPERHERO AND FILL IN TEXT-BOX CAPTION BELOW, CREDITING WHERE YOU GOT THE IMAGE.

NOTE: PLEASE DO NOT EDIT OTHER PARTICIPANTS' SLIDES OR CHANGE ANY OF THE SETTINGS (BACKGROUND ETC.) ON YOUR SLIDE... ALTHOUGH YOU CAN MOVE THINGS AROUND ON YOUR SLIDE AND ADD ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO "CUSTOMIZE."

IMAGE CREDIT (WHAT IS THE IMAGE ABOVE, WHY DID YOU CHOOSE IT, AND WHERE DID YOU GET IT?)



ADD IMAGE OF YOURSELF (OR REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE) HERE...



Appendix G
Building Capacity for Research and Teaching with Comics
IMLS Forum Grant LG-250164-OLS-21
San Diego State University
Graphic Notetaking Images

Why Graphic Notetaking?

Why not graphically represent a conversation about a visual medium?! Graphic notetaking highlights key parts of a conversation and may lead to better recall of the topics discussed. It allows participants to see patterns and can also spark new ideas. As our team at [A Visual Approach](#) says, “Visual facilitation supports greater participant engagement, planning and understanding of complex ideas through real-time synthesis and art. ... Graphic facilitators shine a light on the insights of any group.”

The first forum meeting was asynchronous and we received graphic notes later, however at the national forums, our graphic note-taker was part of the conversation and illustrated our conversation in real-time. We paused twice for them to talk participants through the notes they were creating for us.

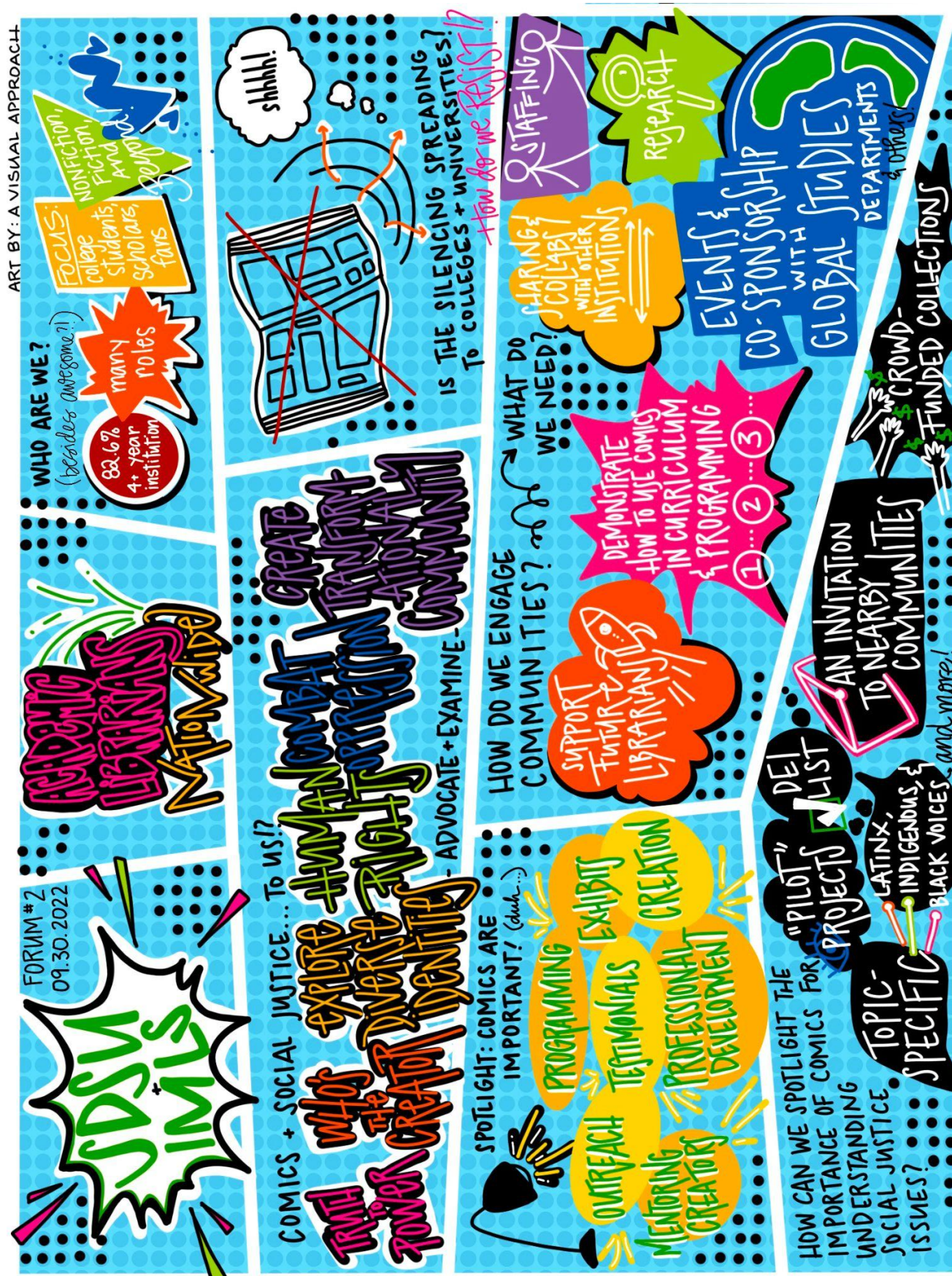
Observations About Graphic Notetaking

The graphic notetaking was particularly valuable for reviewing at-a-glance what had taken place across hours of meetings. For us, the note-taking was most effective as an artifact of what transpired and even as a useful generator for post-meeting conversations. Due to the way we structured the virtual meetings, it was less effective for driving the meeting’s conversation and some attendees found it distracting. In-person or with more time dedicated to talking through the graphic notes (or perhaps working in smaller groups), the graphic notetaking might have been more valuable in the moment. Nonetheless, the graphic notetaking offered a valuable etic/external perspective and an opportunity to see a graphic visualization of the conversation by a non-participant. As such, it provides a valuable conduit for others who did not take part in the live discussions to see what happened. Finally, using a graphic notetaker provided a chance to capture what was discussed in a manner consistent with the visual topic of conversation. The dynamic combination of word and image beautifully captured the vibrant conversation about comics’ value in putting word and image together to create empathy in readers and to promote multimodal approaches to literacy, learning, and social justice.

Forum 1: San Diego Librarians



Forum 2: Academic Librarians Nationwide



Forum 3: Academic Instructors Nationwide



More Information about this grant can be viewed at:
<https://comics.sdsu.edu/grants/impls>

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