Knology

Emerging Research

On Identity, Representation & Inclusion in Museums

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Research Brief: Emerging Research on Identity & Museums

From 2018 to 2020, the Emerging Research on Identity, Representation & Inclusion in Museums project team set out to document graduate-level research on identity in the museum field, and support professionals' ongoing research and publishing on these topics. The project was supported in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (Grant No. #NLG-M-FY18 / MG-50-18-044). Researchers at Knology synthesized over 90 graduate student theses about identity and museums from 2000 to 2018. In parallel, we interviewed a sample of the authors whose work appeared in the literature review, to understand how identity research has played a role in their careers. To support new and ongoing identity research, we hosted a 10-month Writing Scholars Workshop for a group of 12 emerging professionals from across the United States who represented diverse institutions, professional experiences, and backgrounds.

The museum field is currently exploring representation, equity, and authority, but there seems to be less attention paid to the underlying concept of *identity*. By encouraging further consideration of this critical topic through our research, we hoped to strengthen museums' capacity to improve their communities' well-being. Ultimately, we produced a bibliography of graduate-level research on identity and museums, as well as a peer-reviewed paper presenting the analysis of the literature and interviews of select authors. In the workshop, the Writing Scholars analyzed historic research on identity topics and published a series of articles on the evolution of these topics in museum literature. Together, these resources provide valuable insights for the current field-wide conversations about identity, and point to new directions for future research.

This project not only documented the progress of identity work, but also serves as a call for the museum field to continue to invest in this area of practice and inquiry.

This project not only documented the progress of identity work, but also serves as a call for the museum field to continue to invest in this area of practice and inquiry. Unsurprisingly, our study showed that the intersection of identity and museums is a vast and complex subject. Even though we only scratched the surface, the project offered much-needed synthesis of the issues surrounding research on identity in museums. The literature review and interviews, as well as the products of the Writing Scholars Workshop showed that graduate students and emerging professionals are knowledgeable about identity and have the potential to advance museums' work in this area.

Key Takeaways

Our project showed ample evidence of museums' efforts to address both a wide range of identities and continuously changing demographics in the United States. Graduate student research offered an elaborate illustration of this work, which is a valuable companion to the identity research published by museum researchers and professionals. The graduate literature showcased numerous efforts to respond to and represent identity through exhibitions, programs, and collaborations. The majority of graduate research took place in culturally specific museums, which may suggest that they are seen as leaders or models of this work. These identity projects addressed a wide range of topics, including sovereignty, gender, racial equity, and history. In spite of these developments, our analysis also showed that there is still room for growth. Identity researchers observed in their studies that many museum projects still tend to present identities as one-dimensional and ignore the intersectional nature of identity. In turn, these misrepresentations can lead to further marginalization.

Furthermore, the graduate students' writing showed that emerging museum professionals have both sophisticated thinking around and personal experience with these topics. Bringing their insights to bear on the field has the potential to transform the conversation around identity in museums. However, we found two gaps in translating this experience into emerging professionals' daily work. First, individuals who studied identity in graduate school are typically unable to use their expertise when they enter the museum workforce, for reasons relating to funding, administrative support, and institutional inertia. Second, studies of identity in graduate literature – and other academic literature – are not widely read by museum professionals. In spite of these gaps, it appears the museum field is interested in projects on the complexities of identity. We feel many museum professionals can benefit from this work.

Museum professionals should pay attention to power structures in collaborative work.

All Museum Professionals: Representing identity is complex and difficult and requires risk-taking that is often uncomfortable. The studies in our literature review advocated for soliciting input from visitors, as well as engaging in sustained conversations and collaborations with stakeholders. Studies also noted that museum professionals should pay attention to power structures in collaborative work. For those looking for more information on developing projects about identity, we suggest exploring the models described in graduate student literature, such as those named in our Bibliography, as well as other scholarship. We also encourage professionals with experience in identity work to write and publish this information. This has the two-fold benefit of expanding authors' topical knowledge, and rightly positions them as experts in the space.

Leaders & Administrators: There are two areas where museum leaders and administrators have an opportunity to advance their work: first is related to emerging and mid-career museum professionals, and second concerns museums' overarching approach to identity.

Regarding museum professionals, museum leadership should know that recent museology graduates and others who are new to the industry are disappointed by the field's inertia on topics relating to identity, as well as the related issue of compensation. At the same time, these emerging professionals have remarkable confidence in museums and what the field

can achieve, and they are eager to make their mark. Investing in new hires from a range of cultural backgrounds will help the field benefit from these professionals' enthusiasm, experience, and knowledge about identity topics. In parallel, since new hires often come from graduate programs, museum administrators should consider how to strengthen relationships with museology programs at universities, so that priorities are aligned.

The strongest recommendation was summed up as this: change who is at the table making the decisions.

Regarding museums' approach to identity, our research indicates that museums have the opportunity and the responsibility to address identities in richer and more equitable ways. Many studies and interviews pointed to the role of institutional policies in creating or supporting change, and also the interplay between policies, risk-taking, and individual action. Across our research, the strongest recommendation was summed up as this: change who is at the table making the decisions. Additionally, museums have a reputation and a history of ignoring, misrepresenting, or marginalizing some aspects of identity and museums need to build trust with communities to redress this history.

Funding Agencies: Identity topics will likely expand in importance as U.S. demographics continue to evolve. The good news is that many museums are already trying out identity-focused exhibits and programs in response to these changes. By indicating their continued support for these kinds of exhibits and programs, funding agencies can drive forward momentum in museums' efforts to help their communities explore identity. Our research points to two areas of work that funders should consider promoting. First, culturally specific museums can serve as models for approaching identity in sophisticated and compelling ways that audiences respond well to. They need funding to continue this work, and also to mentor others in experimenting with identity topics. Second, emerging museum professionals are fonts of knowledge about identity issues, but museum systems are not set up to prioritize their expertise. The field would benefit from funding agencies' investment in building new mechanisms for foregrounding emerging professionals' insight and nurturing their ongoing learning.

Researchers & Evaluators: Our research showed that evaluation is critical to understanding visitors' reactions to what is – and what isn't – represented in museum practices. And there's an opportunity to further cultivate evaluation and identity work. Graduate student literature can be a valuable resource for those studying museum topics, exhibits, and programs about identity. Culturally responsive evaluation is a growing priority in the museum field, and graduate literature offers methods and analytical approaches that aptly handle the complex issues surrounding identity. For example, graduate theses point to findings that can help evaluators and researchers conceptualize identity topics and assist institutions in navigating identity work. There is also a rich body of work produced by researchers and professionals (i.e., not graduate students) in museums and adjacent fields that we did not address in this project. Future synthesis research should interrogate and mine these resources. A good place to start would be the far-reaching and intersectional aspects of racial and ethnic identities in both museum practice and operations.

University Scholars & Administrators: Our research showed that museums and museology programs in universities appear to operate as separate systems, creating a gap between academic research and professional knowledge. But museums and graduate programs have shared interests, and there are ample opportunities to coordinate their work. Already, there are some strong collaborative efforts between academia and practice professionals, typically evident in internship initiatives. We encourage more conversations about the capacity to produce knowledge and opportunities to build complementary knowledge systems in academia and museums. In particular, graduate school administrators should reflect on the value of theses, and consider effective ways to leverage students' knowledge and publicize their work. Scholarly journals can play a role in this dialogue, but they should be a part of a multifaceted approach to the challenges and not the sole antidote.

Further Reading

Here's where readers can find the products of this project:

Research Brief – A digital version of this Research Brief and the full report can be found here: *https://knology.org/article/emerging-research-on-identity-and-museums*

Bibliography & Abstracts – This is a list of citations and abstracts for the 90+ graduate theses and dissertations that shaped our study of research on identity. The Bibliography and list of abstracts can be found here: *https://knology.org/article/resource-bibliography-of-research-on-identity-and-museums*

Identity & Museum Practice: Promises, Practices, and a Broken Pipeline – This is a peer-reviewed paper published in *Curator: The Museum Journal*, describing methods and results of our synthesis of graduate student literature about identity and interviews of a selection of authors. This paper is currently in press.

Virtual Issues: Articles by Members of the Writing Scholars Workshop – This page provides synopses of the papers produced by the Writing Scholars during the workshop, with links to each of the open-access articles. The Virtual Issues can be found here: *https://knology.org/article/mining-historical-research-on-identity-and-museums/*

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Introduction

This project sought to describe emerging research on identity, representation and inclusion in museums published by graduate students between 2000 and 2018. The project aimed to aggregate, summarize, and disseminate the significant body of literature that is produced in museums studies and related academic disciplines, with a focus of describing what that literature says about museum practice today. Our team also examined how engagement in the research process influenced the subsequent practice of emerging professionals in the early part of their museum careers. There were three intended outcomes of this work:

1. Increase field-wide knowledge about the range of ways museums are responding to the changing demographics of American society;
2. Increase field-wide knowledge about the ways museums are responding to the multi-layered nature of identity; and
3. Increase field-wide capacity to represent the changing demographics and the evolving knowledge about identity.

We engaged in this work with the goal of creating outputs that could support some key groups: museum professionals, administrators, funding agencies, researchers and evaluators, and scholars in university museology programs.

We pursued this effort through four primary activities:

- **Qualitative analysis** of doctoral and master's theses related to identity, representation, and inclusion in museums;
- **Interviews with former graduate students** to examine how they view the role and responsibility of museums in issues of identity and representation, and explore ways in which their academic research influences their practice;
- **An online meeting** with our advisors following Activities 1 and 2; and
- **A mentoring program** for a cadre of 12 emerging professionals who have grappled with the central concepts of identity and representation to support the publication of their work in the peer-reviewed literature.

We undertook these activities **to produce a set of deliverables, which are represented in this report:**

- **This Research Report** to inform the ways that museum professionals design programs, exhibits, marketing plans, community partnerships, and other endeavors; shape the ways museum studies professionals design research courses or advise students, and help administrators make decisions about strategic institutional directions, fiscal priorities, or organizational structure;
- A companion **Research Brief** that summarizes the most significant, promising, or problematic findings and the implications of those findings to practice (appearing as the executive summary for this report);

- A **Bibliography** of all theses we identified and analyzed, and now available at InformalScience.org and at the Knology.org website. This publication was made available to support anyone planning programs with the public or conducting research (Morrissey & Dirk, 2020);
- **Seven scholarly reviews** of the *Curator: The Museum Journal* archives, published in Volume 63(4);
- **A peer-reviewed article** that summarized the literature review and interviews described in this report; and
- At the end of the project, some members of the Writing Scholars Workshop also reported having prepared or neared completion of a manuscript based on their own research for a peer-reviewed museum journal or other museum-focused publications.

Background

In the first two decades of the 21st century, museum professionals have increasingly paid attention to identity and representation in ways that reflect the perpetually changing demographics of society in the U.S. and a growing awareness of the complex dimensions of identity. We sought to understand how this trend might be reflected in graduate student work, given that current graduate students largely come from the generation that came of age at the turn of the century. This age group is also the largest U.S. generation and the most racially diverse generation in U.S. history (Cohn & Caumont, 2016). At the outset of our project, we were aware that graduate student work would cover a wide range of topics. These students were studying topics such as the influence of teen programs on ethnic identity (High, 2013), the representation of Two-Spirit Indigenous artists in art museums (Cooper, 2017), inclusion of people with disabilities (Reich, 2014), programs for returning veterans and their families (Klein, 2015; Romero, 2012; Ahlschwede, 2017), ways in which historic house narratives are disrupting heteronormativity (Buckner, 2016), presentation of racial identities (Erickson, 2015; Moore, 2017), and development of tribal identities (White, 2013).

The suggestion at the start of this project was that the body of thesis research had great potential to inform how museums might be more proactive in their engagement with diversity and inclusion. The body of research had met the rigorous standards for academic research, and the students conducting this research aimed to be part of the future of museum practice. However, university research is rarely available in venues or formats that are commonly perceived as useful to museum practitioners, researchers, or other decision-makers.

For centuries, the land that is now called the United States has been home to people with a wide range of identities. Demographics have always been in flux and these changes continue today. A sampling of recent demographic research illustrates how different aspects of identity have shifted in the last decade alone. By 2020, it was projected that U.S. communities would have more than 20 million veterans, the highest number since the end of WWII (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2018). Thirteen percent of the population is born outside of the U.S., and the U.S. is now the second largest Spanish-speaking country, ahead of Colombia and Spain (Instituto Cervantes, 2015; Planas, 2016). More than a million U.S. residents identify as transgender and young adults are more than

twice as likely as any generation to identify as LGBTQIA+ (Cohn & Caumont, 2016). The percentage of U.S. individuals who identify as solely of White or Caucasian heritage is in decline, and a rapidly increasing segment of the population identifies with two or more races (Jones & Bullock, 2012). The religious landscape of the country is also changing, in part reflecting a global rise of and migration by members of Islamic religions, including those fleeing persecution and religious intolerance. Parallel to the rise in fundamentalism across most religious perspectives, there is also a significant increase in people indicating no religious affiliation (Pew Research Center Religion in Public Life, 2017). At the same time, the ways that people understand identity are changing. Dialogue about identity taps into a variety of frameworks, including culture, biology and genetics, and social groups, among others.

At the time of this report, the museum field was responding to these ongoing shifts with an increased emphasis on inclusive practice, a topic reflected in the solicitation for the IMLS Leadership Grant that *"places importance on diversity and inclusion,"* and the 2016-2020 strategic plan of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) that sought to promote *"Diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion in all aspects of museum structure and programming"* (AAM, 2020). A number of grassroots movements are also focusing on diversity, inclusion, equity and social justice. Museum Hue (*https://www.museumhue.com/*), a consulting organization, is a *"multicultural platform for diversity, advancing people of color within arts, culture and museums."* The Incluseum (*https://incluseum.com/*) is a digital platform started by two graduates of a museology graduate program, which *"advances new ways of being a museum,"* and *MASS Action* (*https://new.artsmia.org/programs/community-arts/mass-action/*) was initiated by Minneapolis Institute of Art to *"build more inclusive museum practices."*

In the following chapters, we present the results of this project, followed by a chapter outlining lessons learned.

Synthesis of Graduate Literature

The research was driven by these questions:

1. What might graduate research contribute to the literature of the field?
2. How does the practice of engaging in graduate research influence practice?
3. What does graduate research suggest about the role of identity in museum practice?
4. What does graduate research tell us about the ways that museums are representing identities?

Methods

The two-stage parallel mixed-methods research employed a configurative literature review of relevant master's theses and doctoral dissertations (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Devlin, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and semi-structured interviews with a sample of the authors conducted before completing the analysis of the literature data corpus. The protocol we used is inquiry-based and qualitative in nature, based in grounded theory. It followed a specific (although flexible) research-based strategy for the selection, analysis, and synthesis of the literature and interview data. Our plan was to conduct a novel synthesis of these data sets with the goal of producing new knowledge. We hoped that these new understandings of identity in museums could advance "evidence-informed decision making" (Gough, Oliver & Thomas, 2012, p. 250) for professionals in a variety of roles in the field.

In this study and across the project, the project team considered how to approach *identity* as a construct. Researchers have conceptualized identity in wide range of ways, rooted in different social science and humanities disciplinary perspectives. Instead of prioritizing an overarching definition, we relied on project participants and authors' approaches to personal or group-level identity in their work. As a result, our research included a plurality of identities and conceptualizations of identity.

Literature Review

We included dissertations and theses published in the United States between 2000-2018 using the ProQuest research database as our primary data source. Our search used ProQuest codes such as Museology (0730), Ethnic and Racial Studies (0631), and Women's Studies (0453) and keywords associated with Diversity or inclusion (e.g., diversity, inclusion, equity, representation); Social justice (e.g., social justice, social change, social issues); and Identity (e.g., identity, Indigenous, gender, race, LGBTQIA+, and variations of those terms).

When we identified a relevant study, we also noted the studies that ProQuest identified as related, and through this snowball strategy, identified further studies and keywords. We focused only on studies that dealt with representation of identities of groups or individuals. This process led to 92 relevant studies from 51 universities and more than two dozen disciplines. Forty-one were master's theses and 51 were doctoral dissertations.

We used a spreadsheet to organize the metadata provided by ProQuest, according to a handful of characteristics, including degree type (masters or doctoral), university, discipline of the department approving the paper, date of publication, ProQuest codes, and keywords as identified by the author (e.g. whiteness, diversity, ethnicity, identity, communication). We incorporated additional categories of information from the study text, such as the types of museums involved (e.g. art, science, living collections) and the type of museum practice studied (e.g. exhibits, programming, management). The spreadsheet became the classification scheme for the studies and allowed us to isolate or compare groups of studies (e.g. studies that took place in art museums, studies that looked at gender identities, etc.).

The spreadsheet and the studies were uploaded to NVIVO to support individual coding based on our central variables (identity, representation, inclusion, diversity, equity) and then with secondary codes that emerged from both text searches and readings. We then searched for, and examined, trends and anomalies across the studies or within categories of studies and through iterative readings and axial coding, identified salient cross-cutting themes.

Interviews

We selected a sample of 16 papers that represented the range of studies that appeared in the literature review, by university, degree type, and topic. We located email addresses of the authors and invited them to participate in an interview. We were able to successfully schedule an interview with 12 of the 16 authors during the summer of 2019. Five had completed master's theses and seven had completed doctoral dissertations. Their degrees were completed between 2008 and 2018 at nine different universities. Three of the degrees were in museum studies or museology, three in arts-related programs, three in anthropology, and the others in education, gender studies, and information science. The universities ranged from large, research-based universities to smaller colleges. Most reported having experience in museum work, but only three were employed in a museum environment at the time of their interview. Several others were working in academia or in community organizations with connections to museums.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol (Appendix A) consisted of three modules:

Module 1 Research Experience: This module largely focused on the individual's experience in writing their master's or doctoral thesis. The module sought to understand how the topic and associated tags were selected.

Module 2 Current Work: This module sought to understand the influence of the individual's thesis work on their current career.

Module 3 Broader Reflections: The module asked about personal understandings of diversity and identity representations in the museum space.

The interview protocols for this project were conducted in accordance with Knology's Federal-Wide Assurance (FWA#00021378) to ensure the protection and safety of human subjects participating in research. The team all maintain current training certificates through Protecting Human Research Participants (PHRP) and have certificates on file for inspection at

Knology's offices. The protocol 2019/05/7, Emerging Research on Identity and Representation in Museums was verified as Exempt according to 45CFR46.101(b)(2): Anonymous Surveys No Risk on 05/17/2019 by the federally registered IRB, Solutions IRB (IRB00008523, IRB Type: OHRP/FDA).

Advisor Review

Our approach was motivated by our belief that the priority of both museums and universities is to understand and advance humanity, and to continually reassess our ideas about equity and social justice. We did not see this work as objective, detached observers. Rather, we positioned ourselves as reflexive researchers who are actively engaged in looking for evidence about what works and what does not work with the hope of informing practice that promotes inclusion and diversity. As a result, we sought to employ a transparent process, continually reflecting on how our roles and backgrounds shape the research in discussions among the research team, and seeking out alternative explanations for what we think we see in the data.

As part of that process, we engaged three advisors in two dialogues to check our work at the mid-point as we sought to triangulate the data from the document analysis with the interviews to challenge and test hypotheses and biases. Based on the feedback we received at that point, we then revisited the work to complete our literature review, settling on the production of a peer-reviewed paper that framed our findings, and could be published alongside the work of the *Curator: The Museum Journal* – Knology Writing Scholars supported by this project. As part of crafting that paper, we once again reached out to our advisory panel to seek peer-review of our results and their assessment of the potential impact this work might have on the museum field once it is published and shared publicly.

The Advisory panel consisted of three leading thinkers on inclusive practices in the museum sector:

- **Alethia Wittman** co-founded The Incluseum in 2012 and currently acts as co-director. Currently, Wittman is a museum consultant supporting clients who are navigating inclusive transformation. She previously worked at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle, WA from 2017-2020. At the Burke, Wittman was the first to hold the position of Interpretation Programs Manager and part of the team that launched the redesigned museum, in October 2019. From 2012 to 2016 she managed exhibits as well as youth and family programming for the Seattle Architecture Foundation. Wittman holds an MA in Museology from the University of Washington where she researched emerging curatorial practice in art museums and how those practices engage with social justice issues.
- **Stephanie Johnson-Cunnningham** has extensive experience implementing inquiry-based learning methodologies at the New-York Historical Society, Brooklyn Museum, and African American Museum in Philadelphia, and has served as a museum educator for children and adult audiences as well as more didactic approaches at the tertiary level as a lecturer at the School of

Visual Arts, City College of New York, and New Jersey City University. As Museum Hue's Co-Founder and Creative Director, Stephanie works to propel the visibility of artists and cultural producers of color in the creative economy. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Art and Art History from Brooklyn College and a Master's degree in Cultural Heritage and Preservation Studies from Rutgers University.

- **Laura Schiavo** is Program Head, Museum Studies and Decorative Arts and Design History; Associate Professor at the Corcoran School of Arts & Design at George Washington University. She has worked at a variety of museums in the DC area and has partnered with the National Park Service on various research projects and a national symposium. Her current research looks at the contemporary work of U.S. museums in the field of civic engagement and the historic roots of that commitment, and has published in the areas of visual culture, museums and diversity, and museums and identity. Schiavo is currently working on an initiative to address the vital issue of the role of Museum Studies programs in the lack of racial, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity in the museum profession.

Advisor Recommendations at the Project Mid-Point

Advisors' input helped guide the project team's thinking about the research and how to shape the work products. There were two points at which advisors provided feedback: at the project mid-point and at the end of the project. Below, we summarize their input and how the project team responded to their guidance.

In December 2019, at the mid-point of the project, the project team met with the three advisors to gather feedback on the preliminary results, as presented in a draft bibliography and consolidated set of abstracts, a draft report on methods and analysis to date, and plans for project outputs in the second year of the project. The advisors also provided written recommendations for the work in the second year of the project. In the meeting and written feedback, they discussed a range of topics. Here is a selection of the discussion points that were most salient to the work: the role of socioeconomic status and race in both graduate research and experiences as professionals in the museum field, how this project could push the museum field and academia toward inclusive practices, the role of race and white supremacy in museums' work on identity topics, and the project's dual focus on museums' representation of identity and the role of identity in the museum career pipeline. Meeting minutes and written comments can be found in Appendix F.

The project team addressed these recommendations in their ongoing work in the second year of the project. We reviewed the data corpus, based on some of the advisors' recommendations. In the peer review paper, analysis took current events into consideration when interpreting opportunities for museums to be proactive in giving voice to diverse experiences and identities. In the Writing Workshop, we also encouraged scholars to investigate topics related to race and ethnicity, especially as they related to current events, in their writing projects.

Advisor Recommendations at the End of the Project

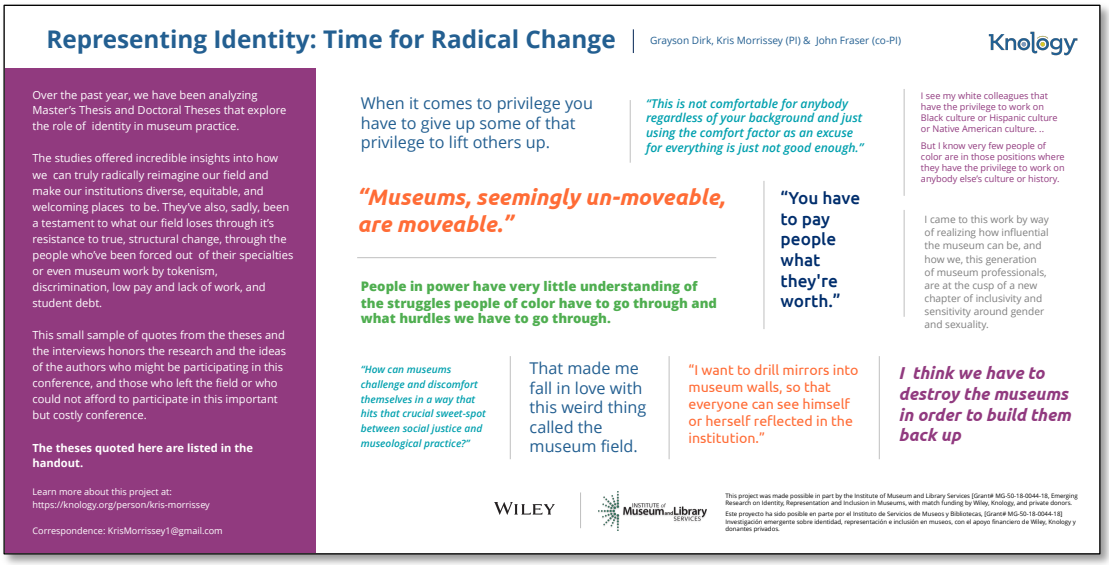
In 2020, the three advisors served as peer-reviewers for the draft paper prior to publication (Morrissey & Dirk, 2020). This "semi-blind" review process allowed the advisors to draw on their earlier critique of the research, recommendations, and priorities to assess the merits of the paper. These review comments were synthesized and shared as a consolidated recommendation. The advisors' peer review comments, in general, noted the following points. They pointed out that the paper needed to be clear about how individuals doing research on identity are often themselves marginalized and tokenized in both graduate school and in the museum field. Advisors also advocated for a higher-level explanation of museums' general approaches to identity, which are too often one-dimensional and overlook the role that the institutions themselves play in marginalization. The reviews suggested that the graduate level research should be framed as nuanced and sophisticated rather than unique, since books and articles written by non-students have addressed similar topics.

The project team revised the paper to address advisors' constructive critiques and submitted the manuscript to *Curator: The Museum Journal*. The journal editor determined that all points were addressed by the authors prior to publication, and the peer-review summary was included in the journal's metadata for archival use and to support potential auditing of the process.

In October 2020, the project team met with project advisors to review the project outputs and conclusions. During the meeting, advisors reviewed each section of this report and made recommendations to clarify or revise specific components. The advisors then assessed the project's contributions to the museum field. They commented that the combination of qualitative analysis, literature review, and a professional development program increased the project's value. This approach both embodied the spirit of inquiry and modeled a way to support the field. Advisors also reflected on the benefits and drawbacks to designing the project around graduate-level publications. While the research elevated an often overlooked yet important source of information about identity, the advisors reminded us that results are limited to graduate theses and do not include the significant body of work in peer-reviewed literature. Finally, advisors said that this project's research on identity could help professionals in a wide range of roles continue to prioritize equity in museums. They hoped for research on this topic to persist, with future studies concentrating on race and ethnicity. The minutes from this meeting appear in Appendix G.

Communicating the Results

We communicated the results of the literature review and interview study in two ways. First, in May 2020, as part of the American Alliance of Museum's virtual conference, Kris Morrissey, Grayson Dirk, and John Fraser presented a poster highlighting key concepts that emerged in the research (Figure 1).



Second, the research findings were the subject of the peer-reviewed paper: "Identity & Museum Practice: Promises, Practices, and a Broken Pipeline," authored by Kris Morrissey and Grayson Dirk (2020). The paper is currently in press and will be published in the November 2020 issue of *Curator: The Museum Journal*. The abstract for the paper is as follows:

> "Acknowledging and representing identities in ways that connect with contemporary society is one of the most complicated, contested and perhaps critical challenges facing museums. To explore how museums are addressing that challenge, we turned to a source of research that is rigorous, cross-disciplinary and often grounded in contemporary ideas of museums as sites of social activism-doctoral dissertations and master's theses. We analyzed almost a hundred studies and conducted interviews with 12 of the authors to explore how their research informed their practice.
>
> The studies demonstrate a range of ways that museums can and are engaging with complex ideas about identity, largely through exhibitions; occasionally through collections, collaborations, and programs; and only rarely through institutional operations. The studies position identity as core to museum work and perhaps an overlooked variable in the efforts to promote diversity, inclusion, and equity. Drawing from different disciplines, they describe identity as complex, fluid, dynamic, and intimately related to both personal experiences and societal structures of power. The studies provide compelling arguments for why museums need to change the ways they address,

acknowledge, and represent identities. These arguments fell into three categories: Opportunity, Responsibility, and Survival.

Interviews identified barriers to entering or advancing within the field for individuals who encompass different life experiences and perspectives. Although a small sample, we believe their experiences demonstrate a broken career pipeline that may contribute to the lack of diversity in the field. We conclude that graduate student research may provide a unique catalyst for social change" (Morrissey & Dirk, 2020).

Writing Workshop

The ***Curator: The Museum Journal*** **- Knology Writing Scholars Workshop** was a professional development opportunity designed specifically to support individuals who identify as emerging museum professionals, who are interested in exploring identity in museums. The cohort consisted of professionals who recently entered the U.S. museum workforce or graduated from a museum studies academic program. The Workshop's goal was to:

1. Engage emerging professionals in scholarly literature and dialogue around museums and identity,
2. Publish original work in scholarly journals about identity in museums.

The Workshop featured periodic online meetings and two or more reading and writing exercises from December 2019 to October 2020. All communication among cohort members employed online platforms (Zoom, Slack, and Google Meetings), with email and one-on-one coaching exercises by the project team using the same online platforms.

Several current events impacted the workshop. First, the COVID-19 outbreak occurred in March. Second, the rise of the Black Lives Matter protests emerged in May and June, and continued throughout the remainder of the funding period. Since all workshop activities were planned to happen online, these events did not undermine the group's workflow. However, in response to these events, workshop members felt impacts individually. On one hand, museum closings caused some people to be furloughed, laid off, or have reduced hours and pay. The protests also appeared to affect workshop members, but we cannot specify exactly how. On the other hand, the group actively looked for opportunities to discuss and even write about these events.

Recruitment

The program was announced online through the Knology web page and social media, and distributed through museum associations and networks. The project team also contacted the scholars whose work appeared in the literature review. The recruitment announcement explained the program, qualifications, and the program outline (Appendix C). Similar to our approach to the research portion of the project, we did not define the concept of identity in recruitment materials and instead allowed applicants to present their own approach to identity topics.

In total, we received 31 qualified applications. The workshop leader (Flinner), and the co-PIs, (Morrissey and Fraser) reviewed all applications and scored their submission materials according to demonstrated interest in identity topics. After completing individual reviews, the three members of the selection committee discussed each application. We found that more applicants had a demonstrated interest than there were places available in the workshop, so we also considered geographic representation, representation of different types of institutions, and the potential to benefit from the workshop. All twelve scholars who received an acceptance letter joined the cohort. This recruitment strategy produced a cohort

of emerging professionals that represented a wide range of experiences and interests with identity. They also featured experience in an array of museum types and learning settings including: science museums, art museums and galleries, natural history museums, historic homes and regional history museums, online museums, military museums, zoos, and higher education. See Appendix E for Participant Profiles.

Program

Exercise 1 ~ Serving as a Peer Reviewer: Workshop members undertook peer review of a journal submission to hone their skills in critical analysis and consider how their own work might be received in peer review publications.

Exercise 2 ~ Critical Archive Review for Virtual Issues: Working in pairs (or independently if schedules did not match), members explored *Curator*'s archive to identify articles related to their chosen aspect of identity and museum work. The scholars then collaborated on developing a publication summarizing and critiquing core themes that drew together their selection of articles.

Starting in March 2020, these scholarly reviews, called Virtual Issues, were posted as open access on the journal's website and the social media site. They were also featured in Knology's monthly newsletter that is sent to approximately 1,000 subscribers, as well as to a mailing list of individuals who had signed up for updates on the Writing Workshop (sign up form is located here: *https://mailchi.mp/79f44cff498b/writing-scholars-workshop-mailing-list*). Wiley also made all of the articles referenced in the papers open access for global distribution until the end of 2020.

The project leadership team collaborated with Wiley staff to release these papers as open access, and support distribution through various museum associations including the American Alliance of Museums, the Association of Children's Museums, the Association of Science and Technology Centers, and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (see Appendix D: Announcement of the Virtual Issues). Wiley also published a piece about the workshop and the Virtual Issues on their website (Flinner, Morrissey, & Fraser, 2020). *Curator: The Museum Journal* subsequently published the collection of Virtual Issues in the October 2020 print edition of the journal.

Exercise 3 ~ Writing for Peer-review: The third activity was designed for writers to individually prepare their own submission to *Curator* or another peer review journal. At the outset of the program, we knew that this third exercise could be ambitious for the amount of time available for the workshop, so we made it optional. Here is a summary of the products that some scholars worked on:

- Submissions to *Curator* and other social science and humanities journals;
- A guide to writing Alt Text and Image Descriptions for peer review journals and other types of publications or platforms, to make images more accessible to people who need assistance, such as individuals who use screen readers; and
- A forum piece on museums and justice, in response to the Black Lives Matter protests (this piece was prepared by a team of three scholars, and other workshop members served as advisor-reviewers on the piece).

Synopses of Virtual Issues

Virtual Issue 1: Curatorial Authority Vs. Subjects' Self-Knowledge

"You Love Them, but You Don't Know Them: Recognizing & Welcoming Lived Experiences," a Virtual Issue prepared by Lauren Cross and Tiffany R. Isselhardt, explores how museums have addressed the diverse social categories represented by their audiences. The literature suggests many identities can be equitably included in exhibition and program planning and implementation, with benefits for long-term collections practices and overall engagement with the community. Read the full article here: *https://curatorjournal.org/virtual-issues/you-love-them-but-you-dont-know-them/*

Virtual Issue 2: Human Health & Wellness in Museums

"The Human Condition: Health, Wellness, & Emotional Connection in Museums," a Curator Virtual Issue prepared by Abigail Diaz and Sunewan Paneto, studies how the museum field has addressed illness, disability, death, and overall health with a variety of techniques. Using the *Curator* archive, the authors trace the evolution of dialogue about wellness in museums, both for visitors and staff. Ultimately, their analysis makes a case for museums to embrace the emotional experience of their constituents. Read the full article here: *https://curatorjournal.org/virtual-issues/the-human-condition-health-wellness-emotional-connection-in-museums/*

Virtual Issue 3: The Struggle of Defining Museums

In the Virtual Issue "Defining the Museum: Struggling with a New Identity," Brenda Salguero traces the history of defining museums, pointing to the ongoing challenge of capturing the essence of this professional field. This study shows that power and privilege have always influenced and continue to shape the museum sector's image of itself. Ultimately, Salguero advocates for a new approach to museum definitions, one that acknowledges the difference between aspiration and achievement, and holds up definitions as a touchstone for the field to advance its work. Read the full article: *https://curatorjournal.org/virtual-issues/defining-the-museum/*

Note: This Virtual Issue was republished in multiple languages by *Swiss Museums Magazine*, a publication of ICOM Switzerland. The article was translated into French, German, and Italian.

Virtual Issue 4: Representation & Inclusion in Museum Evaluation

Alice Anderson and Michelle Mileham's Virtual Issue, entitled "Welcome to the Museum: Reflecting on Representation and Inclusion in Museum Evaluation" examines how museums have embraced people with different identities (or not) in the last few decades. Drawing on *Curator* archives and other museum scholarship, the authors track the impacts of these actions on staffing and professional practice in the profession of museum evaluation. Based on this research, Anderson and Mileham recommend a thorough process of reflection on the level of individuals, departments, and institutions in order to make museum evaluation – and museums writ large – welcoming and supportive of workers and visitors with a variety of identities and perspectives. See the article here: *https://curatorjournal.org/virtual-issues/welcome-to-the-museum-reflecting-on-representation-inclusion-in-museum-evaluation/*

Virtual Issue 5: Small Museums & "Difficult" History

"The 'Rich Gay'? Small Museums and Funding 'Difficult' History," a Virtual Issue written by Kelsey Brow and Joshua Buckner, compares the prevalence of LGBTQIA identities in the general public and particularly in the museum workforce with the lack of funding for exhibitions and programming around LGBTQIA topics, especially in small museums. The authors investigate historical research in *Curator*'s archives to understand how museums have handled subjects considered politically or culturally challenging, and the ramifications for funding of these projects. Brow and Buckner look to present-day examples of historical house museums to highlight the creative community organizing approaches to fundraising that can increase representation of LGBTQIA people and cultures. Read the full Virtual Issue here: *https://curatorjournal.org/virtual-issues/the-rich-gay-small-museums-funding-difficult-history/*

Virtual Issue 6: Serving Non-White Audiences

Nick Martinez's Virtual Issue titled "Increasing Museum Capacities for Serving Non-White Audiences" surveys the history of the relationship between museums and communities of color in the United States, particularly those identifying as Black and African American Studying the research of this topic in the *Curator* archive and other sources, Martinez points to the paucity of studies that focus on this part of the population. The article illustrates the effect of these omissions and historical trends in contemporary museum settings, with a special focus on the famous American Museum of Natural History. Highlighting inclusive approaches and practices from the literature, the article offers solutions to the issues of representation and authority that have challenged many museums' ability to embrace African American communities. Read the full article: *https://curatorjournal.org/virtual-issues/increasing-museum-capacities-for-serving-non-white-audiences/*

Virtual Issue 7: Culturally Diverse Families at Museums

Pamela Maldonado and Cecilia Nguyen's Virtual Issue, "It's Not Just for the Children: On Engaging Culturally Diverse Families at Museums," studies how the museum field has historically prioritized Anglo families in research, exhibit design, and programming. The authors pinpoint gaps in *Curator*'s archive on this topic, with few research articles focusing on families representing diverse cultures and identities. Recent literature features inclusive approaches to research on family learning, and by extension, how museums can serve culturally diverse families. Through their analysis, Maldonado and Nguyen show that museums' ability to work with all families will hinge not only on adopting specific techniques, but also on taking a new perspective on the rich variety of families in light of trends in population demographics and the implications on museum visitorship. Read the full article: *https://curatorjournal.org/virtual-issues/its-not-just-for-the-children-on-engaging-culturally-diverse-families-at-museums/*

Outcomes of the Writing Workshop

To understand the outcomes of the workshop program, we surveyed the writing scholars in early October 2020. The online survey asked scholars about personal and professional outcomes workshop participation. Overall, eight out of the twelve writing scholars responded to the survey. In addition to the survey, eight of the twelve scholars participated in an informal reflection as part of the group's final meeting in October 2020.

Results

The survey asked scholars to rate their level of agreement on three key metrics determined by IMLS. Below, we provide their ratings, as well as their explanations for their rating scale choices.

In response to *"My understanding has increased as a result of this program,"* the eight cohort members either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. They explained that they understood more in general about the process of academic publishing or more about specific steps in that process. Others commented that they had not encountered academic publishing, in particular the peer review process, in any part of their education or professional experience, so the workshop was a valuable opportunity.

For the statement, *"My interest in this subject has increased as a result of this program,"* seven individuals agreed or strongly agreed, and one felt neutral. Two added more detail, saying that they were inspired by the diversity of the workshop cohort and wanted to learn more. Others said that their interest in publishing has grown because they now understand more about the system.

In response to *"I am confident I can apply what I have learned in this program,"* all eight respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. They explained that they gave this rating because they feel more confident about the peer review process, submitting to scholarly journals, and their own writing skills. One commented that they are now able to assist colleagues with the peer review and publishing process.

In the reflection conversation, eight of the scholars discussed the aspects of the workshop that improved their experience, as well as which components could be adapted or improved in the future. We provide a brief summary here. Since this was an informal discussion, the project team was not certain about the degree to which members of the workshop shared each of these perspectives.

Scholars appreciated the diversity of professional and personal experience represented by the workshop cohort. The group's variety of cultural perspectives, as well as the types of museums and professional specialties helped scholars broaden their thinking about their own professional practice. They also enjoyed networking with a wide range of peers and hoped to meet in person someday.

Collaborative writing exercises were among the most effective parts of the workshop. Working with one or more scholars on assignments helped individuals experiment with their writing, explore topics they might not have otherwise addressed, and helped them remain accountable to the writing process and schedule. Another benefit of collaboration was

professional relevance – scholars pointed out that most of their writing projects for their jobs require multiple authors. For these reasons, they advocated for increasing team writing assignments if the writing workshop were offered again.

Workshop members also called for a more expansive approach to scholarly writing. They thought it could be useful to understand how peer review writing and publishing is situated among white papers, gray literature, public publishing platforms (e.g., Medium.com), and personal blogs and websites. This avenue of learning might involve studying how to select the appropriate publishing channel, as well as adapting writing for different channels.

Other advantages of the workshop included: access to a supportive peer group, the opportunity to reflect on current events and how they might be addressed through writing, and external encouragement to set aside time for writing. Recommendations for future iterations of the workshop included: accommodations for different working styles and needs, access to an alumni network, ongoing opportunities for feedback from the group, and the chance to work with or as mentors.

Lessons Learned

The Emerging Research on Identity, Representation & Inclusion in Museums project supported IMLS's strategic goal of Building Capacity. Our three core activities – analysis of identity research in museum graduate theses, interviews with professionals who did identity research in graduate school, and professional development for individuals writing and doing research on identity – were designed to strengthen the ability of museums to improve the well-being of their communities. This project's research and products captured the ways that graduate students investigate identity and museum practice addresses diverse identities in the United States. It became clear early on that the intersection of identity and museums is a complex and expansive subject. While our work has only scratched the surface, we believe this synthesis of the ongoing dialogue surrounding identity is a valuable contribution to the museum field. This project both describes the richness of identity work, and the need for continued investment in this area of practice and inquiry.

As described in the introduction of this report, our intended outcomes were to increase field-wide knowledge about three areas: the ways museums are responding to changing demographics, the ways museums are responding to the multi-layered nature of identity, and the capacity to represent changing demographics and identity. The project's results and products suggested key takeaways for the museum field related to these objectives.

Responding to Changing Demographics & Identity

In our research, we found extensive evidence of museums' efforts to respond to both continuously changing demographics and identity. It was difficult to disentangle the two themes in our data sources, so we discuss them together here. The theses demonstrated that since 2000, there have been numerous efforts to respond to and represent identity primarily through exhibitions. To a lesser extent, museums have also addressed these topics with collections, community collaborations, and programs, but only rarely through institutional operations. The majority of graduate studies focused on identity projects in ethnic or culturally specific museums, with some in art and history museums as well. Identity projects were less common in STEM-based institutions. For focus areas, the graduate studies clustered around racial identity, gender identity, Native American affiliation and identity, and ethnicity, with only a handful around the representation of abilities and disabilities as part of identity. In spite of the breadth of identity projects to date, there is ample opportunity for expansion and improvement. In their graduate studies, authors commented that when museums venture into identity topics, they tend to misrepresent identity as monolithic and fail to grasp the multilayered nature of identity that leads to marginalization. Across the board, these scholars recommended that museums explore how to share institutional authority, through efforts such as collaborations, partnerships, or co-curated exhibits.

The thesis literature also showed that graduate students have sophisticated thinking and personal experience involving these topics. However, both the literature review and interviews with former graduate students who were at early and mid-points of their careers showed that there are untapped opportunities for the museum field. There appear to be two gaps. First, individuals who studied identity in graduate school find it difficult to translate

their expertise into projects when they enter the museum workforce, often due to a lack of funding and administrative support, as well as institutional cultures that discourage experimentation. Second, though our findings did not clearly point to this gap, we suspect that research about identity found in graduate literature does not often get into the hands of professionals in the museum field. These potential breakdowns in the transfer of knowledge suggest that museums stand to gain a lot from academic scholarship on identity.

There is growing interest and support in the museum field for projects focused on changing demographics and the complexities of identity. Despite some gaps in communicating information across the field, we believe audiences are hungry for this work and the museum field can accommodate a great deal more experimentation. As we described in the Research Brief in the beginning of this report, there are lessons learned for different types of museum professionals.

Conclusion

The Emerging Research on Identity, Representation & Inclusion in Museums project (Grant No. #NLG-M-FY18 / MG-50-18-044) showed that from 2000 to 2018, many museums explored identity in exhibitions and other activities. We also found that graduate scholars' analysis of this work offers a valuable source of information to the field. And when emerging professionals receive training to write about identity research, they are able to publish high quality, peer-reviewed articles. Fundamentally, this project demonstrated there is tremendous opportunity for growth in museum practice around the intersectional and overlapping nature of identity. As identity work continues in 2020 and beyond, all museum professionals – specifically leaders and administrators, funders, researchers and evaluators, and university faculty and administrators – can help drive forward efforts toward building an inclusive and equitable field. The investments of the Institute of Museum and Library Services and other agencies will be critical to advancing museums' work in this area.

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Appendix

Appendix A
Post-graduate Participant Interview Protocol

Introduction. [00:00 – 02:30]

Hi, this is [Calling]. I'm confirming this is [Interviewee name].

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Is this still a good time for our discussion?

<wait for assent or reschedule if requested>

I am working with NewKnowledge – a research think tank, on an IMLS award to understand how museums are working with identity topics. The purpose of our research and our call today, is to describe how graduate work reflects and influences the ways professionals think about how museums can and should represent or address issues of identity. As we said earlier, we have planned approximately 45 minutes for this discussion, and we will respect any hard time limits you have if that's too long.

To start, we'll ask you to reflect on your research and your experiences writing your thesis. Next, we'll ask you to reflect on how your research may or may not have influenced your professional experiences. The final questions focus on your broader reflections on the topic and museum practice today. As you saw in the consent form, your participation is voluntary, so if you don't want to answer something, you can always ask me to skip the question.

If you agree to participate, we will ask if it's OK to record and then transcribe the interview. All recordings and transcripts are used only for research and will not be shared beyond the research team at NewKnowledge. Quotations from the interview may be included in publications about the research. You will have the choice of whether your name and the title of your thesis is identified with any quotations. We will contact you prior to any publication so you can have final approval of any attribution.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

I'd like to request that we record today's session. The recording will just be used for research purposes to allow me to focus more on what you are saying and to ensure we don't misquote or misinterpret your meaning. If ok, then: I am now going to turn on the recorder.

<If not ok, continue without recording>

<restate after starting the recording>

For the record, I've turned on the recording. Can you confirm that you've assented to having our discussion recorded?

<if yes, carry on / if no, terminate recording and continue with hand notation>

Module 1: Research Experience [02:30 – 15:30]

To start off, can you describe a few of the factors that influenced your decision to pursue a graduate degree?

Every graduate student finds a topic to study in their own way. Sometimes that path is simple and straightforward but often it is a more complicated path with some twists and turns. Could you describe your path to your topic?

a. [Probe] Where there any particular incidents or experiences that motivated your choice of topic?

b. [Probe] As your ideas evolved, did you get any feedback from others that particularly surprised or influenced how you explored the topic or led to fundamental changes in your study?

c. [Probe] Were there topics you didn't pursue and why?

In your theses, you describe your methodology as [enter one sentence from thesis that describes methodology]. Could you describe what factors led you to select that methodology?

d. Did your topic influence your selection of methodology?

Module 2: Current Work [15:30 – 28:30]

Can you describe, how if at all, your thesis work influenced your work today or your career choices in any small or significant ways?

e. Did your thesis topic and thesis work influence the type of job you looked for or might have tried to avoid?

f. Were there any times when you discussed your thesis at your job or during your job search?

    i. <PROBE> Can you tell me about any situations where you avoided discussing your thesis?

g. Can you tell us about any times, either at work or in your out-of-work professional pursuits, when you discussed or applied your experience conducting research?

In your experiences as a student and now as a professional, have you observed differences in the ways identity and representation are discussed or perceived?

h. Based on your experience, what recommendations do you have for universities in relation to identity and representation in the museum field.

i. Based on your experience, what recommendations do you have that can help museum practice or practitioners work with topics of identity and representation?

Module 3: Broader Reflections [28:30 –44:30]

Thinking about your research and your current work, how would you describe your current philosophy or your aspirations about how museums could or perhaps should address issues of identity?

j. What changes do you hope to see during your career?

k. What potential do you feel you have to impact those changes?

The words “diversity” and “inclusion” are used often in discussions of the role or responsibility of museums in society. Could you describe what each of those words mean to you?

l. Did your definition change over the course of your research?

m. Are there other words that are closely related to diversity and inclusion?

As part of this research project, we are offering mentorships to support individuals in preparing research about identity for publication. Would you be interested in discussing that opportunity further?

Module 4: Final Thoughts [44:30 –47:00]

I really appreciate all you’ve shared. We’ve reached our final question. Thinking back over the entire discussion, would you like to make any final comments or share anything more about what we discussed today?

Summing Up [47:00 – 48:00]

Thank you so much your time. As our research gets toward conclusion, I’ll be happy to keep you updated and to share our draft and the final report once they are done.

Goodbye

Appendix B.
Writing Scholars Workshop Timeline

Details for each month's activities may change. Announcements about changes will be made in the Slack channel. Activities are described on the following page.

December	• Kick-off meeting with entire workshop • Establish communication and info-sharing systems
January	• Access to Curator Archives • Identify pairs for Activity #1 • Begin work on Activity #1 • Begin to plan approach to Activity #3
February	• ****Activity #1 submission due February 14**** • Begin to receive Activity #2 assignments • Start work on Activity #3
March	• ****Activity #2 assignment due March 13**** • Work on Activity #3 submission • Supplemental reading / activities for writing skill-building
April	• Work on Activity #3 submission • Supplemental reading / activities for writing skill-building
May	• Work on Activity #3 submission • Send draft submission to other cohort members by May 15
June	• Comments due to workshop colleagues by June 5 • Work on / complete Activity #3 submission
July	• ****Complete Activity #3 submission**** - No firm deadline because journals tend to have rolling deadlines
August	• If journal provides reviewers' comments: edit Activity #3 submission

Appendix C
Recruitment Criteria for Workshop Participation

Qualifications

We recommend candidates for the Reading & Writing Circle should have the following:

- A degree in museum studies or relevant academic programs; alternatively, an individual with some experience in museum work but without a museum studies degree could apply.
- An interest in scholarly reading and writing, and critical thinking about the museum field.
- Previous research or work in identity in museums.
- The ability to participate in online meetings (via Zoom or Google Meetings) with the cohort and for partner work. These meetings require cameras on your computer so cohort members can get to know each other.

Requirements

- Fully join in the cohort's group learning endeavor, which will involve communicating with peers and leaders of the Reading & Writing Workshop, participating in meetings, and completing partner and individual work.
- Complete Exercises 1, 2, and 3.

Benefits & Compensation

- Reading & Writing Workshop participants will receive:
- One year of full access to *Curator: The Museum Journal's* archive of articles from over 62 years of publishing;
- Mentoring in scholarly writing and publishing in the museum field;
- Experience with publishing in scholarly journals, with publications that can be cited in résumés, CVs, and job applications;
- Networking with peers and the editorial staff of the highest indexed global journal in the museum field; and
- Cohort members who complete the workshop program will receive a stipend of $600 to offset costs of participation.

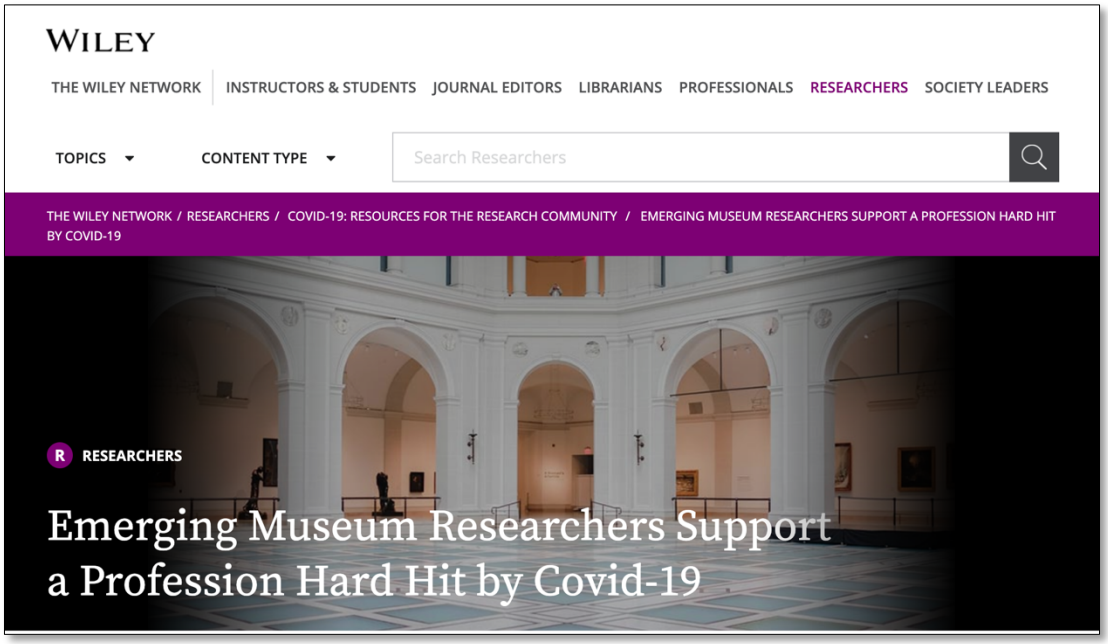
How to Apply

Contact Kate Flinner (*katef@knology.org*) with a résumé and a 100-300-word statement of interest by Nov 15.

Questions?

We will host a webinar for a short overview of the workshop and do a Q&A. Contact Kate if you'd like to be on the mailing list for the webinar.

Appendix D
Wiley Online Library Features the Virtual Issues



https://www.wiley.com/network/researchers/covid-19-resources-for-the-research-community/emerging-museum-researchers-support-a-profession-hard-hit-by-covid-19

Scholars draw on archives, experience to advance research on the intersection of identity and museum practice

Kate Flinner, Kris Morrissey, & John Fraser

Kate Flinner is Editor at Knology and Associate Editor of *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Kris Morrissey is a Research Fellow at Knology, and John Fraser is Editor of *Curator: The Museum Journal* and President & CEO of Knology.

The COVID-19 pandemic has scorched the museum field, closing the doors of nearly all museums, science centers, historic sites, gardens, and zoos throughout the world. Alongside museums, an entire support industry of vendors has been affected. With the closures, millions of museum workers have been laid off, furloughed, reduced, or redirected from their positions. The sudden upending of this sector has been emotionally draining for all types of professionals. At the same time, the hardships have sparked innovation, activism, and soul searching across the museum sector.

In this context, a group of emerging scholars have been studying museum research and drawing on their own experiences to advance dialogue about critical issues in the field. Working with Wiley's *Curator: The Museum Journal* and Knology, a social science research institute, these scholars are publishing their work at a time when professionals are seeking insight and contemplating the future of the museum field.

The scholars are part of the *Curator*-Knology Writing Scholars Workshop, a cadre of emerging museum professionals who are engaged in research that moves the field forward. Many people are familiar with museum curators' study of artifacts and living collections at zoos and aquariums. But museums also have a longstanding tradition of research on the

ways people use and interact with these institutions. The work draws on various social science disciplines, from psychology, anthropology, sociology, to history, and more.

The scholars are developing their own research on the intersection of identity and museum practice. We have released a series of Virtual Issues featuring these scholars' analysis of the *Curator* archives and other studies and theory, offering the opportunity to explore research from *Curator*'s archives and how that work is being interpreted in contemporary culture. All Virtual Issues are freely available and can be found at Curator's website (*https://curatorjournal.org/category/virtual-issues/*) and through the Wiley Online Library (*https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/21516952/homepage/VirtualIssuesPage.html)*.

These articles tackle hot-button issues that are crucial to advancing the work of the museums at a time when the fragility of this sector has been exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. They are investigating public health dialogues in museums, white supremacy and colonialism, STEM literacies, hiring and training practices, the definition of a museum, the culture of museology graduate programs, and more.

Already, the scholars' work has challenged museum professionals to reflect on assumptions and solutions to longstanding debates in the field. In one Virtual Issue, Lauren Cross and Tiffany R. Isselhardt examined case studies where museums had shared their curatorial role with members of their communities. They wrote that these examples show "the museum's potential as a forum in which contextual authority — acting as a system of checks and balances between curator and community — leads to the potential resolution of our 'loving, knowing ignorance.'" In another Virtual Issue, Abigail Diaz and Sunewan Paneto conducted a review of museums' work with health topics, calling for the field to embrace a holistic perspective on health as part of their responsibility to support social justice. Additional Virtual Issues from the Writing Scholars will be published on a rolling basis through July 2020.

Like many of the topics currently debated throughout the world, these issues are brought into high relief by the pandemic. But the scholars are also showing that the issues of today have deep roots in the history of the field. Though the scholars are drawing on research and data focusing on the museum field, their analysis is relevant to other sectors as well, including higher education, non-profit studies, and visual and performing arts, among others. At its root, these studies ask what it takes for a field to thrive. No matter our background or profession, this is a question all of us will have to reckon with in the coming years.

More about the Writing Scholars Workshop

From 2019-2020, *Curator: The Museum Journal* and Knology are hosting the inaugural Writing Scholars Workshop, a professional development program designed to train emerging museum professionals to publish their scholarly work. The Writing Scholars Workshop is supported in part by the Institute of Museum & Library Services (Grant #MG-50-18-0044-18), with matching support from Wiley, Knology, and a group of anonymous philanthropic donors. The grant is led by Drs. Kris Morrissey and John Fraser, with Kate Flinner.

Appendix E
Workshop Participants

Alice Anderson (she, her, hers)

Manager of Audience Research and Impact at the Minneapolis Institute of Art

I am a white, able-bodied cis-gendered person working in a museum that I have attended since I was born. I have always believed that this museum is a place for me. At Mia, I study what people think, feel and learn. I am to lead my work with an collaborative, equitable and ethical approach centering marginalized identities.

Kelsey Brow (she, her, hers)

Executive Director/ jack of all trades at the King Manor Museum,

How do people relate to historic house museums and what can we offer them that they might not be able to get elsewhere? What can they take away from their time with us and how does it benefit the individual and society at large?

Josh Buckner (he, him, his)

Museum Curator with the U.S. Army Center of Military History at Fort Belvoir, Virginia

My work and passion revolves around queer identity/history; how museums incorporate queer stories in their museums and educating museum professionals who are not a part of the queer community on ways of incorporating these stories in their museums.

Lauren Cross (she, her, hers)

Program Coordinator & Senior Lecturer, Interdisciplinary Art and Design Studies at the University of North Texas

In my work, I focus on curating opportunities for women artists of color and engaging diverse communities in museums. My research has included qualitative interviews with curators and visitor study research.

Abbie Diaz, (she, her, hers)

Director of Education & Public Programs at the Wisconsin Maritime Museum

As an ADA Coordinator and also a caregiver to my brother, who has disabilities, I am most passionate about building museums that are radically inclusive to all people. I believe when museums become more inclusive and accessible to people with disabilities, they are better for everyone. Accessibility is not optional and not an afterthought. Inclusive institutions are transformed.

Tiffany Isselhardt (she, her, hers)

Program Developer at Girl Museum, and Development and Marketing Manager at the Kentucky Museum of Western Kentucky University

I focus on girlhood, specifically the impressions of and made by representations of girls (females under age 21) in museums and historic sites, and how this influences young girls today. Much of my work centers on reinterpreting history and culture through the girl-focused lens, either through first person sources or narrative nonfiction based upon historical evidence and material culture

Pamela Maldonado (she, her, hers)

BurkeMobile Program Manager at the Burke Museum of Natural History & Culture

First-generation Colombian immigrant, bilingual in Spanish and English and the focus of my research and museum work is inclusion for people of color in museums and language accessibility. My thesis looked at bilingual Spanish/English family programs at art museums in the United States, and my current role is starting to create a plan for bilingual Spanish outreach programs at my institution.

Nick Martinez (he, him, his)

Manager of Internships and Youth Community at the American Museum of Natural History

My work focuses on engaging students of color in science and I'm particularly interested in the development of STEM identity in males of color that participate in OST STEM programs.

Michelle Mileham (she, her, hers)

Director of Education at the Tracy Aviary,

I am interested in identity through the lens of staff in museums. My doctoral research focused on environmental identities and narratives staff and volunteers told about their significant life experiences in nature. Narratives ensure our identities become recognized both by oneself and by others, and museums offer a unique setting to capture and retell narratives in authentic ways. Recently, I have been thinking about personal identities of museum staff, especially as the field meets the challenge of retaining passionate and knowledgeable professionals.

Cecilia Nguyen (she, her, hers)

Senior Exhibit Developer at Oregon Museum of Science and Industry

My professional career as an exhibit developer has focused largely on creating informal education experiences targeted at identities underrepresented and underserved in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) careers. I've worked on several projects emphasizing relevance and authenticity regarding culturally-specific groups, including Native youth and their families, people with disabilities, and Spanish-English bilingual Latino/-a/-x families. In many of these projects, and expressly so when working with the groups just mentioned, we took on an ethos of "nothing about us without us."

Sunewan Paneto (she, her, hers)

Research and Evaluation Assistant at the Museum of Science, Boston

Much of my current work at my own institution focuses on how the museum can build and support diverse emotional experiences. I believe that emotions are an important aspect of the museum experience and that an individual's emotions are a critical part of their personal and cultural identity. During this workshop I want to focus on how the field as a whole has considered and supported visitors' emotional experiences.

Brenda Salguero (she, her, hers)

College Program Coordinator at MESA at the University of California, Office of the President

I focus on issues of diversity and representation within museums. I try to encourage and suggest actionable items people can take in order to start changing a mostly stagnant and inherently white field.

Appendix F
Minutes from Project Mid-Point Meeting

Online Advisory Meeting

Date:	Dec 13, 2020	Location:	**https://zoom.us/j/5563540087**
Time	10:00 – 11:00 Eastern, 7:00 – 8:00 Pacific	Project:	**Emerging Research on Identity, Representation, & Inclusion in Museums**
Attending:	Laura Schiavo Aletheia Wittman Stephanie Johnson-Cunningham	Project #	IML495
		Grant #	MG-50-18-044
		Project Team	Kris Morrissey (PI) John Fraser (co-PI) Joanna Laursen Brucker Grayson Dirk Kate Flinner

Goals The meeting aimed to gather feedback on the results of our studies to date as represented in a bibliography and consolidated set of abstracts, a draft report on analysis to date, our methods, and the goals and structure of the project outputs anticipated for the dissemination phase of the work.

Minutes

Item	Description	Follow Up
1.1	**Introduction to the Team and Overview of the Attachments** • Bibliography & Abstracts (draft Dec. 09, 2019) (Morrissey & Dirk, 2019) • Identity Research Advisors Summary.docx (revision Dec. 10, 2019) • Overview of the Writing Scholars workshop	
1.1.1	**Discussion** • Advisors discussed the research protocol, the preliminary results, the use of ProQuest and the researchers' efforts to seek out supplementary material from Universities with Museum studies programs that don't use ProQuest. An advisor identified a thesis from the field of American Studies that wasn't included in the inventory. Upon further discussion, the topic of the study pre-dated the time period covered in this research. • Discussion of the interviews led to some concerns about the goals of graduate research that may not align to career motivations. An advisor commented that some people appear less concerned with job prospects, and more interested in a career around making change – something these students reported as not happening at a level they wish to see. • An advisor suggested that the museum studies skills are transferrable outside the field, and that many individuals find rewarding work in fields that are similar to museum work. They pointed out that the field may not be able to absorb all graduates, and that individuals leaving the field should not be seen as a dire situation. Some of the project team felt that this positive spin was not consistent with the interview data, and the larger	Schiavo committed to sharing resources.

	implications reported by interview participants about graduate school debt. This led to a discussion of the challenge of elitism and gatekeeping by low-wage work that leads only those from high SES backgrounds to survive the entry years into the field.	
	• After the discussion of SES background the group turned the conversation to the challenge of racial representation/exclusion as related phenomena. This may be second hurdle for those who may be well-resourced, but feel their lack of representation can lead to a sense of isolation and exclusion, irrespective of financial opportunity.	Project team to address both of these themes in reporting.
	• Advisors suggested that these data were raising critical issues of race and identity, and requested that the project team be more explicit on how this graduate student work might present an indictment of current practice, and the needs in museum studies to support those new to the field so they can thrive in the museum sector. They suggested the analysis focus on what structural barriers might be challenged with these data.	

	• An advisor reminded us that there are two themes in this research and reporting needs to balance both:
	  ○ Focus on ways museums are representing identities
	  ○ Career paths for individuals interested in changing ways identities are represented
		Advisors will follow-up after the meeting with recommendations and suggestions.

	• Another advisor noted that this project is highlighting these equity discourses, inclusion, and how museums might make policy changes. That advisor felt that the draft report demonstrated that graduate research is revealing action potential that current practice does not match. As a result, the advisors all agreed that the museum leaders would be one of the core beneficiaries.	

1.1.2 Post Meeting Recommendations for Year 2 (2 of 3 advisors)

- **Advisor 1**
  - Opinion that the research promises insight into the racial inequity and power dynamics that persist within predominantly white museums. The research at the center of this highlights the disregard for these narratives in museum workplaces, something that requires greater attention to the practices and policies in predominantly white museums. The advisor drew attention the point that museums are not race neutral, and that the hegemony of the dominant culture reinforces the fallacy that only people of color have race and obscures everyday dynamics of racial power in those museums.
  - This study highlights that studies centering representation and identity from people of color while white, western, heteronormative approaches and narratives continue to dominate the field.
  - These data may reveal that museum academic programs might be a gatekeeping mechanism disguised as a discipline to uphold white western standards of the field, the team is advised to explore whether the data suggests that despite qualifications, adequate employment lags for people of color.

- Suggested that the team consider the tension between whether museum studies support students out of an obligation to students, an obligation that does not transfer to museums and therefore may account for the loss of these representation/identity narratives.
- Suggested that the reports include anecdotes from museum professionals (current and former) in this study to describe how unequipped predominantly white museums are in supporting individuals and discourse that centers non-white representation, identity, and experience even through it is well represented in graduate studies.
- Noted that outside the scope of this study, current Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives may exist, but people of color often navigate organizational cultures in which DEI are used amid racist policies. While attempts to make these cultural spaces inclusive will require efforts to undo practices which sustain racial hierarchy, if these data are present, it would be useful to highlight how or multiple identities (women, immigrants, LGBTQIA+, and different abilities) are compiled with race (Black and Brown in particular).
- If the data is present, it is advised that the study explore whether there is difference in the data between culturally specific museums created by people of color, and those dominated by white voices.

- **Advisor 2**
  - Noted that the study offers some critique of academic museum programs and museums as workplaces, highlighting a disjointedness/current incompatibility between academic museum programs and entry level museum careers. To draw attention to this issue, the advisor recommended that the research explore the following pivotal issue:
  - The cost/benefit challenge of museum studies programs versus the notoriously low pay and pay equity issues for those completing graduate studies.
  - Asked whether the data demonstrate whether museum studies programs offer professionalized, specialized degrees that promote sameness, while museums often function by bringing together people from widely varied disciplines.
  - Queried whether the data offer insight into the disparity between the academic rigor of museum studies programs, and the a complex relationship of museum practice where advanced academic credentials are essential to curatorial positions but not to other areas of museum work – a challenge compounded by associations with elitism and efforts to democratize their work.

  - Does the data suggest that museums are reassessing the necessity of academic credentials in museum positions and wondering if the degree programs gate keep or alienates prospective candidates with valuable experiences who cannot afford the high price of a master of museum studies program. Reiterating the details from Advisor 1, that individuals who advance scholarship on identity and representation in museums through an academic program might find that a museum graduate program values their voice, experience and scholarship on identity and representation but find that a job in the museum field is not sustainable financially, emotionally or mentally, in particular for professionals of color as museums continue to be embedded in systems of white supremacy and colonialism.

- In the presentation of results, the advisor recommends that focus be given to these data as hearing from the (presumed) next generation of museum workers and leaders as a temperature check for museums to recognize the depth of discourse, experience and expertise museum studies students develop through their graduate studies and the potential of their contribution to reshaping the internal and external approach museums take to engaging with representation and identity.
- In presentation of the results, it will help to identify from across these data, the systemic issues that force or prohibit those with an expensive museum-related degree. In doing so, the advisor suggested that the project team avoid framing results as a deficit because interviewees did not end up in museum careers, noting that careers in museum-adjacent fields or the use of skillsets outside of museums may be attributed to a range of factors and opportunities. With that in mind, the advisor felt that the results could help advance a critical lens on the complex issues of identity and representation in museums and a museum field that is (largely) not ready and willing to be shaped by and learn from this next generation.
- Consider how to use these data to surface the investment of time, resources, and risk taken during graduate study in the museum field. In the analysis, consider if the lack of work opportunity breeds distrust? In considering this assessment of the data, consider how leaders of museum studies programs can use these results to increase the value of their programs through honesty with students about the issues and challenges of working in the museum sector and an explicit acknowledge that a transferable skill set can help with career opportunities outside the museum field.
- This advisor suggested that the outputs of this project will be valuable to those who hold some power within the museum field, and can hold institutions accountable to the disparity of cost of associated education when compared to compensation. These data may provide the basis for graduate programs to advocate for fair wages in practice that keep up with the increasing cost of education.
- This advisor considered using her social media to activate a discussion of those who have left the field, to consider racism and pay inequity may have alienated talented professionals from the field as well as other reasons for leaving a workplace but we also want to show that the talents of these individuals are applicable across many fields and that they are free agents making an impact in whatever field ends up being the best fit or supporting them and their desire to make a difference.
- The advisor suggested that museums need to hear loud and clear that - like other workplaces - museums too need to prove that they are good places to work. The advisor suggested that preciousness as a reason for low-wages has become an unacceptable excuse.

Appendix G
Minutes from Project End Meeting

Date: October 19, 2020 at 12:30pm ET

Location: https://meet.google.com/gqv-jofq-qqy

Attending: John Fraser
Kris Morrissey
Kate Flinner
Joanna Laursen Brucker
Laura Schiavo
Stephanie Johnson-Cunningham
Aletheia Wittman

Goals

- The focus of this meeting was to review and seek insight from advisors regarding the Museums and Social Issues' IMLS award.

Minutes

Item #	Description	Next Steps
1	**Role of Advisors** Fraser overviews the role of the advisor, as peer reviewer and evaluator for this project. Outlines the goal of the conversation on how the project applies to the field and future directions.	
2	**Advisors' Goals for the Meeting** Fraser asks what advisors hope to get out of the conversation as professionals. Advisors reflected on the roles of insiders versus outsiders in the field, and how both are critical for change related to identity and equity in museums. Insiders – that is, people who work in museums – are often confined by the systems of museum work, but also have the knowledge and the expertise involved in the day-to-day operations of a museum. Outsiders – meaning people like researchers, university faculty, and consultants who don't work *in* museums – push the field to advance its practice, but aren't able to enact changes themselves. They commented that this project is driven by the work of graduate students that stand in both roles, and as a result this project offers findings and products that can be useful to a range of museum professionals.	
3	**Report Review** Morrissey and Flinner guide advisors through a review of each section of the report, identifying ideas that should be clarified, removed, or added. This discussion raised the following points:	Project team to incorporate feedback into the report.

- Inaccurate descriptions of the history of identity-based diversity in the U.S. that unintentionally introduced a colonial mindset, which did not represent the spirit of the project;
- Clarifications on identity-focused initiatives cited in the report;
- Clarifications for the description of synthesis methods for the literature and interview study;
- The need for a more detailed description of the project's conceptualization of identity;
- The need to soften claims about the uniqueness and comprehensiveness of the findings – by qualifying and contextualizing the ways they can be applied to museum professionals' work.

4 **Review of Project Goals**

Fraser overviews the goals of the program.

1. Increase field-wide knowledge about the range of ways museums are responding to the changing demographics of American society;
2. Increase field-wide knowledge about the ways museums are responding to the multi-layered nature of personal identity; and
3. Increase field-wide capacity to represent the changing demographics and the evolving knowledge about identity

5 **Advisor Assessment of Outcomes of the Project**

What contribution does this project make to the field?

Advisors raised the following points:

- The separation between museum professionals and museum academia present challenges for the reach and application of findings and project products. Some parts of the museum field tend to ignore academia, perceiving it as irrelevant to the work. At the same time, the focus on graduate research misses important identity research done by professionals in the field.
- The project's methods have made contributions to the field, by focusing on both studying graduate students' work *and* mentoring emerging professionals on getting their work published. This two-part approach was both reflective and action-oriented.
- The focus on graduate students also had its benefits. The field does not often shine a spotlight on graduate-level work. This project could help executives see young professionals thinking in sophisticated ways about topics that are critically needed in the field. Emerging professionals are often disregarded because they fill entry-level positions – this project shows that their voices should be acknowledged.

Given the world has changed since the project started – especially the upheaval of the museum field in 2020 – what's next?

Advisors raised the following points:

- Identity is such a complex and changing phenomenon that it may be useful for future synthesis research to focus on one intersectional aspect of identity. Race and ethnicity are extremely important aspects of identity that could be the first item to address. Many scholars and organizations advocate with prioritizing race, which can help address so many other identity topics, such as gender, pay equity, and more. The museum field has started to center these issues in 2020 and advisors hope that this conversation continues.
- Museums are suffering because of the pandemic, but also because so many are not relevant to their communities. For too long, they have ignored issues that their communities care about. These institutions need to be more relevant to continue to exist. This study gets to the heart of some of the ideas that museums need to address in order to survive.

Final comments

- Advisors expressed enthusiasm for the project's research results and hope for their application across the museum field.
- Advisors felt that the support for the writing scholars was important and hoped that the cohort could continue their work in some way. Flinner reported on the writing scholars' ideas about remaining in contact with each other and mentoring future cohorts.

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