

Comment on “Seven Theses Against Viewpoint Diversity”

Why They Don’t Apply to the Library

Gabriel J. Gardner

University Library, California State University, Long Beach, USA

gabriel.gardner@csulb.edu

562.985.4976

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*“Before destruction one’s heart is haughty,
but humility goes before honour.
If one gives answer before hearing,
it is folly and shame.
The human spirit will endure sickness;
but a broken spirit—who can bear?”*

Proverbs 18:12-14, New Revised Standard Version

“First, when a country has a strong spirit, foreign and exotic influences do not debilitate that spirit, they strengthen it.”

Jorge Luis Borges, Selected Non-Fictions, p. 428

As a regular reader of *Academe*, the magazine of the American Association of University Professors, I regret to inform you that the Fall 2025 issue contains an article by Lisa Siraganian, a professor of comparative thought and literature at the Johns Hopkins University, titled “Seven Theses Against Viewpoint Diversity”.¹ Standards have fallen at the storied organization, with a President who called a staff reporter at *The Chronicle of Higher Education* “straight TRASH” on social media² (as well as declaring Vice President Vance a fascist),³ and editors who amplify the idea that “viewpoint diversity is anathema to academic freedom.” The *Academe* article has already inspired a critique by Michael W. Clune in the pages of *CHE*,⁴ as well as a response there by Siraganian.⁵ The official blog of *Academe* magazine has published three responses to the Seven Theses article.⁶

At the close of her essay, Siraganian says that anyone committed to intellectual diversity, which she wraps in scare quotes, has an obligation to refute her seven theses. Samuel J. Abrams, of Sarah Lawrence College (and a nonresident senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute), recently replied to that call and helpfully grounded some of his points with empirical support that I (imperfect, biased human that I am) found more convincing than the quotes employed in the original theses.⁷ Happily, the long tradition of academic debate continues. In what follows, I offer further critique of Dr. Siraganian’s views and situate them in the context of academic libraries. Below are counter-theses to each of Siraganian’s seven, drawn from and applied to the context of academic libraries. Readers will note that the counter-theses consider intellectual freedom and neutrality to be critical for the proper praxis of librarianship [in any non-private institution], a position well-defended at this blog in a previous septimal essay.⁸ Lest anyone be tempted to read this comment as an endorsement of the type of politicization that Siraganian critiques, I stipulate that there are errors to criticize in both Indiana and Hungary. But her criticism is overly broad and not applicable to academic libraries. Brian Erb's talk for FLA 2024,

where he documented a few negative effects of making libraries venues for political activism, can help us tread carefully.⁹

Response to “Viewpoint diversity functions in direct opposition to the pursuit of truth, the principal aim of academia.”

Major Premise: Academic libraries support the pursuit of truth by curating collections that reflect rigorous scholarship and evolving disciplinary standards.

Minor Premise: Viewpoint diversity in library collections ensures that competing, emerging, and even controversial perspectives are available for critical examination.

Conclusion: Therefore, viewpoint diversity in library collections complements the pursuit of truth by enabling scholars to test, refine, and challenge prevailing ideas.

One of any academic library’s real powers is its ability to catalyze the pursuit of truth. Our materials and subscriptions directly link intellectual pluralism with scholarly rigor. Genuine knowledge rarely advances within a monoculture. Sometimes, breakthroughs require active intellectual contestation. Libraries are not just storage units (though we have those too); they are sanctuaries offering a record of the human spirit’s quest for understanding.

Exercises matter; inquiry and intellectual resilience can grow stronger when students expose themselves to many perspectives, especially those that challenge established norms. Viewpoint diversity in library collections does not weaken the search for truth; it invigorates it. It allows scholarship to question and evolve continually.

This means we should be collecting emerging, controversial, or even formerly marginalized viewpoints, as long as they fulfill a scholarly need. For that matter, we should also preserve older material of use to our scholars. As Jonathan Lawler has written here: “ensuring *past* voices are present, welcomed, and inform the pursuit of truth, is foundational to noticing untested assumptions, challenging popular theories, and avoiding groupthink.”¹⁰ A library that commits to viewpoint diversity creates a vibrant environment where learning flourishes. It is a place where students and scholars find not just answers, but also questions that drive deeper understanding. Ultimately, this plurality of views acts as the vital nutrient for intellectual life. It is necessary for the growth of knowledge itself.

Response to “Viewpoint diversity can work only as an instrumental value.”

Major Premise: Libraries serve both intrinsic academic goals (supporting research and teaching) and instrumental civic goals (promoting informed citizenship).

Minor Premise: Viewpoint diversity in collections helps fulfill both roles by offering materials that reflect a broad spectrum of thought, including those relevant to public discourse.

Conclusion: Therefore, viewpoint diversity is not merely instrumental but also intrinsic to the library’s mission to support inquiry, education, and intellectual development.

Among an academic library’s duties is the maintenance of an intellectual marketplace of ideas. I know this metaphor is worn and tired and, as Siraganian points out, far from apt.¹¹ But it is directionally correct. Rigorous inquiry, critically testing established knowledge, and strong civic discussion are all aided when the participants have access to useful information. Viewpoint diversity is one structural condition that makes this ‘marketplace’ function. It allows people to have access to adversarial and methodologically sound perspectives. These are crucial ingredients you need for genuine critical testing. Therefore, viewpoint diversity is not only a tool. It acts as the foundational principle for both demanding academic work and informed citizenship. As noted by HxLibraries’ intrepid co-founders, “the intellectual underpinnings of information literacy as an educational agenda for inquiry and critical reflection into the information ecosystem have been enriched by a particular kind of diversity—intellectual diversity.”¹²

Viewpoint diversity feeds both the scholarly and civic aspects of the human spirit. It allows our inquiries to reach for truth while staying firmly rooted in civil discourse. This dual nourishment doesn’t weaken the library’s mission; it enriches it. It transforms the library into a space where our spirit of inquiry meets our spirit of citizenship in the social pursuit of meaning.

Response to “Viewpoint diversity assumes a partisan goal based on unproven assumptions.”

Major Premise: Libraries strive to maintain neutrality by collecting materials across ideological lines based on relevance, scholarly merit, and user needs.

Minor Premise: Viewpoint diversity in library collections does not assume partisanship but reflects a commitment to intellectual openness and balanced representation.

Conclusion: Therefore, viewpoint diversity in libraries is not a partisan project but a principled approach to supporting diverse academic and civic inquiry.

The library's real spirit isn't partisan. It's pluralistic, curious, and open to the entire spectrum of human thought. Diversity in collections shows a profession that wants to look past ideological boundaries. We provide the means for students and scholars to understand the world not through one single lens, but through a kaleidoscope of perspectives. Of course, as the old saying goes about leading horses to water, it is up to them to peer.

A library's goal isn't passive political neutrality. It's a commitment to principled non-partisanship when it applies its standards. As Michael Dudley wrote here, "This is why library neutrality matters: just as the separation of church and state in the U.S. Constitution guarantees freedom of religion by guaranteeing freedom *from* religion, so too does neutrality guarantee freedom of thought by guaranteeing freedom from one particular way of thinking."¹³ By resisting the urge to reduce intellectual difference to mere political maneuvering, librarians affirm their role. We become guardians of the freedom to seek and question.

In such a space, ideas get judged by their power to illuminate, challenge, or inspire. They are not judged by their political origin. Ultimately, if your library adheres to scholarly utility and relevance, its collection will naturally (given sufficient time and resources, of course!) reflect a broad spectrum of published, evidence-based viewpoints. It will include viewpoints disfavored by any current campus consensus.

Response to "Viewpoint diversity undermines disciplinary and specialized knowledge and standards as well as the autonomy of academic reasoning and scholarship."

Major Premise: Libraries respect disciplinary standards by acquiring materials vetted through established publication processes and recognized by academic communities.

Minor Premise: Viewpoint diversity in collections does not override disciplinary autonomy but expands access to legitimate published alternatives within and across fields.

Conclusion: Therefore, viewpoint diversity in library collections strengthens disciplinary inquiry by providing broader context and comparative perspectives.

Viewpoint diversity, far from a threat to academic standards, is rather a mechanism for upholding them. While academic inquiry thrives inside disciplines, it also needs to cross boundaries, explore, and find new areas. Diversity in library collections does not threaten specialized knowledge. It invigorates it by introducing fresh ideas.

By providing diverse, high-quality scholarship, your library supports the essential intellectual friction needed for internal critique. This allows a discipline's main ideas to not become rigid dogma. They remain constantly exposed to rigorous scrutiny from legitimate, internal competitors. "Voices that challenge the norm offer valuable opportunities to reevaluate commonly accepted views."¹⁴ Agency resides in the hands of every scholar and library user. Regarding our own house, my sense is that there is considerable work to be done in our own credibility revolution. ALA has not signed on to the TOP Guidelines for their in-house journals.¹⁵ Few LIS journals comply with them either, though Emerald and Elsevier shine brightly in this area.¹⁶ Thankfully, Amy Riegelman and Megan Kocher are advocating for increased rigor at the leading journal of our discipline.¹⁷ Some wise words previously published here: "Both individually and collectively, librarians should be open-minded and capable of critical reflection, using evidence-based methods to elevate debates and the general discourse in the field."¹⁸

Libraries honor disciplinary standards while embracing diverse perspectives. This balance keeps the spirit of scholarship both rooted and restless. The stacks are organized like a rigid French garden, but in practice, we can collect and weed as English gardeners, allowing evolving insight. The tree of knowledge is able to grow in unexpected ways.

Response to "Viewpoint diversity is incoherent."

Major Premise: A coherent collection policy includes clear criteria for inclusion, such as scholarly relevance, user demand, and intellectual freedom.

Minor Premise: Viewpoint diversity operates within these criteria, allowing libraries to include a range of perspectives without endorsing all viewpoints equally.

Conclusion: Therefore, viewpoint diversity in library collections is coherent and consistent with professional standards of collection development.

This argument counters the charge of incoherence. It frames viewpoint diversity as a logically necessary part of professional collection standards. Though intellectual exploration can be chaotic; it is purposeful, even when dealing with contradictions. Diversity in library collections is not incoherent. It is a direct reflection of the human spirit's groping for understanding.

One of your library's goals should be to ensure that a full range of rigorous perspectives are available for study and critique. While we all bring multiple aspects of ourselves to work, it simply is not our place to let our own or others' proclivities unduly influence collection development. According to ACRL, "The development of library collections in support of an institution's instruction and research programs should transcend the personal values of the selector. In the interests of research and learning, it is essential that collections contain

materials representing a variety of perspectives on subjects that may be considered controversial.”¹⁹

Libraries manage this plurality of views intentionally. Purchase and/or retention is emphatically not endorsement. Thus, we offer students and scholars a structured yet expansive space to engage with ideas. By doing this, your library honors curiosity’s need for both order and openness. It creates a coherent space where intellectual exploration is guided by thoughtful stewardship.

Response to “Viewpoint diversity has already been used, both in the United States and abroad, to attack higher education and stifle academic freedom.”

Major Premise: Libraries protect academic freedom by ensuring access to a wide range of materials without censorship or ideological restriction.

Minor Premise: Viewpoint diversity in collections supports this freedom by resisting homogenization and enabling users to explore contested or minority views.

Conclusion: Therefore, viewpoint diversity in library collections upholds academic freedom rather than threatening it.

No Trojan horse, viewpoint diversity is one practical expression of academic freedom. Academic freedom relies on multiple supports; two that increase its resilience are resistance to censorship and the privacy to read contentious sources, both well-supported by the ALA Code of Ethics. We are at or near our best when shielding library users from ideological surveillance and outside political pressure. This is perhaps the stickiest contemporary wicket when it comes to libraries, as many public libraries across the USA well know. Much hinges on how one chooses to define ‘censorship’ or ‘ideological restriction’. J.A. Kelly wrote here, “Collection development, cataloging, weeding, and programming policies which consider ‘harm’ to be a factor are not in sync with traditional library values. Anyone can find something objectionable in nearly any book.”²⁰ That is true, and yet, for the vast majority of librarians who do not work in the private sector, making some degree of peace with the dictates from our funders is necessary. As readers of *Heterodoxy in the Stacks* know, not all book “bans” are created equal.²¹ A great deal could be written about that subject, and when stepping into the public political arena, or malicious compliance, is justified; this brief essay is not the place, but I do want to acknowledge how complicated these things can be.

By actively acquiring materials that represent a broad, rigorous range of perspectives, the library ensures its collections resist ideological homogenization. Viewpoint-diverse collections don't stifle scholarship. They empower scholars to navigate complexity, confront uncomfortable ideas, and emerge intellectually stronger. In this crucial way, libraries transform into bulwarks of freedom. The spirit of inquiry is not just protected by us, but emboldened.

Response to “Viewpoint diversity is an argument made in bad faith.”

Major Premise: Libraries operate in good faith when they transparently apply professional standards to acquire materials that support inquiry and education.

Minor Premise: Viewpoint diversity in collections is the practical demonstration of a professional commitment to intellectual freedom, which ensures that users can engage with a full spectrum of ideas, not a covert political agenda.

Conclusion: Therefore, viewpoint diversity in library collections is a principled and transparent practice aligned with the library's educational mission.

While Siraganian has shown the existence of some bad-faith actors, her argument simply doesn't apply to the academic library context. The above counter-thesis frames viewpoint diversity as an ethical requirement for every academic library. A library's integrity defines its spirit: a commitment to process, transparency, respectful exchange of ideas, among other things. This integrity requires collection decisions to consistently be grounded on user needs and scholarly utility. These guardrails keep the process free of ideological preference.

When pursued honestly, viewpoint diversity shows a librarian's humility in the face of our complex world. It isn't a desire to manipulate for partisan advantage but one “meaningful contribution they can make to the public policy function, which is enabling informed debate.”²² Libraries that embrace this principle aren't trying to serve hidden agendas. They serve deep human desires: to question and to grow. By honoring those desires with integrity, libraries become places where the spirit gets uplifted. Diversity of thought becomes a genuine asset, not a pretense.

Fidem Servare

One of the consistent weak points in Siraganian's theses is her misunderstanding (or straw-manning) of viewpoint diversity, as pointed out by Dale E. Miller. No serious advocate of viewpoint diversity would call for a biology department to hire a triple-helix theorist.²³ [Note: Please prove me wrong if you can find any analogous example. I consider “serious” to mean 1) someone currently employed in academe, who commands 2) monetary resources, which could

be public or private, and 3) attention measured through non-condemnatory citations to their advocacy.] Similarly, we must not countenance straw-manning of viewpoint diversity in libraries. Jorge Luis Borges already vividly described a library of nigh-infinite viewpoint (as well as a few other types of) diversity in *La biblioteca de Babel*. The library of Babel transparently violates four of Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science (excepting #2 "Every person has his or her book." If they are lucky enough to find it.)²⁴ It is no one's ideal work environment or institutional aspiration.

Reader, you are not (necessarily) part of "a MAGA plot".²⁵ We should not hesitate to support and defend libraries and our institutions when under threat, but these defenses do not require apostasy from "the library faith" nor rejection of viewpoint diversity.²⁶ Despite the fact that the AAUP has published a denunciation of viewpoint diversity, we should not give up our library principles. Let us continue to plow our familiar fields with the highest spirits we can muster during this period of many difficulties and changes. As Rick Anderson wrote in these pages:

'Issues around neutrality and bias matter because they go directly to the core values of librarianship, and to the library's ability to serve its community. If we actually believe that all members of our community have an equal claim on the library and its resources — if, in the words of the ALA's official Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights, we believe that "the essence of equitable library services provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause, or movement may be explored" — then this necessarily implies that we, as librarians, do not believe in putting our own ideological thumbs on the scale of social discourse.'²⁷

Note: The seven counter-theses were generated by pairing two AI LLMs. MS 365 Copilot v. bizchat.20251016.51.1 was given access to Siraganian's article in *Academe* and prompted "Formulate a response to each of the seven theses applying them to the context of an academic library and its collections. Your responses should take the form of major premise, minor premise, and conclusion. There should be seven statements in total." The statements from Copilot were then given to Google Gemini 2.5 Flash, one by one, with the prompt "Here is an argument: 'insert_3-part_counter_thesis' Identify and fix any logical errors and return the improved version."

¹ Lisa Siraganian, "Seven Theses Against Viewpoint Diversity," *Academe*, Fall 2025, <https://www.aaup.org/academe/issues/fall-2025/seven-theses-against-viewpoint-diversity>.

² Len Gutkin, "The AAUP's President Called Me 'Straight TRASH.' Here's What Happened.," Blog, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 13, 2025, <https://www.chronicle.com/newsletter/the-review/2025-10-13>.

³ Todd Wolfson, "Professors Are Not the Enemy. Fascists Are. | AAUP," AAUP News, August 8, 2024, <https://www.aaup.org/news/professors-are-not-enemy-fascists-are>.

⁴ Michael W. Clune, "Professors Can Be Ignorant. That's Why We Need Viewpoint Diversity.," *The Review, The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Washington, DC), October 3, 2025, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/professors-can-be-ignorant-thats-why-we-need-viewpoint-diversity>.

⁵ Lisa Siraganian, "Viewpoint Diversity Is a MAGA Plot," *The Review, The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Washington, DC), October 10, 2025, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/viewpoint-diversity-is-a-maga-plot>.

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- ⁶ Dale E. Miller, "A Modest Defense of Viewpoint Diversity," Blog, *ACADEME BLOG*, September 26, 2025, <https://academeblog.org/2025/09/26/a-modest-defense-of-viewpoint-diversity/>; Joan W. Scott, "On Viewpoint Diversity," Blog, *ACADEME BLOG*, October 15, 2025, <https://academeblog.org/2025/10/15/on-viewpoint-diversity/>; Eric J. Weiner, "Defending My Convictions—A Response to Lisa Siraganian on Viewpoint Diversity," Blog, *ACADEME BLOG*, October 13, 2025, <https://academeblog.org/2025/10/13/defending-my-convictions-a-response-to-lisa-siraganian-on-viewpoint-diversity/>.
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- ⁹ Brian Erb, "DEI/Critical Librarianship and Free Speech," Lightning Round, Florida Library Association Conference, Orlando, FL, May 17, 2024, <https://hxlibraries.substack.com/p/my-presentation-at-the-2024-florida>.
- ¹⁰ Jonathan Lawler, "How Archival Digitization Fosters Viewpoint Diversity and Enriches Academic Life," Substack newsletter, *Heterodoxy in the Stacks*, June 2, 2025, <https://hxlibraries.substack.com/p/how-archival-digitization-fosters>.
- ¹¹ Siraganian, "Viewpoint Diversity Is a MAGA Plot."
- ¹² Craig Gibson and Sarah Hartman-Caverly, "On Not Dismantling Libraries," Substack newsletter, *Heterodoxy in the Stacks*, August 27, 2024, <https://hxlibraries.substack.com/p/on-not-dismantling-libraries>.
- ¹³ Michael Dudley, "The Certainty Trap and 'Taking Sides' in Librarianship," Substack newsletter, *Heterodoxy in the Stacks*, June 3, 2022, <https://hxlibraries.substack.com/p/the-certainty-trap-and-taking-sides>.
- ¹⁴ Lawler, "How Archival Digitization Fosters Viewpoint Diversity and Enriches Academic Life."
- ¹⁵ David Mellor et al., *TOP Signatories Organizations*, OSF, May 21, 2025, <https://osf.io/xb8fw>.
- ¹⁶ David Mellor et al., *TOP Guidelines Journal Signatories*, OSF, May 21, 2025, <https://osf.io/y2rr6>.
- ¹⁷ Amy Riegelman and Megan Kocher, "Seeking More Rigorous Author Guidelines at C&RL," *College & Research Libraries* 86, no. 6 (2025): 858, <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.86.6.858>.
- ¹⁸ Michael Dudley and Craig Gibson, "A Common Sense Librarianship Manifesto," Substack newsletter, *Heterodoxy in the Stacks*, December 13, 2024, <https://hxlibraries.substack.com/p/a-common-sense-librarianship-manifesto>.
- ¹⁹ ACRL Board of Directors, "Intellectual Freedom Principles for Academic Libraries: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights," June 29, 1999, <https://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/whitepapers/intellectual>.
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- ²¹ Fair For All, "The Shadow Hanging Over 'Freedom to Read Week' [Revised and Corrected]," Substack newsletter, *Heterodoxy in the Stacks*, March 3, 2025, <https://hxlibraries.substack.com/p/the-shadow-hanging-over-freedom-to>; mulhern, "The Yearly Charade of 'Banned Books Week,'" Substack newsletter, *Heterodoxy in the Stacks*, April 24, 2024, <https://hxlibraries.substack.com/p/the-yearly-charade-of-banned-books>.
- ²² Dudley, "The Certainty Trap and 'Taking Sides' in Librarianship."
- ²³ Miller, "A Modest Defense of Viewpoint Diversity."
- ²⁴ S. R. Ranganathan, *The Five Laws of Library Science*, Madras Library Association. Publication Series ;2 (The Madras Library Association; E. Goldston, 1931), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001661182>.
- ²⁵ Siraganian, "Viewpoint Diversity Is a MAGA Plot."
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- ²⁷ Rick Anderson, "Libraries and the Contested Terrain of Neutrality," Substack newsletter, *Heterodoxy in the Stacks*, September 14, 2023, <https://hxlibraries.substack.com/p/libraries-and-the-contested-terrain>.