**Inclusivity in Scholarly Publishing – In conversation with DEIA champion – Damita Snow**

**Transcript**

0:00

[Music] hello deita uh We've briefly met before

0:07

but today it's an honor to be having a candid conversation with such an esteemed champion of diversity equity

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and inclusion be as the Director spearheading accessibility and Dei

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strategy for the American Society of civil engineers and we would refer to it

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as asce publication s and standards to being an imperative part of the women in

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AI Collective your pioneering efforts are opening doors for underrepresented

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groups and setting industry benchmarks for inclusive policies and

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processes uh what is rather inspiring uh to me and I'm sure to everybody else who

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will be fortunate enough to be listening to your experience and being inspired by

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it is how you go beyond your professional accomplishments and carry a

1:04

vision for systematic and systemic change if we may call it so today not only I but also the

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researchers globally are eager to gleaning your insights on the progress being made uh with respect to Dei

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persistent challenges ahead that we are forcing and how we might collectively

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build a more Equitable landscape in scholly Communications uh most of all I would

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like to emphasize that I'm Keen to learn what fuels your passion for this work

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every day with several wins along the way I'm sure your wisdom and Triumph uh is what

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we're looking for in understanding better and learning more about you today so

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welcome Dita thank you very much thank you for the invitation to be here firstly

2:03

congratulations on being a finalist for the top 100 Dei professional award well

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this nomination only scratch the surface of your achievements I can only imagine

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how thrilled you must have felt um on seeing your name among such

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distinguished honoraries what was your first reaction

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if may ask like when you saw your name amongst the finalists well I'll tell you I received

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an email about it a few weeks before the announcement and I thought it was spam I

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did not I I didn't believe it and um then I saw a post on LinkedIn and I said

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oh wow this is this is real you know I need to pay attention to this so I was

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shocked and I was honored at the same time it was it's an honor over the years

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you've held various influential roles uh within the American Society of civil

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engineers uh have how do you think have these experiences contributed to your

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expertise in Publications and standards especially and particularly when we talk

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about the realm of accessibility and Dei

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strategizing yes I've been at a for several years and and I actually began my career there as a a graphic designer

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and I was always doing you know outside volunteer work uh related to uh justice

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with the National Association for the advancement of color people for the National Council of negro women and I'm

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still a member and I still do work with them as well in my local area so I was always doing that but you know I was

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working every day and that wasn't a part of my day-to- day um you know I didn't 20 plus years

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ago I didn't know what scotle publishing was you know was just going to a job and

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still to this day unfortunately there are many like me that's that look like me that still don't know it's a career

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path and so a lot of what I do wants to bring that awareness to historically excluded communities um and so that that

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fuels me um I I will say I don't think that I'm an expert because I'm still

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learning I learn a lot I learn um something new I try to learn something new daily I've been lucky enough to be a

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member of committees and or lead teams that are focused on making the the

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industry more reflective of the the public that it serves yes definitely and U like as you

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speak about asce uh being a director of the accessibility and deia strategy for

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Publications and standards at ASC what prompted this transition and how do you

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envision shaping the accessibility and deia Landscape within the Publications

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domain especially the scholarly Publications domain if I may ask

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well as I mentioned I was doing uh Dei work and within Ace with the uh staff

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diversity and inclusion Council and I was working in publishing Technologies so I kind of had two jobs and um the

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managing director and publisher of Publications and standards stay contant saw the need for the dedic for a

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dedicated position that was focused on our Publications deia strategy and

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that's how the position came to be she was a she's a Visionary and she saw the need um

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now I can work with other teams within a and luckily now I only have the one job so so it's great I I'm more able to

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focus on on you know what fuels me um and uh deia is a part of our publication

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strategy and of course you know it's a strategy based on asce's overall organizational strategy with that being

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said there are several things that um I have on my to-do list um and I'm not

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doing it by myself since it's a part of the as publication strategy it's a part of everyone's job within Publications

6:04

but I'll share a few things with you um we recent we redesigned our online

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Publications uh website ASC library and with the redesign we realized that

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usability testing needs to happen to make sure that it is um serving our

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members as we expect it and hope it hope that it will so that's in progress uh we

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are starting to collect we'll be starting to collect demographic data on our authors um and that will help us um

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it will inform our decision making related to our edit make the makeup of our editorial boards and peer review

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we're adding alternative text to our figures and tables to allow screen readers to read alloud content for those that are blind have low vision or

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different learning styles um we expect that authors will soon have the ability to to add Journal article abstracts and

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languages other than English the focus is on Portuguese Spanish Hindi French

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and Chinese if the author wishes to do that we he'll be he or she will will be able to do that uh the other thing we're

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working on are graphical abstracts and those are uh images that visually represent an article abstract so a few

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things going on right now we also have Partnerships with other organizations that are focused on deia such as the

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Coalition for diversity and inclusion scholarly publishing and scholarly Communications I'm sorry and the Royal

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Society of chemistry joint commitment for for action on inclusion and diversity and

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Publishing and we also support the UN sustainability goals we currently support seven of the goals and we'll be

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adding others and we're also members of the uh un SG Publishers compact which

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aims to accelerate progress to achieve the SGS by 2030

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so if you want to know more you can always go to our website ASC Library

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uh.org accessibility so we have a that's just a few things I'll mention to you today uh

8:04

there quite a few I may say and uh it's definitely some commendable work that

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ASC is doing on their um themselves uh but while we are at it uh how do you

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recommend other organizations who may have not uh completely or holistically

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you know taken efforts in terms of embracing deia strategies and approaches

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um are there any Frameworks or metrics that you recommend that people or

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organizations may start at a smaller scale and to probably create a very

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meaningful impact in future uh from my experience assessment

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is key determine where you are and where you want to be and then you can figure out the middle figure out the middle how

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you can get there what are your objectives get your strategies in order and figure out what success looks like

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for you and your organization um as far as metrics there are many deia maturity models out there

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they are maturity models are tools you can use um to assess the effectiveness of your efforts um I will say that the

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anti-racism toolkit for organizations by C4 disk has a chapter called measurements measurement and metrics and

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that's excellent if I say so myself uh if you're limited by budget there are some free assessment tools there I also

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like the race equity and inclusion action guide that was put up by the Annie ekc Foundation that's that's

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really really helpful um and I'm if you know someone wants to read a book um I'm

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reading a book right now called racial Justice at work okay practical solutions

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for systemic change by the winters group one of the chapters talks about de work

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deia work being transformational people focused and emotional therefore complex

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and sometimes polarizing but with in that chapter you know it provides helpful models and as the title says you

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know practical Solutions and actions that anyone can do so really helpful sure I'm sure they will be and uh like

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when you uh work on these projects and you know when you work on strategizing certain uh Solutions or approaches in

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terms of deia uh were there any lessons that you've learned so far uh from your

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leadership experiences um that may have shaped in terms of your approach that you take in strategizing

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Dei so I've always thought of this work in a particular way you know I think of

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it like a train right some people board the DIA train and get off at the next stop some stay on for a few stops others

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stay on for the duration and some just don't get on at all right said that's fine you know this work is super hard

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it's difficult I'll tell anyone that's doing this work to take a break if you

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need it take a break as long as you need it um and as I mentioned

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before assess assess assess where you are the data will allow you to move

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forward it will tell you what you need to stop doing and what what you should continue doing um you don't have to do one large

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thing all the time you know those small steps that will end up being impactful

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over time so don't think it you know I always tell people you can do something that's small it may affect two people

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that still change yes absolutely very rightly said

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and I completely agree with what you just uh said in terms of even smallest

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of your efforts would make a really longlasting and an effective um you know

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impact on someone who has uh somehow stumbled upon a resource or your

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approach in any which way and as I uh mentioned earlier your initiatives and

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efforts with respect to approaches uh certainly have no limits uh while you

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are being humble and saying that it's just a little thing that you're doing but I'm sure it is um you know impacting

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a lot of humans around us uh one such thing that acts as a testament that

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we've already discussed earlier and you've also recommended for people and organizations to look forward to is uh

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the C4 dis anti-racism toolkit uh involving over

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volunteers I would like to understand how would you say has this project

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contributed to addressing systemic racism within scholarly publishing

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organizations and what impact do you see and do you hope to see for it to make in

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the future well first it it was a big project and I have to give a shout out to my project co-chair Jocelyn Dawson

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she's at pen press I don't think either of us realized what we were taking on at the beginning of that project you know

13:01

it was a lot but we had a great group of volunteers they were wonderful they were

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engaged dedicated um I learned a lot from each of them and it was an experience that I was lucky to have and

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and I'll always value it and we did have a lot of fun um the toolkit was actually

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written by a multi-racial group of Industry professionals and it's intended to help individuals at all levels within

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the scol publishing industry uh the goal goal is to help them Implement inclusive policies procedures and Norms the goal

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of the another goal was to provide actionable items for organizations in their Journey that's why it's broken

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down into small into small chapters you don't have to read the entire toolkit at once and within those there are five

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chapters within those five chapters are several sections within them so you can take you know bite-sized pieces and

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Implement them uh in your organization can I mention some of the other toolkits sure sure okay so that

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toolkit is is the second in the series that's called the toolkits for equity and I would recommend that you read um

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those tool kits as well they are the anti-racism toolkit for allies which was actually the first one the anti-racism

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toolkit for organizations was the second one and the anti-racism toolkit for black indigenous and people of color was

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the third one in that series uh the other two resources I want to mention quickly are the guidelines for inclusive

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language and images and scolly Communications and the toolkit for disability Equity the all of these resources are

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are were created by C4 disk all volunteers all great work there are uh

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there's another guideline coming out in the next few months uh related to editorial peer review oh and um last

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thing I'll say about the toolkits right now is that they can be adapted by other Industries we want people to customize

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them for their own use there's a CCB license so you can copy and redistribute the material in any format you wish you

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can build on it but CFR desk will ask that you do not

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customize the content so it does not you know we don't want you to dilute the

15:08

language or alter the spirit in which it was originally written so we want it to be adapted but please keep the Spirit uh

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of the product absolutely absolutely and the messaging I believe should not be dis uh you know Disturbed at any stage

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of it being uh kind of propagated across different uh areas probably um like uh

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for our listeners and all or our audiences across the globe uh would you

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give a little more information as to are these tool kits openly accessible do they need to subscribe do they need to

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be a part of the C4 disc Community can you give some more information on that

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you do not need to be I will say I'll say two things it is open to anyone that wishes to access the content and the

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second thing is if you see something on the C4 disc you don't have to be a member of c4d to volunteer for any um

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committee so please if you feel if if you see a project and it speaks to you please sign up for that project and they

16:10

do have a community of interest you don't as I said you don't need to be a member I'm a member of the community of

16:15

Interest the last time we met we talked about uh Recruitment and Retention so there are a lot of great topics uh I

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think the month before was about creating a safe space for discussion so a lot of great things going on at for

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desk definitely and I'm sure that this will inspire a lot of organizations as well to put forth some fundamental rules

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and some kind of strategies so that uh they are more inclusive and uh make uh

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the scholarly publishing domain or even otherwise uh more inclusive in terms of

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the kind of approaches that they take like I was saying that you know how important it is for like-minded people

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to come together and uh Drive such forces together and bring a change um

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that again um highlights us into getting into the topic of you know Dia

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approaches and the goals that we aim to achieve when like-minded people come together a more inclusive structure is

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formed that's when we can look for a progressive and a very sustainable kind

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of um you know scholarly publishing or overall a very um you know cultured and

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you know culturally diverse uh Community is also something that is really essential to bring in people from

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different geographies right to come and speak about similar things absolutely

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yes and um when we speak about these um di approaches on a industrywide level

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let's say so according to you where are we heading with this progress and what

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Works REM what work do you think is still not done or it it's yet to be done

18:05

according to you what would that be I would say accessibility content access for those

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without funding for research and content access for those that have disabilities

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or people with disabilities uh progress um we you know

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I believe that countries a lot of Publishers believe that countryes should and should support

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authors researchers peer reviewers and emerging economies asce especially has lot they we've just launched our um

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early last year launched our first Open Access engineering Journal called asce open it only host open papers as the

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name implies you know it brings more people into the research conversation because the barriers to the

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content aren't there you know time will allow for open research to grow but the work is happening and will continue I

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heard from a colleague that the European mathematical Society with they been working with

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research libraries and they found a way to make all of their research journals open access without the need for um

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author side fees and so I haven't dug into that um but I think that's

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wonderful uh the work to be done I think we I know we have to be

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more mindful in our content creation we have to involve people with disabilities in the design process early on and the

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creation process early on So speaking of accessibility as one of the primary uh

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you know uh areas where we need to do a little more progress um we also

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conducted a global survey just about uh the beginning of this year and uh we

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found out that a lot of um due to funding constraints or you know due to

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heavily levied uh APC which are the article processing charges it becomes

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really difficult for researchers and authors around the world especially from

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lowincome countries uh to be paying and in that course I think we are losing out

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on some really important research that needs to go out there in the world so

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that's uh we got some really interesting insights from the survey that we conducted which we also presented at the

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EAS conference last year and uh which kind of brought in a lot lot of

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perspectives from uh researchers from different regions wherein we kind of

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understood how difficult would it be for someone whose research is ready but due to uh publishing fund um constraints or

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due to not being able to you know publish in the right targeted Journal

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because of the heavily levied uh apcs um your important research that could

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potentially create a very big impact in the society and create probably it could

21:00

be about environmental Sciences which we are in dire need of at the moment we

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need uh research that would lead us into creating a more sustainable um

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atmosphere to live in so these are certain things even medical research for that matter like I'm sure you must be

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aware of when uh during covid-19 there was so many misinformation there was so

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many misinformation that was kind of propagated around and people were not really aware of what to and what not to

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do in that process so in this um process and this um area especially there are

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certain sensitive areas of understanding where and research where people need to

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be aware more so um and I think with more di initiatives and with more uh

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established and structured funding opportunities for researchers around the

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globe it will be one of the ways to overcome this challenge right what do

22:02

you think about that I agree I think that um you know we do need to have other

22:09

voices at the table we are you know this the world is huge and there are you know

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we we the barriers are there but we're taking things you know taking down some of those walls piece by piece and we

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could only do that as a collective you know we could do our part uh individually but I think

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as a collective we're stronger and we know that this needs to happen and I think and I know it's it will happen it

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is happening sure like even with smaller organizations taking their bit and you

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know their approach into dealing with this I'm sure someday um even the smallest of organizations or when a lot

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of people come together form a collective uh that's when uh the change is to happen change will be more

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impactful there certainly so certainly so but I do want to let those smaller organizations know that they can do

23:03

something they don't have to wait to be a part of a a collective they can do something and certainly Partnerships

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such as the ones that I've already mentioned you know C4 desk and roal Society of chemistry the other

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organizations um you know I I have uh recently become a member of a few um

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Council dni councils she say deia committees I'm sorry I'm thinking about as Dia

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Committees of other organizations um such as the institute for credentialing

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uh Excellence National information standards organization so there are that's a collective that is working to

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address some of the the the issues that we see in publishing uh the the to

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create Equity um and so I as I mentioned I'm a new member of these groups and I'm looking forward to the initiative so we

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were talking about collectives those are two collectives um that are are working

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with uh many organizations to do good work when we talk about you know the

24:04

future and uh when we talk about a more sustainable and inclusive future um what

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future initiatives or projects uh do you envision in advancing de goals within

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the scholarly publishing domain and how do you plan to engage stakeholders in

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these efforts other than just the to other than publishing the toolkits or being a part of several collectives can

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talk a little bit about what we've done with the dni council at asce how we've

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impacted the culture and I'll just tell you really quickly how the council came about you know we were all at a this

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staff meeting we were in person of course all at a staff meeting about 10 years ago and our executive director was talking about how important Dei was to

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the civil engineering profession and I mentioned to you earlier that I done a lot of uh volunteer work in that space

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and and I thought it would be something worth investigating at the office um

25:02

merging my two you know passions together so to speak and um and you know

25:08

create a Community Focus with the focus on dni and the mission of the council is

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actually to focus understanding dignity and respect among staff and to cultivate an inclusive Workforce that reflects all

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segments of society uh some of the things that we have been able to do I'll

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talk about some of the things we've done and and what we are currently working on uh for a minute and um I will say that I

25:34

believe that the council has had an impact in the on the culture and that we talk about deia more internally you know

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we have those courageous conversations be it you know one-on-one or with the

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speaker that we've been able to bring in um you know I've been at as a while and

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it's been rewarding for me to see this change or this growth in the culture I

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won't say change I'll just I'll say growth in the culture people are feeling safe uh

26:03

vulnerable uh they're not fearing judgment by their peers because I've heard some things and I'm like wow you

26:09

know they felt really comfortable and I you know I'm glad that they felt that Comfort uh there at that Comfort level

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because not everyone um is there um and I I think that the council had a small

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part in making that happen um we have an an annual diversity day it's on May 20

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it's based on the May 21st day um designated by the UN world day for cultural diversity for dialogue and

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development we do it around May 21st every year we've had we've been doing it for 10 years before 2020 we had um

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several inperson events to allow staff to celebrate themselves be it via family

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dish you know food always brings people together right yeah uh personal stories um in the virtual space we've been able

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to do things a little bit different um we brought in speaker ERS

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to talk about how to be a Dei Champion Technology's role in building equity and opportunity for all and consciously

27:05

overcoming unconscious bias in the workplace and so you know we didn't that's not the only day you know we have

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education so we have uh standing events such as our short story club and real

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talk Reel Talk you know it's a short film and we have conversation after that

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they're hosted by staff and they are di on Dia related topics we also have had

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other events which allow such as unique Y unique allows people to share

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something about themselves such as a special interest the goal is always for people to share celebrate and learn yes

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um and and we believe that the work allows us to see that we are more alike

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than different we have more in common than not uh myself and the council members believe that those similarities

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allow us to see ourselves and others and and uh we certainly wouldn't have been able to last for 10 years if we didn't

28:01

have the supportive leadership and we had that from day one um and you know

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that support will continue and I will also say to folks if you do not have a budget don't let that be your stopping

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block you know short story club is what we do is have a staff member choose a

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short story they come we you know th send out a mass email and those that

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want to attend will um we ask that you read the this short story beforehand then come to the meeting and have a

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discussion so the person that chose the short story is the host for that meeting um and will you know bring some of the

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the the thoughts from the story some background on the author so that is like

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no budget you don't need a budget to do things like that so um so yeah it's

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great to have a budget but if you don't it's okay yes um I think I absolutely agree

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when you said that you know com for like people feeling comfortable uh within U

29:02

the area of where they are or a group or a collective that they are a part of and

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these initiatives as you mentioned bring a food of your region or your culture or even you know discuss short stories

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because of course uh we relate most to stories and experiences of people and

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that is what helps us in connecting understanding and then trying to improve

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what we are aiming to do right as we conclude today's session what one advice

29:34

uh would you share with the scholarly World professionals aspiring to make a positive impact in deia strategy find a

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community that will appreciate the passion that you have I was fortunate

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during my journey I found colleagues organizations and friends that that you

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know I was able to learn from um get sound advice from collabor

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with and um you know share the the passion that I have for this work you

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know I came across a quote recently a few days ago actually and it said I

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don't know who wrote it but it said go where your energy is celebrated reciprocated and

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appreciated so I'll share that with the listeners today so I want to thank you for uh having me here today I appreciate

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you sharing a bit of my experience with everyone so thank you all and and thank

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you so much for uh giving us your time and uh it's an honor to be having you

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here discussing and having this very important conversation while a lot of

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people talk about Dei initiatives and the approaches that they would want to take I'm pretty sure that um this

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podcast and this conversation that we have had today is going to help a lot of researchers and organizations together

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to actually navigate a road map and create a proper approach so that they go

31:01

English (auto-generated)