1-1-2008

Recruiting for Diversity: Strategies for 21st Century Research Librarianship

Barbara I. Dewey
University of Tennessee, Knoxville, bdewey@psu.edu

Jillian Keally
University of Tennessee, jkeally@utk.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_libpub

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

THEME ARTICLE

Recruiting for diversity: strategies for twenty-first century research librarianship

Barbara Dewey and Jillian Keally

Hodges Library, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The paper aims to focus on organizational and institutional strategies, including a case study from the University of Tennessee, concerned with recruiting librarians from diverse backgrounds.

Design/methodology/approach – Programs from the Association for Research Libraries, the American Library Association, OCLC, and IFLA for recruiting librarians from diverse backgrounds are reviewed. An in-depth case study of the University of Tennessee Diversity Libraries Residency Program is included to provide a detailed example of a successful program and its contributions locally and to the research library field.

Findings – The paper provides strategies and a catalyst for other organizations and institutions to develop robust recruitment programs for a diverse workforce in academic libraries.

Originality/value – This paper lays out strategies for robust diversity recruiting activities at the organizational and institutional level using the University of Tennessee's experiences as a basis for discussion.

Keywords Recruitment, Academic libraries, Equal opportunities, Corporate strategy

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Academic libraries, especially research libraries, are recognizing the benefits and importance of recruiting librarians from diverse backgrounds. The imperative for diversity in higher education and, therefore, in its libraries, provides the context for outlining strategies to recruiting the best and brightest librarians from underrepresented groups. Creative efforts at the national professional organizational level to recruit broadly and effectively are making a difference in widening the pipeline at the entry-level and at higher position levels. In many cases research libraries are campus leaders for diversity initiatives including recruitment and for good reason. This paper will lay out strategies for robust diversity recruiting activities at the organizational and institutional level using the University of Tennessee's experiences as a basis for discussion. Finally, a summary of successful strategies in the current and future context of higher education will provide a roadmap and a catalyst for even greater strides in diversifying academic and research libraries and, in turn, our colleges and universities to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century global society.

Higher education and the diversity imperative

Colleges and universities are emphasizing diversity advancement as core to overall success of the mission of learning, civic engagement, and knowledge creation. Specific

strategic initiatives represent the individual college or university commitment infusing intercultural and international initiatives into the entire campus experience. Examples are the University of Tennessee's (2008) Ready for the World initiative, Diversity Matters at Michigan program (University of Tennessee Libraries, 2008), and University of Iowa's (2008) Center for Diversity and Enrichment. The Association of American Colleges and Universities' (2008) Diversity, Learning, and Inclusive Excellence program provides excellent resources for advancing colleges and universities' diversity initiatives. President Mary Sue Coleman, University of Michigan (2008), summarized the imperative for diversity in higher education in a quote on the Michigan webpage:

> An essential factor in our academic excellence is our diversity. When you bring together students, faculty and staff of different backgrounds and different experiences, you create an intellectual experience that is unmatched in higher education.

Research is mounting on the effects of campus diversity initiatives on student success. Kuh (2005) noted that a positive institutional climate for diversity promotes:

> Students' perceptions that the institution encourages and values interaction with people from different backgrounds. Therefore, student engagement in diversity-related activities relates positively to their understanding of diverse perspectives.

Chang (2005) notes that "when the focus is solely on or primarily on compositional diversity . . . there is a tendency to treat diversity as an end in itself, rather than as an education process that, when properly implemented, has the potential to enhance many important education outcomes." Recruiting for a diverse campus environment among the student and faculty (including librarians) ranks is part of the overall picture of a comprehensive and sustainable diversity initiative.

Libraries and campus diversity leadership

Academic libraries are well qualified to play leadership roles in advancing campus community diversity initiatives because of the inherent commitment to encompassing people and the multitude of ideas reflecting the breadth and depth of the human experience. Libraries also play a central role in the intellectual, social, and cultural life of students, the core campus audience who are at a critical point in their development as productive citizens of the world. Thus, the creation of a welcoming environment in the central campus institution of libraries is paramount. Recruitment of librarians and staff from a variety of backgrounds is key to the library's success in developing the environment, the collections, the services, and the experiences reflecting the rich diversity of humankind. A central part of leadership in diversity is embracing partnerships and collaborations within and beyond the campus. The emphasis on making connections is fundamental to libraries' success in advancing breadth and depth of diverse learning, intellectual, social, and cultural experiences.

The twenty-first century library must incorporate new methods of communication, collaboration, access to scholarship, and learning methodologies recognizing that understanding and advancing diversity in the broadest sense is critical to an individual's success throughout their life. Thus, recruitment of the brightest and most talented people to the ranks of academic librarianship is critical if we are to fulfill our mission in the current and future global society. These new recruits are well trained to adapt and leverage the highly networked world of information. They understand better

than those who were trained in the twentieth century the need to connect to people in their chosen space and to ensure that scholarship is accessible through these spaces. Recruits from diverse backgrounds are an important part of this cadre of new librarians. According to Winston (1998):

> The importance of recruitment efforts related to diversity is based on the need to ensure that a broad range of perspectives is represented in library decision-making, that library staff are representative of the community served, that they are sensitized to the needs of library users, and that equitable service is provided to minority students and other researchers.

Organizational recruitment strategies for diversity in the US

Research libraries, in particular, are far from reflecting the growing racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity in the US. The 2006-2007 ARL statistics indicate, for example, that only 13.5 percent of professional staff at ARL libraries are from underrepresented groups including 6 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 4.7 percent African American, 2.6 percent Hispanic, and 0.03 percent American Indian (Association for Research Libraries, 2008a). Multiple strategies at the local, regional, and national level are needed to recruit a much more representative pool of individuals interested in serving libraries in higher education.

At the national level the Association for Research Libraries (ARL) and the American Library Association have played leadership roles in recruiting a diverse professional workforce at entry and leadership levels. ARL's diversity agenda (Association for Research Libraries, 2008b) related to pipeline issues includes competitive programs addressing recruitment of entry-level positions as well as preparing minority librarians for leadership positions in research libraries. ARL's Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce provides stipends for minority students to help them attend ALA-accredited masters' programs and prepares them through mentors and workshops for their job search and the skills needed to successfully launch a professional career. Initiative participants also visit academic libraries to gain real life perspectives. ARL's Leadership and Career Development Program provides minority librarians interested in research libraries with three to ten years experience with an 18-month intensive program consisting of mentoring, workshops, projects, and visits based on best practices in leadership and career development provided by experts in the field. To date over 200 individuals have participated in these programs enriching academic libraries especially throughout the US and Canada. OCLC's (2008) Minority Librarian Fellowship Program offers Fellows' two, three-month assignments within specific divisions of OCLC, and one sixth month assignment with a specific operating unit within the OCLC organization. It its inaugural year (OCLC, 2008) the program will honor Duane Webster, retired Executive Director of ARL by choosing one Fellow from the ranks of ARL's diversity program alumni.

The American Library Association's (ALA) Office of Diversity (American Library Association, 2008) provides diversity-related resources for all types of libraries including academic. The ALA Spectrum Scholarship's mission is to improve service at the local level through the development of a representative workforce that reflects the communities served by all libraries in the new millennium. Since 1997, the ALA has awarded a total of 564 Spectrum Scholarships. The Office of Diversity also sponsors the Diversity Leadership Institutes on the fundamentals of diversity and provides grants for diversity research.

International recruitment strategies for global diversity

Diversity encompasses an international perspective to higher education so crucial for student and faculty success in a global world. The IFLA/OCLC (2008) Early Career Development Fellowship Program, jointly sponsored by the American Theological Library Association, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and OCLC provides career development and continuing education for library and information science professionals from developing countries. The program includes seminars, mentoring, and visits to selected European and North American libraries as well as a four-week residency at OCLC headquarters in Dublin, Ohio and in Leiden, Netherlands to explore topics of current interest especially to global cooperative librarianship. The fellows translate their learning and global experiences to current and future positions held in libraries throughout the world.

Residency programs: building blocks to building bridges and communities

One strategy to attract diverse professionals to a career in academic librarianship is with residency programs. Usually one or two years in length, these programs offer recent graduates of ALA-accredited master's programs an opportunity to acquire not only valuable work experience but also additional training and skills. In 1992, the Association of Library and Information Science Educators (ALISE) defined residency programs as "the post-degree work experience designed as an entry level program for professionals who have received the MLS degree from a program accredited by the American Library Association." Since 2003, the University of Tennessee (UT) Libraries has offered a residency program designed to attract recent library school graduates from underrepresented groups to a challenging and rewarding career in academic librarianship. A case study of the program, in particular its impact on other library and university recruitment efforts and program initiatives, supports the premise that residency programs are effective tools to attract, train, and even retain diverse professionals to the field of academic librarianship.

Program description

Not all residency programs have the same components or goals. The idea for and subsequent development of UT's residency program occurred under the auspices of the Library's Diversity Committee which was established in January 2001. According to the University of Tennessee Libraries' (2008) Diversity Committee:

> Diversity is a commitment to recognizing and appreciating the variety of characteristics that make individuals unique in an atmosphere that promotes and celebrates individual collective achievement.

Guided by this definition, the committee envisioned a two-year residency program that would enable recent MLS graduates to work closely with librarians in several areas of the library and take part in variety of projects. Residents would be expected also to become involved in professional associations, to participate in committees, and with the guidance of mentors and supervisors, to conduct research and/or contribute to the profession through presentations, poster sessions, exhibits, etc. A search committee comprised of volunteers from the Diversity Committee launched a national search in the fall of 2002. At the conclusion of the interviews in June 2003, the committee secured university and library funding to support salary, benefits, travel, and moving expenses

and extended offers to three individuals. Since that time, two additional cohort groups or five librarians have been hired as residents.

Building blocks

At this writing, the third cohort group is nearing completion of their first year as residents. Building on the experiences and skills they gained while serving as residents, five of their predecessors have accepted positions in other academic libraries across the country. Individually and collectively, these librarians continue to serve as building blocks for attracting diverse professionals to the field of academic librarianship. Effective advocates for the residency program and the UT library, they have been instrumental in the recruitment of future residents for the program, serving as mentors and role models for those who succeed them. Using seed money from a Cultural Diversity Grant awarded by Library Administration Management Association, a Division of the American Library Association, the first cohort group developed the Diversity's Librarian's Network. A free, web-based registry hosted at UT to provide information and announcements about residency positions in academic and research libraries, the site enabled them to connect to diversity librarians working in all types of libraries. Not only were they able to share information, but also to provide guidance, support, and encouragement. In addition, all eight resident librarians were selected to participate in the Minnesota Leadership Institute, where they had the opportunity to meet other residents and to acquire skills needed for future career development. Finally, two of the residency program's required components, involvement in professional associations and completion of a research project, resulted in presentations and articles that focused attention on residency programs and their potential for expanding the pool of diverse librarians qualified to work in academic libraries. At least one other university library, Purdue, has instituted a residency program modeled on the one at Tennessee.

Building bridges

Employing these and other opportunities to connect with diverse professionals, UT's residents built a solid foundation from which to launch additional initiatives. Using the web page created by the Libraries' Diversity Committee, residents share accomplishments and current activities with colleagues both near and far. They also play an important role in attracting new talent to the profession. In 2005 when the University of Tennessee's School of Information Sciences was awarded a grant from the Institute of Museum and Libraries (IMLS) to educate and train science librarians, members of both the first and second cohort groups, were the bridge to colleges and universities in the southeast, targeting students at historically black colleges and universities (HBCU), six librarians, including three residents, from underrepresented groups employed at the University of Tennessee created recruitment materials and then traveled in pairs to campuses as far away as Louisiana. They took part in career fairs and distributed posters and flyers describing the exciting opportunities that librarianship offered. They talked to classes and upperclassmen about their experiences. They found that many students were unaware of opportunities available in the library and information profession. Nevertheless, their face-to-face recruitment efforts resulted in at least three applicants who subsequently enrolled in the "Science Links" program. The residents played an important role as well in welcoming a librarian employed at a HBCU institution during an exchange program in summer 2006. Supported with funding from the Andrew W. Mellon foundation to Association of

Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL), an HBCU librarian from Fayetteville (NC) State University (FSU) spent two weeks at the University of Tennessee Library. Further collaborative efforts between the two institutions are planned as a result a spring 2008 trip by UT staff, faculty, and 2007-2009 residents to the FSU Library.

Building communities

Residents have contributed significantly to the library's collaborative efforts to build a sustainable academic library diversity program. All have served on the Library's Diversity Committee, which is actively engaged in outreach to the community and student groups and organizations; one of the first residents who accepted an instructional services position at the conclusion of her residency served as committee chair. During her tenure, members of the committee assisted with the development of the Libraries' Diversity Plan, which was acknowledged by the university for its "best practices." In 2006, residents along with other library volunteers hosted a fall "welcome back table" for students and took part in other library and university-sponsored events designed to promote the libraries' diverse collections. One of these, an "international focus tour of the library," was offered in conjunction with the "ready for the world initiative," part of the university's plan to help students succeed in the twenty-fist century world. Committed to the recruitment of a diverse workforce, residents serve on search committees, providing important links to diverse communities, both on-line and in person. In 2006, residents from the second cohort group replicated a study conducted at the University of Washington by Dr Scott Walter to determine how the staff and students from international/intercultural centers on campus used the library, its resources and services. Survey administrators not only used email to collect the data but also stationed themselves in the campus communities or locations where students gathered for events or to study. This strategy helped establish relationships with personnel affiliated with a variety of centers serving multicultural/international students that may pave the way for other collaborative activities. However, one of the most important outcomes of the research project was the recommendation to create a position in the library for a multicultural librarian. A total of 82 percent of the respondents indicated that this person would serve as the library's representative to the university community. While the idea of creating a position of a "community outreach librarian" has been considered in the past, this investigation by members of the library's underrepresented population has helped to make it a funding priority. In fact, it is a pleasure to report that a newly hired outreach librarian arrives this fall.

Assessment

Library administrators have conducted exit interviews with all of the residents in order to gather evaluative information about the program's components and suggestions for improvement. At the beginning of each rotation and the year-long assignment, residents set goals in collaboration with the rotational supervisor. A written evaluation assessing progress and outcomes occurs at the end of each assignment. The results of these discussions are used to make adjustments in setting future objectives and establishing priorities. Advice from the first cohort group resulted in a reduction of the month-long orientation to two weeks.

The library's diversity committee conducted an evaluation of the first residency program, surveying residents, department head, and faculty who served as mentors and/or supervisors. Feedback indicated that some of the expectations for what might

be achieved during a three-month rotation were unrealistic. It was not always possible, for example, to complete projects or fully participate in instructional activities. In some cases, residents chose to work in the same department at the same time and consequently, training was incomplete and insufficient. There was also some confusion about the use of the word "minority" that was used to describe the first program and several evaluators suggested the use of the term "diversity" in its place. This recommendation was implemented prior to the announcement and advertisement of the second program and today, the program is officially entitled "Diversity librarian residency program." The majority of the respondents considered the program a good idea and commented that it provided new experiences for the residents and the library staff and a new infusion of talent and energy.

Additional measures of success of academic residency programs include the recent formation of a Residency Working Group within the Association of Research Libraries and a forthcoming survey to collect data that may be used to suggest methods of assessing and evaluating post-master's diversity residency programs.

A case study of the University of Tennessee's Residency Program suggests that:

· Residents serve as allies in helping the library to raise diversity awareness and meet its diversity initiatives.

· Residents are effective in recruiting other members from underrepresented groups to the profession and to academic librarianship.

· Residents connect the library to diverse communities and to libraries serving diverse populations.

· Residency programs serve as a test-bed and training ground for librarians who are uncertain about meeting the expectations of a librarian working in an academic library.

· Residency programs enable librarians from diverse backgrounds to connect with one another.

· Residency programs, their objectives and components, are transferable to other libraries.

· Residency programs are sustainable if outcomes are measurable, achievable and widely publicized.

Comments from residents confirm these conclusions. Mark Puente, Diversity Resident, 2005-2007, currently Coordinator of Digital Projects and Special Collections Music Library, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign:

The UT Minority Residency Program allowed me to explore many areas of academic librarianship while, simultaneously, expanding my skill set and developing practical, marketable skills. (It) was an invaluable experience during which I developed valuable skills and expertise. The support I received from the UT Libraries made an indelible impression on me that will, no doubt, help to shape the type of supervisor, leader, and mentor I hope to be in the future.

Shantrie Collins and Damon Campbell, Research Assistant Professors, University of Tennessee Libraries note that:

We are exceedingly grateful to be a part of the Diversity Librarian Residency Program. We are experiencing the best of both worlds: a combination of specialized academic library training and professional development.

Strategies and next steps

The need to recruit and retain excellent new librarians from diverse backgrounds not only enriches the library experience but also provides support for ensuring campus success in teaching, learning, and research. These librarians bring new perspectives, ideas, and training to jump start the academic library's entry into the twenty-first world of global scholarship, learning methods, and high-tech means of communication. Next steps for advancing recruitment of librarians with diverse backgrounds includes focused programmatic initiatives at the international, national, local, and regional level within in an institution and its library's overall diversity plan. The energy of a diverse library workforce provides proven leadership in advancing student and faculty success beyond the library.

References

American Library Association (2008), "Office of Diversity", available at: www.ala.org/ala/diversity/diversity.cfm.

Association for Research Libraries (2008a), *ARL Annual Salary Survey, 2006-2007*, ARL, Washington, DC.

Association for Research Libraries (2008b), "Diversity initiatives", available at: www.arl.org/diversity.

Association of American Colleges and University (2008), "Diversity, Learning, and Inclusive Excellence program", available at: www.aacu.org/meetings/diversityandlearning/index.cfm

Chang, M. (2005), "Reconsidering the diversity rationale", *Liberal Education*, Vol. 91 No. 1, pp. 6-13.

IFLA/OCLC (2008), "Early Career Development Fellows Program", available at: www.oclc.org/news/releases/200671.htm

Kuh, G. (2005), "Experiencing diversity: what can we learn from liberal arts colleges", *Liberal Education*, Vol. 91 No. 1, pp. 14-21.

OCLC (2008), "Minority Librarian Fellowship Program", available at: www.oclc.org/us/en/community/careerdevelopment/minorityfellows/default.htm

University of Iowa (2008), "Center for Diversity and Enrichment", available at: www.uiowa.edu/~cde

University of Michigan (2008), "Diversity matters at Michigan", available at: www.diversity.umich.edu

University of Tennessee Libraries (2008), "Diversity committee", available at: www.lib.utk.edu/diversity/

University of Tennessee (2008), "Ready for the world", available at: www.utk.edu/readyfortheworld

Winston, M. (1998), "The role of recruitment in achieving goals related to diversity", *College and Research Libraries*, Vol. 59, pp. 240-7.

Corresponding author
Barbara Dewey can be contacted at: bdewey@utk.edu