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Diversity Residency Programs: Strategies for a Collaborative Approach to Development

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From the Field

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Abstract

Many library residency programs are a response to a long-standing issue in our profession: the need to increase ethnic and racial diversity among professional staff in academic libraries. Residency programs allow early-career librarians experience working in a professional setting and the chance to solidify a specialization in an area of choice. Two second-year residents share their suggestions to academic libraries interested in establishing or assessing a current program.

Keywords: diversity, inclusion, residency programs, recruitment

Introduction

Organizations across the United States are investing in diversity and inclusion programs with the goal of increasing the representation of underrepresented individuals (including gender, racial, and ethnic diversity) within the workforce. Libraries are not exempt from this pursuit. For years, academic libraries have been introducing diversity residency programs as a way to recruit a more diverse workforce. These programs are specifically designed to introduce early career librarians from underrepresented groups to academic librarianship. A residency program will most obviously prove transformative for the participating resident, however, a well-designed program will benefit all members of the host library as well. To varying degrees, each member of the library staff will have interactions with the residents and directly influence their experiences. In 2015, West Virginia University welcomed resident librarians through the newly formed Diversity Alliance residency program. Since then, the residents have had the opportunity to work in each of the library's main units, form partnerships with key campus stakeholders, identify long-term professional goals, and contribute to the profession both locally and nationally. Based on experiences and lessons learned, this article serves as a road map for academic libraries interested in beginning an inclusive, transformative, and collaborative residency program.

Data from a range of sources shows that academic libraries generally don't reflect the diversity of their communities. According to the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) 2014-2015 Annual Salary Survey, only "14.8% of the professional staff in US ARL university libraries (including law and medical libraries) belong to one of the four non-Caucasian categories for which ARL keeps records."[1] These non-Caucasian categories include Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, and American Indian or Native Alaskan. Similar statistics are available for other areas of librarianship and often are not reflective

of the communities our libraries serve.[2] These numbers highlight the need for increased representation of underrepresented librarians throughout the profession.

Residency programs offer wonderful opportunities for early career librarians from underrepresented groups to gain valuable experience working in academic libraries and help bridge the gaps in creating a more representative workforce. These programs, typically lasting two or three years, create a supportive environment for professional development, collaboration, and networking. A well-executed residency program is fruitful for both the resident librarian and the host library but cannot be successful without authentic collaboration. The residency program at West Virginia University was coordinated by librarians and staff willing to work across units to establish a dynamic program and worthwhile experience. This required effective communication and team building among colleagues to ensure success.

As two current resident librarians, we offer library administrators and residency coordinators suggestions to implement a new, or revitalize an existing, diversity residency program. While it may not be possible to foresee and plan for all situations related to the creation and implementation of a residency program, carefully considering specific details will create a more thoughtful and rewarding experience for all involved. Whether welcoming a single resident or a cohort of up to three, a library residency program presents opportunities for cooperation both within and outside of the library.

Fortunately, there is a growing amount of literature on creating and implementing diversity initiatives.[3] The following strategies are based on direct experiences, observations, and feedback and are not intended to be comprehensive.

Strategies

1. *Be prepared to assess your program before, during, and after implementation.*

A truly successful program is one that is able to track and report selected data throughout its lifecycle. Specific measures for evaluation should be created early in the design of a residency program. Measures may include concrete skills and knowledge gained, specific outputs (i.e., publications), and socialization. Experiences of residents will vary, so assessing these early in the program will allow space for modification if necessary. A truly collaborative diversity residency program will involve all stakeholders in the library. This will be discussed further, but as it relates to assessment, these stakeholders should be encouraged to share feedback via appropriate lines of communication. Finally, following the collection of feedback, results should be shared widely in a clear and organized way. This may include internal newsletters and/or departmental discussions and meetings.

2. *Provide and encourage robust, ongoing diversity and inclusion training for program administrators and coordinators.*

A residency program is something that will have an impact on the entire library staff. The mission and goals of the program should be shared prior to the arrival of the residents, allowing enough time for broad discussion and thorough understanding. Training should be made available to all library employees, with an emphasis on those working directly with residents. It is highly recommended that coordinators work closely with the university Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Human Resources to develop and provide this training. Depending on the level of prior engagement with this type of training, it may bring up sensitive topics. Be prepared to have difficult conversations in an honest and open way. Finally, each of our campuses and communities has its own

unique dynamics. Take these into consideration when designing diversity and inclusion training.

3. Identify mentors and advocates and define what those roles represent for the residents.

Possibly the most important supports available to a resident are mentors and advocates.[4] Mentors are individuals dedicated to working directly with a resident, both formally and informally. Advocates may not regularly work with a resident, but will advocate for the resident and their work to stakeholders both within and outside the libraries. It is important to note that not all advocates are mentors, but all mentors should also be prepared to act as advocates. Work to identify who these individuals might be, keeping in mind that recruitment may include those outside of the library, and discuss their qualifications and level of commitment to the program. Commitment will likely vary based on the individual's professional role and responsibilities, but should be clearly communicated and agreed to from the start.

4. Design meaningful, manageable rotations.

Rotations, typically consisting of four to as many as seven over the course of a resident's first year, are the foundational experience in a residency. Rotations provide a resident with the opportunity to experience and discover many parts of the library, to see how these units work interdependently, and to choose an area of focus beyond the first year. A rotation typically consists of one or more projects. During each rotation, a resident will develop partnerships with colleagues across the library system. Too many rotations can be overwhelming, while too few can result in missing out on valuable experiences and opportunities for professional growth. Rotations may be project-based or a resident may be assigned to an existing department or unit that aligns with the resident's specific strengths or interests. All rotations should be co-ordinated with the individual units well in advance of the arrival of the resident. Additionally, assessment should be an important part of each rotation and adequate time should be given for reflection by the resident upon completion. The importance of thoughtful reflection will be discussed later.

5. Offer a well-coordinated on-boarding process.

A resident may choose to relocate to a new city or state to pursue a residency program. This move, on top of the challenges of beginning a new job, can be both emotionally and physically trying. A thorough on-boarding process is crucial for the success of any new colleague. Formal and informal on-boarding includes "practices, programs, and policies" designed to efficiently integrate a new employee into their work and community environments.[5] Much needs to be completed relatively early in a resident's program. While this may be an overwhelming process for both coordinators and residents, the consequences of not preparing may be far greater. Consideration should be given to providing information regarding housing options and local transportation as early as possible prior to the resident's arrival. Introductions should be made to key campus units and partners, both formally and informally, within the resident's first month on campus. Practical information, including important phone numbers and email addresses, should be provided as well. This strategy is one that should be replicated for any new library employee, as creating a welcoming environment and making the transition process as smooth as possible will help new colleagues feel welcome and ready for success in their new role.

6. Clearly articulate the library's culture.

An organization's culture includes the guiding principles and overall attitudes exhibited by members of the group. A well-articulated cul-

ture can serve as a cornerstone for the integration of a resident. What are the library's mission, vision, and values? What are the library's strengths and weaknesses? Articulate how a residency program aligns with each of these. If these have recently changed significantly, have an honest and open conversation about these changes. Identify current models for collaboration and areas for growth. It is also worth considering how the library's culture fits in with that of the wider university. Finally, administrators and coordinators should be prepared to provide specific examples that illustrate the culture.

7. Encourage residents to articulate their vision and objectives.

Closely related to the library's culture are the personal vision and objectives of the resident. While these may or may not align directly with the library's, a resident's goals should adequately reflect what they hope to gain from participation in the residency program. Sharing the resident's goals with other members of the library staff will open paths of communication for feedback and discussion. Residents should ask themselves what is needed to meet these goals, and mentors and advocates should actively consider how they might further support a resident in achieving them. Create timelines for goal setting. Vision, objectives, and accomplishments may be communicated verbally (elevator pitch) or with digital technology (electronic portfolio). Finally, it is best practice for a resident to revisit their vision and objectives regularly, revising when necessary.

8. Dedicate time for scholarship and research.

Participating in research and publication is usually an extremely important part of a librarian's role as academic faculty. Emphasizing the importance of contributing to and engaging in professional discourse and international trends will set the precedent early in a resident's career. By

design, a residency program will create space for exploration of topics of interest and encourage the development of knowledge and expertise in a specific area(s). Residents should be encouraged to work with peers to identify a research agenda and locate opportunities for publishing. Working with the university Office of Research is an excellent way to expand the conversation beyond the library and provide a glimpse at the wider role of research within academia. Understanding that scholarship takes many forms, and that one only gets better with practice, residents should take every appropriate opportunity to conduct research, write, and present.

9. Create time for reflection.

So much can happen over the course of a residency program. Residents, administrators, coordinators, mentors, advocates, and the wider library community all face a variety of experiences, many of which challenge assumptions and processes. Genuine reflection is crucial. Allow time between rotations and throughout the residency for residents to reflect on their experiences. All participants in the residency program should evaluate and discuss successes and failures, acknowledging the importance and necessity of each. Thoughtful reflection often leads to insight, which can further transform the experience in positive ways.

10. Listen.

Finally, the most important strategy for any effective residency program is a culmination of each of the previous strategies—listening. Active listening is the basis for any collaborative experience. With proper support and encouragement, a resident will be open to sharing their experiences throughout the duration of the program. The best thing to do is to listen and take this feedback into consideration, acting on it when appropriate. As the number of residency programs increases around the country, the ARL

Residency Interest Group continues to be a leader for resources and provides opportunities for residents to share their experiences.[6] Equally important is the feedback from coordinators, mentors, advocates, and the wider library community. Create both formal and informal avenues for communication and practice active listening for the most positive and transformative experience.

Conclusion

A residency program can be truly life-changing. Residents gain valuable experience, forming the foundation for their future career and contributions to the profession. Host libraries are able to create environments of support and inclusion, while learning from the experiences of underrepresented individuals. While a powerful recruitment tool, residency programs that readily embrace these collaborative strategies will ultimately contribute to the long-term retention of

these individuals within the profession. A residency program needs careful and thoughtful planning to succeed as well as collaboration with a range of stakeholders across the library and the university. These ten strategies come from our own experiences and observations and hopefully will help other libraries develop or improve their own diversity residency programs.

[1] Association of Research Libraries, "ARL Annual Salary Survey 2014–2015," accessed May 1, 2017, http://publications.arl.org/ARL-Annual-Salary-Survey-2014-2015/.

[2] Tracie D. Hall and Jenifer Grady, "Diversity, Recruitment, and Retention: Going from Lip Service to Foot Patrol," *Public Libraries* 45, no. 1 (January 2006): 39-46.

[3] Toni Anaya, Charlene Maxey-Harris, and Anchalee Panigabutra-Roberts, "Strategies for Diversity Initiatives," in *Recruitment, Development, and Retention of Information Professionals: Trends in Human Resources and Knowledge Management*, edited by Elisabeth Pankl, Danielle Theiss-White, and Mary C. Bushing (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2010), 46-64.

[4] Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Maggie Jackson, Ellis Cose, and Courtney Emerson, *Vaulting the Color Bar: How Sponsorship Levers Multicultural Professionals into Leadership* (New York: Rare Bird Books, 2012).

[5] Howard J. Klein, Beth Polin, and Kyra Leigh Sutton, "Specific Onboarding Practices for the Socialization of New Employees," *International Journal of Selection & Assessment* 23, no. 3 (August 20, 2015): 263-283, accessed May 1, 2017, doi: 10.1111/ijsa.12113.

[6] Association of College & Research Libraries, "Residency Interest Group," accessed May 17, 2017, http://acrl.ala.org/residency/.