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Seeding the Vision: Designing a Minority Librarian Residency Program

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Introduction

The University of Tennessee Libraries, in keeping with a long-standing commitment to diversity, is launching its first minority librarian residency program. The UT program follows examples set by ALA, ACRL, ARL, and many other information organizations, which foster cultural enrichment and understanding of cultural differences. The aforementioned associations continue to provide successful residency and internship programs at various ranks of librarianship. In 1997, ARL launched the Leadership and Career Development Program (LCD Program) designed to prepare more minority leaders within academic libraries. Also in 1997, ALA started the Spectrum Scholar Initiative program to encourage and increase minority student enrollment in library science degree programs. The overwhelming success of these two programs inspired the University of Tennessee (UT) to create its first minority librarian residency program. Ohio State University, University of Buffalo, University of Iowa Libraries, University of Minnesota Libraries, and the University of California at Santa Barbara all had minority residency programs in place that proved useful in designing UT's program.

The Libraries' Vision

The Libraries' expectation for the program is that it will bring into our organization not only ethnic and cultural diversity but also the fresh enthusiasm and skills of recent library and information science graduates. The authors see this energy invigorating our organization, widening our vision, and providing future leadership for our library and profession. Additionally, we see the program as a recruitment tool that offers residents early work experience that is transferable to future positions. The residency encourages interaction with colleagues and the establishment of professional relationships through involvement with the Libraries' teams, committees, functional processes, culture, and personnel. Our hope is that the current program will serve as a prototype for a continuing and expanded minority librarian residency program at the University of Tennessee Libraries.

History

During the 2001-2002 academic year, UT Dean of Libraries Barbara Dewey sought funding from the University for implementation of a minority librarian residency program. She described the program as follows:

> "The purpose of the program is to attract recent library school graduates to a challenging and rewarding career in academic librarianship. Candidates will serve as residents for two years and will be eligible for permanent employment as faculty upon completion of the program. Residents will be expected to work closely with librarians to develop skills and career plans; to develop collegial relationships with faculty outside the library; to participate in library committees and to become involved in professional associations; and, with the assistance of a mentor, to complete a research project during the second year of their residency. Each resident will be given an opportunity to select the areas of the library in which he/she will work and to take part in a variety of initiatives and projects."

The Libraries proposed to cover recruitment and relocation expenses, travel to attend local and national conferences and workshops, workspace and equipment for two residents, and salary and benefits for one. The University agreed to pay the salary and benefits for the second resident.

Developing the Program

Initially, the primary responsibility for the program's development resided with the librarian in charge of personnel and the dean of libraries. However, these individuals sought much-needed

and welcome assistance and guidance from a number of groups, committees, and colleagues. The UT Libraries' Diversity Committee served as a sounding board for ideas that came forward from various library teams. The Diversity Committee also helped to define core elements of the residency, including research and scholarship, service to UT Libraries through committee work, and service to the library profession through professional organizations. Prior to interviews with prospective residents, library team leaders were asked to prepare a description of their respective functional areas and a list of potential projects and assignments for residents. Once the financial support was in place, a subgroup of the Diversity Committee was charged with conducting the search. This subgroup, the Residency Search Committee, formed in fall 2002, assumed responsibility for developing and implementing the program.

Residency Search Committee

The Residency Search Committee's first step was to identify and evaluate existing residency programs. The committee gathered ideas for program components and candidate qualifications, and extensively researched existing programs at various types and sizes of libraries. One of the committee members had taken part in a post-MLS fellowship program at another institution and was of great assistance in designing UT's program. The committee also sought the advice and support of several campus offices, including Human Resources and the Office of Equity and Diversity. With funding in place to support two residents for a period of two years, the second order of business was to focus on making the program attractive to entry-level librarians, especially those seeking permanent employment opportunities. The search committee included members of different teams, different races, and different categories of staff. Some had worked for the UT Libraries for more than twenty-five years, while others had been here only a few years. Several had never served on a search committee and brought a fresh approach and new ideas.   Extensive discussion and collaboration with other interested staff and faculty helped the committee to develop the following goals for the program: to offer the residents a participatory exposure to "real life" in an academic library environment; to provide work experiences that would prepare them for positions in academic institutions similar to our own; to fund residents to attend training,

development, and continuing education programs that would enhance their skills; to fund and support resident participation in professional associations through conference attendance; to assign resident assistance to teams with identified, short-term projects; and, finally, to contribute to the Libraries' goal to diversify its workforce. Since librarians at UT hold faculty rank and status, the committee also wanted residents to have a thorough grounding in research, project management, and committee service. One expected result is that the participants will have developed an area of specialization by the end of their residencies. If they arrive with an area already in mind, the committee anticipates they will have the opportunity to develop and demonstrate growth in that specialization through scholarly performance and service.

Another significant element of the program is evaluation of both effectiveness and resident performance. The University administration and the Libraries will want to know whether the program has achieved the intended results and whether the individuals have measured up. At the same time, library administrators, faculty, and staff understand that the residents will be evaluating the UT Libraries. Residents will provide valuable insights into how well the new program is working and how it can be improved. Since the Libraries are committed to a healthy, positive exchange of feedback, this exchange will not be left to the end of the program, but will be undertaken on an on-going basis throughout the two-year period.

Qualifications

Drawing upon the Libraries' definition of diversity, the Committee created a position description with the following required qualifications: recent graduation from an ALA-accredited master's program; member of a historically underrepresented group; authorization to work in the U.S.; ability to work effectively in a library team environment; excellent oral and written communication skills; demonstrated interest in scholarship and professional growth; strong service orientation; and knowledge of issues and development in academic libraries. The Libraries' graphics designer assisted with the development of brochures, posters, and fliers that included a description of the program and information about the University and the Libraries. Except for the open-ended application deadline, the committee

used the same application procedure that the library follows for national searches. Although the committee hoped to fill both positions at the same time and, if possible, to have residents in place by the beginning of fall semester 2003, committee members were uncertain about the size of the candidate pool. Some predicted there might be only a few applications. Furthermore, since the announcement appeared early in 2003, the committee expected to receive applications from individuals who might not complete the degree requirements until summer, and the committee did not wish to eliminate these from consideration. Committee members posted the announcement to discussion lists and other electronic and print media (likely reaching well over 1000 email addresses) and in *The Chronicle of Higher of Education*. Librarians distributed fliers and brochures at professional meetings, and library personnel mailed brochures and posters to at least 500 addresses, targeting graduate schools of library and information science and previous and current Spectrum Scholars. Committee members and fellow librarians also sent information to their professional contacts. The dean assisted with the search as well, contacting her colleagues and sending the following note to potential applicants:

> The University of Tennessee and the Libraries are deeply committed to diversity in all regards. The Libraries' Diversity Committee plays a leadership role on campus to promote diversity through various programs and initiatives. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you or others have questions. I will be pleased to talk to interested people directly.

Working on multiple tasks such as reading applications (which began to arrive in January), developing criteria, reviewing model programs, and planning office space for the residents, the committee faced a number of challenges during the search process. For example, blending staff and faculty expectations required open communication and compromise. There was a lot to do in a relatively short period of time. Setting priorities and assigning specific tasks to each committee member made it possible to meet deadlines. Enlisting the help of a previous participant in a fellowship program enabled the committee to develop a program that attracted a broader audience and contributed to a better candidate pool. Perhaps most importantly, the committee recognized that collectively and

individually, the members did not have all the answers and that mistakes would occur during the search process. Nevertheless, they were determined to complete the process and to achieve a positive outcome.

In addition to its role in conducting a national search to fill the resident positions, the search committee played a critical role in making the library's staff and faculty aware of the program's purpose and its importance to both the library and the university. As expected, there were many questions about why the library was creating a minority librarian residency program and how the library stood to benefit from such a program. Some team members were anxious about the amount of time they might be expected to devote to training and mentoring residents. One rewarding nontraditional *modus operandi* was planning and scheduling door-to door visits to each library team, with sincere invitations to ask questions or make suggestions about the program. Committee members were organized into teams of two--one spokesperson and one note taker for each library team. Prior to the visits, the committee prepared responses to anticipated questions. This strategy proved useful in helping the committee to identify areas of the program that warranted further discussion and development. It also assisted the search committee in devising a standard script that ensured the information provided to each team would be accurate and consistent.

The "packaged" presentation addressed the following points: Background/Purpose/Goals of the Program; Recruitment and Hiring Process; Program Components; along with opportunities to solicit suggestions and to field questions. This approach proved to be an excellent tool for providing the entire organization with a general understanding of the program and securing library-wide commitment. The committee's explanation of the value of the residencies resulted in staff volunteering to assist with the program. The search committee labeled these individuals "champions" and called upon them throughout the search process to assist with preparations for resident interviews and, once residents were hired, with their orientation to the library and the campus. As newcomers to the area, residents needed advice on everything from finding housing to baby- or pet-sitting. Champions helped them navigate through both the academy and their new living environment, to meet colleagues across campus, to identify

appropriate mentors, to make connections in the residents' research areas, and to select service options (such as getting on appropriate committees).

By April 2003, the committee had received more than forty applications from around the world. Each search committee member reviewed the candidates' cover letters and resumes and ranked them according to the qualifications outlined in the job announcement. Then the group met to discuss the results. At the conclusion of the first meeting, the committee had identified twenty applicants who met all the required qualifications and had written excellent cover letters. The committee was delighted with the results of the search process but apprehensive about reaching consensus with regard to identifying finalists. After further discussion and evaluation, the committee was able to reduce the pool to twelve. Next, the committee contacted the candidates' references via e-mail, asking them to respond to a series of questions based on the required qualifications for the position. Using that information, the committee was able to pare down the list to nine finalists. Finally, committee members devised another set of questions, this time to be addressed to the candidates themselves. Using the same process as the committee used for visiting teams, one spokesperson and one note taker called each of the nine candidates and recorded their responses to a series of questions including "Why are you interested in this position? How do you see this position as furthering your career goals? The group shared responses with the committee as well as with team leaders. As anticipated, the committee deliberated several weeks before reaching agreement. Viewed through the eyes of a diverse group of staff and faculty, the candidates' strengths and weaknesses were analyzed, debated, and compared. A month after the initial review, the committee submitted a list of names to the dean for her review and approval.

Interview Process
In June the committee invited six candidates for one-day interviews. One candidate declined the offer. The Libraries pre-paid all interviewing expenses including travel and lodging. In addition to the material normally sent to faculty candidates, search committee members compiled and mailed a list of community resources that included information about area

activities and ethnic and environmental groups. Interview schedules included meetings with team leaders, the search committee, the dean and associate dean, tours of the main and branch libraries, lunch with diversity "champions," and dinner with search committee members. As is the practice with all faculty searches, candidates were asked to make a ten-to fifteen-minute presentation and to respond to questions during a one-hour meeting open to all faculty and staff members. The suggestion for the topic--"How might this residency program benefit the UT Libraries?"--came from the earlier meetings the search committee held with individual teams. During the interview process, the committee was pleased with the level of interest and support. Not only were the open meetings well attended, there was a healthy exchange of ideas that occurred between the residents and the library staff. The structure of the interview itself contributed to the overall sense of "community" that developed between the candidates and the members of the search committee. At the conclusion of the five interviews, the committee met to review the evaluations of the candidates that were submitted by faculty and staff. What the committee heard from evaluators confirmed that the process had succeeded. One evaluator stated it this way: "Congratulations to the search committee for your excellent work in finding this remarkable pool, and showing the candidates compelling reasons for coming to UT Libraries." Another stated, "Each applicant is different and wonderful in his or her own way. They are passionate about different aspects of librarianship. It was a pleasure to see each of them….It seems they would breathe new life into this organization and stir our hearts and minds to greater achievements in ourselves. Each of them has wonderful insights and ideas that we can use to grow as individuals and as an organization."

Current Status
The next steps in "Seeding the Vision" are to select and hire the residents, assist them with relocation, identify mentors, and develop an in-depth orientation program that will enable residents to spend time in each area prior to beginning their first rotational assignment. Although UT's program is still in its infancy, the Diversity Committee continues to receive requests from libraries and potential applicants for more information. In response, the authors of this article have asked for and received

permission from the SELn Editorial Board to write a second article describing those steps. We want readers to hear also from our residents, who will comment on the program from their perspectives. We have high expectations that this program will prove rewarding and valuable to our residents, to the UT Libraries and to the University as a whole. We hope that by sharing our experiences we can inspire other institutions to undertake similar initiatives.

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