

PROJECT TO RECRUIT THE NEXT GENERATION OF LIBRARIANS: THE FIRST YEAR

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ABSTRACT

Five Northern Indiana regional academic libraries participate in an Institute of Museum and Library Sciences (IMLS) supported project awarded under the funding initiative “pre-professional program of the 21st Century Librarians.” The 3 year project, which began 1 November, 2004 to recruit diverse and younger people to the profession will allow 42 college-bound diverse high school graduates to be hired as library summer student assistants. The project’s strategies are cost-effective and measurable.

INTRODUCTION

The University Libraries of Notre Dame and its partner libraries collaborate in the *Project to Recruit the Next Generation of Librarians*. The partner libraries are: Kresge Law Library (Notre Dame), Franklin D. Schurz Library (Indiana University South Bend), McKenna Library (Holy Cross College) and Christopher Center for Library and Information Resources (Valparaiso University). The project is an expansion of Notre Dame’s earlier similar project called the Summer Program created in 2002 by the University Libraries and the Law Library. In addition to hiring students to work in the libraries for the summer, mentoring services provided by librarians, tracking students’ career/education decisions, and special programming such as field trips and instructional learning sessions are new components of this grant project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project tests the assumption that if students are exposed to academic libraries at a younger age and in a meaningful way, then they are more likely to consider librarianship as a viable career choice sooner than historical recruits to the profession do now. Library literature underscores the critical need for an infusion of new librarians. The reasons for the shortage are well-known. There are too few library school graduates to replace the boomer-librarians whose retirements will create many of the anticipated vacancies (St. Lifer, p. 40). In addition, there is a greater likelihood that library school students are apt to be of

the majority race while the demographics of the people whom they would likely serve upon earning an MLS degree are rapidly shifting (ALISE, 2004). They are apt to be older than graduate students in other professional schools thereby maintaining an overall older profile of professionals within librarianship than within other professions. (ALISE, 2004) Bosseau and Martin’s (p. 198) thesis is that academic librarians tend to find the profession accidentally. That would partially explain why so many people who enter the profession do so as a second career. One reason that contributes to the profession not being regarded as a viable career destination earlier in one’s career path, is that academic librarians have discontinued performing services as mentors because the time involved seemed burdensome (Curran, p. 38). Add into the mix Michael Gorman’s view as expressed in an interview that where library schools are located makes a vast difference in who can attend, and we can see many of the contributing factors that bring the profession to this crisis (Gorman, 2003).

DESIGN

This project responds to this data by introducing area students to librarianship through meaningful summer employment in various functional areas of the participating academic libraries and through mentor services offered regularly by practicing academic librarians. The project asserts that summer jobs as student assistants for college-bound high school graduates provide the meaningful introduction to academic libraries that the students otherwise might not receive well into their undergraduate education. The partner libraries each summer will offer 14 college-bound culturally and racially diverse seniors an opportunity to work for eight weeks as library student assistants during each of the three summers of the project.

The participants work with the local area public high school guidance counselors to identify dynamic students who would apply for the vacancies the participating libraries could offer. They were contacted by a letter that included brochures about the project,

advised of the purpose and nature of the grant project, and requested to assist in identifying a high caliber pool of potential applicants for the available summer positions. Graduating college-bound seniors from the South Bend, Mishawaka, and Valparaiso area public high schools are eligible to apply.

The counselors in the four South Bend high schools again provided invaluable assistance, but by the time students declined offers for various reasons, the pool was just large enough to hire ten students. The Valparaiso partner's road was even bumpier. The counselors in three area high schools did not play a role in identifying a pool of applicants. His friends at one of the high schools commented that subsequent years will be easier, because the student grapevine will take over communication about the program. Each counselor who participated received a modest gift of appreciation and motivation for future participation.

DIVERSITY

The partner librarians are committed to diversity as an integral feature of this project. The partner institutions' policies and practices signify the institutional support for diversity through their mission statements and strategic plans. Although Affirmative Action has done much to increase diversity, universities continue to struggle with the issues of not only hiring, but also the retention of minorities, women, and people with disabilities. One critical issue in higher education is the relationship between student and faculty retention and diversity. Underrepresented students and faculty are more likely to stay at an academic institution that is diverse (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, 77). To increase retention for underrepresented students, universities need to increase the numbers of underrepresented faculty and staff. This evidence underscores the credibility and dedication of partner librarians to carry out the project that includes a diversity component. The students who were hired for the project are racially and ethnically diverse.

HIRING

At least two library contacts traveled to the South Bend and Mishawaka schools to interview the applicants. The interviews, timed around the schools Spring breaks, were conducted using a script of questions created by the library contacts. A decision was made by the libraries drawing from the South Bend / Mishawaka high schools to hire students to the program and to assign the library at the time a position was offered while Valparaiso library would interview and hire all students from that geographic area. A timeline for our activities was established. With graduation in South Bend area schools occurring on 12 June, the start date for the student assistants was set at Monday, 13 June 2005. Valparaiso selected Friday, 10 June 2005 to

begin. The four representatives of the South Bend university libraries met to discuss all of the applicants and decide which students would be assigned to which library based upon their interests and diversity in terms of gender and originating high school.

The preference was to hire two students from each of the South Bend/ Mishawaka schools for the 10 available positions in the South Bend academic libraries, but it did not work out. The Valparaiso partner formed contacts at church and through Spanish language teachers until eventually he was successful in hiring four students to fill the positions he had available. Word of the job opportunities spread after all and another diverse, highly qualified student applied for a position and was hired out of the library's budget. Thus, the project this year exceeds by one the total number of expected hires (15 students; 107%).

WORK ASSIGNMENTS

The participating libraries offered work that is indicative of work college-level student assistants provide during the academic year. At all of the partner libraries, the students were assigned to both technical and public services areas. Within the eight weeks, they were rotated into other areas so they could gain a breadth of experience within libraries. The needs of the participating libraries in any given summer would dictate the availability and character of work. At University Libraries of Notre Dame, all of the students worked in the preservation department, Catalog & Database Maintenance, Government Documents Technical Services, and MicroText Periodicals units. A couple of students worked with some technical support consultants/ analysts. The specific supervisors within the areas trained the students in their work and conveyed the expectations of their performance and productivity. Participating library directors were willing to send recommendations to library directors on behalf of any student seeking work in his/ her undergraduate institution's library.

Individual work schedules took an inordinate amount of time to create. Each partner library used a strategy that worked for its situation. At the Schurz Library for example, a student's work day was divided into two hour time slots that for the most part, repeated Monday through Friday, although there were exceptions.

PROGRAMMING

In addition to work assignments, the project incorporates additional programming for the students. These additional opportunities are important because they expose students to other professional activities. One goal of the project is to deepen the students' understanding of academic libraries and how they

function. The activities also offer opportunities to bring together all of the participating students. Libraries seek to offer staff development opportunities and the additional programming for students is analogous.

A field trip to Chicago during the ALA Annual Conference was organized. In the morning, the students attended ALA exhibits at McCormick Center. In the afternoon, the students had a special guided tour of the Harold Washington Library Center by the director. Another field trip was organized for the South Bend area students to travel to Valparaiso to tour the new Christopher Center. The IUSB student assistants toured the ND libraries and Saint Joseph County Public Library in South Bend.

The grant partners agreed that all participating libraries would provide the students with some common instruction. The students would learn to create a resume and cover letter and receive some bibliographic instruction in using library resources. Notre Dame's University Libraries scheduled two hours of instruction each Friday for the Notre Dame students. Valparaiso University's students received individual training on how to create their own web pages as well as group library instruction. Indiana University South Bend mentors worked through the online course that is mandatory for their freshmen.

A panel of new librarians of color and one newly named Spectrum Scholar presented to Notre Dame students how each came to librarianship. The presentations were powerful and caught the students' attention. The expectation is to repeat this event next year and include all students. Valparaiso University interns had a two hour session with Mark Winston, then Associate Professor of Library Science at Rutgers University, to discuss career options for persons from underrepresented groups and his experiences in the working world as a person of color.

All students attended a half-day orientation meeting held at Notre Dame. The agenda included introductions and presentations on the purpose of the project. All students signed an authorization and release form granting permission to use their likenesses in promotional literature. Visits to the Law Library, the Medieval Institute Library and to the Schurz Library were arranged to follow the meeting. All students and mentors were invited to a wrap-up luncheon held at Notre Dame. Jennifer Younger, the Edward H. Arnold Director of Libraries, presented an address to the students.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) mandates that the project be measured; therefore, data are collected and analyzed. Incorporating technology wherever possible to help with data collection, reports, and analysis was beneficial by saving time on manual processes. The plan was to complete all computer

programming activities by early February, but it became obvious that it would be more practical to develop applications and products as needed. The partners and mentors, for example, are required to record and report time spent on the project. An online form and a database were developed for this purpose. The data are output in a text file that can be imported into a database for storage and reports. The reports can be formatted as a spreadsheet, rtf, or pdf file. When the time reports were due to the granting agency at the end of the year, it was clear that this task had been easy to overlook. Most partners and mentors scrambled to catch up on their logs. But it was still more efficient than other means of recording time spent on the project. An electronic list also was created to facilitate regular communication among the partners. In addition, an online form existing from an earlier and similar program became the prototype for a form devised to track participating students' career and education decisions through their undergraduate years. Finally, the technical support consultant/analyst created a web presence for the project that will be expanded and updated as the project progresses. This is a means of disseminating information about the program and the participating libraries and students (<http://www.library.nd.edu/diversity/summer/imls/index.html>).

The importance of data collection and analysis to the partner libraries, however, is to determine whether or not it is reasonable to support an ongoing program to recruit new high school graduates to the profession. The students' responses to interview questions were used as preliminary, baseline data demonstrating their knowledge and experience with libraries. They are most knowledgeable about public and school libraries. Their notions of librarians, while positive, are inadequate for making career decisions.

Just before the students finished their summer work, exit interviews were conducted with each of them. Their notions of academic libraries have deepened. They commented about the number of journals subscribed to and about subject specific libraries in contrast to libraries that they had had experience with prior to this summer. Students indicate that they appreciated libraries more and said that they liked the introduction to different departments and types of jobs. One student indicated an interest in pursuing library school and currently works as a student assistant in his undergraduate library. Through mentor contacts, three other students have been identified as working in their undergraduate libraries. After the students had completed their eight weeks of work, information was gathered from the two major groups interacting with them: mentors and supervisors.

MENTORING

A critical piece of the entire project is that of the mentor. Mentors have long been used in private

enterprise and in libraries as well. Research shows that in private enterprise there is a direct correlation between having a mentor and career advancement (Munde, 172). Library literature indicates the same direct connection between librarians and having a mentor relationship. Because of this evidence it was decided to include mentors as an integral part of the program in the grant proposal.

For this project, librarians are paired with students just out of high school. The librarians are attempting to establish a long term relationship that could lead to library school. No students expressed any interest in librarianship during the interview process but after the summer one student expressed an interest in becoming a librarian and is working at the Franklin D. Schurz Library.

"The mentors have been selected according to their perceived abilities to relate to teenagers who are quite likely to be in their first job, to articulate the myriad descriptions of what it means to be an academic librarian and to describe how one becomes a librarian." (Project abstract)

Mentors can be many things and this project expected a great deal out of our mentors. The responsibilities of the mentors are:

- Build a relationship with mentee
- Positively affect mentee's attitudes and knowledge about the profession
- Model librarianship
- Offer career counseling
- Insure development of library competencies
- Describe the project and teach the web contact form
- Professional communication
- Introduce: intellectual freedom and ethics concepts
- Develop project web pages
- Communicate effectively with mentee across the generational divide.

These responsibilities were to be met by interacting with the students two hours per week for a minimum of sixteen hours over eight weeks. It is apparent that this contact time needs to be increased. Mentoring these students became a hybrid of traditional mentoring and academic counseling. The mentors spent a good portion of their time describing academic libraries and their functions to the students. Library instruction was included for many of the students as well which will benefit the students as they enter college. Mentors also discussed college life and expectations in addition to helping the students write resumes and cover letters.

Rewards for the students were many, including gaining a huge advantage over other college freshmen in understanding academic libraries and how to do research. The students also interacted with someone in the profession, observing the positions and activities in an academic library. They also left the program with a resume and letter of recommendation from the library director that helped three of them secure student jobs in their college libraries.

Rewards for the mentors were also many. The mentors gained valuable insight into the workings of the "millennials" and how to communicate across generations. They had the opportunity to share their expertise and to instruct students in library research, ethics and current issues. Although their roles were largely undefined the mentors valued this experience and felt confident that next year they would gain even more from this experience. Students remarks included: *Appreciate librarians more. Had no clue all the jobs people do to keep the library running smoothly. Won't take librarians for granted anymore; We explored college research books, careers, schools, research topics, including one on majors and job availability...*

MILLENNIAL STUDENTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

It was expected that there would be communication issues to be addressed between supervisors and students and between mentors and mentees. To alleviate as many communications difficulties as possible, a workshop for mentors was presented. There was also a session for the students about communications given during their orientation. Even after these sessions some encountered communication problems. These problems can best be described as "non-communication or mixed communication about responsibilities and expectations."

Some of problems encountered could best be described as generational communication issues (between millennials who were the students and their Gen x or boomer supervisors and mentors). However, most of the problems were a mix of students' lack of job experience and the supervisors'/mentors' unrealistic expectations.

The anticipated results of the students' library experience are:

- Students will be more knowledgeable about the profession than when they began
- Students will be more likely to regard academic librarianship as a profession of choice
- Students will be more likely to pursue employment in their undergraduate years as student assistants in the academic institutions they attend.
- Students will keep in touch with the mentors periodically throughout their years in academe

Students will keep the program appraised of their career choices through an online Web form

The participating libraries will benefit from the work produced by the student assistants. Mentors will become more accustomed to offering these services and will incorporate this service into their professional lives.

The students worked an 8-5, 40-hour work week. This was something that few of them if any had done before. The supervisors expected the students to know that if the schedule says 8 a.m., then they are expected show up at that time – not later. The students were expected to move from department to department posing difficulty for supervisors as well as students. Some students did not show up at the scheduled time and supervisors did not know what authority they had to deal with the situation. Sometimes students would show up to a department and the supervisor would not be there. Because the students lacked job experience, they did not know what to do in the situation and would just sit in the area waiting for someone to tell them what to do next.

Each library had elaborate schedules that would guarantee each student the opportunity to experience different aspects of the library: technical services, reference, circulation, etc. The purpose of this was to address our number one goal: “Students will be more knowledgeable about the profession than when they began.” In fact, our exit interview confirmed that students had learned a lot about libraries but the exit interview also spoke to many activities that students considered “make work”. A better connection needs to be made between seemingly trivial tasks and how they fit into the workings of a library. For next year’s students it will be important not only to teach them how to do the task but how and why the task fits into the entire scheme of things in operating a library.

Another change for the following year will be an increase in the amount of job shadowing of the librarians who serve as mentors. The students were exposed to the paraprofessional jobs but had little contact with the librarians except for the two hours per week with their mentors.

Another challenge was one of multiple supervisors. It was inevitable due to the number of shifts that each student had per week. Some students took advantage of these confusing reporting lines. Supervisors were unsure of their authority to discipline or even to whom to report any situation often did nothing.

Although communications with and expectations of students presented problems for the first year of this project, all of these concerns can be resolved for next year. Additional workshops are planned for supervisors and mentors that will cover not just communication between generations but also specificity of their roles,

responsibilities and lines of communication. Mentors will be encouraged to include job shadowing activities. For the students an addition to the orientation will be a session on job responsibilities and workplace behavior.

YOU CAN HAVE THIS PROGRAM IN YOUR OWN LIBRARY

Why would you want to? For the same reasons that we are pursuing this project. Libraries have a critical need for an infusion of new librarians, and especially librarians from underrepresented groups. Future projections show 40% of current ARL workforce retiring between 2000 and 2010 with an additional 27% retiring between 2010 and 2020. (Munde, 171) Replacement of directors, redeployment of vacancies and recruitment of new librarians are huge issues that all libraries are facing or will soon face.

This project supported by a grant from the IMLS provides a possible solution for these problems. The grant provides the wages for the students for eight weeks during the summer, but academic and public libraries can also do something very similar with little or no additional cost to their budgets.

One way to start is to use your own student worker or part time staff population. You can easily set aside current monies already budgeted for student workers and then earmark some of those monies for a recruitment project. Additional funds could also be petitioned for but it may be easier to ask for a reallocation of already existing funds.

Determine what the underrepresented group for the library’s service area may be and be aware that recruiting underrepresented groups may be very difficult. For example: Valparaiso University, one of the project partners, had a difficult time recruiting underrepresented students from the Valparaiso area and had to expand to Portage and Chesterton.

What to do:

First: If interested in pursuing a similar project, ensure you have buy-in from everyone in the institution. This includes not only the library director and board but also all staff and librarians that will be working with the students or staff members.

Second: Determine a timetable of events, results and activities. Keep it manageable and sustainable. Set up results that are attainable.

Third: Establish a detailed plan that includes the number of student workers, hours per week, tasks or special projects; identify the mentors, their responsibilities; create recruiting and interviewing plans and schedules; identify realistic outcomes.

Fourth: Follow all of the local recruiting and hiring practices and have the proposal reviewed by counsel.

The plans needs to be equitable: recruit from all high schools in the local service area. If the plan is to offer this opportunity to staff members, also follow the institution's guidelines for internal promotions or job opportunities.

Document everything. If it is to be a sustainable project then proof that outcomes were met is critical. Remember that all outcomes do not have to be met every year. The fresh-out-of-high school students will not be making a decision about library school for three or four years.

OUTCOME EVALUATIONS

Outcome-based evaluations of the project are required by the granting agency. All five project partners attended the IMLS 2-day Outcomes Based Evaluation workshop in Washington, DC just after the funds were awarded.

The skills gained through this program would be helpful to students in their undergraduate years. Their experiences would open the possibility of working in their undergraduate institutions libraries when seeking campus employment. While the students would not necessarily be matriculating students in any of the projects participating libraries, the students, nevertheless, would take their skills and new knowledge with them into their futures and be more inclined to select librarianship as a career destination.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it takes planning, good will and flexibility to make the project successful. After only the first year, the partner libraries learned the following: mentoring is an important service librarians should consider reintroducing into their professional lives; communication across generations is critical; a multicultural experience is valuable and enriching. The rewards are valuable enough to continue the project.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Dwight King, head of research, Kresge Law Library (Notre Dame), Linda Fisher, government publications librarian, Franklin D. Schurz Library (Indiana University South Bend), Charles Gregg (2005), Mary Ellen Hegedus (2006-2007), director, McKenna Library (Holy Cross College) and Rick AmRhein, dean, Christopher Center for Library and Information Resources (Valparaiso University). Laura Bayard, documents access & database management head, University Libraries (Notre Dame) is the principal investigator.

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