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Afterword

While working on this book, we encountered other intriguing writings that also offered practical approaches to diversity, equity, and inclusion in libraries. We also found ourselves asking more questions that we hope other library researchers will someday answer. This afterword is by no means a comprehensive overview of DEI initiatives in libraries. Although recommendations are summarized here, the articles all deserve a fuller reading.

A survey of the literature by Kung, Fraser, and Winn identifies the categories of the most frequent interventions mentioned in the library literature: internships/residencies, mentorship programs, professional development, recruitment, and surveys.[1] Kung, Fraser, and Winn conclude that "despite the fact that academic librarians have been concerned about the lack of diversity within the field since the 1920s, the number of diverse librarians in the profession remains low to this day."[2] They recommend that any program with the goal of diversifying the profession include a clear statement of program goals and an assessment component. These programs should also take into account intersectional identity rather than a single dimension of identity and should also target mid- to late-career librarians.

> However, there remains a large gap in these interventions between diverse librarians' entrance into the field and whether they are encouraged to stay. There is limited commitment to supporting and retaining mid- to late-career diverse librarians, many of whom face barriers when striving to advance their careers beyond entry-level positions.[3]

A white paper by Neely and Peterson recommends a "comprehensive, collaborative recruitment and public awareness campaign for recruitment purposes."[4] They also recommend that ACRL develop a research agenda "that addresses the lack of membership data for decision-making and goal setting."[5] Their recommendations

include identification of best practices for recruitment "accompanied by sound empirical evidence with results,"[6] realistic goals for assessment and analysis, more reliable data, more research about retention.

According to Neely and Peterson, the literature on retention is "weak,"[7] but strategies mentioned include orientations and welcomes, programming that addresses work culture, opportunities for professional development, a positive environment, compensations and rewards, good management, and recognition of work-life balance needs. Some ideas from their literature review for supporting advancement include mentoring, shadowing library leaders, proactive nominations for awards and recognition, job rotations, participation in fellowships and institutes, job rotations, and better data on library leaders of color and tracking available leadership pools of minority candidates. Damasco and Hodges also recommend mentoring programs, which should include an assessment component, and ensuring the librarians of color develop successful grant writing skills.[8] "Library administrators should also emphasize the value of the work of library faculty of color who engage with and provide service to communities of color served by their institutions."[9]

It would appear that directors of ARL libraries need a better understanding of what constitutes diversity, equity, and inclusion and the factors that have allowed the profession to remain mostly white, including structural issues within the profession itself. Two Ithaka S+R reports surveyed directors of libraries that are members of the Association of Research Libraries.[10] The 2017 report finds that library directors were more likely to consider their own library more equitable than other libraries, that directors of more homogenous libraries saw their libraries as more equitable than the overall library community, and that "they do so by a larger margin than the more diverse institutions. We observe a similar pattern with regards to inclusivity."[11] These library directors recognize the lack of racial and ethnic diversity among their staff as a problem, but they perceive it as related to external factors (limited applicants from diverse backgrounds, geographic locations) and not internal factors (implicit bias or markers of inclusiveness in the library culture). The 2021 report notes that "most library directors did not expect that employees of color would be disproportionately affected by cuts due to COVID-19. However, job types with relatively greater percentages of employees of color were more impacted by recent furloughs and role eliminations."[12]

Neely and Peterson, among others, recommend looking at the strategies used by other fields to recruit a more diverse workforce.[13] Kim and Sin also recommended that

investigating approaches used in other professional fields might also offer some insight on successful strategies. Pre-college bridge programs used for recruiting minorities in engineering and nursing; partnerships among research universities, colleges and community colleges used for developing systematic recruitment programs in psychology, and early intervention programs and nationwide campaigns used for improving the public's image of the professions in nursing and other healthcare fields[14]

are among the strategies included.

Alburo, Bradshaw, Santiago, Smith, and Vinopal looked at corporate diversity initiatives for ideas.[15] Target Corporation makes diversity a central tenet; its extensive diversity plan includes recruiting directly from the communities it wishes to hire from, affirmative steps to achieve parity between diverse and non-diverse team members in turnover, in workplace experiences, and in diversity at mid- to upper-staffing levels. It also conducts regular pay audits and launched extensive training programs. The MetLife insurance company created a program to attract recent college graduates by "demonstrating to them before they were hired why working at MetLife would be beneficial to them and their careers."[16] Coca Cola launched a comprehensive mentoring program, and T-Mobile worked to maintain and continually assess a climate of inclusivity, using assessment tools developed by marginalized communities. Alburo and colleagues draw many actionable conclusions from these examples that libraries should consider.

What other professional fields do people of color enter?[17] What can we learn from the fields that are successful in attracting people of color? Two other fields dominated by women, nursing and social work, are more racially and ethnically diverse, at least at first glance;[18] why do these fields succeed where the library world has failed?

The demographic problem of the library field begins with the demographics of library school students.[19] It would be interesting to look at which fields are successful in attracting postgraduate students of color and why.[20] In some fields—for instance, law—the student body is more diverse than the population of practicing attorneys, which may mean that in time the profession will become more diverse.[21] Meanwhile, what can other LIS programs learn from Knowledge River, a library and information science program focusing specifically on Latino and Native American perspectives?[22]

Kim and Sin asked librarians of color for their suggestions on increasing ethnic diversity in library schools.[23] Their suggestions included financial aid; ethnic diversity of faculty; role models; presence of faculty and staff of color in the recruitment process; opportunities for students of color to work in LIS-related fields or with LIS faculty, graduate students or librarians; advertising; presence of alumni of color in the recruitment process; availability of career services/job placement in the LIS school; and active solicitation and personal contacts by the LIS school. Many of these strategies were also listed in their survey of library literature. Additional strategies suggested in the literature: creative delivery of classes, sensitivity to diversity and anti-racism, diversity in the curriculum, and internship placements that entail working with minority communities.

It will surprise no one that Kim and Sin, along with Steffen and Lietzau, among others, suggest that the low salary of librarians is a barrier to recruiting;[24] they cite fields with higher salaries (e.g., lawyers and engineers) as more successful in recruiting ethnic minorities. The negative image of librarians, cited by both articles, is another obstacle. Clearly, as a field, we need some creative new ideas to address both of these fundamental issues.

The cost of an MLIS is undoubtedly a barrier to people of color considering the library field. Espinal, Hathcock, and Rios make a radical yet simple proposal: every academic library with an annual budget above $500,000 should take salary savings from retirements and sponsor two new people of color each year to attain their MLIS.[25] They estimate that this would increase the number of librarians of color by over 3,000 per year; if we added large public library systems, we could support even more new librarians. As the authors point out, salary savings are often redirected to support technology and innovation. Why not use them to support the strategic goal of increasing and enhancing diversity, inclusion, and equity?

In 2011, Brett Bonfield asked the question "Is the United States training too many librarians or too few?"[26]—an excellent question, though a hard one to answer, given limited availability and inaccuracy of the data—a project for our professional organizations and research entities. What kind of employment situation are we asking new librarians to enter?

According to Michael Kelley, "African Americans and Hispanics are some of the strongest supporters of libraries, and yet they continue to be thinly represented among the ranks of librarians."[27] Why don't people of color want to go into the field? The coeditors of this book speculated among ourselves that the

general public doesn't know what librarians do, but in fact the teaching profession has similarly lopsided demographics,[28] and most Americans have had direct experience with teachers.

Although it isn't practical to survey all college graduates to ask why they don't consider librarianship, there is one population we can ask: library assistants. In 2005, Keith Curry Lance wrote that the demographics of library assistants were much closer to those of the general American population (this was based on 2000 census data, so the data needs updating).[29] Steffen and Lietzau interviewed Colorado library assistants about the factors that discouraged them from pursuing a career in librarianship: pay, negative stereotypes, limited job opportunities.[30] Lance, and Kim and Sin, and Kelley are among those who recommend recruiting and supporting library assistants as a way to diversify the profession.[31]

For many writers, these strategies are not enough without a critical reexamination of the profession itself.

> Critical librarianship offers a framework for thinking about our work that asks how library structures came to be and what ideologies underpin them. Viewing librarianship through this frame allows us to imagine new and better worlds on our way to making them.[32]

April Hathcock writes:

> Reading through the onerous application process, the realization hit me: our diversity programs do not work because they are themselves coded to promote whiteness as the norm in the profession and unduly burden those individuals they are most intended to help.[33]

The standard requirements of application form, résumé, essay, transcripts, and letters of support from faculty or employer

> assumes that applicants are situated in positions of white, middle-class, cisgender normativity that allow for the temporal, financial, and educational privilege that fulfilling these criteria would require…. Reworking application processes to accommodate applicants with different backgrounds and experiences in no way requires lowering standards.[34]

Hathcock suggests allowing applicants to submit letters of recommendation from members of the community or an acquaintance familiar with their qualifications, as well as teaching new librarians "how to navigate effectively the white system that we have. We also need to teach these new librarians how to dismantle whiteness' stranglehold on the profession."[35] She recommends that librarians of color seek out the mentorship groups, social media spaces, and relevant library organizations that exist to support diverse library workers. And she exhorts all librarians to find ways to make change—serving on ALA diversity-related committees, taking part in formal and informal mentoring programs—librarians with privilege should speak up on behalf of those without privilege.

Michelle Gohr also recommends "dismantling the current system of accreditation for librarians by accounting for different combinations of skills and education."[36] This includes revising job descriptions, hiring practices, and communication styles that are exclusionary to marginalized populations. White allies are urged to "critically unpack the anxieties, apprehension, and defensiveness"[37] they may feel about these changes and to understand that these feelings are rooted in privilege.

Jennifer Vinopal brings together ideas of actions that library leaders must take to "make our organizations and our profession inclusive, open to difference, and diverse."[38] They include raising awareness of implicit bias, including diversity initiatives in the library's strategic plan, and providing time and support for staff to accomplish them; creating a stand-alone diversity plan; collecting data; recruiting job candidates from among the communities you wish to include; devising targeted mentoring and professional development strategies; and offering paid internships. She also lists some areas that require further research: better data on diversity; effective organizational processes that might help "push an organization toward a better understanding of privilege and discrimination";[39] why staff from underrepresented groups are leaving the profession; and leadership styles and methods that can help leadership "promote awareness of bias and discrimination and… develop actions to address them."[40]

Brown, Ferretti, Leung, and Mendez-Brady write that

> a common misconception about our failures to diversity librarianship is that there is nothing wrong with the profession.... Framing the library as "inherently good," or within contexts such as centers of "democracy" and "neutrality," conceals covert structural forms of racial exclusion that protect white interests.[41]

They demonstrate that the incorporation of critical race theory into the LIS curriculum is essential: "When we fail to take into account the lived experiences of those we provide service to, we not only fail our patrons and communities but also uphold whiteness—through the standardized exclusion of people of color."[42]

They note that "diversity programs and initiatives make the profession *appear* more diverse without actually tackling the systemic issues underlying librarianship, which we believe is the work of the… institution."[43] Although mentorship is key to retention, "white centered mentorship opportunities often have the unintended consequence of pushing librarians of color to assimilate into the whiteness of librarianship, alienating those at the margins even further."[44] One of the coauthors of the article created a Facebook group called We Here, "designed as a space for librarians of color to reach out."[45] This group now sponsors a community school, book reviews, and other support systems for library workers of color, while also working to "recognize, discuss, and intervene in systemic social issues that have plagued these professions both currently and historically."[46]

These voices, and those of the contributors to this book, are among the many to challenge us to reflect even more deeply about how diversity, equity, and inclusion will continue to be addressed within the academic library workforce. We invite academic librarians and affiliated stakeholders to engage with emerging solutions and work together to build a more inclusive and productive future.

Notes

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