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Residency Programs and Demonstrating Commitment to Diversity

Kelly McElroy and Chris Diaz

The ACRL Diversity Standards state that, “if libraries are to continue being indispensable organizations in their campus communities, they must reflect the communities they serve.”¹ These standards for cultural competencies are intended to help academic libraries become more inclusive and equitable in both the services they provide and the people they employ. Diversity is essential to the future of academic libraries. In recognition of this, numerous nationwide efforts have attempted to recruit people from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups into librarianship.

Residency programs are one popular and highly visible example of these efforts. The current model of these programs began in the 1980s as entry-level temporary positions specifically designed to attract recent LIS graduates of African-, Hispanic-, Asian-, and Native American backgrounds for careers in academic libraries. Roughly thirty years later, academic librarianship is no more diverse than it was when these programs began to address the lack of diversity in librarianship.

Although the ACRL Diversity Standards shy away from focus on any particular area of difference, a quick examination of the racial and ethnic demographics of academic librarians shows a bleak situation. In 1990, several years after the first diversity residency programs began, academic librarianship was 86.1% white. In 2010, academic librarianship remained 86.1% white (table 1).

	1990	2010
Total Academic Librarians	26,341	26,954
Total White Academic Librarians	22,680 (86.1%)	23,207 (86.1%)
Total Non-white Academic Librarians	3,661 (13.9%)	3,747 (13.9%)

Sources: Diversity Counts, 2012, Table A-5, Table C-5.

This stasis comes in the face of great demographic change elsewhere in higher education. Between 1990 and 2010, minority enrollment in the United States increased by 16% among undergraduates and 17% among graduate students (table 2).

During this same period, the overall rate of masters’ degrees obtained by minority students has increased by 15% (table 3). Although it may seem that the required MLIS could be a barrier and thus a contributor to the lack of diversity among librarians, the data suggest that the opportunities for graduate education among minority students is actually keeping pace with the larger demographic shifts in student populations.

What about faculty? Although most full-time faculty positions require a doctoral degree, the representation of minorities in these positions more than doubled from 1990 to 2010, from 12% to 26% (table 4). Considering that attaining a doctoral degree requires

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TABLE 2
Racial Demographics of Undergraduate and Graduate Students: 1990 and 2010

	1990	2010
Total Undergraduate Students	11,959,100	18,078,100
Total White Undergraduate Students	9,272,600 (76%)	10,897,700 (60%)
Total Non-white Undergraduate Students	2,686,500 (24%)	7,180,400 (40%)
Total Graduate Students	1,859,500	2,973,500
Total White Graduate Students	1,449,800 (78%)	1,824,400 (61%)
Total Non-white Graduate Students	409,700 (22%)	1,149,100 (39%)

Sources: Digest of Education Statistics, 2012, Table 239, Table 332.

TABLE 3
Racial Demographics of Masters Degrees Conferred: 1990 and 2010

	1990	2010
Total Masters Degrees Conferred	342,863	730,635
Total Masters Degrees Conferred on White Students	265,927 (78%)	462,903 (63%)
Total Masters Degrees Conferred on Non-white Students	76,936 (22%)	267,732 (37%)

Sources: Digest of Education Statistics, 2012, Table 239, Table 332.

more time and financial commitment than a master's degree, it cannot be true that the degree requirement is keeping academic librarianship from diversifying at the same rates as the rest of higher education.

The diversification of students and faculty is not expected to slow down. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that the country will become a majority non-white nation by 2043.² The 2012 ALISE statistical report indicates that 83% of ALA-accredited masters degrees awarded in 2010-11 went to white students.³ If the current trend continues, academic librarianship is on course to become even more disproportionately white than ever before. In a recent paper on diversity and the future of libraries, Morales, Knowles, and Bourg, rightly point out that given these numbers, we have "little reason to hope that the profession will be-

come more diverse without intervention."⁴ Since the 1980s, residency programs have been one attempt at intervention, the effectiveness of which has gone largely unquestioned.

Historically, residency programs were not intended to address diversity at all. These programs have their roots in full-time internships for recent LIS graduates, intended to address a skills gap between the theory and practice of research librarianship. Recommendations for post-LIS education training started with the 1923 publication of a set of guidelines for a 12-month, full-time internship program to include a departmental training rotation within a host library.⁵ (According to job announcements from the last two years, departmental rotations continue to be a staple of residency programs.) The 1923 guidelines were

TABLE 4
Racial Demographics of Full-time Higher Education Faculty: 1991 and 2011

	1991	2011
Total Full-time Faculty	520,324	761,619
Total Full-time Faculty: White	456,222 (88%)	563,689 (74%)
Total Full-time Faculty: Non-white	64,102 (12%)	197,930 (26%)

Sources: Digest of Education Statistics, 2012, Table 287; Digest of Education Statistics, 1995, Table 218.

endorsed by the American Library Association and implemented in host institutions across the country in the 1930s.⁶ By 1949, the Library of Congress began its prestigious Special Recruiting Program for outstanding LIS students who, upon the recommendation from a dean or recruitment officer, would be paid a competitive salary and receive specialized training in various departments of the library. In 1957, the National Library of Medicine began what is now the Associate Fellows Program to train new librarians in the specialized work of medical and health sciences libraries.⁷ The first post-masters internship position in an academic library started at Ohio State University in 1961.⁸ In 1992, The Association for Library and Information Science Education published a set of guidelines for residency programs which emphasize skills training and make no mention of diversity.⁹ The history of these programs shows an intention to respond to and experiment with the technological changes and emerging needs of libraries.

And yet, the diversity component of residency programs has become prevalent. In 1984, the University of Delaware became the first post-masters internship program to emphasize the recruitment of librarians from underrepresented groups.¹⁰ A survey of job postings on the website of ACRL's Residency Interest Group estimates that over 70%, or 26 out of the 36, total active residency programs specifically recruit applicants from underrepresented groups and identify the program as part of the library's commitment to diversity.¹¹ The suggestion that these programs can effectively draw underrepresented people into the profession is difficult to unpack.

In order to understand the addition of diversity as a goal to these long-standing programs, we need to look to the past. In a 1996 essay, Lorna Peterson exhorted librarians to examine the racial history of the profession. She notes examples of racism within the history of librarianship in the United States, such as informal policies that prevented black women from enrolling in library schools and segregation in state library associations that went unchallenged by ALA through the Civil Rights era.¹² Last year, the Black

Caucus of ALA denounced the association's choice to hold the 2016 annual conference in Orlando after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of black teenager Trayvon Martin.¹³ Although this statement has spurred dialogue about Stand Your Ground Laws as well as actions by a coalition of ethnic caucuses and others, it also raised ambivalence. By citing bureaucratic obstacles or changing the subject to note that conferences also occur in states that do not permit same-sex marriage, librarians effectively dismiss the concerns raised by BCALA. This exemplifies the de-politicized approach to diversity Peterson lamented, and confirms what Todd Honma has called the "unacknowledged whiteness and celebratory multiculturalism" pervasive in LIS.¹⁴ In an essay on the unacknowledged white normativity of LIS, Honma traces the rhetoric on multiculturalism to a backlash against the Civil Rights and ethnic rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Multiculturalism and diversity provide ways to celebrate difference while avoiding dealing with specific forms of racial and ethnic discrimination. The introduction of "diversity" into existing residency programs in the 1980s and 1990s begins to make sense in this context.

So diversity requirements were added to existing models of temporary employment in academic libraries. However, combining efforts to address a skills gap and efforts to address diversity can send an unfortunate message. If job titles like "Affirmative Action Intern," "Minority Resident Librarian," and "Diversity Resident" were not stigmatizing enough, their temporary employment status can imply that these new librarians are not ready for "regular" positions in academic libraries.¹⁵ In 1990, the ACRL Taskforce on Recruitment of Underrepresented Minorities specifically identified stigmatization of "underprepared, lacking skills, or otherwise unqualified for permanent entry-level professional positions" as a primary concern about residencies.¹⁶ This stigma may also manifest in microaggressions, which are subtle, unintended slights that may leave the recipient unsure if they have indeed been attacked. The blog *LIS Microaggressions* provides a space for librarians, archi-

vists, and information professionals to anonymously share stories of these disparaging interactions. Several posts refer specifically to stigmatizing experiences in residency programs: “Right out of library school, I landed an awesome post-MLIS early career fellowship intended to promote diversity in the profession. Less awesome: being tasked with non-librarian work while our interns gained real librarian experience.”¹⁷ Hardly a welcoming introduction to academic librarianship, and indeed, the writer goes on to say they “couldn’t get out of there fast enough.”

Certainly, residency programs have their benefits. They provide libraries and early-career librarians the opportunity to explore new or emerging areas of the field. New graduates are generally pleased to get their first job, and indeed, many residents indicate overall satisfaction with their experience.¹⁸ The long history of residency programs suggests that they fill a need in our profession. Today, residencies offer a chance to invest in new services that anticipate the future of higher education. To pick just one of many forecasts of the future of academic libraries, the biennial trends list of the ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee summarizes themes in current and emerging areas including collaborative data management services, openness in scholarship and educational resources, and student success outcomes.¹⁹ Residency programs focused on these kinds of topics offer the new librarian a chance to gain cutting-edge skills, while the library takes only a short-term risk in exploring a new area. Although there are both strengths and room for improvement in residency programs, pairing these programs with diversity requirements has not helped make the profession more diverse, and must be seriously reconsidered.

Residency programs aren’t the only efforts to diversify academic librarianship. However, writing about the Spectrum Scholars, LAMP, IDOL, and ARL internship/ mid-career leadership programs, Morales, Knowles, and Bourg conclude: “These programs are laudable and likely to be of great benefit to both the participants and the participating libraries and their communities. Nevertheless, the impact of such pro-

grams on the overall demographic diversity of the profession is constrained by the small number of participants and scholarships available.”²⁰ Boutique solutions will not reverse the current trend.

To truly bring diversity to library workforce at all levels, individuals must be recruited to work in a library, but in order to work as a professional librarian, they must also be recruited into an LIS program. The 2003 Bridging Boundaries study of Spectrum Scholars revealed that, “The single most predictive indicator for choosing to enter a LIS program was prior experience working in a library.”²¹ While only 13.9% of academic librarians are non-white, 33.3% of non-credentialed staff in academic libraries are non-white.²² Although certainly not all paraprofessional staff want to get an MLIS, this pool of potential librarians must be considered. According to the 2003 study of Spectrum Scholars, 76% of respondents had worked in a library as a paid employee before applying to an LIS program. This is supported by the findings of Kim et al whose study of academic librarians of color found that about 22% decided to pursue an MLIS while working in a library, and another 24% while they were undergraduate students.²³

Another strategy is to recruit more student workers from underrepresented groups, and focus on encouraging them to consider librarianship as a future profession. An admirable parallel program in higher education is the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Undergraduate Fellows Program, which matches undergraduate students with student affairs professionals on their campus.²⁴ Like LIS, there are few undergraduate academic programs in student affairs, but ample opportunity to connect with students based on their expressed interests and talents. The NASPA program provides one-on-one mentorship to students, along with opportunities for scholarships to attend national conferences, and the potential for paid internships. It provides an example of cooperation between individual professionals who volunteer their time, institutions that invest in paid student employment, and a national organization offering both financial and logistical support.

Ultimately, shifting the demographics of our profession is a mammoth, shared task. Tacking a diversity angle onto a residency program, position, or even network of programs does not demonstrate a commitment to bringing diversity to the profession. Recruitment among underrepresented minority groups needs to happen before the MLIS is obtained, because the job market for entry-level librarians requires experience and training well before students are ready to submit their first professional applications. If reflecting the communities we serve is essential to the future of academic libraries, we need to begin by taking seriously what is working and what is not.

Notes

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