The Role of Recruitment in Achieving Goals Related to Diversity

Mark Winston

One of our diversity-related goals is to broaden the number of perspectives represented in academic library decision-making, administration, and library services. The research conducted in library and information science, as well as that conducted in numerous other disciplines, provides a basis for identifying those factors that have an impact on the decisions of individuals to choose a particular profession and/or professional specialty. This information should inform our recruitment strategies, as we identify approaches that will prove effective in increasing the number of minority academic librarians, and thus help to achieve our goals related to diversity.

Although there are numerous articulated reasons for making diversity issues a priority in academic libraries, one of the primary goals of diversity initiatives is to address the documented underrepresentation of ethnic minority professionals employed in college and university libraries. By increasing the number of minority academic librarians, we will be able to broaden the number of perspectives represented in academic library decision-making, administration, and library services. In addition, we will better reflect the multicultural community that is being served and offer an environment that is more open, receptive, and conducive to the success of all of those who use and are employed by academic libraries. However, to approach recruitment without an adequate understanding of those factors that have been proven to affect career choices, we are doomed to continue the cycle of underrepresentation and to fall short of achieving our goals related to diversity.

The research conducted in library and information science (LIS), as well as that conducted in numerous other disciplines, provides a basis for identifying those factors that have an impact on the decisions of individuals to choose a particular profession and/or professional specialty. In addition, this information should inform recruitment strategies as approaches are identified that will prove effective in increasing the number of minority academic librarians. Many researchers have contributed to a body of literature that might be described as "recruitment theory," which relates to the identification of those factors that have influenced the career choices of individuals in a broad range of professions, at various educational levels, and in a number of demographic categories. These categories include various

Mark Winston is Assistant University Librarian and Assistant Professor in Odum Library at Valdosta State University; e-mail: mwinston@valdosta.edu. This article is based on the author's upcoming book being published by Scarecrow Press.

medical specialties,[1] education majors and employees,[2] counseling, school administration, various LIS specialties, as well as high school, college, technical school, and graduate students, men and women, and members of minority groups.[3] Despite the multiplicity of disciplines and career fields considered, many common themes emerge with regard to the relative importance of individuals, such as professors and teachers, parents and other family members, friends, and other role models, and activities or other factors, such as interesting academic courses and curricula, academic performance, work experience, expected salary and benefits, the desire to make a contribution, and ethnicity and gender, in the career decision-making process. The recruitment factors identified in the general literature correspond closely with those related to the recruitment of librarians in general and in various LIS specialties.

The role of ethnicity and gender in career decision-making appears to be in dispute.

One premise of this article is that what is known about the reasons why individuals have chosen their professional specialties provides a worthwhile basis for the development of recruitment strategies because there are similarities between those who are currently employed in a given profession and those who are likely candidates for recruitment into that profession. This premise is valid based on the findings in the published research. In addition, career assessment instruments often are designed to measure the extent to which responses and preferences are similar to those of individuals in various professions and to those of individuals who are happy in their professions, based on the assumption that similar responses and preferences are likely to correlate with similar professional preferences.

Recruitment Theory

Numerous researchers have categorized the list of factors affecting the recruitment of individuals into professions in terms of either the individuals or the activities that affect career choices.[4] The individuals who have an impact on the career decision-making process include:

- family members;[5]
- friends and peers;[6]
- teachers;[7]
- counselors; [8]
- other role models.[9]

The activities and other factors that influence this process include:

- "interesting" academic courses and curricula;[10]
- "course grades;"[11]
- extracurricular activities;[12]
- work experience, including internships;[13]
- desire to make a contribution;[14]
- expected salary and benefits;[15]
- ethnicity;
- gender.

The published research provides some explanation for the factors that appear to be most important to those who are making career decisions, as well as for the importance attached to those factors. The recruitment factors that have been rated most highly include teachers, interesting courses, grades, work experience, the desire to make a contribution, and expected salary and benefits.

Other factors were not rated highly in some instances. For example, the importance of family members was indicated by young people selecting a career field, but this was not the case for older individuals. The role of ethnicity and gender in career decision-making appears to be in dispute. Some researchers have found that gender and ethnic background lead to differences in career choices for men and women[16] and minorities and nonminorities; others have found that gender and ethnicity do not have such an effect.[17]

Although work experiences have a significant role in the career decision-making

process, extracurricular or "out-of-school activities" have not been rated highly by those making career decisions.[18] Richard J. Noeth, Harold B. Engen, and Patricia E. Noeth provide a possible explanation for this lack of a high rating. "It is interesting to note that students [in their study] did not rate the extracurricular and nonschool experiences highly. Perhaps the positive components of these activities are difficult for students to abstract and relate to potential career directions."[19]

The recruitment factors identified in the general literature correspond closely to the list of factors related to the recruitment of librarians in general and in various LIS specialties, with regard to recruitment factors related to the influence of role models, interesting courses, internship, or other related work experience, expected salary, and desire to make a contribution.

The recent published literature regarding those factors that may form the basis for LIS recruitment theory includes writings by Lois Buttlar and William Caynon,[20] who present a relatively comprehensive list of factors affecting the recruitment of minorities into the profession and the research of Kathleen de la Peña McCook and Paula Geist,[21] which substantiates a number of the findings of Caynon and Buttlar, particularly in relation to issues of the importance of paraprofessionals as potential future librarians and the role of financial aid for LIS graduate students. In general, these factors have been identified as being applicable in the recruitment of individuals into various specialties, including special librarianship and science librarianship. Other writings that add to this theoretical framework regarding LIS recruitment are those by Susan M. Vazakas and Camille Clark Wallin,[22] Beth M. Paskoff,[23] Lorene B. Brown,[24] Phyllis J. Hudson,[25] and Kathleen M. Heim and William E. Moen.[26] Current recruitment theory indicates that factors which cause individuals to accept recruitment into the library profession include:

- personal desire to enter the profession of librarianship;[27]
- information provided by role models and/or the "influence of role models"[28] on individuals to consider librarianship as a profession;[29]
- "availability of financial aid or scholarships;"[30]
- paraprofessional or student assistant library positions held by individuals which, in turn, motivated them to consider the profession;[31]
- appreciation for the work in which librarians are engaged, which has encouraged them to consider the information profession as a career;[32]
- appreciation for "the environment of library work;"[33]
- interest in entering "a service position"[34] or service profession;
- availability of professional positions in the field of library and information science;[35]
- image of the profession;[36]
- salaries paid to library and information professionals.[37]

Implications for Practice

Some specific observations of the LIS profession seem to become apparent based on what is known about recruitment theory. Many individuals who are seeking or changing careers indicate that their interest in entering a service profession or the desire to make a contribution is an important factor in the decision-making process. This is important for all LIS recruitment, but it is particularly important with regard to specialties such as business librarianship, law, science, and engineering librarianship—specialties in which individuals with either an interest in the discipline (an interest in business or chemistry, for example), an educational background or work experience in these areas, or some combination of interest and experience may be amenable to applying their expertise and/or interest in a discipline within a profession that is service oriented.

There may be aspects of the work environment or professional responsibilities associated with other professions that are not appealing to those who have, for example, less interest in focusing on the bottom line or on billable hours that are a part of the business world or the practice of law. Thus, LIS recruiters may have an advantage in encouraging these individuals to become librarians.

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The availability of positions in the specialty is another factor that appears to be a positive asset or "selling point" of the profession at present. The expanding numbers and types of positions in library and information science are likely to be an attractive inducement for those who are selecting a career field.

The importance of "interesting" courses and academic curricula in the successful recruitment of librarians and other professionals should be of interest to everyone in library and information science. Whether practitioners, library educators, or adjunct faculty in LIS programs, everyone should insist that LIS education be made relevant and attractive to students. The quality and rigor of the education provided is key in ensuring an informed and motivated cadre of new professionals.

Certainly, the proliferation of undergraduate courses in library and information science is likely to play a key role in recruitment efforts by introducing undergraduate students to issues related to information and the role of libraries in society. A growing number of colleges and universities are offering such courses, including institutions with ALA-accredited LIS programs. For example, "the number of undergraduate programs grew from four [ALA-accredited] schools in the fall of 1992 to eight in 1996, according to the 1997 *Statistical Report*, issued recently by the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE)."[38] Because many undergraduate and graduate students have difficulty in selecting an academic major or a professional specialty and are uncertain about their career options, it seems clear that many of these students have not considered librarianship. Thus, their first impressions of the discipline and the profession are likely to play a pivotal role in their consideration of librarianship as a career choice.

In terms of issues related to salary and benefits, the LIS profession may offer less in terms of what we can promote for those we are attempting to interest in the profession. However, the research suggests that few individuals have been motivated to become librarians on the basis of anticipated salary. However, recruitment efforts can highlight certain fringe benefits generally associated with academic library work and work in academia. The issue of academia is addressed in greater detail below.

The issue of image has been of concern for some time. It seems that those who understand what librarians do also are aware of both the importance of what they do and the key role they will continue to play, particularly with regard to information and information technology.

To a certain extent, this article has addressed primarily undergraduate and graduate students, but the recruitment of librarians also must focus on those working in other professions. In many cases, these individuals may be dissatisfied with their current professions and thus may be open to recruitment strategies that highlight the differences between the business world, for example, and librarianship, particularly in academia. Moreover, the academic environment itself may offer some of the benefits that individuals believe to be important in their professions/

work environments. However, the reality is that most librarians of color work in public library settings. Certainly, this preponderance of librarians of color who choose to work in public libraries may be based on perceptions, accurate or otherwise, of the nature of academia and academic library work. It seems that this preponderance of librarians of color who choose public libraries over academic libraries often is based on a sense that the minority librarian who wants to make a contribution to his or her community has more opportunities to do so in the public library, and more aggressive minority recruitment efforts in public libraries presumably reflect an appreciation for diversity, as well as opportunities for advancement in a "fairer" system.

An understanding of these perceptions, to whatever degree they are accurate, should help in defining recruitment strategies. For example, in attempting to recruit persons of color into academic librarianship, it may be necessary to face the view that the ivory tower of academia is not welcoming. Thus, recruitment efforts may need to be more aggressive and emphasize the institutional support (read administrative and widespread organizational support) for diverse perspectives. With the use of words such as institutional commitment and administrative or organizational commitment, the responsibility has been depersonalized (or objectified) to a certain extent. The intention is to do just the opposite. Institutional commitment is based on the personal commitment of individuals—library faculty, teaching faculty, and administrators. Although this commitment is necessary and important, it must be translated into actions that lead to successful recruitment (i.e., hiring, promotion, and retention). Finally, it must be emphasized that academic librarians can and do make important contributions in their work with students, faculty, and other researchers, in general, and minority students, in particular.

Recommendations

A number of specific recommendations regarding the LIS profession seem to be apparent based on what is known about recruitment theory. Certainly, information on the importance of various factors in the recruitment of individuals into their professional specialties is useful to employers, library educators, practicing librarians, and others who are interested in recruitment and in addressing issues of underrepresentation. Thus, this information may make it easier to target those individuals who are the most likely candidates for recruitment based on a more complete understanding of the factors that influence their career decisions. In addition, it may be possible to undertake recruitment that leads to positive results if the profession can be "marketed" by highlighting its strengths with a focus on the desired population of potential new professionals.

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Obviously, further research is needed in order to better define the population of librarians in specialties where underrepresentation is particularly acute. The results of this research will define more fully those individuals who are working currently in these specialties and provide details on the specific criteria related to educational background, work experience, interests, and factors affecting their recruitment that were significant in their choice of professional specialty.

It seems apparent that the information on recruitment theory described in this article, as well as the results of subsequent research, should enhance the effectiveness of recruitment efforts that target those who have some combination of interest and experience in the specialties in which underrepresentation is of particular concern. These recruitment efforts are likely to be most effective if particular selling

points of the profession are highlighted, including the service orientation of the profession, the professional opportunities and availability of positions, and the fringe benefits associated with working in academic libraries and in academia in general. The apparent perception that academia may not be a welcoming environment for minority librarians suggests that recruitment efforts should be aggressive and should highlight organizational and administrative support for diversity in general, as well as for minority employees.

> **These recruitment efforts are likely to be most effective if particular selling points of the profession are highlighted.**

For those who do not have a clear and complete picture of the role that librarians play in academia and in society, every opportunity should be taken to provide this type of information. Undergraduate courses in library and information science should be identified as—and used as— recruitment venues. When we instruct students in LIS courses, as well as in bibliographic instruction sessions and as guest lecturers in other courses, we are compelled to make the first impression of the discipline and the profession one that is positive, intriguing, and informative. In terms of the importance of work experience and internships in students' career choices, we are compelled to increase internship opportunities and to encourage successful and promising library paraprofessionals to consider the profession.

Conclusion

Despite the standard aversion to evaluating our efforts related to any aspects of diversity because of the connection made between evaluation and goal-setting and the concept of quotas, it is necessary to be able to establish goals and to evaluate success as our recruitment strategies are refined. Certainly, we are less apprehensive about establishing goals and evaluating success in relation to other aspects of academic library operations. And, the ability to define and measure success and to refine diversity recruitment efforts will be based, to a large extent, on the ability to evaluate the outcomes of our efforts.

The importance of recruitment efforts related to diversity is based on the need to ensure that a broad range of perspectives is represented in library decision-making, that library staff are representative of the community served, that they are sensitized to the needs of library users, and that equitable service is provided to minority students and other researchers. To this end, aggressive and informed recruitment efforts must be incorporated which reflect the institution's commitment to creating, retaining, and promoting a diverse workforce and which reflect an understanding of the factors that are important to individuals as they select a profession.

Notes

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