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Achieving racial and ethnic diversity among academic and research librarians

The recruitment, retention, and advancement of librarians of color—A white paper

At the 2006 ALA Midwinter Meeting in San Antonio, the ACRL Board of Directors outlined the focus of a white paper using the 2002 ACRL white paper *Recruitment, Retention and Restructuring: Human Resources in Academic Libraries* as a guide.[1] The proposed white paper would focus primarily on "workforce diversity, with an emphasis on the recruitment, retention, and advancement of groups traditionally underrepresented in the academic library workforce." The Board also specified the white paper should:

• discuss efforts to promote, develop, and foster workforces that are representative of a diverse population, and

• address the development of a climate in the workplace that supports and encourages advancement.

The growing labor gap in librarianship, a result of an "increasing demand for library and information science professionals, and a declining supply of qualified individuals," provided the framework for the 2002 white paper. It also included a review of the environment at that time and strategies for the "recruitment, retention, and the potential for [the] restructuring of library education and the library workforce." The 2002 white paper did not address diversity specifically, but dealt with the broader recruitment, retention, and restructuring issues.

Racial controversy in the United States provides a backdrop for the issue of recruitment by race and ethnicity within the profession of librarianship. Additionally, the research literature reveals a historical shortage of librarians. The current environment for the recruitment,

retention, and advancement of people of color in academic librarianship remains virtually unchanged since the appearance of the 2002 white paper. The published professional and research literature provides some insight into the barriers to recruitment and reasons why librarianship is a chosen career path.

For decades, advocates for increased racial and ethnic representation in the profession of librarianship have relied primarily on U.S. Census data and subsequent statistical data as justification for the goal to increase ethnic diversity in the library workforce. A more realistic agenda for recruitment and retention is needed by the profession at large, and ACRL in particular.

Accompanied by specific goals with justification, preferably empirically based and/or logically determined, a revised agenda should address not only the library profession, but also the communities being served. This is not to say that demographics are not key, however, the agenda should be grounded in strategic goals. In 1996, Camila A. Alire wrote: "[All of this is further translated into] a need for more minority library professionals who can identify with people in the minority communities; who can assist in the necessary outreach efforts to serve those minority residents; and who can serve as role models for minority children using the library."[2] John W. Berry's 2002 ALA

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Presidential Message[3] echoed this when he reminded us that in order for the profession to serve the increasingly diverse communities, we must build a workforce that reflects that diversity. The goal for recruitment should be broadened beyond the emphasis on increasing numbers to match the demographics of the U.S. population to focus strategically on increasing diversity in order to serve the diverse communities libraries serve. Careful and appropriate consideration and acknowledgement should be given for the successes and gains realized thus far in the profession, but within the context of specific strategic aims.

The following recommendations are a result of a review of the literature that builds on the 2002 white paper, with a particular focus on empirically supported solutions, from the broader recruitment and retention literatures, and the literature on advancement where available.

Recommended goals for recruitment

One recruitment goal is to develop a comprehensive, collaborative (among all stakeholders) recruitment and public awareness campaign for recruitment purposes. A collaborative, cohesive, holistic approach to harnessing the available information and resources on recruitment and retention and opportunities for advancement is recommended. A profession-wide concerted effort will eliminate duplication and channel all efforts through one resource. There are several recruitment Web sites cited in the literature, however, none of these have achieved profession-wide acceptance or appear to have impacted recruitment efforts.

Disvocernursing.com provides a fully developed, functional, and proven successful model that can be adopted by the profession of librarianship. LIS organizations should collaborate on the effort to develop such a source which includes the creation of one online comprehensive resource accompanied by print, radio, and television advertisement/recruitment spots.

In addition to the recommendation to contribute to the development of this resource, it is recommended that ACRL develop a research

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ALA awards 2007 Diversity Research Grants

ALA's Office for Diversity recently announced the recipients of its 2007 Diversity Research Grants. The 2007 recipients will be presenting their research at a program during the ALA 2008 Annual Conference in Anaheim, California.

The 2007 grant recipients are:

• Karen E. Downing, foundation and grants librarian at the University of Michigan's Hatcher Graduate Library, for her study "The Relationship Between Social Identity(ies) and Role Performance Among Academic Librarian."

• Mark Winston, associate professor at University of North Carolina (UNC)-Chapel Hill School of Information and Library Science, and Allison Rainey, MLIS student at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Information and Library Science, for their project on (re)envisioning diversity and multicultural librarianship and pedagogy in the post 9/11 context.

• Allison M. Sutton, assistant professor and psychology and social work subject specialist, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library for her project "Archival and Grey Literature Use Patterns in Library and Information Science Journal Articles with a Focus on the African American Experience (1986–2006)."

Diversity Research Grants consist of a one-time $2,000 annual award for original research and a $500 travel grant to attend and present at ALA's Annual Conference. Topics for the 2008 Diversity Research Grants will be announced during the ALA Midwinter Meeting in Philadelphia and will be posted on the Office for Diversity Web site February 1, 2008. For more information on the Diversity Research Grants, please visit the ALA Office for Diversity's Web site at www.ala.org/diversity or contact Karen Letarte at (312) 280-5020 or kletarte@ala.org.

agenda that addresses the lack of membership data for decision-making and goal setting. This research agenda could include the following strategic goals for recruitment within the membership framework:

• *The identi cation, creation and/or development, implementation, and replication of best practices for recruitment accompanied by sound empirical evidence with results, outcomes, and indicators for success.* ACRL has distinguished itself as a leader in developing standards and guidelines and, most recently, in leading the effort to identify/develop best practices for information literacy so there is precedent for leading the effort for recruitment. The profession and ACRL must develop and implement a research agenda that builds on proven methods, as well as supports creativity and initiative in scholarship aimed at addressing critical gaps in the recruitment literature, particularly for race and ethnicity.

• *Realistic goals for assessment and analysis and clearly stated standards and expectations not necessarily grounded in the demographics of the U.S. population.* The most recently cited statistics reveal minority representation in the U.S. population at approximately 30 percent in 2000, with the number for minority representation in the profession lagging behind.[4] The profession overall, and ACRL in particular, must develop and implement a research agenda that supports realistic strategic goals for addressing recruitment and retention objectives.

• *The creation, gathering, and maintenance of reliable and accurate data for the profession overall and for academic librarians in particular.* "Although we may never have accurate total numbers of minority professionals in LIS, tracking the enrollment figures and graduation rates over time may provide us with a better picture of how many individuals of color are matriculating."[5] The Future of Librarians in the Workforce is a national research study funded by the Institute for Museum and Library Science (IMLS) and headed by José-Marie Griffiths, dean of the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. This study has significant potential and could provide the appropriate empirically driven data needed to accomplish broad-based recruitment, retention, and advancement goals.

A look back at the strategies for recruitment put forth by the 2002 white paper finds there has been some action, but there has not been a comprehensive review of the progress to date. Other recommendations and findings in this paper can be aligned with many of those from the 2002 white paper to begin the framework for a strategic research agenda. It is also recommended that ACRL take the next step in comprehensively assessing those outcomes.

Recommended goals for retention

The literature on retention of minorities in academic librarianship is weak and close to nonexistent. The 2002 white paper also acknowledges the lack of research on retention in librarianship. Retention strategies do exist in the literature, but there is little longitudinal research to confirm the success of such strategies.

The 2005 IMLS grant won by principal investigator Joanne Marshall, "Workforce Issues in Library and Information Science (WILIS)"[6] may be able to provide the data needed on librarianship in general. Retention strategies include:

• orientations and welcomes;
• programming that addresses work culture issues and is presented in a nonthreatening, more social activity, way;
• opportunities for professional development;
• positive environment, honoring of employee values, opinion, and voice;
• compensation and rewards;
• good management; and
• recognition of work-life balance needs.

Recommended goals for advancement

Advancement as a concept was not addressed in the 2002 white paper. If advancement in the field is related to leadership, then there is no lack of literature regarding leadership, a leadership crisis, and descriptions of the institutes, programs, and fellowships developed to

create library leaders. *Library workers: Facts and gures fact sheet 2005*[7] by the AFL-CIO Department for Professional Employees looks at the numbers of librarians and library workers for 2004 and projected to 2012 and sees a trend of "'deprofessionalization': Work once performed only by librarians is now performed by support staff." Regarding advancement, the report makes this comment: "While the distribution of positions within the minority and white populations appears to be growing more similar, differences certainly remain, especially in the managerial positions." Some ideas for supporting advancement include:

• mentoring and grooming—from a review of the literature on advancement and creating an environment conducive to advancement in academic libraries, mentoring is consistently cited as an ingredient for successful leadership development;

• shadowing leaders;

• proactive nominations for awards and recognitions;

• job rotations; and

• participation in fellowships and institutes.

Recommendations for promoting advancement of minorities beyond entry level positions are:

• track assistant director/director/dean positions of academic libraries;

• track available leadership pools of minority candidates;

• develop statistical and data reports that can serve as the foundation for further research; and

• institute a system of accountability regarding the retention and advancement of underrepresented groups in libraries.

Recruitment to the profession, retention of qualified diverse professionals, and a need to create opportunities for and support the advancement of those professionals are not concerns new or unique to librarianship.[8,9,10,11] Although the current environment for recruitment, retention, and advancement of people of color in academic librarianship remains virtually unchanged since the appearance of the 2002 ACRL white paper, methods and strategies for addressing the issue seem to be evolving. Additionally, the reasons for the issues remaining relevant seem to be changing, as well.

Notes

1. ACRL Personnel Administrators and Staff Development Officers of Large Research Libraries Discussion Group, *Recruitment, retention, and restructuring human resources in academic libraries: A white paper* (Chicago: ACRL, 2002).

2. Camila A. Alire, "Recruitment and retention of librarians of color," *Creating the future: Essays on librarianship in an age of great change,* ed. S. G. Reed, 126–43 (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 1996).

3. John W. Berry, "Addressing the recruitment and diversity crisis," *American Libraries* 33 (2002): 7.

4. K. Hipps, 2006, "Diversity in the U.S. ARL library workforce," *ARL: A Bimonthly Report on Research Library Issues and Actions from ARL, CNI, and SPARC* (246): 1–2.

5. Teresa Y. Neely, "Minority student recruitment in LIS education: New profiles for success," *Un nished business: Race, equity and diversity in library and information science education,* ed. M. Wheeler, 93–117 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2005).

6. J. G. Marshall, 2005. Workforce issues in library and information science (WILIS), IMLS Grant, Unpublished document.

7. AFL-CIO Department for Professional Education, 2005, *Library workers: Facts and gures, fact sheet 2005.*

8. S. L. Bowie and H. Hancock, "African Americans and graduate social work education: A study of career choice influences and strategies to reverse enrollment decline," *Journal of Social Work Education* 36 (3): 429–448.

9. J. K.Thornton, "African American female librarians: A study of job satisfaction," *Journal of Library Administration* 44 (1/2): 141–64.

10. Neely, *Un nished business.*

11. P. I. Buerhaus, and K. Donelan, B. T. Ulrich, L. Norman and R. Dittus, "State of the registered nurse workforce in the United States, *Nursing Economics* 24 (1): 6–12. ✄