
The evolution of affirmative action at the University of Arizona Library

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Setting numerical goals and following specific guidelines for hiring and promotion move affirmative action from principle to practice.

The University of Arizona Library has endorsed the concept of affirmative action for several years. However, by 1987 women and minorities were still being underutilized in proportion to their availability. The extent of the problem could not be measured precisely because the library did not have statistics showing the percentage of affirmative action employees within the library or the percentage available in the workforce outside. As the library administration considered this challenge, several points became evident. For instance, people often succumb to the temptation to interview on the basis of equal opportunity but then hire the candidate who exceeds the job requirements by the greatest margin. This perpetuates the inequities of the past by favoring the hiring and promotion of white males at the expense of minority applicants and women who also meet the job qualifications.

Affirmative action begins where equal opportunity leaves off. Its goal is to ensure that qualified minorities and women are hired and promoted in proportion to their numbers in the job market. To

accomplish that goal, the employer must accumulate statistics on the available workforce. Numerical goals must be established to ensure that women and minorities are hired and promoted in proportion to their availability. Job openings must be advertised in a way that will encourage qualified minorities and women to apply. Job interviews must be conducted with sensitivity for the concerns of those applicants. Follow-up must be done to measure the organization's progress toward its goal. Finally, appropriate incentives must be provided for women and minorities to remain with the organization, including viable opportunities for promotion.

Developing a plan

In 1987 the university's office of affirmative action encouraged colleges and departments to develop their own affirmative action plans. In the same year the library's affirmative action committee was charged with developing an affirmative action plan specifically for the library. First the

committee studied the university's plan; then the committee worked with the university's office of affirmative action to develop additional guidelines. That office also provided a statistical snapshot indicating the name, sex, ethnicity, and job level of each library employee. The information was verified by asking library employees to self-identify their ethnicity.

The snapshot, done in August 1988, clearly showed that the library was underutilizing minority workers at the level of classified staff and both minorities and women among the ranks of librarians. Among classified staff the percentage of minority workers was 17.6% in the library, whereas 26.5% of the local workforce was composed of members of minorities. The percentage of female librarians was 53.6 in the library compared to 63.6% in the ARL survey. (The percentage of female librarians among ALA members is 75.1.) Minority librarians at the library represented 8.7% of the workforce compared to the ARL figure of 10.8% and a figure of 11.5% among ALA members. The library decided to use the ARL percentages as its immediate goal for representation of female and minority librarians.

Implementing the plan

In order to use the plan effectively to hire professional librarians, the affirmative action committee created several supporting documents. These were developed to address the need to educate the members of search committees appointed for each professional vacancy, and to obtain statistics from committees when the searches were completed. One of these documents is a set of guidelines for writing library job announcements. These guidelines include examples of wording to use and to avoid in order to encourage affirmative action candidates to apply. The document stated up front:

"Library job announcements must be worded in a way that supports the library's affirmative action goals. Female or minority status, veteran status or other protected category can be used as a job qualification when based on an affirmative action plan. In order to recruit the broadest possible candidate pool, use general statements that encompass the necessary experience. Some helpful phrases are: 'understanding of,' 'familiarity with,' 'experience in,' 'knowledge of,' 'ability to,' 'interest in,' 'desire to.' Selection committees were requested to use such language as "desired" rather than "required," 'experience in' instead of 'at least one year's experience,' 'library experience' instead of 'academic library experience,' or 'a combination of relevant experience and/or training' instead of 'three to five years' experience in.'"

Another supportive document is a script to explain to a search committee, at its first meeting, its

responsibility in regard to affirmative action. This document begins by outlining the commitment to affirmative action made by the State of Arizona Board of Regents, the University, and the University of Arizona Library. It then indicates the percentages of women and minorities currently in the library workforce, the percentages employed by the University of Arizona Library, and the goals set by the library to bring it into harmony with national percentages.

The guide then explains those selection criteria that are based on affirmative action principles, how job interviews must be conducted, and how the successful candidate will be selected in order to meet affirmative action guidelines. It concludes by explaining the documentation required by the library to ensure that the search and selection process has been conducted in accordance with affirmative action principles. Although the member of the library affirmative action committee who presents this material to the search committee does not read the script word for word, care is taken to avoid extensive paraphrasing. This is felt to be important, since the script was carefully worded to ensure that the legal requirements of affirmative action are accurately stated.

The library affirmative action committee also developed a form to tabulate affirmative action diversity statistics of the candidate pool for each vacant position. It is completed by the chair of each search committee. The information for this form is obtained mostly from a voluntary affirmative action reply form that the library encourages applicants to complete. The search committee chair uses the information on the voluntary form to categorize candidates by sex, age, and ethnicity. The committee chair shares this information with the committee members before the candidate pool is narrowed. The remainder of the report form gives the sex and ethnicity of the candidates interviewed, and of the candidate hired. After completing this part of the form, the chair sends it to the library's affirmative action committee.

Over time, these forms provide a means of monitoring the library's success in attracting appropriate candidates and making the final appointments.

In May 1988, the library administration issued guidelines for achieving affirmative action goals in classified staff positions. These guidelines specified that "If minority candidates who meet the posted University Approved Minimum Qualifications and the Departmental Preferred Qualifications are judged to be able to be successful in the position with a reasonable amount of training, the most qualified minority will be recommended for hire."

By applying these guidelines, the library has almost met its numerical goal for minority classified staff, and the hiring guidelines have now been

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refined to be less prescriptive. Rather than stating "the most qualified minority will be recommended for hire," the guidelines specify that "because we are working to meet and sustain our affirmative action goals, affirmative action status will always be a primary component of decisions to hire and promote in the library." The revised guidelines also make supervisors accountable for their performance in equal opportunity and affirmative action efforts.

Encouraging staff acceptance

Several steps were taken to encourage staff acceptance. Initially, the library affirmative action committee noted some concerns and scheduled a meeting for all staff in which the university affirmative action officer, a personnel officer, and a member of the library administration addressed these concerns. The meeting was videotaped for those who could not attend and is available for viewing by new members of the library staff. A library display on affirmative action was also exhibited during this period. Although the display was created mainly for library users, it also helped increase the staff's awareness of affirmative action issues.

Despite initial success in implementing an aggressive affirmative action plan, staff acceptance remains a concern. The library is still the only unit on campus which bases its hiring exclusively on affirmative action guidelines rather than equal opportunity. The library therefore serves as both role model and guinea pig, and often finds itself breaking new ground. In many cases the impact of affirmative action is not felt by career staff until they are in the process of applying for a promotion. It is not easy for a highly experienced non-affirmative action candidate to understand why he or she was passed up for promotion because a less experienced but qualified minority candidate was available. Because of this, affirmative action guidelines need to be reviewed frequently and openly with the library staff in order to provide an opportunity for staff to ask questions and receive answers. Notwithstanding such orientation, it is necessary to accept the fact that total staff acceptance of an affirmative action program may never be attainable. Continuing effort may be necessary to maintain a work environment that is supportive of minority workers.

The library is in the process of developing a broad-based training program to help employees reach a better understanding of what building and sharing a diverse work environment means. A task force appointed by the university librarian is coordinating the establishment of a diversity education program in conjunction with the library staff development committee and affirmative action commit-

tee. Also, a consultant was hired to assist the library in establishing basic organizational values affecting diversity in the workplace and in promoting a work environment where diversity is valued.

The University of Michigan has used a similar approach. A nationally known consultant was hired who worked in small group sessions and trained a core group of volunteer trainers. These trainers then provided continuity after the workshops ended. The consultant was brought back a year later for follow-up sessions.

In response to the emphasis on affirmative action and diversity, a group of Hispanic women in the library have instituted a monthly lunch-time gathering in order to share common concerns. Hispanic women from other areas on campus have joined the library group, which has been given library space in which to meet. Speakers are frequently brought in, and the group has grown to over 25 participants.

Results

Modest gains have been realized in the hiring of faculty librarians who are women. Since August 1988, the number of female librarians has grown by 4%, increasing their representation to 57.5 percent. The library's goal is to attain the ARL statistic of 63.6% female. The library now has seven minority librarians, compared to six when the plan was implemented. In spite of this gain, the percentage of minority professionals has not changed. This is due to an increase in the number of temporary librarians hired during this period.

An interesting development in the hiring of professionals has been a commitment by the university to find positions for spouses of underutilized ethnic groups and women who have been offered professional positions. For example, the recent hiring of an Hispanic librarian resulted in the creation of an additional permanent position to accommodate the candidate's spouse, who also happened to be a librarian.

Since the plan was issued a little over two years ago, the library has increased the percentage of minority classified staff from 17.6 to 24.69 by rigorously applying affirmative action guidelines in initial hires and promotions. By hiring three more minority staff the library will reach the percentage of minority workers available in the city of Tucson, 26.5.

Final thoughts

Affirmative action guidelines are a less than perfect way to address past inequities, but the library recognizes that such methods are the only ones which have worked. For years the University of Arizona Library discussed affirmative action

issues, stayed current with affirmative action developments on campus, and encouraged the hiring, promotion, and retention of persons from underutilized groups. These efforts failed to produce the desired results. Only by setting numerical goals and

implementing hiring guidelines based on an active affirmative action stand that goes beyond a passive equal opportunity doctrine have we been able to progress from inequity to equity. ■ ■

New UCLA mentor program to address shortage of African-American librarians

Increasing the number of African-American librarians in the state of California is a new focus of the UCLA Graduate School of Library and Information Science. The school has received a grant of \$27,000 from the California State Library to develop a mentor program in cooperation with the California Librarians Black Caucus of greater Los Angeles. The program, called Mentoring African-American Students, will offer encouragement and professional support to African-American students who are enrolled in GSLIS or who are about to enroll. The initial phase of the program will involve preparation of a handbook for mentors and training a core group of mentors, all of whom will be professional, practicing African-American librarians. The handbook is expected to serve as a model for other mentor programs.

Mentoring is widely recognized as an important means for encouraging students to complete academic programs and launch careers in a variety of fields. Heading the new program is GSLIS Dean Beverly P. Lynch, who reports that a similar GSLIS mentoring program for Hispanic students, now well established, has proven very effective. "Through our new mentoring project," Lynch says, "we will reach out to talented African-American students, make them aware of career options available in library and information science, and urge them to pursue this profession where their talents are so urgently needed."

Black Caucus leaders working with Dean Lynch on the mentoring program are Louise Parsons, Santa Monica Public Library, and Billie Frierson and Joyce Sumbi, L.A. County Public Library. ■ ■

Research library fellowship program for minority candidates

The University of Iowa is seeking applicants for a new fellowship program designed to assist a minority graduate student in pursuing the master's in library science and making a successful transition to professional librarianship upon completion of the degree. The Minority Research Library Fellowship Program will provide full tuition support and, upon completion of the master's degree, two years of professional experience in the University of Iowa Libraries. The program will begin in the fall 1991 academic year.

While attending the University of Iowa's School of Library and Information Science, the fellow will serve as a research assistant in the libraries for approximately 15-20 hours per week. Once the Master of Arts in Library and Information Science (MALIS) has been awarded, the fellow will be

appointed as a librarian I for a two-year period in the University Libraries system, with a minimum salary of \$24,500. It is anticipated that the program will enhance the fellow's career options in academic and research library settings.

Consideration for the program is contingent upon admittance to the University of Iowa School of Library and Information Science. Prospective fellows should complete all SLIS application forms, which may be requested from: Ethel Bloesch, School of Library and Information Science, Main Library, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242. A letter of intent to apply must be simultaneously submitted to: Barbara I. Dewey, Director of Administrative and Access Services, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA 52242. ■ ■