

Dwight King

The next generation

Partnering with high schools for future minority librarians

Christian wanted to become a doctor. Toni was interested in pharmacy. Mainza wanted to be an electrical engineer. But could we interest them—and about 50 other young people—in considering a career in academic librarianship? At Notre Dame we hoped we could with the Summer Program and the Project to Recruit the Next Generation of Librarians.

Summer program 2002

The Summer Program began in 2002. It was a joint program between Notre Dame's main library and its law library. It was developed by the main library's Diversity Committee, of which I am a member. Librarians become interested in the profession in a variety of ways, for me, it was through my part-time job as a high school page in my local public library. Thus, we decided we would try to recruit more minority students to librarianship—specifically, academic librarianship—by offering these students employment in our libraries.

After securing funding from our directors, we contacted department heads and supervisors asking them to describe projects for which they could use assistance.¹

Soon after, we contacted area high school principals to ask for their participation in the program. Working with the schools' guidance counselors we were able to get applicants from six of the seven schools.

Another librarian and I traveled to the schools to interview about 40 students. Although we intended to hire only four, we ended up hiring five students—four juniors and one senior.

The students worked ten 40-hour weeks, performing the same types of duties as our college student assistants. They worked a four-hour shift in one department in the morning and then in a different department in the afternoon. After five weeks, they switched to two or three other departments.

We also had weekly programming for the students. We offered classes on electronic resources students were likely to use in college. Our Librarian-in-Residence² spoke to them about becoming a librarian, emphasizing how to become an academic librarian. Students toured many of the Notre Dame branch libraries. We also sent the students to a leadership workshop on campus.

In their exit interviews, most students reported having a positive experience and said they would recommend the program to others;³ however, there were some complaints. Students were “not fond of the more monotonous tasks,” such as searching for missing sources, shelving and filing.⁴

And the major student complaint was that they spent too much time sitting around. In several instances, supervisors over-estimated the amount of time it would take to complete projects, and they did not have back-up projects when students worked more quickly than expected.

Summer program 2003 and 2004

A few changes were made to the Summer Program in 2003 and 2004. We hired only

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seniors because we were disappointed with the immaturity of some of our juniors the previous summer. We also wanted to reduce the number of applicants. The program was cut from ten weeks to eight after students complained the ten-week program was too long. And students were assigned two-hour shifts in a department instead of four-hour shifts, so that they could obtain a greater variety of assignments.

Project to Recruit the Next Generation of Librarians (PRNGL)

In 2003, the Diversity Committee sought to expand the Summer Program with a grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Science (IMLS). IMLS awards the “Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program” grant, which supports projects to “recruit future librarians from the ranks of promising junior high, high school or college students.”⁵

Although our proposal was not accepted in 2003, we received the grant for the PRNGL in November 2004. IMLS awarded \$194,000 to six partner academic libraries in northern Indiana⁶ to support the three-year project. Like the Summer Program, PRNGL introduced college-bound graduating seniors from area public schools to the profession of academic librarianship through employment as summer student assistants. In addition, PRNGL involved mentoring services and tracking of a participant’s career/education decisions. Like the Summer Program, it also featured special programming, such as field trips and instructional learning sessions—but more than what was offered by the Summer Program.

With PRNGL, we hired many more students than we did with the Summer Program—14 per year as opposed to 4. To help attract a larger applicant pool, we developed a brochure, a colorful poster, and a Web site.

After traveling to the South Bend public schools for interviews, the five representatives of the South Bend libraries met to review the applicants and decide where to assign them.

The Valparaiso partner, of the six partner libraries, had a more difficult time attracting

students. We were interested in attracting diverse students, but the Valparaiso area is very homogeneous. The guidance counselors in the three area high schools were not helpful in identifying applicants. The Valparaiso partner used his contacts through church and with local Spanish-language teachers to find candidates. His struggles paid off,⁷ and he ended up with five students.

Programming

Several activities were offered to give the students more information about librarianship. These activities also afforded opportunities to bring together all 14 participating students from South Bend and Valparaiso.

Each year, all students attended a half-day orientation at Notre Dame. The agenda included introductions and presentations on the purpose of the project. In 2005, we took a field trip to the Exhibit Hall at the ALA Annual Conference in Chicago and had a tour of the Chicago Public Library. The tour was repeated in 2006 and 2007.

Each year, the South Bend students traveled to Valparaiso University for a luncheon and a tour of the university library. The 2006 students were able to practice the table manners they had learned in a talk on business etiquette. Each Valparaiso intern was featured in an ALA READ poster. Valparaiso University interns had a two-hour session with Mark Winston, then associate professor of library science at Rutgers University, in which he discussed career options for persons from under-represented groups.⁸

Mentoring

Mentoring was a new and important aspect of the PRNGL project. We did not have a formal mentoring mechanism in the Summer Program. We hoped that our mentors would advise these recent high school graduates on ways to become successful college students—and particularly on ways to become successful researchers. Ideally, the mentors might establish a relationship that could lead to library school for some of the program participants.

In May 2005, all 14 mentors attended a half-day training session offered by the Notre Dame Human Resources (HR) department. Mentors were assigned to one or more students and met two hours per week for a minimum of 16 hours over eight weeks.

An outcome-based evaluation

The IMLS grant mandated that we use outcome-based evaluation to assess the success of the project. These are some of the most important outcomes we set out to achieve. Did we accomplish them?

Outcome 1: College-bound student assistants will gain knowledge of academic librarianship through summer employment.

We are quite confident that all who completed the program gained knowledge about academic librarianship. We measured this outcome by comparing the students' responses during their initial interviews at the high schools with their responses in their exit interviews. In the exit interviews, they stated that their knowledge of academic libraries had deepened. Students indicated that "they appreciated libraries more" and "they liked the introduction to different departments and types of jobs."⁹

Outcome 2: Supervisors and mentors will communicate effectively with a different generation of student employees.

Supervisors

To measure this outcome, we surveyed supervisors, mentors, and students. We were much more successful with this outcome in subsequent years than in 2005. In 2005, supervisors were very disappointed with the workplace behavior of some students. Tardiness was a large problem. Some students did not show up for their shifts. Consequently, in June of 2006 and 2007, we asked a Notre Dame HR representative to meet with all PRNGL students and speak to them about job responsibilities and workplace behavior.

Supervisors were also told to be more explicit in telling students what was expected. Following these actions, supervisor satisfaction increased.

Mentors

When surveyed, many of the mentors responded that they gained valuable insight into the minds of millennials. They enjoyed sharing their expertise and instructing students "in library research, ethics, and current issues."¹⁰

While most mentors reported having positive relationships, only 31 percent of the 2006 students felt as if they could talk to their mentors. Eight percent specifically said that they *could not* do so. It was a disappointment to learn that 15 percent of the mentees said that they could not establish a one-on-one relationship with their mentors, and 23 percent complained that they did not learn *anything* from their mentors.

Outcome 3: Students will pursue employment as student assistants in their undergraduate years.

Outcome 4: Students will keep in touch with partners/mentors periodically throughout college.

These two outcomes go hand-in-hand. We wanted interns to keep in touch to let us know if they used their PRNGL experience to find a library job in college.

Each year, invitations were sent to the interns asking them to furnish education and career data through our online participant update form.

In June 2008, in preparation for a presentation on the PRNGL program, I attempted to contact all 40 of the PRNGL interns to find out how many of them worked in libraries after completing our program. I heard from 22 (55%) of them. Thirteen (33%) of them have worked in a library in college. Eight have worked multiple years. Our goal was to have one third of our students continue to work in libraries, and we accomplished it.

Outcome 5: Students will regard academic librarianship as a profession of choice.

We still don't know the answer to this one, but we are committed to tracking students through 2011—the year that the 2007 class will complete college. One student in particular had indicated a strong interest in attending library school. This 2005 intern worked at the Indiana University-South Bend library for three years. Now, however, he is pursuing a career in business.

Conclusion

Whatever happened to the three Summer Program students I mentioned at the beginning of this article—the students who hoped to become a doctor, pharmacist, and engineer? Christian did not become a doctor. He graduated from Duke with majors in political science and sociology and is now a day trader in Austin, Texas. He worked in the Duke library as a sophomore, junior, and senior. Unfortunately, I've not been able to contact Toni, who intended to become a pharmacist. In 2003, Mainza was interested in computer science and electrical engineering. Now he's a hip hop artist in New York City. Perhaps he will consider librarianship when his hip hop days are over.

Time will tell whether any of our students become librarians. For now, we take pleasure in knowing that we were able to provide summer jobs for 40 diverse high school students, and most of them left our program with a deeper appreciation for academic libraries. Thirteen of those students were able to work in their college libraries. Eight have worked in libraries for multiple years. And many have told us that by participating in our program, they became better researchers in college.

Thus, we count our small successes and hope that our efforts ultimately result in a few more librarians from underrepresented groups. But no matter what happens, we know that when it comes to recruiting more librarians, we definitely gave it the "old college *library try!*"

Bibliography

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Jessica Kayongo, LeRoy LaFleur, and Ira Revels, "Reaching High School Students: Sowing the Seeds of Librarianship," in *Achieving Diversity*, edited by Barbara I. Dewey and Loretta Parham (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2006), 102–13.

Notes

1. Jessica Kayongo, LeRoy LaFleur, and Ira Revels, "Reaching High School Students: Sowing the Seeds of Librarianship," in *Achieving Diversity*, edited by Barbara I. Dewey and Loretta Parham (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2006), 107.

2. With the Librarian-in-Residence diversity program, the Notre Dame Libraries offer a two-year residency to recent minority library school graduates.

3. Kayongo, 107.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Institute of Museum and Library Services, Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program: Grant Program Guidelines 2. Available at www.imls.gov/applicants/grants/pdf/L21_2009.pdf (April 21, 2009).

6. The five initial partner institutions were: The University Libraries of Notre Dame; Kresge Law Library at Notre Dame; McKenna Library at Holy Cross College; Franklin D. Schurz Library at Indiana University South Bend; and the Christopher Center for Library and Information Resources at Valparaiso University. Cushwa-Leighton Library of Saint Mary's College became the sixth partner institution in 2006.

7. Laura Bayard and Linda Fisher, "Project to Recruit the Next Generation of Librarians: the First Year," *Indiana Libraries* 25(2) (2006): 10.

8. *Ibid.*, 11.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, 12. ¶¶