

Increasing Minority Representation in Academic Libraries: The Minority Librarian Intern Program at The Ohio State University

José Díaz and Kristina Starkus

In 1988, as part of The Ohio State University's campuswide affirmative action plan, the university libraries' director appointed a committee to develop an internship program for newly graduated minority librarians. A two-year program was established in 1989 to provide practical work experience in a wide variety of library settings during the first year, and the opportunity to select one area of specialization during the second year. The goal of the internship is to assist in attracting more minority librarians to academic libraries. The internship is structured, organized, and evaluated by the Minority Librarian Intern Committee. Members represent several subject areas and diverse ethnic and professional experiences. Committee members also serve as mentors to the intern, providing support, guidance, and encouragement during the program. The internship program is one of approximately seventeen such programs in academic libraries throughout the country. Although the program is not unique, it has represented a notable attempt to increase diversity within the library system, and is part of nationwide efforts to enlist underrepresented minority librarians (i.e., African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans) to the field of academic librarianship. In this article, the authors describe and analyze the program and offer suggestions for strategies to increase minority representation in academic libraries.



Despite ever-increasing attention to multicultural diversity, two decades of affirmative action programs have had minimal impact on recruiting minority librarians to academic librarianship. Cliff Glaviano and R. Errol Lam cited several reasons for such a phenomenon: inadequate commitment to affirmative action programs in higher education; sparse library literature on minority recruitment and retention—indicating low

priority interest in these topics; decreasing percentages of minority applicants in candidate pools; and “unequal employment and promotion practices and recurrent racism and incidences of racial tension” on college campuses.¹

The decreasing number of minority librarians, especially African-Americans and Hispanics, has been noted in other recent studies. Joseph A. Boisse and Connie V. Dowell observe that, in spite of many years of affirmative action efforts,

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"minority librarians filled only 9.9 percent of all positions in the Association of Research Libraries in the United States in 1986."² William E. Moen's and Kathleen M. Heim's recent profile of 3,000 library school students shows that a minority composition of 6.2 percent is even less than the percentage in present academic libraries.^{3,4} Ann Knight-Randall sums up the state of minority recruitment by indicating the composition of underrepresented minority librarians in academic libraries as follows: African-Americans 4.1%, Hispanics 1.5 %, and Native Americans 0.2%.⁵ This representation of 5.8% contrasts sharply with current demographic data which indicate that these three groups comprise nearly 22% of the United States population.⁶

The Association of College and Research Libraries' Task Force on Recruitment of Underrepresented Minorities reported in January 1990 on efforts under way to recruit and retain minority librarians. The task force identified three causes that contributed to low recruitment and retention of minority academic librarians: lack of institutional commitment to change and accountability, personal and institutional racism, and barriers to advancement and retention.⁷ The task force acknowledged that its report was just the initial phase in a long and difficult process and concluded with a series of recommendations presented to the Association of College and Research Libraries Board of Directors. These recommendations included strategies to increase the recruitment and retention of minority librarians. Chief among these suggestions is the need to establish "guidelines for entry-level trainee internships and other academic library positions for underrepresented librarians."⁸

The need for entry-level postgraduate internships has been recognized widely by the library profession. During the past few years, internships have been a part, although a small one, of overall efforts to attract underrepresented groups to academic librarianship.⁹ Joyce Wright notes that these internships pro-

vide a valuable opportunity for minority graduates to obtain practical work experience in academic libraries.¹⁰

This message has not gone unnoticed. Recently, the number of internships has been increasing and the goals for internships have been expanding. Minority internships for new graduates of library school programs now exist in at least seventeen academic libraries.¹¹ The majority of these internships are two-year commitments, with the first year offering broad experience in several areas of the library and the second year focusing on one area of responsibility geared to the skills and interests of the intern.¹² Some academic libraries, such as the University of California-San Diego, the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and The Ohio State University, have expanded beyond postgraduate internships to recruit undergraduate minority students interested in library school programs, thus adding to the number of potential minority librarians for academic positions.¹³

The program provides the opportunity for a newly graduated minority librarian to gain practical, hands-on experience in an academic library and enriches the intern's prospects for permanent participation in the library profession.

In an attempt to increase minority representation in the library profession, The Ohio State University Libraries has renewed its efforts to bring recent minority library graduates into academic librarianship. To date, its most successful endeavor has been the creation of a two-year post master's internship intended for recently graduated minority librarians. The program provides the opportunity for a newly graduated minority librarian to gain practical, hands-on experience in an academic library and enriches the intern's prospects for permanent participation in the library profession. In addition, the internship is seen as an effective way to increase rep-

resentation of minority librarians in the university's libraries. In the following sections, the authors will document the first two years of the university's program, beginning with the initial planning stages and ending with the completion of a successful two-year cycle.

GETTING STARTED

In order to build a strong and successful foundation for the program, a dynamic hands-on committee was formed to plan and coordinate the internship. Called the Minority Librarian Intern Committee, it was initially composed of five library faculty and staff representing a cross section of library departments and areas, including technical services, public services, departmental (branch) libraries, and administrative services. The committee later expanded to include the university libraries' first intern. In addition, four of the six committee members belong to an underrepresented minority group.

In coordination with department and section heads, the committee devised a two-year schedule that met the intern's desire to learn while retaining enough flexibility to accommodate sudden changes and unforeseen difficulties.

Once constituted, the committee quickly defined its goals and objectives: to structure and plan a two-year internship program for recently graduated minority librarians, conduct a nationwide search, recruit the successful candidate, coordinate all activities of the program, serve as guide and mentor for the intern, and finally, evaluate the overall effectiveness of the program and recommend changes and improvements.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

An internship program was not new to the university libraries. One was established in 1961 as part of the libraries' commitment to assisting new librarians.¹⁴ Although not a minority intern-

ship, this program continued successfully until 1971, when it ended because of budgetary constraints. The committee benefited from the experience of Celianna Wilson, former personnel librarian; Lewis C. Branscomb, then director of university libraries and supporter of the intern concept; and Jay Ladd, assistant director, department and undergraduate libraries, who provided continuity between the earlier program and the development of the current minority intern program. The principles of the intern program have endured in the current program, "to help the beginning librarian develop and contribute faster and more effectively to library service."¹⁵

PUBLICITY AND RECRUITMENT OF THE INTERN

The committee's charge was clear: to prepare a position description that was faithful to the university libraries' goals and objectives and subsequently to reach the university libraries' target audience through announcements in library and educational journals. These publications included those geared toward underrepresented minorities, such as *Black Issues in Higher Education*, *Black Caucus Newsletter*, *Reforma Newsletter*, and *American Indian Libraries*. In addition, letters were mailed to libraries of all American Library Association-accredited programs and to libraries of over one hundred historically black colleges.

After the application deadline, the committee began the difficult process of selecting three among the many highly qualified candidates for on-site interviews. A comprehensive day-long interview was scheduled in order to assess each candidate's educational background, interest in the program, commitment to academic librarianship, and professional goals.

Upon selection of its intern, the committee prepared a comprehensive schedule that would provide a thorough exposure and logical structure to the intern's library assignments.¹⁶ In coordination with department and section heads, the committee devised a two-year schedule that met the intern's desire to

learn while retaining enough flexibility to accommodate sudden changes and unforeseen difficulties. The schedule consisted of a first year that would give the intern a general overview of the library's entire operation, and a second year in which the intern would specialize in his or her area of interest.

The role of the committee did not end upon selection of an intern. Prior to the intern's beginning work in each department, the chairperson of the committee met with department heads to establish guidelines and to request a schedule of the intern's activities. Evaluation reports from department heads were requested, and committee members used these reports to restructure and improve working experiences. After joining the committee, the intern provided regular feedback and ideas for further refining the program. Since the internship was a new program, committee members also served as information sources for other library employees, explaining the program and addressing questions and concerns. In addition, committee members served as guides and informal mentors for the intern; the chairperson of the committee served as the intern's primary mentor.

FIRST YEAR

During the first year the intern receives an opportunity to acquire practical experience in a variety of library settings. The intern has a chance to work in all technical services departments (Cataloging, Acquisition, and Preservation), public services (Information Services, Circulation, Special Collections, and Language and Area Studies), the Automation Office, Collection Development, and twenty-one departmental (branch) libraries. The intern also fulfills a practicum in one of the departmental libraries. Special assignments, such as the compilation of subject bibliographies, may also be completed during the first year.

During this first year the intern also experiences the day-to-day administration of a large and complex academic library system. Specifically, the intern is

encouraged to attend and participate in a wide variety of departmental and committee meetings. The committee believes that the intern's attendance at these meetings will lead to an understanding of the decision-making process and problem-solving patterns. As a regular member of The Ohio State University Library faculty, the intern is also appointed to the committee and to additional committee work.

Minority internship programs are not intended to be ready-made answer to the current problems of increasing minority librarians in academic libraries. There is no substitute for individual achievement and, concomitantly, institutional commitment to excellence.

Additional opportunities for professional growth are made available throughout the first year. The intern receives financial support to attend local, regional, and national meetings and conferences, including the midwinter and the annual American Library Association conferences. In addition, there are opportunities to attend various instructional sessions on automation and electronic database searching, to meet colleagues in the field, and to learn about broader issues that affect librarians at other institutions. At the conclusion of the first year, the intern writes a report of his or her experiences and the committee members write an evaluation of the program.

SECOND YEAR

The second year of the internship is spent in an area of specialization of the intern's choosing. The Libraries' first intern chose to work in a departmental library, the Human Ecology Library, where she served as an assistant to the head of that library and, later, as acting head. The valuable training and managerial experience acquired from this position led to the eventual employment of the intern as the permanent head of that library.

EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

Although the university libraries experienced success with its first intern, the overall success of any newly instituted program is difficult to measure. A recently concluded survey reveals that the Association of Research Libraries, which supports minority internships, noted that their programs "had not had time to be successful as yet."¹⁷ Minority internship programs are not intended to be a ready-made answer to the current problems of increasing minority librarians in academic libraries. There is no substitute for individual achievement and, concomitantly, institutional commitment to excellence. Conclusions about the internship program's degree of success cannot be drawn from the experience of two years; however, the tireless efforts of The Ohio State University Libraries' faculty and staff have contributed to getting the program off to a good start and have helped both the intern and the committee to achieve most of their goals and objectives successfully. It would be premature to imply that the success of one internship program has changed the future outlook of minorities attempting to enter academic librarianship. However, the positive results of the first internship have been very encouraging and have led to the participation of two minority librarians for the next two-year cycle.

CONCLUSION

Academic libraries have been involved in the recruitment of minority librarians for over twenty years, with limited success. In fact, there appears to be a decrease in the number of minority students entering the library profession. Curtis Kendrick et al., point out that "while the proportion of minorities is expected to continue to grow over the next few decades, the proportion of minority librarians is decreasing . . . the profession is not doing an adequate job of attracting minority students to pursue

careers in librarianship."¹⁸ Academic libraries continue to be staffed overwhelmingly by white employees while society is rapidly becoming more pluralistic and culturally diverse. It is clear that, despite decades of affirmative action programs, the old ways of recruiting minority librarians to academic librarianship have been only marginally successful. New initiatives are needed to address the demographic changes in the work force so that academic libraries can truly represent an increasingly diverse population.

It is clear that, despite decades of affirmative action programs, the old ways of recruiting minority librarians to academic librarianship have been only marginally successful.

The Ohio State University Libraries has assumed a leadership role in recruiting minority librarians by strongly supporting the minority internship program. The commitment includes the director, who secures sufficient funding for the program, the department heads who help organize the intern's daily schedule, and the staff who train and supervise the intern's activities. All those involved in this endeavor hope that internship programs throughout the country will have a positive effect on increasing the number of minority librarians in academic libraries. The authors firmly believe that, in addition to recruiting minority librarians, libraries must go beyond the purely intellectual commitment to this goal by providing opportunities for professional advancement in order to retain minority librarians. Finally, as minority internship programs continue to increase, there is a need to share information about various programs, to evaluate their structure and training experiences, and to collect follow-up data on the long-term effectiveness of minority internship programs in attaining their goals.

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