LIS 6409 Management Paper

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Abstract

Closing the diversity divide in the librarianship workforce was about recruitment and retention. Following slow growth after 30 years of diversity initiatives, it has become imperative to realign the focus of the diversity divide with the lived experiences of diverse librarians.

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Management can be considered imperative, as it’s process or lack thereof, can make or break an organization (Ugah & Udoh, 2011). It is essential to consider many parameters when leadership is concerned. Take for instance, a review of several studies showing an increase in United States (US) minority population numbers by more than 75% since 2005 but a stagnant divide in the workforce diversity of librarianship (Jaeger & Franklin, 2007). Often viewed as community gatekeepers to information resources, librarians hold the power to that access, especially in underrepresented, ethnic and minority groups (Hosoi, Evans, & Kirkpatrick, 2020). Leading in the midst of challenging times, one must embrace consistency, awareness and the ability to hold critical conversations to address the diversity divide in librarianship. Through strategies such as engaging in diversity initiatives and advocacy, leaders in librarianship can find ways to increase racial and ethnic diversity.

Closing the diversity divide has been an issue since the Civil Rights Act, however, let’s begin by clarifying diversity. Fife, Stephens, Lyons and Huang (2021) recently reported on the ambiguity noted by academic librarian leaders when encountering the term diversity in their managerial responsibilities. A research study conducted on more than 80 academic library leaders revealed the need for greater discussion in relation to whether they had a responsibility to create diversity, as it was defined differently, depending upon the library type. The American Library Association best defined diversity by referring to it as a fusion of characteristics often exhibited in individuals, groups, societies, organizations, etc (Morales, Knowles & Bourg). Though considered inclusive in regard to ethnicity, gender, culture, religion, age, etc, diversity can also extend to power and privilege (Morales, Knowles & Bourg). In recent years, library associations have supported diversity through numerous initiatives and policy enforcements, however, increase in workforce numbers remained slow (Hosoi, Evans and Kirkpatrick, 2020).

Addressing the lack of diversity in the librarian workforce has been a concern as far back as the 1920s when the American Library Association established a Board of Education for Librarianship to address the need for minorities in the field. In fact, this very Board was an early adopter of practices to close the diversity divide in librarianship by sponsoring a training program for Afro-American Teacher Librarians (Kung, Fraser & Winn). With an ever-increasing minority U.S. population, by 2060, the expectation is that one out of every three U.S. residents will be Hispanic (Morales, Knowles, & Bourg). In fact, by the year 2045, the U.S. is expected to be a nonwhite nation for the majority of its population. This is why census data, as well as, American Library Association Diversity Counts reports revealing nearly 80% of credentialed librarians with master’s degrees are White is of such grave concern (Kung, Fraser & Winn, 2020). Only 10% of the credentialed librarians were composed of other ethnic minority groups. As the fastest growing minority group in the U.S., Latinos will represent almost 25% of the population by 2050, yet, as librarians, Latinos comprise only 3.3% of the workforce (Jaeger & Franklin, 2007). African Americans make up 5.5% of the librarian workforce though a board was established by American Library Association early in its endeavors to encourage support for diversity (Jaeger & Franklin). In 2008, Tony Greiner reported 88% of credentialed librarians were White, however he cited finances as the issue not diversity or racism, as keeping minorities out of the field. Back then, Tony felt the fact that librarianship required a Master’s degree to even enter the field was the biggest obstacle, which wasn’t related to race. I beg to differ, since 88% of the credentialed librarians at that time were White, which means financially, Whites were equipped to take advantage of the schooling for the degree, while minorities lacked access.

As a service oriented profession, it is only natural for the librarianship workforce to reflect the makeup of the communities in which they exist, therefore, they model and advocate for the needs and resources that are prevalent for their specific community. Yet, we find our communities laden with a homogeneous librarianship workforce demonstrating issues causing an inability to recruit and retain minority librarians. The Association of College & Research Libraries deemed these issues related to a lack of institutional commitment and racism, as they have been in existence for nearly 30 years (Kung, Fraser & Winn, 2020).

In 1999, the American Library Association made diversity a core value, even after the Spectrum grant was put in place to ensure minorities had opportunities to gain professional degrees (Morales, Knowles & Bourg, 2014). Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL) backed this stance by developing a number of diversity programs that enhanced professional growth at the college and research level. In 2021, we find our country faced with the question of, if there is only one Latino librarian for every ten thousand Latinos, though Latinos comprise almost 20% of the U.S. population, yet barely 3% in the U.S. ever become librarians, how can we meet the needs of communities? (Gulati, 2010). With additional programs and monies available, Gulati (2010) thought minority librarians should seek to develop a more diverse curriculum vitae to convey their access to social economic progress as well as the advantages of living and competing in a democratic society (Morales, Knowles & Bourg). This meant Library In Science programs needed to take more responsibility for diversifying the profession and owning the lack of marginalized perspectives being taken into account.

ALA and ACRL accepted ownership of the librarianship diversity workforce issues by creating signature programs, labeling diversity as a core value, attaching dollar amounts to diversity campaigns, etc. Still nearly 30 years later and the growth of minorities in the librarianship workforce remains stagnant, regardless of the initiatives in place to address the issue. Viewing diversity through the lens of the marginalized perspectives of minority librarians could provide insight to open the doors of growth for minorities in the librarianship workforce.

Hosoi, Evans and Kirkpatrick (2020) took a different approach to address diversity in the librarianship workforce, as noted in their recent report based on findings from numerous articles. The goal of their report was to find ways to build racial and ethnic diversity within the work environment through diversity trainings, developing mentor or sponsorships, and awareness building. Offering diversity training in the past was listed as a top-down method that brought little success because it did not change attitudes as employees felt forced to take the training (Hosoi, et al). As a second year media specialist and a second year member of the Florida Library Association, I was selected as a mentee for their mentoring program and have found it to be the most rewarding situation as it will go a long way towards extending my retention as a minority librarian in the field. As a mentee, the focus was on development, growing their confidence and competence. However, greater gains for women were discovered through sponsorships, as they could gain senior level positions or promotions, based on research by Ibarra, Carter, & Silva ( Hosoi, Evans & Kirkpatrick). Through authenticity, and opening up to build deeper relationships with individuals of varying ethnicities, mentors and sponsors increased their ability to facilitate healthier and stronger social relationships as well. Additionally, Hosoi, Evans & Kirkpatrick sought out diversity task forces that engaged managers in problem-solving and setting goals which lead to greater success in conflict resolution. Finally, one thing the authors (2020) of this text supported was a campaign for awareness of conscious and implicit bias sustained by critical conversations. With the Black Lives Movement sweeping the country in the past year, awareness campaigns for implicit bias trainings took precedence in many workplaces. Hosoi, Evans & Kirkpatrick suggested evaluating bureaucratic policies, even in the rules we implement in libraries by becoming aware of the bias in those alone. As a middle school librarian teaching in a Title I school, I have to question late book fees and whether or not they are even necessary.

For several decades, the focus for addressing diversity in the librarianship workforce was on recruiting minorities. Though diversity was recognized as a fundamental value in ALA, and brought an increase in minorities to the field, it did little to retain diverse librarians. Kung, Fraser and Winn’s (2020) study suggested exploring the diversity divide from the perspective of the experiences of minority librarians, especially, those with limited career advancement opportunities. Whether through feelings of isolation, lack of funding for tenure, or experiences of microaggressions, challenges faced by minority librarians have often gone unreported simply because they existed only as a part of their lived experiences. The job expectations of a librarian offered no differences on paper, according to VanScoy and Bright (2019), as they interviewed minority librarians about their experience they would discover, differences. Key revelations of VanScoy & Bright’s (2019) study demonstrated minorities experienced a sense of heightened visibility, microaggressions and the realization of the lack of privilege alongside expected representation of the minority population (2019). Several of these experiences related to work responsibilities were intended specifically for diverse librarians, for example, serving on the diversity committee. Recently, I experienced a similar situation, in which I applied to join a book selection committee but was put on the diversity committee. The most interesting aspect of that situation was all the book selection candidates for three groups were white, but diversity committee consisted of many people of color. I would consider this a microaggression at the very least. Diverse librarians in VanScoy & Bright’s study were exposed to this as well as discrimination from colleagues and patrons, which continues to be a finding even today.

Age-old, institutional bias, was examined by Higgins and Stark (2021) including implicit bias as a deterrent in the library system for exacerbating the diversity divide. These bias’ represented attitudes or stereotypes that impacted an individual’s actions unconsciously. One area of discussion Higgins and Stark offered was on the Dewey Decimal Classification system and how it addressed LGBT subjects and race from a bias perspective. Bias that exist within the library system affects the patron’s ability to successfully locate and use resources, as well as, have positive experiences during library visits (Higgins & Stark). As change agents, American Library Association (ALA), The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and Medical Library Association (MLA) all have developed resources to support the education and recognition of implicit bias. Higgins and Stark developed curriculum to reduce bias, especially for librarians working in health science information fields. Suggested methods for mitigating implicit bias were to explore your own personal bias relating to health issues or perform literature searches to develop strategies for specific health disparities for people of color, etc. Ultimately, all librarians should consider how bias is impacting their work and spend time reflecting on their awareness level and asking themselves questions.

It’s clear that there remains a diversity divide in the librarianship workforce, though ALA put preventive measures in place in 1920 and has continued to strive towards that goal. this means the problem is greater than library association entities and could benefit from the body of knowledge growing through research. Initially, recruitment of minorities to librarianship was at the forefront of the mission. Over the years, this goal has expanded to retention, providing finances, inclusive spaces, developing diversity initiatives, encompassed marginalized perspectives, courageous conversations, and finally opportunities for mitigating bias. Each library association had their reason for pushing the goal further. The Association of College and Research Libraries had a vested interest in academic librarians and the impact of institutional racism (Kung, Fraser & Winn, 2020). Health care disparities was of great interest to the Medical Library Association as they addressed diversity, prejudice and access in the MLA code of ethics (Tucker, 2019). Librarians have the distinct opportunity to act as change agents and assist in being the pathway to changing attitudes and not reliving the past.

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