

Recruitment and Retention of Diverse Groups to Librarianship

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Issue: How can recruitment and retention of diverse groups to librarianship lead to a more culturally competent profession?

The American Library Association (ALA) values diversity as a core value of librarianship, and defines it as ways we are similar and different from one another via internal and external characteristics (ODLOS Glossary of Terms, n.d.). A related term, inclusion, is defined as a world where all people are treated equitably and with respect, and are valued for their differences (ODLOS Glossary of Terms, n.d.). The relationship between diversity and inclusion in our twenty-first century global society is based on all people's access to and control of information (Black, 2018). When there is inequitable access to information resources, ethical and social justice issues arise, calling for the profession to step up to promote inclusion through cultural competence (Black, 2018). According to the ALA's Diversity Counts study (updated 2012), which uses 2009-2010 American Community Survey analyses, 12% of credentialed librarians are categorized as racial and ethnic minorities working in public, academic, and school libraries. (Diversity Counts, n.d.).

Thus, a need exists for "culturally competent LIS professionals who know how to effectively integrate social, cultural, and linguistic information" (Winston, 2009, p. 190, as quoted in Black, 2018, p. 2) into policy, education, and practice (Blackburn, 2015). This need occurs in all types of libraries – public, health, academic, and school (Blackburn, 2015). Many strategies exist for improving diversity and inclusion within the information sciences profession. They range from creating a strategic diversity plan to removing financial barriers for education

in the profession, like the Spectrum Scholarship, to recruiting and retaining people of color in the profession, including faculty (Black, 2018; Kim & Sin, 2008, as cited in Cruz, 2019).

Specifically focusing on recruitment of diverse practitioners, research sources agree that information organizations should look the way their communities look, and this mirroring should begin at the academic educational level (Black, 2018; Blackburn, 2015; Cruz, 2019; Hastings, 2015). Recruitment of people of color begins with high schoolers and college students (Black, 2018), and continues by encouraging their entrance into the profession through paid summer programs and student assistantships (Cruz, 2019). Second-career professionals who are successful in other careers or paraprofessional and support staff in libraries also provide other excellent pathways for diversity into the profession (Black, 2018; Cruz, 2019).

Despite most American Library Association-credited programs closing at historically black colleges and universities, Chicago State University has responded to the need for more diverse graduates by consistently enrolling a population of over 50% African-American and Latino students (Cruz, 2019). Its on-campus climate is described as welcoming and inclusive, and it is located within an African-American community in Chicago (Cruz, 2019). Libraries in large American urban areas have the advantage over other locales when it comes to diversity because they historically have served more diverse communities (Gollop, 1999, as cited in Cruz, 2019). Other ALA-accredited programs, especially in urban areas, ought to follow Chicago State's lead in recruiting and supporting people of color, utilizing its methods for inclusion.

Upon completion of information science formal education, recruitment and retention in the profession must be intentionally pursued. Due to the lack of diversity and general inequity of opportunities for library science candidates, those in charge of the hiring process must adopt a goal-oriented approach that allows knowledge of this inaccessibility (Cruz, 2019). This approach goes further than fairness by actively advertising in minority-based publications and other venues (Cruz, 2019). If there is no careful planning, systematic approaches, or commitment by the information organization, then isolation and underachievement is reported (Blackburn, 2015). Some academic libraries provide career experience for underrepresented groups through diversity residencies (Cruz, 2019). Further, mentoring, role models, and targeted work experience have assisted in inclusion of people of color into the library workforce (Blackburn, 2015). Finally, a “you are welcome here” environment combined with training programs for all staff to increase everyone’s cultural competency are vital to retaining librarians of color and improving diversity (Cruz, 2019; Hastings, 2015; Rivera, 2013, as cited in Blackburn, 2015).

If information organizations undertake a goal-oriented approach to recruiting and retaining people of color in the field via the practices stated above, then the cultural competency of the profession will be better for it. A commitment to diversity via community collaboration requires continuous hard work and intention, but it is worth it for everyone to feel like their voices are heard and they belong in the library.

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Office for Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach Services (ODLOS) Glossary of Terms. (n.d.).

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