

Spring 5-20-2016

Race Matters: Recruitment & Retention: Diversifying the Library Profession

Wilma L. Jones
CUNY College of Staten Island

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Recommended Citation

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http://academicworks.cuny.edu/si_pubs/79

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**Race Matters: Recruitment and Retention:
Roundtable on Diversifying the Library Profession, LACUNY Institute, May 2016
By Wilma L. Jones, Ph.D.**

Diversity and inclusion remains a significant issue in higher education institutions. The intent to be an institution that embraces diversity and inclusion is found on just about every mission statement of a higher education institution, but are institutions truly doing what is being stated? The topic of diversity and inclusion is a weekly recurring one in the Chronicle of Higher Education. During the week of the LACUNY Institute, the article “Demand surges for Diversity Consultants,” was featured, the issue stemming from a result of a “wave of student protests over racial or gender discrimination [that] has generated awareness of how unwelcoming many colleges remain for much of society” (Schmidt, May 15, 2016). A study in 2010 from the Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute (WISELI) confirms that diversity of a university’s faculty, staff, and students influences its strength, productivity, and intellectual personality. Hence many institutions are trying and aspire to ensure a diverse community at all levels – students, faculty, and staff.

Who are we as librarians in academic libraries? What do we look like, in terms of race and ethnic backgrounds, in each of our libraries presently? What do we want to look like in the future? Does the workplace of your library mirror the diversity of your institution? The overall student body of senior colleges at the City University of New York in fall 2015 was 0.3% American Indian/Alaska Native; 21.9% Asian/Pacific Islander; 23.4% Black; 24.1% Hispanic and 30.3% White. See Figure 1.



**Total Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and College: Percentages
Fall 2015**

	American Indian/Alaska Native	Asian/Pacific Islander	Black	Hispanic	White
Baruch	0.2	40.0	11.4	15.4	33.0
Brooklyn	0.3	18.6	27.1	15.0	39.1
City	0.2	26.7	20.4	31.0	21.7
Hunter	0.2	25.3	12.9	20.3	41.5
John Jay	0.3	12.7	20.8	40.6	25.6
Lehman	0.1	7.5	32.4	48.8	11.2
Medgar Evers	0.3	3.1	86.3	8.3	2.1
NYCCT	0.4	22.5	33.9	29.9	13.3
Queens	0.3	30.0	10.4	20.0	39.2
Staten Island	0.2	12.7	14.9	17.4	54.9
York	1.0	27.1	42.9	21.8	7.2
Graduate School	0.1	12.2	9.0	11.0	67.7
Journalism School	0.5	3.7	15.7	19.8	60.4
Professional Studies	0.2	11.6	37.7	23.1	27.4
Law School	0.3	15.0	13.0	15.0	56.8
Total Senior Colleges	0.3	21.9	23.4	24.1	30.3

Figure 1.

In looking at the demographics of the individual colleges, one should reflect on whether one's institution's faculty and staff mirror the demographics of their student body on their college campus; or anything close to the larger picture of the community in which one's institution is located? Everyone should do a quick self-reflection of their institution and visualize whether their library department or unit comes close to the demographic breakdown, in terms of race and ethnicity, of one's campus' student body? And who in their library is at the various ranks, e.g. dominant groups, underrepresented groups. Does race matter?

Research shows that diverse working groups are more productive, creative, and innovative than homogeneous groups, and suggests that developing a diverse faculty will enhance teaching and research (Herring 2009, Chang et al, 2003, ACE & AAUP, 2000). Programs such as American Library Association (ALA) Spectrum Scholars Program, and the Association of Research Libraries' (ARL) Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce are established programs committed to the professional development of individuals from under-represented groups; however what are each one of us doing to help minority librarians or librarians from an underrepresented group enter the workforce to keep pace with the needs of our communities; because while librarians in underrepresented groups exist, we are not seeing them in our immediate environments. For this paper, individuals from underrepresented groups include American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander.

Do we have a lack of graduates from diverse backgrounds or underrepresented groups in the field of library and information studies? Not according to the most recent statistics that we have about LIS education from 2013, as reported on the ALA accreditation website. In an article by Janes (2015), his analysis of the numbers revealed that while there is "a slight dip in numbers of minority students enrolled," there is however "an increase in members of minority groups as a proportion of all students"

Hall and Grady (2006) posit that "to be effective, recruiting for diversity has to be interlinked with a cultural shift in the institution"...one that is ready "to cultivate an environment of inclusively and mutual respect." They go on to say that "In the workplace, a behavioral change is easier to accomplish, but an attitude change requires that we really assess what is going on with us personally, with our library's culture -- one of our discomforts with diversity is that it requires a deeper level of reflection, on-going self assessment, and education (p.42). That said, if you believe your library is quite diverse and inclusive, then your work is done and you are doing the right thing. But if it is not, then roll up your sleeves, because the work of becoming a change agent in helping to increase diversity in your workplace starts with recruitment and requires follow up activities to support retention. As such, this paper recommends that the following people must play a key role in changing the culture and developing a diverse faculty -for recruitment, the Chief Librarian ¹and members of the Search committee, and for retention, everyone is responsible including the Chief Librarian, senior members, members of the appointments committee, and all other librarians.

¹ For this paper, "Chief Librarian" will be used to refer to anyone who is the head of an academic library.

RECRUITMENT

Role of the Chief Librarian

The Chief Librarian has the ultimate decision to define new positions in the library given his/her vision for the development of the library in concert with the institution's mission and vision; however this is usually done in collaboration with executive/appointments committee members. In defining a new position, how an advertisement is written makes all the difference in who will apply. Therefore, it is the Chief Librarian's responsibility to ensure that the job description is well written and that the language used does not exclude qualified and eager candidates. For example, a requirement in entry-level job descriptions often asks for professional experience or academic experience. This requirement is almost like a catch-22, in that newly graduated librarians, in particular those from underrepresented groups, may not have had any academic experience nor professional experience as new graduates of library and information studies. As such, this simple sentence disqualifies and discourages many people to apply.

Secondly, the placement of the job posting needs to be sent far and wide to reach a larger and diverse pool of applicants and to get the best candidate. It would always be wonderful to have the advertisements placed in the *New York Times* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, as well as listings in the jobs section of the Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and American Library Association (ALA); but alas, not all of libraries can afford the cost in all of these venues. Therefore, it behooves all Chief Librarians to find other ways to get the job ads out to free listservs and social media and this can be done by calling on colleagues or acquaintances who are on various library listservs. A variety of venues are library graduate schools nationwide; Associations (e.g. New York Library Association, Louisiana Library Association, Texas Library Association); or Affinity groups such as the American Indian Library Association (AILA), Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA); REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library and Information Studies to Latino and Spanish Speaking, Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA), and the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA).

Third, timing of recruitment in posting the advertisement is very important. The Chief Librarian should speak up strongly if the advertisement needs to be sent out earlier in the academic year or much later than the institution's timeline. If one is seeking an entry level position and looking for new graduates then placing the advertisement in late spring when the majority of students are graduating and closer to the ALA convention may yield a large and diverse applicant pool. However, if one is looking for someone with a some years of experience in the library field, then placing the advertisement in early fall will yield folks who are already in a job – some not looking and some hunting for a new position.

Lastly, careful selection in the "make-up" of search committee members is important, and in particular, whoever is selected as chair of the committee. Therefore the Chief Librarian must be selective in identifying a group of search committee members who are sensitive to diversity issues in order to yield the best and most qualified candidate. More importantly, the individuals of the search committee need not only be members of the Appointments Committee/Executive Committee of the Library, but rather a group with a mix that includes non-appointment committee

members. This may include a pre-tenured faculty member of the department, and at least one faculty/staff member from another department/unit of the college. With the latter member, the Chief Librarian can identify a faculty member, with consent of his/her chairperson, one who could relate to the function and/or role of the position. For example, in searching for an Acquisitions Librarian it would be great to have a Finance/Accounting faculty or a staff member from the Budget/Purchasing Office. For a Web Services Librarian, identifying a Computer Science faculty or a staff member for the Office of Information Technology may serve your search well. In my experience, what I have found to be rewarding is that the external member of the committee often becomes further engaged with library resources and programs, long after the search. In some cases, the external member may later become a mentor to the successful candidate and assists with mentoring the successful candidate in involving them in college activities and/or co-authoring publications with them, thus indirectly assisting your department with retention. Furthermore, in an attempt to recruit candidates from an underrepresented group, the chief Librarian must also ensure that the search committee is visibly diverse along race and ethnicity lines as it does, indeed, make a huge impact on the interviewee's perception of the institution.

Role of the Search Committee

The Chair of the search committee plays a critical role. If the Chair is not the Chief Librarian, as lead person of the search, the Chair must be aware of certain things that must be done, all of which are documented in the institution's recruitment package (e.g. *CUNY Search Committee Guide*). A timely and important task of the Chair is to call a halt to search if, upon review, the pool of candidates is found to be weak. CUNY's recruitment online-form requests that applicants fill in their gender and race/ethnicity so as to ascertain the breath of the pool. An underutilization report from your Office of Diversity and Compliance should be provided at the first convened meeting of the search committee. Ask for it, if not given one. This report illustrates the percentages of graduates currently in the discipline of the search, nationwide, with a breakdown in gender and race/ethnicity and it shows a comparison to the current picture in your department.

To ensure a successful process, Search Committees must make time to meet and spend at least an hour or two just on logistics and procedures of how the search will be conducted in order to maintain a fair and legal compliant search. First, as we all know, the same questions must be asked of all candidates either on the telephone and/or in the on-campus interview; but committee members should understand how follow-up questions can be asked, should the opportunity arise. Questions should be freshly constructed and aligned with the job at hand--update your reference scenario questions, e.g. replace or modify the question that asks about "your strongest and weakest points."

Second, search committees must think about multiple intelligence when developing the questions or logistics for the telephone, skype, or on-campus interviews. Each of us learns, absorbs, and perceives things differently. Some of us are more tactile, visual, literal, or auditory learners. Therefore, include in your list of questions the ice-breaker question, the scenario question, the presentation with hands-on demonstration, the quiet time for reflection—a variety of questions

that will help the committee understand the strengths and weaknesses of a candidate as they respond to the questions.

Third, the Chair is to be alert and sensitive to language used while discussing candidates. Unconscious assumptions and biases can influence interactions and affect the evaluation of a candidate. I need not give examples of generalizations one might make about a group or common social assumptions or expectations one might make, but I will give you an example of what a senior faculty member said to me--one who had been on the search committee that recruited me. He expressed that they [not sure who the "they"] were relieved that my search had garnered them three positive strikes, "Not only was I female, I was a person of color, and I was competent." The chair is to engage committee members to stay on course and move the process to a successful end. Discussions on race and ethnicity can be discussed, however unkind statements about any candidate must not be tolerated. Short readings about micro-aggressions can be distributed to members in advance of the interviews to educate them about things people might say unconsciously. A highly recommended booklet on the topic is *Benefits and Challenges of Diversity in Academic Settings* (WISELI, 2010).

Fourth, the search committee should organize the interview process to be welcoming and inviting to applicants from all different backgrounds. If possible, a full day process that might include: (i) extended time with other members of the department who are not on the search (but who may play an important role with the position being sought); (ii) lunch with several people that would include a mix of committee members, non-committee members, and the external faculty or staff members; (iv) an exhaustive tour of the building and its facilities, to include behind-the-scenes, so they may see the other employees and perhaps their prospective office space; and (v) a tour of the campus, the faculty dining area, the bookstore, campus center, auditoriums, parking availability and/or mass transportation stops.

Lastly, it is always cordial to have a prepared package with a few items that are not visible on your website for candidates to be presented to them at the end of the interview. Whether the interview went well or not, this gesture indicates to the candidate your well intentions to recruit them to your institution and thus providing them with more to learn about the institution of which you are so proud. Materials in this package may include the alumni newsletter, local newspaper (where they will find housing info); student newspaper; and flyers of past library programs -- e.g. library events promoting Italian-American Heritage; Veterans Day; International Education; American Sign Language -- programs that will inform candidates of how your library communicates with members of the campus community, will also demonstrate that all members of your community are respected and valued.

RETENTION

For every position we recruit, the intent is that we are recruiting the person who will be successful in this position and who will grow into the position, attain tenure and promotion, and remain an active member at the institution for a long time. Think about the energy that goes into getting the

line. Think about how much time was spent writing up the job description, designing the logistics the telephone and on-campus visits, the paperwork involved in getting individuals on board, or immigration work permit papers. Therefore, for any librarian who has just been blessed with a new colleague, please reflect on the retention strategy your department has in place, or lack thereof. The following recommendations are some pointed information for the following key people to keep in mind about their role with regards to supporting and retaining newly recruited faculty members, and in particular members from underrepresented groups.

Role of the Chief Librarian

Set the tone! Be the role model! With actions that support retention, the Chief Librarian has a responsibility to set the tone and be the role model to all librarians, new or veteran. For newly recruited members, I strongly suggest that the Chief Librarian schedule monthly meetings during the first year. Facetime is critical; and while one-on-one meetings should be done for everyone, regularly; it is very important for new members to meet somewhat frequently with the Chief Librarian. These meetings not only give one ample time get to know each other professionally, but it also gives the Chief Librarian the opportunity to squelch rumors, give good advice, set goals, and discourage bad habits. Monthly meetings should be done for the first year and then quarterly meetings should be done from there on. If the Chief Librarian's schedule does not permit, then this duty should be assigned to the Deputy Chief, or a senior member of the appointments committee.

Second, the Chief Librarian should seek out appropriate committees in which new faculty members can participate. Being involved in ad-hoc and formal committees within the library and in campus committees are some ways to get your new faculty engaged with other colleagues, and also a way for them to learn about the institution's culture. I am often tickled at the reaction from new faculty members when I take them along with me to their first Faculty Senate meeting. They either find the issues being addressed sensational and want to be a part of the senate, or they absolutely want no part of it.

Third, the Chief Librarian should assign mentors to all new faculty, within the department; outside the department; and if possible- find a match within the larger institution (i.e. CUNY). It is so easy for a new faculty who is not from the dominant group of library faculty members to feel isolated in a new environment. Case in point, when I was hired into my current institution twenty four years ago, I was the first hire in eight years and as such all the librarians were (in my mind at the time) at least a generation older than I was. The closest person to me in age was the Media Librarian, who when I arrived was on family leave that year. Nevertheless, some time during my first fall semester, I received a phone call from a Dr. Stanton Biddle! Dr. Biddle was calling from another CUNY Library to welcome me. I felt really special. At the time, he was Vice-President/President Elect of the Library Association of the City University of New York (LACUNY). He invited me to the LACUNY membership meeting which was a social in December and offered time to mentor me. I took his offer and ran with it. What I found out later was that welcomed every new librarian who came into CUNY during the time he was vice-president and president of LACUNY. I still felt special. But what a difference it made to me – to not only be welcomed, but also to be included!

Office location is a very important factor and may play a key role in the retention of any new faculty. Placing a new faculty in the middle of a suite space with senior and junior faculty is ideal. Having them at the end of the hallway around the corner, next to the restroom sends a loud and different message. With space at a premium at most institutions, sharing office space is becoming the norm. For some of our new faculty at the College of Staten Island, this set up is working out well, and in particular for recent cluster hires of underrepresented groups. In my case, my strongest ally in the department, is someone with whom I shared an office suite for two years prior to attaining tenure. As I reflected on this section of this presentation, I do think that her friendship, moral support, invitation to her home, and her push to get me involved in ALA when it came to New York City in 1995, all aided in reducing my sense of isolation and ultimately served as a tool of retention at an institution that was predominantly white, at the time. Despite the change in relationship from peer-peer to supervisor-subordinate, Rebecca Adler Schiff has remained an unflagging supporter who continues to give me frank and honest constructive feedback.

Fourth, the Chief Librarian should offer training opportunities to all members in the department, not just for faculty, but for all ranks of staff, to understand issues and build awareness about diversity and inclusion, among other issues. This provides on-going self-assessment and education for all who participate. For those libraries already offering such trainings to their faculty and staff, kudos to you. However, one must continue to offer new trainings and cycle back to past trainings so as to include new members and to refresh memories of veteran faculty and staff. The following are just some examples of diversity/sensitivity training opportunities that are already being done locally in many academic institutions by faculty and staff on the ground: Reasonable Accommodations training; Safe Zone training; Conflict Resolution training; Customer Service training; Anti-Sexual Assault training; and Sexual Harassment Education training. In addition, the Chief Librarian should attend and participate in these training sessions as it sends a message to the skeptic staff and faculty who were planning to sit out these training sessions. The Chief Librarian's presence also sets the tone and sends a strong message supports issues of diversity and inclusivity and will not tolerate any unwanted behavior or micro-aggressive behavior toward patrons or colleagues. Furthermore, there are leadership and international programs that provide opportunities for professional development for faculty to participate in during their career at your institution. Exposure to such programs offers faculty insights to professional and social differences within librarianship. These include programs such as Fulbright Scholars, HERS Leadership Institute, Harvard Leadership Institute, Frye Leadership Institute, and the IFLA Exchange of Scholars. All of these programs are life-changing experiences that aid in increasing effective communication among colleagues, "change attitudes, decreasing discomforts, decreasing anxiety, and increasing cohesiveness in the department" (WIESLI, 2010).

Lastly, the Chief Librarian, in collaboration with faculty and staff in the Library, should institute programs that can attract and help develop new graduates, as part of a way to give back to the field. Some examples include: (i) establishing an internship program that will provide professional experience for new graduates, especially those in underrepresented groups; (ii) creating a visiting scholars program or implementing an exchange scholar program, which can be used as a

prospective recruiting tool; or (iii) employing an underrepresented person for a substitute (temporary full-time) position so that they may gain the professional experience needed to obtain a position that requires professional and academic experience. Indeed, it would be a commitment on the part of the Chief Librarian, along with senior members to undertake any or all of the above suggestions; however any of these initiatives would contribute greatly to the professional development of someone from an underrepresented group for either your institution or another's.

Role of Senior Members

While mentoring relationships are critical, making an effort to interact with new faculty members, especially members from underrepresented groups, is just as important in settings inside and outside of the library. Hence, librarians, senior members should try to interact with new members in the campus environment, not just at the reference desk, which is just as important. Activities could include an invitation to a brown bag lunch, invitation to walk during lunch hour, invitation to seminars/events on campus to introduce them to hallmark activities of the college, etc. Senior members engaging with new faculty members in this way sends a message to new faculty that the department as a whole is interested in their welfare, and this is ultimately a way of strengthening ties between senior and junior faculty. These local social activities could be done with one or two others, and could also include another faculty/staff outside of your department.

Members of the appointments committee, to some extent, are almost always senior members in the department. While engaging new faculty in informal meetings, such as walks or brown bag lunches, this is a good opportunity to keep abreast of the candidate's professional growth and scholarly pursuits; offering support to read and review manuscripts; and/or offering to co-author an article with them. This might indicate to them your interest in the new librarian's future in the department. Most important, since teaching is not an offered course in library school, senior members must offer fair and constructive criticisms during peer observations so new librarians may become better teachers by tenure. In addition, senior members/appointment committee members can also offer new faculty members the opportunity to shadow them when they teach library instruction or when presenting at a seminar or local campus program. All of the above efforts naturally work towards the professional growth of any new librarian, in particular those from underrepresented groups.

Your Role

Everyone has a role in the retention of new colleagues. Just because one may not be in a leadership position does not mean one should not play a part in the retention of new or junior faculty members. Every librarian can assist in any way positive from locating the office for IDs to finding housing and schools in the institution's community. In addition, activities to make new members feel welcomed, respected, and valued could also include any librarian offering to co-author articles, co-present a poster-session or paper; offering to co-teach a library instruction class; and inviting them to programs taking place in the library or beyond the library walls, on walks, and brown bag lunches. Furthermore, librarians could opt to participate in sensitivity training programs to be better informed about issues of diversity and inclusion. Again, as stated in the paragraph above, one can start with local events on campus, which are surprisingly quite many.

Conclusion

Everyone has a role in the recruitment and retention of new colleagues. It is vital that as the campus community expands with students and faculty from diverse backgrounds, more effort must be made to increase and maintain a diverse group of faculty and staff. Kudos to institutions like University of Utah - Salt Lake City, University of North Carolina – Greensboro, Pennsylvania State University, and Towson University for implementing and institutionalizing diversity residency programs to recruit individuals from traditionally underrepresented and culturally diverse groups.

Reflecting on the questions again: “*Who are we as librarians in academic libraries? What do we look like, in terms of race and ethnic backgrounds, in each of our libraries presently? What do we want to look like in the future? Does the workplace of your library mirror the diversity of your institution?*,” each of us, as change agents, can do something in support each of our institution’s mandate for diversity and inclusion. In looking at my own institution, the College of Staten Island (CSI), the student body in fall 2015 was 0.2% American Indian/Alaska Native; 12.7% Asian/Pacific Islander; 14.9% Black; 17.4% Hispanic and 54.9% White. The demographic of the library faculty in fall 2015 was 0.2% American Indian/Alaska Native; 12.7% Asian/Pacific Islander; 14.9% Black; 17.4% Hispanic and 54.9% White. Using us as an example, we also have some work to do in getting our demographics of library faculty to match the student body.

	Student	Librarians
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.2%	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	12.7%	7%
Black	14.9%	7%
Hispanic	17.4%	7%
White	54.9%	79%

Figure 2. Total CSI Student Population and Librarians by Race/Ethnicity: Percentages, Fall 2015

The College of Staten Island created and implemented a five-year Faculty Diversity Strategic Plan in 2013 and we hope to see changes in 2018 for the faculty at-large, and also for the Department of the Library.

In closing, I leave you with an excerpt from the well known speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. as a reminder of how far we have come and how much further we have to go:

I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

August 28, 1963

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Wilma L. Jones is Associate Dean and Chief Librarian at the College of Staten Island (CSI), a senior college of the City University of New York. She has held the position of Chief Librarian since 2002.