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Implementing excellence in diversity, equity, and inclusion in the library workforce: Tips to overcome challenges

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Implementing excellence in diversity, equity, and inclusion in the library workforce

Tips to overcome challenges

Diversifying the library workforce is challenging,¹ with the graduation data of library and information science degrees not representing equity in demographics for diverse populations. Is this the reason for the lack of diversity among library staff or are recruitment practices not based on measurable performance standards?² Both questions call upon the library and information science (LIS) profession to address diverse staffing issues to remedy these challenges.³

Librarianship has struggled to be recognized as a legitimate profession.⁴ Similar to nursing, social work, counseling and therapy, education, etc., librarianship is considered a feminized profession or a second career option.⁵ Without professional licensing and high-stakes requirements,⁶ librarianship cannot be perceived as a serious career.⁷ Furthermore, librarianship attracts more Whites than those from other demographics.⁸ Many people, including those from diverse backgrounds, opt for professions with higher compensation. The U.S. Bureau of Labor reported that librarians' salaries did not increase similar to other professions, though they were in sync with inflation from 1990 to 2000.⁹

Advocate parity and end misperceptions

Graduate LIS education seems to have applied less effort to expanding specializations with a variety of advanced certifications, and

state licensing with renewal requirements.¹⁰ Conversely, nursing has blossomed into different specializations, including clinical nurse specialist, licensed practical nurse, nurse anesthetist, nurse educator, etc. Similarly, pre-K through 12 teachers can advance to numerous paths in education: administrators—assistant principals, principals, superintendents, etc.—or at the instructional level as literacy coaches, master teachers, professional development trainers, reading specialists, etc.

Increasingly, tenure-track positions for library faculty are being replaced by administrative positions with lower salaries and fewer benefits, thereby lowering the status of profession. LIS has been offering degree programs, ranging from associate degrees to post-doctoral research degrees, as well as special area certifications like Social Sciences, Arts, Humanities, and STEM disciplines. Oddly, questions about library science as an academic discipline are still posed.

Better compensation to encourage equity and inclusion

As of May 2018, the median compensation

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for academic librarians per the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* was \$64,130, including universities and professional schools of state, local, and private¹¹ sectors. The poverty line in New York City, for example, is currently below \$60,000 for household income. Most academic libraries require an MLS with an additional Master's in another field, a specialized professional degree, or a doctorate.¹² This requires substantial finances and time. In comparison to librarians' salaries, the 2018 median salary of \$78,470 of post-secondary teachers /assistant professors was reported.

Can salaries in librarianship support librarians and their families after attaining two Master's degrees? Let's examine this closely. In the United States, associate degrees holders in computer science and technology were paid \$70,980 as a median annual wage in 2018. Their compensation is higher than those who hold an MLS. There is no equity and competitive compensation in librarianship as compared to academic teaching disciplines and corresponding to the level of degree attainment. Compensation criteria to establish competitive salaries that match librarians' is warranted.

Recruitment of diverse workforce for social justice

Access to higher education requires systematic changes, including creating opportunities, overcoming obstacles, and implementing social justice rights.

A review of librarian job postings in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and on a variety of listservs reveals that navigating entry-level positions for librarians with international credentials and for minorities is almost unattainable under current recruitment practices. The majority of job postings require a Master's degree from an ALA-accredited institution. Job announcements do not mention the equivalent international credentials evaluated by North American academic credentialing organizations such as American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers and/or World Education Services.

In addition, the hiring committee's lack of knowledge results in resistance to recruiting

international students who hold an MLS from a U.S. institution.

LIS leaders are calling for revising the recruitment guidelines so that minorities choose librarianship. Professional associations should additionally support the hiring practices that value international credentials and licensing similar to healthcare and STEM professions.

Conclusion

Clearly, the LIS profession needs to establish standards collaboratively with the higher education accrediting boards, professional library associations, and graduate schools to sustain:

- measurable performance standards aimed at establishing social justice,
- advancement opportunities and healthier compensation based on academic and professional accomplishments,
- equity and inclusion in recruitment practices by development of certification and licenses for library credentials outside of the United States,
- parity in valuing the library as an academic department, with faculty status of librarians and a workload on par with faculty in other disciplines, and
- specializations in LIS, similar to those in education, law, healthcare, nursing, and others.

We have summarized ways to redesign and revamp performance standards and guidelines for success in hiring and retaining library staff from diverse backgrounds. From the grassroots' level to the top-most administrative levels, all stakeholders should collaborate towards the goal of increasing diversity in librarianship.

Notes

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11. “Librarians,” Occupational Outlook Handbook, <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/education-training-and-library/librarians.htm>.

12. Ibid. *zz*

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