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**In Pursuit of Diversity in the CUNY Library Profession: An Effective Approach to
Leadership in Academic Libraries**

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Abstract

Maximizing the current organizational culture and diversity/inclusion practices within CUNY libraries is crucial to retaining highly talented support staff with significant potential for future leadership roles. This research explores equity, diversity, and inclusion within the library profession, with the intention of implementing strategic frameworks to attract, recruit, and retain underrepresented groups within the University. To spotlight areas of upward mobility within CUNY academic libraries, a CUNY-wide Library Workplace Climate survey on the perceptions of diversity, universal inclusion, and career progression was conducted. The scope of the survey study compares the different perspectives of CUNY librarians, full-time library classified paraprofessionals, and part-time classified staff to measure CUNY's commitment to addressing the diversity gap in the library profession. CUNY-wide, 141 library employees participated in a survey study to uncover professional development opportunities in support of career advancement and upward mobility. Nearly 2 in 5 African American/Black library staff-members are paraprofessionals, while 13.5% are faculty. A stark contrast to 3 in 5 or 64% CUNY library faculty, which identified as White/Caucasian. The findings reinforce the need for measures to maximize workplace diversity through support-staff mentoring, guidance, and recruitment. Workplace mentorship and career development—across all levels within CUNY libraries—cultivate skills for a better work environment that can lead to promotion and successful plans for succession. Investing and sustaining structured library professional development opportunities geared towards underrepresented groups—generally in paraprofessional and student-worker roles—will help identify next generation CUNY library leadership.

Keywords: paraprofessionals, library diversity workplace management, academic libraries, higher education, professional development, succession planning

The City University of New York Libraries (CUNY Libraries)

The City University of New York academic libraries and librarians are integral partners in faculty research, instruction, and remain contributors to student success throughout the wider CUNY communities. The CUNY librarian workforce, which is predominantly White/Caucasian, has yet to be as ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse as the resources, programming, and services they provide, including the communities they serve. According to a 2016 US Department of Education report, a diverse campus leadership significantly contributes to cultural competencies, inclusive pedagogy, and fosters positive student interactions. Research shows that through education, interaction, and exposure to different cultures, CUNY stakeholders are more willing to recognize and accept the contributions of a culturally diverse society (Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2016). Given NYC's long history of remarkable cultural diversity, CUNY Libraries must commit to strengthening diversity and inclusion in the library profession within the university. There are underrepresented groups of diverse backgrounds in librarianship and library managerial positions within the City University of New York; therefore, mentoring, recruiting, and retaining support staff is imperative in establishing a legacy of leadership that offers the potential of increasing diversity in the profession and truly represent an inclusive experience. This all begins with fostering respect, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace which benefits societies by improving morale, strengthening productivity, and providing individuals the opportunity to learn from other identity groups.

The City University of New York (CUNY)

The City University of New York (CUNY)—the largest urban public higher education system in New York and the United States—plays a vital role in educating, training, and creating professional opportunities for New York's working class. Though its founding dates back to

1847, CUNY established a distinctive mission in 1961, intended to “recognizes and responds to the imperative need for affirmative action and the positive desire to have city university personnel reflect the diverse communities which comprise the people of the city and state of New York.” (CUNY, Mission, 2020). University-wide affirmative action laws, policies, and practices are committed to a diverse and inclusive workforce through equal employment, advancement opportunities, and non-discrimination of protected groups, including individuals with disabilities, covered veteran status, gender, African Americans/Blacks, Latinos/Hispanics, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and American Indian/Alaskan Natives. Additionally, Italian Americans are designated as a protected group within the University.

The CUNY university system extends over 25 campuses of pedagogical and cultural enrichment—including eleven senior colleges, seven community colleges, and seven graduate, honors, and professional schools—across five New York City boroughs. Ranked in 2020 by a *U.S. News & World Report* as one of the most richly diverse public universities in the nation; and in June 2020 a nationwide report from the Brookings Institution identified numerous CUNY campuses among the top 10 for successfully advancing student pathways to academic excellence and social mobility (Sinclair, Reber and Chenoah, 2020).

Overall, the student body population across CUNY resembles the general demographics of its neighboring New York City communities. According to a fall 2019 report by the CUNY Office of Institutional Research, university enrollment by race/ethnicity consisted of (0.3%) American Indian/Alaska Native, (21.2%) Asian/ Pacific Islander, (25.2%) Black, (30.2%) Hispanic, and (23.1%) White/Caucasian (CUNY, Office of Institutional Research, 2020). In contrast, the Office of Human Resources Management compiles and disseminates yearly CUNY workforce demographic reports for purposes of recruitment and diversity representing the entire

CUNY workforce. Data from a fall 2019, University-wide Staff Facts report shows that CUNY has had marginal progress throughout the years in faculty diversity across campus-wide disciplines. Although the University is increasingly implementing strategies to boost faculty diversity, White/Caucasian accounted for 48.7% in executive job functions as well as (57%) full-time instructional positions, while federal protected groups identified as (12.1%) Black/African Amer., (2.2%) Puerto Rican, (8.1%) Hispanic/Latino, (14.1%) Asian, Native Haw/Other Pac. Isl. (0.0%), American Ind./Alaska Native (0.2), Two or More Races (0.9), and Italian American (5.3%). Data further demonstrates discrepancies in University-wide classified (paraprofessional) staff groups with (20.3%) White/Caucasian, (35.1%) Black/African Amer., (8.1%) Puerto Rican, (20%) Hispanic/Latino, (10.9%) Asian, (0.2%) Native Haw/Other Pac. Isl., (0.3) American Ind./Alaska Native, and (4.1%) Italian American. Nevertheless, the data comparison between federal protected groups in instructional titles make-up (42.9%); yet full-time classified staff titles top over (79.6%) of the 6,008 workforce; and part-time classified staff comprise (77.3%) of 8,227. The City University of New York website proclaims, “to enhance its national standing by continuing to build a diverse community that enriches its academic environment” (CUNY, Diversity & Inclusion, 2020).

The classification of various title designations within CUNY library services include Library Faculty in professorial titles as well as, Lecturers, Instructors, and Higher Education series. Full-time classified civil service in Gittleson title groups, include CUNY Office Assistant and CUNY Administrative Assistant, and part-time classified College Assistant titles are rank as non-competitive hourly labor. Throughout this research study, the terms paraprofessional and/or support staff refer specifically to full-time classified civil service staff and are utilized interchangeably without distinction. Integral to achieving greater CUNY Libraries workforce

diversity, and upward mobility of library classified and hourly staff titles that mirror the talent pool already in place. It is vital for CUNY library administrators to take steps in cultivating skills of current employees from underrepresented groups that prepares them when leadership and management opportunities arise. Furthermore, effective CUNY leadership embraces and values cultural differences/diverse identities; from top/down, and throughout the library department.

American Library Association (ALA)

Founded in 1876, the American Library Association (ALA) was established to “provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all” (ALA, mission & history, 2020). ALA has maintained a longstanding commitment to creating, embracing, and celebrating a more diverse and inclusive library profession, while also advocating for social justice. According to ALA’s, *Core Values* (2006), diversity represents one of the fundamental principles of modern librarianship. The association “encourages libraries to develop internal and collaborative initiatives that will assist library personnel from diverse backgrounds in identifying and preparing for career advancement and management opportunities” (ALA, B.3 Diversity, 2010) within libraries. Yet, marginalized groups are represented at significantly lower rates in the library profession; this could be attributed to these groups not actively pursuing library science degrees and major concerns with nationwide recruitment efforts. Matters of increasing ethnic/racial diversity, equity, and inclusion in the profession continues to be top priority within CUNY and national library associations, which can aid in leading institutions to allocate necessary resources for these purposes.

As a former library paraprofessional, the primary investigator is interested in understanding different perspectives in support-staff mentoring, recruitment, and upward

mobility within the CUNY library profession. Despite considerable efforts to increase workplace diversity, ethnic minorities and people who identify as a non-binary gender continue to be the lowest represented in the profession, and conversely remains one of the highest demographics in support-staff roles. Recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups set the stage for the upward mobility of library support staff and can help build inclusive environments in librarianship. The primary research objectives of this study are: (1) to assess the CUNY Libraries workplace climate and diversity survey; (2) to explore the level of diversity and inclusion in CUNY Libraries; (3) to identify implications for future growth; and (4) propose strategic measures that will help increase workforce diversity in libraries University-wide.

The research addresses mentorship, recruitment, retention, and succession planning, which are paramount to the author, as a “Latina,” “librarian of color,” and “a part of an underrepresented group” with hopes of closing cross-cultural gaps in the profession. Recruiting librarians from underrepresented groups positively influences the communities in which they live. The core values of librarianship rests on the organization, evaluation, accessibility, and delivery of information—regardless of format, language, cultural views—reflecting the richly diverse communities which libraries serve. Library profession associations recommend “encouraging the professional development of co-workers and fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession” (ALA, Professional Ethics, 2017). Historically, library studies have shown individuals of color are predominantly in paraprofessional roles. CUNY librarianship should mirror the diversity seen in NYC populations and in broad library collections (e.g. books, periodicals, audiobooks, and electronic formats, which are readily available to everyone). Through mentoring, recruitment, and retention initiatives, CUNY library support-staff are more likely to consider pursuing librarianship, which will ultimately help

increase diversity in the profession. It is the responsibility of academic library institutions and professionals, including librarians, to provide information access, and user-centered services/systems based on community needs, expectations, and interests.

The researcher conducted a CUNY-wide survey on diversity, universal inclusion, and career progression by comparing library personnel perspectives, and the dynamics of their individual organizational structure (see Appendix). For decades, efforts to increase diversity in the library profession via numerous scholarships, fellowships, (e.g. Spectrum, Mosaic Fellows) and advertising to diverse constituencies has maintained a slow and steady progression. Yet, these diversity efforts do very little to attract, retain and promote marginalized groups and attempts continue to be substandard in hiring for upper-management ranking positions in academia. CUNY statistics show disparities in librarian and supervisory roles, which also pose a problem in serving CUNY's diverse student population. How approachable do librarians seem—in the eyes of students—when they aesthetically look nothing like the community they serve?

In 2012, the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), an organization that represents academic libraries and library employees in higher education published the *Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries*. These standards call for libraries to “continue being indispensable organizations in their campus communities that must reflect the communities they serve and provide quality services to their increasingly diverse constituencies” (ALA, Diversity Standards, 2012). It is imperative that greater efforts be made to achieve a culture that focuses on diversity in recruitment, services, and collection development that are up to par with the current cultural climate.

The Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Queens College is the only ALA-accredited program within the City University of New York (CUNY). In 2009, the Queens College, master's program in Library Information Science (MLIS) reached a total student enrollment of 535 (ALISE, Library and Information Science Education Statistical Report, 2010). The student population breakdown by racial/ethnic origin was White/Caucasian 74.6% (n=399), Asian/Pacific Islanders 9.2% (n=49), Hispanic/Latino(a) 8.2% (n=44), and Black/African American 7.5% (n=40). For comparison, a 2019 report by the CUNY Office of Institutional Research & Assessment showed Whites/Caucasian accounted for 33.1% of Queens College overall student enrollment, in contrast with over two-thirds of the federally protected groups (10.3% African Americans, 22.4% Hispanics, 33.9% Asian/Pacific Islanders, and .3% American Indian/Alaskan Natives). Furthermore, this report shows there were 271,242 total students enrolled throughout CUNY. Out of the total number of students enrolled CUNY-wide, approximately 23% or 62,702 identified as White/Caucasian, while Hispanic/Latino(a) represented 30.2%, Black/African American 25.2%, Asian/Pacific Islander 21.2%, and American Indian/Alaskan Natives .32%. Despite CUNY and Queens College student enrollment being progressively diverse, the only ALA-accredited graduate library school program within CUNY has remained nearly unchanged for over a decade among the White/Caucasian racial group being the majority. There is a stark contrast between overall CUNY student population and graduate library program enrollment at Queens college. Consequently, White/Caucasian students have consistently represented the greatest percentage of the total annual Queens MLIS enrollment over a considerable period; however, no existing data confirms whether CUNY library staff graduate this program. Although national library associations and information science education programs are actively striving to expand diversity and inclusion across all levels of the

profession, efforts begin with establishing internal and external recruitment strategies that help reduce the gap. This research demonstrates a need for changing the proportion of library faculty to underrepresented groups and creating impactful strategies to enhance a more diverse library profession.

Research Methodology

Survey Study:

This research involved the collection of data from human subjects through a CUNY-wide Library Workplace Climate survey on the perceptions of diversity, inclusion, and career progression (see Appendix). The knowledge gained from this investigation will promote mentorship opportunities that inspire library support-staff upward mobility. This study examined library staff perceptions of diversity with goals of achieving a more representative workforce in library leadership roles. Overall, diversity, mentoring, and recruitment can harness individual potential as well as create a robust cultural climate in the library profession and society. The investigation was designed to acquire knowledge that may aid individuals in similar settings in the future.

This exploratory qualitative study helps gain in-depth information of the workplace climate at CUNY libraries in an effort to improve diversity, level of satisfaction, and talent retention. The survey may determine how library leaders can proactively address the deficiency of support-staff attaining library professional roles. The 54-question survey included creating a simple Google assessment form, which consisted of drop-down, multiple choice, check box, Likert scale, and an open-end, general comments section at the end (see Appendix).

The web-based survey was distributed to 585 members via email to CULIBS-L, a subscription-based listserv for all CUNY librarians, library staff, University-wide. Additionally, respondents also received a survey invite via their direct work emails obtained from the CUNY

Libraries public interface. Out of 585 CUNY Libraries listserv members, 141 responded to library study to uncover professional development opportunities in support of career advancement and upward mobility. The researcher selected voluntary response sampling that requested participants to join the sample study. To achieve a desirable response rate, an additional reminder email was sent two weeks later. For a broader perspective, the study encouraged responses from participants in CUNY library instructional, classified, and hourly (over 18 years of age) title groups within their respective departments.

Table 1*Details of the City University of New York Library Position Types*

Characteristics	Part-Time	Paraprofessional	Faculty
What best describes your gender identity?			
Female	74.2% (n=23)	69.4% (n=25)	59.5% (n=44)
Male	22.6% (n=07)	22.2% (n=08)	32.4% (n=24)
Non-Binary/Third Gender	–	2.8% (n=01)	2.7% (n=02)
Prefer Not to Disclose	–	5.6% (n=02)	4.1% (n=03)
Other	3.2% (n=01)	–	1.4% (n=01)
Hispanic, Latino(a), or Latinx origin?	41.9% (n=13)	66.7% (n=24)	20.3% (n=15)
How would you describe yourself?			
African American/Black	16.1% (n=05)	38.9% (n=14)	13.5% (n=10)
American Indian/Alaska Native	3.2% (n=01)	–	–
Asian/Asian American	22.6% (n=07)	8.3% (n=03)	10.8% (n=08)
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	–	–	–
Two or More Races	9.7% (n=03)	22.2% (n=08)	4.1% (n=03)
White/Caucasian	22.6% (n=07)	13.9% (n=05)	63.5% (n=47)
Prefer Not to Disclose	12.9% (n=04)	11.1% (n=04)	4.1% (n=03)
Other	12.9% (n=04)	5.6% (n=02)	4.1% (n=03)
Length of Service?			
0-3 years	74.2% (n=23)	19.4% (n=07)	28.4% (n=21)
4-6 years	12.9% (n=04)	22.2% (n=08)	13.5% (n=10)
7-9 years	6.5% (n=02)	5.6% (n=02)	6.8% (n=05)
10+ years	6.5% (n=02)	47.2% (n=17)	50.0% (n=37)
Prefer Not to Disclose	–	5.6% (n=02)	1.4% (n=01)

The City University New York system consists of three types of institutions: senior colleges (associate, bachelor, and master's degrees); community colleges (associate degree); and graduate or professional schools. *Note.* Table 1 highlights the need for inclusion of non-binary response options in data collection with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

This investigation demonstrates 141 CUNY library workers, including 65.2 % (n=92) females, 27.7% (n=39) males, (2.1%) non-binary/third gender, (3.5%) preferred not to disclose,

and (1.4%) opted to self-identify as transgender, and genderqueer (See: Table 1). Although individuals of non-conforming gender maintain anonymity, this population should be represented in large-scale surveys and statistics. This highlights the importance of also integrating gender identity and sexual orientation measures into nationwide surveys, such as the Census 2020. Table 1 clearly illustrates women predominantly make up the CUNY libraries workforce. Expanding the collection and analysis of gender data helps better enforce anti-discrimination laws, which supports diversity in the workforce. Nearly (64%) White/Caucasian participants represent the CUNY Library faculty workforce, while part-time and paraprofessional roles are considerably lower. Conversely, data for African American/Black faculty represents approximately (14%), and (10.8%) for Asian/Asian American. Although the data reported close to (40%) of the participants were Hispanic, Latino (a), or Latinx origin; only (20.3%) represent CUNY librarian faculty, of which (3.5%) also declared White on the survey. This means that a percentage of the Hispanic or Latino population self-identify and count as White/Caucasian on national surveys. Race/ethnicity data reveal African American/Black and Hispanic, Latino (a), or Latinx populations account for most of the library paraprofessional roles within CUNY.

Research Questions & Instruments

The research will explore the following underlying queries to address cultural disparities in the CUNY library profession with hopes of establishing strategic methods to close the enormous gap: RQ1: How does mentorship improve workplace performance and perception regarding the diversity gap? RQ2: What are the necessary steps libraries can take to address the diversity gap and enhance employment opportunities? R3: Which organizational diversity initiatives support upward mobility in the CUNY library profession?

Review of Literature

Taking measures to increase diversity among CUNY Library faculty produces authenticity to the personal experiences and perspectives of underrepresented personnel. The following literature covers three major challenges in academic librarianship. While the study is not intended to be an exhaustive review, it nevertheless serve as a working draft that can guide additional diversity efforts. First, a need for recruitment, retention, and advancement opportunities for diverse groups within library services in higher education. Second, providing academic, personal, and professional mentorship that help retain talented paraprofessional classified staff for leadership roles. Third, developing future leaders by providing training and development prospects for the CUNY libraries' existing talent pool that aligns with the organization's culture to help address succession planning challenges.

Recruitment, Retention, and Promotional Opportunities:

Historically, the library profession in higher education and the US continues a longstanding pattern of being predominantly non-Hispanic White and female. According to a 2017 report from Ithaka S+R and Mellon Foundation “academic libraries have traditionally struggled to address problems of equity, diversity and inclusion.” It is very important to recruit people from diverse backgrounds in order to provide an intellectually stimulating environment that ensures fairness and equal opportunity. Notwithstanding their efforts, library organizations have not always yielded success in attracting, recruiting, and retaining socially excluded, marginalized, underrepresented groups. As April Hathcock (October 7, 2015) succinctly stated, “it is no secret that librarianship has traditionally been and continues to be a profession dominated by whiteness... that can extend beyond the realities of racial privilege to a wide range of dominant ideologies based on gender identity, sexual orientation, class, and other categories.” Notwithstanding that underrepresented groups may not actively be pursuing advanced degrees in

librarianship or may not recognize it as a viable profession, due to the misconceptions of what librarians do professionally. Academic librarians simultaneously juggle numerous responsibilities: researcher, instructor, administrator, and collaborator. Yet, paraprofessionals share in these duties without formal post-secondary training, title and salary required for the position. Unfortunately, paraprofessional, and classified library staff positions offer limited career advancement, stagnant compensation, and benefits that do not help raise the attractiveness of a library career. Library administrators must invest considerable efforts and resources in faculty attritions, staff upward mobility, resembling the proactive approaches to the recruitment and hiring process. According to Vinopal (2015), well intentioned recruitment efforts are not making any meaningful difference in diversity, as libraries are also grappling with library faculty retention. The stagnantly disproportionate underrepresentation of marginalized groups in CUNY library faculty ranks, curtails any prospects of mentorship for individuals considering the profession.

Ortega and Ramos (2012) took an in-depth look at the history of recruitment and mentoring in library services to identify why there is a lack of progress. The article recognized limited progress in satisfactory library professional representation and suggested collaborative efforts with leading library associations and stakeholders to proactively enhance diversity. National associations, such as the ALA, has five ethnic Affiliates which advocate for a more ethnic and diverse mix in the profession. These affiliates provide a sense of community/belonging for librarians and library staff from underrepresented groups at any stage—school, public, academic, specialize libraries—in their career spanning across various institutions from public to school to academia. The article recommended a study by Jennifer Grady based on best methods for attracting minority students. The study's result proved

scholarships targeted to underrepresented groups as well as “official recruitment programs” were most successful. A 2007 *Diversity Counts* report compiled by ALA stated:

The attrition rates of library assistants... merits attention as it suggests that even those employees most available and likely to be recruited into LIS education and professional practice, or at least promoted into support staff positions offering higher level responsibility, are not being provided with the career ladders necessary to leverage and training within the library.

However, Ortega and Ramos (2012, p.109) clearly pointed out questions of recruiting marginalized federally protected individuals are a constant topic of discussion because there are still many unanswered questions. The authors stated, “the fact that the library and information profession is disproportionately White/Caucasian when compared with the population boost of many minority groups in the United States, especially Hispanics at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, calls for the need to find more effective ways to increase diversity in our field to serve a more multicultural and multilingual society (Ortega & Ramos, 2012, 106).”

CUNY offers higher education benefits for Classified Title employees toward the completion of a degree and to enhance knowledge, skills, and abilities to achieve their career goals. As stated on the CUNY Professional Development and Learning Management Office (PDLM) Website “investing in the professional skills, academic knowledge, personal development and cultural proficiency of” all college employees... “CUNY is able to attract, develop, and retain a high-performing workforce that continues to meet the University’s goals” (CUNY, Learning & Development, 2020). For example, tuition fee waiver benefits allow educational development opportunities to eligible CUNY full-time classified Gittleston titles for undergraduate, graduate, and certificate level courses taken at any CUNY campus. Hourly classified employees who become members of District Council 37 and work 17.5 hours or more are eligible for \$800 in tuition assistance once every calendar year. Additionally, PDLM supplies workforce individual development tools that assist employees with career goals and guide

supervisor succession planning. Rothwell et al. (2015) explained “career and succession planning programs help ensure the continuity of talent needed to preserve economic growth and organizational viability” (preface, ix). This requires a mutual partnership between the employee and supervisor to help them navigate career progression. According to the CUNY PDLM site, supervisors can utilize the succession-planning template to ensure that employees are learning the necessary skills and competencies to move into leadership positions as they become vacant (CUNY, Learning & Development, 2020). Widely publicizing these CUNY-wide practices can help make the profession more desirable, and in turn, more diverse candidates will be willing or interested in becoming librarians.

Transforming workplace culture would attract the most qualified employees and prepare the next generation of leaders in library services. The City University of New York invests in hiring with the intention of retaining valuable employees to grow and succeed in the job and/or profession. Nixon (2008, p. 249) stated, in order to “grow your own” leaders, succession planning techniques should: identify staff with interest and potential for upper-level positions, determine the gaps in knowledge, and set up training and mentoring programs so that employees are ready to assume leadership positions in the near future. Raising awareness of the hidden internal talent within the CUNY libraries workforce will enhance staff recruiting and broaden retention. Mentoring, training, and retaining internal talent is more beneficial and cost-effective than hiring external candidates. Warraich, Ameen, & Malik (2019) stated, “many organizations spend a lot of time and money on finding the right person for a position, but often forget, or do not realize, that keeping them is as critical as hiring them in the first place” (p. 570). Staff retention and succession planning goes hand in hand, especially in unpredictable situations where employees quit, retire, or unexpectedly pass away, leaving the organization with no

direction. A driving force behind employees leaving their job/profession prematurely is the lack of developing clear career pathways in library services. The article also pointed out academic library hiring decisions, once made, are difficult to reverse or undo, and can prove to be costly in terms of time, resources, and service quality (Warraich, Ameen, & Malik, 2019).

Mentorship:

Connor (2009) concisely indicated, “an academic library’s single most valuable resource is its workforce. Without educated, well-trained, and motivated librarians and library staff, an academic library program is ill-prepared to meet the needs of its clientele or the challenges that face institutions of higher education (preface, xiii).” Mentoring in the workplace provides incredibly valuable developmental support for employees looking for career advice or direction. This form of coaching fosters professional development, networking support, and career interactions between professional, paraprofessional, and part-time library staff. Campbell-Meier and Hussey (2016) declared, “opportunities for professional development and mentoring could provide the incentive student workers need to consider and explore the career opportunities in LIS environments” (p.748). CUNY offers mentorship opportunities for newly emerging and experienced librarians which help strengthen their knowledge-based, marketability, and organizational skills. According to Zhu (2012) in academic libraries, although professionals have had opportunities for career advancement via promotion and tenure, fewer systems have been in place to recognize the contribution of paraprofessionals to libraries or to encourage their professional development (p.130). Through CUNY-wide initiatives, library paraprofessionals and part-time classified staff would likely benefit from structured mentoring support that encompass the promotion of academic and professional success. The article further discusses that “establishing career ladder programs to recognize paraprofessionals’ skills and abilities to

function in the same capacities as professionals in a variety of duties and tasks is critical” (Zhu, p.130). Mentorship and career guidance—at all levels of the academic institution—is a beneficial, cost-effective strategy for engaging, sustaining, retaining classified professional staff, and ultimately investing in the workforce. Lifelong relationships are cultivated through collaborative mentoring partnerships that foster long-term guidance and an inside view of possible future leadership roles in academia.

CUNY, like many educational institutions, provides junior faculty with professional development and senior faculty/mentor designation within the department that have experienced the tenure process; however, this generally does not apply to library adjunct faculty or those on a substitute line. Senior colleagues serve as advocate and adviser to junior faculty by helping them acclimate through the process of teaching, tenure/promotion, and create collaborative workspaces that align with department and college culture. Harrington and Marshall (2014) stated, “formal mentoring relationships are often those organized by administration with the expectation that both mentees and mentors will participate (p.763).” This requires that both mentor and mentee work symbiotically to establish strategic short-term and long-term goals that align with career responsibilities to achieve professional success. All constituents working in academia—across every level—benefit from developing mentor-mentee relationships that trickle down from leadership, to employee, to student. Harrington and Marshall (2014) also suggest, mentored “professionals were more likely to believe that they would advance in their careers... a clear indicator of career success (p.764).” Workplace mentorship opportunities provide library employees with gradual professional development that encourages the pursuit of a career in librarianship.

Career guidance in the workplace positively influences employee self-confidence, engagement, job commitment and overall satisfaction, which play a key role in employee retention and succession planning. The authors suggest having a mentoring presence in higher education provides employees with feelings of value, increased commitment, and may reduce turnover in the organization (Harrington & Marshall, 2014, p.765). Best practices in academic library talent development begins with cultivating a college-wide culture and environment that encourage structured and informal peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities. Hall-Ellis and Greal (2013) indicated, “mentoring, coaching, and professional development empower staff for movement up organizational career ladders as part of succession planning and management” (p. 587). It is critical for the CUNY Libraries leadership to collaboratively implement effective employee performance practices that include structured support-staff mentoring and succession planning initiatives for next-generation leaders.

Succession Planning:

Academic libraries across the globe encounter challenges with maintaining the pace of emerging trends, budgetary constraints, and employee turnover. Charbonneau, D.H. and Freeman, J.L. (2016) declared, “it is imperative for libraries of all types to be responsive to the forecasted changes in the demographics of the library workforce... succession planning is critical to the management of libraries in order to identify, develop, and retain talent in the workplace” (p.887). CUNY library administrators need to finance long-term performance and leadership development opportunities for library paraprofessionals and part-time student workers. Strategic and succession planning play crucial roles in the foundation of academic library leadership and governance in higher education. Crumpton (2015) poignantly identified “factors that highlight the importance of having a succession plan program in place can include: an aging workforce or

expected retirements in the near future; needing more ethnic diversity to better balance staff with users; changing labor markets including demographics and locations; shortage of needed skills, knowledge, education, or experience; and emerging trends that impact current workforce attributes” (p. 42). Strategic training and development for succession planning in CUNY academic libraries involves much more than providing employees with development opportunities.

Huynh (2016) stated, “succession planning processes are reflected by identifying the requirement of the next leader generation; evaluating internal human resources; staffing relevant internal candidates or external recruitment; training or mentoring; and evaluating the impact of succession planning” (p. 760). Long-term leadership development requires cultivating employee outlook on the preparation of competencies, skills, knowledge, and expertise for higher positions within the organization. Advancing the career pathways for CUNY library support-staff works simultaneously with recruitment and retention of an already diverse group. Farrell (2017) pointed out that aligning key library employee development consists of “working at the senior management level to develop an appropriate budget for organizational learning that maximizes return on investment” (p.6). CUNY invests in helping all their employees reach full academic and professional potential. An effective career management and succession planning process for all positions within CUNY consists of selecting from the internal talent pool. This research concurs with other studies by Rothwell (2010) and Huynh (2016), which identify potential talent for advancement opportunities, ongoing candidate evaluations of key strengths and weaknesses, and developing/sustaining employee competency-based training programs—across all levels—of CUNY library workforce.

Findings Overview

While there was a lack of statistics found in the literature regarding library personnel throughout CUNY, workplace climate and diversity survey provided an overall faculty/staff/part-timer snapshot. Without this data, the primary investigator would have found it difficult to create a clear caption of the CUNY library workforce structure. The table demonstrates various disparities across library ranks, as nearly 2 in 5 African American/Black library staff are paraprofessionals, while 13.5% are faculty. Moreover, half of the faculty respondents have the longest tenure of 10 years or more in the position, which limits new opportunities for paraprofessional and part-time staff. Two-thirds of the paraprofessional staff identified as Hispanic, Latino(a), or Latinx origin. Over 3 in 5 or 64% library faculty identified as White/Caucasian, a stark contrast to 11% Asian/Asian American faculty as well as 31% of part-time and paraprofessional library staff. This should open further discussions of enhancing practices and a call to action within CUNY to ameliorate mentoring and retaining paraprofessional library staff.

For the purposes of this research, the four primary categories that help shape rewarding experiences for employees at work are: Culture & Environment, Training & Development, Work Satisfaction, and Leadership & Supervisory Support. To identify a constructive assessment, a random selection of statements was asked repeatedly and from different perspectives.

Culture & Environment:

The role of academic libraries is continuously evolving to foster collaborative and inclusive organizational cultures for all individuals in higher education. 57.4% (n=81) of the respondents agree that their library department attracts, recruits, retains diverse students, faculty, and staff; while, 21.3% (n=30) disagree, 16.3% (n=23) selected neither agree nor disagree, and 5% (n=7) opted for not applicable. However, 46% (n=63) respectively stated their library

department engages in targeted recruitment to attract a diverse slate of candidates; though, 21.3% (n=30) disagree, 26.2% (n=37) chose neither agree nor disagree, and 6.4% responded not applicable. While, 64% (n=90) answered they have a clear understanding of the promotion and/or career trajectory in their department, only 45.4% (n=64) agree they have the potential to reach full career pathways in their respective departments, and 28.4% (n=40) either disagree or strongly disagree. This statement ranked higher in agreement among faculty 58.1% (n=43) and part-time classified staff 45.2% (n=14), contrary to classified paraprofessional staff with 47.2% (n=17) disagreement.

Training & Development:

One of the various roles of academic library leadership is to facilitate an environment which fosters the professional growth and development of all library personnel. Most of the respondents 51.1% (n=72) claimed their library department offers professional development opportunities through conferences, scholarships, online and in-person workshops; 34% (n=48) of the surveyed participants agree and 17% (n=24) strongly agree. Nearly one-fourth of the respondents or 23.4% (n=33) disagree with the statement; while 20% (n=28) remained neutral, and 5.7% (n=8) indicated not applicable. Upon further exploration among faculty, 64% (n=47) voiced having access to professional development opportunities. Yet nearly 42% (n=15) of classified staff and 29% (n=9) of part-time staff either disagree or strongly disagree. 41% (n=58) of the respondents agree their library offers mentorship opportunities on a departmental or college level, while 36% (n=51) disagree and 18% (n=25) remained noncommittal. When asked to rate their agreement to the statement that their immediate supervisor provides mentorship on a departmental or college level, nearly 60% (n=83) agree and 29% (n=41) either disagree or strongly disagree. Conversely, 44% (n=62) of respondents disagree with the statement that their

department has an employee mentoring program, 17% (n=24) neither agree nor disagree, and 4% (n=6) said not applicable. 47% (n=67) of the respondents stated their job provides activities that support networking strategies to develop partnerships, while 28% (n=39) disagree with the statement.

Work Satisfaction:

Individual feelings of workplace fulfillment and high productivity achievement play a key role in enhancing library employee retention. The majority of respondents 70% (n=99) expressed agreement with the statement “you feel your ideas are valued by your immediate supervisor,” an additional 16% neither agree nor disagree with the statement, while (2%) stated it was not applicable. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents 64% (n=90) agree or strongly agree with the statement “you have a clear understanding of the promotion and/or career trajectory in your department,” while 21% (n=30) disagree with statement, neither agree nor disagree 10% (n=14), or stated not applicable 5% (n=7). 64% (n=89) of respondents agree with the statement “you are given the opportunity to participate in workplace decision-making,” while 20% (n=28) disagree. 60% (n=84) of respondents agree with the statement “you are satisfied in your current position,” though 17% (n=25) strongly disagree or disagree, and 23% (n=32) neither agree nor disagree. On the other hand, just 46% (n=64) agree with the statement “you have the potential to reach full career pathways in your department,” while 29% (n=40) of respondents disagree, and 21% (n=29) neither agree nor disagree. Among classified staff, 22.6% of part-time classified staff disagree with the statement “you are satisfied with how your library department is managed” to some extent compared to 41.7% of paraprofessionals. Conversely, 58.1% of part-time student workers agree (29% strongly), while just 54.1% of faculty agree.

Leadership / Supervisory Support:

Leadership and supervisory support play a vital role in improving recruitment and retention practices in support of an intellectually stimulating academic environment. 60% (n=84) of the surveyed respondents said they endorsed the statement “your library leader(s) contributes to a positive work environment,” versus 15% (n=20) opposing, 24% (n=34) remained neutral, and (2%) indicated not applicable. Close to three-fifths, 58% (n=82) claimed their immediate supervisor gives constructive feedback on their work performance, and 18% (n=25) stated their opposition. Conversely, 26% (n=26) disagree with the statement “you are comfortable giving ‘upper feedback’ to library leadership,” even though 55% (n=78) endorsed the statement. Overall, 59% (n=83) of respondents consider their immediate supervisor(s) leads by example, 22% (n=32) disagree, 16% (n=23) neither agree nor disagree, and 2% (n=3) stated not applicable. Among part-time classified staff, 77.4% (n=24) agree, whereas 55.5% (n=20) classified paraprofessional staff and 52.7% (n=39) faculty favored this statement.

All things considered; job titles may have dramatically influenced attitudes toward the selected four categories. Broad-ranging opinions, attitudes, and responses differed among respondents across title groups. Overall, the findings revealed that of the forty-five Likert statements, (93%) showed satisfaction ranging from (50%-75%) in Culture & Environment, Training & Development, Work Satisfaction, and Leadership & Supervisory Support section. According to respondent perception and satisfaction level, the areas with need for improvement focused on whether their library department has: an employee mentoring program (44%); creative strategies for promoting and enhancing inclusion (36%); and ongoing diversity awareness/education programs (39%).

Limitations

The CUNY Library Workplace Climate and Diversity Survey utilized a six-point Likert scale. Participants ranked a series of job-satisfaction statements based on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed. The rating options were as follows: SD– Strongly Disagree, D– Disagree, NAND– Neither Agree nor Disagree, A– Agree, SA– Strongly Agree, N/A– Not Applicable. While there are numerous factors that influence job-satisfaction, like pay and job security, the author decided to focus on four specific categories, based on a review of previous studies. The six-point scale had no midpoint which indicates that neither *agree nor disagree* option responses were higher than expected. Although respondents had the convenience of selecting *neither agree nor disagree* and *not applicable* options, this also increased the probability of respondents avoiding the opportunity of declaring an opinion.

Workplace assessments produce useful information and limitations that offer considerable insights for future survey studies on diversity. Neutral and not applicable categories are often viewed as limitations considering the author must discern whether responses address concrete circumstances or perceptions of the participants. Respondents may interpret there are no opportunities because information was not communicated appropriately, which signals a lack of marketing/communication, but not a lack of actual opportunities. Other participants may have answered based on unfair assessments by their supervisor, or due to receiving poor work performance evaluations, which workers may perceive as limitations on career advancement opportunities.

Recommendations

Progress and advancement are shown in a representative and diverse collective knowledge and workforce reflecting the cultural diversity of CUNY students and the nation. Given the current state of the library profession, this research tackled different management

approaches with the intention of CUNY-wide collaborative initiatives to increase paraprofessionals transitioning into professional roles in library services. Yet, the fundamental points or key issues of this article propose strategic methods which would prove valuable in enhancing CUNY libraries workforce diversity. Theoretically, these research assessment methods will develop paraprofessional intellectual knowledge, enhance recruitment and retention for a more diverse population, and achieve a continuity of lead positions on a continuous basis.

In view of the foregoing circumstances, future research involves gathering CUNY library paraprofessional and part-time staff statistics that reflect whether these individuals enroll in the Queens graduate library program. Prospective efforts should also explore how many CUNY library staff-members graduate and go into librarian positions within the university. Creating an open line of regular communication between CUNY library leaders, library faculty, and graduate programs in the field encourages talented library support-staff who are also students to apply for vacant adjunct or full-time positions post-graduation. Historically, marginalized individuals currently working in CUNY Library services are high-potential candidates for librarian positions, if provided with guidance from a mentor with similar lived experiences, professional development, and additional tools to pique an interest. The following recommendations can be applied in other similar academic environments:

- Establishing or enhancing the library department's 3-5-year strategic plan which includes succession management as a preparation method for unannounced employee departures, unforeseen circumstances, such as termination, resignation, or an untimely death.
- CUNY-wide structured mentorship programs that promote professional growth and advancement opportunities for library paraprofessionals and part-time classified staff in support of their respective department's mission, values, and policies. This includes but is not limited to:
 - Fostering diversity and inclusion in support of career upward mobility.

- Promoting effective communication and staff development.
 - Providing strategic and succession planning.
 - Matching willing participants with senior employees to impart intellectual knowledge to aid mentee in attaining professional development and career advancement.
 - Peer-to-peer guidance, career enhancement, leadership, and management development.
- Offering opportunities of title reclassification for paraprofessionals and part-time classified working additional or new responsibilities outside of their general responsibilities due to high volume of staff turnover.
 - Exploring library leadership's role in encouraging and stimulating informal mentoring relationships between faculty and staff (part-timers included), which builds lifelong connections.
 - Empowering employees to partake in self-directed education and career development.
 - Enhancing outreach strategies that specifically target library paraprofessional and part-time classified staff.
 - Strengthening CUNY-wide library outreach specifically intended for K-12 students, transfer students, first-generation college students of underrepresented groups.
 - Frequently advertising and circulating CUNY-wide or collegewide professional development, continuing education/learning initiatives, which may also be available to student workers (e.g. monthly or semesterly departmental flyers, newsletters, or service brochures).
 - Regularly marketing promotional job opportunities within respective CUNY library departments via work email or CUNY employee listserv.
 - Require all CUNY library employees (librarian, paraprofessional, and part-time staff) to sign up for CULIBS listserv for all CUNY librarians and library staff, University-wide.

Conclusion

CUNY upholds the need for ongoing and purposeful climate assessments that identify best practices in achieving a more diversified library workforce. Establishing targeted cross-

training, mentoring, and retention initiatives throughout library units that are focused exclusively on career goals and developing future library leaders. These practices contribute to staff motivation through leadership support and the productive exchange of ideas that empowers individuality, share work responsibilities and accolades. Continuous organizational climate assessments in academic libraries help mobilize workplace communication, broadens collaboration efforts that transforms culture similar to comparable institutions.

For CUNY library faculty to be change agents, they must aim to empower students and paraprofessional staff to thrive in library disciplines, then pursue in leadership roles in academia. Existing discussions on library workplace demographic diversity emphasizes one subset of larger inclusivity issues and embrace identities of marginalized populations. It is of utmost importance to enhance recruitment by restructuring the workplace environment that encompasses positive attitudes and perceptions of academia. Fostering workplace mentorship and inclusion across all CUNY campus communities—no matter rank or title—contribute to supportive work environments that encourage individual strengths, collaborative teamwork, and overall productivity. The objective is to aid in transforming and transitioning paraprofessionals and part-time classified staff to professional growth and career pathways in librarianship. It is essential to acquire different perspectives, to emphasize the significance of promoting excellence, creativity, and leadership within the college community. Finally, there is an overall cost-benefit to staff retention as they develop professionally and move up in rank, which would open opportunities for part-timers of diverse backgrounds.

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Appendix

Library Workplace Climate and Diversity Survey

Educational Institution:

☐ 11 senior colleges, ☐ 7 community colleges ☐ 3 graduate, and professional schools

What best describes your gender?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Non-Binary/Third Gender
- ☐ Prefer Not to Disclose
- ☐ Other _____

Hispanic, Latino (a), or Latinx origin?

☐ Yes ☐ No

How would you describe yourself?

- ☐ African American/Black
- ☐ American Indian/Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian/Asian American
- ☐ Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Two or More Races
- ☐ White/Caucasian
- ☐ Prefer Not to Disclose
- ☐ Other _____

Position Type: Employment Classification

- ☐ Adjunct
- ☐ Faculty (Assistant, Associate, Full, etc.)
- ☐ Paraprofessional Staff (Classified, aHEO, etc.)
- ☐ Part-Time Staff (College Assistant, Student Assistant, Work-Study, etc.)
- ☐ Other _____

Length of Service:

- ☐ 0-3 years
- ☐ 4-6 years
- ☐ 7-9 years
- ☐ 10+ years
- ☐ Prefer Not to Disclose

Work Area: (select all that apply)

- ☐ Access Services (circulation, reserve)
- ☐ Technical Services (cataloging, material processing, acquisitions)
- ☐ Reference Services
- ☐ Archives & Special Collections

- ☐ Administrative Offices
- ☐ Information Technology
- ☐ Other _____

Do you attend any of the following types of professional development programs hosted by a library association?

- ☐ Conferences
- ☐ Workshops
- ☐ Networking socials
- ☐ Meetings
- ☐ Other _____

If not, Why?

- ☐ Not Informed
- ☐ Cost
- ☐ Offerings Not Applicable
- ☐ Unable to Get Release Time at Work
- ☐ N/A
- ☐ Other _____

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following six-point Likert statement:

☐Strongly Disagree, ☐Disagree, ☐Neither Agree nor Disagree, ☐Agree, ☐Strongly Agree, ☐N/A

Your department offers support for employees who feel affected by stereotypes from their supervisor(s)

Your library department has creative strategies for promoting and enhancing inclusion

Your department has ongoing diversity awareness/education programs

Your library department has effective mechanisms to address bias-related concerns from staff

Your department has an employee mentoring program

Diversity training programs are available at all levels of your organization

Your department offers employee training opportunities at all levels

Your library offers mentorship opportunities on a departmental or college level

Your department shows a commitment to reducing bias through library programs, workshops, and services

Your library department engages in targeted recruitment to attract a diverse slate of candidates

You have the potential to reach full career pathways in your department

Your library department engages in targeted recruitment to attract a diverse slate of candidates

Your job provides activities that support networking strategies to develop partnerships

The salary for your position is commensurate with your experience

Your library department takes steps to reduce bias during the hiring process

Your library department takes steps to reduce bias during the hiring process

Your library department offers professional development opportunities through conferences, scholarships, online and in-person workshops

You are acknowledged by upper management for going above and beyond your job description

You foresee a long-term commitment to your position

You are satisfied with how your library department is managed

Your library department employs the best practices in support for workforce diversity

You are comfortable giving "upper feedback" to library leadership

You receive recognition from library upper management

Your library leader(s) contribute to a positive work environment
Your library department recruits in support of diversity and inclusivity of underrepresented groups
Your library department attracts, recruits, and retains diverse student, faculty, and staff
Your immediate supervisor gives constructive feedback on your work performance
Your immediate supervisor provides mentorship on a departmental or college level
Overall, your immediate supervisor(s) lead by example
Your work environment motivates you to achieve peak work performance
You are satisfied in your current position
Your library leader(s) contribute to a positive work environment
Your current job or duties nurture your passion
Your library department maintains an atmosphere of professional and social inclusiveness
You are happy in your work environment
Your workplace embodies a culture of mutual respect
Your campus encourages good working relationships among students, faculty, and staff
You would refer or encourage others to work in your department
You are given the opportunity to participate in workplace decision-making
You feel your ideas are valued by your department
You have a clear understanding of the promotion and/or career trajectory in your department
Your library department encourages good working relationships (i.e. student-staff, paraprofessionals, and librarians)
You feel your ideas are valued by your immediate supervisor
Your daily interactions on campus reflect a strong support for diversity and inclusion
You are able to balance work and personal time

Which areas within upper management need improvement? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Communication
- ☐ Scheduling
- ☐ Hiring
- ☐ Leadership Attitude
- ☐ Training
- ☐ Other _____

Are you familiar with your library department's diversity policies and practices?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you feel it is necessary to improve employee performance, culture, and morale?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you seeking to further your career within your department?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you seeking to further your career path in library services?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Feel free to provide additional comments or questions not covered above. _____