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Seeding the Vision: Designing a Minority Librarian Residency Program - Part 2

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Introduction

This is the second article describing the design and implementation of a Minority Librarian Residency Program at the University of Tennessee Libraries. The first article, which appeared in the spring 2004 issue of *The Southeastern Librarian*, provided the background for "Seeding the Vision" and outlined the process used to identify, recruit, and interview qualified librarians for the residency positions. In this article, readers will learn about the final steps in the search process and hear from the residents themselves about their experiences to date.

Seeding the Vision, part 2

At the conclusion of the interviews, the search committee began its deliberations. Faculty and staff evaluations proved insightful. It was clear that all five finalists were not only qualified but also genuinely interested in our program. Reaching consensus proved to be difficult. We were fortunate, however, that the search committee had worked together for more than a year as members of the Libraries' first Diversity Committee. This experience enabled us to address our differences of opinion in an open, honest, and respectful fashion. Library support staff felt comfortable disagreeing with faculty colleagues.

In the end, those candidates with recent experience in academic libraries along with a demonstrated interest in research received the highest ratings. The committee remained split,

however, in its choice of the two finalists. Finally, in desperation, the committee asked the dean if we might hire three, instead of two residents. After consultation with university administrators, the dean agreed to fund the third resident from a restricted (endowed) account.

At the end of June 2003, the head of library personnel called and offered the positions to three individuals. All responded positively. Following the same procedures used during other faculty searches, the search committee chair telephoned the other finalists and sent letters to the remaining candidates informing them of the Libraries' decision. Although one of the candidates was local and available (even anxious) to start work immediately, we felt it was important for all three to begin at the same time. We needed enough time to complete the necessary paperwork, locate appropriate housing, select moving companies, and move two of the residents to Tennessee. We also needed to plan an orientation program for the residents. After consulting the successful candidates about their preferences and needs, we determined that the residents would begin employment on September 1, 2003.

Communication with and between the three residents began immediately after they accepted the positions. Each was given an e-mail account and encouraged to get in touch with us and, more importantly, with one another. Members of the Diversity Committee offered assistance in various ways: some offered to find housing; some offered furniture; others offered to introduce them to the community; one person

offered to meet them upon their arrival in Knoxville and to help them get settled.

One of the first tasks was to locate appropriate office space for the residents. Our goal was to put them in close proximity to one another as well as to other librarians. Since the majority of our library faculty works in Reference & Instructional Services (RIS), we identified and configured office landscaping to accommodate all three residents in this location. Although the residents would be rotating to various teams, RIS became “home base” for the first year of their residency. We purchased laptops that would enable the residents to move easily from one work area to another.

Orientation: The Libraries’ Perspective

In collaboration with the Diversity Committee and the Libraries’ team leaders, the head of personnel created a month-long orientation program for the residents. The first order of business was to orient them to the library, to their personal computers and their e-mail clients. The calendar included not only opportunities to spend at least a half-day in each team, but also included tours of branch libraries, visits to the campus museum, Black Cultural Center and the International House. During the first week, the Diversity Committee hosted a Welcome Event in the library, providing all staff with an opportunity to meet the residents. Everyone was encouraged to invite the residents to lunch and to include them in as many activities as possible. The primary goal of the orientation was to give residents enough information about each team within the Libraries so that they could select their first rotational assignment before the end of the month. In retrospect, the orientation accomplished much more than originally intended.

First, the orientation allowed the residents to become comfortable with their new surroundings before actually being asked to “perform.” It also gave them an opportunity to develop mentoring relationships with both the head of personnel and former head of Diversity Committee. The fact that they began working at the beginning of fall semester enabled them to participate with other faculty and groups in events and activities that occur at this time of year. Along with other librarians, they attended a

fall social at the dean’s house; a lunch with Library Friends (donors); and participated in various library and campus workshops.

Second, a month-long orientation allowed the residents to get to know one another—not only as colleagues but also as friends. Each brought to the residency program different skills, talents and experiences. They learned quickly that as a group (or team), they were able to accomplish more than as individuals. Even prior to their arrival, the residents agreed to serve on several library committees. This early involvement was another important factor in their acclimatization.

Finally, orientation enabled the residents to spend time in each unit and team so that, by the end of the September, they had enough information to select a first rotational assignment.

Orientation: The Residents’ Perspective

Being a new employee at a large academic institution such as the University of Tennessee can be overwhelming and intimidating. It was especially daunting for us as residents.

Our work as Minority Resident Librarians began with a month-long orientation arranged specifically for us. There were a number of welcoming events, including receptions and lunches with various colleagues and staff. Each day, we benefited from the opportunity to learn about the functions of various departments in the Libraries. We were happy to observe that the faculty and staff in such a large system interact with each other well, collaborating both formally and informally to deliver user-centered services to the university’s clientele. Attending some of the administrative meetings and workshops, and meeting Library Friends, faculty and staff gave us insight into the organizational structure of the Libraries. But the orientation did not just introduce us to the Libraries’ units and departments but also to other areas of interest around the campus, such as the McClung Museum, Black Cultural Center and the International House. It was beneficial to learn our way around the university, not just the Libraries. Although it was an exhausting process, we felt the orientation accomplished its goal, thanks in part to the support of the program coordinator, the Diversity Committee, and our

departmental colleagues. We learned more about the Libraries in that first month than most employees learn in their first year.

The First Rotation: The Libraries' Perspective

At the conclusion of the orientation, the residents began their first rotations. Two of the three preferred to work in functional areas of the library with which they were already familiar. The third chose to work in The Studio which provides media equipment, computers, software, and consultation services for the creation of media-enhanced instructional products. The mentors and team leaders did not feel that it was in the best interests of the residents, nor the program, for the group to remain together during their rotational assignments. As library staff reflected on this, it was the right decision. Teams benefited from the assistance provided by the residents; residents benefited from the one-on-one training and the opportunity to meet staff and faculty working in other areas of the Libraries; the program benefited from the positive impressions and contributions that each of the residents made during the first rotational assignment.

Working with the rotational supervisors, each resident wrote a job description and set goals in preparation for the performance review that occurred at the end of the three-month rotation. Successes during the first few months produced a level of confidence that helped them strive for and achieve even more than anyone had expected during an initial rotation. They taught classes, made presentations, attended conferences, and even wrote a grant proposal. In November, almost half-way through the first rotation, the residents were already thinking about their choices for their second rotation.

The First Rotation: The Residents' Perspective

Kawanna Bright

Kawanna Bright received the Masters of Library and Information Science from the University of Washington in June 2003. At UW, Ms. Bright was an active participant on the Information School's Diversity Committee and created several websites.

Admittedly, my choice for the first rotation of my residency surprised everyone. Instead of selecting Reference and Instructional Services, an area where I had worked previously at the University of Washington, I chose to work in The Studio, a multimedia lab that offers services to the UT community ranging from video production to website development. I was enthralled with this new area, not having seen one in a library before, and curious about how it functioned and the role of the academic librarian within this area. No one had expected any of the residents to select this location during the first year, but to the credit of the Libraries, and The Studio staff, I was welcomed with open arms.

The Media Services Librarian in charge of The Studio worked diligently to help design an orientation to the area that would introduce me not only to The Studio as a place, but to The Studio's place within the Libraries' system as a whole. As the newest member of the Studio staff, everyone from the head of the department to the undergraduate student assistants willingly shared their expertise with me. I participated in all aspects of The Studio, from assisting patrons to participating in staff meetings.

Working in The Studio presented both expected and unexpected challenges for me as a new librarian. My ability to help library patrons was dependent upon my knowledge of the software and equipment. Learning how to operate workstations running both Mac and PC platforms along with the various applications was especially challenging. At the same time, I agreed to prepare a subject guide for a new and evolving area called Media Arts. With no background experience in this area, I had to complete extensive research to determine exactly what the study of Media Arts involved, how it was taking shape at UT, and what resources were the most useful and available on the subject. With the help of the Media Services Librarian, I prepared a subject guide for the Media Arts. (<http://www.lib.utk.edu/refs/mediaarts>)

What I do not want to overlook about my first four months on the job are the other assignments that also contributed to my overall understanding of the Libraries. For example, I served on three committees: the Staff

Development Advisory Committee (SDAC), the Diversity Committee, and the Dean's Faculty Advisory Committee. As an active participant in all three groups, I made the most of the opportunities presented to me. As a result, I gained both teaching and leadership experience. I designed and taught a three-part workshop on Macromedia Flash for the staff and faculty of the Libraries and was given the opportunity to coordinate the development of the Libraries' Culture Corner, a collection of resources that showcase titles from the Libraries' collection related to the many dimensions of diversity.

I think back now on the orientation and my four months in The Studio and realize how much I have learned in such a short time. I also know that the first five months were only the beginning – there is still so much to experience, and I welcome it with open arms.

Jayati Chaudhuri

Jayati Chaudhuri earned her MLIS from the University of Rhode Island in fall 2002. Ms. Chaudhuri holds a second masters in geography from the University of Calcutta, India.

Rotating into different departments of the Libraries is a unique component of the residency program. This exclusive experience gave the other two residents and me a minimum of three real-life job experiences in different facets of the Libraries. I chose to spend my first rotational assignment in the Cataloging unit, which is part of Technical Services and Digital Access. To begin my training, the team leader demonstrated the various components (modules) of the integrated system Aleph. Next, I learned how to use the Cataloger's Desktop and the Library of Congress Classification Web. As part of my database maintenance responsibilities, I searched for records in OCLC, exported them to Aleph, changed and modified the records in Aleph, and created the holdings and item records. In addition to cataloging monographic materials, I also learned how to catalog electronic theses and dissertations. Since I have experience and interest working with cartographic materials, the final phase of my training included an introduction to cataloging resources that pertain to this particular format. My first rotational experience was rewarding for several reasons. Not only did I learn how to catalog various

material formats, but I also gained an understanding about the workflow of the cataloging and acquisition functions. Finally, while the training benefited me, I, in turn, was able to make contributions to the team.

As a resident, I receive both formal and informal mentoring from the resident program coordinator and the Training Librarian, who is also a member of a minority group that is underrepresented in the library profession. In addition, each time I rotated to a new department, my departmental supervisor automatically became my mentor as well. There are also opportunities for development of informal mentoring relationships with the senior librarians in the Libraries who are interested in supporting minority librarians in the early stages of their careers. Mentoring has played an important role in helping me strengthen my skills and expand my knowledge base.

Serving on committees is an essential component of the UT Libraries' residency program. Currently, I serve on both the Libraries' Diversity Committee and the Staff Development Advisory Committee. I am always encouraged and guided to become involved in various committee activities inside the library, on campus, and in the profession.

Maud Mundava

Maud Mundava received her MLIS in spring 2003 from SUNY-Buffalo as a Fulbright Scholar. She holds a BA in history and two postgraduate diplomas from the University of Cape Town, South Africa and previously worked as a librarian at the University of Zimbabwe.

Although I found it difficult to choose a first rotation, after consultation with the program coordinator and the other residents, I chose Reference and Instructional Services (RIS).

The opportunity to work closely with the public excited and challenged me. I spent most of the first week in RIS with the department head who helped orient me to the team's functions, staff, and services. By the second week, I was providing information and other services to the patrons at the main reference desk. In addition, I was working in the Digital Reference Center, responding to virtual requests received via the

chat room, e- reference, and telephone. Since training is a very important component of the program, I worked closely with the Social Sciences Coordinator and other senior librarians as well. Their collective advice and support and in some cases one-on-one instruction contributed to the knowledge I needed in order to make a successful transition to a new environment and a new position. Throughout the rotation, the head of the department was readily available to assist me with any question that I had.

In addition to learning the functions and activities of RIS, I was also encouraged to learn about the operations of the Libraries. As a result, I joined task forces and committees, and attended departmental and general faculty meetings. These opportunities enabled me to meet other librarians outside the department and to learn what was happening in other areas of the Libraries. With the help of the head of RIS and the Social Sciences coordinator, I created a plagiarism guide for students (<http://www.lib.utk.edu/instruction/plagiarism>).

This assignment helped to sharpen my web design skills. Unfortunately, a three-month rotation was not enough time for me to teach classes, even though I have a passion for teaching and training our users. However, I had the opportunity to observe classes taught by other librarians, and in the near future I will be conducting a workshop for students on “Understanding Plagiarism.”

Having briefly discussed my participation on committees, it should also be noted that, as residents, we are expected to participate not just in departmental committees, but in any other professional activities that help the library function as a system. To this end, I joined the Diversity Committee and the Staff Development Advisory Committee at the time of my appointment. They are proving to be eye-openers for me. In addition to individual initiatives, I am involved in team work with the other residents. We are involved in grant writing and have submitted two conference proposals for the Tennessee Library Association and for the National Diversity Conference. Participation in these activities has further enhanced my writing and communication skills. Above all, they have allowed me to contribute positively to the organization’s priorities.

The Minority Librarian Resident Program has not only facilitated a training ground for me, but also a professional forum to actively contribute to the organization and the university community at large. Working in the reference department was exciting, stimulating and challenging. Interacting with the public has strengthened my desire to keep up with the current developments that enable user satisfaction. I feel privileged to be part of a community that is committed to quality and excellent service to our users. What I have learned so far will form the basis of lifelong skills and expertise that I can always cherish and be proud of in my career.

The other two residents and I agree that it is advantageous to have more than a single resident in the program. As peers, we are comfortable sharing our ideas and our experiences. The ability to work as a group, not just as individuals, is mutually beneficial. Thus far, we have worked together on a number of projects including a library workshop presentation and local and national conference presentations and projects. Recently, we applied for and won the 2004 Cultural Diversity Grant offered by the Library Administration and Management Association. Working as a team, we have developed a web site that will enable us to create a platform to share information about residency programs in other libraries and to link past, present and future residents across the country.

Conclusion

At the time of this writing, the residents have completed the rotational phase of the program. All three have selected to work in Reference and Instructional Services during the second year of their residency. Staff, faculty, and administrators marvel at how much they have accomplished. Their successes in both the work environment and the library profession have convinced the Libraries’ administration to move ahead with plans to recruit and hire a second class of residents. The seeds have been sown, watered, and fed. Plants are almost fully grown. Soon, buds will form. Stay tuned for the final chapter to be written next summer when the flowers are bloomed and fertilized, resulting in a new seed pod.