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Guest Editorial: From School Librarian to Diversity Resident

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GUEST EDITORIAL: FROM SCHOOL LIBRARIAN TO DIVERSITY RESIDENT

Laura Tadena

As one of the inaugural Diversity Residents at the University of Texas (UT) at Austin, I am excited to have the opportunity to open the Library Diversity and Residency Studies (LDRS) Journal and highlight my experience as a Diversity Resident. My experience as a resident has been instrumental in helping to shape both my professional and personal goals, so when the opportunity to write an editorial piece for the LDRS journal presented itself, I knew that I had to be a part of this work.

BACKGROUND

In the spring of 2018, I was working as a school librarian in Texas while finishing up my Master of Science in Library Science with a School Librarian Certificate from the University of North Texas (UNT) at Denton. It was my last semester, and I was excited to graduate and be done with all of my course work. Even though I was tracked for school librarianship, one of my goals was to one day work as an academic librarian. What I had not realized was that because of my school librarianship track and lack of experience in higherED, it would be challenging to make that transition from school librarianship to academic librarianship.

Most positions in academic libraries require a minimum number of years of academic library experience, which was an experience that I did not have. I had over ten years of experience working as an educator in Texas, but without the higher education experience, I would most likely never get past the first round of applications. So when I came across a residency position with The University of Texas Libraries (UTL) at The University of Texas at Austin, I eagerly applied for the job. The position offered me the opportunity to rotate through different areas of UT Libraries and acquire a variety of new skills,

including those centered around leadership development. It was also the first time I had come across an academic librarian position where I met all the requirements and believed that this was my chance to make the cross over into academia.

Resident librarian positions were new to me, so I spent a few days researching the position before applying for the job. I graduated from UNT and was going on interviews for school librarian positions when I got an email about the first round of interviews for the resident librarian positions with UTL. Still thinking it was a long shot, I continued my research. I learned that resident librarian positions had been around for years, so I was shocked by the limited amount of scholarship that was freely available around the topic of residencies. When I applied for the job, I was a graduate student; however, by the time recruitment came around, I had graduated and had limited access to subscription-based databases and, therefore, have limited access to published information around residency programs and trends in librarianship.

This is the case for many recent graduates making open-access journals like the LDRS Journal that much more critical to our field. The LDRS Journal is an open-access, peer-reviewed journal that will examine questions concerning library diversity programs and highlight the work that institutions are doing to develop future library leaders.

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS LIBRARIES DIVERSITY RESIDENT PROGRAM

UT Libraries residency program began as a pilot program and as a result of careful planning and organizing, will be a recurring position for the foreseeable future. The program was designed as a two-year term appointment, where residents would be hired in a cohort model, meaning that

they would start with two diversity residents and then recruit another resident every year after that. The intent is that there will always be a second-year resident to serve as a mentor to the new, or first-year resident. The residency program is also rotation based for the first year, where residents "rotate" through different departments of the library based on personal interest and professional learning goals. In the second year, residents then focus on a specific area or specialty for the duration of their residency.

MY EXPERIENCE AS A DIVERSITY RESIDENT LIBRARIAN

For the first year, I wanted to translate the work that I did as a school librarian into an academic setting. I designed my rotations intending to close what I believed to be "experience gaps" while building on my strengths. My rotations consisted of the following: User Services, Digital Initiatives, Liaisonship in STEM & Social Sciences, and Assessment. Through my first year, I was able to gain a broader understanding of the work that librarians do, both here with UT Libraries and at other academic institutions. The rotation experience provided me the opportunity to identify areas of librarianship that I enjoyed and valued as well as gave me the chance to discover things that I perhaps would rather not be in my job description.

After a year of reflection and under the guidance of my residency coordinator and mentors, I was able to design my second-year placement in our Teaching and Learning Services Department as the Liaison Librarian for Health and Social Sciences. In this role, I work as part of the Teaching and Learning Engagement Team supporting instruction, consultations, and collection development in a specific subject area. My goal for this year was to obtain experience providing instruction and research support, to teach with a variety of databases and resources, create online learning objects, and gain expertise in collection development.

In addition to the professional development that I gained throughout the

program, I was also receiving a variety of support from my mentors, which included leadership discussions, guidance, and assistance with navigating the national professional community. Our program also focused on developing our leadership skills, which include being able to meet with our Vice Provost and Director of UTL. Our biannual meetings provided us the opportunity to get to know our director on an individual level and share our experiences with them. We also had the chance to ask questions around mentorship, leadership, and the future of academic libraries. As part of a mentorship series, our library director and resident coordinator also organized meetings with a variety of leaders and librarians working in Austin, Texas.

THE DIVERSITY ALLIANCE INSTITUTE

Our resident cohort started the first week of the fall semester. It was a busy time of year, and I was excited to see the campus so alive with an energy that usually comes at the beginning of every academic year. The two of us in our cohort had no idea what we were supposed to be doing, and I personally felt unprepared for the position. What I did not realize was that there was a whole group of resident librarians experiencing similar feelings across the nation. Fortunately, this feeling did not last too long because we were scheduled to attend the Diversity Alliance Institute hosted by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro at the end of the week. We were informed that the institute would help orient us to the profession, gain insight into residency programs, and connect us with a network of fellow diversity residents. So days after starting a new job, I packed my bags and headed to Greensboro to attend a weekend institute.

Throughout a long weekend, we were learning and growing together. There were approximately thirty-five residents from across the United States and Canada, consisting of a range from newly hired residents to residents over-a-year into their program. We learned about the ACRL Diversity Alliance from Dr. Jon

Cawthorne, engaged in workshops led by Dr. Irene Owens and Dr. LaTasha Velez, and participated in discussions that were facilitated by former resident Dr. Jason Alston, Dr. Martin Halbert, and Gerald Homes. Over the weekend, we also had built-in networking time, where we had the chance to share stories and experiences and tour the International Civil Rights Museum as a group. We concluded the institute with an address by Wanda Brown and planned to continue our conversations on a newly created listserv.

I returned to my campus and felt prepared for the year and ready to start my rotations. I reached out to our cohort multiple times throughout the year and even started an online community for resident librarians with my colleague here at UT. We were asked to return to the Diversity Alliance Institute as an Institute Mentors, which we happily accepted. Attending the Diversity Alliance Institute for a second time helped me reflect on my first year as a resident and provided me the opportunity to support new residents that were starting their programs. I also was able to reflect on the activities that I did during the first institute to the second institute. It was great seeing how I grew both in my understanding of residency programs and in my professional confidence.

TAKE AWAY

The institute ended up being one of the most meaningful experiences of my professional career. It is incredible feeling like I am part of a community where everyone is rooting for your success, and I still feel as if we are all working towards a common goal. The connections that I made attending the institute and during my residency continue with me today. These librarians are my conference buddies, my writing partners, my support, my mentors, my aspirations, and, most importantly, my friends.

The attention to detail that UTL put towards preparing and developing the program helped shape my experience as a resident librarian. It provided me the opportunity to discover other areas of librarianship and build on

my existing professional strengths and passions. For all the people that officially and unofficially mentored me during my residency, thank you. Your support and guidance are what helped me get through one of the most challenging yet fulfilling times of my career.