4-22-2020

Recommendations for Diversity Residency: Summary of a Mixed Methods

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIVERSITY RESIDENCY PROGRAMS

Summary of a Mixed Methods Study

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This article represents a summary of my doctoral research findings. These findings are based on my dissertation data results and other data in the library literature on diversity residencies, and are intended to offer some suggestions on planning, implementing and hosting library diversity residencies most effectively.

OVERVIEW

In February 2017 I defended my dissertation, entitled "Causes of Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction for Diversity Resident Librarians: A Mixed-Methods Study Using Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory." (Alston 2017) Though diversity residencies have existed for over 30 years, empirical data about diversity residency programs is scarce, with most of the literature on these programs being anecdotal recaps of experiences written either by former diversity residents or by residency coordinators. My dissertation was the first published study on diversity residencies to analyze quantitative data with inferential methods, and it is the most in-depth study of diversity residencies completed to date.

My goal in writing this executive summary is to assist host institutions in building and maintaining diversity residencies that provide the best possible experiences and opportunities for the residents, based on available data.

PROBLEM

Diversity residencies are term-limited appointments for newly-graduated professional librarians that aim to aid in retention of ethnic minority practitioners by enhancing their skill sets and employability, while giving them practical librarian experience. However, this goal of retention hinges on providing the new librarians serving in diversity residencies with experiences that are satisfying and rewarding to the resident, as well as preparatory for the resident's next professional appointment.

Because of the lack of empirical research on diversity residencies, there tend to be oversights in execution and other preventable errors at many hosting institutions, with the various hosting institutions often committing the same errors. These errors can potentially stunt the professional growth of the residents or cause their residency experiences to be bad enough that retaining them in the profession becomes more difficult. In the next section, common challenges and suggested solutions based on dissertation survey results and qualitative analyses are detailed to assist hosting institutions with planning, improvement and assessment of their diversity residency programs. While many of the challenges may seem like they would be obvious things to address, a number of residency programs overlook addressing these issues, which are likely easily remedied.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS TO COMMON CHALLENGES

A variety of challenges are commonly encountered in residency programs. My research suggests several proactive solutions to address these challenges.

Explain Why the Residency Exists

In the dissertation and in a previous study I did on diversity residencies appearing in the book, *Where are the Librarians of Color? The Experiences of People of Color in Academia* (Alston 2016), a theme that emerged within qualitative data was that some host institutions

neglect to even explain to the library faculty and staff why the diversity residency is in place. When this happens, other library personnel may be confused as to why such a position exists and why so much of the library's resources have to be dedicated to it. When library personnel do not understand why the position exists, but see a well-paid position at their institution that specifically seeks out practitioners of color and appears to give special treatment to them, hostilities can emerge. Coworkers may view the diversity resident as an affirmative action hire, resent that they themselves or other internal workers were ineligible for the position, and object to any special attention the diversity resident receives in learning skills in a professional appointment that others may be expected to acquire before receiving a professional appointment.

To combat potential hostilities and foster coworker understanding and cooperation, residency coordinators should ensure that library personnel are aware of what the diversity residency is and why it exists. The library field's lingering diversity problems should be explained when announcing to library personnel that a residency is being formed; this information should ideally be shared during an all-staff meeting. Even at institutions with ongoing diversity residencies, a concise explanation of the purpose for the residency should be shared during an all-staff meeting whenever a new resident is announced, as there are likely to be new personnel with each hiring cycle who had not heard the explanation previously. Coordinators should also explain what is being expected of the resident and how the residency will benefit the institution and the profession. This information should also be pushed through employee newsletters and other materials as appropriate as well.

Court Buy-In for the Resident
Also emerging through qualitative data in the dissertation and in the *Where are the Librarians of Color?* research piece were hints that some host institutions do not court buy-in for the resident from library faculty and staff. They

do not announce and explain who the resident is, including what the resident's educational background, research interests, and future career goals are. Some residents have expressed that it was not even explained to coworkers that they were degreed professionals and not still in library school, and that coworkers therefore still thought they were matriculating through MLIS programs. In employee newsletters and perhaps also through library web news announcements and other venues, host institutions should acquaint library personnel and other stakeholders with who the resident is and how they will contribute to the organization.

Only 73% of survey respondents in the dissertation agreed that their coordinators believed seeking buy-in for the residency was important, and only 58% of respondents agreed that residency coordinators explained the relevance of the residency well to library faculty and staff. Only 59% of respondents agreed that their host institutions explained the job duties and expectations for the resident well to library faculty and staff. How strongly survey respondents felt residency coordinators explained the relevance of the residency and the job duties of the resident to other library personnel both correlated moderately with the residents' overall rating of their residency experience. Also, 44% of survey respondents marked an unsure/neutral response when asked if their coworkers seemed supportive of there being a well-paid position where a highly-experienced candidate would not be considered; ideally, this percentage would be much lower and at least half of the respondents would indicate agreement.

Don't Forget Paraprofessional Staff!!
Feedback from qualitative interviews within the dissertation suggests that some host libraries may be selling the residency idea and seeking buy in from library faculty, but are not doing the same with paraprofessional or non-degreed library staff. As a result, library faculty could be on board with the residency and supportive of the resident, but library staff showed resentment toward the resident, again,

due to lack of knowledge and understanding of the position. The resident is likely to work with the staff closely as well, and these relationships should ideally be positive. Remember, staff may be envious of some of the perks that residents may be getting, such as extra travel funding. Also, staff may have loyally worked for a host institution for a long time, so there may be some ill-feelings when they see a new employee with little experience getting perks that would not be available to them.

Twenty-two percent of respondents in my study marked an unsure/neutral response when asked if they believed their coworkers supported the extra travel opportunities and budgeting opportunities that residents received, while 16% disagreed that their coworkers supported these extra perks. While this question did not explicitly focus on staff versus faculty, qualitative data collected in the study suggests that paraprofessional staff may have been among those coworkers that disapproved of perks given to the entry-level professional.

Assign Professional Job Duties & Meaningful Work

While diversity residencies have the aim of providing meaningful work experience to the residents, an obstacle that diversity residents occasionally encounter is that their duties within the residency are not professional enough or preparatory for their next career stop. In my study, 10% of respondents either disagreed that their residency duties exceeded those of a graduate intern or were unsure whether they did or did not. There was a moderate correlation between the residents' beliefs that they were performing more than what would be expected of a graduate student intern and their overall ratings of their residency experiences. The results suggest that care should be taken to ensure that the level of work expected of a resident goes beyond that expected of a graduate intern. Even in situations where residents may have to learn the same skills that a host institution would teach interns, because the resident is a full time employee serving for longer than just one

semester or year, the resident should have ample time to learn functions beyond what an intern would learn.

Thirty-four percent of respondents either disagreed or were unsure of whether they were expected to and adequately trained to publish, present or complete a capstone, which would translate into experience completing library projects. Because these functions are crucial to many academic library jobs, academic libraries hosting residents should probably consider adding a publishing, presentation or capstone element to their residency expectations. However, there are advantages to not requiring a capstone, so the capstone element in particular should be considered on a case by case basis. Supervisory experience may also be beneficial to diversity residents, even if it only consists of supervising student workers; however, only 49% of survey participants had opportunities to supervise any other library personnel as residents according to survey results.

Avoid Wasted and Idle Time

Lost and wasted time is highly detrimental to a diversity resident, who is in a time-limited appointment and cannot recoup lost hours. Twenty-five percent of residents in the survey responded that they had a lot of directionless, idle time during their appointments. There were moderate, noteworthy correlations wherein residents who did not have a lot of directionless idle time tended to have better overall residency experiences, and residents who were frequently assigned busy work that no one else wanted to do tended to have poorer overall residency experiences. Not all of a resident's worktime needs to be structured and supervised, but make sure that there are always activities that the resident can perform during downtime that enhances employability. Remember, the resident is new to the field and therefore still needs some structure and guidance on how to best use downtime to maximize employability. Time spent doing what is perceived as "busy work" can also be considered wasted time, and 21% of respondents agreed that they would at least

occasionally be assigned busy work by coworkers.

Assess & Make it its Best!

Significant numbers of residents participating in the survey indicated uncertainty when queried on assessment efforts for the residency. Twenty-two percent of respondents noted an unsure/neutral response when asked if they believed residency coordinators reviewed and implemented best practices to improve the residency; 20% indicated they did not believe their institutions reviewed and implemented best practices. Thirty-two percent of respondents noted an unsure/neutral response when asked if they believed their residency coordinators communicated with residency coordinators at other institutions to assess and improve the residency; 22% indicated they did not believe their institutions communicated with other institutions to assess and improve the residency. Thirty-one percent of respondents noted an unsure/neutral response when asked if they believed their host institutions assessed the cultural climate of the library and its readiness for a diversity residency; 26% indicated they did not believe their host institutions performed such assessment. Twenty-two percent of respondents noted an unsure/neutral response when asked if the residency was improved as needed; 17% indicated they did not believe their host institutions improved the residency as needed. There was a moderate correlation wherein the more strongly residents agreed that their host institutions reviewed best practices to improve their residencies, the higher they rated their overall residency experience. There was a strong correlation wherein the more strongly residents agreed that their host institutions improved the residency as needed, the higher they rated their overall residency experience.

That so many residents were unsure about their host institutions' assessment practices or did not believe they made honest attempts at assessment should be concerning, as residents themselves should actually be involved in the assessment measures at their host institution. If residency coordinators are not reviewing best practices with residencies, they should do so on a consistent basis, and they should communicate with coordinators of other residency programs. Ideally, a cultural assessment of the host library should be performed to gauge its preparedness for a residency; if the institution is not ready to host a residency, implementing one should be delayed until diversity training and promotion for the residency are completed. The residency should also always be improved on a cyclical basis, so that known flaws do not become institutionalized.

Combat Microaggressive Behavior

As far as microaggressive behavior manifesting against the resident, 34% of study participants said coworkers had questioned their legitimacy as a "diverse hire" during the residency. Thirty-one percent of participants said coworkers at times seemed overly impressed with their ability to perform basic or non-challenging tasks. Twenty-eight percent of participants said coworkers made insensitive or offensive jokes or comments about their race or ethnicity during the residency. One solution for combating microaggressions is ongoing diversity training for staff. Because microaggressions probably will not be eradicated from any workplace, incoming residents should also be told soon after hire that they may encounter this behavior, and taught methods that can be used to respond to it. Also, residents should be assured that they can come to a designated person for mediation should the need arise. These suggestions by no means, however, are meant to excuse a hosting organization from attempting to combat microaggressive behavior, be it toward a diversity resident or any other employee or patron.

Strive for Appropriate Guidance and Mentorship

Within the qualitative portion of the study, it became clear that appropriate guidance and support from seasoned professionals and appropriate mentorship were tied to better overall residency experiences. How to best deliver guidance and mentorship is likely to vary from

resident to resident and from institution to institution. However, be sure that residents are aware of who they can contact whenever they need advice on such things as skills to acquire throughout the residency, how to appropriately search for post-residency positions, relations with coworkers, and professional development pursuits. Qualitative data did not aid in making a determination of whether the "go-to" contact for these types of questions should or should not be a direct supervisor, but the data did suggest that the go-to contact should be someone who understands and appreciates the residency and diversity initiatives in libraries.

Goals

Oddly, some residents within the qualitative portion reported that their coordinators did not work with them to establish goals. The solution here is for a seasoned professional to work with the resident in establishing goals, starting at the beginning of the residency, with updates on a recurring basis.

Match Resident Interests

Some libraries appear to gear their residents toward a certain career path within libraries more than others. Residents should get diverse experiences and become well-rounded and knowledgeable candidates, but residents in the qualitative portion of the study did seem to have better experiences if their host institutions noted their interests and tailored their activities to be pursuant of these interests. This relates to goal-setting; institutions may have visions for their diversity residents and ideas of what they want these professionals to become, but it appears the most successful residencies do not steer the resident too strongly into duties that do not reflect the interests of the residents.

Transparency in Job Ads and Before Hire

Another theme that emerged through the qualitative portion of the study was that many of the residents who agreed to be interviewed reported having substantial expectations sprung on them after reporting to work that were not stated during the search and hiring process. After hire, these residents were told things like they

were hired to be "change agents" for the institution (a fairly huge expectation of a new professional) or "guinea pigs" for diversity initiatives at their universities, among other things. Such lofty expectations should at the very least be communicated to a potential hire prior to said person accepting the position. The resident should be privy to as much information about host institution expectations and intentions with the residency as possible.

Allow for Ambition & Innovation from the Resident

During the qualitative portion of the study, a clear sub-theme emerged wherein residents who were allowed to be ambitious and to offer innovation to the host library tended to have better experiences than those who were "put in a box" and not allowed to bring innovation to the library or were told they were being overly ambitious. Even though they are new professionals, residents still may have valuable things to bring to the library, either due to prior career experiences (including from other fields) or due to other expertise or qualities they have. Allow residents to contribute new information or experimental things to the library; they may be there to learn and build experience, but their presence should also benefit and grow the library.

CONCLUSION

While there are other considerations for how to best execute a diversity residency, which are documented largely in anecdotal recaps of diversity residency experiences written by former residents and residency coordinators, the suggestions here spawn from data collected through qualitative and quantitative methods and go beyond my own personal experiences. Please also see the "Further Reading" list attached as an appendix.

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