Research Proposal: Library Diversity

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Introduction

Library diversity is, and has been for some time, an important topic among the library community, mainly because there does not seem to be much of it. Although schools and associations have made attempts at recruiting diverse students in library programs, it does not seem to be translating into the education or employment statistics. Many populations throughout the United States are a blend of different racial and ethnic backgrounds; however, most libraries do not reflect their communities. While many diversification initiatives have been made, the majority of libraries remain predominately consisting of white females. It may not be a conscious decision, however, it looks as though libraries are saying one thing and doing another.

This paper presents a research study proposal that involves a questionnaire-style survey to be taken within Florida public libraries and will be sent to library leaders, reference librarians, and circulation desk paraprofessionals. The survey will examine the differences of attitudes about library diversity within different levels of library staff. This study is useful because it may shed light on the reasons for the persistent lack of diversity within libraries. Different levels of staff in any job perceive issues differently and it is always best to consult a variety of position levels to get a consensus of what is really going on.

This research proposal includes every stage of the research project including providing evidence of why this research is needed and how it can be accomplished. First, a literature review on library diversity was conducted to give a richer background on the subject. Next, the research problem is defined to describe why the research is essential. Following the research problem, the methodology description was applied that included the research design, research population and sampling, data collection, and data analysis. After that, the plan’s execution is described. Finally the proposal discusses implication for further studies and any issues that the study may encounter.
Literature review

Historically, library professionals were a replication of their communities; however, as the demographics changed within the United States, the demographics within libraries remained, for the most part, the same – white and female (Montiel-Overall & Littletree, 2010, p. 67). Despite the efforts made by the American Library Association (ALA), a majority of libraries have not made many improvements (Montiel-Overall & Littletree, 2010, p. 68). In fact, only 13 percent of racial and ethnic minorities received MLIS degrees between 1990 and 2000 (Davis & Hall, 2007, p. 3). As an example, currently the Latino population makes up over 15 percent of the population in the United States but only makes up 3.7 percent of LIS school enrollments and only 1.8 percent of the library workforce (Montiel-Overall & Littletree, 2010, p. 68). While LIS schools have produced a limited number of Latino MLIS graduates, they have attracted even less of those students back to pursue doctoral degrees to pursue faculty positions (Adkins, 2004. p. 149). Meanwhile, many African Americans working within the library community have experienced discriminatory practices and behaviors within the profession (Preston, 1998, p. 436).

In any event, if diversity does exist within librarians, it usually tends to be within the lower paid positions (Wagner& Willms, 2010, p. 129). The survival of libraries depend on if a space is created which reflects the community and the user’s information needs (Davis & Hall, 2007, p. 19). In fact, by not including staff diversity among all levels, libraries are providing inadequate library service due to a lack of cultural and language familiarity that translates into a lack of respect for different perspectives (Mestre, 2010, p. 480).

While the literature expresses the need for diversity within libraries and has shown some initiatives that attempted to make changes for the diversification of the profession, nothing was expressed why no significant changes have been made. Research needs to be done within
libraries to find out the reasons for the gap between the face of the community and the face of the library as well as why diversity mainly takes place only within lower paid jobs.

Research Problem

The purpose of this study is to reveal the differences in attitudes about the topic of diversity within public libraries between people who work in different library job levels. This is important because people within different job levels see issues affecting their work environment differently. For this purpose, it is necessary to survey different levels of library job positions, including library leaders, librarians, and library paraprofessionals.

Methodology

Research Design

The survey will consist of a mixture of open and closed questions to allow for both exact and detailed responses. It will incorporate questions regarding demographics along with general and specific diversity questions (see Appendix A).

This survey will be sent to library leaders, reference librarians, and circulation desk paraprofessionals within Florida’s public libraries. These positions were chosen due their high amount of interaction with the public. The surveys will be mailed out to each participant in order to get a consensus of any variations that job level may have on diversity within libraries.

Research Population and Sampling

The research population will be found through the use of the American Library Directory. By using this website, I am able to prepare a list that locates every public library within Florida, the number of professional and non-professional staff, and their job titles. From there, separate spreadsheets are to be created for the library leader, reference librarian, and circulation desk paraprofessional so that each staff member within that job title can have their own number to
allow for the random sampling. Finally, the random sample would take place using a computer program in order to find the random sample of 50 library leaders, 50 reference librarians, and 50 circulation desk paraprofessionals.

Data Collection

In advance of sending out the surveys to the selected participants, a letter will be sent out advising them of the topic the survey, the importance of the study, a guarantee of a small incentive of $10.00 to participate, and the date when the survey will be mailed out to them for participation along with the researcher’s contact information just in case they have any questions regarding participation.

The survey would then be mailed out to each participant with a cover letter explaining what the project is for, how it will be used, the directions for the survey, date the survey should be received back by, the directions for receiving their incentive of $10.00, and contact information. Two weeks before the deadline, a reminder letter with attached survey will be mailed to every respondent who did not return their completed survey. After that, a second follow-up letter with attached survey would be mailed out one week after the deadline listing a new deadline of two weeks later to allow one last chance for respondents to answer.

Data Analysis

Since the survey consists of both quantitative and qualitative questions, different techniques are to be used in order to analyze the data properly. The quantitative questions will be analyzed by reorganizing the data into a cohesive format by using a statistic software computer program, such as SPSS. Each quantitative question will have a specific number attached to allow for the statistical analysis. Meanwhile, the qualitative questions will be analyzed by using a code book and coding procedure to examine the similarities within the open-
ended questions. Given that the details of the answers will only be known upon receiving the completed surveys, the code book and procedure will be completed upon receipt of all of the received surveys.

Execution Plan

In order to complete this research study, the first stage would be to compile a list of all of the library leaders, reference librarians, and circulation desk paraprofessionals within all of the public libraries in the State of the Florida from the American Library Directory website. After that, the separate lists for each library position must be made in order to number each employee to prepare for random sampling. Next, the preparation of the survey and letters would commence followed by the surveys being mailed to the participants. After receiving all of the completed surveys, analysis would take place, results would be tabulated, and a conclusion will be made.

The project would consist of a developer to prepare the questions and letters, and two research assistants – one to aid in the quantitative coding and analysis and one to aid in the qualitative coding and analysis. The research assistants would also serve as administrative assistants by keeping track of the participant’s responses and mailing of additional letters and surveys.

The supplies for this project would include paper, copy services, printer and ink supplies. The estimated cost of this project would include supplies along with the small payment of $10.00 to each participant which would come to an estimate of about $3,000.00. The estimated time table for the project is ten months. This includes the time to develop the survey, the initial mailing to advise participants of the survey, the time allotted for the survey, mailings after the
survey for the participants who do not respond by the deadline, and time to code and analyze the data.

Conclusion

This research project will contribute to the understanding of diversity within public libraries, especially between the different staff levels. This survey will help to uncover the reasons why libraries promote staff diversity, but the diversity among the staff is not reflected. It could be the basis for further studies on diversity within all types of libraries. A possibility for a future study would be to complete a nation-wide survey that incorporates the differences between the different staff levels along with differences between regions or states across the United States.

One potential issue with this survey could have a low response rate from the participants. This could include not receiving back the completed survey from the participants or receiving incomplete answers. If this happens in a high degree, it could weaken the results of the survey.

Overall, this is a straight-forward study that will be an effective way to grasp the differences between different levels of staff workers in one state on the topic of diversity. The self-administered, mailed survey is adequate for the type of research being done; however, this research topic could benefit from a future, larger scale survey conducted with in-person interviews to allow for greater depth of the participants.


Appendix A
Diversity Survey

Race
☐ American Indian or Alaska Native ☐ Asian ☐ Black or African American
☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ☐ Caucasian ☐ Hispanic

Job Title
☐ Reference Librarian ☐ Circulation Desk Paraprofessional ☐ Library Leader

Age
☐ 18-25 ☐ 26-40 ☐ 41-55 ☐ 56-70 ☐ 70+

1. Do you feel that staff within libraries should be diverse? Why?
☐ Yes ☐ No
__________________________________________________________________________

2. What are the major factors contributing to non-diversity of library staff? Check as many that apply.
☐ Qualifications ☐ Recruitment ☐ Prejudices ☐ Non-Diverse Community ☐ Other:
__________________________________________________________________________

3. Do you feel that the library staff should reflect the community that it serves? Why?
☐ Yes ☐ No
__________________________________________________________________________

4. How much do you think that patrons would benefit from a diverse librarian staff? Check one. Explain.
☐ High Amount ☐ Moderate Amount ☐ Low Amount ☐ No Amount ☐ No Opinion
__________________________________________________________________________

5. Do you think that the level of patrons approaching the staff would change if the library was more diverse? Explain.
☐ Yes ☐ No
__________________________________________________________________________

6. Do you notice diversity among that staff of the library where you work? Explain.
☐ Yes ☐ No
__________________________________________________________________________

7. Do you notice a difference with staff diversity according to job position level? Explain.
☐ Yes ☐ No
__________________________________________________________________________