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Where Do the Next "We" Come from? Recruiting, Retaining, and Developing Our Successors

by Paula T. Kaufman, University Librarian, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and ARL President

Recruiting librarians to work in research libraries has never been easy. Today, however, it seems to be harder than ever, just as it is in other sectors of librarianship. The recent news that President Bush has proposed \$10 million to recruit and educate new library professionals has been met with much celebration throughout all types of libraries for, in addition to meeting the challenges of recruiting librarians to fill new positions, we face the daunting task of replacing unprecedented numbers of librarians who will retire over the next 20 years. ¹ As Susan Kent of the Los Angeles Public Library said recently, our most serious problem is "how to replace ourselves." ²

Issues of recruiting and retaining academic librarians and of identifying and developing leaders from among them are intertwined, and not unique to librarianship. Last year, Shelly Lazarus, Chairman and CEO of Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide, a major advertising agency, said in the *New York Times*, "There's so much opportunity for young people now.... The challenge for us is to figure out how to keep those people long enough that they are ready to become CEOs." ³ And one only has to watch prime-time network television to see Johnson & Johnson's "dare to care" ad, which touts the rewards of the nursing profession. Imagine, a major company investing money to help recruit people to become nurses!

We have long known about the problem. Stanley Wilder has documented well the graying of the academic library profession, confirming what most of us have been observing. ⁴ Although more academic librarians are retiring now than in recent memory, recruitment pools are small and, although they contain wonderfully strong people, they are not necessarily characterized by them. In addition, it is becoming increasingly difficult to interest frontline librarians in taking on managerial responsibilities, and just as difficult to entice middle managers to consider assuming the responsibilities of senior library positions.

President Bush's support for more students of library and information science is welcome news indeed. It appears that, in recent years, smaller percentages of students pursuing

graduate degrees in library and information science have moved into traditional libraries. New opportunities in the private sector, albeit slowing slightly but temporarily in the current economy, appear to be luring more graduates with the promise of interesting work and robust salaries.

We know there also are other factors that have deterred new entrants to academic and research libraries, including comparatively low salaries and the rise of dual-career couples that limits mobility.⁵ And, I think perhaps there's another little-discussed factor at work. Back when I began my library career, more than 30 years ago, many professional jobs were, quite frankly, boring. They were rich with nonprofessional work and, because the environments of many academic libraries still resonated with (more than) remnants of the patriarchic bureaucracies that characterized post-WWII academia, librarians had little if any involvement, let alone input, into decisions, directions, new services, and all of those other things in which our academic librarians are so engaged today. My perception is that, as a result, there was a fair amount of moving from library to library in search of jobs with richer content, opportunities to participate in decision making, and better compensation packages. The only sure road to higher salaries was to move into managerial ranks, either in one's own institution or at another location. Thus, in addition to the many more graduates of library and information science programs who entered the market each year,⁶ it seems as if there were many more experienced librarians also seeking new opportunities.

To sum it up, we have fewer graduates of library and information science programs than in the past and these graduates have more diverse opportunities than ever before. Our workforce is graying at unprecedented rates. More librarians seem to be content to stay in their current institutions, and many librarians are uninterested in leaving their specialties to embark upon managerial paths. In addition to the challenges of recruiting people to fill jobs in our libraries, how will we meet the challenges of recruiting new people to our profession, developing and retaining them in our institutions, and making management positions attractive alternatives to their current jobs?

Generational Differences

As an early baby boomer now turned grandmother, I often marvel at the different ways different generations perceive and view things. Demographers such as Judith Nichols, from whom we will hear at the ARL May Membership Meeting, identify five current generations, four of whom represent groups of our employees. Each generation embodies different sets of perspectives, lifestyles, and financial styles. Nichols articulates the differences this way:⁷

Birth years 1901-1924:

Depression or G.I. Generation

Lifestyle: CIVIC "We fought for it."

Financial style: CAUTIOUS "Save, save, save."

Birth years 1925-42:

Silents or Eisenhower

Lifestyle: ADAPTIVE "We earned it."

Financial Style: BALANCED "Save, then spend."

Birth Years 1943-1960:

Baby Boom

Lifestyle: IDEALISTIC "We deserve it."

Financial Style: GREEDY "Spend, spend, spend."

Birth years 1961-1981:

Baby Bust of Generation X

Lifestyle: REACTIVE "We won't get it."

Financial Style: RESIGNED "It's hopeless."

Birth Years 1982-1992:

Baby Boomlet or Generation Net

Lifestyle: CIVIC

Financial Style: PROTECTED

Nichols goes on to compare the three major generations who are our workers (and our fund-raising targets) this way. Mature Civics (55 and older) value duty and tend to be team players. Boomers (33 to 54) place a high value on individuality and youth. Busters (younger than 33) approach life pragmatically. Clearly, understanding the differences among the generations is critical to successful recruiting and retention strategies.

Recruiting Strategies

Research libraries have long used a number of proven recruiting strategies. These include such techniques as supplementing typical advertising venues with listservs, personal contacts, and networks; ensuring that the qualifications sought are flexible and open; selling the library, the institution, and the community; speeding up search and recruitment processes and applying creative ways to move quickly within one's institutional strictures; offering signing bonuses, higher salaries, and creative compensation packages; using institutional or developing library-based partner hiring programs; developing focused internship programs; using search firms; holding open houses, participating in job fairs and traveling to library school locations to recruit; identifying and mentoring student workers; involving teaching faculty in the recruiting process; emphasizing to all librarians and staff the importance of their roles in the recruiting process; and offering relocation and sometimes even mortgage loan help.

But, clearly this is not enough. There are other approaches to both recruiting and retaining talented employees that we should consider. Here is a sampling.

Post-Job Libraries

To be successful recruiters, we also must examine just what we are trying to recruit talented librarians to do, and consider designing, changing, or perhaps even ending what we now know as "jobs."

Conventional wisdom used to be that an organization designed and described jobs with some degree of specificity and hired people to fill them. But many savvy companies have shifted their focus from having people perform specific duties to getting the work done. This provides

a very provocative and interesting model for research libraries to consider. Although there are numerous barriers that abound in the institutions that house our libraries, these barriers often can be hurdled. Instead of filling jobs, we should consider hiring talented people for the general areas in which we need them, and then designing jobs around them. Or letting them get the work done. Or hiring talented people and helping them find the best things for them to do.

If this is to be a successful strategy, we will need to provide the post-job employee with extremely flexible organizations. Policies will need to change; new training programs will need to be developed; different kinds of communication will be required. Careers will have to be reconceptualized and career development will have to be reinvented. The answers to the following questions ultimately will determine an organization's success:

- Is the work being done by the right people?
- Are the core tasks being done in-house and are other tasks being outsourced, done by temporary employees, or contracted to term hires?
- Are the people who do the work in each of these categories chosen in such a way that their desires, abilities, temperaments, and assets are being matched with the demands of the tasks?
- Is everyone given the information they need to understand their part in the larger tasks? Do they have the understanding they need to succeed?
- Does the way people are organized and managed help them complete their assignments, or does it tie them to outmoded expectations and job-based assumptions?
- Are leaders being developed and nurtured? Are we identifying and mentoring our successors? ⁸

Even where job ending is neither practical nor desirable, the underlying ideas are worthy of careful consideration. Job flexibility, hiring good people and then designing jobs for them, and reconsidering where and how people do their work are all viable strategies for creating an environment to which professional librarians will be attracted and in which they will stay.

Internship and Development Programs

Although traditional academic library internship programs have had some success, they are limited in the numbers of people they reach, and they are often hard to sustain over the long term. ARL's Leadership and Career Development Program and its Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce provide interesting paradigms for cooperatively designed and funded approaches. Leveraging funds for mutual advantage need not be done only on a national basis, however. There are many opportunities to create and develop similar, but smaller, programs to attract people who have not yet made career decisions, or who may be considering career changes, or who want midcareer development opportunities. Once these people are identified, we will need to provide internship or development opportunities within our libraries and design individualized academic degree programs that recognize the previous educational levels, skills, and experiences some of these potential recruits bring to our organizations. Midcareer internships, such as those run by the Council on Library Resources

(now the Council on Library and Information Resources, or CLIR), were very effective, but also very expensive. Today, CLIR's Frye Institute provides a different, but equally useful and effective professional development opportunity for midcareer librarians, information technologists, faculty, and others who aspire to make a difference in the conception, design, and delivery of information services within their institutions.

To develop interest in library management, a rarely tried but intriguing approach is that of "internal internships," in which a librarian is relieved of his or her regular assignments for six to nine months to work on special projects or to "shadow" an administrator. Resulting assignments to fill the intern's usual role by someone else provide additional opportunities for librarians to taste the flavor of another job without having to commit to it on a long-term basis, and without having to relocate geographically. A twist on this idea is a focused internship program offered by a single institution to librarians from other universities. One example is the internship program recently developed at the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The intern (the first of which is from the University of Toronto) will work in residence at the Center for six weeks, helping to develop and deliver a specific set of programs to a group of librarians from South Africa. The intern will subsequently travel to South Africa to continue the program, the goal of which is to develop *in situ* trainers. The intern is expected to return to his or her home institution prepared to develop other internationally focused programs and to infuse his or her colleagues with an appreciation for the urgency of understanding international librarianship.

Other Partnership Approaches

There are a myriad of partnership opportunities. For example, in partnership with library schools and relevant professional associations, research libraries, either individually or in groups, would work with K-12 schools to introduce librarianship as a career throughout the various grades. Libraries could offer meaningful internship and job opportunities to high school students, along with special programs and encouragement. Campus-sited summer "library camps" (but with more alluring titles), designed to help students think critically about their information needs and wend their way through the ever-more-complex information morass, could be attractive supplements or alternatives to the "computer camps" that attract so many teens and preteens to campus in the summer. We must be alert to students we identify through these programs, along with those we identify in their undergraduate years, mentoring them carefully, aiding their entry into schools of library and information science, and following/assisting them throughout their careers.

In another possible model, again teaming with schools of library science, research librarians would work vigorously to identify graduate students or recent degree holders (at all levels) who are unhappy with their job opportunities and who might not have yet thought about research librarianship as a career. Instead of waiting for them to discover librarianship, we should be aggressive in seeking them out. And, instead of requiring that they attend graduate school for another two years or so, we should consider designing programs based on current executive M.B.A. programs. In my vision, students in the program would come together for one to two weeks prior to the start of each academic year, thus forming a cohesive cohort. They would take classes either on campus or through distance learning technologies, with

those class (and their face-to-face) sessions designed specifically for students who have already taken and taught many graduate courses. Programs need not require two years to complete and could and should be individually designed. And libraries need not wait until degrees are awarded to employ these students to carry out appropriate professional work.

Diversity Issues

Although student bodies in America's research universities are diverse, many of their library staffs are not. Data collected by the American Library Association's (ALA) Office for Research and Statistics in 1998 indicate that 87% of academic librarians are white; the most recent data collected on school librarians by the National Center for Education Statistics also show that 90% are white. ALA's analyses of the *Library and Information Science Education Statistical Report* published annually by the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) indicate that graduates of ALA-accredited masters degree programs in library and information science for the years 1991-1997 range in percentages from 88-92% white. And, according to the *ARL Annual Salary Survey 2001-2002*, in U.S. ARL academic libraries, 88% of professional staff are white. ⁹ Stanley Wilder observes that new entrants to careers in ARL libraries are increasingly diverse – from 1985 to 2000, the percentage of minority new hires in ARL libraries rose from 8% to 15% – but it will take time for this trend to impact the research library profession as a whole. ¹⁰ This lack of diversity clearly impacts library services, including interactions with library users and the development of collections and access to a wide range and variety of information resources.

In addition to enhancing and intensifying many of the recruiting and development methods and ideas already discussed, research libraries must focus on issues surrounding the work environments they provide if they want to recruit and retain a diverse workforce. Research studies that focus on faculty in general show that faculty of color experience social isolation, subtle (and occasionally overt) prejudice, lack of mentors, and ambiguous expectations. My observation is that minority librarians often experience these same pressures. These findings suggest the need to concentrate on changing workplace environments.

Mentoring Future Leaders

Most of us do not need to read the spate of literature attesting to the value of continuous professional development programs. We have observed their success, and often personally benefited from them. But, professional development programs alone cannot do the job of developing individuals to take leadership roles in research libraries. They must be supplemented by, and eventually serve as supplements to, individual mentoring programs.

Much has been written about mentoring, so there is no need to recite a litany of what we all know. In many ways, mentoring programs seem contradictory to our environments of openness, participation, and equity, for they require that we identify and select individuals and provide special one-on-one development. Mentoring takes time, lots of time, and it takes the courage to open doors for "mentees" and encourage them to walk through them, on paths that are different than we have taken, to heights and parts unknown. In today's, and

tomorrow's, world's mentoring can make the difference between success and failure to lead; it can make the difference between developing people to succeed successfully or letting the chips fall where they may. Previous generations of academic library leaders have fulfilled this obligation, and so will we, for in the end it may be the most powerful tool we have.

Conclusion

Each one of us has a different story to tell about how and why we became librarians, how and why we decided to work in research institutions, how and why we took the career paths within (and outside) them that we did, and how we have been mentored throughout our careers. We cannot generalize from these stories very well, but the lesson we should draw is that there is no one right way to recruit and retain academic and research librarians. We must use basic tried-and-true techniques in new and creative ways, and we must consider all ideas, wacky as some might sound.

I will be disappointed if the ideas presented here are not at the low end of the creativity scale. I encourage every reader to send me your better ideas <ptk@uiuc.edu> and I'll feature them in a subsequent piece. Let's brainstorm together and find more effective ways to attract people to join us, and stay, in the joy and pleasure of this profession.

Footnotes

1. Stanley J. Wilder, *The Age Demographics of Academic Librarians: A Profession Apart* (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 1995): 5-15. Also available in *Journal of Library Administration* 28, no. 3 (1999): 8-11. [back to text](#)
2. John N. Berry III, "Librarian of the Year: Susan Kent, Los Angeles Public Library," *Library Journal* no. 1 (15 January 2002): 44. [back to text](#)
3. Reed Abelson, "A Leader's-Eye View of Leadership," *New York Times*, 10 October 1999, late edition, sec. 3, p. 1, col. 5. [back to text](#)
4. See note 1 above. [back to text](#)
5. Larry Hardesty, "Future of Academic/Research Librarians: A Period of Transition—To What?" *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 2, no. 1 (2002): 79-97. [back to text](#)
6. Many, mostly private, library schools closed in the 1970s and 1980s. Masters degrees in library science conferred from 1970-71 to 1997-98 fell from a high of 8,037 in 1975-76 to 4,871 in 1997-98. Source: *Digest of Education Statistics 2000* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.): 296, table 255. [back to text](#)
7. Judith Nichols, "Generational Differences" (flyer), quoting Ron Zemke, Claire Raines, and Bob Filipczak, *Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace* (New York: AMACOM, 2000). [back to text](#)
8. William Bridges, "The End of the Job," *Fortune* 130, no. 6 (19 Sept. 1994): 62+. [back to text](#)
9. See the article in this issue of ARL by Mark Young, "[ARL Salary Survey Highlights.](#)" [back to text](#)

10. See the article in this issue of *ARL* by Stanley J. Wilder, "[New Hires in Research Libraries: Demographic Trends and Hiring Priorities.](#)" [back to text](#)

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