

University Library's Undergraduate Diversity Fellowship

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In the fall of 2007, IUPUI's University Library welcomed its first set of Undergraduate Diversity Fellows. Created by the library's Diversity Council, the Fellowship sought to introduce two highly-motivated students to the library and its resources as well as to librarianship as a profession. Several events made the creation of this unique program possible.

In November of 2006, African American students at IUPUI sent a report to the campus's administration. In "Through Our Eyes," students said that while the campus claimed diversity as a founding value, this commitment was not apparent. Students called for the campus administration to renew its commitment to diversity with concrete actions. IUPUI's Chancellor Charles Bantz responded to the students' concerns, agreeing to seek a full-time diversity officer for the campus and to create a Multicultural Center.

In addition to these actions, IUPUI established Diversity Vision, Mission, and Values statements, as well as goals. Each school was tasked with establishing its own Diversity Council and creating a strategic plan to help the campus achieve its four diversity goals:

- Recruitment, academic achievement, persistence and graduation of a diverse student body;
- Recruit, retain, advance, recognize, and promote a diverse faculty, staff and administration while creating a campus-wide community that celebrates its own diversity as one of its strengths and as a means of shaping IUPUI's

identity as a university;

- Make diversity a strategic priority touching all aspects of the campus mission;
- Regularly assess, evaluate, improve and communicate diversity efforts of IUPUI.

University Library's Diversity Council, established in early 2007, was part of this response, and its first task was to develop the library's diversity plan, of which the Undergraduate Diversity Fellowship was one piece.

The fellowship was able to come together in such a short time, within 6-8 months, largely because of the work done by a previous library committee, the Recruitment Task Force. That group investigated the issue of recruiting minorities to librarianship through reading literature on the topic and conducting focus groups with minority undergraduates and minority non-professional library staff, as well as one-on-one interviews with minority professional librarians. The results of the focus groups can be found in Mary Stanley's *Library Administration & Management* article, "Case Study: Where is the Diversity?, Focus Groups on How Students View the Face of Librarianship." This research guided many of the council's decisions about the fellowship.

When the council started working out the details of the fellowship, in the spring of 2007, members quickly decided on some fundamentals. The program would:

- Target undergraduate students;
- Be a fellowship—meaning it would

include work experience instead of being simply a scholarship;

- Provide students with a variety of opportunities, while treating students as professionals;
- Be symbiotic—both the students and the library would benefit from their participation.

The emphasis on recruiting undergraduates instead of library school graduate students served several purposes. On a practical level, this kept the program from competing with the library's existing graduate assistantships. Also, there were already a number of other diversity programs designed to recruit and support college graduates from underrepresented populations. A focus on undergraduates would provide a larger pool of applicants, including students who may never have considered librarianship as a career. Focusing on undergraduates would also allow the council to achieve two important goals—recruiting at an earlier level and student outreach. Focus group research previously conducted by the library's Recruitment Task Force suggested that recruiting students after they had received their bachelor's degrees was too late; introducing librarianship at an earlier stage in their education was important. In addition, articles, such as Barbara Valentine's "Undergraduate Research Behavior: Using Focus Groups to Generate Theory" suggested that students preferred to ask other students for assistance with research. The library could extend its influence on campus by showing the fellows how to use library resources and allowing them in turn to convey that information to their classmates and peers.

Another easy decision the council made was to create a fellowship instead of a scholarship or an unpaid internship. Although it would have been easier to establish a scholarship, the council wanted to bring students into the library, to give them experiences that they may not otherwise have had, and that would not have happened with a scholarship. An unpaid internship was not feasible because so many IUPUI students have to work in order to support their education and family.

Establishing a fellowship meant that the library would have the benefit of a student's perspective and additional student workers, but the students would also benefit from exposure to librarians and library resources while gaining practical work experience. To make the fellowship competitive with other campus opportunities, the council suggested a pay rate of \$10/hour for a 20-hour work week. The library's dean agreed to fund the year-long program for two fellows.

The council also decided it was important to give the fellows an assortment of tasks and duties, allowing them to experience the variety of work librarians do. By combining planned activities with the flexibility to initiate their own projects, the council hoped to encourage the fellows to develop a sense of independence, accountability, and professionalism. This served as another of the fellowship's appeals because students would benefit from these qualities, regardless of what career they eventually chose. For the fellowship's first year, the planned projects included: working with the library's External Relations Team on a fund-raising project; producing monthly multi-cultural displays to make the library more welcoming for its diverse clientele; and creating READ posters to highlight the diversity of library personnel as well as the variety of work they do. The posters and monthly displays were also part of the council's original diversity plan.

A symbiotic experience was another crucial element of the fellowship; the fellows should benefit from the experience as much as the library itself would benefit. Making the fellows' tasks and projects meaningful was a significant part of the experience. The council hoped to achieve this by incorporating an element of reflection, through the use of journal entries. Documenting their activities would allow the fellows to track their progress and synthesize individual tasks into a larger, more meaningful, and holistic picture. The council sought to incorporate a mentorship component into the program as well for the fellows' benefit.

Once the structure of the fellowship was established, the council had to work out the logistics, such as selection criteria, and the promotion, application, and selection processes. When the coun-

cil was originally formed, it adopted an intentionally broad definition of “diversity” in its charter. Because of this, along with questions about the legality of such a stipulation, the council chose not to restrict applicants based on race or ethnicity. Instead, the council decided to include an essay component in the fellowship application: “Discuss, in 500 words or less, what you think are the benefits of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and diverse society, and how your activities allow you to contribute to such an environment.” In addition to this essay and contact information, the application asked for grade point average, extracurricular activities, previous work experience, and two or three recommendations.

To direct interested students to the application materials located on the library website, the council combined traditional means of promotion with newer media. Council members created flyers to post in the library and on campus bulletin boards, sent announcements to the campus’s online newsletter, *JagNews*, and posted to a database of campus job and internship opportunities, JagJobs. In an attempt to reach a broad audience as quickly as possible, the council also placed advertisements on Facebook.com.

After much discussion, the council decided to adapt a selection score sheet from the IUPUI Norman Brown Diversity & Leadership Scholarship Program. This score sheet took into account each element of the application—academic achievement, recommendation letters, community involvement/civic engagement, written communication skills, and commitment to diversity. By looking at the totality of applicants’ experiences, the selection committee was able to treat applicants in an equitable manner—a student with high grades but no work experience would receive the same consideration as a student with mediocre grades and exceptional community service. From the approximately twenty applications received, the four highest scoring applicants were invited to the library for an interview with the selection committee. Based on their initial application materials and their interviews, two students were awarded fellowships, which began in September 2007.

Before the fellows could even begin working, how-

ever, other logistical decisions had to be made. Space for the fellows had to be negotiated. Since each fellow would be expected to work 20 hours per week, the council decided dedicated workstations, including computers, were warranted. This space was created in the library’s restricted technical services area; however this decision brought up another concern once the fellows actually began working. The library’s full-time employees have access to the space outside of regular business hours, but there were safety concerns involved with allowing undergraduates this same level of access. Because of this concern, the fellows’ hours were not as flexible as the council had originally envisioned. The council realized that the fellows’ privileges—something more than work-study students but less than full-time employees—had not been sufficiently articulated.

Because of the short time span between the fellowship’s conception and implementation, its structure was not as well-defined as the council would have liked. While general guidelines had been established, the council had not specified who would be the fellows’ supervisor or what exactly that role would entail. For the inaugural fellows, this role fell to the Diversity Council’s chair, partly because of her role as contact person for the applications and the selection process, but largely because of her commitment to the program’s success. Because the supervisor’s role had not been clearly delineated, the supervisor became responsible for a wide range of tasks: soliciting projects from library colleagues; managing the fellows’ day-to-day activities; and serving as a mentor to the fellows. The supervisor’s role, therefore, became more time-consuming than anticipated.

The final unexpected concern resulted from a miscommunication about the fellowship’s length. The council proposed, and advertised, that the fellowship would last for one year. The library’s dean agreed to finance the fellowship for this time period. The council, however, interpreted one year as one calendar year—September to August; the dean’s definition was one academic year—September to May. Because of this misunderstanding, the fellows’ supervisor had to find another funding source to bridge that gap.

Results

Despite the unanticipated challenges, the fellows accomplished a great deal during the program. They created multi-cultural exhibits, participated in a variety of digitization activities, produced READ posters, conducted an oral history, and carried out a project of their own choosing.

Shortly after their arrival at University Library, the fellows met with several librarians who shared information about what librarians do in general and their jobs and training in particular. A reference librarian gave demonstrations on some of the most commonly used databases, and subject librarians introduced the fellows to resources they might find useful in creating their diversity-related displays.

The fellows' supervisor, and the Diversity Council, soon realized that the diversity displays required a great deal more time and energy than they had anticipated. Because of this, the monthly multi-cultural displays became quarterly exhibits. The first year's fellows focused on the diversity months celebrated at IUPUI, with exhibits on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people, Native American people and beliefs, and African American poets and leaders. In the process of creating these displays, the fellows connected with student organizations, worked with special collections, and made use of a variety of library resources.

Another large portion of the fellows' time was spent with the Digital Libraries Team. University Library was involved in scanning the John Tipton papers for the Indiana State Library, and the fellows performed quality control and cropping work for that project. They created metadata and uploaded files to the Moi University/IUPUI Partnership community in IUPUI's institutional repository, IDeA, and created metadata for the library's Crispus Attucks collection, which includes digitized yearbooks, newspapers, and graduation programs from the school.

Both fellows also spent time with the library's External Relations Team. In addition to learning about the team's work, the fellows helped with

organizing and promoting a Scholastic Book Fair, which raised money for a local Indianapolis public school. The External Relations Team also invited the fellows to the library's community board meetings, as well as a special library-sponsored reception for Nikki Giovanni, keynote speaker at the 2008 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Dinner.

Although the fellows worked well together, they also worked on separate projects. One fellow worked with Special Collections on an oral history project and also compiled information on IUPUI-related centers, so that librarians could better market the library's opportunities for digital scholarship. The other fellow assisted in photographing library personnel and created the library's first READ posters, which were part of the original diversity strategic plan. All of the back issues of the School of Social Work's journal *Advances in Social Work* are now available online thanks to that fellow's efforts.

During these projects, the fellows were asked to keep a reflective journal of their experiences. Instead of keeping their reflections private, the fellows chose to keep a public blog, <http://diversityfellowship.blogspot.com/>. This was beneficial because it allowed the fellows to look back at the variety of experiences and to see how they had grown, but it has also served as a marketing tool for the library and the fellowship.

The fellows' most notable project was one of their own choosing: To Mexico With Love. This international service learning program had already been established at IUPUI, and the fellows were able to participate in building a library at a women's shelter in Mexico. Because of their connection with University Library, the fellows spearheaded the collection of children's books and developed a low-tech, easy-to-implement and maintain organizational system for the library. The fellows received financial support for this project from the library's dean, the Minde Browning Fund, and individual donations from library staff. When they returned from their month-long project in Mexico, the fellows gave a presentation to the library and a later one to the library's community board.

The real success of the first year can be seen in the

fellows' positive comments and evaluations of the program. Despite the inevitable growing pains of a new program's first year, the fellowship accomplished much of what the council hoped for, as seen in the fellows' last blog post:

This fellowship was a blessing. I have experienced so much in less than one year. This position was awesome because:

- I had meaningful projects
- Projects I was passionate about
- Learning experiences
- Experience in a professional setting
- There were opportunities to share my opinions and my voice was heard... and I was given opportunities to carry out my ideas
- We had an awesome supervisor - Kristi Palmer. Many kudos to her.
- Meeting awesome people within the library and receiving their support and help. Gracias a todos! (Thanks to all).

Bibliography

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