

LaQuanda Onyemeh reflects on UNCG Library Diversity Institute



LaQuanda Onyemeh is a 2017-2018 Scholar who received her MLIS from University of North Carolina at Greensboro and her B.S Dual Degree in Psychology and Sociology at The College at Brockport SUNY. She is currently the Diversity Resident Librarian at Texas A&M University where she will rotate among various departments at Texas A&M University Libraries. LaQuanda is currently assisting with planning the Texas Library Association (TLA) 2020 Houston Conference and was the recipient of NASIG's

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[pk_association_webpage_menu=732&pk_association_webpage=1271](http://www.nasig.org/site_page.cfm?pk_association_webpage_menu=732&pk_association_webpage=1271)), 2018. Here, LaQuanda shares her experiences having recently attended the Library Diversity Institute

(<https://library.uncg.edu/info/diversity/institutes/index.aspx>) at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro held from August 31, 2018 - September 2, 2018.

I thought long and hard of a song that could capture my exact sentiments of the Library Diversity Residency. Michael Jackson's song, "You Are Not Alone!" summed it up best:

*"You are not alone
I am here with you
Though we're far apart
You're always in my heart
You are not alone"*

It all started with a question. *"Would you like to come to the Library Diversity Institute?"* Dr. Halbert asked me during the ALA conference in New Orleans. I thought to myself, *What exactly is a diversity institute?* A few months would go by and I didn't quite understand where I was going or when, but I was looking forward to it.

Fast forward to August 31; I arrived among a sea of beautiful, colorful faces. I was nervous, but excited to talk to my cohort. I grabbed a seat near the front of the room and began talking to Resident Librarians surrounding me. We were all eager to know what the institute was about and what we would be learning for the next couple of days. We were all excited to meet other Resident Librarians.

Some of us were in the beginning of our residencies and others were in their residencies for more than a year. We had the pleasure of hearing from various speakers who discussed a broad selection of topics. This helped us formulate ideas about our role and understand the importance of the residency program in academic librarianship.

Dr. Jon E. Cawthorne, the Wayne State Dean of Libraries and SLIS, discussed his success, failures and his circuitous path to leadership. Hearing Dr. Cawthorne speak, I learned about the importance of leadership and how I can start being a leader in my role as a Diversity Resident Librarian. He also discussed bringing creativity and innovation to your role, and how leaders can effectively change organizational culture within the library. Dr. Cawthorne made sure to engage with every Resident Librarian during the conference by talking with us during our activities. He was a pleasure to meet and I feel fortunate having him as a leader in my cohort. We also received the opportunity to hear from past Diversity Residents from UNC Greensboro, Dr. Jason Alston and Dr. LaTasha Velez. They told us where they had been and where they are now. It was great to meet past Resident Librarians who were once in our shoes; to see where they are and how they have flourished was beyond inspirational. I had an opportunity to hear Dr. Alston give his presentation on "Library Diversity Residencies - Common Challenges and Best Practices."

We shared our fears about our new role, the challenges it presents, and more during interactive activities. We all offered solutions on how to tackle our challenges and fears including sharing places to give and receive assistance. This was an essential exercise to me because I realized that the majority of us around the room had similar fears about our new roles as well as transitioning out of these roles when re-entering the job market. I felt closer and stronger to my cohort. I realized I wasn't alone in my feelings. By discussing our fears and challenges we came up with solutions, offered each other advice, and just had a community of support that was there to say, "I got you and I won't let you fall."

Dr. Irene Owens, directed a powerful session on conflict management. This session was significant to us as Resident Librarians because this was our first professional role at an Academic Library. She gave us the tools on how to address issues and/or conflict that we may possibly face in our new roles or at our organization. We assessed our strengths and weaknesses. Conflict is something that we all deal with daily, knowing how to address conflict without feeling overwhelmed, being too passive, or compromising your integrity is a valuable skill! Thank you Dr. Irene Owens for letting us know that it is okay to not agree or accommodate the other party, and to pushback especially something that we are passionate about!

Our cohort of Resident Librarians took a tour of the The International Civil Rights Center & Museum (<https://www.sitinmovement.org/>) in Greensboro, N.C. This tour was shocking, impactful, and a pivotal moment at the Library Diversity Institute. The tour reminded us how far we have come, but most importantly, how much further we have to go. ALA President-Elect Wanda Kay Brown talked to us on our last day. It was heartfelt, purposeful, and passionate. Hearing her speak reinforced my passion and commitment to diversity of librarianship. I want a role in leadership, so that I can be the change I want to see in the profession. I plan on contributing by giving back to my own community and paving the way for other librarians of color following me into the profession by serving as a resource and role model.

The institute got me thinking about my future and what I want to accomplish in my residency at Texas A&M. It was a safe environment to ask questions and figure it all out. I met people who were in the same place as me. I found a community and I did not feel alone in my new role as a Diversity Resident Librarian.

Starting something new like a Residency can be scary, challenging, and may be ambiguous to faculty and staff in the library. Having people in your journey who can offer advice, support, or just a place to vent means everything. I left the institute feeling empowered with tools, community, and support to tackle my goals, challenges, and even failures. My role in the academic library matters. I have a critical job to do on behalf of my cohort and community, including my ancestors who paved the way for me to access quality education and civil rights. I am grateful to have met new friends that I plan to see at the JCLC conference in a couple weeks and hopefully during the rest of my career. Currently singing, "I am not alone!"

I want to say thank you to Dr. Martin Halbert, Gerald Holmes, and everyone who participated in the institute. Thank you for creating this Library Diversity Institute for us! Thank you for advocating for diversity and inclusion. And a special thank you for showing us the beauty of the collaborative nature of librarianship.

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