The Role of Recruitment in Achieving Goals Related to Diversity

Mark Winston, Assistant University Librarian
Odum Library, Valdosta State University

ABSTRACT

One of our diversity-related goals is to broaden the number of perspectives represented in academic library decisionmaking, administration and library services. The literature related to recruitment theory addresses the factors which impact the choices of individuals to choose a profession and will help us to develop recruitment strategies that will lead to increasing the number of minority academic librarians.

Introduction

While there are numerous articulated reasons for making issues of diversity a priority in academic libraries, one of the primary goals of diversity initiatives is to address the documented underrepresentation of ethnic minority professionals employed in college and university libraries.

By increasing the number of minority academic librarians, we will be able to broaden the number of perspectives represented in academic library decision-making, administration and library services. In addition, we will better reflect the multicultural community that is being served and offer an environment that is more open, receptive and conducive to the success of all of those who use and are employed by academic libraries. However, to approach recruitment without an adequate understanding of those factors that have been proven to affect career choices, we are doomed to continue the cycle of underrepresentation and to fall short of achieving our goals related to diversity.

The research conducted in library and information science, as well as that conducted in numerous other disciplines, gives us a basis for identifying those factors which have an impact on the decisions of individuals to choose a particular profession and/or professional specialty. In addition, this information should inform our recruitment strategies as we identify approaches that will prove effective in increasing the number of minority academic librarians. Many researchers have contributed to a body of literature that I will describe as "recruitment theory," which relates to the identification of those factors which have influenced the career choices of individuals in a broad range of professions, at various educational levels, and in a number of demographic categories. These categories include various medical specialties[1], education majors and employees[2], counseling, school administration, various library and information science specialties, as well as high school, college, technical school, and graduate students, men and women, and members of minority groups[3]. In spite of the multiplicity of disciplines and career fields considered, many common themes emerge with regard to the relative importance of individuals, such as professors and teachers, parents and other family members, friends, and other role models, and activities or other factors, such as interesting academic courses and curricula, academic performance, work experience, expected salary and benefits, the desire to make a contribution, and ethnicity and gender, in the career decision-making process. The recruitment factors identified in the general literature correspond closely with the factors related to the recruitment of librarians in general and in various LIS specialties.

It is my premise that what is known about the reasons why individuals have chosen their professional specialties provides a worthwhile basis for the development of recruitment strategies because there are similarities between those who are currently employed in a given profession and those who are likely candidates for recruitment into that profession. I believe that this premise is valid based on the findings revealed in the published research. In addition, career assessment instruments are designed often to measure the extent to which one's responses and preferences are similar to those of individuals in various professions and those who are happy in their professions, based upon the assumption that similar responses and preferences are likely to correlate with similar professional preferences.

Recruitment Theory

Numerous researchers have categorized the list of factors affecting the recruitment of individuals into professions in terms of the individuals or in terms of the activities that affect career choices(4). The people who have an impact on the career decision-making process include the following:

1. Family members;(5)

2. Friends and peers;(6)

3. Teachers;(7)

4. Counselors;(8)

5. Other role models.(9)

The activities and other factors that influence this process include the following:

1. "Interesting" academic courses and curricula;(10)

2. "Course grades;"(11)

3. Extracurricular activities;(12)

4. Work experience, including internships;(13)

5. Desire to make a contribution;(14)

6. Expected salary and benefits;(15)

7. Ethnicity; and

8. Gender.

The published research provides some explanation regarding those factors which appear to be most important for those who are making career decisions, as well as explanations regarding the importance attached to those factors. The recruitment factors that have been rated most highly include teachers, interesting courses, grades, work experience, the desire to make a contribution, and expected salary and benefits.

Other factors were not rated highly in some instances. For example, the importance of family members was indicated by young people who are selecting a career field, but this was not the case for older individuals. The role of ethnicity and gender in career decision-making appears to be in dispute. Some researchers have found that gender and ethnic background lead to differences in career choices for men and women(16) and minorities and non-minorities. Other researchers have found the gender and ethnicity do not have such an effect.(17)

While work experiences have a significant role in the career decision-making process, extracurricular or "out-of-school activities" have not been rated highly by those making career decisions.(18) Noeth, Enger and Noeth provide a possible explanation for this lack of a high rating. "It is interesting to note that students did not rate the extracurricular and nonschool experiences highly. Perhaps the positive components of these activities are difficult for students to abstract and relate to potential career directions."(19)

The recruitment factors identified in the general literature correspond closely with the list of factors related to the recruitment of librarians in general and in various LIS specialties, in regard to recruitment factors related to the influence of role models, interesting courses, internship or other related work experience, expected salary, and desire to make a contribution. The role of family and friends was not addressed in the LIS literature.

The recent published LIS literature regarding those factors which may form the basis for library and information science recruitment theory includes writings by Buttlar and Caynon,(20) who present a relatively comprehensive list of factors affecting the recruitment of minorities into the profession and the research of Heim and Geist,(21) which substantiates a number of the findings of Caynon and Buttlar, particularly in relation to issues of the importance of paraprofessionals as potential future librarians and the role of financial aid for library and information science graduate students. In general, these factors have been identified as being applicable in the recruitment of individuals into various specialties, including special librarianship and science librarianship, as well. Other writings that add to this theoretical framework regarding library and information science recruitment are those by Vazakas and Wallin,(22) Paskoff,(23) Lorene Brown,(24) Phyllis Hudson,(25) and Heim and Moen.(26) Current recruitment theory indicates that factors which cause individuals to accept recruitment into the library profession include:

1. A personal desire by individuals to enter the profession of librarianship;(27)

2. Information provided by role models and/or the "influence of role models"(28) on individuals to consider librarianship as a profession; (29)

3. The "availability of financial aid or scholarships;" (30)

4. Paraprofessional or student assistant library positions held by individuals which, in turn, motivated them to consider the profession;(31)

5. An appreciation for the work in which librarians are engaged, which has encouraged them to consider the information profession as a career; (32)

6. An appreciation for "the environment of library work;"(33)

7. Interest in entering "a service position;"(34)

8. Availability of professional positions in the field of library and information science;(35)

9. The image of the profession; (36)

10. And, salaries paid to library and information professionals. (37)

Implications for Practice

Information regarding the importance of various factors in the recruitment of individuals into their professional specialty is useful for employers, library educators, practicing librarians, and others who have interest in recruitment and addressing issues of underrepresentation. Thus, using this information, we are better able to target those individuals who are the most likely candidates for recruitment based a more

complete understanding of the factors that influence their career decisions. In addition, we are better able to undertake recruitment that leads to positive results if we are able to "market" our profession by highlighting the strengths of the profession, with a focus on the desired population of potential new professionals.

Some specific applications regarding the library and information science profession seem to become apparent based on what is known about recruitment theory. Many individuals who are seeking or changing careers indicate that their interest in entering a service profession or the desire to make a contribution is an important factor in the decision-making process. This is important for all library and information science recruitment. However, it is particularly important in regard to specialties, such as business librarianship, law, science and engineering librarianship--specialties in which individuals with either an interest in the discipline (an interest in business or chemistry, for example), an educational background or work experience in these areas, or some combination of interest and experience may be amenable to applying their expertise and/or interest in a discipline in a profession that is service-oriented. There may be aspects of the work environment or professional responsibilities associated with other professions that are not appealing to those who have, for example, less interest in focusing on the bottom line or on billable hours that are a part of the business world or the practice of law. Thus, library and information science recruiters may have an advantage in encouraging these individuals to become librarians.

The availability of positions in the specialty is another factor which appears to be a positive asset or "selling point" of our profession at present. The expanding numbers and types of positions in library and information science are likely to be an attractive inducement for those who are selecting a career field.

The importance of "interesting" courses and academic curricula in the successful recruitment of librarians and other professionals should be of interest to all of us in library and information science. Whether we are practitioners, library educators, or adjunct faculty in library and information science programs, we should insist that LIS education is made relevant and attractive to our students. The quality and rigor of the education that we provide is key in ensuring an informed and motivated cadre of new professionals.

Certainly, the proliferation of undergraduate courses in library and information science is likely to play a key role in our recruitment efforts, by introducing undergraduate students to issues related to information and the role of libraries in society. A growing number of colleges and universities are offering such courses. As many undergraduate students and graduate students have difficulty in selecting an academic major or professional specialty and are uncertain about their career options, it seems clear that many of these students have not considered librarianship. When we instruct students in LIS courses, in bibliographic instruction sessions, and as guest lecturers in other courses, we are compelled to make their first impression of the discipline and the profession one that is positive.

In terms of issues related to salary and benefits, the library and information science profession may offer less in terms of what we can promote for those we are attempting to interest in the profession. However, the research suggests that few individuals have been motivated to become librarians on the basis of the anticipated salary that they would realize. However, there are fringe benefits associated with academic library work and work in academia, in general, that we can highlight in our recruitment efforts.

The issue of image has been of concern for some time. My experience has been that those who understand what librarians do are also aware of both the importance of what we do and the key role that librarians will continue to play, particularly with regard to our role involving information and information technology. Certainly, we are compelled to express this message clearly to those who do not have such an understanding of our role.

In terms of the importance of work experience and internships in the career choices of students, we are compelled to increase internship opportunities and to encourage library paraprofessionals to consider the profession.

As I have addressed undergraduate and graduate students to a certain extent, recruitment of librarians must focus also on those who are working in other professions. In many cases, these individuals may be dissatisfied with their current professions and, thus, may be likely to be open to recruitment strategies that highlight the differences between the business world, for example, and librarianship, particularly in academia. The academic environment itself may also offer some of the benefits that individuals believe to be important in the professions/work environments.

However, there is the reality that most librarians of color work in public library settings. Certainly, this preponderance of librarians of color who choose to work in public libraries may be based on perceptions, accurate and inaccurate, regarding the nature of academia and academic library work. I suggest that this preponderance of librarians of color who choose public libraries over academic libraries is based often on a sense that the minority librarian who wants to make a contribution to his or her community has more opportunities to do so in the public library and more aggressive minority recruitment efforts in public libraries presumably reflect an appreciation for diversity, as well as opportunities for advancement in a more "fair" system.

An understanding of these perceptions, to whatever degree they are accurate, should help us in defining recruitment strategies. Thus, as we attempt to recruit persons of color in academic librarianship, we may be faced with the view that the ivory tower of academia is not welcoming. Thus, we should make our recruitment efforts more aggressive and emphasize the institutional support (read administrative and widespread organizational support) for diverse perspectives.

With the use of words such as institutional commitment, and administrative or organizational commitment, I have de-personalized (or objectified) the responsibility to a certain extent. My intention is to do just the opposite. The institutional commitment is based on the personal commitment of individuals--library faculty, teaching faculty, and administrators. While this commitment is necessary and important, the commitment must be translated into actions that lead to successful recruitment; i.e., hiring, promotion and retention. Finally, we must emphasize the fact that we, as academic librarians, can and do make important contributions in our work with students, faculty, and other researchers, in general, and minority students, in particular.

Conclusion

Finally, in spite of the standard aversion to evaluating our efforts related to any aspects of diversity because of the connection that is made between evaluation and goal setting and the concept of quotas, it is necessary to be able to establish goals and to evaluate our success as we refine our recruitment strategies. Certainly, we are less apprehensive about establishing goals and evaluating our success in relation to other aspects of academic library operations. And, our ability to define and measure our success and to refine our diversity recruitment efforts will be based, to a large extent, on our ability to evaluate the outcomes of our efforts.

The importance of our recruitment efforts related to diversity are based our need to ensure that a broad range of perspectives is represented in library decision-making, library staff are representative of the community served, library staff are sensitized to the needs of library users, and equitable service is provided

to minority students and other researchers. Thus, we must incorporate aggressive and informed recruitment efforts, which reflect the institutional commitment to creating, retaining and promoting a diverse workforce, and that reflect an understanding of the factors that are important to individuals as they select a profession.

NOTES

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6. Judith D. Emmett and Carole W. Minor, "Career Decision-Making Factors in Gifted Young Adults," *The Career Development Quarterly* 41 (June 1993): 354; Noeth, Enger and Noeth, 245; Ireh, Savage and Hatch, 119.

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12. Ibid., 244.

13. Davis, Field and Giles, 89.

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238; Ireh, Savage and Hatch, 119.

17. Arbona, 237-8; Noeth, Enger and Noeth, 246.

18. Noeth, Enger and Noeth, 244.

19. Ibid., 246.

20. Lois Buttlar and William Caynon, "Recruitment of Librarians Into the Profession: The Minority Perspective," *Library & Information Science Research* 14 (1992): 270-5.

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27. Paskoff, 57; Buttlar and Caynon, 272; Heim and Moen, 566.

28. Buttlar and Caynon, 272.

29. Vazakas and Wallin, 166; Hudson, 79.

30. Buttlar and Caynon, 272; Paskoff, 60; McCook and Geist, 36.

31. Buttlar and Caynon, 272. Brown, 69.

32. Paskoff, 58; Brown, 69; Buttlar and Caynon, 274.

33. Buttlar and Caynon, 274.

34. Buttlar and Caynon, 274; Heim and Moen, 563.

35. Buttlar and Caynon, 274; Brown, 65.

36. Paskoff, 59; Buttlar and Caynon, 275.

37. Hudson, 77; Buttlar and Caynon, 275; Brown, 68.