

Chapter 5

Recruitment of Subject Specialists to Academic Librarianship

Charlene Kellsey

University of Colorado at Boulder, USA

Stephanie Alexander

University of Colorado at Boulder, USA

James P. Ascher

University of Colorado at Boulder, USA

Matthew Brower

University of Colorado at Boulder, USA

ABSTRACT

Library faculty at the University of Colorado at Boulder developed a fellowship program for current graduate students to provide them with a work experience in an academic library. Under the mentorship of a library faculty member, they completed meaningful projects, often using their language or subject expertise, while exploring career possibilities in librarianship. The goal was to introduce academic subject specialists to a career in academic librarianship as a viable career option. Based on the results of a follow-up survey the program was quite successful. The survey indicates that over half of the respondents are considering working in an academic library, and over half are attending or have graduated from a library science graduate program.

INTRODUCTION

Concerns have been expressed in library literature for a number of years about the increasing number of retirements of practicing librarians and what this implies for libraries of all types. Academic

libraries, especially in larger research universities, have additional concerns about the availability of people who, in addition to a library graduate degree, possess subject and language expertise that will meet the information and instruction needs of faculty, researchers and students. It can be difficult, however, for practicing librarians to undertake ad-

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ditional graduate study in an academic subject, or language, while working as a librarian. The Committee on Recruitment to the Profession of Academic Librarianship at the University of Colorado at Boulder (CU) Libraries decided to tackle the problem by recruiting graduate students who were already developing subject or language expertise. The Recruitment Committee planned to educate them about the career opportunities in academic librarianship by providing a fellowship experience using mentors and real-world projects within the CU Libraries.

Libraries generally provide internship opportunities for students who are already enrolled in a graduate library program. The Recruitment Committee, however, wanted to increase the pool of potential students enrolled in disciplines other than library science by giving them a mentored experience in an academic library and encouraging them to consider applying to a graduate library program. The program that was developed, the Provost's Fellowship Program, was thus not intended specifically to recruit for the CU Libraries, but as a broader means of recruiting to the profession of librarianship. The focus of this chapter is a case study of this specific program, which was established to encourage graduate students to consider a career in academic librarianship. The authors hope that librarians at other universities can use ideas from this program to develop their own recruitment program tailored to their specific needs.

This chapter has four main objectives. The first is to establish the context for the need for recruitment to the profession of academic librarianship based on demographic data found in the library literature, as well as reports on job prospects for graduate students in academia. The second objective is to detail elements of a recruitment program for subject specialists based on a description of the Provost's Fellowship Program developed at CU. This includes issues encountered, the work accomplished for the library through the projects, and the fellows' experiences. The third objective

is to describe the assessment of the program that has been done so far, including a survey of past fellows and structured interviews with librarians who have served as mentors. The final objective will be to discuss ongoing issues for the program such as funding, the need to encourage graduate students in additional fields (such as the sciences) to apply, the time commitment for mentors, and whether the program is sustainable. This last section will also include suggestions for libraries interested in establishing a similar program.

While only a small number of graduate students have completed the Provost's Fellowship Program at the time of writing, results of a survey of former participants indicate a modicum of success. Five of the nine responders were either enrolled in or had completed a library science program and five also said they were very likely to seek employment at an academic library. For the four who indicated they were not likely to seek employment at an academic library, the program gave them the experience to make an informed decision. Further details on the results of the program are found in the Assessment section below.

NEED FOR RECRUITMENT

Background

The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) has expressed concerns about the impact of the large number of projected retirements on the academic library since at least 1995 with the publication of Stanley Wilder's book, *The Age Demographics of Academic Librarians: A Profession Apart*. Wilder projected a large impact of retirements in academic libraries through at least 2015 (Wilder, 1995 and see also Wilder, 2003). At the same time, Martin (1995) noted that libraries were not attracting the best and the brightest to librarianship although the profession had become newly exciting because of the electronic information age. He called for a more concerted and organized effort in recruitment

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