

Chapter 72

Analysis of Job Responsibilities of Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Human Resource Professionals

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter was to convey the results of an exploratory survey given to human resource professionals working within the 123 institutional members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). The objective was to further define the role of human resource professionals in ARL libraries and reveal the nature and extent of human resource support for faculty and staff at ARL libraries. Respondents were recruited through email and asked to characterize their human resource functions by answering 35 open-ended and closed survey questions via an online proprietary survey tool. The response rate was 30% and provided data for the researchers to examine the experience level and education of human resource professionals, the role these individuals play in the day-to-day library operations, and the extent of interaction with the university human resource department.

INTRODUCTION

The role of human resource management within higher education reflects a vital yet complex function of leadership and management that affects organizational development. An integral area of

human resource management within academic organizations is a separate human resources department located within an academic library. Human resource personnel in academic libraries provide counsel and information to library administrators for decision making purposes, aid faculty and staff with human resource issues, and provide training and instruction to all library employees. In addi-

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tion, library human resource personnel maintain contact with and follow regulations set forth by the institutional or university human resource department. The human resource personnel within large research libraries face the challenge “to establish a function that is affirming and highly relevant to the core of the library and to its strategic direction” (Simmons-Wellburn, 2004, p. xii) as well as support development between the library and university.

This paper reflects the results of an exploratory study of human resource professionals working within the 123 institutional members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). The researchers sought to gain an understanding of the role of human resource professionals in ARL libraries, gauge the level of interaction between library faculty, library staff and human resource professionals, and examine the day-to-day activities of ARL human resource professionals. The objective was to illustrate the breadth of responsibilities of human resource personnel within ARL libraries and more specifically their impact on library faculty.

The researchers employed a variety of closed and open-ended questions via survey to discover more about the human resource challenges in libraries relative to the level of involvement in hiring and recruiting faculty, the number of individuals hired or processed per year, and the extent of their participation in library outreach and in-house training activities. Specific areas in which the researchers delved deeper included, what education or specialized training do the human resource professionals possess; what tasks or practices are performed within a human resource professional’s daily job and duties; how the human resource department fits into the library organization as a whole; and the relationship between a libraries’ human resource personnel and the institution’s or university’s overall human resources system.

BACKGROUND

The tasks of academic library human resource personnel are similar to human resource departments at the university level; human resource personnel at many levels are familiar with employment laws, engage in hiring practices, participate in evaluations and performance appraisals, deal with conflict resolutions, offer training and professional development, recruit and train new hires and work with diversity initiatives, among other tasks. Even with the depth of responsibilities held by academic library human resource personnel there is a lack of literature supporting their function and duties.

Library human resource professionals are effective and strategic elements in change management. Library employees in the new millennium are seeking change from hierarchical styles of administration, casual styles of training, unspoken policies, the overuse of stagnant committees, and other attributes that lead to an organization’s character. Generally, employees want a clear focus of leadership goals and guidelines. The human resource representative is in a good position to mediate ideas and goals between all levels of administration and staff through assessment and accountability whereby identifying needed process changes and reinforcing behavioral changes (Kreitz, 2008, p. 104).

In his 2008 article, “Human Resource Administration in the Academic Library,” Dennis R. Defa emphasizes the sometimes complex human resource challenges found in a university library and recommends that a trained *in-house* (emphasis added) human resources professional would be better suited to handle such responsibilities in the academic library because of their familiarity with university policies. Large research libraries have unique staffing needs that differ from other areas of the university. Not only are there a large mix of positions working together (faculty, staff, students, etc.) and several library departments collaborating on projects (reference, collection development, technical services, etc.) but the

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