

Inclusive Leadership: Perspectives From Academic Library Leaders

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This paper presents the results of thirty-seven interviews, conducted with deans and university librarians at large, research institutions in the US, regarding how they practice inclusive leadership and develop future leaders from diverse backgrounds. A demographic survey shows this cohort has become increasingly representative of the profession in gender and racial identities. Content analysis of interviews indicates that academic library leaders are moving beyond DEI training programs to actions that advance equity in their organizations and within the profession. Best practices for recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and retention are presented along with strategies to increase inclusion and belonging within academic libraries.

Introduction

Libraries have been called to antiracist work by a joint task force of the American Library Association and the Association of Research Libraries.¹ It is especially important for academic library leaders who have positional power and influence networks across higher education to advance social justice. This paper focuses on describing current inclusive leadership practices by academic library leaders and how they support the development of future leaders with diverse identities. Best practices and trends are drawn from interviews with thirty-seven senior library administrators at American Association of Universities (AAU) libraries. As part of a sabbatical project, the author replicated methods used in a prior study on decision making in libraries that additionally revealed strong support for developing diverse future leaders within libraries.² A new question was introduced to assess the adoption of inclusive leadership practices within the population. The results pertaining to decision making were analyzed in a separate paper.³

This paper focuses on the current adoption of inclusive leadership practices by senior library leaders at large research universities and describes best practices. While leadership can be practiced throughout an organization, senior library leaders have authority and influence based on their position, meaning that they hold “positional power” within their organizations. The author hypothesized that strong support for leadership development of individuals with diverse identities in the prior study would show outcomes in a more representative population of library leaders in terms of gender and ethnicity. The author hypothesized that this population would focus on inclusive leadership practices that support Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). The author also anticipated that these new practices would change approaches

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to developing future library leaders increasingly focusing on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Comparing responses to a similar question on leadership development in the prior study, this paper reveals changes in practices of developing future library leaders. Themes derived from content analysis reveal innovative approaches to dismantling racist systems within these large, research libraries. Library leaders are doing more than just supporting equity through words, they are taking action to make their organizations more equitable.

Literature Review

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are not only core professional values for libraries, they are core institutional values for the universities where academic libraries operate. Racial inequities are embedded in systems of oppression throughout society, universities, and the profession of librarianship.⁴ Inclusive leadership has arisen as a term describing a holistic, encompassing approach to leadership and management that integrates multiple attitudes and practices to advance equity within organizations.⁵ Within the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) the Inclusive Leadership Subcommittee of the New Roles for a Changing Landscape (NRCL) proposed defining of Inclusive Library Leadership as: “individuals who are aware of their own biases, actively seek out and consider different perspectives to inform their decision-making, collaborate more effectively with others through cultural competency, and center empathy and compassion in their approach to leadership.”

This approach begins with self-reflection and self-assessment, so that individuals can act with awareness of their leadership style, biases, and knowledge gaps. It is also important for inclusive leaders to be committed to continuous self-improvement through learning about other cultures, experiences, and ways of being. Openness and curiosity are key attitudes that also encourage listening and actively seeking out diverse perspectives for decision-making. The inclusive leader takes a human-centered approach, acting with compassion and empathy. These practices can promote an environment of trust that affirms marginalized voices and supplants inequitable systems. In a discussion about this definition, library leaders from across the profession talked about the importance to inclusive leadership of equitable practice and encouraging BIPOC individuals toward leadership roles.⁶ This aligns with a growing library literature showcasing the importance of DEI to effective library leadership and practice.

Since the 2020 murder of George Floyd by a police officer in the US, support for social justice and DEI in universities and libraries has become a focus for leaders and employees. Job descriptions for top library administrators doubled the frequency of DEI-related responsibilities in just over a year.⁷ The focus of DEI work for these leaders was developing their library workforce and supporting professional development. DEI initiatives have also risen in library programming, collections work, and organizational development. Among BIPOC in libraries, awareness of these efforts is higher than among White employees.⁸ While employees of color had a clear idea of inequitable systems within libraries, White employees often point to causes in the surrounding environment. DEI work also falls disproportionately on BIPOC, who are uncompensated for additional duties. The emotional labor and stress for BIPOC—stemming from racial unrest compounded by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic—is not accommodated by library or university policies and systems.⁹

Leaders set the tone for the climate of their organizations through action and inaction. Library administrators and supervisors can have a large impact on morale and retention of library employees.¹⁰ Inequitable treatment, discrimination, and unfair compensation drive li-

brarians not only from their current institutions but also from the profession. BIPOC in libraries are disproportionately affected through individual experiences and institutional systems of oppression.¹¹ Senior library leaders can also create dysfunctional or toxic workplaces through inequitable practices, micromanagement, or bullying that result in increased turnover and burnout for BIPOC.¹² The status quo of Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) can also be inequitable environments as they are based on norms and standards of White Supremacy, which are not explicitly identified, discussed, or questioned.¹³

BIPOC in management roles in libraries can bring an inclusive leadership approach informed by their experiences and identities.¹⁴ However, many barriers exist along the career path to academic library leadership. The inequitable representation of BIPOC in librarianship and library leadership has been examined by researchers for decades.¹⁵ Recruitment and retention of librarians of color has focused primarily on early career librarians, graduates with the Masters of Library Science (MLS) degree. Recruitment and leadership programs for BIPOC in the library profession began in the late 1990s with the ALA Spectrum Scholarship, Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Kaleidoscope and Leadership and Career Development Program (LCDP), and the Minnesota Institute for Early Careers Librarians. The benefits of these dedicated programs come from networking and cohort building in addition to skill development and training.¹⁶

BIPOC who are new professionals leave the field or their current jobs due to negative experiences such as microaggressions, inequitable compensation, and isolation.¹⁷ Graduate schools and libraries have been encouraged to address racism in their organizations and the profession with frank conversations and education on Critical Race Theory (CRT). Mentoring has long been seen as an important approach to retention and career advancement for BIPOC in libraries.¹⁸ The longer that healthy mentoring relationships are maintained, the greater job satisfaction and likelihood of pursuing opportunities for promotion. Review of hiring procedures through an equity lens can also increase success of recruitment.¹⁹ Consideration should also be given to non-traditional pathways to senior library leadership roles, which could result in deans and directors from different backgrounds.

BIPOC and women in organizations are more often placed in precarious leadership positions than White men in a phenomenon known as the “glass cliff.”²⁰ These roles, often interim, can have deleterious rather than helpful effects on career pathways. For interim leadership opportunities to be successful for the individual and the organization, sufficient preparation should be made.²¹ Succession planning, equitable access to professional development, and multiple mentorship opportunities increase the effectiveness of interim leaders and trust from their organizations. Well-constructed interim leadership opportunities can benefit career progress and increase confidence, though they also have an impact on wellness with added stress.²² The most successful interims have a prior interest in leadership although focusing on self-promoters can limit the opportunities of diverse leaders.²³ Effective succession planning should ensure BIPOC have equitable access to mentoring and professional development.

Academic library employee perspectives show an increasing preference for leaders with leadership characteristics that are traditionally viewed as feminine, such as empathy, communication, and person-focused decision-making.²⁴ These are traits associated with the inclusive leadership definition. Cultural and institutional barriers to advancement of women in library leadership exist as unquestioned assumptions grounded in male privilege.²⁵ Libraries still need to remove gendered behavioral expectations, provide mentoring and coaching, and enable

networks between women in management roles. Some gender-neutral equity measures, such as tenure stays, have benefitted men more than women.²⁶ The lived experiences of women in library leadership showcase the barriers, discrimination, and inequitable expectations still faced despite the growth in representation.²⁷

Methods

This paper presents a portion of the results of a sabbatical project approved by Penn State University for 2023 related to inclusive leadership and decision making in academic libraries. This paper focuses on inclusive leadership and development of future library leaders, while the companion paper presents results related to decision making in libraries. The overall project consisted of a series of interviews (see Appendix A) with academic library leaders and an accompanying demographic survey (see Appendix B). The Penn State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed this study at the exempt level. The demographic survey was based on the prior study but expanded to include non-binary gender identity. An additional age category was added for those seventy plus years old, and the question of racial/ethnic identity was modified to match the US Census Bureau standard.

The author conducted interviews starting in February 2023 and completed by May 2023. The author sent emails to the most senior administrator at each of the libraries at the sixty-five Association of American Universities (AAU).²⁸ Participants were asked for their informed consent and to complete a demographic survey prior to the interviews. In total thirty-seven members of the population agreed to participate for a response rate of 57 percent, which was lower than the prior study (71% response rate). Those who declined to participate but who gave a reason for their lack of participation most often mentioned insufficient experience in their current position or impending job changes, including retirement. The author did not perform cross-tabulation of demographic data with interview responses due to the small size of the population to preserve anonymity since several demographic categories had few members.

The interviews were conducted over the teleconferencing software Zoom, which provided machine transcription. Participants also agreed to be recorded, which allowed the author to use recordings to correct errors in the automatic transcription. After the author corrected and anonymized all transcripts, the recordings were deleted to protect confidentiality. The author replicated the content analysis methodology from the prior study, which consisted of individual coding. Only having one coder for the interviews did limit the reliability of coding and diversity of perspective. For the two interview questions analyzed in this paper, the first required a new codebook since it was not included in the prior study. The second question was modified from the prior study (#2), changing it from: "How are you preparing future deans and university librarians?" to: "How are you preparing individuals with diverse identities for leadership roles in the profession?" To make comparisons, the author used the codes from the prior study for this question. The author created new codes in the same method as the prior study, when concepts appeared frequently in the "Other" category. For the new question on inclusive leadership, the author created a new set of codes for inclusive leadership practices and expanded using same methodology. Several participants spoke of values they hold or attitudes they adopt as an inclusive leader, such as treating each employee as a whole person or practicing self-reflection. These were not coded individually as practices of inclusive leadership, so additional research could be done on leadership attitudes and mindsets.

Results

This paper analyzes responses to the first two questions of the interview, which focused on inclusive leadership and developing diverse leaders, along with several aspects of the demographic survey. The remaining five interview questions and other demographic results were analyzed in a companion paper.

Demographic Survey

When compared to data from the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and to the prior study for library deans and directors, a higher percentage of participants indicated that they identified as a woman (see Table 1).²⁹ No participants indicated that they identified as non-binary or transgender. While this is a far greater representation of women than in the US population (50.4%), it reflects the gender distribution among ARL library professional staff (64.6%).³⁰ While the population of this study was small, it follows the trend of increasing representation of women in leadership roles in academic libraries over the past four decades. Despite increasing representation of women in senior leadership positions, ARL salary data still indicates a measurable salary gap compared to men in similar roles.

Past data from the previous study and ARL can also be used to analyze the increased representation of BIPOC individuals in library leadership roles. This study aligns with recent ARL data showing an increase in Black or African American identifying deans and directors (see Table 2). These percentages slightly exceed representation among the current US population (13.6%) yet are almost double the proportion of Black or African American identifying ARL professional staff (7.4%). Although representation of Black senior administrators has

risen over the previous decade, the number of Black professional librarians in ARL institutions remains unchanged. The demographic composition of paraprofessional staff in academic libraries, however, is closely aligned with the US population.³¹ The credential barrier of the MLS degree disproportionately affects BIPOC due to undergraduate debt disparities, climate of graduate programs, and cultural assumptions on librarian identity. Programs are needed to create equity in the credentialing of librarians or the requirement for the MLS in all librarian positions should be reexamined based on job duties.

There was also an increase in the representation of Asian American identifying individuals in the most senior leadership roles. Both this study and ARL data for library leaders align with Asian American professional staff representation (6.9%) and the US population at large (6.3%). Asian American employees in libraries and higher education still experience stereotyping, xenophobia, unfair evaluations, and questioned expertise.³² In order to reach current representation levels in senior library leadership roles, they had to challenge these systems of

TABLE 1 Answers to the Question "Gender: How do you identify?"		
	Woman	Man
1986 ARL	25%	75%
1994 ARL	37%	63%
2005 ARL	56%	44%
2014 ARL	58%	42%
2015 ARL	57%	43%
2015 Meier	55%	45%
2021 ARL	59%	41%
2023 Meier	68%	32%

TABLE 2 Answers to the Question "What is your racial or ethnic identity?"			
	White	Black	Asian American
2014 ARL	86%	8%	6%
2015 Meier	95%	5%	0%
2021 ARL	74%	15%	7%
2023 Meier	81%	14%	5%

oppression through networking, coalition building, professional development, and connecting with identity-based mentors. Interviews with Asian Americans library leaders show they had to leverage cultural-identity based leadership skills in addition to mastering mainstream expectations of senior managers.³³

This study cannot report results for American Indian or Alaska Native; Hispanic or Latino; Multiracial; or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander identities, as it would identify individuals that participated in this study. Based on 2021 ARL data, 4.2 percent of ARL employees identify as Hispanic or Latino while only 1.2 percent of deans and directors indicated this identity. With US population statistics approaching 20 percent Hispanic or Latino identity, both representation of library employees and especially library leaders are dramatically lower. ARL 2021 data found a higher representation of library leaders identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native (2.4%) over the percentage of professional staff (0.7%) and the US population (1.3%).

While the proportion of Hispanic and Latino paraprofessionals and credentialed librarians varies geographically across the US, there are persistent barriers across the profession. ARL data shows the largest remaining wage gap based on ethnicity is for Hispanic and Latino library employees, and it is widening.³⁴ The MLS degree is almost universally required for librarian and library administrative positions. Paraprofessionals conduct library work for lower salary with limited career advancement opportunities. For students even in institutions with a majority Hispanic or Latino undergraduate population, MLS programs primarily enroll White students.³⁵ Establishing pathways to graduate education and effective recruitment through mentoring could enable positive transformation of the library workforce. ARL data shows.

Interview Responses

Although they were not asked about the proposed ACRL definition for inclusive leadership, 22 percent of respondents said that they supported the definition as written and one participant disagreed with the definition.

Many interviews highlighted DEI professional development within their organizations in order to practice inclusive leadership in agreement with literature on the topic (see Table 3). Over half of these responses began with the participant first focusing on their own DEI training and professional journey. Several interviews mentioned they also went through programs with their senior leadership team or required those individuals to complete the same program they had. The goals ranged from increasing awareness of bias, developing cultural competency, building appreciation of differing viewpoints, and fostering understanding of diverse lived experiences. The most frequently cited organization was DeEtta Jones and Associates (DJA) (22%), which provided a gamut of services from stand-alone programs like the Inclusive Manager's Toolkit to multiple training sessions and in-depth consultation services. The second most mentioned program was the Racial Equity Institute (REI), where often the cohort experience built shared lan-

TABLE 3
Answers to the Question "How do you practice inclusive leadership?"

DEI Training	20	54%
Salary equity project	12	32%
Build trust	11	30%
Transparency or more communication	9	24%
DeEtta Jones and Associates	8	22%
Created a staff governance body	8	22%
Town Hall meetings	8	22%
Intentionally hiring BIPOC employees	8	22%
Created a DEI administrative position	6	16%
Created diversity committee	5	14%
Listen to anyone	5	14%

guage and ongoing conversations locally. In some cases, participation in DJA or REI was in multi-institutional cohorts, either through a consortium or regularly offered programs. The Crucial Conversations program was also mentioned by a few (8 percent) participants as either a library or university-wide program in support of inclusive practices.

After training, the most frequently mentioned practice of inclusive leadership was some type of salary equity project (32%). Each example varied greatly due to Human Resources (HR) practices, institutional policies, or employee population of focus. For rationale, a few participants said it was evident to them when newly arriving at their position that salaries were inadequate. In most cases a formal HR process, sometimes called a compensation review, was conducted across all employees. After analyzing salaries holistically, most found compensation falling behind over the years due to frequent budget cuts and high inflation. In one case the salary equity project was prompted by employee feedback during a climate survey. In another institution analysis of salaries revealed BIPOC employees were paid less than their White colleagues. In many cases staff salaries were found to be trailing behind market values, and adjustments were implemented through percentage or hourly rate increases. Other studies have found that the racial pay gap is wider for paraprofessional staff than among librarians.³⁶ In a few cases professional or faculty salaries were increased, often with financial support from the provost's office. The most frequent goal stated was equity, but a few mentioned retention as a positive result. One participant noted, "I think that's one of the reasons we haven't seen the great resignation in this library, and if you look at the staff survey, I think you'll see evidence to back that up. People generally feel well compensated, although they still feel overworked. And the motivation to stay levels are really high."

The importance of trust, particularly among their leadership team, was mentioned frequently (30%) by senior library leaders as part of inclusive leadership. Many participants highly valued honest and very direct feedback from their administrative team, including being told that they are wrong and encouraging disagreement. One participant observed:

I think that one of the things you have to do is encourage people to push back against things that you say. And then actually, actively, both listen to it and then have your mind changed. And if you don't engage in a way that allows for that to happen, then it doesn't matter what your structure is, you're never going to have any sort of inclusive leadership style in place.

Interviewees wanted differing perspectives, alternative solutions, and the varied expertise from the diverse individuals on the team. A few respondents noted the importance of everyone having an equal voice, although one acknowledged the positional power they hold within the group. In a few cases the participant spoke about their organization more broadly, encouraging all employees to ask questions and disagree with leadership decisions. Inclusive leadership practices highlighted here were actively listening and being open to changing your mind.

Another key practice of inclusive leadership is transparency and increased communication (22%). Several participants talked about how they share more information with all library employees than in previous years or past leadership. This could be more details about the library budget, open positions, or information they are privy to due to their position, though at least one respondent noted some personnel matters can't be shared. Others talked about making portions of their executive meetings open or sharing broadly the notes from senior

leadership meetings. As a method to help employees understand their role, a few participants talked about ways they communicate their weekly activities via a blog or newsletter. Others used their position to amplify or highlight different individuals or departments within their organizations on a regular basis. Another goal mentioned during a few interviews, beyond sharing information, was to invite feedback and more communication from their employees.

The town hall was one communication method mentioned often enough (22%) to merit a separate discussion. These open forums had many titles, but in all cases invited every employee of the organization to participate and ask questions, sometimes via an anonymous form. In many ways the COVID-19 pandemic and remote work made this type of gathering feasible for large library organizations with hundreds of employees often working from many different locations. Though a few examples originated before the pandemic, most were recently established and have continued as online town halls even as library employees returned to working on-site. Beyond sharing information, it was important to many of these responses that everyone has an opportunity to be heard. In addition to presentations of information, these town halls often included question and answer (Q&A) portions, and a few individuals mentioned using anonymous question submission methods.

Several responses (22%) mentioned intentionally hiring BIPOC, LGBTQ, and women to bring different perspectives to the library, especially the senior leadership team. Most of these participants described their initial administrative team's demographics as overwhelmingly White and male. One participant noted, "The first way that I seek out and consider different perspectives is that when I came to the library the leadership, the people who reported to me, were typically white males. And so now I have a more diverse leadership team. I actively sought out leaders who didn't look like I did and hopefully they don't act and think like I do." Many leaders deliberately hired or promoted people who had different life experiences, which resulted in a more diverse leadership group. It was noted as very important that this group take the time to build teamwork and collaborative culture with many different backgrounds working together. Almost all these respondents expressed a goal of having different perspectives and experiences to inform decision making. A few also said their goal was to have the library's leadership reflect their employees' identities. There were also examples of new approaches to hiring librarians, such as opportunity hiring when excellent candidates are identified in the field. Student interns and employees were another group mentioned with leaders looking beyond basic qualifications and instead for exceptional lived experiences. A few challenges were difficulty recruiting due to an unwelcoming environment in the geographic area and fears that state legislation or US Supreme Court decisions would restrict recruitment programs and support.

Another way participants used to bring diverse perspectives to their leadership team, steer organizational development, or improve workplace culture was to hire a DEI administrative position (16%). These positions had as many different titles and responsibilities as responses, and had portfolios including accessibility, diversity, equity, inclusion, or organizational development. Many of the responses highlighted that the individual hired into this new role had a diverse identity. One goal noted was that BIPOC library employees would feel comfortable speaking directly with this person and that their voice would be represented in library leadership. In some cases the candidate was hired from outside of the institution, but in others the individual had been with the university for years and was recently hired into the library organization. One participant noted, "We centered the reorganization on the new AUL position, not only to meet the functional need to do all that work around organizational

development, but also to help start supplementing and changing the dynamics on the leadership team. I've really tried to practice valuing difference of opinion. I had to really go out and cultivate it, bring it into that leadership team, and then do it throughout the organization."

Interviews also talked about establishing a DEI committee (14) to bring more voices into decision making and strategic planning. These groups had many different official titles including accessibility, belonging, diversity, equity, inclusion, or social justice. Respondents placed emphasis on the fact that membership in these group was from across their libraries and most members did not have positional power within the organization. The responsibilities of these groups varied greatly, including review of the mission, vision, and values statement biannually to advising the leadership team including, in some cases, chairs of the group sitting on that team. Interviewees valued the insights into employee perspectives that these committees bring, especially from BIPOC employees. Equally as often (14%) participants set up structures and expectations to encourage input directly to them from any member of their organization. This included meeting as many members of their organization as possible and learning their names, holding all employee meetings as mentioned above, and populating leadership groups from across organizational hierarchies.

Developing Leaders with Diverse Identities

When analyzing responses to the second question, the author compared the prior study and current interviews, although the question was shifted to focus on individuals with diverse identities. While many of the same themes occurred, several new areas were identified (see Table 4).

TABLE 4
Answers to the Question "How are you preparing individuals with diverse identities for leadership roles in the profession?" ("—" indicates response was not coded in 2015 study)

	2023	2015
Mentoring	43%	41%
ARL Leadership Programs	41%	52%
Improve recruitment or search process	38%	—
Budget support and professional development funding	24%	25%
Local (library) programs of development and assessment	19%	18%
Developing leadership in entry level or middle managers	16%	32%
New evaluation process or criteria	16%	—
Local (university) programs on leadership	14%	20%
Diversity resident program	14%	—
Improve retention	11%	—
Sponsor or recommend for jobs	11%	—
Harvard Leadership program	8%	39%
Opportunities to lead projects	8%	11%
Succession Planning	8%	27%
Hiring a coach	8%	—
Delegate duties or committee membership	5%	23%
Leading Change program	3%	25%
UCLA Senior Fellows	3%	14%

Mentoring

Mentoring rose to the most frequently noted approach for preparing individuals for leadership roles, which is especially important for retention of BIPOC.³⁷ While most responses in this theme mentioned formal mentoring programs, such as those operated by ARL, a few participants primarily or only do informal mentoring. Almost all these responses spoke of mentoring outside of their own organizations, but two mentioned internal mentoring and said that it required a different approach. Internal mentoring programs were also often associated with tenure-track systems, providing support for academic writing and making connections to facilitate research projects. Those mentored were other senior leaders, mid-level managers, new professionals, and even graduate students entering the profession. Mentoring activities included giving career advice, recommending them for job openings, nominating for committees and boards, and helping them to publish scholarship. A few participants said that it was just as important to help their mentee assess their readiness for a leadership role, saying some emerging leaders feel pressured to move quickly into jobs of increasing responsibility. Mentors also feel that they learn from mentees and many of these relationships continue long after any formal time period has elapsed.

Overall, participants talked about mentoring as an active role that uses their professional network to benefit future leaders. One participant noted

You have to be action oriented and intentional about connecting people. Because it's really about my network, and I leveraged those networks. And I think it's really important for me in the position I am in to leverage my network to benefit others. Because if we don't have help, it's really difficult for underrepresented people to succeed, and I've certainly benefited from a lot of help in my years.

Several participants (11%) made a distinction between mentoring and sponsoring, that is, between being a mentor versus being a sponsor. Sponsorship was most frequently associated with recommending candidates by name to search firms or other library leaders. A sponsor needs to be able to “talk up” the aspiring leader in multiple venues, advocating for them if leadership positions become available in the profession.

ARL Programs

While ARL Leadership programs were mentioned less frequently (41%) than in the prior study (52%), they are still one of the top approaches to developing future leaders. Interview subjects most frequently referenced the Leadership and Career Development Program (LCDP) that focuses on “mid-career librarians from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups to take on leadership roles in their careers.”³⁸ This program has operated for over twenty-five years and multiple alumni are in this study's population of senior library leaders. Several respondents described participating as coaches, hosting meetings at their institutions, and noted significant investments of time and funding put towards the program. Mentioned by fewer participants was the Kaleidoscope program (formerly Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce) that prepares “BIPOC graduate leaders, building professional networks for these emerging leaders, and creating community both locally and in the profession.

The final program from ARL mentioned by the least number of participants was the Leadership Fellows program, which “provides the next generation of senior and executive leaders with exceptional opportunities for growth in research libraries.” While not included

under the umbrella of DEI program for ARL, the Leadership Fellows goals include “expand the diversity and overall pool of talented leaders.” Interviewees mentioned hosting this program, acting as mentors, and sending their employees, particularly librarians of color. Participants want to prepare future leaders for success both within their own institutions but also broadly in the profession. Multiple respondents mentioned their past participation in this program, valuing the cohort experience and ongoing networking connections they built.

Recruitment

Recruitment was the most frequently mentioned new theme (38%) identified as an approach to preparing leaders with diverse identities. Most of these examples focused on improving the search process with more equitable and inclusive practices. Several participants conducted assessments of their search procedures either with an external consultant, an internal review, or programs like the Search Advocate Workshops from Oregon State University. A few changed the language of their search postings to reduce minimum requirements, use inclusive language, and express clear expectations particularly around promotion and tenure. They also made sure to promote open positions online, especially via lists and websites focused on BIPOC librarians, and even increased the budget spent on advertising significantly. To improve the process, some respondents changed their search rubric or matrix to be robust and freer of bias, including asset-based assessment approaches. When forming search committees, improved practices included balancing representation of different roles and identities, as well as making sure all members of the committee are trained on DEI principles.

In order to increase the likelihood of a candidate reaching the final stage and of accepting an offer, a more candidate-centered approach was described, consistent with research-based recommendations.³⁹ Participants found ways to decrease the timeline of the search process and reduce barriers, such as having more meetings and stages of the interview online, because the senior leader’s availability is often the most restrictive element to schedule. Some interviews mentioned both making entry level and management positions more open to external candidates, while also providing opportunities for internal candidates to move up into leadership roles. A few participants mentioned changing institutional culture to allow for external candidates, while a few others had to shift practices to enable internal candidates to have a chance. A few were able to collaborate with the university or create their own cluster hiring program, which could include both a DEI and thematic focus.

Local Support

Participants also mentioned that putting funding toward supporting their values by increasing budgets for professional development at a similar frequency (24%) to the prior study (25%). Most of these responses described expanding professional development funding to all employee types, not just librarians. A few also mentioned that BIPOC individuals, particularly new hires, were well supported for training and conference travel. Participants mentioned seeking additional funding from the provost’s office or donors to increase these budgets. Other responses talked about expanding successful programs, such as internships for students or financially supporting affinity groups for BIPOC employees. One participant

created a framework and internal-library policies for the creation of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) that are self-run with specific charters, sponsored by

someone in administration. It's not just an interest group, it's to give a space for people of color, and other groups, a space where they can come together and determine what their needs are. And then be able to convey those and get us to pay attention and commit resources.

Another key strategy (8%) intended to bolster the onboarding of new administrators was to hire an executive coach for the individual or the entire team. This can require a significant financial commitment but can occasionally be included as part of the offer negotiation process. Indeed, one participant insisted on a coach for themselves as the senior administrator of the library as part of their hiring package.

Several participants (19%) described local library programs to support leadership growth and DEI, like the prior study (18%) in response to the second question. While responses to the first question, discussed earlier, were focused on DEI topics, most of these responses were focused on leadership training. A few of these programs included cultural competency and inclusive practices, although the primary goal was to develop leaders internally. Programs were open to all employee identities, often explicitly expanded to include library staff. Two participants mentioned internship programs for students from underrepresented backgrounds, hoping to engage new professionals in the field of librarianship as a career. University programs were mentioned slightly less frequently (14%) than in the prior study (20%). These examples were also split between leadership programs and DEI programs, though fewer integrated the two concepts into inclusive leadership. Participants identified library employees to participate in various ways, depending on the program, with most encouraging all eligible to participate. In the few cases with smaller opportunities, responses mentioned prioritizing BIPOC individuals or those appearing to the administration as having the greatest need.

Retention

While the need for more support of entry level professionals and middle managers was identified as key in the prior study (32%), fewer participants in this study mentioned this theme (16%). The two main goals mentioned in these responses were to create a career path within the organization and to increase employee competencies so they can lead in their current roles. One participant tries to

create promotional opportunities to create a career path for them right here within the organization. Sometimes we look outwardly, and we forget to look and leverage the skills we have inside and really grow and nurture those people for leadership positions. We continue to do that, as we also continue to diversify our workforce.

The benefits to the organization come in the form of retention, diversity among managers, and communities of practice. A few participants talked about creating a community of managers who can support each other and who are trained on common vocabulary in management and inclusive leadership. One response discussed creating a rotation in leadership roles, so that more employees can gain the necessary experience for career progression without leaving the institution. Retention, primarily focusing on either investing in employee professional development or counteroffers, was mentioned frequently enough (11%) to merit analysis. In one case, counteroffers were newly implemented at an institution where it was not a past

practice, while in another the participant concurred with the institutional policy against them. Two challenges mentioned were that the employee might stay and still not be satisfied with their job or that inequities would result in compensation within the library.

Another way participants talked about developing leaders with diverse identities was to improve annual evaluation processes (16%). For some, this involved integrating equity and inclusion activities into goals and performance evaluations, such as using SMARTIE goals (Strategic, Measurable, Ambitious, Realistic, Time-bound, Inclusive, and Equitable). Other responses focused on including staff in processes previously only open to librarians, such as career path planning and recognizing service work in annual evaluations. A few completely redesigned their promotion ranking system or job descriptions to both equitably promote and compensate employees regardless of status within the organization. While only one of these responses specifically highlighted the benefits for retaining BIPOC employees, most spoke to opening opportunities for all and centering DEI activities in every employee.

Interviews mentioned other ways to give opportunities to “everyone” through leadership roles within the library slightly less frequently (8%) than in the prior study (11%). All these examples used internal committees and committee leadership positions as an example of developing leaders within their organization. One participant described this approach as similar to “affirmative action” though noting that they could appoint anyone to a committee. Other ways senior leaders created opportunities was to delegate duties, which was mentioned (5%) significantly less (5%) than the prior study (23%). This could be due to the focus of the interview question from preparing individuals to be deans and directors toward preparing leaders with diverse identities. In these few examples, the senior leader stepped aside from a campus committee or professional organization appointment to give the opportunity to a person from an underrepresented group.

DEI Programs

Diversity resident programs were mentioned by several (14%) participants as a way to take action to increase the representation of diverse identities in the profession. These two- to three-year-long temporary positions focus on providing an initial professional job opportunity to individuals from underrepresented groups. Most responses discussed their program with the caveat that a permanent position within their organization was not a likely outcome for the residents, although a few mentioned job offers extended after the residency ended. Many participants talked about making improvements to their established programs, such as adding additional positions to create a cohort, securing sustainable funding, or focusing on outcomes for the individual rather than the library work accomplished. At least one new residency program is being established, so it seems that these programs may be more prevalent in the future.

One of the most noticeable declines among responses was for library leadership development programs not organized by ARL. Harvard’s Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians (LIAL) was frequently mentioned (8%), but not nearly as often as in the prior study (39%). Even though the program lists “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging” as one of the five topics addressed in the weeklong experience, no mention is made of underrepresented groups or diverse individuals under “Who should attend.”⁴⁰ The Leading Change Institute (LCI), formerly known as the Frye Institute, a joint initiative of EDUCAUSE and the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) was mentioned by 25 percent of participants in the prior study, but only by one participant in this study. While LCI states that “each class

cohort reflects the diverse and dynamic spectrum of experience found in the current higher education workplace,” there is no indication in the curriculum or application process encouraging underrepresented individuals.⁴¹ The interview subject only discussed how university Information Technology (IT) professionals and library professionals brought different points of view to the LCI experience. Finally, UCLA Senior Fellows was also mentioned by only one individual, while in the prior study 14 percent of responses referenced the program.

Succession Planning and Retirement

When discussing goals for preparing individuals with diverse identities for leadership roles, succession planning was only mentioned by three (8%) of participants which was lower than the prior study (27%). One respondent talked about the need for a succession plan for various roles within their organization, planning for inevitable vacancies in leadership roles and preparing internal candidates. Another focused on planning for their own future retirement, which was still years away, not only preparing their administrative team members to potentially step into their role but also making sure the team works well together. The last participant in this theme talked more broadly about their career accomplishments having already peaked, and thus they were now making it a goal to get others involved, particularly those from diverse backgrounds. It is notable that in the prior study 11 percent of participants mentioned an impending retirement, but only 5 percent did in this study.

Additional Themes

While the demographic survey did not ask participants about their sexual orientation, a few interviews discussed LGBTQ status as it relates to DEI and leadership. Participants mentioned difficulties in working with donors who are politically conservative while fundraising for the library. Others talked about the leadership benefits of having empathy and compassion because of their life experiences as a LGBTQ person. Several participants talked about mentoring LGBTQ individuals and the importance of representation for this population in academic libraries and higher education. Neurodiversity was another topic addressed by a few interview participants. One respondent discussed the ways they mentor and advocate for neurodiverse individuals. Another participant outlined in detail the structures and communication they have tried to implement within their organization to respect neurodiversity, which included speaking less in generalities and creating clear processes.

Several participants (16%) talked about uncertainty in promoting DEI within their library or university due to state legislation or federal judicial decisions. Much attention was focused on US states with Republican legislatures and governors, such as Florida and Texas, and even adjacent states were closely monitoring pending legislation. One participant noted, “I think that will be a challenge in the future. I will say that the library’s in a unique situation in that DEI is really built in our profession, much more so than some of the other entities and units and departments and colleges on campus. And so we are trying very hard with building leaders.” A few participants were waiting to make changes to the strategic planning documents or hiring initiatives. Others mentioned the politics of their state were a barrier to recruitment of individuals with diverse identities. University programs supporting recruitment of diverse individuals were also seen as potentially threatened by US Supreme Court decisions. Overall, it seems important for senior academic library leaders to pay close attention to the political environment of their states and consult with their colleagues in similar situations.

Discussion

It may seem surprising that only half of library leaders mentioned DEI training as an inclusive leadership practice; however, this does not necessarily mean that the other half does not have professional development in DEI in their organizations. It is possible that these leaders do not think of it as an inclusive leadership practice. Library leaders frequently indicated that they wanted to take real action towards inclusion and equity, going beyond training and education. As one participant summarized, "There's been this major shift from diversity programs to really becoming inclusive organizations." These results could also be due to DEI professional development becoming core to academic libraries rather than extra activity. Participants were not asked for examples of DEI and leadership programs; however, several were mentioned often enough to be notable in this study, such as DeEtta Jones & Associates and the Racial Equity Institute.

While salary adjustments can be part of regular human resources practice in libraries, the salary equity projects noted in this paper go further than adjusting individual salaries based on market trends. The intention and scale of these efforts to address equity across racial, job classification, or employment status is new and notable given the racial and gender pay gaps in the field noted in the literature and ARL statistics. Participants frequently talked about the value of open feedback, often introducing or maintaining mechanisms within their organizations to give more employees a voice. Accountability and transparency can give evidence to these intentions, so library employees can see that their contributions matter. These senior library leaders also said their administrative teams are most helpful when they are the most honest, even disagreeing when necessary. While these intentions and practices align with inclusive leadership, positional power still exists within hierarchical organizations like academic libraries. Some library deans and directors even acknowledged that this level of openness is a goal rather than reality, something that takes time and concerted effort to approach. Teambuilding, coaching, and actions that confirm trust are the methods they use to build this type of workplace climate.

In many cases participants felt that their efforts toward inclusive leadership were most effective when they heard perspectives different than their own. Several initiatives, such as one salary equity project, came from bringing representatives from staff governing bodies into leadership groups. Other leaders pointed to inclusive practices that only began or gained success when new BIPOC leaders within their organization were hired or empowered to act. These benefits of bringing diverse voices into leadership are supported by the literature and reinforce the importance of representation of BIPOC and development of future leaders. Senior leaders in academic libraries dedicate their professional and personal efforts to many approaches toward this goal, primarily mentoring and professional development programs. ARL and other programs seem to have had some impact on slowly increasing representation among academic library leaders, but not for everyone. Both individual institutions and these consortia need to grow and evolve these efforts to address inequities, especially for individuals identifying as Hispanic or Latino.

With library organizations hoping to increase the diversity of their leaders and employees, they are looking outward rather than inward in most cases. Though some can remove barriers for current BIPOC and marginalized employees within their organization, many look to recruitment and retention strategies. More equitable hiring practices are known in the profession and literature; however, local human resources policies and past library practices make adopting new approaches difficult. Nonetheless, this is important, hard work and

many participants in this study mention positive results in recruitment or retention through best practices, such as creating balanced search committees with representation of diverse identities, members trained on DEI principles, and clear and equitable criteria lead to hiring practices that center on the candidate. It is also vital to build a welcoming organizational climate for the success of new hires for improved morale and retention. There appears to be a need for collective action across consortia like ASERL, or across library organizations like ARL, to create systematic change, such as establishing postbaccalaureate fellowships to support increased BIPOC pursuit of the MLS degree.⁴² The question remains: is there sufficient will to put collective action and funding toward efforts at this scale?

Limitations

The author acknowledges their bias and privilege as a White, cisgender male researcher at a large research institution. The main limitation of this study is that the results are based on a small, self-selected sample, so the results are not generalizable to all libraries. While a few respondents discussed the impact of ARL leadership development programs on their careers, particularly in building a cohort experience and professional network, more research is needed to quantify the impact of these programs on outcomes for leaders with diverse identities. Researchers could follow the career trajectories of these programs' many years of participants and could compare outcomes for participants with diverse identities. The author also did not compare representation of BIPOC among library employees at AAU library organizations to assess the impact of inclusive leadership practices. Researchers could examine both current representation and change over time within one institution or multiple institutions in a population that practices inclusive leadership as outlined in this paper. The author attempted to draw comparisons in responses to the second question with the prior study even though the framing and text of the question differed. This could have influenced participants to address individuals with diverse identities rather than all future library leaders as analyzed in the prior study. Though the most frequent responses were consistent between studies, long term trends cannot be validated if the question was changed.

Conclusions

Inclusive leadership in libraries means self-awareness of bias, seeking out different perspectives in decision-making, collaborating through cultural competency, and centering compassion and empathy. From the perspective of senior leadership in AAU libraries, this begins with training and self-assessment, starting with their own journey and continuing through opportunities for their library organizations to participate. These leaders show commitment to equity through resources committed to hiring, professional development programs, consultants, and salary equity adjustments. These leaders also try to model inclusion through open communication, transparency in decision-making, increasing governance structures, and town hall gatherings. Intentionally seeking and hiring BIPOC and women for administrative roles and creating positions dedicated to DEI work are concrete actions taken to advance diversity in libraries. Increased representation in senior leadership teams and governance bodies resulted in increased morale and perception of equity within these library organizations.

Library deans and directors are also taking action to enable pathways for future leaders from historically minoritized backgrounds. Their positional power as the final decision maker

within their library organizations enables them to take real action for change. While mentorship is still important, the current focus on sponsorship is a more active advocacy by current leaders through leveraging their professional networks to support the career advancement of BIPOC and women. When supporting the development of future leaders with diverse identities, participants overwhelmingly focused on ARL DEI programs rather than other leadership programs (e.g., Harvard, LCI, UCLA). These programs often include inclusive practices recommended by the research literature such as mentoring/coaching, cohort building, and are targeted to individuals from diverse backgrounds. Library leaders brought in consultants or initiated strategic reviews to improve hiring practices by removing inequitable language, focusing on asset-based measurements, and keeping processes candidate focused. Recruitment has become interwoven with retention as library leaders focus on improving workplace climate, creating opportunities for promotion within their organizations, and expanding access to professional development.

The author hypothesized that academic library leaders would focus on DEI when describing inclusive leadership practices. Most academic library leaders spoke to leveraging established programs and practices, but there were a few examples of traditional systems of rank being eliminated towards equitable access. Examples from this study are evidence that best practices exist across academic libraries; however, no organizations have adopted all these practices, which are complimentary and which build on each other toward the goals of DEI. The author also anticipated that these new practices would focus on BIPOC as future leaders. While participants mentioned individuals with diverse backgrounds as important to DEI outcomes, they stressed that inclusive leadership development benefits all their employees. Finally, the author hoped that leadership development in academic libraries has improved representation within senior leadership. While representation of those identifying as women, Black, or Asian American in ARL libraries and this study have improved, for other racial identities there are significant gaps, especially for Hispanic or Latino individuals. There is still important work needed to advance DEI outcomes in academic libraries through the best practices presented in this paper.

Appendix A. Interview Questions

1. ACRL is developing a definition for inclusive leadership, “Inclusive library leaders are individuals who are aware of their own biases, actively seek out and consider different perspectives to inform their decision-making, collaborate more effectively with others through cultural competency, and center empathy and compassion in their approach to leadership.” How do you see this approach reflected in your work and planning?
2. How are you preparing individuals with diverse identities for leadership roles in the profession?
3. * How do you make decisions about your organization’s future?
4. * What are your main strategic goals over the next 3-5 years?
5. * What major organizational changes have you made in the past 3 years? What factors drove these changes in your library organization?
6. * What major organizational changes do you see ahead in the next 3-5 years?
7. * Who do you rely on for advice or direction in your leadership and decision-making?

* Responses to these questions were not analyzed in this paper

Appendix B. Demographic Survey

Gender: How do you identify? (based on UCLA Williams Institute)

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Non-Binary
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Prefer to self-describe _____

Do you consider yourself to be transgender?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Which range below contains your age?

- ☐ 20-29
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50-59
- ☐ 60-69
- ☐ 70+

What is your racial or ethnic identity? (Based on US Census data collection)

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian American
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Multiracial
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- ☐ Prefer to self-describe _____

What year did you receive your most relevant terminal degree? _____

What year did you begin working at your current institution? _____

Is your current appointment permanent or temporary? _____

What is your job title? _____

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