

Understanding the Organizational Value of Post-Master's Degree Residency Programs

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Post-master's degree research library residency programs have been in place for many years, primarily in ARL libraries.¹ A number of large research libraries have hosted residency programs for several decades.² Accounts of residency programs are most often presented from the residents' perspectives or discussed in terms of how participants benefit. Many former residents enthusiastically report on their residency experiences at professional conferences and in various publications. It is clear these early-career development opportunities greatly benefit participants.

However, the decline in the economy of the past few years has challenged research libraries to assess how residency programs benefit the organization. How do residency programs further the mission and strategic goals of the library? Providing early-career development may not be enough of a rationale to start or continue a residency program when library budgets are being reduced.

While a few residency programs are funded with endowments, grants, or other private funds, the majority of residency positions are managed as regular salary lines. These positions can be vulnerable even in good budget cycles, since they are temporary, short-term, and vacant at predictable times. Many pressing administrative needs compete for salary resources whenever a position opens. Continued funding depends on how well organizational benefits are understood and communicated. Residency programs require renewed commitment with each recruitment opportunity. As a former resident myself, as well as a residency program coordinator at the University of Delaware Library and as a consultant to residency programs in other research libraries, I have grown increasingly aware of the organizational benefits of residency programs and the importance

of communicating these benefits. Following are some of the administrative rationales for continuing to support residency programs in difficult economic times, demonstrating that residency programs reward library organizations as well as the residents.

Enhancing Diversity

A primary objective of many residency programs is to increase the racial and ethnic diversity of the library staff, which in turn supports the broader organizational goal of expanding the delivery of library services to increasingly diverse student and faculty populations. Much has been written about how diversity contributes to organizational productivity, decision making, and culture and most research universities include diversity among their core values. Faculty, staff, and student recruitment initiatives are specifically designed to increase campus diversity. Post-master’s residency programs naturally align with library and campus diversity goals.

While residency programs do increase staff diversity, there are additional diversity outcomes that are not as visible. Long-standing residency programs

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bring value to research libraries beyond changing demographics. They very publicly demonstrate a sustained commitment to diversity over time, as well as organizational adeptness in managing diversity. These are significant indicators of

organizational effectiveness that enhance diversity recruitment and retention for positions throughout the library.

Job seekers from underrepresented groups notice library employers that host residency programs. A long-standing residency can be a positive indication of a welcoming environment to prospective employees. Residency programs contribute to diversity retention, as well. Many library staff from underrepresented groups make meaningful contributions to residency programs and take pride in the success of the resident librarians. They are often very attuned to how the program is handled by administrators and valued by colleagues. Current and prospective employees from all backgrounds view the residency program as a measure of the organization’s ability to manage diversity.

Beyond racial and ethnic diversity, residency programs also contribute to career-span diversity within research libraries. The composition of professional staff in large research libraries is typically dominated by mid-career and late-

career librarians. Because research libraries are large, complex organizations with work that is highly specialized, search committees naturally favor candidates with the most technical expertise and years of experience. It is not unusual for search committees to prefer candidates with the most advanced education and greatest record of scholarship to ensure their success through promotion and tenure systems. Although unintentional, these environmental and cultural factors substantially limit employment opportunities for early-career librarians. It is rare to find position announcements in research libraries requiring less than three to five years of professional experience.

Residency programs intentionally remove these institutional employment barriers for early-career librarians. Residency positions are designed for new graduates with no post-master’s professional experience. Many are classified as non–tenure track positions, providing time for residents to acclimate to the higher education environment and build a record of scholarship and professional service “off-the-clock.”

Organizational Effectiveness

Research libraries with long-standing residency programs value the unique contributions that early-career librarians bring to the organization. Those just out of graduate school bring an immediate student perspective. Their recent student experience and ability to connect with the library’s primary constituency is invaluable. In addition, they bring enthusiasm and currency with emerging technologies, as well as knowledge of how students and faculty are using or could be using these technologies in their research. Their enthusiasm, their new ideas, and their willingness to experiment contribute to the goals and mission of research libraries.

Career-span diversity also enhances organizational effectiveness through professional and career development. When individuals at different points in their careers work, collaborate, and learn from one another the organization is more dynamic. Senior staff have opportunities to mentor and be recognized for their expertise and experience. Newer staff bring questions, ideas, and energy for change. The professional development interests of both senior and early-career librarians are met when they collaborate in pairs and on teams.

Another organizational benefit is the extension of professional development opportunities originally designed for resident librarians to other staff. Long-standing residency programs often extend mentoring programs, seminars, and

site visits to other continuing staff. Many of the cross-institutional learning and networking opportunities initiated for resident librarians benefit other early-career librarians, as well. Recent examples of collaborative learning and networking opportunities across institutions are the Chesapeake Information and Research Library Alliance (CIRLA) Fellows Program and the regional residency program meeting held at the University of Delaware Library in April 2010. The consideration given to supporting the regular influx of early-career librarians and their professional development sustains a culture of learning for everyone.

Managing Change

The staffing flexibility provided by residency programs also enhances the organization’s ability to manage change. Having a temporary, professional position available every year or two years allows research libraries to experiment with the design and delivery of new services. Residents can fulfill short-term staffing needs before continuing resources are committed. Residents often assist research libraries to explore and adopt emerging technologies. New trends can be investigated with a timeliness that is not possible through more traditional staffing such as requesting a new position or reassigning or retraining existing staff. As a result, residency programs enhance organizational flexibility and the ability of research libraries to manage change.

Residency programs also help to develop frontline managers or specialists in areas that are difficult to recruit, such as the natural and health sciences. Research libraries with long-standing residency programs recognize the value of developing leaders “in-house.” Providing leadership development is especially important as early-career librarians take on management responsibilities. Residency programs are one way research libraries prepare individuals for leadership positions early in their careers. The libraries benefit by tailoring development opportunities to the specific needs of the organization.

Conclusion

After reviewing the organizational impact of some long-standing programs, it is apparent that post-master’s residency programs have broader organizational benefits than may have been initially understood at their implementation. Residency programs that started out years ago as strategies for minority recruitment and early-career development have succeeded in enhancing organizational climate and flexibility. They no longer focus exclusively on how

participants benefit. Instead, they serve as one indicator of organizational effectiveness.

Well-established residencies represent dynamic organizations that value diversity and professional development for all positions. They visibly communicate the nature and priorities of the library’s organizational culture to prospective employees and to the research library community at large. The importance of these organizational benefits is renewed with each residency recruitment cycle.

¹ A library residency is a post–master’s degree work-experience program that provides entry-level employment and professional development for early-career librarians. Residencies are short-term professional librarian positions that typically last one to three years. In 1996 the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) distinguished post-master’s residency programs from pre-professional internships and mid-career fellowship programs in their “Guidelines for Practices and Principles in the Design, Operation, and Evaluation of Post-Master’s Residency Programs,” published in *Library Personnel News* 10 (May/June 1996): 1–3.

² The University of Delaware Library celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Pauline A. Young Residency Program on June 27, 2010 in Washington, DC, at the American Library Association Annual Conference with colleagues from the national research library residency community. There are approximately two dozen active residency programs today. More than 50 academic and research libraries have hosted residency programs for early career librarians at one time or another. ARL has provided tremendous support over the years for residents, residency program coordinators, and the development of new residency programs. The forthcoming book, *The New Graduate Experience: Post-MLS Residencies and Early Career Librarianship*, co-edited by Megan Zoe Perez and Cindy A. Gruwell, to be published by Libraries Unlimited in January 2011 provides the most current accounts of residency experiences, as well as discussion on managing diversity and early-career development. Additional information about residency programs, including resident profiles, links to current residency programs, news, resources, and collaborative initiatives is available on the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Residency Interest Group website <http://acrl.ala.org/residency/>. For more information about the University of Delaware’s residency program, see “Library Celebrates 25th Anniversary of Pauline A. Young Residency Program,” *UDaily*, July 6, 2010, <http://www.udel.edu/udaily/2011/jul/residency070610.html>.

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