

Preliminary Proposal to the Institute of Museum and Library Services		
Program:	Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian	Type: Planning Project
Goal/Objective:	Goal 1. <u>Recruit, train, develop, and retain retain a diverse workforce</u> ; Objectives 1.1	
Lead Applicant:	Western Carolina University (WCU) - <u>Hunter Library</u> + <u>Office of Chief Diversity Officer</u>	
Project Name:	Planning for a Multi-State Workforce Study of BIPOC Academic Library Paraprofessionals	
Project Period:	August 1, 2022 - July 31, 2023 (one year)	
<p>Summary: WCU and project partners in North Carolina, Maryland and Indiana request \$149,977 (with \$0 cost sharing) to plan for a future applied research project. The project addresses a national need for new approaches to recruiting more diverse professional librarians, by planning a multi-state library workforce study of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) already working as paraprofessionals in academic libraries. The future study will provide better national understanding of BIPOC paraprofessionals as a potential target for diversity recruitment and training.</p>		

Please note: All citations in the narrative below can be found online at <https://tinyurl.com/ks7spc33>.

Project Justification

A lack of diversity in the library professional workforce is well-documented.^{1,2,3,4,5} One recent report explained that, "in spite of concerted efforts from major library associations as well as library and information science programs over the last several decades ... little progress has been made with respect to representation of racial and ethnic categories that, historically, have been underrepresented within the profession".⁶ These "visible minorities"⁷ of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) have held steady at 10-12% of the library professional workforce for decades while the percentage of minorities as a percentage of the U.S. population has increased to nearly 40% during the same period.^{8,9} This is a problem across all types of libraries, but the American Library Association's "Diversity Counts" and other studies demonstrated that it is more pronounced in academic libraries.^{10,11} With only minimal improvements despite more than two decades of national efforts to diversify the professional librarian workforce, what more can be done?

One promising idea for more successful diversity recruiting can be found within the same data that confirms the problem. Previous studies showed that library "paraprofessionals" (non-librarian clerical and support staff) as a group are more diverse than their professional librarian counterparts. While only 11% of degreed academic librarians are non-white, **almost 25% of paraprofessionals in academic libraries identify as members of underrepresented groups**. This data raises interesting possibilities for research to inform future minority recruiting efforts. A preliminary literature search identified multiple past studies on changes in the jobs of academic library paraprofessionals,^{12,13,14,15,16} and other publications suggesting better ways to support paraprofessionals.^{17,18} However, little was found concerning diversity among paraprofessionals ranks, even among IMLS funded projects. **WCU and its partners believe this is a largely unexplored opportunity**. For these reasons, the applicants propose to plan a multi-state workforce study of BIPOC paraprofessionals to gain new insights and understanding of BIPOC paraprofessionals' current status (numbers, distribution, demographics, levels of educational attainment, activities, etc.), their professional interests and aspirations, and potential barriers (financial, cultural, personal) that might hinder recruitment, training, and placement programs.

Project Work Plan

Planning a mixed-methods multi-state library workforce study is ambitious and will require anticipating and managing challenges and risks. Organizations involved in planning will need to consider the diversity among hundreds of academic libraries and thousands of BIPOC paraprofessionals. The envisioned collaborative research design and testing work during the planning phase will be complex. The success of this planning project also will depend on a reliable network of partnerships and commitments, an effective governance strategy, and capable project management. The project team will:

1) Solidify and expand existing partnerships in North Carolina, Maryland, and Indiana; **2)** Identify additional partners for a total of at least 5-10 states that wish to plan and participate in a study; **3)** Connect with related work at ALA, ARL, ACRL, Ithaka S+R, state chapters of national organizations, and other entities; **4)** Form an initial advisory board and governance structure; **5)** Ensure all of each participating state’s academic libraries -- public and private universities, colleges, and community colleges -- are equitably considered in the project planning; **6)** Identify all in-scope libraries and primary contacts for each participating state; **7)** Conduct a full literature review and pull granular data from IPEDS for validation; **8)** Articulate research questions; **9)** With assistance from Purdue and other participants, design a mixed-methods workforce study; **10)** Develop a strategy for approval by WCU’s Institutional Review Board and other approving groups as needed; **11)** Iteratively test and refine research instruments and protocols; **12)** Conduct a limited pilot test study; **13)** Examine centralized, distributed, and hybridized options for administering the study; **14)** Outreach to prepare audiences for the future study; **15)** Conduct formative and summative evaluation of the project; **16)** If the multi-state study is deemed viable, prepare a research proposal; and **17)** Write the final report to IMLS. **Note:** all meetings, events, and communications will be done virtually during the planning project.

<i>WCU Personnel</i>
<p>Shamella Cromartie (PI) - Expertise in strategic planning, project management, public relations, DEI in libraries Chuck Thomas (Library Dean) - Expertise in partnerships, collaborative governance, project management, research Dr. Ricardo Nazario-Colon (Chief Diversity Officer) - Expertise in research design, workplace DEI, engagement Dr. Brandi Hinnant-Crawford, (co-PI) - Expertise in research design, workplace DEI, dismantling barriers</p>
<i>External Personnel</i>
<p>Mark Puente (PULSIS) - Expertise in national workforce diversity programs, project management, research design Initial Partner Groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Libraries of private colleges and universities in North Carolina (via a loose federation) ● UNC System University Library Advisory Council ● North Carolina Community College Library Assn. ● Purdue Univ. Libraries & School of Information Studies (via Mark Puente, who also will be a link to other states) ● University System of Maryland & Affiliated Inst. Library Consortium

Diversity Plan

All project partners are committed to national and more local efforts for increasing diversity within academic libraries. The project team includes multiple recognized champions for workforce diversity and anti-racism. The topical focus of this project is LIS workforce diversity, and the project will involve working with diverse institutions and libraries that differ in size, mission, demographics, geographic location, and resources. Building on WCU’s institutional value of “Inclusive Excellence”¹⁹ the project team will infuse diversity and equity into the way the planning project is conducted. Our commitment to diversity and inclusion will be manifested in the ways we structure the collaborative research design process, our selection of participants in project activities, and communications and outreach to project audiences.

Project Results

This planning project will prepare for an intended multi-state workforce study of BIPOC paraprofessionals in academic libraries. This future study will differ from previous work in two significant ways: 1) its methods and scope will complement other national statistics reporting programs and studies, and 2) it will ask new questions of BIPOC academic library paraprofessionals that are not normally captured in national library workforce data and studies. The study will generate new types of data and insights to inform future LIS workforce diversity recruitment and training efforts.

Budget Summary: Total Project Cost: \$149,977 | Total Requested from IMLS: \$149,977 | Cost Share: \$0

Includes \$47,417 (WCU personnel salary offsets), \$31,771 (subcontract to Purdue University), \$15,000 (ten advisory board members honoraria), \$5,000 (incentives for testing participants), \$8,400 (marketing & outreach), and \$42,389 (WCU’s negotiated indirect cost rate of 44.24%). Budget projections are subject to revision if WCU is invited to submit a full proposal.