Identifying Opportunities for Retention of BIPOC Librarians Using Survival Analysis

The University at Buffalo and East Carolina University request $474,448 to conduct a three-year research in service to practice project investigating the retention of librarians who identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). The research team will use a statistical method called survival analysis to determine whether, when, and why BIPOC librarians are likely to leave the profession. The research team will work with key stakeholders to identify potential directions for retention of BIPOC librarians in the profession.

Statement of Broad Need. The lack of diversity in librarianship has been a critical issue for decades. Only 9.4% of librarians are from under-represented minority groups [1]*. A lack of diversity poses both organizational problems, such as serving a diverse public and team functioning, as well as individually-borne problems. BIPOC librarians suffer from isolation, discrimination, low morale, and other issues that put them at risk for leaving the profession. If the profession cannot retain BIPOC librarians who have already been recruited, then recruitment strategies will have a limited and temporary effect. Thus, identifying effective strategies for retention of BIPOC librarians are critical. There has been limited research on the retention of BIPOC librarians. Of the research that exists, most is focused on academic librarians, neglecting other environments, such as school and public libraries. Studies tend to be small-scale and anecdotal in their recommendations. Suggested barriers to retention of BIPOC librarians include micro-aggressions, discrimination, isolation, culture of Whiteness, work overload, lack of advancement, and low morale [2, 3, 4]. Strategies for retention in the literature include mentorship programs, professional development, networking, and counternarratives [5, 6, 7, 8]. The existing studies do not explain when and why work life experiences result in BIPOC librarians' final decision to leave the profession.

Research Questions. The research questions for the study are
1. When do BIPOC librarians tend to leave the profession?
2. Is there a difference in timing of leaving the profession among different ethnic groups?
3. Are contextual factors identified in the literature, such as mentoring and discrimination, associated with a greater or lesser probability of leaving the profession? If so, how do these factors work differently for the BIPOC and non-BIPOC groups?
4. How have the patterns of retention of BIPOC librarians changed over the last decade?

Project Design. The proposed project uses a novel technique in this area, survival analysis, on two data sets, a) an existing nationally representative data set from ten years ago collected by an IMLS-funded project (WILIS 2); and b) a new data set, resulting from the project, that covers the years since the WILIS 2 project in order to provide current information on retention of BIPOC librarians and to explore trends over time.

Survival analysis examines whether, when, and why an event or status change (e.g., leaving librarianship) has occurred in a longitudinal framework [9]. An example of a recent project using survival analysis demonstrates its potential: Kim et al. [10] used survival analysis to identify the different stages when students of color are more likely to drop out of high school. They found that different ethnic groups drop out at different times; for example, African-American students were more likely to drop out in the first and second year and Hispanic students in their last year of high school. These findings allow schools to develop specific interventions for these groups and time them appropriately. The proposed IMLS project will similarly allow the profession to develop appropriate interventions with appropriate timing.

Year 1 – Analysis of Existing Data: A previous project funded by IMLS, "Workforce in Library and Information Science" (WILIS 2) was a retrospective career study with data available for secondary analysis. Although the WILIS 2 data was analyzed for retention of librarians, it was never examined specifically for BIPOC librarians. Our research team will analyze the existing data (2000-2009) from the WILIS 2 project using survival analysis, drawing new findings from this data and suggesting factors to examine in new data collection.

Year 2 – Collection and Analysis of New Data: Working with the advisory board, our team will develop a survey seeking data about the careers of graduates of LIS programs in the United States, about factors that are

* Underlined numbers in brackets are linked to references and related works when the document is viewed as a PDF.

believed to affect retention, and about graduates' ethnic identity and demographics, including intersectionalities. Using the model of the WILIS 2 project, the research team will work with LIS programs in the United States to recruit 2010-2019 graduates. All BIPOC graduates, along with a portion of White graduates to provide comparison, will be invited to participate. A sample size of at least 256 participants is required for the statistical analysis. Given a total of approximately 650 BIPOC graduates per year, this sample is attainable. The team acknowledges the effects of diversity fatigue, in this case, the repeated requests to a small number of BIPOC librarians to participate in research. Thus, a significant portion of the budget provides compensation for participants. Survival analysis will be conducted on the data resulting from the survey. Findings will be compared with our findings from the analysis of the WILIS 2 data to identify change in retention and related constructs over time.

Year 3 – Making Findings Useful to the Profession: Working with the advisory board, the research team will interpret the findings of the research and draft potential directions for continuing work in this area. This draft will be shared with key stakeholders in the profession to brainstorm for possible retention strategies and future research. The combined network of the advisory board and research team is broad, tapping into diverse ethnic groups and library environments. The team will also develop peer-reviewed scholarship to present at practitioner and scholarly conferences and to publish in high-quality, open-access journals. Finally, the team will partner with professional organizations to disseminate findings and recommendations widely.

Diversity Plan. While a single phrase, BIPOC librarians, is used to describe the group under study, the research team recognizes the diversity of this group. Survival analysis is particularly suited to the research aims because it can create models for groups within the broader sample. The research team and the advisory board are composed of scholars and librarians with diverse backgrounds that will help to build inclusive research strategies from the outset and establish credibility with multiple stakeholder groups.

Broad Impact. Knowing what causes BIPOC librarians to leave the profession, when this occurs, and what interventions show evidence for support can lead to improved retention plans for individual libraries and for professional associations. Knowing when certain groups of librarians are likely to leave would help to justify additional funding requests for sabbaticals and professional development programs and would inform for more targeted and useful programs that would provide the right support at the right time.

Project Team. Kawanna Bright (co-PI), Assistant Professor, East Carolina University (ECU), has published and presented widely on LIS diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues, with a specific emphasis on the assessment of library DEI efforts; **Mónica Colón-Aguirre** (co-PI), Assistant Professor, ECU, studies user services, academic library administration, and Latinx use of information organizations. **Sunha Kim** (co-PI), Assistant Professor, University at Buffalo (UB), is a methodologist with expertise in survival analysis; and **Amy VanScoy** (PI), Associate Professor, UB, studies professional issues for librarians, including diversity. A BIPOC doctoral research assistant will also be hired. Members of the research team have collaborated on research projects and have experience implementing grant funded projects (including IMLS grant LG-12-190032, an ALA Diversity Research Grant, and an NSF grant).

The project's advisory board includes representation from various ethnic groups and library environments: **Nikhat Ghouse**, Associate Librarian for the Social Sciences at American University and Coordinator, Diversity Alliance Residency Program; **Sandy Littletree**, Assistant Teaching Professor at the University of Washington and past president of the American Indian Library Association; **Antonia Olivas**, Engagement & Inclusion Librarian at California State University San Marcos; **Mark Puente**, Associate Dean for Organizational Development, Inclusion, and Diversity, Purdue University Libraries and School of Information Studies; **Kelvin Watson**, Director, Broward County Libraries and Public Library Association Director-at-Large. We are working to identify a school librarian to serve on the board, as well.

Budget. $474,448 is requested from IMLS to support the three-year project: (1) Salary/fringe for PI/co-PIs: $200,171, (2) Support for doctoral student: $80,844, (3) Travel for dissemination: $11,400, (4) Software, supplies: $750 (5) Stipends for participants: $10,000 and advisory board: $4,500, (6) Indirect costs: $166,783.

* Underlined numbers in brackets are linked to references and related works when the document is viewed as a PDF.