Applied Research Grant Proposal to IMLS
Program: Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian
Lead Applicant: Clemson University (Clemson University Libraries)
Title: A Workforce Study of Minoritized Academic Library Support Staff (Non-MLS)
Project Period: August 1, 2024-July 31, 2026

Introduction: Clemson University Libraries and its project partners at Western Carolina University and Purdue University request **$658,636** (with $0 cost sharing) in an applied research grant to conduct a two-year, mixed methods workforce study of minoritized academic library support staff. This request follows the successful completion of an IMLS-funded LB21 planning grant (RE-252396-OLS-22). The project aligns with agency goal 1: to recruit, train, develop, and retain a diverse workforce, and objective 1.1 to encourage people from diverse backgrounds to pursue professional careers in library and information science. Activities within this applied research grant include collecting demographic data about the representation of minoritized academic library support staff nationally, distributing a workforce study of minoritized support staff in academic libraries, and conducting focus groups to pursue more in-depth analysis. This phase will be a continuation of the planning grant's original intent: to generate new insights and understanding of minoritized academic library support staff's current status (numbers, distribution, demographics, levels of educational attainment, activities, etc.), their professional interests and aspirations, and potential barriers (financial, cultural, personal, other) that might hinder recruitment, retention, and advancement of minoritized populations in the field. The research questions that will be addressed are:

> **Q1**. How do minoritized academic library support staff describe/characterize their experiences within academic libraries?
> **Q2**. How do minoritized academic library support staff conceptualize the career ladder within academic libraries?
> **Q3**. What barriers to career advancement do minoritized academic library support staff perceive in academic libraries?
> **Q4**. What opportunities for career advancement do minoritized academic library support staff perceive in academic libraries?
> **Q5**. What incentives or motivations would be most likely to cause minoritized academic library support staff to pursue career advancement toward professional librarian positions?

Project Justification: The results from a nationwide survey of minoritized academic library support staff may dispute often-stated misconceptions regarding recruitment, retention, promotion, and training of these populations and provide insight into academic library climates for minoritized, non-MLS staff. The survey may represent one of the largest and most comprehensive studies undertaken on the experiences of minoritized support staff (non-MLS) in academic libraries. While our initial planning activities focused on three states (Indiana, Maryland, and North Carolina), the next iteration will be conducted nationwide to capture a snapshot of the career reflections of minoritized staff in academic libraries. Generalized observations may also lead to innovation in program planning to counter this population's stated barriers to career advancement.

Following Sankofa's (2022) transformative measurement development methodology, with input from our advisory board, we co-designed an instrument that allows support staff to report their perceptions of barriers (e.g., tuition for MLS programs) to professional librarianship. With the descriptive intentions of a workforce study, we anticipate that large-scale deployment of our survey in conjunction with focus groups in a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design will allow us to describe barriers to pathways to librarianship (i.e., to understand why so many minoritized individuals remain in support staff roles instead of becoming librarians). With the exception of large-scale demographic studies conducted previously by ALA and Ithaka S+R, there have been no comprehensive studies of demographics, inclusive of racial/ethnic classifications, for minoritized support staff in academic libraries, nor have there been efforts to collect data on the workplace experiences of these populations. This would be a seminal and comprehensive study.

Project Work Plan: Project activities will include communication and outreach to announce the study; a demographic survey distributed to all 50 states and US territories via personal networks and contacts with state chapters of national organizations; mining IPEDs and other relevant data to enhance data visualization for the project; and virtual focus groups

(5-10) of representatives from a variety of states to conduct more in-depth research informed by survey results. In addition, the project team will coordinate two nationally advertised online forums to share and explore general observations from survey results and discuss strategies for eliminating barriers to the MLS for the target populations. Before the finalization of project outputs, a draft of findings will be posted, and there will be an open comment period for the LIS community. The project's formative and summative evaluations will be conducted with the assistance of Quality Metrics, LLC. The full results of the project will be published, and datasets will be made readily available for others studying these populations within academic libraries. As in the planning grant that preceded this research study, the team will be led by Dr. **Shamella Cromartie** (PI) of Clemson University Libraries, who brings expertise in strategic planning, project management, and DEI in academic libraries, as well as **Dr. Brandi Hinnant-Crawford** (co-PI), a noted expert in research design and workplace DEI. Other notable personnel include Mark A. Puente (Purdue University), with expertise in national workforce diversity programs, and Chuck Thomas (Western Carolina University), with significant expertise in project management, partnerships, and research collaborations. Other Clemson personnel include Alydia Sims, Library Manager and EDI Coordinator, and two Library Residents. They bring expertise and interest in diversity, equity, and inclusion in academic libraries.

Additionally, we propose to partner with well-known groups and consortia to collaborate on survey distribution and dataset dissemination, such as the American Library Association (ALA) and associated ethnic caucuses, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL), the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), and state library associations to name a few.

Diversity Plan: The diverse project team from the planning grant remains intact; both PI's are women of color and several members of the project team are from minoritized backgrounds. We will continue to incorporate the advice and reflections of the advisory board, which consists entirely of minoritized academic library support staff (currently working in academic libraries). Our planning grant proposal asked, "What more can be done despite nearly fifty years of national efforts to diversify the librarian workforce?" The project will generate new insights into the motivations of underrepresented populations in support staff roles, contribute diverse perspectives on recruitment, and potentially impact academic library workforce initiatives.

Project Results: The research will provide data critical to planning for minoritized staff to participate more extensively in pathways to MLS degrees and realize successful library careers. The survey instrument and focus group scripts will be made readily available for use by academic and other types of libraries to draw insights concerning their workforce. The research project results will contribute to new perspectives and suggest new strategies for contending with the longstanding national problem in LIS of the underrepresentation of minoritized individuals in academic libraries. The demographic data collection of minoritized support staff in academic libraries will be the most comprehensive study since two _ALA Diversity Counts_ reports in 2007 and 2012. We will consider our efforts a success if our sample is representative of the racially minoritized workforce; where we can draw conclusions (and make recommendations) about the nuanced of experiences of support staff in academic libraries, i.e.: not all Black, not all Latina— but also Indigenous, Asian, etc.

Budget Summary: Funds to support the proposed activities are broken down as follows over the two years of the project period: (1) Salaries and Wages totaling $126,175; (2) Fringe Benefits totaling $32,388; (3) Travel costs totaling $60,000; (4) Supplies, Materials, and Equipment totaling $5,000; (5) Subawards and Contracts totaling $241,051; (6) Student Support totaling $27,527; (7) Other Costs totaling $15,000; and (8) Indirect Costs totaling $151,495. The total proposed budget is $658,636. Estimated costs are subject to change due to annual updates to university rates, such as fringe benefits, salaries, tuition remission, and indirect costs.