

Professional Development Program: Training for Success within Academic Librarianship

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In 1985 the research libraries at Northwestern University, the University of Chicago, and the University of Illinois at Chicago launched a Professional Development Program to address concerns about integrating younger, newer professional staff members into the complex structure of large research libraries and encouraging them to look broadly at the issues facing these libraries. The authors conducted a survey of the program's Fellows to determine how well the program is meeting its goals and the effectiveness of the program in training librarians for success within academic librarianship. The authors conclude that the program could serve as a model for training in other institutions.

HISTORY

In 1985, research libraries at Northwestern University, the University of Chicago, and the University of Illinois at Chicago initiated a cooperative Professional Development Program (PDP) for select librarians from each of the institutions. The University of Chicago Graduate Library School assisted in initiating the program at the three mid-western universities. The program was intended to address concerns about integrating younger, newer professional staff members into the complex structure of large research libraries and about encouraging them to look broadly at the issues facing these libraries.¹ Launched with a three-year grant from the Council on Library Resources, the Professional Development Program was offered annually from 1985 to 1987. It then changed to a biennial format. After the initial funding grant was expended, the three

participating institutions assumed responsibility for program costs.

The administrative structure for the program included a governing board, Fellows, presenters, and a coordinator. The governing board originally consisted of the directors of the three libraries and a representative from the University of Chicago Graduate Library School. Later, one assistant university librarian from each library was added to the board and the representative from the Graduate Library School withdrew. The board planned and guided the program, and occasionally met with the Fellows.

Nine to ten Fellows made up each year's program class, although the current class (1992-93) consists of fifteen Fellows. Three to four were librarians from each of the participating institutions. The board invited librarians with less than seven years of professional experience to apply to the program. Prospective candidates were required to submit an

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application form, including references, a brief essay, and a time-release agreement signed by their supervisor. The board made the final selection of Fellows.

The program consisted of a series of seminars. For two days each month, Fellows attended seminars featuring lectures, discussions, and exercises led by experienced librarians—department heads or assistant university librarians acting as the presenters—from the three institutions.² Topics chosen by the board varied from year to year, but often included technical services, special collections, reference, access services, budget, and personnel, among other areas. The Fellows also suggested one or two topics they wished to have presented. The administration of the program was the responsibility of the coordinator, who organized the seminars and served as a liaison between the board, Fellows, and presenters.³

The authors hypothesized that the PDP would encourage academic librarians to change position, assume greater responsibilities, shift areas of library specialty, and affiliate with different types of libraries.

The program was intended to fulfill four goals that centered on fostering a broader perspective on research libraries. These goals, which were outlined in the original grant proposal, included expectations that the PDP would "broaden the intellectual and professional horizons of the . . . Fellows about issues and problems facing the research library"; that both the Fellows "and the senior staff should be more fully aware than before of the dimensions and implications of particular management and professional policies and procedures"; and that "a sense of the nature and value of alternatives will be evident to participants because of the different approaches represented in each library." Another expected outcome was that the seminar approach would foster "the development of analytical thinking and improved communication skills."⁴

SURVEY

The authors conducted a survey of all Fellows in order to study how well this program met its goals and trained librarians for success within academic librarianship. Respondents were asked to give some background information and to rate the PDP on professional contacts and program content for each position held during or after the program. The ratings were on a Likert scale of one to five, with five being excellent. The two areas to be rated, professional contacts and program content, were intended to correspond respectively to the two program goals of integrating newer professional staff and encouraging them to look broadly at the issues facing libraries. Training for success would then be gauged by examining position changes, especially those that indicated a shift in the area of library specialty or in the type of employing library. The authors hypothesized that the PDP would encourage academic librarians to change position, assume greater responsibilities, shift areas of library specialty, and affiliate with different types of libraries. Statistically significant results were not anticipated because of the limited size of the total population. In order to validate this assumption, a variety of t-tests were performed.

Thirty-six of the Fellows returned the surveys. Information on the remaining two Fellows was obtained by telephone. Unless otherwise noted, all statements in this article are based on responses from thirty-eight Fellows, which is the number of Fellows who had finished the one-year program of intensive seminars when this article was written.

PARTICIPANTS' BACKGROUND

Of the thirty-eight Fellows, twenty-nine hold graduate library degrees from midwestern universities, eight hold graduate library degrees from North American universities outside the Midwest, and one Fellow does not hold a graduate library degree but is pursuing a subject Ph.D. Nineteen men and nineteen women completed the program. The age

of the Fellows when entering the program ranged from twenty-five to forty-six, with an average of thirty-four.

The Fellows had an average of three years of paraprofessional experience. Paraprofessional experience was interpreted differently by the various respondents, some noting that the experience was part-time or student experience. Nine of the respondents did not indicate any paraprofessional experience, making the average length of paraprofessional experience for those reporting such experience four years.

When they started the program, the Fellows had been at their institutions almost three years and had an average of almost three years of professional experience. However, only nine of the respondents had had professional experience outside of their sponsoring institution. Those nine individuals had been at their institutions an average of one and a half years and had an average of five years professional experience.

Two members of the original board emphasized that the intention of the program was not necessarily for librarians to go on to other positions; an equally important goal was for librarians to do their current jobs better.

Of the twenty-nine Fellows whose professional experience was entirely within the sponsoring institution, the average length of time at the sponsoring institution was three years and the average length of professional experience was two years. This statistic reflects the background of five of the Fellows who worked as paraprofessionals before becoming professionals at the same institution. These five individuals averaged more than six years at their institutions and two years of professional experience.

POSITION CHANGE

The average rating of the PDP for relevance to any position held during or after the PDP was 4.03 for program content and 3.88 for professional contacts. In

two cases, respondents rated only the program content for relevance to a given position. One noted that PDP "gave me self-confidence about moving on," yet did not rate the program for professional contacts. Another stated that the professional contacts were "more beneficial to the organizers [seminar leaders] than to the Fellows."

Of the thirty-eight Fellows, twenty-three reported holding a different position now than at the time they went through the program. Thus, 60 percent of the Fellows have changed position since PDP participation. Of the twenty-three Fellows who have changed position, sixteen are female, and seven are male.

Ratings for the PDP both in terms of program content and professional contacts appear to be affected by whether or not the Fellow assumed another position following the program. Those who did not report a change in position (fifteen Fellows) rated the program content at an average of 3.71 and rated the professional contacts at 3.75. Those who did report a change in position (twenty-three Fellows) rated the program content at 3.92 and the professional contacts at 4.18 for the position held at the time of the PDP. In relation to their next position following the PDP, these Fellows rated the program content at 4.20 and the professional contacts at 3.82—the professional contacts decreasing in usefulness with a new position. For a second or third position following the PDP, the program content was rated at 4.29, and the professional contacts held at 3.59. Thus, although professional contacts seem to wane in importance with changes in position, a higher rating of the program content—both for the original position and later positions—seems to characterize those that changed positions. Several comments by the Fellows indicate that the decline in the rating of professional contacts may be attributed to changes in area of specialty (e.g., academic librarianship to law librarianship) or to relocation outside of the Midwest. (See figure 1.)

In addition, it was confirmed by phone that two male Fellows had changed

positions but did not report the changes. Of these two changes, one was an enlargement of responsibilities within the same department with a concurrent change in title. The other was a change to acting head of the department. Thus, 65 percent of the Fellows have actually changed position since PDP participation.

By class, 33 percent of the class of 1989, 60 percent of the class of 1987, 80 percent of the class of 1986, and almost 90 percent of the class of 1985 have changed positions. This change in rate is readily correlated with the passing of time and the availability of further career opportunities to each class of Fellows. Therefore, it may be safe to conclude that Fellows value the program content of the PDP more as they change positions and, thereby indirectly, as time passes. The rating of professional contacts seems to diminish slightly with changes in position.

SPECIALTY SHIFT

Thirteen of the twenty-three Fellows who reported a change in position also reported a change in area of library specialty. Seven of these thirteen Fellows are still employed by their sponsoring institutions, and an eighth is at another of the three libraries. Three Fellows reported changing from reference to administration/management, one went from cataloging to reference and collection development, and one went from reference to cataloging. Other changes included from reference to systems, and from archives to cataloging. As a subset of those Fellows who changed position, these Fellows also rated the PDP higher than the overall average. The rating for the position held during PDP averaged 3.94 for program content and 4.24 for professional contacts for this subgroup. For the next position held, the average was 4.21 for content and 4.08 for contacts. When a further position was held, the average was 4.25 for content and 3.35 for contacts. Again, we may conclude that a shift in area of library specialty will indicate a greater value placed on the program content of the PDP, while the value of professional contacts will decrease slightly. (See figure 2.)

INCREASED RESPONSIBILITIES

Twenty-one of the twenty-three Fellows reporting a change in position also reported an increase in responsibility associated with the change in position. Nineteen experienced this increase in responsibility with the first position taken after completion of the PDP. Two reported an increase with the assumption of a second position. Additionally, seven of the twenty-one reported an increase in responsibility in both their first and second positions held after completing the program. This group of twenty-one includes almost all of the Fellows who changed positions. Therefore, the ratings bear the same characteristics for both groups.

INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

Of the thirty-eight PDP Fellows, twenty-three (61 percent) are still employed at their sponsoring institution—thirteen are in the position they had at the time of participation in the PDP, six are in a new position, and four others are in a second new position since PDP. However, retention has been uneven, with one of the libraries retaining eleven (79 percent) of its fourteen Fellows, one retaining eight (66 percent) of its twelve Fellows, and one retaining only four (33 percent) of its twelve. One Fellow has moved from one of the three libraries to another, meaning that the institutions as a whole have retained twenty-four (63 percent) of thirty-eight Fellows. Twenty-nine (76 percent) of the thirty-eight Fellows are employed at institutions within metropolitan Chicago, including the three sponsoring institutions. Only nine Fellows have left Illinois.

The fourteen Fellows no longer employed by one of the three research libraries have found positions at eighteen different institutions, representing ten types of libraries. Some of the Fellows have held positions at two different institutions since participating in the PDP. Three found positions in other research libraries, three went to special libraries, three went to college libraries, two went to university libraries, and one each went

All Fellows / all positions

Program content  4.03

Professional contacts  3.83

No position change reported

Program content  3.71

Professional contacts  3.75

Position change reported

Position during PDP

Program content  3.92

Professional contacts  4.18

Next position

Program content  4.20

Professional contacts  3.82

Second or third position

Program content  4.29

Professional contacts  3.59

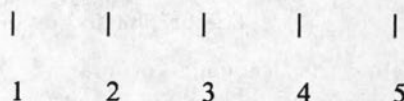


FIGURE 1
Professional Development Program
Effect of Position Changes on Ratings

All Fellows / all positions

Program content  4.03

Professional contacts  3.83

Shift in area of specialty

Position during PDP

Program content  3.94

Professional contacts  4.24

Next position

Program content  4.21

Professional contacts  4.08

Second or third position

Program content  4.25

Professional contacts  3.35

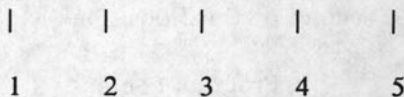


FIGURE 2
Professional Development Program
Effect of Shift in Area of Specialty on Ratings

to academic arts, academic, corporate, industry, law, and public libraries. The terms for type of library are those used by the respondents. One Fellow is employed by a library software vendor. Of the fourteen Fellows no longer employed by the three sponsoring libraries, only one is currently in a research library. Thus, Fellows who have gone elsewhere have primarily gone to nonresearch libraries. Fellows who are still employed

by their sponsoring institutions rate the program content for all positions held at an average of 3.90 (below the total average of 4.02) and professional contacts at 3.91 (just above the total average of 3.80). Fellows no longer employed by their sponsoring institutions rate program content at an average of 4.15 and professional contacts at 3.85. The authors conclude that a shift in institution also increases the rating of the program con-

tent, while the rating of professional contacts diminishes.

RATINGS COMMENTS

Of all the Fellows, only the two oldest wrote on their survey form significant personal comments about the impact of the program on their lives. Both of these Fellows (one male and one female) entered the program when they were forty-six years old, both had previous nonlibrary careers, and both have since left the institutions that sponsored them to assume library positions with greater administrative responsibility. Following their first position held after completing the PDP, these two librarians gave the program the highest rank for both program content and professional contacts. Their written comments were also similar. One wrote, "The PDP helped give me not only broad-based knowledge of academic libraries, but helped instill in me a sense of confidence regarding my abilities to handle additional responsibilities in the field." The other Fellow said:

PDP experience was very important to me, not only for its orientation to concerns of large research libraries . . . the people I met . . . insights and knowledge I have since applied to my administrative work, [but] it was also important to me in a very personal way. It helped confirm to me that my career change in middle age was a good one: I felt that I was now accepted by professional peers and that I had been identified as a person with much potential.

BOARD OF GOVERNORS' EVALUATIONS

In interviews conducted by telephone or mail with six current or former members of the board, responses to questions evaluating the PDP were remarkably similar in rating program content and professional contacts. All surveyed members of the board perceived the original goals of the PDP to be to expose the Fellows to the broad issues facing research libraries; to develop the Fellows' understanding that these issues can be addressed and solved by different institutions in a variety of

ways; to provide a more satisfactory professional development program for new research librarians that, by being both practical and theoretical, accelerated professional growth; and to increase the opportunities for both Fellows and presenters to interact with librarians from other research libraries in the Chicago area. Two members of the original board emphasized that the intention of the program was not necessarily for librarians to go on to other positions; an equally important goal was for librarians to do their current jobs better.

The success of the contacts made through the PDP was viewed enthusiastically by all members of the board.

The board agreed unanimously that the original goals of the PDP remained stable throughout the program's history. Board members also concurred that the PDP had been successful in meeting its original goals. Gerald J. Munoff of the University of Chicago stated, "Everyone I have talked with about the program has basically felt very positive about it. We are continually making improvements on something that everyone seems to feel good about." Lance Query of Northwestern University noted, "Success across the board." Several of the respondents commented that the three institutions have continued the program at their own expense since grant funding has expired. This support comes, they noted, at a financially challenging time, therefore underscoring their endorsement of the program.

Most members of the board commented favorably on the content of the program, noting the mix of theoretical and practical considerations of core research library issues. Martin Runkle of the University of Chicago pointed out that, among other goals, the program aimed "to develop Fellows' understanding that there are no easy solutions to many of the problems facing research libraries and that often there is no single

correct solution." The respondents also mentioned the generally high quality of the presenters.

The board's comments on the importance of contacts made through the program were even more extensive than those on the content of the program. The success of the contacts made through the PDP was viewed enthusiastically by all members of the board. Beverly P. Lynch, who was University Librarian at the University of Illinois at Chicago from the inception of the program until 1990, stated, "The professional contacts by Fellows, session presenters, or the Board of Governors were excellent. Friendships were established or strengthened, and professional networking enhanced." One board member noted that relationships among Fellows have remained ongoing, even after their year of seminars together ended. However, another suggested that the Fellows who benefited from the contacts with each other, the presenters, and administrators, may have been high achievers who would have made these contacts even without the program (for example, through professional association meetings).

CONCLUSIONS

The high ratings given by the Fellows to professional contacts, especially for

the position held at the time they participated in the PDP, seems to indicate that the program was successful in its goal of integrating newer professional staff into the structure of the sponsoring research library. It is important to note that none of the Fellows has left the profession. That the rating for professional contacts waned with a change in position does not lessen the value of this initial integration, but may be attributed to changes in specialty, type of library, or geographic location. The even higher ratings given to program content indicate that the program was successful in meeting the goal of encouraging program participants to look broadly at the issues facing research libraries. The climb in this rating with changes in position speaks of the long-term value of the program content and its applicability to a variety of academic library positions. Finally, the twenty-five Fellows' changes in position, thirteen Fellows' shifts in area of library specialty, twenty-one Fellows' assumptions of greater responsibilities in new positions, and the affiliations with different types of libraries (ten different types of libraries represented), indicate that the program was effective in training academic librarians for success in the field and could serve as a model for other institutions.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Melissa Trevvett, "The Professional Development Program," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 16(May 1991):73.
2. For information on one exercise, see Dennis K. Grumling and Carolyn A. Sheehy, "An Exercise to Test Perception of Expectations for Tenure and Promotion," *College & Research Library News* 52(May 1991):300-301.
3. For more details on the structure and history of the Professional Development Program, see Trevvett, 73-75.
4. "Multi-Institutional Program of Professional Development: A Proposal to the Council on Library Resources," Chicago, 1984, 7.