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Research Proposal

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LIS 7050 Research Methods

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Problem Statement

There is a glaring lack of racial and ethnic diversity within librarianship. With the United States' population being 40% people of color based on 2016 United States Census estimates, only 13% of American Library Association member librarians in 2017, self-identify as people of color, as cited in Rosa & Henke (2017). In spite of the fact that the racial and ethnic diversity of the United States population is rising, the number of credentialed librarians is not. And although the American Library Association recognized this problem prior to 1997 and seeks to "increase the diversity of the library workforce to reflect an increasingly diverse national and global community" by advancing strategic objectives (American Library Association Core Values of Librarianship, 2004), and emphasizing diversity as one of its core and fundamental values (American Library Association Strategic Plan, 2010) the number of credentialed librarians who are racially or ethnically diverse has grown minimally for twenty years.

Kim, Chiu, Sin and Robbins (2007) discuss and emphasize studies that show how individuals, regardless of their race or ethnicity, benefit from interacting with a librarian of color. These benefits include feeling welcome, improved ease of communication and reducing anxiety. Additionally, Villarejo, Barlow, Kogan, Veazey and Sweeney (2008) discuss a 2005 National Academy of Sciences Report, which accentuates how scientific inquiry is more inclusive when addressed by a diverse workforce.

The purpose of this study is to contribute knowledge towards understanding the possible reason(s) for a lack of racial and ethnic diversity within librarianship. It will investigate the awareness and interest levels of library degrees and careers within an undergraduate

student population to assist in determining if there is a significant difference between students

of color and non-students of color.

This study is important because the undergraduate population has been fundamentally

overlooked in past research, and as revealed in my review of the literature, there are few

comparable studies. Therefore, I intend to achieve and provide valuable insight into

undergraduate student awareness of library and information science (LIS) as well as explore the

relationship of the awareness between undergraduate students of color and other

undergraduate students.

This study is beneficial to providing a credible focus on the gap in research by evaluating

quantitative and qualitative data from the population and it will provide increased

understanding into a possible reason for the lack of credentialed librarians of color.

Research Hypotheses

Research Hypothesis #1: Students from racially underrepresented groups are less aware

of/interested in careers in library & information science than other undergraduate students.

Research Hypothesis #2: Students from racially underrepresented groups are less aware

of/interested in library & information science degree programs than other undergraduate

students.

Literature Review

Awareness defined by Merriam-Webster (2017) is, the "knowledge and understanding

that something is happening or exists." Frequently, awareness needs to be heightened in an

effort to address a problem or increase one's consciousness of an issue. Awareness is what I

seek to increase and understand while I conduct my study of undergraduate students because

unfortunately, there is very little literature concerning racial and ethnic undergraduates in relation to library and information science that supports my research hypotheses. Themes found in related literature, will emphasize the significance and need for my study.

Awareness of high school and undergraduate students

Libraries and librarians are advocates for countless community resources, but when are they advocates for *librarianship*? Though few in number, there are studies which evaluate racially and ethnically diverse student awareness of the profession, but these focus on students who are already enrolled in LIS schools or focus on students who are not racially or ethnically diverse (Kim, et al., 2007; Love, 2010; Moniarou-Papaconstantinou, Vassilakaki and Tsatsaroni, 2015; Mugot, 2012; Newbutt & Sen, 2009; Stanley, 2007).

Newbutt and Sen (2009) found that youth with little understanding and awareness of librarianship will not consider the profession as a career. This study, which surveyed LIS students and non-LIS students aged 18-24, revealed that student perceptions of librarians and libraries influenced their reasons for not entering or entering the profession.

Love (2010) found that minority undergraduate students had little awareness of the "job responsibilities" of librarians and that academic librarians were aptly positioned to successfully recruit minority students. Love also emphasized the need for qualitative

research to inform the profession on in-depth reasons into why minority undergraduates are attracted to or repelled from librarianship.

Mugot (2012) found that evaluating student awareness of LIS degree programs significantly informed promotion strategies to increase enrollment in LIS schools. This researcher studied high school students, their perceptions of librarians as well as their motivations to choose LIS as a career.

Moniarou-Papaconstantinou et al. (2015) found that in order to influence high school student awareness of and motivation towards library careers, library schools should take it upon themselves to educate undergraduate students on the importance and value of library roles. The researchers found this necessary in order to attract undergraduates to library and information science.

Awareness of postsecondary education opportunities

Equally important is the postsecondary awareness students of color gain while enrolled in primary education (grades K-6) and secondary education (grades 7-12). Studies show that their exposure to LIS as a graduate degree and career are limited (Banerji, 2006; Stanley, 2007; Bergerson, 2009; Martinez, 2013).

Linnehan, Weer & Stonely (2006) found that high school guidance counselors advised students to attend 2-year or 4-year colleges based on their socioeconomic class rather than ethnicity or race. This study surveyed guidance counselors across the United States

to evaluate social stratification in education and to address equity and access issues. It

revealed that stratification negatively affects students within lower socioeconomic

classes, which are frequently students of color, and their awareness of potential

graduate school and career opportunities, like LIS.

Stanley (2007) found that undergraduate students were not aware of librarianship as a

career choice and that while in high school, counselors rarely suggested it a career

opportunity to them. Additionally, few students indicated they used their high school

library while there. Information for this research evaluated racially and ethnically

diverse undergraduate students during focus groups.

Bergerson (2009) found that racially and ethnically diverse high school students have

several barriers to navigate when choosing to attend a college or university. This study

recognized that though students of color value education, they have unequal "access to

information, inadequate academic preparation, and financial resources" (p. 83) available

to them prior to and at the time of college selection.

In contrast to previous research, Martinez (2013) found that Latina/o high school

counselors greatly understand the needs of Latina/o students and assist in connecting

students to college information and college representatives. This study evaluated

interviews, was qualitative in nature and shared how racially and ethnically diverse

guidance counselors can be positioned to impact student awareness of postsecondary

education on a small scale.

The concept of awareness in these studies has emerged as a strong theme, though the

concept is designed differently, measured differently, collected differently and conducted by

different types of researchers, the research strongly suggests awareness of youth is lacking in

library and information science. Also, based evaluated research and literature (Emanuel, 2012;

Newbutt & Sen, 2012 and Vallerejo et al., 2008), "awareness" of LIS can be created and

enhanced to positively impact and therefore improve course and degree program enrollment,

better understanding of a librarian's role and help people unfamiliar with the career to become

more familiar and supportive of the field.

Methodology

Design/Data Collection Method and Rationale

For this project, I propose to study the undergraduate population of St. Catherine

University via an electronic survey questionnaire. I propose the use Google Sheets, which is

software offered by Google and available online. My rationale for designing a survey and

collecting data through this method is supported by a study published by Porter, which

discusses how "web surveys seem especially useful for the current generation of college

students, who are much more familiar with the Web and more likely to have and use e-mail

compared with earlier generations" (2004, p.96). I prefer to use this method because studies

suggest that web surveys may be quicker to complete in comparison to paper surveys, because

respondents can simply click on their responses rather than handwriting them. Finally, Porter

(2004) noted that using a web survey would keep costs low, in comparison to printing, mailing or scanning surveys, in addition to reducing the errors in compiling the survey data. Electronic surveys are low in cost to create, often no cost to transmit and frequently no cost to compile because the respondents enter the data. This method is appropriate to address my hypotheses because based on Porter's 2004 research; electronic web surveys have the most benefits in comparison to other survey types, like those on paper.

Measurement: Variables and Measurement

This proposal grew from an exploratory pilot study of sixty-four (64) undergraduate students attending St. Catherine University and conducted from November 15, 2017 to December 1, 2017. The hypothesis of that study was to test the difference in awareness and interest of a small sample of the undergraduate population and to determine if there is less awareness and interest in these degrees and careers by students of color in relation to other students. Students were asked to rate their level of awareness as not aware, fairly aware, aware or very aware. Similarly, students were asked to rate their interest as not interested, fairly interested, interested, or very interested.

I propose to study a larger undergraduate population at St. Catherine University in comparison to the exploratory pilot study with the desire to focus on first year and second year student awareness and interest in library and information science. The dependent variable would be "awareness" and the independent variable would be "race". I intend to ask closed-ended, exploratory questions as well as demographic questions.

Sampling Procedures

This study intends to measure the undergraduate student population at St. Catherine University who are eighteen (18) years of age and older and who represent a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds which include students who self-identify as African, Black, Alaska Native, Latinx, Middle Eastern, Indigenous American, Pacific Islander, White and students who identify as more than one race. The population will include students in all levels of their undergraduate study as well as those with varying different degree majors.

The convenience sample method will determine the sample population, due to the fact I am a graduate student with St. Catherine University and I am physically on campus on a frequent basis to interact with undergraduate offices who I will ask to disseminate the electronic survey link sent via e-mail.

IRB Requirement

In order to conduct this study, I will submit an Institutional Review Board application because the study constitutes research and involves human subjects. In this case, the category of this study is exempt because I intend to conduct research, which involves minimal or no risk. My sample does not fall into the category of vulnerable populations because based on Lim, 2017 the study does not involve children under the age of 18 and therefore I do not have to collect assent or consent forms. Additionally, my sample will not be prisoners or institutionalized persons, individuals receiving protective services, or individuals whose decision-making is impaired.

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