

Pennsylvania Libraries: *Research & Practice*

Feature

Penn State Diversity Residency Program Celebrates First Graduates

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Introduction (by Barbara Dewey)

Penn State's Library Diversity Residency Program was launched in 2013. This program attracts recent library and information sciences graduates from historically underrepresented and culturally diverse groups for a two-year experience in research librarianship. The program is currently co-funded by the University Libraries, the Office of the Provost, and the Office of the Vice President for Educational Equity. Penn State's first two residents, Rachel Smith and Mohamed Berray, discuss their experiences and viewpoints on the program in this article.

The purposes of this program are to

- increase diversity among Penn State Libraries' faculty;
- increase diversity in the field of academic librarianship;
- invigorate the organization with fresh ideas, skills, and enthusiasm;
- prepare library leaders for the future; and
- enhance Penn State's reputation as an institution that supports, trains, and mentors diverse librarians

The proposed program grew out of the University Libraries' longstanding commitment to diversity. It supports the university's strategic plan, particularly "Faculty Recruitment and Retention for Excellence," which includes the university's commitment to increase diversity among faculty and the strategy, "Build on the Framework to Foster Diversity." Within the Framework to Foster Diversity, the stated challenges to "Recruit and Retain a Diverse Workforce" and "Diversify University Leadership and Management" both directly benefit from a Diversity Residency Program.

The libraries' Diversity Residency Program is a two-year faculty appointment. In the first year, participants experience assignments in a variety of areas of the libraries on a rotational basis. All of the assignments relate to the University Libraries' strategic areas of priority:

- digital initiatives;
- emerging technologies;
- instructional and research services; and
- repository and data curation services.

Residents participate actively in university and libraries' committees, councils, and task forces. They develop collegial relationships with Penn State faculty members and provide support in a variety of ways for students. Residents also contribute to national and regional professional organizations.

The University Libraries is pleased to be graduating the first two residents in the program. Both Rachel Smith and Mohamed Berray gained an array of experiences, not only at Penn State Libraries, but also at the Penn State University Park campus. They are now well grounded for careers in academic librarianship. They also brought rich perspectives and new knowledge to the libraries, to Penn State, and to the profession of librarianship, which they have generously shared during the program. These experiences and contributions are articulated below in their own voices.

Happy Valley: My Time as an Inaugural Diversity Residency Program Librarian (by Rachel Smith)



In January of 2013, I was beginning my final semester of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's (UNCG) Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) degree program. Knowing that I would soon be the recipient of an American Library Association (ALA)-accredited MLIS degree, I began my job search. I applied for more than a handful of entry-level librarian positions in public and academic libraries, but the one position in which I was the most interested was the Diversity Residency Program Librarian position at the Pennsylvania State University Libraries. I had never lived or worked permanently outside of sunny and warm North Carolina, but I had a feeling that would be changing soon. In the span of a few short months, my interest would turn to nervousness and then excitement!

As a newly minted Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Career Enhancement Program (CEP) Fellow, I was able to attend the ARL Leadership Institute in Seattle during the last week of January in 2013. One of the most enlightening and memorable presentations I attended during the institute revolved around academic library residency programs. I listened to resident librarians from Ohio State University and Emory University discuss the rotations they participated in, the benefit packages they received as faculty members, and the opportunities for professional development they were able to take advantage of as residents in their respective programs. It was after this presentation that I realized I had made the right decision to apply for the position at Penn State University (PSU). During the next few months I had a phone interview, an on-campus interview, and finally a job offer. I was fortunate to have other options, but I was elated to accept the Penn State offer.

In August of 2013, I began my appointment as an inaugural Diversity Residency Program Librarian at Penn State. In an interesting twist of fate, the other incoming librarian who would share this experience as an inaugural resident was Mohamed Berray. Not only had I previously met Mohamed, but we attended the same MLIS program

at UNCG and just 3 months prior to our first day at Penn State, we had both walked across the stage in Greensboro to receive our degrees. In this position, I would be a fixed-term faculty member with generous benefits that even included a professional development fund. Other components of the appointment included having my very own knowledgeable mentor and opportunities to serve on and lead both library and campus-wide committees. I had a good idea of the opportunities and expectations my new position would entail, but I had no idea just how impactful my two-year residency would eventually become.

The wonderful thing about being an inaugural resident is that I could blaze my own trail and set my own bar. I was given the opportunity to select my work rotations based on my own professional interests—talk about a dream entry-level job! I found that this setup was perfect for me, as I went into library school with a public librarianship focus and did not have the opportunity to learn much about academic libraries and related responsibilities. I had prior internships in academic libraries, but this flexibility would grant me hands-on professional experience in a research library ranked 8th in North America by the ARL Library Investment Rankings for 2011-2012.

During the first year of my residency, I completed work rotations in the Schreyer Business Library, preparing online learning objects; the Research Hub, providing in-person and virtual reference assistance; and in the department of Adaptive Technology Services, where I converted textbooks into accessible formats for blind and visually impaired students. I also began long-term rotations in the departments of Library Learning Services (LLS) and Digitization and Preservation. In LLS, I provided information literacy instruction, created online learning objects, and served as a collection developer and co-selector for the library's Leisure Viewing Collection. In Digitization and Preservation, I served as project manager for the digitization and restoration of *The Penn State Froth*, a student-led magazine published from 1910 to 1985. This year-long project included scanning, editing, handling sensitive materials, linking metadata, and loading the collection of 19,876 images to CONTENTdm. I have actively served on the libraries' Diversity Committee as chair of the programs subcommittee, the libraries' Open House Steering Group, and the libraries' Disability Services Committee. I have also served the Penn State University community as a member of the President's Commission for Women on the Personal Safety and Sexual Assault Awareness Committee; the PSU Martin Luther King, Jr., Commemoration Planning Committee; and the PSU Student Technology Advisory Committee.

During the summer, between the first and second year of my residency, I taught information literacy classes for LEAP (the Learning Edge Academic Program), which provides entering Penn State freshmen the chance to begin their academic journey by taking prerequisites while being fully immersed in college life. I also presented alongside Penn State University Libraries Dean Barbara Dewey on a panel about residency programs at the 2014 ALA Annual Conference in Las Vegas. Also in the summer of 2014, I attended the Teacher Track of the ACRL Immersion Program in Burlington, Vermont. None of these opportunities would have been possible had it not been for this residency program.

The flexibility of the residency program truly allowed me to find my niche in librarianship. When I began at Penn State, I had little idea of what my career-related research interests would be. My work in various areas and with all types of library and campus employees solidified my research interest in classism and rankism in academic institutions, specifically in academic research libraries. I also had no idea when I began of whether I wanted to work in reference, special collections, adaptive technologies, cataloging, instruction, digitization, or collection development. Through my residency, I have been able to gain foundational experience in all of these areas. I have found through my work that I absolutely love creating online learning objects and providing information literacy instruction. I assume that this affinity stems from my baccalaureate background, which is in theatre performance. I could take this to indicate that I love to teach and be the center of attention and that I love to create and hear and see

myself on-screen! Ultimately and truly, I love interacting with students and helping them along in their educational endeavors, and I have found the perfect career that allows me to do exactly that.

Now as I come into the final months of my residency, I want to share as much as I can about the benefits of residency programs in academic libraries. Not only do these programs actively foster diversity in libraries but they also provide absolutely critical experience to recent MLS/MLIS graduates. In a professional climate where even entry-level positions are requiring that candidates have at least two years of experience in academic library settings, the support and continuation of library residencies could not be more important. Even in residency programs that are subject- or duty-specific, the hands-on professional experience gained by recent graduates in these fast-paced research libraries makes for more well-rounded librarians who can be as competitive as possible upon the completion of their residencies. As all good things must come to an end, my time as a Resident Librarian at Penn State will end in July of this year. In August, I will begin my work as the Learning Technologies Librarian at the Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries, where I will develop, implement, and assess a suite of online learning tools to support students' information literacy and research skills. I will also be providing information literacy instruction to students with various backgrounds. I am confident that the skills, experiences, and relationships I gained during my residency made me a strong candidate in my recent job search and that they will serve me well as I continue in my career as an academic librarian. I am thoroughly pleased with my first post-MLIS position. Despite the frigid winters and spans of time where everything outside just seems gray, I can honestly reflect on my time at Penn State and not regret a single experience. It is, after all, Happy Valley.

Reflections of a Resident Librarian (by Mohamed Berray)



In August 2013, I started my residency at Penn State, two months after successfully completing a Fulbright fellowship at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). Before moving to UNCG, I was at the American University in Cairo, where I first worked as research/library specialist with the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies, and later, as head of a small law library housed in the university's main library. Coming from smaller institutions, moving to Penn State was initially overwhelming. Yet, after the first semester, I was astonished to see myself becoming an integral part of this complex machinery. The Penn State University Residency Program provides a model for new and proven leaders with diverse perspectives and initiatives to bring innovations to the profession and increase the impact of libraries to the communities they serve. The program is designed to enhance greater involvement of residents in all aspects of the libraries' engagement at the institutional level. The inaugural residency program has achieved this goal in addition to enhancing Penn State's reputation as a leader in promoting and cultivating diversity.

To hit the ground running, my wonderful colleague, Rachel Smith, and I started work in the new Research Hub. Here I provided instruction and advanced research support to students in the social sciences. This was an excellent opportunity to learn library process at a large research institution and to observe and assess graduate students' and faculty experiences with library research. One key advantage of the inaugural residency program is that as much as we are held to the highest expectations as all other faculty at Penn State, we were allowed to shape our duties in line with our strengths and our future career goals. Given my interest in collections management and in assessment, I was appointed to the libraries' Reference, Collections, & Research (RCR) Group and to the Collections Services Advisory Group (CSAG). Both RCR and CSAG provide overall direction in ensuring that the Penn State

Libraries meet its strategic priorities in the area of collection development. I also was appointed to the libraries' Assessment and Metrics Council, providing leadership for assessment, metrics, and data-gathering activities across the University Libraries. The design of library functions at Penn State was particularly supportive to my professional growth. Unlike other libraries where there are librarians for certain specialized duties like collections and assessment, Penn State has committees for these duties, allowing greater participation and representation from all areas in the library.

In the semesters that followed, I took over subject responsibilities for political science, international law, and international affairs when the head of the Social Sciences Library was on sabbatical. I also worked part-time with Acquisitions Services on negotiation and licensing of electronic resources and on maintenance and troubleshooting of our Serials Solutions 360 database. As part of my duties in Acquisitions, I served on the libraries' E-Books Task Force to review options for acquiring e-books and to recommend best practices for moving forward with the libraries' Demand Driven Acquisitions (DDA) program. The experiences gained in Acquisitions Services and in the Social Sciences Library will enrich my career for the many years to come.

Currently, in the final months of my residency, I am involved in establishing (or setting the framework for establishment of) new initiatives at the Penn State Libraries. In collaboration with Publication and Curation Services, I am working as part of a vibrant team of librarians to implement a pilot project to support Open Access publishing for faculty at Penn State.

The all-inclusive experience that comes with the residency program at Penn State sets the pace for library residencies all over the United States. Two major highlights of my residency are the passing of the libraries' Open Access policy, which I co-authored, and my attendance at the 9th Minnesota Institute for Early Career Librarians. This week-long institute helps develop library leaders from diverse backgrounds with leadership abilities proven to be necessary for organizational success. The Associate Dean for Collections Information and Access Services here at Penn State mentored me during and after the institute. The influence of the Minnesota Institute will resonate beyond my librarianship career, and the mentorship experience could not have been any better.

At the end of my residency, I hope to move into a full-time position where I will have a greater impact on library processes and help move forward the role of libraries in the institutions they serve. With my experiences participating in the Penn State Libraries' Strategic Planning Working Group on Advancing University Research and by working with statewide programs like the Pennsylvania Hub Working Group for the Digital Public Library of America, I feel I now have a greater understanding of intra- and inter-institutional collaboration to help me stream the agenda of academic libraries. Here I have realized the true potential of an environment with adequate resources and expertise. It has been a true blessing to work with the galaxy of high-profiled colleagues here at the Penn State University Libraries.