

The HBCU Library Alliance: Developing Leadership

by Carolyn Hart, Lillian Lewis, Elizabeth McClenney, V. Tessa Perry,
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The Leadership Institute has made a significant impact on my role as library director. The institute provided quality presentations and materials that have proven to be valuable resources. I have revisited the package of information from the institute on several occasions and used the information to help me during daily operations. The most inspiring part of the program was the networking experience that allowed me to meet many accomplished library professionals. Their insight and knowledge is invaluable, and it was a pleasure to learn from them. The institute left me feeling motivated, sharpened my leadership skills, and gave me greater confidence to lead.

—Tasha Youmans, library director, Bethune-Cookman College, Daytona Beach, Florida

The HBCU (Historically Black College and University) Library Alliance (HBCULA) is a consortium that supports the collaboration of institutions dedicated to providing an array of resources designed to strengthen these libraries and their constituents. The purpose of the HBCULA is to ensure excellence in HBCU libraries through the development, coordination, and promotion of member programs and activities.

Plans for the organization first emerged as early as 2001 during discussions held by the Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET) Board

of Directors and HBCU library deans. In 2002, a steering committee was formed, a website unveiled, and support from SOLINET and the Council of Libraries and Information Resources (CLIR) con-

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firmed. Library deans and directors from more than one hundred HBCUs met later that year to draft the HBCULA's mission and vision statements. In 2003, bylaws were adopted, thereby officially forming the HBCULA.

In 2003-04, a planning project that was conducted by the HBCULA and SOLINET and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation identified several obstacles to the effective integration of many HBCU libraries into their campus programs for teaching and learning. These factors include fiscal constraints, rapidly changing technology, an aging workforce, ineffective assessment tools, and lack of training. To address these and other issues, the planning project concluded that the HBCULA should begin by developing greater

leadership within the HBCU library community. The partners clearly realized that to overcome obstacles and transform HBCU libraries into effective partners in the teaching and learning process, cultivating strong leadership must be a priority.

The Leadership Program (LP) comes at a critical moment in the history of HBCU libraries. With the coming retirement of many deans and directors in librarianship, the founding members of the HBCULA recognized that unless there will be a cadre of trained leaders, armed with the knowledge and skills needed to deal with the constant change and complexity

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of the library and information profession, there will be a shortage of potential library directors, which would be devastating to HBCU institutions.

To develop leadership, the HBCULA and SOLINET were awarded Mellon Foundation grant funds to develop a multi-part LP centered by a two-part Leadership Institute (LI) for teams from selected HBCU libraries. The goals of the LI were to further equip HBCU librarians to articulate and advance a vision for the library as a valued partner in teaching and learning; manage change that will transform the library into a "learning commons"; build partnerships with faculty and administrators and within the broader HBCU community; and create a culture of leadership within the library staff.

The five components of the LP include a Pilot Institute (PI), a two-part LI, site visits, scholarships for daylong workshops, and an exchange program for associate level HBCU librarians. Mentors from the pilot guided participants with assignments at both parts of the LI. They also made site visits to participating libraries. Scholarships were provided for focused, daylong training sessions for staff from HBCU libraries participating in the LP, supporting skill development in specific ancillary topics (budgeting, fundraising, coaching and mentoring, communications, etc.). Finally, the exchange program provided an opportunity for HBCU librarians to work with librarians at non-HBCU academic libraries.

The Pilot Institute

The HBCULA LP is the single most comprehensive effort to train its librarians as managers and lead-



*Participants at the Pilot Leadership Institute.
Left, Lillian Lewis directs the HBCU Library Alliance.*

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ers. The Pilot Institute was held on June 11–15, 2005, at the Evergreen Marriott Conference Resort in Stone Mountain, Georgia. The primary purpose was to test the components of the planned LI and, more specifically, to test the tools, methodology, and case studies of leadership; assess institutional environmental scan and strategic plans; assess leadership styles; and develop mentoring and coaching skills. Thus, the overarching goal was to design a blueprint for developing mentors within the HBCU library community. Since developing leaders is a key function of the HBCULA, mentorship was essential throughout the Pilot Institute.

The PI organizers paired "seasoned" librarians with emerging leaders, thereby building a network of leaders trained to jointly address issues of relevance to HBCU libraries and their constituents. The intent was to achieve the goals and objectives of the LI in a supportive and nurturing environment. The eighteen participants in the program were comprised of nine mentors (a director or dean) and nine potential leaders from the following HBCU libraries: Alabama State University, Bowie State University, Florida A&M University, Kentucky State University, North Carolina A&T State University, Robert W. Woodruff Library of the Atlanta University Center, Southern University at Baton Rouge, Tennessee State University, and Virginia State University. The instructors—Dr. Karyn Trader-Leigh of KTA Global Partners; consultant Marsha Hughes-Rease; and Cleve Clark, executive vice president of Comprehensive Integrated Solutions—combined team-based instruction with

lecture-mentorship techniques in an intensive five-day workshop.

Two critical components of leadership development emerged from this approach. First, it created opportunities for librarians to engage in experiences that prompted critical self-reflection designed to deepen their understanding of leadership and management. Second, it provided a forum for librarians to develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence necessary to mentor and share best practices with other colleagues. The agenda focused on competencies for twenty-first century leadership, the strategically focused organization, vision-driven leadership, and managing change in a knowledge-driven world.

As expected, the evaluative results of the PI validated the need for a comprehensive program and bolstered the morale and enthusiasm of participating members. The PI was successful in showcasing models for best practices, as well as building knowledge-sharing and problem-solving networks. Further, these best practices and networks also serve to strengthen interorganizational relationships, coalitions, services, programs, and policies, thereby further advancing the objectives of the HBCULA.

The Leadership Institute (Part One)

The HBCULA LI was a great experience for every participating librarian. The casual environment and wooded resort set the tone and provided a tranquil setting for five intense days of learning and training. The desired outcomes were presented by instructors who developed, delivered, and executed a dynamic institute with energy that empowered the participants to explore outside-the-box thinking and move towards achievement of more productive objectives.

In 2005-06, forty-five librarians from twenty-four HBCUs were

selected to receive the two-part training. The participating HBCUs included Alabama A&M University, Albany State University, Alcorn State University, Allen University, Arkansas Baptist College, Bennett College, Bethune-Cookman College, Claflin University, Fayetteville State University, Fisk University, H. Councill Trenholm State, Hampton University, Howard University, Lawson State Community College, Lewis College of Business, North Carolina A&T State University, Oakwood College, Saint Philip's

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College, Savannah State University, Shaw University, South Carolina State University, Texas Southern University, University of the Virgin Islands, and Xavier University of Louisiana; and, in 2007-08, teams of two from Hinds Community College Utica Campus, Jackson State University, Johnson C. Smith University, Mississippi Valley State University, Morehouse School of Medicine, Saint Augustine's College, Southern University New Orleans, Tougaloo College, Tuskegee University, and Wiley College.

At the sessions, library directors were congratulated for having selected an excellent group of junior colleagues to prepare for leadership roles. These colleagues learned that effective management skills are critical to the success of the library and were provided with essential information to invoke the power of strategic thinking and planning, assess the environment, define institutional identity,

identify stakeholders, and develop plans of action in activities that simulated strategy planning. Leadership for change management, including performance management, was an important theme of the sessions. Participants were challenged to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and how to best manage these qualities in the day-to-day leadership operations. For example, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) personality assessment was applied to help them develop awareness of their emotional intelligence and how it affects leadership and communication styles.

In a real-world approach to library management, interactions were centered on the HBCU institutions' actual strategic plans, missions, and goals. The institute provoked the dynamics for critical thinking and actions and provided a platform without limitations or constraints, encouraging intellectual exchange among all participants. The institute stimulated all to go back to their respective institutions and make a difference by implementing strategically focused plans based on skills developed during the institute.

The Leadership Institute (Part Two)

In April 2006 and 2008, librarians reconvened on the campus of Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, to demonstrate the techniques learned during Part One.

Part Two had a two-fold objective: to develop communication skills among attendees and demonstrate their application of skills learned during Part One. Recognizing that successful communication is essential to a successful organization, participants spent the first day addressing various types of communication competencies, both individual and organizational. Throughout the day, attendees performed exercises to

improve their listening skills and to learn nondefensive communication techniques. In addition, they spent time reinforcing the ability to understand how their MBTI assessments impact their communication patterns. During days two and three, participants gave topical presentations in teams; all developed their projects in consultation with their assigned mentors. Teams worked together to apply skills and techniques developed during Part One. In support of those lessons throughout the year, mentors had conducted site visits, scheduled conference calls, and in many cases met with university officials and other members of library staff to assist in guiding mentees through their projects. Observers of the presentations provided critiques, giving each presenter another opportunity to receive constructive feedback. The subjects included developing an information literacy pilot project, creating sound archives, and disaster planning in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Mentors and attendees took much away from their peers' presentations and also from their partnerships.

The ASERL and HBCU Library Exchange Program

John Donne's seventeenth-century meditation, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent," is still ever so relevant four centuries later. Its philosophical application can be seen in the interactions among libraries of all types. Libraries have allied to address shared concerns and issues and forge new knowledge in the information sciences. Libraries form consortiums to alleviate the budgetary strain of providing quality electronic information, share advice on enhancing information literacy by implementing strong programs, and collaborate on modifying services in response to a rapidly changing technologi-

cal environment. Another component of the LP is the collaborative relationship developed between the HBCULA and the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) librarians.

During the summer of 2006, five associate-level librarians from HBCU libraries—Fayetteville State University, North Carolina; Fisk University, Tennessee; Florida A&M University; North Carolina A&T State University; and the University of the Virgin Islands—were chosen to participate in a two-week

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exchange program. The HBCU librarians had various strategic areas of interest that included library collection budgets, technology, institutional repositories, information literacy, and the effects of merging campus IT with the library. To address these interests, the librarians partnered with an ASERL library with relevant expertise in those areas. The ASERL institutions—including the College of William and Mary; the University of Kentucky; the University of Louisville; the University of Tennessee, Knoxville; and Wake Forest University—made provisions for the HBCU librarians to meet and have intensive discussions with the appropriate personnel. For example, the HBCU librarian interested in library technology spent extensive time with an ASERL web services librarian, exchanging ideas on providing dynamic online services for library patrons.

The products of these interactions were developed into formal

presentations. The goals of the program were exceedingly well met, as indicated by presentations by the exchange participants during the second HBCULA Membership Meeting. HBCU librarians not only gained practical knowledge in their fields of interest, but have also either applied or developed strategic implementation plans utilizing the lessons learned. Participating institutions have agreed to continue dialogue to identify opportunities for future collaboration. For example, soon thereafter, exchange partners collaborated on a subsequent archival photograph identification project. Such immediate teamwork is evidence of the program's success in fostering collaborative relationships between HBCU and ASERL libraries in keeping with the tradition of libraries working with each other to provide superior information services.

Lessons Learned and Future Opportunities

Having been in the field of librarianship for eighteen years, I am grateful for the opportunities, mentoring, and inspiration I have received from various groups and individuals throughout my library career. Participating in the HBCU Library Alliance's Pilot Leadership Institute has definitely had a positive impact on my tenure as director of libraries at Kentucky State University. The institute was a wonderful development opportunity to network and engage with other individuals in the profession and gather valuable insights and information that I feel gave me the confidence needed to handle this new leadership position. The HBCU Library Alliance Leadership Institute is a fabulous opportunity for HBCU librarians to strengthen their leadership abilities, share and gain knowledge, and explore new ways of thinking about the library profession.

—Sheila A. Stuckey, director of libraries, Kentucky State University

Bringing together librarians from the HBCU community to develop leadership skills is one way to make use of previously untapped opportunities. Occasionally, the challenges and successes faced in HBCUs are different than those seen in "majority" institutions—not better or worse, just different. The leadership institute allowed individuals who shared intrinsic commonalities by virtue of being part of the HBCU environment to grow and learn together. The mentoring component, whether through formal relationships or by simply sharing a meeting space and meals, provided an opportunity for directors and their associate-level librarians to reach out to their colleagues on current issues in their home environments, as well as offering food for thought for future endeavors.

As a result of the HBCU LP, participants were exposed to many leadership development techniques and gained better understanding of effective leadership skills. The future for participating HBCU librarians, libraries, and institutions is brighter for taking part in this historic undertaking.

A testament to the success and

impact of the LP is in the number of associate-level librarians who have since become library directors. Three of the four leadership participants are now serving as directors within the HBCU community. This trend is precisely the outcome the LP was established

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to accomplish: to better equip current directors for success and prepare associate-level librarians for leadership within the HBCU community.

The leadership institute has greatly impacted my role as library director. Prior to attending the institute, I felt ill-prepared to lead within any organization. The institute gave me resources, confidence, and camaraderie. Since the institute, I have relied

heavily on the leadership website, printed materials, and resources. I also gained an additional amount of confidence in handling complex problems. As the printed manuals often gave me a blueprint for staff, fundraising, and other library challenges, the ability to pick up the phone and call a seasoned director has proved most beneficial. This camaraderie of peers and seasoned directors has opened my sphere of contacts beyond any one state. Since the institute, I have nurtured professional relationships with noted and transformational library leaders.

—Janet Walsh, director of library services, American Baptist College, Nashville, Tennessee

In just three years, the HBCULA has sponsored two LIs, a librarian mentorship program, an HBCU and ASERI librarian exchange program, SOLINET workshop scholarships for HBCULA members, and two membership meetings. These activities build the capacities that will help HBCU librarians become leaders while preserving, providing access to, and disseminating information relevant to the history and mission of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. ■