

Everything Under the Sun: Different Mentoring Pathways in Florida Libraries

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Abstract

This article shares a study done on mentoring in the state of Florida for librarians, library staff, and library science students. Using a survey that gathered both quantitative and qualitative data it imparts the findings on informal vs. formal mentoring, mentoring and retention, and benefits of mentoring. Additionally, the article contains the authors' perspectives which demonstrate the relevance of mentoring at different stages within the profession. It includes implications on how the information gained from the survey results can be applied to mentoring relationships in libraries and indicates areas for future research.

Article Type: Research paper

Introduction

There is an abundance of literature on mentoring in libraries. Lorenzetti and Powelson's (2015) scoping review of library mentoring programs includes best practices and current trends of formal mentoring programs in academic libraries. One of the strengths of Farmer, Stockham, and Trussell's (2009) article on revitalizing a mentoring program is its' extensive bibliography. Shupe and Pung (2011) review the literature from a psychological perspective. What could another article on mentoring in libraries possibly add to the literature? This article is the result of three unique mentoring experiences at an academic

library, involving an MLIS minority student, new librarian of Latino descent, and a seasoned professional Gringa¹. The authors' experiences prompted them to wonder what other institutions were doing to create and foster mentoring relationships to improve opportunities for growth and retention.

The article discusses a survey done in the state of Florida for librarians, library staff, and library science students. It reports the results of the survey developed with the intention that any person working in any kind of library (academic, public, special, or school) could have participated. It includes non-librarian employees,

¹ From the Urban Dictionary, Gringa is a female native speaker of English. urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=GRINGA

such as library staff or other information professionals, whom are rarely included in mentoring research. Using a mixed-methods approach this article shares insight to mentoring in libraries.

Literature Review

Mentoring Defined

According to the *Encyclopedia of Counseling*, the origin of mentoring can be traced back to the character Mentor in Homer's book of *Odyssey* (Black & Zullo, 2008). When Odysseus left home to fight the Trojan Wars he asked his advisor and friend Mentor, to protect his son, Telemachus. Athena, the female goddess of wisdom, incorporated Mentor's form to guide, teach, and protect Telemachus. In the search for his father Telemachus evolves into a new stronger identity – in today's parlance, a protégé (Black & Zullo, 2008; Eleanor, Day O'Connor, Ragins, & Kram, 2008).

In 1985 Kram updated the definition of mentoring. She defined it as "a relationship between a senior, more experienced individual—the mentor—and a less experienced, junior protégé (or mentee) from the same organization." Kram was instrumental in increasing the amount of mentoring research conducted across professions and industries. The majority of research shows that mentoring has a positive impact for the industry (regardless of type) and the mentor and mentee. Overall, mentoring has been shown to increase retention, job satisfaction, and self-esteem (Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997; Kram, 1985; Ragins & Scandura, 1999).

Formal vs. Informal Mentoring

Formal and informal mentoring relationships differ in essential ways including initiation, duration, commitment, and structure of the relationship. Formal mentoring is systematic and structured; one-on-one and hierarchical with the mentor being the senior person and the mentee being less experienced (Eleanor, Day O'Connor, Ragins, & Kram, 2008). Formal matching of mentors and mentees happens in a variety of ways from using a calculated formula to setting

up "blind dates" where the individuals identify what is needed from the relationship (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2008). Distinct measurable goals may also be set by external sources rather than individuals. Formal programs are usually prescriptive and set a minimum number of meetings and sometimes dictate the content of the meetings (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2008). Conversely, informal mentoring relationships are developed based on need which vary from emotional support, professional training, and general guidance. They are formed by engaging in interaction and relationship building with colleagues and peers. Informal mentoring happens when both parties desire to participate, even if the agreement is unspoken (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2008). Informal mentoring relationships are unconstrained in regards to time, number of meetings, interactions between parties, and formality of meetings.

The evidence is mixed on whether there is greater impact with formal or informal mentoring. Regardless of the type of mentoring, research shows that employees with mentors have higher job satisfaction, stronger commitment to the organization, and better interpersonal relations. Additionally, mentees are challenged and introduced to more opportunities which increase their visibility and the likelihood of being promoted (Eby, et. al, 2013). Not only does the protégé benefit from a mentoring relationship but so does the mentor. He or she may feel a sense of higher personal satisfaction and improved attitude towards their work (Allen, Lentz, & Day, 2006). Serving as a mentor may cause a renewed energy to take on new projects and revitalize the energy for day-to-day activities (Eby, et. al, 2013).

Mentoring and Libraries

Searching for academic articles with *librar** AND *mentor** in the major library databases results in a plethora of research, case studies, how-to guides, and best practices literature. In reviewing the literature, the researchers found that the majority discussed the positive impact mentoring has on retention, advancement, and improved understanding of organizational culture for the

mentee. Many discussed the positive effects on the mentor too.

Studies have shown that new librarians are interested in mentoring programs when considering positions. The Human Resources in Academic Libraries: White Paper (ACRL, 2002) found that new librarians were not only motivated by salary, job duties, and professional development but also mentoring. Black and Leysen (2002) surveyed new librarians employed at Association of Research Libraries and 76% of the responses rated informal mentoring as important to orienting to a new position. Of those surveyed some noted issues with formal mentoring programs including being paired with someone incompatible, selecting a person to serve as a mentor without knowing him or her, having mentors who were uninterested or too busy to be helpful, and having mentors who gave contradictory advice (Black & Leysen, 2002).

Mentoring and Library School Students

Many studies on mentoring programs focus on student workers, new hires, or tenure track librarians. Rarely are library school students mentioned in the literature. However, Lacy and Copeland (2013) found that library school students greatly benefit from mentoring to help ease the transition from student to professional. Through a formal mentoring program the study showed that student mentees gained information literacy skills, confidence in decision-making, an understanding of the wider role librarians play as liaisons, and an understanding of the professional culture (Lacy & Copeland, 2013). Mentors also valued the experience as some were mentored earlier in their careers and wanted to pay it forward. Mentors were motivated to keep up-to-date with their area of expertise (Lacy & Copeland, 2013).

Burke and Lawrence (2011) discuss informal mentoring calling it, "accidental mentoring". Accidental mentoring is when a mentor unexpectedly takes on the role of a mentor, whether out of necessity or through small acts

such as reviewing a resume or providing the student with an opportunity to learn new skills (Burke & Lawrence, 2011). While seemingly small and ordinary acts, these actions create an environment which allows the student to feel a part of a team, take ownership of their work, and understand the work culture of an organization.

Survey Methodology

A survey was used to gather feedback on mentoring in Florida Libraries. The goal of the survey was to get broad participation. Survey questions included demographic information and perceptions of mentoring programs. Participants were asked to opine on the success or failure of their mentoring program experience. A question was included regarding whether mentoring programs were in place to address retention. The survey (Appendix) was created using Qualtrics. Any questions that were not relevant to the subject were suppressed.

The subjects of this study were employees in Florida Libraries. The survey was sent to various email lists within Florida including the Florida Library Association (FLA) list, the Florida Academic & Colleges Research Libraries list, University of South Florida library school student list, and the Dade County Library Association list. Additionally, the survey was promoted on Facebook and Twitter by the authors and on Twitter by the FLA. The survey was carried out with full Institutional Review Board approval. All of the emails, Facebook messages, and Tweets included an IRB compliance message. The survey consisted of 22 questions including 10 demographic questions. Participants could opt out of any question.

Survey Results

The demographic results of the survey show that there is a lack of diversity in the age, gender, and ethnicity of the participants. Of the 272 participants who took the survey, 81.2% identify

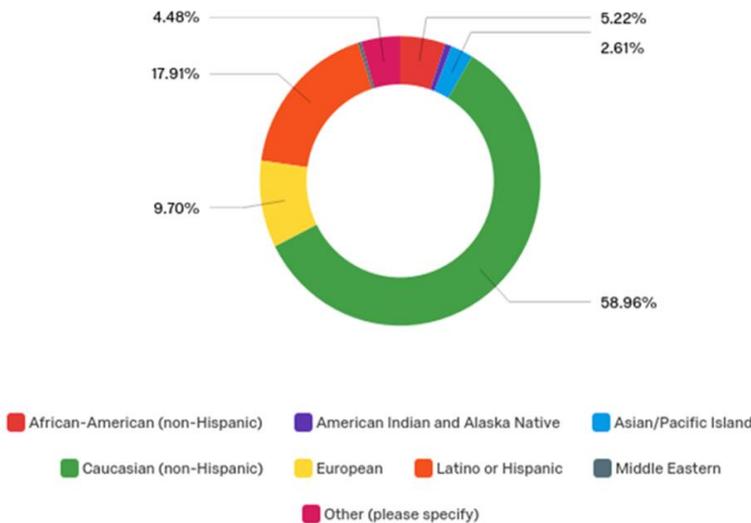


Figure 1 Demographics in Florida Libraries. The survey results indicate that Florida Libraries lack diversity with 58.9% identifying as non-Hispanic Caucasians.

as female and 18.8% as male. The largest percent were between the ages of 31 and 35 (17.9%) followed by 41-45 (16%) and 56-60 (14.4%). Although the target of the survey population was for all types of libraries, the majority of participants (55.4%) were from academic libraries compared to 35.8% from public, 1.6% from special, 1.6% from school, and 5.6% from other.

Participants were asked to describe their current position. The vast majority (54%) were librarians with two-plus years of experience at their current institution. Twenty-five percent of the respondents were library staff, 10.2% newly hired librarians, 9.4% other, and 1.4% library school students or recent library school graduates. The majority (40.8%) have been in their current position between two and five years followed by zero to one year for 19.3% with a close 3rd place of six to ten years.

The survey asked a number of questions about identity. Eighty-nine percent of the participants identified as Americans with 11% identifying as foreign born. In terms of race and ethnicity, 58.9% identified as Caucasian/non-Hispanic, 17.9% Latino/Hispanic, 5.2% African-American, 9.7% European, 2.6% Asian/Pacific Islander,

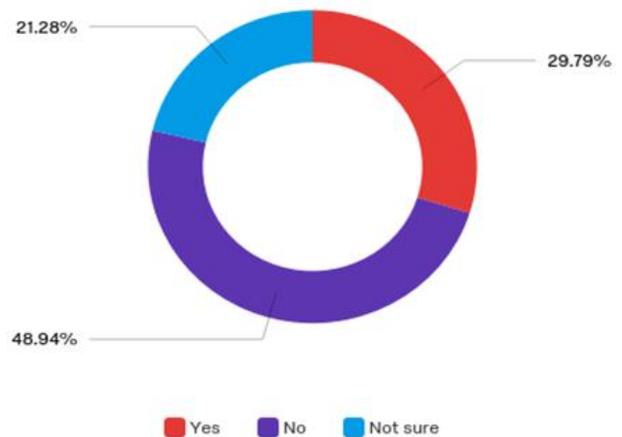


Figure 2 Mentoring program beyond new librarian training. The results of the survey indicated a lack of available mentoring programs aimed at new professionals in the library field (48.9%). The number of participants who were not sure of whether their institution had mentoring programs was 21.3%.

0.8% American Indian and Alaska Native, 0.4% Middle Eastern and 4.4% other. (fig.1)

Forty-nine percent of the respondents stated that their library did not have mentoring beyond new librarian training (Fig.2). However, 59.4% (139 respondents) have participated in some type of mentoring program. (Fig. 3). It is evident that despite the lack of opportunity within their own libraries, respondents pursued mentoring opportunities through other avenues.

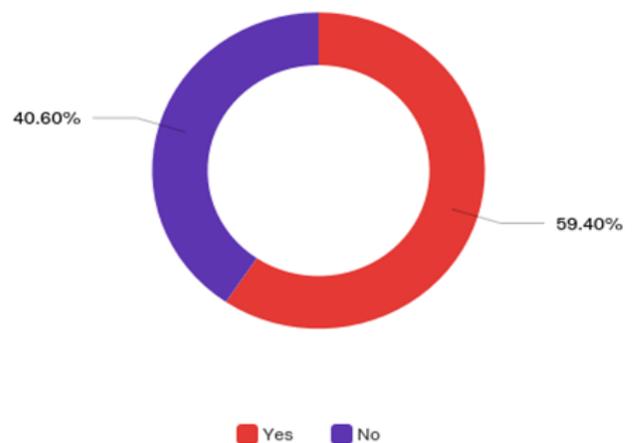


Figure 3 Participation in a formal or informal mentoring program. According to the survey results, more than half of the participants (59.4%) have participated in some form of mentoring, either formal or informal.

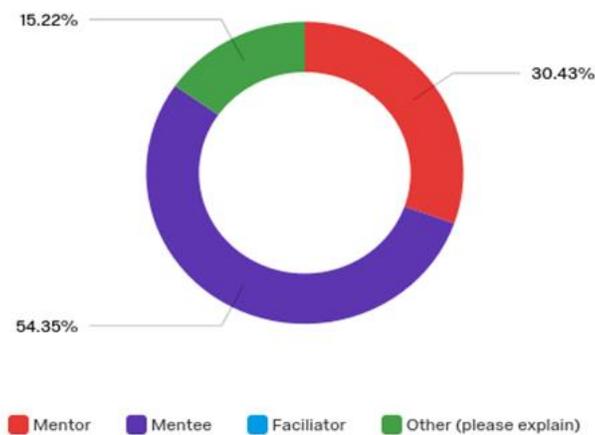


Figure 4 Participants' role in the mentoring program. The graph displays the different roles performed by survey's participants. "Other" indicates dual participation in mentor and mentee roles (15.2%).

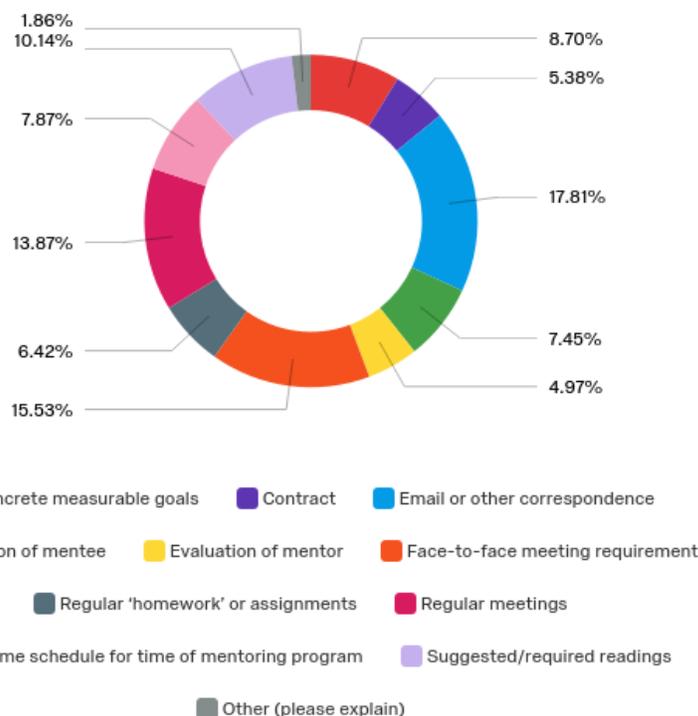


Figure 5 Tools applied for goal-setting. The figure shows the different tools utilized in mentoring with emails (17.8%) and face-to face meetings (15.5%) being the most popular while contracts, evaluations, and assignments are all less popular and are considered part of formal mentoring.

Of those who have participated in a mentoring program, 75 were mentees, 42 were mentors, and 21 filled both roles (Fig.4). The survey shows that the most common tools utilized in mentoring programs are email (17.8%) and face-to-face meetings (15.5%). Less popular tools include contracts, evaluations, and assignments or homework, (Fig.5) which are all considered part of formal mentoring.

The role of the mentoring program was closely split between collaborative partnerships/projects, committee work, confidence building, daily job routine, institutional and library culture, leadership development, presentation/ professional development, professional involvement, promotion/tenure, publishing, research, retention efforts, and institutional/ professional socialization. Most of the mentoring programs focused on professional and leadership development, institutional/ professional socialization, and collaborative partnerships. Only five participants noted grant writing. (Fig.6)

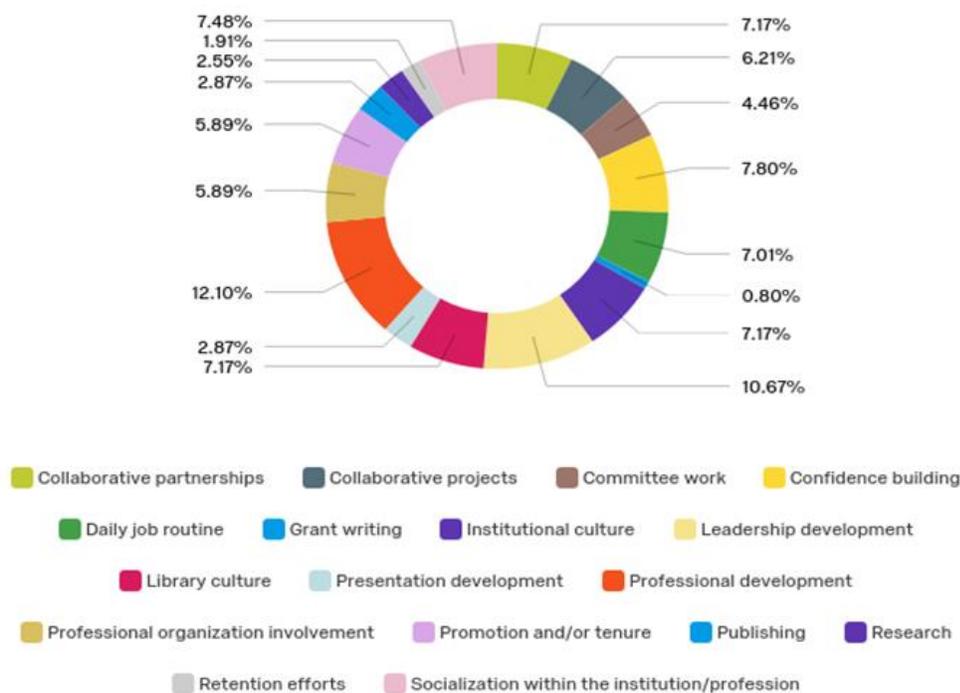


Figure 6 Areas addressed by mentoring programs. Even though research shows mentoring programs are often created for issues of retention, the survey statistics show only a small percentage (2%) are trying to address this issue.

The survey included a question on whether the mentoring program attempted to address retention efforts and if so, how, why, and whether it was effective. Comments were general such as “team building and advancement opportunities help retain good employees” to more specific “... the program has had mixed results, some of our new librarians have stayed and flourished, while others have decided to move to other cities or positions ...”.

The three most common reasons for a mentee to participate in mentoring were professional

development (63.4%), leadership development (57.8%), and confidence building (40.9%), the same areas that most programs attempt to address (Fig.7). Mentees mentioned the strength of mentoring included the ability to self-select a mentor with whom to freely speak with for advice and guidance. The opportunity to pursue professional development opportunities such as collaborating on projects or publishing was also key to the success of the program. Weaknesses included a lack of structure, time, and professional development opportunities. Several noted the preference of face-to-face interactions versus virtual communication.

Orientation was one of the most requested components of an ideal mentoring program. Orienting new hires, explaining the organizational culture and its expectations, and serving as a motivator for promotion all lead to developing confidence in the mentee. Orientation was also noted to help increase the mentees network for collaborative projects/publications in order to acquire promotion/tenure.

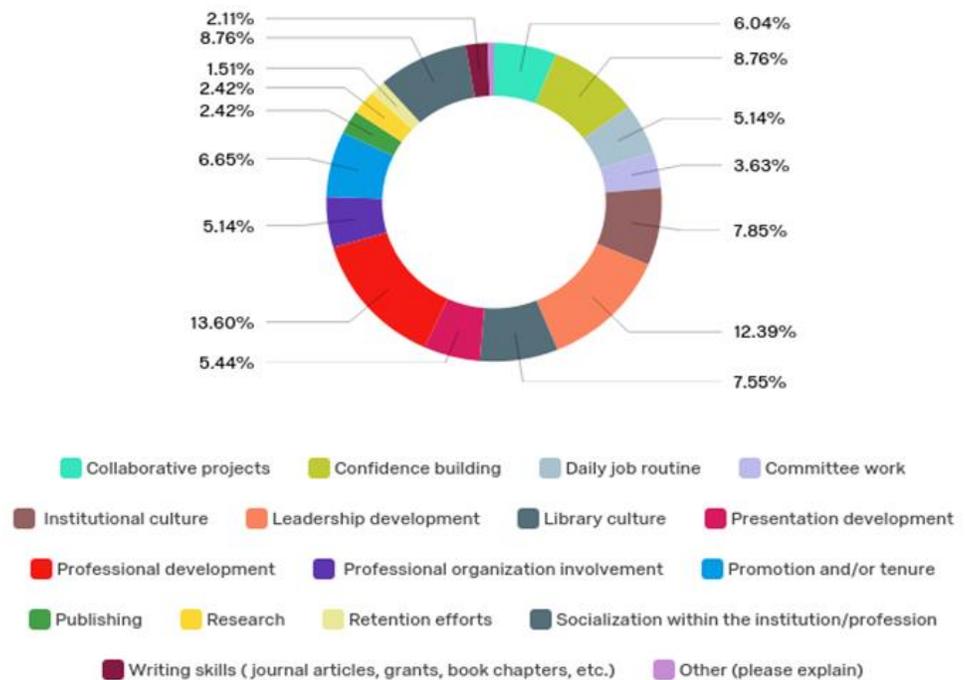


Figure 7 Priorities in a mentoring relationship. The top priorities in a mentoring relationship are professional development, leadership development, confidence building, and socialization within the institution.

Mentors were asked about the strengths and weaknesses of the relationship and what impact it had on them. Overall the theme was that serving as a mentor was “extremely rewarding” resulting in lifelong friendships. Many mentors believe ideal mentoring includes cross-training, professional development, measurable goals, soft-skills building, promotion advice, flexibility, and orientation to the organizational culture. The relationship should be built out of trust and respect. Much of the same was mentioned as the strengths of current mentoring programs in Florida libraries.

Discussion

Formal vs. Informal Mentoring

The survey results gleaned that formal mentoring programs set for a specified time lacked the opportunity for strong relationship building. However, others noted that the absence of a formal structure was a weakness due to the lack of goals. Regardless of the type of mentoring program, it is necessary to identify goals to avoid the misuse of time, and help the relationship to

grow. The researchers feel that participants should determine what type of mentoring program will work best for them by understanding the fundamentals of each option. Some will be more comfortable with a formal program; others will prefer the flexibility of an informal program.

Having served as a mentor in both a formal and informal capacity, one author sees the advantages of both. In the formal mentoring program, the mentee selected her mentor and since she was taking over some of the duties of the mentor, it seemed like a natural fit. However, the extreme amount of paperwork required and the predetermined timeline prevented a natural evolution of a relationship. The rigidity of the program was set by the facilitator who was more interested in her personal gain than the benefits of the program for the mentor and mentee. As a result, the relationship between the mentor and mentee never reached its natural evolution. The same author has served as a mentor in an informal capacity where the relationship budded into a natural friendship and the two have co-presented and authored publications (including this one) together.

As a mentee, another author was a scholarship recipient of the Project Pipeline. Project Pipeline was an IMLS funded effort to identify, educate, and support library staff (Institute of Museum and Library Services, n.d.). It provided financial assistance, academic advisement, tutoring, test preparation, mentoring, workshops, and certification support. The formal mentoring program was fundamental to achieving the author's goals. It helped transform the mentoring experience into a career opportunity. More recently, informal mentoring has inspired and encouraged her to pursue other possibilities within the library field. Just last year she was selected as a recipient of a preservation grant awarded by the Latin GRAMMY Cultural Foundation. Formal mentoring provided the author with the tools to get a library degree, while informal mentoring helped her to build confidence as a new professional.

Furthermore, another author has also participated in informal and formal mentorships

that have provided insight about organizational culture, current issues and trends in the profession, and helped make the most of conference experiences. Benefits have included publishing and presenting opportunities, along with resume reviewing and other job-seeking advice. Since no formal mentoring program is available at the author's institution, mentoring programs provided by organizations such as the American Library Association, and the Association of Research Libraries became essential for professional growth and networking opportunities. This included both year-long and conference mentoring programs. This echoes survey results indicating that even though some institutions do not offer mentoring programs, participants still find ways to partake in them.

Mentoring and Retention

It was purposefully asked whether mentoring programs help with retention efforts. Florida International University (FIU), a large rapidly growing urban public research university, is a majority-minority institution serving a diverse community of students including 65% Hispanic, 13% Black, 15% White Non-Hispanic, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander and 7% other (FIU, 2017). Located in Miami, commonly known as the Gateway to the Americas, individuals not from the city sometimes find it hard to acclimate to the diverse and complex culture. As a result, FIU has an ongoing struggle with retention. The survey comments showed that South Florida survey participants understand the challenges of retention but do not necessarily feel mentoring programs can solve the problem. According to participants, two of the major challenges of retention include: not being used to South Florida culture and salaries not being competitive. The issue of retention shows how essential it is for the profession to incorporate cultural competencies and diversity into the curriculum.

Mentor Benefits

Articles in *Psychological Bulletin* (Eby, et. al, 2013) and the *Journal of Career Development* (Allen, Lentz, & Day, 2006) outlined the benefits of mentoring for the mentor. The same themes

of increased personal satisfaction and improved outlook were found in the survey results. For example, one participant mentioned the joy she got from sharing her knowledge and how previous mentors had impacted her. "... So much of what I have learned throughout my career is not taught in a classroom. I was lucky to have a few people who helped me and now I am passing it on."

"Mentors learn as much if not more during the mentoring process about an organization and the people within the organization. It provides an opportunity to engage and interact with colleagues which in turn leads to better relationships ..." sums up what a number of participants noted. One participant's comment related directly to the sense of renewal and heightened self-awareness, "Made me more aware of my own skill set...reenergized me to stay involved." Others mentioned the development and improvement of leadership skills and how working with new librarians gave them new perspectives.

Mentee Benefits

The comments from the mentees about their mentoring relationship coincide with the literature. One mentee mentioned being offered a librarian position at the end of the program. Others noted making life-long friends and how beneficial it was to have someone outside their department to ask "stupid questions". One comment, "I am learning more about myself through another perspective. I feel encouraged to pursue a leadership role in my library. My confidence has increased so that I ... want to be a mentor ..." represents the overall theme of mentoring benefits.

Similar to the mentor comments, mentees mentioned time constraints, shortness of the program, lack of structure, and conversely too much structure. A number of mentees mentioned that the mentor was too busy and did not reach out enough. One mentee who lacked concrete goals felt she did not fully benefit from the program. For any mentoring program it is important for the mentee to have specific goals (which can evolve and change) and for the

mentor to commit to the time and expectations of the program.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Survey respondents mirror nationwide trends in that the majority of respondents are white and female. In addition, although most libraries did not have mentoring programs in their institution, more than half of respondents said they participated in mentoring programs. This suggests that recruitment efforts need to be made to promote library staff and that mentoring programs should be considered. Throughout the development of the survey and from the survey responses, the researchers came across mentoring programs that are currently active or were previously active in the state of Florida. Those mentoring programs should be revived and redesigned to include all library staff.

Mentoring programs such as Project Pipeline need to be reestablished. Project Pipeline was an IMLS funded effort to identify, educate, and support library support staff (Institute of Museum and Library Services, n.d). The existence of these types of programs should be geared to and can significantly help minorities with economic, social, or language barriers. There is a need for programs that offer mentoring on how to succeed as a librarian and provide financial assistance for graduate programs. Furthermore, the Board of Governors in the state of Florida previously extended tuition waivers for state university employees to cover all state universities in the State University System. This provided library workers who worked in state institutions the financial assistance to pursue a library degree from either Florida State University or the University of South Florida, Florida's only in-state MLIS programs. Reinstating that program would be beneficial to state employees who want to move forward in their careers but may not have the funds to do so.

Florida's highly successful Sunshine State Library Leadership Institute, should include opportunities for staff. According to the website, only professional librarians or those in management positions are eligible (Florida Department of State, 2017). Widening the pool of

mentees to include all library workers would help increase retention while supporting promotion and growth. To quote a survey respondent, "Many employees don't even get to join such a program because they aren't hand-picked by administration. An ideal program would be open to anyone interested. Everyone can benefit from growing." This inclusion can also help increase the recruitment, retention, and promotion of library workers from racial and ethnic minorities.

Diversifying our Profession through Mentoring Programs

National statistics show a lack of diversity in our field with 84% of librarians identifying as Non-Hispanics whites (Department for Professional Employees, 2016). Projections show that in 2050 the Latino community will increase by 184%, so it would behoove the profession to increase the number of minorities enrolling in MLIS Programs (Al-Qallaf & Mika, 2013). One possible way to do this is to provide mentoring for currently employed library staff - of which 32,775 are of minority descent (American Library Association, 2012). In our survey, 25% of the respondents (N=62) were library staff. Of those, 38 identified as something other than white Non-Hispanics. Florida Libraries would benefit from initiatives used to recruit members of underrepresented groups.

Efforts could include a residency program, scholarship program, and cultural competency courses. In 2003, the University of South Florida established the Henrietta M. Smith Residency program, which included mentoring, to "counter the apparent problems of recruitment efforts and to ... increase ... library faculty from diverse populations" (Taylor, 2005). The residency encouraged new librarians from diverse ethnic groups to apply for one-on-one mentoring to help develop their careers. Unfortunately, the program was discontinued. However, similar efforts should continue to be made across Florida library systems to help decrease barriers.

Retention

Retention and its relationship to mentoring in Florida Libraries is an area for further research.

One reason the researchers were interested in surveying Florida library employees was due to retention issues at their institution. Prior research shows that mentoring often leads to retaining employees (Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997; Kram, 1985; Ragins & Scandura, 1999). However, the survey results showed that retention was not a focus for library mentoring programs in Florida. Future research should examine whether mentoring programs have had an unintended positive impact on retention and whether mentoring programs focused on retention make a difference.

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Appendix

Mentoring Survey for Employees in Florida Libraries

What is your age group?

- 21-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- 41-45

- 46-50
- 51-55
- 56-60
- 61-65
- 66+

How do you most identify?

- Female
- Male
- Other

Where are you from?

To which racial or ethnic group(s) do you most identify? Please check all that apply.

- African-American (non-Hispanic)
- American Indian and Alaska Native
- Asian/Pacific Islanders
- Caucasian (non-Hispanic)
- European
- Latino or Hispanic
- Middle Eastern
- Other (please specify) _____

What kind of library are you in?

- Academic
- Public
- School
- Special
- Other (please specify) _____

How large is the library staff at your library (please include all library employees regardless of title)?

- 1-10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61+

Where is your library located?

- Central Florida
- North Florida (not Panhandle)
- Panhandle
- Southeast Florida
- Southwest Florida
- Other (please explain) _____

What best describes your current position?

- library school student
- recent library school graduate
- library staff

- newly hired librarian (first professional library position)
- newly hired librarian (have professional experience at another library)
- librarian with 2 or more years at current institution
- retired librarian
- other (please explain) _____

What is your title at the library?

How long have you been in your current position?

- 0-1 year
- 2-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 26+ years

Does your library currently have a formal or informal mentoring program beyond new librarian training?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Have you participated in a formal or informal mentoring program? (Either at your current place of employment or at a previous place.)

- Yes
- No

What role did you fill in the mentoring program?

- Mentor
- Mentee
- Faciliator
- Other (please explain) _____

What areas does the mentoring program attempt to address? (Either at your current place of employment or at a previous place.) Please check all that apply.

- Collaborative partnerships
- Collaborative projects
- Committee work
- Confidence building
- Daily job routine
- Grant writing
- Institutional culture
- Leadership development
- Library culture
- Presentation development
- Professional development
- Professional organization involvement
- Promotion and/or tenure
- Publishing
- Research
- Retention efforts

- Socialization within the institution/profession
- Other (please explain) _____

If the mentoring program attempts to address retention efforts, please explain how, why, and how effective you feel the program has been.

What does/did the mentorship program include? Please check all that apply.

- Concrete measurable goals
- Contract
- Email or other correspondence
- Evaluation of mentee
- Evaluation of mentor
- Face-to-face meeting requirement
- Regular 'homework' or assignments
- Regular meetings
- Set time schedule for time of mentoring program
- Suggested/required readings
- Other (please explain) _____

As a mentee what is your priority in your mentorship relationship? Please check all that apply.

- Collaborative projects
- Confidence building
- Daily job routine
- Committee work
- Institutional culture
- Leadership development
- Library culture
- Presentation development
- Professional development
- Professional organization involvement
- Promotion and/or tenure
- Publishing
- Research
- Retention efforts
- Socialization within the institution/profession
- Writing skills (journal articles, grants, book chapters, etc.)
- Other (please explain) _____

As a mentor, please describe how the mentoring relationship has impacted you.

As a mentor, what are the strengths and weaknesses of your mentoring relationship?

As a mentee, what are the strengths and weaknesses of your mentoring relationship?

As a mentee, please describe how the mentoring relationship has impacted you.

In your opinion, what would the ideal mentoring program for library employees encompass?