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## Review of Residencies Revisited: Reflections on Library Residency Programs from the Past and Present

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## Review of Residencies Revisited: Reflections on Library Residency Programs from the Past and Present

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**Preethi Gorecki and Arielle Petrovich, eds. *Residencies Revisited: Reflections on Library Residency Programs from the Past and Present*. Sacramento, Calif.: Litwin, 2022.**

Library diversity residencies are entry-level positions that generally last for a term of one to three years. They have been around for decades with a goal of “increasing the hiring pipeline of qualified and talented individuals from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups,” with an end goal of diversifying the profession.<sup>1</sup> However, as Preethi Gorecki and Arielle Petrovich, editors of *Residencies Revisited: Reflections on Library Residency Programs from the Past and Present*, point out, “there is little empirical evidence that the impact of these programs lives up to their intent” (3). While there is some professional literature around how to structure and implement diversity residency programs, assessments on diversity residency programs, and causes of resident satisfaction and dissatisfaction, there is a dearth of literature from current or former diversity residents sharing their experiences in these programs.<sup>2</sup> This book centers the experiences of current and former diversity resident librarians, although it also includes the perspectives of residency scholars and coordinators, and goes far in filling a large gap in residency literature. Residency coordinators, scholars, and other non-resident librarians have discussed the opportunities that diversity residency programs provide for recent graduates for decades. This collection, however, will help academic librarians and administrators better understand the harm of these programs if they are not carefully planned, well-structured, supported, and resident-centered.

*Residencies Revisited* contains twenty-two chapters divided into four sections. The first section, “Dear Program Administrators,” includes critiques aimed toward library administrators and diversity residency program coordinators, supervisors, and stakeholders. Its six chapters offer advice and guidance for those running these programs, as well as those who are considering if a residency program might be right for their institution. The second section is titled “Reclaiming Our Time.” It consists of six chapters that largely address how residents can try to salvage poorly planned, structured, and supported residency programs. The personal narratives in this section share common themes around inattentive and absentee supervisors, the importance of peer support networks, the frustrations around realizing a residency program will not deliver what was

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<sup>1</sup> “ACRL Diversity Alliance,” Association of College and Research Libraries, American Library Association, <https://www.ala.org/acrl/issues/diversityalliance>.

<sup>2</sup> On structuring and implementing residency programs, see Lorelai Rutledge et al., *Developing a Residency Program: A Practical Guide for Librarians* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), and Kalani Adolpho et al., “Diversity Residency Toolkit,” IUScholarworks, October 2021, <https://doi.org/10.5967/egje-kw85>. On assessments of such programs, see Angela Boyd, Yolanda Blue, and Suzanne Im, “Evaluation of Academic Library Residency Programs in the United States for Librarians of Color,” *College and Research Libraries* 78, no. 4 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.78.4.472>; Julie Brewer, “Post-Master’s Residency Programs: Enhancing the Development of New Professionals and Minority Recruitment in Academic and Research Libraries,” *College and Research Libraries* 59, no. 6 (1998), <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.59.6.528>; and Julie Brewer and Mark D. Winston, “Program Evaluation for Internship/Residency Programs in Academic and Research Libraries,” *College and Research Libraries* 62, no. 4 (2001), <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.62.4.307>. On causes of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, see Jason Kelly Alston, “Causes of Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction for Diversity Resident Librarians—A Mixed Methods Study Using Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Theory” (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 2017). For the limited literature on residency experiences, see Jason Kelly Alston, “Minerva’s First Born: My Experiences as UNCG’s First Diversity Resident Librarian,” *North Carolina Libraries* 68, no. 1 (2010): 14–16, and Kawanna Bright et al., “Seeding the Vision: Designing a Minority Librarian Residency Program—Part 2,” *Southeastern Librarian* 53, no. 3 (2005), <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln/vol53/iss3/6/>.

promised, and residents being put in the position of needing to facilitate their own training and mentorship. Section 3, “Life after Residency,” spends five chapters discussing the long-term impact of these programs using the narratives of former residents. The authors share how their residencies did (or did not) successfully prepare them for their subsequent careers. The book wraps up with five chapters in section four, “Looking towards the Future,” which suggests ways to improve residency programs. Additionally, this final part explores the inherent issues and sacrifices involved with accepting precarious, temporary work, and whether these sacrifices are worth the potential benefits. This review does not address every chapter in the volume. Instead, chapters were selected to showcase recurring themes, highlights, and important takeaways for readers.

### **Section One: “Dear Program Administrators”**

Jason K. Alston’s chapter “When Not to Host a Residency: Three Red Flags” is a strategic chapter to place first, and it sets the tone for the rest of the volume. The first red flag Alston describes is “those who don’t want criticism published.” Here, Alston speaks of white saviors more concerned with their reputations than the experiences of their residents, as well as the right of residents to share these experiences without fear of retaliation (13). The second is “people who have to come up with something for this fall!” Essentially, this description refers to those pushing through implementation of a residency program without thoughtful consideration or understanding of the work that goes into structuring and planning a successful residency experience, which, given the rest of the book, seems to be a common pitfall (18). The third red flag is “those who don’t know how racist their institution is,” which should be self-explanatory. Alston wraps up the chapter with the message that “not every library should be hosting a diversity residency program and that is okay” (20).

The second chapter is from Twanna Hodge, who is uniquely qualified to write on diversity residencies as a former diversity resident librarian, former diversity residency program coordinator, former diversity residency mentor, and former convener of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Residency Interest Group.<sup>3</sup> Hodge describes the invisible and emotional labor involved in being the first diversity resident in a program, incidents of tokenization and isolation, and how former residents use their experiences when becoming coordinators to try to pay it forward (23–24). The chapter addresses challenges with coordinating programs that suffer from a lack of planning and the situation of having one person fill multiple roles in a residency program. If Alston were to have included a fourth red flag, it perhaps would have been a residency program that rests on the shoulders of a single champion, an issue mentioned repeatedly throughout the volume.

One of the book’s editors, Arielle Petrovich, authored the third chapter, which hits on an important and common resident experience: host institutions not delivering on their promises. Petrovich’s chapter demonstrates that joining well-established residency programs will not guarantee residents a structured residency experience. Although the residency program she joined was almost twenty years old, it suffered from poor planning; lack of training, support, and supervision; and issues around classification as visiting faculty, such as being unable to join library committees yet

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<sup>3</sup> “Former Residents,” Association of College and Research Libraries, Residency Interest Group, <https://acrl.ala.org/residency/residents/past-residents/>.

somehow being automatically assigned to the library's diversity committee (43). The chapter concludes by asking, "Does the library profession want residency programs to work?" (52). While this chapter works well in the first section of the book, it also would have been appropriate for the second.

The final chapter of part 1 is the only chapter in the volume that was not written or cowritten by current or former residents, and it is also the weakest in the book. Annie Bélanger, Scott Ayotte, and Sarah Beaubien discuss how Grand Valley State University (GVSU) libraries reworked their hiring and onboarding processes to be more candidate-focused and inclusive, and how this was applied to the diversity residency hiring process in 2018 (96). The chapter covers considerations and suggestions for writing job postings and assembling a search committee, changes made to interview practices and onboarding, and reflections from the authors and GVSU residents to these changes. While there are some great pieces of advice littered throughout, the chapter does not always focus on residencies, or even on libraries. An example of this can be found in the section titled "Preparing Your Culture." As demonstrated throughout the volume, an organization that lacks buy-in and understanding of residency programs results in an unwelcoming and uncomfortable work environment for diversity residents. Rather than discussing how GVSU prepared its library culture for a diversity residency program, this section covers an icebreaker exercise that one of the authors facilitated as a business school professor in which small subsets of MBA students were treated like "outsiders" by classmates for five minutes (97–99). In the following section on writing job postings, the authors discuss gender bias in job titles, providing the following advice: "Examine whether titles carry a gendered component such as 'hacker' or 'rockstar' or if they contain the word 'man' (e.g. 'policeman' vs 'police officer')" (101). These sections and others would have been stronger if the authors had stuck to examples for how GVSU libraries generated buy-in and understanding for residency programs, and how they attempted to mitigate bias in their library job postings. Lastly, while the chapter does include anonymous feedback from GVSU residents on their experiences with the hiring process, the feedback is constrained to a single paragraph and largely consists of gratitude for receiving interview questions one hour in advance (109–10). Incorporating the perspectives of residents throughout the chapter would have been more impactful.

## **Section Two: "Reclaiming Our Time"**

The chapters in this section by Quetzalli Barrientos and T. Miller complement one another as they each grapple with issues surrounding mentorship and inattentive supervisors. Barrientos describes how for her residency, the selected supervisor was well-known for their poor supervision, and the solution the library offered was to assign the resident three mentors with no structure, shared vision, or oversight (118). Miller, on the other hand, was assigned two supervisors without a clear division of duty, which ultimately resulted in no supervision at all (146). Barrientos, fortunately, was able to find a mentor relationship that gave her the support she needed in her residency. She states that the success of residency programs often relies on someone stepping up, generally without credit for their labor, and how often this falls on one of the few people in the library who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC), who may themselves be former residents (118). While Miller was also able to find a mentor, project partner, and champion in the library, her supervisors ultimately felt threatened by the mentor relationship and did not allow them to continue to partner on projects. As a result, Miller states that she spent a month playing Candy Crush in her

office as “the few projects I was assigned to included reading the ALA Code of Ethics and reviewing one of my supervisor’s article drafts for errors before they submitted it to a library journal for publication” (147). Miller was left feeling as though she ended the first year of her residency with no transferable skills. She urges supervisors and administrators to recognize what she calls a “residency clock,” wherein residents “only have a portion of their term appointment to make significant advancements in their skills, experiences, and expertise in order to be considered competitive with peers for permanent positions” (147–48).

While relocating for work in academic libraries is common in the profession, several chapters by former residents share how residencies require early career BIPOC individuals to uproot their entire lives by leaving family and finding new friend groups and support systems, all in exchange for temporary work. Sheila García Mazari in her chapter “Re(Negotiating) Familismo: Cultural Tensions in the Library Residency Model” reflects on the impact of not only leaving family behind for contingent work but the “first-generation guilt” involved in being unable to financially assist your family (184). She also discusses how for many residents it goes beyond not seeing themselves reflected in their institutions to also include their neighborhoods, stating, “It was as if the university never ended and I was constantly navigating my way through academia until I closed my front door and collapsed into my small one-bedroom apartment” (189). While she overall views her residency as a positive experience, she urges institutions to question if communities both on and off campus will be welcoming to residents (192).

### **Section Three: “Life after Residency”**

In “Everyone Else Contributes and You Contribute Nothing,” Pambanisha Whaley shares her fourteen-year career trajectory transitioning from resident to interim department head to a full-time, tenure-track position at the same institution. While this sounds like a residency success story on paper, Whaley’s chapter details years of “disturbing levels of verbal abuse, mobbing, bullying, pay inequity, and a host of other dehumanizing behaviors” (206). This chapter demonstrates that any metric for determining the successfulness of residencies needs to center the perspectives and well-being of the resident, rather than what their CV looks like.

In “Going Irish with a Husband and Family in Tow,” Leslie Morgan describes her experience coming into librarianship as a third career through a residency position. Her chapter details numerous microaggressions, some related to her having grown up in Detroit: “They joked that I must have been exposed to so much violence and drugs, that I must have felt a sense of relief being offered a position to escape that existence” (210). Others related to devaluing or erasing her prior work experience. Morgan writes, “I was new to the library profession, not new to working within a profession” (211). Similar to other accounts throughout this book, she found herself in a residency program that was quite different from what was promised. These unexpected changes included a change in supervision, the removal of promised rotations in administration and emerging technologies, and permanent assignment to reference and instruction without input. As Morgan succinctly points out, her “residency was no longer a collaborative agreement” (213). Morgan ultimately accepted a permanent position at her host institution, where she remains to this day (215, 341). It is clear that this is because Morgan herself was successful, rather than the residency program itself.

LaQuanda T. Onyemeh discusses why she chose a residency program over pursuing a permanent position in her chapter “A Resident’s Narrative.” Like many other authors, Onyemeh was drawn to the idea of a program that promised extensive training, opportunities, and experiences that would make her a more competitive candidate post-residency (231). She did receive many of the promised opportunities, and also experienced unforeseen challenges. In addition to issues around a lack of clarity in the purpose of her role and the structure of the program, she writes, “I felt as though I was building the library’s residency program from the ground up while simultaneously completing my residency experience” (235). Additionally, while she felt she and the program had many champions during the interview process and onboarding, she was ultimately “alone managing the daily structure and assessment of the residency program.” In the end, Onyemeh left academia and moved to the corporate sector, where she provides training and consultations for academic, public, and K-12 libraries on a national scale (237).

#### **Section Four: “Looking towards the Future”**

The final section of the book begins with a chapter by Kaia MacLeod titled “Year One: My Introduction to the Indigenous Internship Program.” This chapter provides a possible blueprint for creating a pipeline into the profession for underrepresented groups through graduate school internships that remove financial barriers by offering tuition assistance. The Indigenous Internship Program at University of Alberta Libraries (UAL) started in 2015 with the aim of “indigenizing librarianship by assisting Indigenous MLIS students.” It consists of a part-time, paid position in UAL that includes paid tuition for the two-year duration of the internship. After this internship, UAL also offers an additional one year of project-based work through an Indigenous Residency Program (262). MacLeod states that without the paid tuition benefit, she would not have been able to consider pursuing her MLIS (261). That being said, provincial budget cuts led to the University of Alberta’s renegeing on their offer to pay tuition, which in turn left MacLeod needing to scramble to apply for scholarships midyear (269–70). Still, with guaranteed funding, this type of program could offer an alternative path where the potential disruption and harm that comes with temporary work is somewhat negated by coinciding with library school enrollment.

Natalie C. Hill, Laura A. Tadena, and Adriana Cásarez share challenges and strategies for navigating term-limited positions in their chapter “Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Autonomy and Agency in Term-Limited Library Positions” (288). The challenges discussed in this chapter are both generalized to diversity residency programs and grounded in the authors’ personal experiences. These challenges include being made to justify why their positions exist to their colleagues (299), their job titles doubly marking them as visible minorities (292), and the ways in which accepting temporary work to pursue additional training and development can feel like “career purgatory” (290). While there are many inherent challenges involved in participating in diversity residencies, the authors make a point to highlight the opportunities these programs offer. These opportunities include the ability to fill gaps between theoretical knowledge and practical experience (295–96); career exploration through resident-selected rotations (297); and leadership development with direction and support from coordinators, supervisors, mentors, and library administration (298). Overall, the chapter provides a fair accounting of the challenges and opportunities in residencies, with advice throughout on how to make these positions more resident-centered.

The book closes out strong with the chapter “Temporary Invitations to the Party: Reflections on Recruitment as Performative Action in Diversity Residencies” by Amanda M. Leftwich, Jessica Y. Dai, and Mallery Rawls. This essay works well as a conclusion, stating that “systems rather than individual people are the cause and mechanism of systemic oppression in libraries” (317), which reinforces that the narratives shared throughout the book are examples of larger systemic issues rather than the result of failures in individual residency programs, all of which contributes to poor retention of BIPOC members in our field (318). Since Leftwich, Dai, and Rawls are looking at diversity residencies systemically, rather than individually, they address the ACRL Diversity Alliance, a program that unites member institutions hosting diversity residency programs. These members pay membership fees, agree to certain commitments, and have access to members-only community spaces. The authors question what, if any, oversight, support, evaluation, or accountability the Diversity Alliance provides for member institutions (326). In the end, this chapter serves as a call to action to focus less on recruitment and more on retention of BIPOC individuals in the profession by “engag[ing] in critical reflection to understand and counter how the normalization of whiteness actively and passively harms the success of diversity residents,” with the hope that someday our profession will not need the “temporary invitation to the party” that diversity residencies function as (331).

## **Conclusion**

*Residencies Revisited* is long-awaited and essential reading for those involved in planning, implementing, and proposing residencies, as well as LIS students and new professionals who are considering if a residency might be right for them. The unwelcome work environments, deluge of microaggressions, cultural tensions with the whiteness of academia, and more shared by the authors also serve as a reminder that DEI initiatives in libraries desperately need to focus inwardly to address employee retention. This book shows that, although many residents do stay in the profession and have successful careers, this is often in spite of their residency experiences, rather than because of them. The editors state that readers, after concluding this book, will be left contemplating, “who are these programs for and should they exist?” (4–5). Readers may also be left wondering if diversity residencies are less of a pipeline into the profession and more of a gauntlet for early career BIPOC librarians to run.