

Presentation made at
U of A during job interview
3/19/92

When Ms. Phipps called me the other day and asked if I could put a presentation together on what the University of Michigan has been doing in the areas of staff development and diversity I panicked for a seconde, but then I realized that I have been active in diversity and staff development at Michigan for at least four years, both as a participant and as a programmer. What I'd like to do is to describe for you what has been taking place at the University of Michigan library in these areas, describe what I think are some essential components to successful staff development with specific emphasis on diversity, and then answer any questions you might have.

Getting adults to examine their own beliefs and behaviors about race, ethnicity and culture, and encouraging them to expand their awareness of these issues and change their behaviors when necessary, is no easy task. It takes commitment, time and above all leadership, to create a truly multicultural environment.. At Michigan we have been fortunate to have not only the backing and commitment of the library administration, but of the campus administration as well. Following a series of very unfortunate racist incidents in 1987, then provost and now president, James Duderstadt issued what is known as the Michigan Mandate, a document that directed all departments on campus to set goals in the area of diversity. The library took a leading role early on and continues to provide leadership in this area. Not only has our staff of color increased to over twenty percent, we continue to innovate and challenge our staff to educate themselves and become aware of these

issues.

You might ask, how was all this accomplished? Over the past four years, the University of Michigan Library's staff development office, Personnel office and Library diversity committee have worked side by side in developing numerous opportunities for the library staff to learn more about racism, sexism, homophobia, and multiculturalism in our society. Workshops, film festivals, discussion groups, and a number of special committees have all been created from the ground up by a staff that is dedicated to making the library a truly multicultural institution. Guided by the leadership of people like Carla Stoffle, whom I'm sure you all know by now, and Lucy Cohen, the Library's personnel manager, the University of Michigan library is now considered a national leader in diversity.

What I'd like to do now is give you a brief overview of what has occurred at Michigan in these areas.

To my knowledge the library's diversity program really got off the ground with a series of workshops held in the Spring of 1988. Entitled *Overcoming Racism: Exploring the Value of Diversity*, these workshops included presentations and small group sessions that were intended to get staff to assess their own biases and prejudices around these issues, and to encourage them to explore various avenues for making the library not only a multicultural institution, but one that was a welcoming environment for all people. The workshops sought to

empower people to develop a sense of personal and collective control over the effects of racism and to promote diversity as a positive force. Following these sessions, many people on the staff, including the original group of facilitators, felt a need to continue the dialogue that had begun on these issues. Hence, the facilitator group continued to meet as the Diversity Task Force. The original goals of the group were to engage the staff in a series of discussion sessions on the issues raised at the original workshops. From there the task force came up with a number of staff development initiatives, including among other things, the planning of a series of film festivals focusing on diversity, the formation of an Amity committee, the purpose of which was to make new staff feel welcome, the planning of a series of multicultural library displays and exhibits as well as more actual workshops that focused on various aspects of diversity.

A year after the formation of the original task force, the library director gave the group permanent committee status. Since its formation, the committee has been instrumental in encouraging the library staff to focus on how diversity affects their day to day lives on the job. Not only does it work to make various programs available, it also serves as an advisory group to the director of the library, bringing to his attention whatever issues need to be dealt with and making recommendations when appropriate. Other activities undertaken by the committee include the planning and facilitating of departmental focus group sessions, a survey assessing the successes and failures of the program, and the authoring of a book on our experiences in these areas.

What I would like to do now is take a few minutes to describe for you in more detail some of the staff development activities that have occurred in the past few years.

Managing a Culturally Diverse Workforce: looks at how biases, perceptions and expectations, about work affect the management of others. It also examines what it means to manage a diverse workplace and identities work styles and their relationship to culture.

Stares and Stairs: Working with people with disabilities intended to increase sensitivity to architectural and attitudinal barriers and responsiveness to disabled persons in the library setting

Lesbian and Gay Awareness workshops: These sessions were intended to increase staff awareness of the challenges and obstacles that lesbian and gay staff members face, issues dealt with included non-traditional families, stereotypes, and "religious intolerance". The workshop was structured in such a way that it included a panel discussion composed of various members of the academic community and the community at large, including a couple of parents from P-Flag, members of the activist community, Barbara Gittings, co-founder of GLTF of ALA, and select "out" staff members. The Gay and Lesbian Library Association helped plan

and coordinate these. As an aside, one of the most positive outcomes of the libraries diversity efforts has been that lesbian and gay staff have felt comfortable enough to organize openly, a clear sign that our efforts and tearing down barriers was working.

Ebony view of the ivory tower: sponsored by HRD, this workshop gave staff of color an opportunity to express their perceptions of how the dominant library culture treated them. It was a chance for staff of color to air their own concerns. Included a follow-up session with recommendations

Cross-cultural communication: deals with issue of ethnocentrism and communication styles; three part program. Intended for student employees and supervisors.

These are but a few of the activities that have taken place in our library. As an aside, the staff development librarian at Michigan has also planned and coordinated a number of other sessions, including time management workshops, computer skill workshops, conflict management workshops etc.

What makes for a successful staff development program

The ingredients that I believe go into making a successful staff development program include an awareness and openness on the part of the coordinator to the needs of the staff and a willingness to lead the staff to new levels of skill, awareness and

understanding. As a staff development librarian, I think my role would be to act as not only a sounding board for the staff but also to have a vision of what the staff's future needs will be, in whatever areas need to be addressed be it in automation or diversity. I think that the role of the staff development librarian also entails a great deal of planning and organization, as well as a willingness to get out and network with people in both the campus community and the community at large.. The challenges that I see as most important are those that deal with encouraging adult learners to develop a sense of openmindedness about the issues surrounding diversity. Paramount in this is the ability to lead and teach without alienating or discouraging. After all, successful training and development is only as good as each and every one of us makes it. In my view, the successful organization is one that encourages growth as well as awareness and understanding of what the future holds.