

REPORT TO AAHSL

Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians

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Submitted by:

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The Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians (LIAL) was an amazing experience. Held by the Harvard Graduate School of Education, this weeklong course was a serious immersion into leadership theories with extensive readings and practical exercises. The 2016 LIAL cohort was the 18th since its inception and the program overall was well-planned and executed.

The Agenda & Instructors

Prior to our arrival, the institute's website provided links to readings and a mini-case study we were to complete. This was a predictor of the institute's intensity. Upon arrival at Harvard, we checked in at registration and were immediately divided into our small groups for our first of many discussions. Dr. Joseph Zolner, Education Chair of the LIAL, provided background on how the institute originated plus an overall introduction to Leadership and Change. Dr. Zolner also introduced the "Cone of Silence" on the first day stressing that in order for us to share problems and challenges within our libraries, everyone would take an oath of confidentiality. What was said in the institute would stay in the institute. There would be no trending, tweeting, or posts to Facebook regarding things said in the LIAL. I believe this went a long way in freeing everyone to share openly management problems in a candid way but it also allowed for honest feedback within groups and discussion sessions. Each day had required readings and exercises so I spent most nights doing homework in preparation for the next day's dialogues.

Class topics early in the week, such as The Four Frames, were built upon in following sessions. Once we learned the Four Frames, we were able to practice identifying which frame of reference an assigned reading or practicum would fall into. Early on students were encouraged to share individual perspectives and views thus "painting intellectual mosaics".

In addition to extensive readings, discussions and in-class exercises, the institute included other educational moments. We were able to visit the Gutman Library and take tours of the main Widener Library and the Harvard campus. It was fascinating to learn details about the Widener collection as well as the history of Harvard and its traditions.

As you would expect of a course at Harvard, each faculty member of the institute was incredibly knowledgeable and supportive. Their collective passion for the topics was obvious. I truly appreciated their insights and desire to help us see different challenges in a constructive way. Each had their own method for leading discussions and I learned valuable information from each.

Cohort & Groups

The 2016 LIAL Cohort was varied and international in scope. Fellow students hailed from 31 states and 6 countries (Canada, Cutter, Jamaica, Singapore, Switzerland and United Arab Emirates). During regular class sessions I was lucky to be seated next to a Library Director from Singapore. Over the course of the week, we were able to share work and life challenges plus I had the opportunity to learn much about the university structure in Singapore.

Small group work began the first day and we stayed with our groups of 10 for the entire week. I can't speak for every group but our group was fabulous. Each session we could follow the prescribed topic or we could discuss our own leadership challenges. This in effect provided us with free consulting from colleagues from various backgrounds and different viewpoints. If I had to pinpoint one aspect of the institute I found most valuable, it was these small group discussions.

During the week we were also assigned to triad groups with just 3 in each. The triads provided us with a smaller group in which we discussed mini-cases written before we arrived. This was another opportunity to discuss challenges or problems we had faced or were currently facing plus obtain input from other librarians.

IMPACT ON JOB RESPONSIBILITIES

As a faculty member on an academic health sciences campus, I often teach students, residents and faculty in various settings. One of the most immediate impacts the week had on me was from an educational point of view. The structure of the institute, the participation of the students and the overall passion of the instructors in their topics was refreshing. It has reinvigorated my love of teaching.

As a department head and manager, the institute provided opportunities to expand my knowledge base. Introduced by Dr. Joan Gallos, I learned about the Four Frames or “lenses” through which management or campus ecosystems can be viewed. Concrete exercises allowed me to practice the art of identifying a problem within the Four Frames of Structure, Human Resources, Politics or Symbolism. We were often asked how case studies from the assigned readings were presented within these Four Frames. The frames become a diagnostic model for problems or situations within the cases or how a leader or individual’s perspectives tied into the frames. For a leader to be effective, she or he needs to be able to pick the appropriate frame or lens for the situation. By the end of the institute I was much more adept at identifying my default “lens” and was able to step back and look at problems using the other frames. The recommendation to “go up to the balcony” ties into the frames nicely. A leader who can go the balcony has the ability to step back and see an issue within the big picture. This is particularly important on an academic health sciences campus where educational focus can compete against research arms and both vie against the priority of providing clinical care in a hospital environment.

USEFULNESS IN PREPARATION FOR LEADERSHIP POSITION

There are many aspects to the LIAL that I found useful as a faculty member, as a librarian, as a manager but most importantly as a possible library leader. I feel I now have a playbook, so to speak, for viewing and addressing managerial issues in my current position. More importantly I feel better suited to asking the appropriate questions of myself and others as I prepare for more leadership responsibilities in the future. Throughout the institute it became clear that a good leader must have the ability but also the willingness to think outside the box. Flexibility and finesse can be major tools for the successful leader but it seems these tools work in tandem with a deep sense of commitment and calling. The knowledge I gained during this institute will allow me to grow as a manager. I also strongly believe the network of colleagues built through the institute will provide a support system for all of the 2016 attendees.

As a mid-career, tenured librarian, my goals are to become a more effective manager and prepare myself for future opportunities as a potential leader. This institute has given me tremendous amounts of knowledge and structure to prepare for that future.