

Report on the Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians, July 30th – August 4th, 2017

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Evaluation of the program

While researching this institute, I heard that it would be a transformational experience. I did not expect personal or professional transformation in one week. I expected to be challenged, to gain tools for inquiry and leadership, to meet people who would learn with me and dig into some of the career and climate issues in academic librarianship here and now. Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians exceeded my expectations.

I would describe the Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians as accessible, specific, modern, and provocative. As a mid-career professional, I felt at home in my cohort of 110 participants. I was pleased by the diversity of participants in career orientation, institution type, gender, culture, and geographic representation. Our small groups were organized to balance many of these areas; I noted that each small group of about 8-10 participants included one person from outside the US. During our small group daily meeting and reflections, we worked through individual cases, talked about “aha!” moments, and reflected on the course content presented during the previous day. These were informal discussions; we moved as a group through a routine of checking in, addressing issues, listening, and affirming.

The program provided ample time for networking, reflection, analysis, and examination of cases. Along with many of my colleagues, I had not been in a course where we rigorously analyzed cases as students; the precision of the process was impressive. The various modalities for learning and breaks for social interaction helped the institute feel balanced. The institute integrated semi-structured reflection and sharing time into the week efficiently.

Impact on my job responsibilities and career goals

As a newer academic librarian and new faculty member, I recognize that my approach to leadership needs a personalized maturity model that fits me within the complex environment of an academic medical center. I sincerely appreciated the opportunity to gain leadership insights from experienced library faculty and a cohort of colleagues within a learning program specifically for librarians.

As a unit head and committee chair within the library and committee chair and faculty senate committee member outside of the library, I work with faculty and staff to promote representation and achieve goals in a variety of areas. I have often reflected on the four frames of leadership, as presented by Dr. Joan Gallos, to consider where some leaders are placing emphasis and what might need to be given some more attention. I was surprised by the frame that kept coming up in my discussions and analysis: the symbolic or visionary frame. That validated my yearlong focus on a few favorite questions: How can we do this? What could this experience be? Why is this meaningful? One direct impact of my sharing my enthusiasm for this frame has been my push for research and grant activities. I am now on a new library committee to develop grant projects. I feel more confident about stoking the energy around

my symbolic frame and identifying growth areas around the political, structural, and human resources frames.

This institute also reignited one of my career goals: advocacy. I was reminded at the institute that there are many ways to gain and lose advocates, that advocacy is about knowing your audience and being able to tell an appropriate story—smart politics for the workplace. Since then, I have taken on the responsibility of leading advocacy training for library staff during a time of major renovation and statewide budget uncertainties.

Usefulness in preparing me for leadership positions

This institute was useful in preparing me for leadership positions and helping me to see room for improvement in my current responsibilities. One immediate outcome of the institute was a new network of colleagues. We discovered that we could quickly connect and trust each other on several kinds of issues. This institute was a proving ground for forging relationships with colleagues who have similar responsibilities and challenges. In practicing communication in various settings, we also considered “who else?” and “what else?” around every turn. Incorporating those two questions into interactions is now a habit, and that has helped me, with teams, stretch our thinking and be more efficient with our work.

My career goals include growing proficiency in navigating many of the hallmark strains that library leaders may face in an academic medical center: budgets, facilities, human resources, stakeholder relationships. I will continue to stretch and grow as a leader by mentoring others (wherever they may be) and contributing to the structures and relationship building that supports faculty success (on my campus). My career goals include working in a library leadership position where I will lead programs, advocating for the library and its users, and multi-institutional collaboration with regional libraries or department-specific projects involving information resources.

An investment

The Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians required a significant investment of pre-meeting study and reflection, but it was all worthwhile. The guest speakers and facilitators were generous with their time, authentic, and engaged. They knew what we had read, knew where we came from, and kept questions flowing. The environment (including freedom from daily work duties and the on-social media ban) permitted us to devote sustained attention and intention to the experience of being at the institute. To me, the LIAL was a relevant, thought-provoking professional development opportunity. It would be a worthwhile investment for other potential leaders.

I thank the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries for supporting my participation at the LIAL.