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Iyanna Sims

North Carolina State University, iyanna@ncat.edu

Lynn Sorensen Sutton

Wake Forest University, suttonls@wfu.edu

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GETTING TO KNOW YOU: HBCU-ASERL LIBRARIAN EXCHANGE

Iyanna Sims and Lynn Sutton, Ph.D.

Iyanna Sims is an Electronic Resources Librarian for the F.D. Bluford Library of North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro, NC. She can be reached at iyanna@ncat.edu. Lynn Sutton, Ph.D. is the Director of the Z. Smith Reynolds Library of Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, NC. She can be reached at suttonls@wfu.edu.

In June, 2006, two librarians from North Carolina participated in an exchange program sponsored by the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) and the Historically Black College and Universities (HBCU) Alliance. Iyanna Sims, Electronic Resources Librarian from North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University, spent two weeks on the campus of Wake Forest University in the Z. Smith Reynolds Library, at the invitation of Lynn Sutton, Director. The exchange experience is part of a comprehensive leadership initiative of the HBCU Alliance.

Background

As stated on their website, the HBCU Library Alliance is a consortium that supports the collaboration of information professionals dedicated to providing an array of resources designed to strengthen [Historically Black Colleges and Universities](#) and their constituents. HBCU libraries serve as the gatekeepers for history, culture and the African-American experience. The Andrew Mellon Foundation has provided funding for a leadership program designed to provide theoretical and practical instruction to develop leadership skills in HBCU librarians.

One facet of the leadership program was the idea of an exchange program. Twenty thousand dollars from the Mellon grant was set aside to host a pilot exchange for five associate-level librarians from the HBCU Leadership Program to spend two weeks at an Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) institution during the summer of 2006. The stated goals of the program are to provide the HBCU librarians with an opportunity to address a specific issue of strategic importance to their library with the assistance and expertise of

ASERL library leaders, and to foster additional collaboration between ASERL and HBCU libraries. John Burger and Lillian Lewis (Burger and Lewis 2007, 34) have described the benefits of the regional program.

ASERL is the largest regional research library consortium in the United States. The ASERL mission is to bring together leaders from research libraries in the southeastern region to foster a high standard of library excellence through inter-institutional resource sharing and collaborative efforts. The exchange program was seen by ASERL library directors as an excellent match to this mission. The program included a site visit by the participating ASERL library dean to the HBCU library prior to the two-week exchange.

The Exchange

Iyanna Sims is Electronic Resources Librarian at the Ferdinand D. Bluford Library, North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro, North Carolina. Founded in 1891, North Carolina A&T is one of the nation's leading Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The University is classified as Carnegie Doctoral/Research Intensive and offers degree programs at the baccalaureate, master's and doctoral levels. With a current enrollment of more than 10,000 students, it is recognized as one of the top producers of African American engineers and technologists. Ferdinand D. Bluford Library maintains a balanced collection of print and non-print materials with an ever growing collection of electronic databases, e-journals and e-books. The Library maintains special collections in Archives, Black Studies and Teacher Education materials.

Lynn Sutton, Ph.D. is Director, Z. Smith Reynolds Library at Wake Forest University. Wake Forest was founded in 1834 in Wake

Forest, North Carolina and later moved to Winston-Salem, NC in 1956. Wake Forest is presently a private, Carnegie Doctoral/Research Intensive University, ranking in the top 30 U.S. News and World Report, and has a total student body of 6,500. The Z. Smith Reynolds Library is one of three libraries on campus and contains 1.4 million volumes with strengths in the use of instructional technology, information literacy and a relentless service approach.

From June 11-23, 2006, Iyanna Sims lived and worked on the campus at Wake Forest University in the Z. Smith Reynolds Library, at the invitation of Lynn Sutton, Library Director. The questions and answers below give a detailed account of the value of the experience for each participant.

Why were you interested in participating in the exchange program?

Iyanna Sims:

John Donne's 17th century meditation, "no man is an island, no one is self-sufficient, everyone relies on others" is a personal philosophy. I feel it is extremely beneficial to engage in information sharing with other librarians to provide optimum services for patrons. The basis of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) Exchange Program piqued my interest as a great opportunity to have extensive dialog with other librarians in the areas of electronic resources management and providing dynamic web services.

Lynn Sutton:

When I first heard about the HBCU exchange program at an ASERL membership meeting, I was immediately interested in the project. When I wrote the application for Wake Forest, I practically begged the coordinators from ASERL and the HBCU Alliance to include us. I was fairly new to the southeast region and I saw this as an excellent opportunity for collegiality and collaboration. I was thrilled when we were accepted and matched with Iyanna Sims from North Carolina A&T in nearby Greensboro since it would allow us to develop a lasting relationship with a neighbor.

What were your personal goals for the exchange program?

Iyanna Sims:

As electronic resources librarian at North Carolina A&T State University's F.D. Bluford Library, my responsibilities include web services and maintaining access to electronic resources. Therefore, my goal was to exchange ideas on providing dynamic web services using scripting languages such as JavaScript and creating databases for information retrieval. Also, I was interested in seeing how other libraries were handling digitizing archival material and what tool they were using for maintaining metadata for finding aids. I also wanted to see how other electronic resources librarians were handling workflow in regards to electronic journal management.

Lynn Sutton:

My first priority was to make Iyanna feel welcome and nothing does that like food and fellowship. To kick off our relationship, I hosted a welcome party in my home for Iyanna and our department heads. During the two week exchange, we organized as many lunches and dinners with staff as we could so that everyone would feel comfortable with each other and develop personal relationships. At least half of the staff had at least one meal with Iyanna.

I also wanted to structure an experience that would meet the goals of Iyanna's leadership program. To that end, I arranged for Iyanna to meet with members of each team in the library and to spend extra time with technology staff and the electronic resources librarian. We gave her the opportunity to team-teach a class in podcasting with our Systems Librarian and to address our monthly staff meeting.

Another goal was to develop a collegial relationship with a neighboring library. Our Wake Forest staff gained from the many ideas and experiences that Iyanna so enthusiastically brought to us. Hosting her for two weeks provided an enriching experience for our staff and the opportunity to develop a lasting relationship.

Describe a typical day during the exchange:

Iyanna Sims:

Before the exchange, I assumed the majority of my days would be spent with the Information Technology and Resource Services teams, specifically those involved with web development and electronic resources. As a delightful surprise, Lynn had arranged for me to spend time with all of the library's teams including Access Services, Research & Information Services, and Special Collections & Archives. A typical day would include discussions with the aforementioned teams extensively about team responsibilities, workflow, and projects. On several occasions, I had the opportunity to attend a variety of team meetings that ranged from beginning a digitization project to a library leadership meeting. The days were full of valuable information and allowed me to stand back and really see the whole picture of the organization.

Lynn Sutton:

We gave Iyanna an office down the hall from the Administrative suite, so we saw her every morning when she came in to start the day. She met with every team in the library, since her interest in digital information cut across nearly every unit. A typical day might be a three hour session with the Electronic Resources Librarian in the morning, followed by a group lunch, and then an afternoon session where Iyanna taught a staff development class jointly with our Systems Librarian on podcasting. At 4:00 p.m., Iyanna had an hour in her temporary office to catch up on email or write in her daily journal. In the evening, we would line up willing staff members to host a dinner at a local restaurant. Even though Greensboro is only 30 miles away, Iyanna had not been to many Winston-Salem restaurants. After dinner, Iyanna would return to the Residence Inn about a mile from campus to unwind from the day and prepare for the next one.

Did you do anything for fun?

Iyanna Sims:

The exchange experience was the perfect balance of professional and social networking. Lynn began the festivities with a welcoming reception for me at her home. Wonderful lunches and dinners at area local restaurants throughout the exchange followed suit. Not only did the lunches and dinners give me a chance to experience the culinary offerings of Winston-Salem, it also provided a great opportunity to get to know the staff outside of the work environment. Towards the end of the exchange experience, Lynn and I, along with her husband, enjoyed a movie on a Saturday evening on the front lawn of the Reynolda House. The social activities truly enhanced my exchange experience.

Lynn Sutton:

As much as we could! The highlight for me was the Saturday night midpoint in the two week exchange where my husband and I took Iyanna to dinner at the local favorite Village Tavern, then walked over to Reynolda Gardens to admire the roses, followed by an outdoor movie (Spike Lee's Do the Right Thing) on the lawn of Reynolda House. It was a perfect North Carolina summer night with a new friend.

What ideas and skills did you take away from the experience and how have you implemented them?

Iyanna Sims:

The insights I have gained from the exchange experience have been priceless. Advanced cascading style sheets (CSS) and the introduction of basic JavaScript are skills I have implemented since the exchange. We have redesigned our library's intranet page using advanced CSS and are currently in the final stages of implementing JavaScript to provide a dynamic website for our users. In addition, from conversations with the Resource Services team, I have a mental rolodex of the tips of the trade for future use. The team shared good advice on electronic resource management including handling license agreements with the use of a checklist to choosing an ERMS (electronic resource management system).

Lynn Sutton:

We learned as much from Iyanna as she learned from us. She was full of ideas on how to enhance services to users that she shared freely with us. One example was her suggestion to our Archives staff to sponsor a picture identification party at our upcoming Homecoming and 50th Anniversary celebration. A&T had successfully done this with their local photograph collection. This was an ideal way for us to identify campus photographs that we were preparing for inclusion in our collaborative Digital Forsyth project. When we held the party three months later during Wake Forest's homecoming, Iyanna and her Archivist came back to visit.

What possibilities do you see for future collaboration with your exchange partner?

Iyanna Sims:

After the initial exchange, A&T and WFU archivists took advantage of the recently formed relationship. The archivists collaborated on the development and implementation of an archival picture identification project - soliciting the help of alumni, faculty, and staff to help in the identifying archived photographs. As of this date, A&T is brainstorming future areas of collaboration specifically in the area of library technology.

Lynn Sutton:

We are still trying to schedule a visit by our Wake Forest technology staff to Iyanna and her colleagues to discuss common issues. We had also talked about the possibility of a true "exchange" by sending a Wake Forest librarian for two weeks to A&T to experience the immersion in another library that Iyanna enjoyed. I would still like to do that.

Would you recommend this kind of exchange experience for others?

Iyanna Sims:

I am a strong advocate for the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) Exchange Program. Any librarian willing to learn and share expertise should take full advantage of an opportunity to participate. Not only does it serve as an invaluable practical professional experience, it also encourages collaborative relationship among libraries.

Lynn Sutton:

Absolutely! It was a win-win all the way around. We had a very enjoyable experience and learned a lot on both sides. The HBCU Alliance has won a second Mellon grant for the continuation of the Leadership program and to conduct a second round of exchanges next year. I highly recommend the program to anyone.

References

Burger, John and Lillian Lewis. 2007. "Each one teach one." *American Libraries* 38(2): 34-6.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities Library Alliance. Exchange program.

<http://www.hbculibraries.org/html/exchange-program.html>