Proposal: "Planning for a Multi-State Workforce Study of BIPOC Academic Library Paraprofessionals"

Project Justification

Please note: All citations and references in this proposal are provided in attached Supporting Document 1.

Western Carolina University (WCU) and project partners in North Carolina, Maryland and Indiana request **$149,320** (with $0 cost sharing) to support a planning grant for a future applied research project. The project addresses a national need for new approaches to recruiting more diverse professional librarians, by planning a multi-state library workforce study of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) already working as paraprofessionals in academic libraries. The envisioned future study will provide better national understanding of BIPOC paraprofessionals as a potential target for diversity recruitment and training.

This work will support the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program's Goal #1 to "Recruit, Train, Develop and Retain a Diverse Workforce" and related Objective 1.1 to encourage students from underrepresented groups to pursue careers in library and information science. The proposed work will commence August 1, 2022 and conclude July 31, 2023.

A lack of diversity in the library professional workforce is well-documented.[1,2,3,4,5] One recent report explained that, "in spite of concerted efforts from major library associations as well as library and information science programs over the last several decades ... little progress has been made with respect to representation of racial and ethnic categories that, historically, have been underrepresented within the profession".[6] These "visible minorities"[7] of BIPOC workers have held steady at 10-12% of the library professional workforce for decades while the percentage of minorities as a percentage of the U.S. population has increased to nearly 40% during the same period.[8,9] This is a problem across all types of libraries, but the American Library Association's "Diversity Counts" and other studies demonstrated that it is more pronounced in academic libraries.[10,11] With only minimal improvements despite more than two decades of national efforts to diversify the professional librarian workforce, what more can be done?

One promising idea for more successful diversity recruiting can be found within the same data that confirms the problem. Previous studies showed that library "paraprofessionals" (non-librarian clerical and support staff) as a group are more diverse than their professional librarian counterparts. While only 11% of degreed academic librarians are non-white, almost 25% of paraprofessionals in academic libraries identify as members of underrepresented groups. This data raises interesting possibilities for research to inform future minority recruiting efforts. A preliminary literature search identified multiple past studies on changes in the jobs of academic library paraprofessionals, [12,13,14,15,16] and other publications suggesting better ways to support paraprofessionals.[17,18] However, with only a few exceptions, [19,20,21,22] little was found concerning diversity within the paraprofessional workforce or ways to encourage BIPOC paraprofessionals to participate more extensively in pathways to MLS degrees and professional careers. **WCU and its partners believe this is a largely unexplored opportunity to improve diversity recruiting.**

For these reasons, the applicants propose to plan for a multi-state workforce study of BIPOC paraprofessionals already working in academic libraries. The study will generate new insights and understanding of BIPOC paraprofessionals' current status (numbers, distribution, demographics, levels of educational attainment, activities, etc.), their professional interests and aspirations, and potential barriers (financial, cultural, personal, other) that might hinder recruitment, training, and placement programs.

Project Work Plan

Overview

The core project team consists of multiple personnel from <u>Western Carolina University</u>, with a subcontract to <u>Purdue University</u>'s Library and School of Information Studies. In addition to these two primary partners, the core team will rely upon material support by multiple consortia and organizations that represent academic libraries statewide in Indiana, Maryland, North Carolina, and other states that may commit to project participation. For the purposes of this project, in-scope "academic libraries" are libraries serving accredited degree-granting institutions, including public universities, private and independent colleges and universities, and community colleges. An Advisory Board will represent the interests of these libraries and organizations, as well as key stakeholder populations including library BIPOC paraprofessionals.

At the time that this proposal was submitted, the following organizations have committed to participation on the Advisory Board and in other ways. Commitments from each of these organizations can be found in supporting documents accompanying this proposal.

Organizations Already Committed to Project Participation:

Indiana	● Indiana University - Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI)
Maryland	● University System of Maryland & Affiliated Institutions (USMAI) ● Maryland Independent Colleges & Universities Libraries (MICUA) ● Maryland Community College Library Consortium (MCCLC)
North Carolina	● North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU) ● UNC System - University Libraries Advisory Council (ULAC)
Other Organizations	● Ithaka S+R

These commitments show that the project team already is well on its way to building the envisioned network of partners that will be required to execute the anticipated full future study. Consistent with the

purposes of an IMLS planning grant, if this proposal is funded the project team will continue to expand and formalize commitments with other useful organizations.

Core Project Team

The following personnel constitute the core project team. More biographical and professional information about each person can be found in the supporting documents accompanying this proposal.

- **Shamella Cromartie** (co-PI @ 15%) - Associate Dean, WCU Hunter Library
- **Dr. Brandi Hinnant-Crawford** (co-PI @13%) - Associate Professor of Educational Research
- **Mark A. Puente** (co-PI @ 8%) - Associate Dean Purdue University Libraries and School of Information Studies
- **Dr. Ricardo Nazario-Colon** (Research Advisor @ 1%) - WCU Chief Diversity Officer
- **Chuck Thomas** (Outreach, Communications, Project Mgmt. @ 5%) - WCU Dean of Library Services

Project Communications and Outreach

- Consortial partners and others will be key to effective project communications and outreach.
- Most communications will be conducted via email lists, websites, and other media channels managed by relevant library consortia and organizations within each state.
- If webinars and online presentations are found to be advantageous, they will be conducted via Zoom.
- Presentation proposals will be submitted to the following state library association conferences, or as part of ongoing webinar series sponsored by each association.
    - North Carolina Library Association Annual Conference - October 2022
    - Indiana Library Federation Annual Conference - November 2022
    - Maryland Library Association Annual Conference - May 2023
- The budget includes $5,000 to help offset costs of working with partner organizations, paid advertising, and possibly outsourcing Marketing and Communications coordination to another cooperating organization. These funds may also be used to cover any costs of conference registrations that may be required to be able to make project presentations during targeted conferences and online events.
- Part of our outreach strategy will be to not only inform audiences of planning project activities, but also to prepare these same stakeholders and audiences for the envisioned future multi-state study.

Major Project Activities (Also see attached Schedule of Completion)

Planning a mixed-methods multi-state library workforce study is ambitious and will require anticipating and managing challenges and risks. Organizations involved in planning will need to consider the diversity among hundreds of academic libraries and thousands of BIPOC paraprofessionals. The envisioned collaborative research design and testing work during the planning phase will be complex. The success of this planning project also will depend on a reliable network of partnerships and commitments, an effective governance strategy, and capable project management. The project work plan includes each of the activities described

below. Although some of these activities must be conducted in a linear and sequential manner, many of the activities listed in this section will be conducted in parallel with others, with the goal of all being completed within the one-year planning project period.

Activity 1: Solidify and expand existing partnerships in North Carolina, Maryland, and Indiana.

Supporting letters of commitment have already been obtained from multiple key organizations representing the libraries of public and private colleges and universities, and community college libraries, in all three states. Each organization is committed to providing a representative to the project advisory board, facilitating project communications with each library, helping with local promotion and information-sharing about the planning project and the envisioned future workforce study, and monitoring and encouraging responsiveness from each library to any requests for information or data needed in the planning process. Effective and consistent project communication and outreach will be coordinated by the core project team and distributed partners, and will include email lists, a project website, and cooperation with each state's consortia and organizations that can effectively reach target libraries and audiences.

Activity 2: Identify additional partners in at least 5-10 geographically distributed and diverse states that wish to plan and participate in a future study.

The project team will apply selection criteria to guide the addition of new states. These criteria will include geographic distribution, total number of academic libraries in the state, likelihood of widespread interest and participation by library organizations and library paraprofessionals, estimated numbers of visible minorities within a state's academic libraries, and other variables to be chosen in coordination with the advisory board. This selection process may be iterative as we explore and try to solidify partnerships with consortia and library organizations in multiple states. Some states and groups may express initial interest but not be able to commit, in which case we will use selection criteria to begin exploratory talks with another appropriate state.

Activity 3: Connect with related work at ALA, ARL, ACRL, Ithaka S+R, state chapters of national organizations, and other entities.

In addition to state organizations and consortia, the project team will build relationships with other national organizations that have conducted related research related to diversity within the library profession. By sharing information about our intentions and those organizations' future plans, we will seek their advice and lessons learned from previous studies, more clearly differentiate our work from theirs, minimize redundancy across research efforts, and try to share our envisioned future study in a manner that acknowledges, leverages, and complements those other organizations' work.

Activity 4: Form a project advisory board and governance structure.

An Advisory Board will include up to 10 members to effectively represent the interests and perspectives of the libraries serving public and private colleges and universities, and community colleges in the three initial partner states (North Carolina, Maryland, and Indiana). A primary function of the Advisory Board will be to ensure that the diverse academic libraries in each participating state are equitably considered in project planning and execution. The selection process also will ensure that library paraprofessionals and people of color are appropriately represented in a group guiding a study of BIPOC paraprofessionals.

Each Advisory Board member will receive an honorarium of $1,000 for a year's worth of service. The project team will create a statement of expectations of each member's participation and contributions to the project. Once Advisory Board members are selected, they will help the project team to create bylaws that specify the purposes, activities, and decision-making processes that will be employed throughout the planning project.

Planned project evaluation activities will include assessing the effectiveness of the Advisory Board. Any identified problems or desirable modifications to this governance structure will be reflected in both the final project report to IMLS, and in any future research proposal to IMLS or another potential funder for the envisioned future study.

Activity 5: Identify all in-scope libraries and primary contacts for each participating organization and academic library.

By working with each of the three initial state's consortia and other library organizations, and using IPEDS data, the project team will compile and validate a dataset of all in-scope academic libraries within each library, and primary contact information for each library's director or chief administrator. The team will then contact each library leader with the help of its corresponding consortium contact, to notify them of our intent to collect basic demographic data on a library-by-library basis. These email communications will provide each library leader an opportunity to designate an alternate contact of someone who is best able to provide the basic demographic information we are seeking.

This work also will attempt to identify any academic libraries that do not belong to any partnering consortia, but are still in-scope for this project. We know in advance that there are a few such academic libraries.

Activity 6: Conduct initial library-by-library demographic data collection from each in-scope library in 3 states

Using established contact information for each library, the project team and partner organizations in each of the 3 initial states will solicit responses about the current numbers of library paraprofessionals who identify

as belonging to one of the racial or ethnic classifications established by the U.S. Government for reporting purposes:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Two or More Races
- Unknown

To incentivize responses from as many libraries as possible, the project team will hold five random drawings from libraries that have responded, for $500 awards to be donated to the selected libraries. Three of these five awards will be designated by state, so that one random award will go to a respondent library in Maryland, North Carolina, and Indiana. The other two $500 random awards may be awarded to any respondent library across the three initial participating states.

The library-by-library demographic data will be one of the primary datasets generated during this planning, and will be a foundation to inform planning for the envisioned future quantitative and qualitative mixed-methods study. Knowing in advance the anticipated approximate size of the population to be studied in each state and each library will help the project team plan its work, allocate resources, and evaluate response rates during a future study.

Note for reviewers: Even though this planning project will generate a small number of datasets, please note that IMLS does not require a Data Management Plan for planning grants. However, we have included the required Digital Products Plan as an accompanying document supporting this proposal, and it covers our plans for managing these datasets.

Activity 7: Conduct a literature review and finalize research questions

A planning grant will provide more time to consider and refine research questions for the envisioned future study. The research questions shown below will be the starting point for those additional discussions. These questions clearly demonstrate that the project team wishes to go beyond simple aggregated national statistics about the numbers of racial minorities working in academic libraries, such as was done in the American Library Association's *Diversity Counts* research projects.[23] While that work provides a valuable foundation, Western Carolina University and its partners intend to conduct research that can provide more valuable insights to inform and guide future professional diversity recruiting initiatives.

Q1. How do BIPOC paraprofessionals describe/characterize their experiences within academic libraries?

Q2. How do BIPOC library paraprofessionals conceptualize the career ladder within academic libraries?

Q3. What barriers to career advancement do BIPOC paraprofessionals perceive in academic libraries?

Q4. What opportunities for career advancement do BIPOC paraprofessionals perceive in academic libraries?

Q5. What incentives or motivations would be most likely to cause BIPOC paraprofessionals to pursue career advancement toward professional librarian positions?

Activity 8: Design a mixed-methods workforce study; obtain IRB approval; test research instruments

To answer the research questions posed above, this study will employ a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design, characterized by the collection of quantitative followed by the collection of qualitative data, where qualitative data are used to aid in the interpretation of quantitative findings.[24] More specifically, our team will employ mixed-method phenomenological design, using quantitative survey data to both provide a broad description of the general landscape and to "help identify participants for the phenomenological phase who can provide information-rich experiential accounts".[25] This work will center the voices and experiences of BIPOC paraprofessionals, and by capturing "a specific lived experience in a number of variations" will make it possible "to identify insights that are common throughout experiences in order to emphasize the universal themes held within the lived experiences". [26] This work seeks to be both generalizable with the quantitative data and descriptive, with deep insights from participants being given the same esteem as the quantitative generalizations.

The research design consists of five phases to be completed during this planning project. The envisioned future full research project will build upon the work during these initial five phases.

Phase One will be to design one or more research survey instruments for the envisioned future study design. Library professional literature is for the most part silent on the frequency of library paraprofessionals moving into professional positions, and on the reasons why more BIPOC paraprofessionals do not choose to advance into professional librarian positions. Building upon research instruments developed in other non-library contexts, the research team will incorporate measures like the Perceived Racism Scale[27] and the Workplace Belongingness Scale[28] to develop questions, scales, and instruments unique to the context of academic libraries.

Phase Two will focus on external review and refinement of the draft research instruments. A virtual panel of five qualified scholars and experts from relevant fields will review and suggest revisions before piloting the instrument. We will also recruit a separate panel of five paraprofessionals, to assess the readability and interpretation of each instrument and its contents. Each of the ten panelists will be compensated with an honorarium of $250. After each of these panels, the instruments will be revised prior to piloting the instruments.

Phase Three will be to obtain approval from Western Carolina University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct a pilot study using the designed research instruments. Based on previous experiences, we estimate this process will take approximately 3-4 months. Multiple members of the core project team have extensive experience stewarding proposals through IRB approval processes.

Phase Four is the pilot of our survey, which will include both previously established measures and new, team-developed, measures. During the pilot phase, we will attempt to generate a capped maximum of 100 responses from among BIPOC paraprofessionals working in selected academic libraries in the three states participating in the pilot project. As an incentive for participation, respondents to the pilot survey will be given the option to provide contact information and automatically be entered into a random drawing awarding incentives of multiple $100 Amazon.com gift cards. The pilot data will be used for preliminary psychometric analysis. Particularly, using pilot data, we will assess the reliability and internal structure of new scales within the survey using Cronbach's alpha and factory analytic techniques.[29]

Phase Five will be a pilot of the phenomenological data collection procedures. We will pilot our interview and focus group protocols. Based on the data yielded from these pilots (3 small focus groups with 4 participants each and 3 interviews) we will make changes to ensure the questions and prompts developed will yield what is necessary to answer our research questions. Each focus group and interview participant will be compensated with a $100 Amazon.com gift card.

Activity 9: Examine centralized, distributed, and hybridized options for administering the study.

The project team and the Advisory Board will consider options for most effectively and efficiently conducting the envisioned future study of BIPOC paraprofessionals in academic libraries. We anticipate considering multiple models on a spectrum ranging from a heavily centralized model, to more cooperative and distributed models, and hybridized models. These discussions will inform decision-making about the viability and feasibility of a full multi-state future study.

Activity 10: Conduct formative and summative evaluation of the project.

The attached Performance Management Plan supporting document outlines the major categories of evaluation we will use throughout the planning project. The evaluation also will include summarizing key lessons learned, and solicited feedback from our partners on how well the project was conducted.

Activity 11: If the multi-state study is deemed viable, prepare a research proposal.

Our intent at the outset of the planning project is to be preparing for a future full study. However, we recognize that during the course of the planning project we may need to make significant modifications to our initial assumptions and plans. By the third quarter of the project, we should have a much better

understanding of whether the envisioned future study is viable, and will make a decision at that point about whether to prepare a full research grant proposal for IMLS or other potential funders.

Activity 12: Write the final report to IMLS.

Because of the one-year timeline for the planning project, we will not wait until the final weeks of the project to write the final report. Instead, we will work with the Advisory Board to document our process and experiences throughout the project, so that this information is already available for compilation into a final summary report to IMLS in July 2023.

Note: Most meetings, events, and communications will be conducted virtually during the planning project as a cost-savings measure, and as a strategy for managing potential continuing risks of COVID-19.

Diversity Plan

- The majority of the core project team consists of non-white scholars and academic professionals.
- The focus of the entire project is to learn more about BIPOC paraprofessionals in academic libraries.
- The research design will center the voices and experiences of the target population in a search for patterns and commonalities across collected quantitative and qualitative data.
- The project will involve all types of academic libraries serving diverse institutions, including HBCUs.
- Advisory Board members will be recruited to intentionally achieve an equitable and representative balance of participants from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and will include paraprofessionals from within some of the libraries involved in the study.
- The project will involve and seek assistance from committees and groups statewide organizations (ALA and ACRL chapters) that represent the intersecting interests of library paraprofessionals, and ethnic and minority concerns within libraries. One example of engagement with these groups is that the majority of intended presentations to promote and raise awareness of the project, will be proposed as part of each group's annual meetings or periodic webinar series.
- Outreach and communication will include email lists, publications, and other pathways that intentionally try to reach people of color in the library and information science professions.
- The project team also hopes that its work will attract attention and support from Chief Diversity Officers and Human Resources officers within the many academic institutions to be contacted during the planning project.

Project Results

Major project deliverables that we will pursue include:

- Established relationships with national and state organizations such as ACRL, ARL, Ithaka S+R, ALA.
- Established relationships and communications channels with major organizations and consortia representing all types of academic libraries in at least 5-10 selected states.
- An established and representative Advisory Board and governance structure capable of guiding a full future research project.
- A research plan and research instruments that have been approved by the WCU Institutional Review Board and pilot tested on small groups of BIPOC paraprofessionals in 2-3 states.
- A publicly-available dataset of current numbers of BIPOC paraprofessionals working in most academic libraries in selected states.
- A final report on lessons learned during the planning project and the viability of conducting a future multi-state research project on BIPOC paraprofessionals.
- If the planning project finds that the future study is viable and desirable, project deliverables also will include a full research proposal suitable for later submission to IMLS and/or other potential funders.

Schedule of Completion

Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July
Solidify NC, MD, IN Partnerships											
Identify and Solidify Add'l States & Partners											
Meet, Coordinate, Learn w/ ALA, ACRL, Ithaka etc.											
Form Advisory Board	Advisory Board Meets Monthly										
Identify All In-Scope Libraries in Selected States											
Establish + Maintain Communications w/ Partners & In-Scope Libraries for Announcements, Updates, Information-Gathering and Sharing											
Lit. Review + Refine Rsch. Questions				Research Design + Secure IRB Approval				Iterative Testing of Rsch. Design			
								Analysis of Collected Data			
Formative Project Evaluation (throughout project)									Summative Evaluation		
								Write Full 3-Year Research Proposal (Contingent)			
									Write Final Report to IMLS		

Digital Products Plan

Types of Digital Products:

- A project website to be created and maintained by Western Carolina University's library.

- 3-5 early-project virtual presentations or recordings to introduce and raise awareness about the project and the envisioned future research study, in each targeted state. (MP4 A/V and/or PDF derivatives of presentation slides).

- For the planning project, two <u>primary datasets</u> will be compiled for planning purposes::

  - A list of all in-scope colleges and universities for each participating state including key institutional data and characteristics (type, degrees granted, etc.) harvested from the IPEDS Data Center (https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/), and including selected reported data about each institution's library. This dataset will be supplemented with key contact information for each library's director or another designated administrative contact. <u>Before this dataset is shared on the project website, contact information for each director will be redacted from the data</u>. (.CSV format)

  - Simple statistical human resources data for each identified in-scope academic library, on the total number of racial and ethnic minorities working in non-librarian positions in each institution's library. These racial/ethnic categories will be based on the U.S. Government's established categories for federal agencies ("American Indian or Alaska Native", "Asian", "Black or African American", "Hispanic or Latino", "Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander", "Two or More Races", and "Unknown"). Solicitations for this data will be sent to the leader or each library. (.CSV format)

- Research instruments (e.g., surveys and focus group questionnaires) that will be developed during the research planning project. (PDF format)

- Additional <u>secondary data</u> will be collected as part of testing research instruments (e.g., responses to pilot survey(s) and pilot focus group questionnaires). This data is expected to be very limited in size and scope. (.CSV format plus PDF format for any written analysis)

- Final report of the planning project to be posted on the project website. (PDF format)

Availability:

- The project website, project report(s), copies of presentations, final versions of the research instruments, and the two primary planning datasets will be linked and made publicly available via the WCU library website.

- Secondary data collected to evaluate research instruments and methods <u>will not</u> be made available beyond the project team and Advisory Board. This data will only be of ephemeral value during the planning and testing processes, and is not suitable for wider access.

Access:

All products we make publicly accessible on the project website will be licensed under a Creative Commons "Attribution" (CC BY) International License. Users are free to share any digital products created as long as they attribute the source. With proper attribution, they can copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format. They are also allowed to adapt, remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercial use. We have chosen this form of license because we want others to be able to use and adapt our materials for re-use in their local contexts. The simple attribution requirement will help ensure that project institutions and team members will be given proper credit for their work, and also inform the users of materials who they can contact with questions.

This project will not create or release information with Personally Identifiable Information. The simple compiled data about institutions, libraries, and human resources diversity statistics is not sensitive in nature, and could be compiled through a variety of other publicly-available sources.

Sustainability:

- All project materials made available via the project website will be preserved during and after the project period using Western Carolina University's established policies and procedures for routine enterprise website and data backup and recovery.

- The very small amount of secondary data generated as a result of testing research instruments and methods will be considered of temporary value for the life of the project, and will intentionally be discarded/erased once the planning project is completed.

Organizational Profile

Organization Name:	Western Carolina University – Hunter Library
Organization Mission:	Western Carolina University was founded in 1889 to bring higher education and career opportunities to the people of the western region of North Carolina. The 600-acre campus is located in Cullowhee, North Carolina, near the Great Smoky and Blue Ridge mountains, 52 miles west of Asheville. Since its founding, WCU has grown in size to become a major cultural, scientific and educational force in the region and the state—and the university continues to grow. A member of the University of North Carolina system, WCU employs 562 full-time faculty members. Western Carolina's enrollment for fall of 2021 was over 11,877, with students from across the United States and around the world enrolled in university classes. Western Carolina University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges to award bachelor's, master's, education specialist and doctoral degrees. Western Carolina offers more than 115 undergraduate degree programs, concentrations and minors, in addition to more than 40 master's-level programs and certificates and five doctoral programs. Hunter Library is integral to the mission of Western Carolina University. We provide scholarly information resources and tools, expert instructional and advisory services, inclusive physical and virtual spaces, and employees dedicated to helping users explore, discover, learn, and produce new scholarly and creative works. The library supports WCU's regional engagement mission through local partnerships and other activities to collect, preserve, and make available the rich intellectual, cultural, and environmental heritage of the region.
Governance Structure:	Hunter Library is an administrative unit within the University's Division of Academic Affairs. The Dean of Library Services is the chief administrative officer of the library, and reports to the University Provost.
Service Area:	Western Carolina University is a regional comprehensive university within the UNC System, primarily serving the western region of North Carolina. The university focuses its programs, educational outreach, research, creative, and cultural activities to sustain and improve individual lives and enhance economic and community development in Western Carolina and beyond.