Visible Minority Librarians: Mentoring Expectations, Benefits and Challenges

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Librarianship has been a profession dominated by Caucasians. The 8Rs redux study indicates that only 11% of librarians identified as visible minorities (DeLong, Sorensen & Williamson, 2015). It is vital for libraries to recruit and retain visible minority librarians as the increasingly diverse patron population would benefit from library staff that reflect the demographics of their patrons. Many studies show that mentoring programs are helpful in attracting visible minority librarians. Mentoring not only benefits librarians individually, but also contributes to the library profession as it positively affects retention rates of minority librarians (Bonnette, 2004; Howland, 1999; Johnson, 2007; Olivas & Ma, 2009; Ross, 2013). The mentoring literature focuses mainly on the American experience, however, there is little research that explores mentoring experience of Canadian visible minority librarians (Harrington & Marshall, 2014).

Established in 2012, the Visible Minority Librarians of Canada (ViMLoC) Network is a platform for supporting visible minority librarians in Canada. This paper gives an account of the ViMLoC Mentorship Program that ran from October 1st to November 30th, 2018. There were 73 participants including 25 mentors and 48 mentees. The mentees comprised current library students (58.3%), librarians with less than 5 years of experience (27.1%), librarians with more than 5 years of experience (12.5%), and those having a master's degree in librarianship from outside Canada (6.3%). Their expectations from this mentorship program varied. Generally speaking, immigrant librarians were seeking advice on how to pursue librarianship in Canada. Library school students needed guidance on future career directions, and newer librarians were looking to move up the career ladder. Regarding their visible minority status, 25% of the mentees were Chinese, 12.5% were Latin Americans and 10.4% were South Asians. Of all mentors, Chinese (44%), South Asians (20%), Black (8%) and Latin Americans (8%) took a larger part in this program. Mentors had between 3 to 29 years of librarianship experience and mostly work in academic libraries (40%), public libraries (36%) and special libraries (16%). A survey was conducted about their mentorship experience. Survey results will be presented in this paper including a comparison of mentors with mentees in their perspectives about mentoring expectations, benefits, interactions, activities, relationship building and more. This research will provide insights into the needs of current and future visible minority librarians, and help the greater library community to find effective ways to retain visible minority librarians in the profession.