

Emma Bekele and Amelia Costello

Another Post-Graduation Transition

Diversity Residencies and Beyond

Academic Library Workers in Conversation is a *C&RL News* series focused on elevating the everyday conversations of library professionals. The wisdom of the watercooler has long been heralded, but this series hopes to go further by minimizing barriers to traditional publishing with an accessible format. Each of the topics in the series was proposed by the authors, and they were given space to explore. This issue's conversation follows up on a discussion in the December 2025 issue from Stephanie Reyes and Magaly Salas. It is a discussion of early career opportunities, how the field of librarianship should not abandon residencies, and when librarians should recklessly say, "Yes." —*Dustin Fife, series editor*

Emma Bekele (EB): Recently our friends Magaly and Stephanie talked about some of the challenges they faced as early career librarians as they transitioned into their first full-time librarian roles. But there's another type of early career academic librarianship transition that, Amelia, you and I are working through right now: the conclusion of our diversity residency programs.

Every program is different, but at a high level, these residencies are temporary appointments for recent BIPOC library school graduates, with the goal of increasing the number of underrepresented librarians in academic libraries.

Amelia, how is your residency structured, and do you think being a resident has had an impact on the way you approach librarianship?

Amelia Costello (AC): This is such a great observation, Emma. I have definitely encountered challenges that I did not anticipate. As you mentioned, while all diversity residencies have the underlying goal of diversifying the profession, the structure and execution of each program can be very different.

I am nearing the end of my residency, a three-year research and instruction program led by a residency coordinator with one other resident in my cohort. We are the first residents post-pandemic, the first-ever cohort, and entering a newly restructured program. So in addition to navigating hierarchies and unspoken norms, I found myself trying to figure out what the outline of this residency was going to look like and how I was going to fit into the department. Scary! As Magaly mentioned in part one, trust and support is everything, and I feel very fortunate to have gone through this experience with the best co-resident. She has played such a pivotal part in finding my footing, building my confidence, and developing

Emma Bekele is a resident science and engineering librarian at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, email: eabekele@wisc.edu. Amelia Costello is a resident librarian at American University, email: costello@american.edu.

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my identity as an academic librarian. Emma, I'm so curious to hear how your residency is structured and how you have been able to navigate the gray area of being above intern status but maybe not quite feeling like a "full-fledged" librarian.

What did your onboarding and process for building library and faculty relationships look like from the resident position?

EB: I'm also nearing the end of a three-year residency. I'm surprising myself by saying this, but I feel like I'm already a "full-fledged" librarian. I think the structure of my program played a big part in this. I do all the same types of work as my colleagues, but I get some extra mentorship support and professional development funds. Here, the decades-old residency program transitioned to a diversity residency program over ten years ago. I joined as the final resident for the foreseeable future, but I have a robust community of current and former residents (diversity and otherwise) here.

That community, and my community of science librarians, has played a key role in navigating the early stages of my career. Building librarian relationships came easily, but the trade-off is that since I'm not embedded in my department like some librarians, connecting with faculty has to be a lot more intentional.

Since your residency program has been restructured, has it been difficult to communicate with faculty or other librarians about your position and role?

AC: Despite the restructuring of my residency, the librarians in my department are all familiar with the role. They understand that since there is no position to transition into at the end of the three years, the goal is to gain as much experience as possible in preparation for finding new roles. All the librarians are very open, sharing their strategies and approaches to instruction, which was incredibly helpful when first starting. Innovation is always supported when designing instruction. Residents at my institution also hold faculty status, which is a major learning curve, but hearing from other librarians who are successfully engaging in faculty spaces has been helpful.

As for connecting with faculty, this was something I had anticipated to have many more difficulties with than I actually did. My primary responsibility is supporting our First Year Writing Studies program. Every semester I am paired with a list of faculty members whose classes I go into and teach information literacy sessions to. Initially I felt like imposter syndrome was working in overdrive—worried that these faculty with PhDs who had been teaching for years would not take me seriously or look down at my lack of experience. I found myself consistently giving a disclaimer that I was a resident and had never taught before as part of my introduction when meeting my new faculty partners. I found out rather quickly that none of my faculty really cared about the resident title, and if anything, they were excited to work with someone new and trusted my expertise. Since then, I have had the pleasure of working with a lot of the same faculty every year, building strong relationships that have empowered me to bring new ideas to my information literacy sessions.

Without that direct faculty pairing structure, how have you been able to successfully find ways to connect with faculty? Do you find yourself overthinking the resident title when meeting new faculty, or is that just me?

EB: It's not just you! We take a team approach to instruction here, which has helped me start building relationships and learning how more experienced librarians teach. It's been great to have their knowledge of different courses, to try out new ideas without as much of a risk that I'll be completely missing the mark. But that doesn't stop me from overthinking how I present myself when I'm connecting with faculty.

At my institution, librarians are staff, not faculty, which can imply a power dynamic that's not in our favor. Add being a young, queer Black woman working with scientists at a PWI, and it's hard for me not to overthink how I'm coming across when I'm meeting new faculty. I even have multiple email signatures: one for library colleagues and one for faculty. My librarian-audience signature has my pronouns, name pronunciation link, and resident title. I removed those from the faculty-audience signature and added my fancy master's degree after my name. These days, I don't feel a ton of imposter syndrome. In our nation's present climate, it feels radical to say I'm participating in a program designed to increase diversity and to say I deserve to be here. But even so, I can't get away from that double-consciousness sense that even though I don't feel like an imposter, people will still see me as one.

All of this makes me really love how open you were about your residency title and your newness to librarianship. I think there's a really great lesson for early career librarians to take away from the fact that faculty were excited to work with you because of your new perspective and not in spite of it.

For you, how was learning to be an academic faculty member different from learning to be a librarian? Is there particular advice you'd leave for the next person to fill your role?

AC: This is such a great and powerful reminder for not just diversity residents but for all early career librarians! We deserve to be here and are actively contributing to the improvement of the campus. I have reached a place where I am confident in myself and my capabilities, particularly within my department and my writing studies partnerships. However, in other areas of my faculty obligations, I still struggle. Faculty governance is part of my role, and I have sat on committees with teaching faculty who have been in the field or at the university for ten plus years. A lot of the conversations revolve around the history of the university and curriculum design. As a resident librarian, I'm not embedded in a department or school, I don't teach semester-long classes, and I'm on a terminal contract. I felt like I couldn't make meaningful contributions in these groups, but with time I felt more comfortable. I learned you can't learn institutional history overnight or be able to join a university committee that has been in conversation for several semesters and expect to instantly know what is going on, and that's okay! Time and patience are everything.

My biggest piece of advice for the next resident librarian would be transitions take time. Whether faculty or staff, learning who you are as an academic librarian and how you fit into your department takes time. I would venture to say it can take up to a year to fully integrate and feel confident in all areas of the role. Resident and early career librarians shouldn't feel like they can't ask questions; more often than not, there's nothing librarians love more than talking about institutional history within the department and university! I personally think that one of the main purposes of the residency is to provide a slower and more guided transition into academic librarianship. Residencies were created to help emerging librarians without experience get their foot in the door. For my role in particular, the faculty governance realm

is perhaps one of the tougher areas to transition into and a space where residents might need more guidance and assistance compared to library related tasks.

Reflecting back on your two years of residency, what is one or a few pieces of advice you would offer to prospective residents?

EB: I love this advice, Amelia, and I really appreciate that you brought up committees. I've really appreciated how serving on committees has let me make connections outside of my unit and get firsthand experience with how the library and university operates. So my advice is for your first year as a librarian, say yes recklessly! Take advantage of this transitional time to join in every interesting opportunity that comes your way. There will be plenty of time in your career to say no to things, and like you mentioned, a fresh perspective is invaluable. I've met so many wonderful people and participated on so many fantastic projects, and it's helped me feel like I belong here as an integral part of the community.

We've been doing a lot of reflecting, but I'm also curious about what you think of the future. The number of these programs has shrunk dramatically over our past two years as residents. Do you think residencies will still have a role to play in academic libraries in the coming years?

AC: I absolutely think residencies still have a role to play in academic libraries. However, with the way things are moving in higher education right now, I don't know how realistic it is to expect them to continue. Political climate aside, I think residencies are so valuable if universities can work to uphold the core purpose, helping early career librarians of color get their footing in the world of academics. Diversifying the library field continues to be a need, so universities that can commit to long-term retention through residencies are crucial. While not always possible because of budget or other factors, there is still value in term residency positions. Two to three years of being able to figure out how academics works and begin to find a niche sets early career individuals up strongly to enter the job market.

If universities have the financial means and can be reminded of how important it is to help shape the future library field, then the residency program should be sustainable. Though, as we are seeing in real time, there are a lot of factors outside of academic library control that are preventing this. While we've seen so many programs disappear in the last few years, do you think it's possible that they'll resurface in the future, or will this be lasting damage?

EB: I think you're right, Amelia, and there's certainly more work to be done in diversifying our profession. I don't know if residencies will come back, but I hope these difficult and precarious times are a chance for us all to reflect on our values and what we want the future of librarianship to look like. You mention the core purpose of these programs, and I think that that's where our focus should be. All the aspects you mentioned—from recruitment and retention to mentoring and training—are essential, and all academic libraries should be considering how to recruit and support underrepresented librarians with every recruitment, not just for diversity residency positions. We also need to consider how our libraries can function in ways that make them attractive to BIPOC, both as patrons and as possible future librarians. If we could do *that*, perhaps there's even a near future where we don't need residency programs anymore. ~