

Library Services and Cultural Competency in Health Professions Education and Patient Care



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INTRODUCTION

The US Census Bureau projects that more than half of all Americans are projected to belong to a minority group (any group other than non-Hispanic White alone) by 2044, and by 2060 nearly one in five of the nation's total population is projected to be foreign born.¹

Elimination of racial/ethnic health care disparities is one of two overarching goals of Healthy People 2020.² "Health care disparities are exacerbated by the conscious and unconscious biases of health care professionals on the one hand and the fear of bias of patients on the other."³ Health care professionals and educators should take important and unique roles in academic medicine to help reduce health inequity and disparities.³

The most recent accreditation standards from the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) mandates that medical students develop an understanding of the basic principles of culturally competent health care and the manner in which people of diverse cultures and belief systems perceive health and illness.⁴

The external forces above drive changes in educational institutions and health care. How do academic libraries adapt to the demographic changes of the US population as well as changing needs of clients whom libraries serve?

The purpose of the study was to survey health sciences libraries and librarians to investigate how they lead, promote, and support initiatives in cultural competency in health professions education or patient care, level of librarians' cultural competency, and their attitude toward providing culturally competent library services.

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METHODS

Research Design: A cross-sectional research design

Participants: A convenience sample of health sciences librarians

Instrumentation: A survey questionnaire was designed and piloted on a small sample of health sciences librarians to enhance the content validity of the questionnaire. The final version contained 16 items to elicit information on demographics of study participants, types of clients and services provided to develop or support initiatives in cultural competency in health professions education or patient care, barriers to providing culturally competent services, and librarians' attitude toward cultural competency.

Data Collection and Analysis: The online version of questionnaire via SurveyMonkey was distributed to listservs of health sciences librarians. Data collected were imported to SPSS for data analysis. Descriptive statistics (e.g., mean, standard deviation, correlations) was used for data analysis.

RESULTS

- Of 176 respondents, 73 (41%) from health sciences or medical libraries at academic settings; 78 (44%) from hospital settings; and 25 (15%) from general academic, special, consumer health, and public libraries (Table 1).
- 163 reported serving clients from diverse cultural backgrounds; 7 unsure; 5 no.
- Various services were provided to develop or support initiatives in cultural competency in health professions education or patient care (Figure 1).
- 80 (46.5%) indicated no barriers to providing culturally competent library services; 50 (27.9%) encountered barriers; and 42 (23.8%) unsure.
- 156 (89.1%) perceived it important to provide culturally competent library services; 16 (9.1%) unsure; and 3 (1.7%) unimportant. Similarly, 162 (93.1%) indicated the importance of cultural competence for health sciences librarians; 9 (5.2%) unsure; and 3 (1.7%) unimportant (Table 2).
- 81 (46.3%) reported having training in cultural competency; 87 (49.7%) no training; 7 (4%) unsure.

Table 2: Perceived importance of culturally competent library services

Q 10. How important is it to provide culturally competent library services? (n=175)	
Extremely important	58 (33.1%)
Very important	58 (33.1%)
Important	40 (22.9%)
Unsure	16 (9.1%)
Not important	3 (1.7%)
Q 11. How important is cultural competence for health sciences librarians? (n=174)	
Extremely important	59 (33.9%)
Very important	59 (33.9%)
Important	44 (25.3%)
Unsure	9 (5.2%)
Not important	3 (1.7%)

- A majority rated their level of cultural competency with a score of 4 or 3 (Figure 2).
- 139 (79.4%) respondents expressed interest in taking a CE course in cultural competency; 23 (13.1%) unsure; 13 (7.4%) negative.
- Compared with those who would not take a course in cultural competency, respondents who would take such a course placed higher importance on providing culturally competent library services (p=0.0095) as well as cultural competency for health sciences librarians (p=0.0056).
- Those who self identified as whites had a mean±SD score for Q11 (Table 2) of 3.8±1.03 while non-whites had a mean ±SD score of 4.2±0.9 (p=0.0393).
- Those who spoke other than just English rated their level of cultural competency higher (p=0.0128) than those who only spoke English.
- Respondents from health sciences or medical libraries at a hospital setting would more likely take a CE course on cultural competency (p=0.0158).

Figure 1: Various services provided to develop or support initiatives in cultural competency in health professions education or patient care

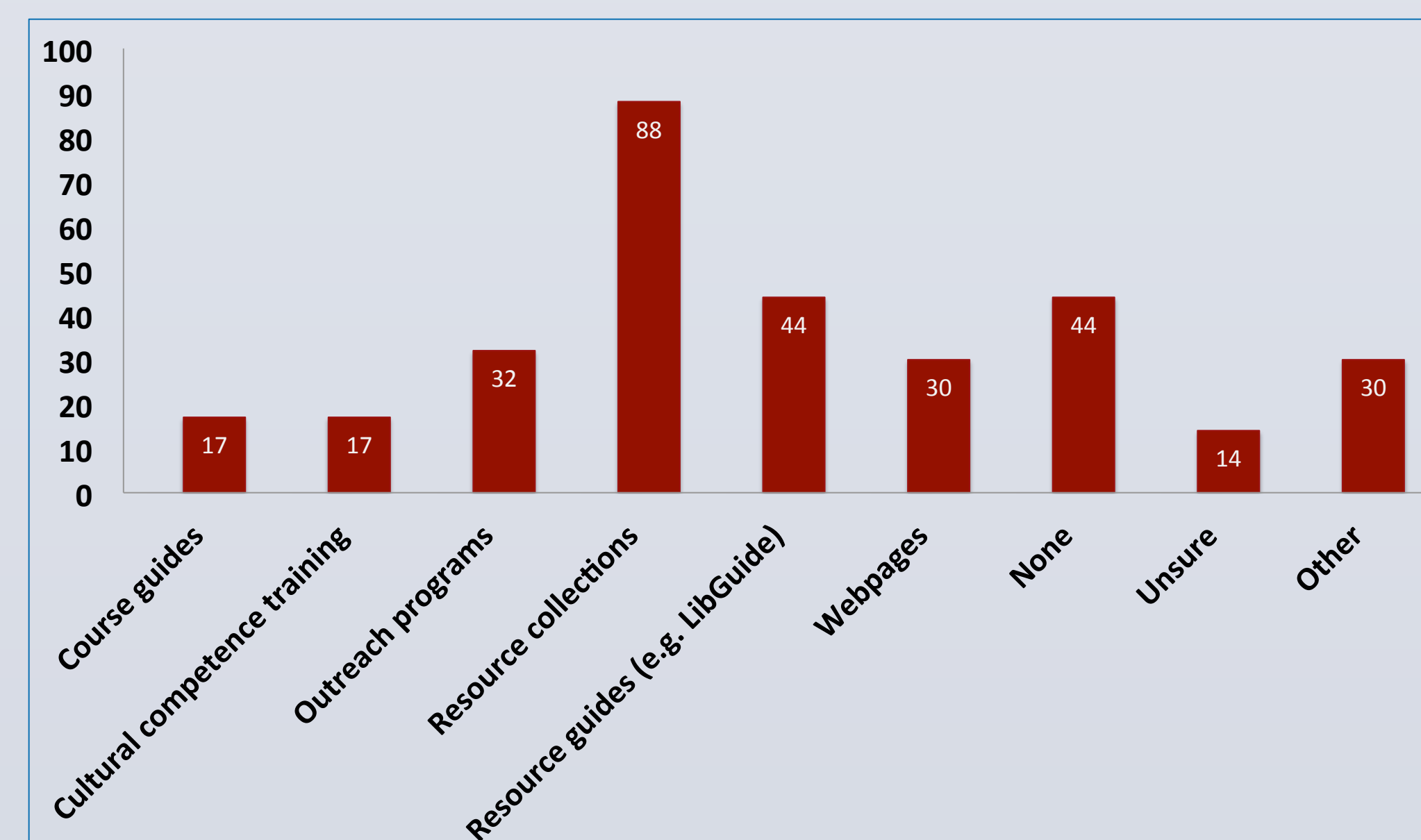
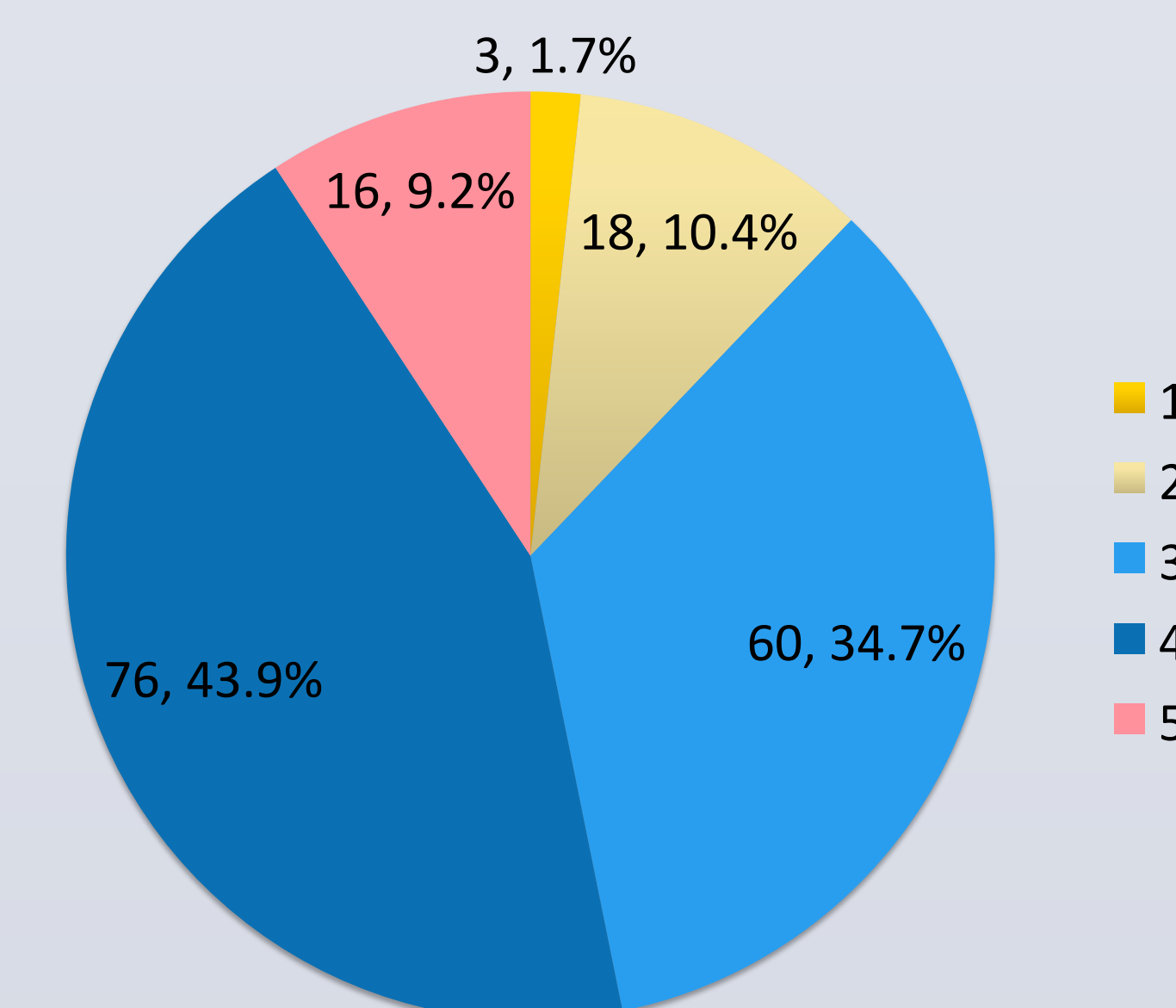


Table 1: Demographics of survey respondents

Type of Current library (n=176)	
Academic health sciences/medical library	73 (41%)
Hospital health sciences/medical library	78 (44%)
Corporate/special library	5 (3%)
Consumer health library	2 (1.2%)
Public library	8 (4.8%)
Other	10 (6%)
Age (n=174)	
18 - 29	6 (3%)
30 - 39	22 (13%)
40 - 49	29 (17%)
50 - 59	60 (34%)
≥60	57 (33%)
Gender (n=175)	
Female	149 (85%)
Male	26 (15%)
Race(s) (n=173)	
American Indian or Alaska Native	1 (0.6%)
Asian	17 (9.8%)
Black or African American	14 (8.1%)
Hispanic or Latino	4 (2.3%)
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1 (0.6%)
White	138 (79.8%)
Other	2 (0.1%)

Figure 2: Self rating of level of cultural competency on a scale from 1 (1 not competent) to 5 (highly competent)



DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

- There is a paucity of research on the issue of cultural competency pertaining to health sciences libraries and health information professionals. The results of this cross-sectional study--the first one of its kind to investigate the issue--offers useful insight into the current state of provision of culturally competent services in health sciences libraries, librarians' perceptions about this issue, as well as self assessment of their own cultural competency.
- The key findings of the survey reveal that respondents who are interested in learning about cultural competency, speak another language other than English, and identify themselves as non-whites, placed a higher importance on cultural competency for health science librarians.
- An overwhelming number of respondents expressed interest in taking a CE course on cultural competency even though a majority of them gave themselves a high rating of their cultural competency.
- The findings add to the literature indicating the utility of providing culturally competent library services, professional development needs, and the areas and dimensions of what librarians can do to contribute to cultural competency in health professions education and patient care for the ultimate goal of reducing ethnic/minority health disparities.
- The study serves as a needs assessment to identify gaps and needs in professional development in cultural competency for health information professionals. The results will help the authors make informed decisions on developing and offering future continuing education opportunities on cultural competency for health sciences librarians.
- In response to the diversity trend in society and the changing health care environment, it is essential for libraries to implement continuous quality improvement plans and adapt services to meet the changing information needs of health care professionals and students, and their home institutions.⁵

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