

**RECRUITING ETHNIC MINORITIES  
INTO THE LIBRARY PROFESSION –  
A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE  
U.S. FEDERALLY FUNDED PROGRAM**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Recruiting ethnic minority librarians into the library profession is very challenging. Library literature highlights the under-representation of librarians with ethnic minority backgrounds in the U.S. Several factors contribute to this phenomenon: a persistent negative image of librarians; low and non-competitive salaries; the lack of minority faculty, diverse curricula, and concerted recruitment efforts; and limited financial support. Since 2003, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) has provided funding to help recruit new library and information science (LIS) professionals, including ethnic minority students to attend LIS programs through its Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program. More than \$100 million has been awarded to fund 3,220 master's degree students, 186 doctoral students, and 1,256 pre-professional students, according to Dr. Anne-Imelda M. Radice, Director of IMLS.<sup>1</sup> This paper surveys selected LIS programs funded by the U.S. federal grants that focused on recruiting under-represented ethnic minority students, identifies models that may be useful for future recruitment, and offers recommendations for similar programs.*

**INTRODUCTION**

The make-up of the general population in the U.S. has witnessed rapid changes in the past decades. The data from the 2005-2007 U. S. Bureau of Census's *American Community Survey Demographic Estimates* show that more than 30% of the U.S. population consists of minorities.<sup>2</sup> The minority population categories are Black or African Americans, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and Hispanic or Latino. According to the projections of the U.S. Census Bureau released in August 2008, the nation will be more racially and ethnically diverse by midcentury, with 54 percent minority in 2050.<sup>3</sup>

The demographic changes have influenced the way many organizations conduct business, whether for profit or non-profit. With diverse populations, libraries have to strive to provide services and programs that meet the needs of their changing

user communities. For those libraries located in urban areas and in minority communities, the challenges are even greater. In trying to attract potential users from various ethnic groups, increasing professional librarians with diverse backgrounds is one way to help meet with the challenge.

Smith<sup>4</sup> points out that the presence of minority faculty at college campuses will help attract minority students to pursue higher education in that environment. The same may hold true for libraries: that users will feel more comfortable if they are served by library staff who are like them. According to Dunkley and McCook, “recruiting and retaining new librarians of color is a challenge that both the library profession and the faculty of schools of library and information science must face together.”<sup>5</sup> The nearly 110,000 credentialed librarians in all types of libraries in U.S. are predominantly white, as shown in Table 1. The total number of credentialed librarians with ethnic minority backgrounds is only 12,131, or 11%.<sup>6 (p9)</sup>

**Table 1:** Number of credentialed librarians by characteristics, 2000

			White	African American	API	Native American	Two or more races	Latinos
Total		109,958	97,827	5,244	3,516	310	923	2,138
Gender	Male	19,463	17,386	572	570	93	245	597
	Female	90,495	80,441	4,672	2,946	217	678	1,541

**Source:** 2000 U.S. Census

According to the American Library Association’s 2007 report, *Diversity Counts*, the data indicate that currently over half of the ethnic minority librarians age 45 and older will retire over the next two decades. This report also states that LIS is not recruiting or graduating enough ethnic minority librarians to replace the number expected to retire in the next two decades, highlighting the need for recruiting the next generation of ethnic minority librarians.<sup>6 (p11)</sup>

## RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

In order to increase the ethnic minority librarians in U.S., the 1985 American Library Association (ALA) President’s Commission on Library Service to Minorities released a report, *Equity at Issue: Library Services to the Nation’s Major Minority Groups*. The report recommended that the ALA Committee on Accreditation request that all ALA-accredited LIS programs have minority recruitment policies and procedures.<sup>7</sup>

The influence of the ALA President’s Commission’s report should not be underestimated in the profession’s efforts to recruit ethnic minority librarians. In the *Standards for Accreditation of Master’s Programs in Library and Information Studies 1992*, adopted by the ALA Council in January 1992, a specific statement was

added to the Standards, "The school has policies to recruit and retain a multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual student body from a variety of backgrounds."<sup>8</sup>

Subsequently, in the 2008 Standards, the language became more specific than its previous version: "The school has policies to recruit and retain students who reflect the diversity of North America's communities."<sup>9</sup>

Several U.S. library associations have notable initiatives to help recruit librarians with ethnic backgrounds. The ALA Spectrum Scholar Program is one of the successful recruitment programs. The mission of the program is to improve service at the local level through the development of a representative workforce that reflects the communities served by all libraries in the new millennium.<sup>10</sup> The ALA Spectrum program provides financial assistance, mentoring, leadership and professional development opportunities to help recruit students from underrepresented ethnic minority groups into library and information science programs. From 1998 to 2007, the Spectrum program supported 523 students with scholarships. Additionally, the Medical Library Association, Association of College and Research Libraries, and Public Library Association have also built on the Spectrum program's efforts by contributing funds and development opportunities to ethnic minority students enrolled in LIS programs.<sup>11</sup>

## ROADBLOCKS TO RECRUITMENT

In their interviews with several ethnic minority LIS educators, Dunkley and McCook<sup>5</sup> identified factors contributing to the low percentage of ethnic minority librarians: the old stereotypical images of librarian held by minority students, the low starting salaries for librarians in comparison with other professions, lack of minority librarian role models, and lack of recruiting efforts from LIS programs. Furthermore, in Neely's professional library literature review on recruitment,<sup>12</sup> the author confirms the same recruitment roadblocks: persistent negative image of librarians, low and non-competitive salaries, and increased competition from related information professions. Additionally, Neely attributes the lack of minority faculty, diverse curriculum, concerted recruitment efforts, and limited financial support as barriers that are pertinent to recruiting minority students into LIS programs.<sup>12</sup>

In the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) 1997 statistical report, the year prior to the inception of the ALA's Spectrum Scholars Program, only 444 or 9% ethnic minority students graduated from LIS programs in U.S. in 1996-1997, out of a total of 5,068 graduating candidates in the same year.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 2:** Degrees and certificates awarded by gender and ethnic origin, 1996–1997

Gender	AI	AP	B	H	W	I	NA	Total
Male	4	20	36	28	851	48	120	1,107
Female	22	111	157	66	3,126	101	378	3,961
Total	26	131	193	94	3,977	149	498	5,068

Note: AI-American Indian, AP- Asian or Pacific Islander, B-Black, H-Hispanic, W-White, I-International students

The recruitment situation has not improved much between 1997 and 2004, the latest year for which ALISE data are available. The number of ethnic minority students at LIS programs has held steady, except that the number of Hispanic students increased from 94 in 1997 to 195 in 2004, as shown in Table 3. Among 5,951 ALA accredited degree candidates in 2003-2004, the minority graduates numbered only 596 or about 10%.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 3:** Degrees and certificates awarded by gender and ethnic origin, 2003–2004

Gender	AI	AP	B	H	W	I	NA	Total
Male	2	39	31	45	849	37	177	1,180
Female	18	105	206	150	3,475	161	656	4,771
Total	20	144	237	195	4,324	198	833	5,951

### LAURA BUSH 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY LIBRARIAN PROGRAM

The largest financial support to help recruit ethnic minority students into LIS program so far has come from the U.S. federal government. In 2002, the Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program was established within the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The program aims at “the recruitment of new library and information science professionals,” according to then First Lady Laura Bush.<sup>15</sup> Ms. Mary L. Chute, IMLS Deputy Director for Libraries, points out that “with the administration’s commitment and bipartisan support of the Congress, the first \$10 million investment proposed for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian program in January 2002 has grown to over \$120 million over the past six years.”<sup>15</sup> Table 4 shows the increasing funds that the U.S. Congress has allocated to the program from 2003 through 2009, with a total close to \$150 million.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 4:** IMLS Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program Appropriation History 2003-2009 (Budget Authorized in Thousand of Dollars)

Year	Amount
FY 2003	9,935
FY 2004	19,882

<b>Year</b>	<b>Amount</b>
FY 2005	22,816
FY 2006	23,760
FY 2007	23,760
FY 2008	23,345
FY 2009 Request	26,500
Total	149,998

**Source:** IMLS Appropriation History, 1998-2009.

The increased federal funds have enabled the library and information science programs to aggressively recruit, educate, and train new library and information science professionals with the knowledge and skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century library and information services. It is noticeable that some of these funded programs are specifically designed to attract new professionals with ethnic minority backgrounds. As shown in Table 5, from 2003 to 2008, close to \$35 million from IMLS Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program was awarded for recruiting 1,401 ethnic minority students and library staff.<sup>17</sup> This initiative has helped address the specific issues to quickly increase the number of ethnic minority librarians in library profession.

**Table 5:** IMLS Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program funding for ethnic minority students' programs, 2003–2008

<b>Year</b>	<b>Master's degree</b>	<b>Ph.D. Degree</b>	<b>High school interns *</b>	<b>Funding \$\$\$</b>
2003	186	1		3,631,740
2004	280		42	3,418,061
2005	217		513	7,315,318
2006	158	12		4,870,082
2007	283	4	60	8,420,549
2008	260		90	6,960,670
Total	1384	17	705	34,616,420

\* Some programs did not include the specific number of high school interns. So the total number of the funded interns is incomplete at this stage.

A brief survey on the funded LIS programs reveals that the federal funds have helped these programs address critical issues facing minority student recruitment.<sup>18</sup> These programs can be characterized as follows:

1. Financial support: Funding of more than \$34 million as shown in Table 5 from the federal agency was provided to the LIS programs for aggressively recruiting under-represented ethnic minority students. The scale of financial support is unprecedented in library profession.
2. Curriculum: The funded programs offer courses to train the recruited students to understand diverse user needs, diverse communities, and diverse individuals within the communities served by the library. This kind of curriculum prepares the students to meet the real challenge when they enter the employment stage.
3. Research projects and community outreach activities: Several funded programs provide minority students with the opportunity to conduct research projects that are related to diversity and to reaching out to the local communities. This type of professional exposure in the early stage enables the students to explore various career paths in library profession
4. Mentoring: Most of the funded programs match the minority students with experienced librarians during their LIS course work to assist their career development and prepare for employment upon graduation.
5. Internships: Funded programs offer students internship opportunities at the academic, public, school, or special libraries to help them gain practical experience during their LIS programs.
6. Leadership and professional development opportunities: A dozen of these programs received funds to help students attend national and local professional conferences and meetings which help them network and make professional connections with other librarians.
7. Collaboration: In several cases, the funded programs collaborate with libraries and library associations to expand recruitment efforts.
8. Transition to work: A couple of the funded programs have built in transition periods to assist minority students in employment upon graduation.

### **BRIEF CASE NARRATIVES**

In researching this article, the author was assisted by several individuals who generously offered information about their respective programs. They are Dr. Jana Bradley, Professor and Director, School of Information Resources and Library Science at the University of Arizona; Professor Toni Carbo, Dean of the School of Information Sciences and Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburg; Professor Irene Owens, Dean of School of Library and Information Sciences at North Carolina Central University; and Mr. Charlie Greenberg, Project Director at Yale Medical Library. Their narratives offer insightful observations, experience, and comments on the IMLS funded programs which they direct and manage.

### ***Knowledge River (KR) Program***

The KR program was founded within the School of Information Resources and Library Science at the University of Arizona in 2001 by Ms. Patricia Tarin who was the director of the program from 2001-2007. The program focuses on librarianship from Hispanic and Native American's perspectives. It provides scholarships to students with the combination of interest, expertise, knowledge, language abilities, and commitments to provide services for multi-cultural communities. The program weaves multi-cultural perspectives throughout its curriculum. For example, every student must take at least one class that centers on library and information issues from multi-cultural perspectives. In the initial class in 2002, the program recruited seven Native Americans and 17 Hispanics from all over United States. The students met all academic requirements of the LIS program.<sup>19</sup> Each year, between 15 and 20 Hispanic, Native American or other ethnic minorities graduated from the program. In 2005, the program received \$990,174 from the IMLS Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program. The federal funding has enabled the program to accept more students. Subsequently, 48 Native American and Hispanic students were recruited into the master degree program in 2006 as a part of the KR initiative. The grant money has been very influential in making the KR program successful.<sup>20</sup>

The KR program graduates have become very much in demand and have been employed in libraries across U.S. The program is very proud of its outstanding graduates. For instance, Mr. Mark A. Puente, a 2004 graduate, was recently appointed by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) as Director of Diversity Programs.<sup>21</sup> In that capacity, Mr. Puente will provide leadership for a range of initiatives to recruit people from under-represented racial and ethnic groups into careers in research libraries and prepare and advance minority librarians into leadership positions in ARL libraries.

### ***The Spectrum Doctoral Fellowship Program***

At the University of Pittsburgh, the library and information science (LIS) program in partnership with ALA created a Spectrum Doctoral Fellowship Program. The program was designed to recruit and provide full tuition support and stipends to 12 full-time doctoral students for four years of study. The fellows entered the program in fall 2007 and 2008. The program was funded by IMLS Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program in 2005 with \$999,771. The fellowship builds on the success of the ALA Spectrum scholarship program.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to the University of Pittsburgh, nine LIS programs at other universities in U.S. participated in the effort. The fellowship program's emphasis is on leadership. The six fellows who started in the fall of 2007 are continuing to be heavily involved in research activities through their course work, especially doctoral seminars which require extensive research and writing. According to Dr.

Toni Carbo, all six fellows have already demonstrated leadership initiative and have been mentored by their advisors to build their leadership skills.<sup>23</sup>

The fellows have become key promoters and visibility raisers to help recruit a diverse student body. For example, several fellows have worked closely with senior staff responsible for recruitment to develop detailed plans to recruit at conferences and meetings targeted to under-represented groups. They have also been actively involved with identifying individuals from minority groups to speak at their schools and have met with alumni from these groups to identify ways that they can develop partnerships among students, alumni, and staff for the most effective recruitment and retention of master's and doctoral students, Dr. Carbo states.

#### ***Library as Place: North Carolina Central University Diversity Scholars***

In 2006, the School of Library and Information Science at the North Carolina Central University received \$439,688 from the IMLS Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program. The funding enabled the school to partner with public and school library systems from five counties in central North Carolina to recruit 20 minority students to earn master's degrees in library and information science. The financial support allows the students to conduct research projects on the themes related to public and school libraries while earning their degrees. Students are expected to return to their libraries of origin or to public and school library systems in North Carolina upon graduation.

Based on the successful experience and built on the first funded program, in 2008 the program was awarded \$839,073 from the same federal funding agency to provide scholarships to an additional 20 minority students. This extended, research-oriented master's program focused on studying the theme of library as place and the issues relating to diversity in librarianship. The partnering libraries provide students with work experiences, mentors, and opportunities for greater interaction between the academy and practice in their research projects.<sup>24</sup>

The outcomes of this research-centered program were quite impressive and multi-faceted, according to Professor Owens. The students conduct research projects that are useful to the profession; they apply what they have learned about diversity within the context of library as place into their careers; they aspire to become leaders in the profession; they gain from their travel and training experiences; they become interested and committed to pursuing Ph.D. programs in their future careers; and they have become recruiters on their own for the LIS programs at the university.<sup>25</sup>

#### ***Academic and Cultural Enrichment Scholars' Program***

The Department of Library and Information Studies (LIS) and the University Libraries at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), along with partners from the ten academic libraries in North Carolina, received \$862,014 from IMLS Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program in 2008, to create an Aca-

demic and Cultural Enrichment (ACE) Scholars Program. The program is now recruiting 12 ethnic minority students interested in working in academic libraries into the LIS program at the university.

UNCG opened its door in 1892, as a direct result of a crusade by Mr. Charles Duncan McIver, then President of the institution, who believed in women's education. For many years it was the only institution of higher education in North Carolina that women could attend. Becoming a co-educational institution in 1964, UNCG has continued striving for diversity recruitment and retention of its student body. In 2008, the percentage of UNCG's ethnic minority students reached 24%, making it the most diverse historically white campus among the University of North Carolina System and with the highest rate of retention and graduation of the ethnic minority students.<sup>26</sup> The enrollment of the minority student body at UNCG also reflects the percentage of the ethnic minority populations in the geographic area that the university serves. However, the number of ethnic minority students enrolled in the Department of Library and Information Studies at UNCG has lagged, and is much lower than that of the university. As shown in Table 6, less than 10% of ethnic minority students, i.e., African Americans, American Indians, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics, were enrolled in the LIS program, based on the data of 2003-2008.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 6:** The UNCG LIS Department enrollment by ethnicity, fall 2003 – fall 2008

	White	African Americans	American Indians	Asian/Pac Isl	Hispanic	Unknown	Total
Fall 2003	120	3	0	5	0	8	136
Fall 2004	119	3	0	3	1	4	130
Fall 2005	210	10	0	2	3	13	238
Fall 2006	206	9	0	4	2	13	234
Fall 2007	201	14	0	5	1	13	234
Fall 2008	189	13	0	4	2	12	220

**Source:** UNCG Fact Book, 2003-2008

With funding from the federal program, 12 ethnic minority students will be recruited into the LIS program at UNCG in fall 2009. The program will provide the minority students with financial aid for tuition, stipends, travel to conferences, internship opportunities at the participating libraries; pair them with experienced librarians for mentoring; and offer them cultural enrichment activities during their two-year LIS program.

Due to much media attention from the local and the region to this federally funded program, the LIS program is receiving a larger pool of minority applications than before, which enables the program to select students receiving the scholarships on a very competitive basis. Because this is a partnership project with

a LIS program and ten academic libraries, a Steering Committee was established to assist in carrying out the project plans. Additionally, three subcommittees, i.e., Recruitment, Internship, and Mentoring, are also formed within the Steering Committee to take advantage of talents and energy from all the participating libraries.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Career in Health Information, Librarianship, and Informatics (CHILI)***

In 2005, the William H. Welch Medical Library at the Johns Hopkins University received \$639,746 from the IMLS Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program to increase the number of under-represented minorities in the health information professions. With the partnership from medical libraries at seven universities, the program, Career in Health Information, Librarianship, and Informatics (CHILI), introduced high school students from under-represented minority groups to a health science library career, with a 30-hour after school internship program at the participating libraries. Some of the program activities included: students interviewed library staff to discover their educational background, occupational activities, and career goals; shadowed library staff in their daily library work; received database training from the librarians; attended library classes conducted by librarians; assisted librarians at the reference desk; interacted with minority professionals from a wide spectrum of science and health profession on each campus, etc. The wide range of activities gave the participating high school students maximum career exposure to the library profession. The students also received compensation for participation. Comments from students are very telling. For instance, one student wrote, "I did not realize that being a librarian was more than sorting books. It is kind of exciting actually. I would never have guessed it." Another student also reflected, "Learning that (library work) is not as boring as it seems."<sup>29</sup>

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The IMLS Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program is the largest federal funding source that has helped aggressively recruit librarians to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century library and information services in many diverse communities in U.S. The funded LIS programs across the U.S. are well designed to address the critical issues and remove roadblocks through financial support, outreach efforts for recruitment, diverse LIS curriculum, mentoring, internships, and research, career and leadership development opportunities. The benefits and influences of this federal funding effort are far-reaching. The program directors cited in this article have attributed the success of their respective programs to the available funding from federal program which has helped them sustain their existing programs and support their new programs that otherwise would not be possible.

Based on the positive outcomes and feedback from the cited programs, it is recommended that a full scale of survey to funded LIS programs focusing on recruiting ethnic minority students be conducted to learn the best practices and models for program design, curriculum development, recruitment strategies, graduation rate, and employment. Such efforts will ultimately increase the number of ethnic minority librarians in library profession.

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