

# Diversity and LIS Education: Inclusion and the Age of Information

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While LIS continues to struggle with representation of populations traditionally considered as core to diversity, socio-economic and technological changes have significantly increased the range of populations that are disadvantaged, underrepresented, and excluded in terms of information. Drawing from studies of diversity in LIS education and professions, as well as national demographic data, this article: (1) examines understandings of diversity within the field; (2) analyzes the implications of diversity in education, recruiting, and scholarship; and (3) explores models for inclusive diversity education. This paper argues that the field needs to embrace a broader, more inclusive understanding of diversity to remain culturally relevant.

**Keywords:** diversity, inclusion, underrepresented populations, education, research

## Introduction

In the United States, the LIS field has long struggled with issues of diversity, representation, and inclusion. The “challenges of diversity in LIS” was the focus of the keynote talk at the 92nd annual conference of the American Library Association (ALA) nearly four decades ago (Jones, 1974). Since then, these issues have been examined in terms of LIS master’s students, doctoral students, faculty, and staff; of information professionals in the information workforce; and of LIS research and pedagogy (e.g., Abudallahi, 2007; Adkins & Espinal, 2004; Bonnici, & Burnett, 2005; Buddy & Williams, 2005; Chu, 2002; Josey, 1993, 1999; Lynch, 2000; McCook & Lippincott, 1997; Winston, 1998). In spite of this attention, diversity in LIS has not changed greatly over time, continuing to echo Wheeler’s (2005a) statement that “realistically, there is no need for research regarding the re-segregation of library schools. Statistically speaking, there are few, if any, that have ever truly integrated” (vii).

Yet, the scope of the discussion about

diversity in terms of information and information technology is rapidly expanding to include issues such as political, socio-economic, and technological divides. Having limited or no access to the Internet and Internet-enabled tools is now a tremendous social disadvantage in terms of education, civic participation, employment, and other major life functions (Clark & Gorski, 2001; Norris, 2001; Vie, 2008). LIS needs to broaden its stand on diversity to embrace all populations disadvantaged in terms of information access. Populations affected by issues of diversity and representation in LIS now include disability, age, gender, socioeconomic status, language, literacy, sexual orientation, and geography, along with the areas of race, ethnicity and multiculturalism that have received most of the traditional focus in LIS.

The purpose of this article is threefold: (1) to expand the discussion and definition of diversity within the LIS community; (2) to offer insights into the implications of diversity in promoting scholarship, instruction, and understanding within LIS; and (3) to describe a model for inclusive

diversity education within LIS from which other LIS programs may benefit.

### Defining Diversity

Racial diversity has traditionally received the most focus in LIS literature related to diversity, in preparation to work with diverse populations, and in initiatives to diversify the profession. This approach makes sense within the historical context, as race and ethnicity were the first categories that received legal protections from the mistreatment and marginalization that had been socially engrained. Over time, other populations have received varying levels of legal protection from discrimination, such as that based on gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Within LIS, there has been tension about whether the field should focus on diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, in terms of legally protected populations, or in broader terms (Jones, 1999; Peterson, 1999; Welburn, 1999). However, much of the focus in LIS literature has been limited to diversity in terms of race and ethnicity (Jaeger, Franklin & Bertot, 2010). Even the major *Diversity Counts* report issued by the ALA was focused almost exclusively on race and ethnicity, with some attention paid to gender (Davis & Hall, 2007).

However, LIS as a profession cannot limit itself to focusing on increasing inclusion based on race and ethnicity or even based on populations protected from legal discrimination (Jaeger et al., 2010). As information professionals facilitate access to information, to prepare students to work with the information needs and information behavior of diverse populations, LIS education should shift its focus from diversity in terms of simple demographics to a focus on diversity as the populations that are underrepresented, disadvantaged, and underserved in terms of information. This definition of diversity should encompass populations that have traditionally been mistreated and marginalized in relation to information needs and information

behavior, as well as populations that are traditionally underrepresented in the LIS professions. Such a definition would be large enough to include legally protected populations based on race, ethnicity, gender, and disability, as well as populations with access challenges related to literacy, poverty, language, sexual orientation, and age, among others. In an information age, diversity should embrace the underrepresented, the disadvantaged, and the underserved if information professionals are to provide truly inclusive services. Preparing professionals for such practice begins in LIS schools.

As the focus on racial diversity predominates in LIS literature and pedagogy, it is the appropriate place to begin a review of diversity issues in the field. Racial minorities constitute just 11.3% of the LIS student population, compared to 31.3% of the United States (US) population (Kim & Sin, 2008). Only 3.3% of librarians are Latino, as compared to 14.7% of the total population—a number projected by Census Bureau to rise 24.4% by 2040. African Americans comprise only 6.0% of librarians, compared to 12.4% of the population (Lance, 2005; Winston & Walstad, 2006). In 2009, 76.5% of full-time LIS faculty members were white and 13.9% were Asian/Pacific—a far cry from anything approaching proportional representation among the US population (Wallace & Naidoo, 2010). African Americans comprise 5.9% of LIS faculty, and 2.5% of LIS faculty members are Latino (Wallace & Naidoo, 2010). The shortage in representation for LIS faculty into the future is likely to continue, as only 6.8% of the doctoral degree recipients from LIS Schools in the United States were African Americans from 1993 to 2007 (Franklin & Jaeger, 2007).

Libraries and other information organizations, however, will be serving an ever more diverse national population. From 2000 to 2010, 83% of population growth in the United States was non-white (Morello, 2010). Half of the population 18 and

younger is non-white, and minority births now account for 48% of children born in the United States (Associated Press, 2010; Morello, 2010). The diversity of the population is increasing in every state in the United States with exception of West Virginia (Associated Press, 2006). By 2050, minorities are projected to comprise 54% of the United States population (Associated Press, 2010; Penny, 2008).

Many places are already majority-minority, meaning that the majority of the population is non-white. Of the 3,141 counties in the United States, 303—nearly 1 in 10—are already majority-minority; in addition, in 1 of every 4 counties, there are more minority children than white children (Associated Press, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). By 2005, California, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Texas were majority-minority states, with five more—Arizona, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi, and New York—projected to join them in the next few years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Many libraries are thus already located in areas where the majority of the population is non-white.

The lack of racial diversity in LIS is reflected in the preparation of future information professionals and in current information practice. Historically, students pursuing master's degrees in library and information science (MLS) have been the focus of most efforts to improve diversity (Gollop, 1999; Jaeger & Franklin, 2007; McCook, 2000; Totten, 2000). In the first half of the twentieth century, initiatives to diversify librarianship centered on the creation of library schools for African Americans at the Hampton Institute, Clark-Atlanta University, and North Carolina Central University (DuMont, 1986a, 1986b; Josey, 1970; Josey & DeLoach, 2000; Stephenson, 1991). This educational approach paralleled the prevalence of segregated library services in many parts of the country (Fultz, 2006; Gleason, 1941; Musmann, 1998).

Since the 1970s, there have been a number of initiatives to increase the presence

of underrepresented populations within library education, with efforts mounted at library schools such as University of Arizona, Clark-Atlanta University, Columbia University, Florida State University, University of Illinois, University of Maryland, University of North Carolina, North Carolina Central University, Rutgers University, University of Toledo, and Wayne State University, as well as a long-running recruitment program under E. J. Josey at Pittsburgh (Gollop, 1999; McCook, 2000; Welbourne, 1994). Similarly, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the ALA, the Special Library Association (SLA), the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), the Medical Library Association (MLA), the American Association of Law Librarians (AALL), and many state library organizations have employed a wide range of initiatives and funding programs to promote diversity in the library workforce (Kim & Sin, 2006; Malone, 2000; McCook, 2000; McCook & Geist, 1993; Subramaniam & Jaeger, 2010). IMLS, for example, funded multiple long-running projects—such as Arizona State's Knowledge River, University of Texas' Honoring Generations, University of North Texas' Rio Grande, and the multi-institutional Project Athena—to promote diversity in the library profession (Bonnici & Burnett, 2005; Hayden, 2004).

Since the 1990s, however, the overall emphasis on diversity awareness and training in LIS has actually decreased (Mestre, 2010). This dwindling emphasis is reflected in the perceptions of librarians from underrepresented populations, the majority of whom feel the limited diversity in LIS faculty, staff, students, and professionals inhibits attracting students from underrepresented populations (Kim & Sin, 2006). "If students are not aware of the range of issues of diversity, inclusion, and underrepresentation related to information and the ways to provide services that meet the needs and expectations of diverse populations, these students will not be able to adequately serve their communities or their

profession" (Jaeger et al., 2010, p. 179). The lack of representation among librarians was even the subject of an Associated Press article that was published in major national newspapers like the *Washington Post* (Thomas, 2007). Although education and research about racial diversity in LIS includes focus on the wide range of different racial, ethnic, national origin, and linguistic groups in the United States (e.g., Adkins & Hussey, 2006; Burke, 2007; Chu, 1999; Fisher, Durrance, & Hinton, 2004; Fisher, Marcoux, Miller, Sánchez, & Cunningham, 2004; Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010; Whitmire, 2003; Winston & Walstad, 2006), there still is abundant space for progress especially in the areas of recruitment and retention of librarians from diverse communities and assimilating the knowledge of diversity into LIS curriculum.

In spite of the increasing diversity of society, only 22.2% of recent LIS graduates had the option to take a course related to diversity in their degree program, and only 21.3% of LIS graduates indicated that they were prepared by their MLS program to work with diverse populations (Mestre, 2010). Few courses in LIS programs have a stated diversity component in the course description; of those that do, the clear majority of these courses are electives (Subramaniam & Jaeger, 2010). Tellingly, attempts to increase diversity in the profession and increase the responsiveness of the profession to the needs of diverse populations have not been focused on the MLS or doctoral curriculum (Kim & Sin, 2006; McCook, 2000; McCook & Geist, 1993; Smith & Moreno, 2006; Subramaniam & Jaeger, in press). Instead, education initiatives have focused on trying to increase the presence of underrepresented, disadvantaged, and underserved groups without changing the curriculum to better reflect the needs of these groups or to prepare all librarians to be culturally competent (Overall, 2009). This lack of attention in education carries into practice. For example, only 14 of the 107 libraries that are

members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) have staff members identified as coordinating diversity efforts, even though ARL as an organization has programs meant to increase professional diversity and awareness of diversity in academic libraries (Mestre, 2010).

This failure to adequately address racial and ethnic diversity is compounded by the growing racial diversity of the United States and by the range of other populations—socio-economically and geographically disadvantaged, older adults, persons with disabilities, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) individuals, and among others—that need to be considered for information practice to be truly inclusive. These are not small populations. For example, there are 65 million Americans who have a disability, but we do not know how many information professionals, LIS students, or LIS faculty have a disability (Jaeger, 2009). Nor do we know how many persons with disabilities make use of libraries and their resources and services, a surprising situation given that the ALA created its first set of standards for patrons with disabilities in 1961. However, many libraries initially lagged behind these commitments by the ALA to patrons with disabilities, and even now LIS programs are more likely to focus on legal requirements related to access for persons with disabilities than the actual provision of effective services to patrons with disabilities (Gibson, 1977; Walling, 2004).

While comprehensive studies of the representation of many of these underrepresented, disadvantaged, and underserved populations in LIS has been lacking, the indications are problematic. The GLBTQ population serves as an excellent example of the neglect of the population in terms of education, practice, and research. The body of literature on GLBTQ librarians and library patrons is very small, but it clearly reflects discomfort in the lack of focus on GLBTQ issues in information services, in LIS education, and in the LIS profession

(e.g., Carmichael, 2000; Carmichael & Shontz, 1996; Cooke, 2005; Mehra & Braquet, 2007; Pruitt, 2010). A recent study of members of gay men's book clubs found that gay men felt excluded from public libraries, feeling their underrepresentation among librarians leads to a lack of interest in or understanding of their needs as library patrons (Pruitt, 2010). A review of the course and program descriptions of LIS schools reveals scant attention to GLBTQ issues, even in courses related to diversity (Subramaniam & Jaeger, 2010).

The lack of focus on a population in LIS education and research should not be taken to mean that the traditional LIS emphasis on race and ethnicity as the primary aspects of diversity results in students being prepared to work with other diverse populations. People of low socio-economic status present a telling example. Public libraries have been serving as "America's first responders to the economic crisis" (Rettig, 2009, n. p.) and are developing many innovative ways to provide information and social services to patrons in response to the crisis (Bertot & Jaeger, *in press*). However, library education remains primarily disconnected from these efforts, with some faculty even objecting to focusing on the information needs of the poor (Bishop, Tidline, Shoemaker, & Salela, 1999; Gehner, 2010; Kinney, 2010).

This equation of diversity to race in LIS, however, is part of larger trends in academia. In many academic institutions, diverse populations are not considered as a related set of groups, and interventions to address the needs of diverse populations are not conceived in a holistic manner; instead most fields still view diversity in purely racial terms (Banard, Stevens, Siwatu, & Lan, 2008; Bourke, Strehorn, & Silver, 2000; Dona & Edmister, 2001; Hindes & Mather, 2007; Izzo, Murray, & Novak, 2008; Jaeger & Franklin, 2007; Pawley, 2006; Zeff, 2007). Among white faculty, diversity is predominantly considered to be exclusively a racial issue

(Banks, 2009). Similarly, most faculty members and academic programs do not view diversity as including disability (Banard et al., 2008). These stances are reinforced both by general perceptions that other populations do not face similar levels of social exclusion as racial minorities and by resistance among certain members of populations that have long been considered diverse to expand the definition (Davis, 2002; Francis & Silvers, 2000).

Further, though faculty generally respond positively to diversity training, integration of the concepts from the training into educational practices is mostly limited (Thompson, Snell, & O'Malley, 2009; Weimar, 1990). "Addressing attitudinal resistance among instructors is more complicated than supplying useful books and sponsoring workshops" (Simoni, Sexton-Radek, Yescavage, Richard, & Lundquist, 1999, p. 93). In spite of numerous interventions in the field of education, for example, there is still a general lack of progress in preparing teacher candidates to deal effectively with diverse populations (McHatton, Keller, Shircliffe, & Zalaquett, 2009; Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008).

The presence of similar issues in other fields, however, cannot stand as an excuse in LIS. The issues are more pressing in LIS than almost any other field, as graduates of LIS programs are entering careers that require working with diverse service populations every day of their working lives. Ultimately, LIS programs "must accept responsibility for populating the profession with a new generation of culturally competent librarians" (Wheeler, 2005b, p. 184).

The seemingly intractable challenges of diversity, representation, and inclusion in LIS are the more painful for the fact that the professional stances of library organizations and libraries themselves, like the Code of Ethics and the Bill of Rights of the ALA, emphasize the inclusive creed of helping all of those who enter the library and of providing materials that reflect the diverse range of perspectives and groups

in society. The population served by libraries is increasingly diverse and, in a number of communities and states, diverse populations are in the majority—and this trend will continue. The economic downturn may simultaneously further increase usage and further diversify library demographics, as many people who had not previously used the library may need to begin using it. Regardless of the budget cuts that many libraries and library systems are facing as a result of the economic downturn, a very diverse patron population is the reality of library service. LIS programs should prepare the profession for changing trends in demographics. It is time for LIS programs to radically rethink their approach to the meaning of diversity and the breadth of coverage of diversity in LIS education, preparing students to work with the underrepresented, the disadvantaged, and the underserved. It is time for LIS to “make diversity more inclusive” (Bowman & Jaeger, 2003, n.p.).

### **Inclusion and Information**

Information underlies virtually every interaction, serves as a vital social and political equalizer, and provides a unifying thread throughout all human actions. Given the importance of equal access to information by all members of society for education, civic participation, employment, interaction with the government, and many other vital functions, it is essential to frame the study of information in the most inclusive terms possible. While diversity is often considered as an issue of race and ethnicity, diversity includes a much broader range of concerns in information services and includes all of the various underserved, disadvantaged, and underrepresented populations mentioned earlier. Future information professionals should be prepared in their education programs to be ready to meet the information needs and ensure equal information access to these populations.

Each underserved, disadvantaged, or

underrepresented population has its own information needs and cultural perspectives toward information that need to be accounted for in education and practice. Different social groups have their own attitudes toward sources of information, methods of information access, and the value of different kinds of information that frame information behavior of the members of each social group, and the increasing electronic nature of information is heightening the varying nature of these approaches to information (e.g., Burnett, Besant, & Chatman, 2001; Burnett, Jaeger, & Thompson, 2008; Chatman, 1999, 2000; Durrance & Fisher, 2002; Fisher et al., 2004; Fisher & Naumer, 2005; Hersberger, 2002, 2003; Jaeger & Burnett, 2010).

It is the responsibility of LIS educators to prepare future librarians to understand and meet the unique information needs of underserved, disadvantaged, and underrepresented populations in physical and electronic settings. Without preparation for these kinds of issues, future information professionals will struggle to connect information with the populations who seek it. This preparation is particularly important in terms of electronic information, as equal access to the Internet is an issue where the disadvantaged are those “who have fought for civil rights in other areas of our society” (First & Hart, 2002, p. 385). Studies have demonstrated gaps in Internet access and usage by gender, race, age, literacy, disability, language, and ethnicity and most significantly socioeconomic status (Fairlie, 2005; Fox & Livingston, 2007; Hamilton, 2002; Hoffman & Novak, 1998; Jaeger & Thompson, 2003, 2004; Lenhart, Rainie, Fox, Horrigan, & Spooner, 2000; Livingston, 2010; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2000; Spooner, Meredith, & Rainie, 2003; Spooner, Rainie, & Meredith, 2001).

Currently, nearly 40% of U.S. homes lack Internet access and the percentage of households without Internet is 62% in ru-

ral communities (Horrigan, 2008, 2009). The library has become the established social institution for people with no Internet access, limited Internet access and limited technological skill to seek access and assistance (Bertot, McClure, & Jaeger, 2008; Bertot, Jaeger, & McClure, 2010; Jaeger & Bertot, 2009). This role of the library has expanded significantly during the great recession, as many people—particularly those of lower socio-economic status—have dropped their home Internet access and have nowhere but the local library to turn for access (Carlton, 2009; CNN, 2009; Horrigan, 2008; Nicholas, Rowlands, Jubb, & Jamali, *in press*; Van Sant, 2009).

However, these realities are not successfully connecting with LIS education, research, and practice. A recent study of courses related to diversity among the largest LIS programs found that the number of courses with a stated diversity component in the title or course description is a very small slice of the total number of courses being offered by these schools, and many of such courses are electives that focus on a limited number of aspects of diversity (Subramaniam & Jaeger, 2010). IMLS has been very supportive of grant programs promoting diversity among students, but these programs have not yet translated into changes in representation of diverse populations among faculty in LIS and information professionals (Subramaniam & Jaeger, 2010). While LIS research offers a nearly limitless set of opportunities to conduct research related to diverse populations, most receive proportionally little attention (Jaeger et al., 2010).

In short, most LIS programs include just enough diversity to ensure that the diversity requirement of the ALA accreditation process is satisfied, and few faculty are drawn to teaching and researching about a large portion of the population. As noted above, of the United States population, 14.7% is Latino, 12.4% is African American, 21% is persons with disabilities, and the portion of the population compris-

ing older adults will reach 20% by 2030 (US Census Bureau, 2010). While there is overlap between these different populations, it is possible that LIS students are only being prepared to work with, and only represent, the minority of the United States population in terms of race, age, and ability. With the exception of LIS courses that educate future librarians in providing information for young adults and children (which have been integrated in all LIS curriculum addressing services provided in public libraries, school libraries and museums), providing services to other diverse communities has not been aggressively pursued by library educators and researchers. While a segment of the literature examines the provision of information services to diverse user populations (e.g., Maxey-Harris, 2010; Shachaf, 2008; Shachaf & Horowitz, 2006; Shachaf, Oltmann, & Horowitz, 2008; Shachaf & Snyder, 2007; Whitmire, 1999, 2001, 2003; Zoe & DiMartino, 2000), this literature has not translated into these areas as a focus of many LIS courses.

The rapid maturation of the information society and the increasing movement of educational, professional, and governmental functions partly or fully online have shifted the ground under the feet of LIS. To be truly included in society at this point, a person needs have access to information, mainly through the use of the Internet and Internet-enabled technologies, services, and resources. Depending on the information need and information source, information access can require a range of literacies, including information, technology, civic, and more. As a result, the Internet era has widened the definition of diversity and inclusiveness to include people who lack information access or sufficient access due to literacy, economy, or geography, as well as people disadvantaged by the technology itself, such as older adults and persons with disabilities. For LIS professionals to provide inclusive information services, they need to be able to meet the needs of all of these

information-disadvantaged populations, all of whom bring different, and likely multiple, disadvantages to successfully navigate the evolving information environment.

For LIS programs to prepare truly inclusive information education and LIS professionals to provide truly inclusive information services, numerous social factors and populations have to receive greater attention in LIS education, research, and practice, including, but not limited to: race, ethnicity, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, geography, literacy, technological literacy, Internet access, language, socioeconomic background, and national origin. This definition of diversity will need to remain flexible, as changes in technology and other social factors will shift which populations are underserved, disadvantaged, and underrepresented over time.

All of these groups will have unique information needs, values, access approaches, and behaviors. Yet, instead of confronting the new inclusion challenges of the twenty-first century, LIS is still unable to address the diversity concerns of the previous century. A sports cliché seems apt in this situation: it's time to go big or go home.

More accurately, if LIS does not go big on diversity now, the majority of the US population may decide they do not feel they are adequately represented in and included by the library and its services, choosing to prioritize other sources of information and other community organizations. There has been a tremendous amount of fretting about the future of the library in face of new information technologies (e.g., Baker, 1996, 2001; Brophy, 2007; Brown & Duguid 2002; Buschman, 2003; Manoff, 2001; Tisdale, 1997). However, the failure to prepare future librarians to provide inclusive services for diverse populations seems a much greater threat to the long-term viability of libraries as trusted and valued social institutions where people will seek the information they need.

## Going Big on Diversity

The question, then, is what should LIS programs do to break the historical patterns? The most important change is a reconceptualization of diversity in LIS on two levels—definition and intervention:

1. *Definition*—Diversity should be understood in a sense of inclusiveness that includes both the traditional understanding of diversity and the new groups that are information-disadvantaged in the age of the Internet—the underrepresented, the disadvantaged, and the underserved.
2. *Intervention*—Innovative interventions should be conceived and implemented to accommodate the larger understanding of diversity.

Both of these elements need to be built directly into curriculum and practice. To be effective, a focus on diversity and inclusion needs to be a coherent element across the courses of a degree program, not just a stand-alone elective (Belay, 1992; Neely, 2005; Nilsen, 2004). Focusing on recruiting and admitting more diverse MLS students will not work if people from underserved, disadvantaged, and underrepresented groups do not see people like themselves among library professionals and LIS program faculty, staff, and students (Ingle, 2006; Kim & Sin, 2006, 2008; McGarvey, 2007; Piercy, Giddings, Allen, Dixon, Meszaros, & Joest, 2005; Umbach, 2006; Winston & Walstad, 2006). Diverse faculty members, in particular, are essential in recruitment for diversity (Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2008).

Interventions to promote diversity in LIS can be conceptualized as a completely interrelated whole, with the complementary approaches forming a "virtuous circle" to promote diversity (Franklin & Jaeger, 2009; Jaeger & Franklin, 2007). This virtuous circle model suggests that interventions to improve diversity in LIS should happen in multiple aspects of the field if



there is any chance of success. Recruiting is tied to representation among professionals and among LIS faculty, and the presence of diversity in the curriculum is related to the diversity of the faculty, while the diversity of the faculty is dependent on the diversity of doctoral students. All aspects of diversity in the field depend on one another. Trying to recruit more diverse master's students may seem like an easy solution to diversity, but it will not be sufficient to succeed. To have a chance to succeed, efforts should embrace both the breadth of diversity related to information and the number of aspects of the field affected by diversity issues.

### Developing LIS Diversity Programs

Librarianship long ago made the commitment to diversity and inclusion as foundational elements of the profession. But based on the content of courses, statements on websites, and academic programs available to students, a distressingly small number of LIS programs have committed to diversity as a key focus in the development of curriculum. Even though the ALA accreditation guidelines for MLS programs include language that issues of diversity need to be covered to some extent in instruction, few LIS programs have made diversity an explicit pedagogical focus and a very small number of course descriptions include specific language about diversity.

Diverging from this general state, some programs—such as the University of California Los Angeles and the University of Maryland—are engaged in efforts to make diversity a central component of their programs and demonstrate the breadth of educational options related to diversity that are available to LIS programs. At UCLA, the program emphasizes diversity in terms of cultural opportunities and organizations within the school, focusing primarily on inclusion of and opportunities to focus on specific populations. A significant portion of the school's website is also devoted to

diversity issues (<http://is.gseis.ucla.edu/about/diversity.htm>). These opportunities at UCLA also include a core course in their archives program entitled *Diversity, Ethics, and Change* that “includes elements drawn from cultural and critical race theory, as well as a significant service learning component” (White & Gilliland, 2010, p. 245).

The College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland has created an MLS track designed to expose students to the broad range of diverse populations they might work with as information professionals. This program—the Information and Diverse Populations Concentration (<http://ischool.umd.edu/about/newinclusiveinfo.shtml>)—was designed to prepare students to provide inclusive information services in their professional careers. The Concentration enables students to develop a range of practical and analytical skills to provide information and technology services to diverse populations in libraries, archives, school media centers, government agencies, and numerous other information settings.

This approach was developed through extensive research and consultation with many community stakeholders to meet the needs of the employers and patrons of the region that the College primarily serves. A committee comprising members of the faculty, staff, MLS program, and Ph.D. program at the College was formed to develop the Concentration and accompanying initiatives. Members of the College community who were not part of the Concentration development were given multiple opportunities to contribute and provide feedback about the program as it was developed.

Discussions with public libraries, school libraries, academic libraries, archives, and government agencies in the area provided a baseline for understanding the wide range of diverse populations in the area, as well as the service issues that regularly challenge information organizations in the area. These community stake-

holders provided insight into the specific areas of preparation that Concentration students would need. Concurrent to these discussions, educators in other academic fields with a stronger established approach to preparing students to work with diverse populations were consulted, with the focus of multicultural education being particularly helpful. Courses and programs at other LIS schools were examined for different approaches on teaching diverse populations in LIS. The scholarly and professional literature of LIS, and education and research related to specific populations, were consulted for further perspectives. All of these inputs shaped the goals and content of the new Concentration.

The resulting Concentration embraces the wide definition of diversity that encompasses the underrepresented, the disadvantaged, and the underserved in terms of information. It is intended to prepare students to be culturally-aware information professionals who are ready to provide inclusive information services to populations that are diverse in terms of gender, ability, language, literacy, socio-economic background, age, geography, and other factors. The Concentration will prepare students to design, develop, implement, integrate, and evaluate inclusive information services, resources, technologies, and outreach that serve diverse populations in various information environments, both physical and virtual. They will also learn about the social, political, educational, and ethical issues shaping service to diverse populations.

Two new courses serve as the backbone of the Concentration: *Diverse Populations, Inclusion, and Information* exposes students to the range of diversity and inclusion issues related to information, while *Information and Universal Usability* emphasizes issues related to technology. A thorough review of all College courses was conducted to identify which courses already included a focus on diversity issues and which could be revised to bring greater emphasis to the already existing

diversity content. For example, in the *Information Policy* course, the first several weeks are devoted to gaps in access and underserved populations, and these issues are then discussed in relation to every other issue in the course. The Concentration was carefully designed so that students interested in any types libraries and information organizations could complete the course of study for any type of practice and for the Information and Diverse Populations Concentration without taking any extra courses for graduation.

Employing a virtuous circle approach to building the program, the Concentration was developed as part of an expansive set of initiatives to promote education and research about diversity in LIS. These interrelated initiatives included establishing a diversity committee, forming of a student diversity organization, establishing an ongoing series of diversity lectures and events, and creating a new award for innovative efforts in diversity education and scholarship, among other endeavors (<http://ischool.umd.edu/about/culture.shtml>). Expanding on the virtuous circle notion, the College intends to recruit students in this concentration into the doctoral program to help to foster a more diverse LIS faculty in the field.

The first class of the Concentration began in fall 2010, with 27 students—a strong enrollment for a new program. These students are a mix of newly enrolled students and continuing students who have transferred into the Concentration. Concurrently the College received a generous grant from IMLS to provide scholarships, and a range of mentoring, internship, and professional development opportunities, for students enrolled in the Concentration.

The College will iteratively improve the Concentration's curriculum and implementation through solicitation of feedback from students and community partners via surveys and interviews. Feedback from community partners will be extremely important, as the students in the Concentration will have extensive opportunities to

intern at local information organizations that serve diverse populations and to be mentored by current information professionals who work with these populations.

## Conclusion

With the growing diversity of this information society, more focus on issues of diversity, inclusion, and underrepresentation in LIS is necessary for the continuing relevance of the field and the information professions. It is a matter not only of creating a more diverse profession, but also of ensuring all professionals are ready to engage in culturally competent, inclusive information practices. If libraries do not adequately meet the needs of and provide inclusive services to the diverse range of populations that are currently underserved, disadvantaged, and underrepresented in terms of information, long-term library usage will suffer as society grows ever more diverse.

In not that many decades, Latinos and African Americans will outnumber whites and Asian Americans. If the LIS professions are still nearly bereft of the former populations by then, the library will likely not maintain its societal position as trusted and valued source of community information for the majority of the population. Similarly, failing to prepare students to meet the needs of the groups that have become disadvantaged and underrepresented due to social and technological changes will limit the relevance of the library to these populations.

Just as significantly, a stronger focus on diversity and inclusion in LIS education, research, and practice presents a way for the field to create many new contributions to society. In a world defined by information and information technology, LIS is positioned to make significant contributions to the nature of life in the information society. However, without a better representation and understanding of all of the diverse and underrepresented populations in terms of information, LIS scholar-

ship is at risk of irrelevance for the majority of the population.

To meet the diversity challenges both new and old, LIS programs should:

- Conceive of efforts to increase diversity in the field as interrelated, and work to simultaneously address representation issues among students, staff, faculty and professionals rather than relying on change coming through one population;
- Frame diversity initiatives in terms of the inclusion of all populations diverse and underrepresented in terms of information;
- Develop courses explicitly devoted to preparing students to work with the range of diverse populations related to information;
- Create programs for students who wish to specialize in working with diverse populations;
- Create opportunities for LIS students to intern or obtain field experiences in libraries, museums, archives, or other information organizations that primarily serve underrepresented and information challenged populations;
- Tie educational efforts to promoting increased research about diversity, inclusion, and representation by faculty and doctoral students; and
- Learn from innovative inclusive initiatives developed by libraries and other information organizations to serve diverse and underrepresented populations.

While there are undoubtedly many other productive approaches to help promote diversity efforts in LIS, these major ideas can provide a framework to strive for and build upon.

Far ahead of LIS education, some libraries have already decided to "go big" into diversity, linking traditional library services and new technological capacities specifically to reach otherwise underserved populations. One approach is known as community-focused information services (CIS)—using new media technol-

ogies to enable users to create and share content about themselves, their social groups, and their communities (Bishop, Bazzell, Mehra, & Smith, 2001; Fisher et al., 2004; Srinivasan, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). Such CIS efforts reassert the public library as a vital community asset that can help connect patrons to locally-relevant information and provide new means through which to bring library services to underserved populations within diverse communities (Becvar & Srinivasan, 2009; Boast, Bravo, & Srinivasan, 2007; Lyons, 2007; Mehra & Srinivasan, 2007; Caidi & Allard, 2005). The Chicago area provides two key examples of CIS projects. NorthStarNet (<http://northstarnet.org>) is designed to link people from diverse populations across the various suburbs of Chicago's urban sprawl, while SkokieNet (<http://skokienet.org>) not only focuses on long-term community members' interests—such as community revitalization, child care, jobs, and housing—but also offers resources in their native languages to the new immigrant populations that frequently move to the area, including Indian, Korean, and Assyrian, among others. Activities that are of similar ambition and scope in preparing future librarians to work with and conduct research about diverse and underserved populations are desperately needed in LIS education. Training future librarians to embrace inclusion and understand the needs of diverse populations will ensure that programs like those mentioned above continue to emerge and flourish.

Inclusion of all of the populations of society in information is a moral imperative of LIS education, research, and practice. For a field that has explicitly stated its commitment to diversity and inclusion for nearly a century, played an important role in integration, and stood solidly for freedom of access from the McCarthy era to the Homeland Security era, the situation with diversity remains challenging. In spite of the focus on diversity in the field by some faculty members and some schools, a discipline-wide commitment to

diversity as a major and explicit aspect of education, scholarship, and practice has not been achieved. As a result, LIS has yet to address the diversity concerns of half a century ago. Those challenges with diversity have now been joined by numerous other challenges as many new populations struggle with inclusion and representation related to information due to the prominence of the Internet—and some of these populations are ascending to being majority populations and already are in some communities.

Unless meaningful action occurs soon, LIS as a profession and libraries as a societal institution risk becoming exclusive rather than inclusive. Such an outcome would be antithetical for the field and for the patrons, communities, educational organizations, and governments that rely on libraries and other information organizations to ensure equal access to information to all. Fortunately, LIS programs still have the opportunity to embrace an inclusive concept of diversity. The time to wait for diversity to come of its own volition is past: we need to move forward immediately and proactively.

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