



**Kynita Stringer-Stanback**

## Recruitment, Retention, & Diversity In Libraries & Higher Education: Why Doing the Right Thing is Easier Said than Done

“We fail to do the right thing because our values are merely theoretical constructs that do not warrant serious consideration and practical implementation.”<sup>1</sup>

Are libraries and institutions of higher education that train librarians ready, willing, and capable of diversifying? Are libraries and institutes of higher education seriously committed to diversifying their staff and student body? If so, what is being done, and, if not, what is going to be done?

It is very easy to give lip service to the importance of diversity and having a diverse staff or student body. But what does diversity mean to any given institution? Does it mean having an equal number of left-handed people and right-handed people or an equal representation of Baptists, Catholics, and Lutherans? According to LaKeisha Darby, “...there is a widespread view that all librarians are white, old, and unfriendly. Upon further examination of the stereotype, one may easily dispel the idea that librarians are unfriendly but removing the label that all librarians are old and white is more difficult.”<sup>2</sup> The perception of who a librarian is and what a librarian does must change—the profession needs a facelift.

The image of librarians needs to reflect the diversity within the population of the United States of America. It is imperative that information professionals are trained and educated to serve the needs of their communities. Greg Reese, director of East Cleveland Library, says this is “one reason why we need to recruit more people of color, those that can relate to the community they serve from an intellectual as well as a cultural standpoint. I understand the needs in this community and that’s why we can do such a good job, because we communicate easily with the people that we serve.”<sup>3</sup> He recently organized a campaign that raised \$3.6 million to build a new library in the East Cleveland, Ohio community—a community that, without Mr. Reese’s cultural connection and sensitivity, may have gone underserved. The question then becomes, how do libraries and institutes of higher education attract a diverse pool of applicants and students?

When elected to the ALA Presidency in 2002 Carla Hayden said, “we have to do more, even beginning in preschool, to let our children know that this profession has a lot to offer...not just exposing them to what libraries can do, but also to what the people who work in libraries do.”<sup>4</sup>

What Hayden speaks to is getting out on a grassroots level and letting people know about the profession and reshaping what is traditionally thought about librarians. The video *Me? A Librarian?* was funded by the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grants from the State Library of Ohio. The video was created

by Greg Reese, who wanted to appeal to high school students. Reese had to portray the profession in a fresh and interesting way to spark interest and get young people of color to think about careers in library and information science. The video was used to educate the students about the opportunities within Library and Information Science as well as show them the diversity of librarians and information specialists within the field. The video was such a success that in 2001 another video was made to target college-aged students. Reese and the directors received another grant worth \$75,000 and filmed the video in Ohio, Illinois, and New York. The director and producer of the videos, Ron Goldfarb, said after the making of the videos, “whatever your interests are, there’s a job for you in a library somewhere.”<sup>5</sup> If an interest can be sparked, how then do we translate that interest into a diverse pool of applicants within libraries and higher education?

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In his 2001 article, David M. Harralson argues, “librarians as a group have not been very active in formal recruitment programs for librarians.”<sup>6</sup> Not every librarian is as gregarious and creative as Mr. Reese of Cleveland, Ohio. How then do we take the videos and visits to preschools, high schools and colleges and use them to create increased numbers of minority students matriculating into MSLS (Master’s of Science in Library Science) programs? African-Americans represent 12.1% of this country’s population and only 4.4% of MSLS graduates. Additionally, Latinos represent 14.5% of the population and only 2.2% of MLS graduates. Where then can we look to find graduation rates of minorities from MSLS programs? The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s record of minority student graduation within the MSLS program indicates that between the years of 1980 and 2006 (May through May of each year) UNC-CH awarded 1,563 MSLS degrees. Of the MSLS degrees awarded, only 103\* went to minorities representing four minority groups (African-American, Asian and Pacific Islander, Latino, and Native American). Of the 76 PhD Degrees awarded during the same time period only 14\* were awarded to minorities (five of which were African-American and nine Asian & Pacific Islander). According to those numbers, over the past twenty-six years the highest ranked MSLS program in the country has awarded a paltry 7% of its degrees to minorities! Is this the norm for library science programs across the country? If so, what needs to be done to increase the recruitment and retention of minorities within MSLS programs?

\*Nationality is unknown – possibility that some degrees awarded to foreign nationals.

In order to get a clearer picture of minority recruitment, retention, and attrition, it is essential to look to ALA accredited programs for more information. The research could be conducted in three parts.

First, the program directors would be contacted and asked to fill out a survey that addressed issues of diversity. Specifically, they would be asked about their commitment to diversity and how their programs live up to that commitment. Second, students would be given a similar survey to indicate their perceptions of diversity on their respective campuses (surveys would go to both Caucasian and minority students). Students would be asked their perceptions as to whether or not their programs and universities welcome minorities. Finally, a look at the numbers would give an indication as to whether or not the students' and faculty members' positions on diversity are reflected in the number of minority graduates from their respective programs. The numbers would shed light onto the national trend and demonstrate whether or not graduate schools need to be more proactive with the recruitment and retention of minorities.

After all the information had been gathered and measured, suggestions and strategies would be offered to help universities and programs increase their numbers and attract more students of color. Successful strategies employed by eleven graduate programs in psychology, as examined by Rogers and Molina, outline proactive minority recruitment practices. Every single one of the eleven schools offered some kind of financial aid package to first year students. They also employed the help of current graduate students and faculty of color to help recruit students to their programs. Faculty and students of color must be active in order to increase minority representation in their respective programs. Librarians of color must be visible in order to attract more students of color into their programs. Visiting students at their undergraduate universities, inviting them to explore and visit departments, and creating new student application packets that target students of color were all strategies employed by schools with successful recruitment and retention rates.

Are graduate schools and programs doing enough to recruit and retain students of color? Rogers and Molina describe the importance of having a welcoming environment once minority students arrive, "departments and graduate programs at predominately White institutions may not know how to create educational and training environments that are perceived as welcoming and sustaining by students of color."<sup>7</sup> Graduate schools and departments that desire to diversify their student bodies need to create environments where people of all races and creeds feel welcomed and appreciated. If students do not feel welcomed it could lead to higher attrition rates. According to Rogers and Molina, "negative faculty attitudes, even if covertly expressed and communicated, may become evident to students and lead to perceptions of a less than welcoming training environment. Some have described predominately White institutions as reflecting a 'chilly climate' for students of color."<sup>8</sup> How then do graduate schools and departments create a welcoming environment? What strategies have been proven effective? In order to find this information, it is imperative to seek out programs that have proven to be successful with the retention of minority students of color.

As technology and information continue to shrink the size of our world, it is imperative that professionals are able to communicate and work with diverse groups of people. The business world knows that multiculturalism and diversity means good business. Diversity offers businesses and organizations advantages over the competition. As stated by Raatikainen, "very often competitive advantages are listed as human resources, processes, products, financial means, knowledge—multiculturalism has been seen to be more and more advantageous."<sup>9</sup> By training and educating more librarians of color, our profession would only benefit and grow. Challenges that face libraries in urban and rural areas need to be addressed from fresh perspectives with new ideas. Homogenous institutions and programs are unable to sense the pulse of an ever-changing world. Raatikainen further states, "if everybody in the room is the same you'll have a lot fewer arguments and a lot worse answers."<sup>10</sup> Diversity may not be an easy feat to achieve; however, the benefits are well worth the effort.

According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook, "More than three in five librarians are aged 45 or older and will become eligible for retirement in the next ten years, which will result in many job openings."<sup>11</sup> With more than one-half of the library profession leaving within ten years, it is essential that a new generation is poised and ready to address the needs of diverse communities. Sam Roberts, a researcher who studies trends in minority populations, says, "One in ten of the largest counties within the United States are predominately populated by minorities."<sup>12</sup>

Graduate programs in information and library science must take the lead and cultivate the next generation of information professionals in order for them to be poised to serve the needs of a multicultural and global client base.

## References

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- <sup>2</sup> LaKeshia Darby, "Abolishing Stereotypes: Recruitment & Retention of Minorities in the Library Profession," *Rural Libraries* 25.1 (2005): 7–17.
- <sup>3</sup> Greg L. Reese, "Man of the People," interview by *Versed: Bulletin of the Office for Diversity*, American Library Association, May 2005.  
<http://www.ala.org/ala/diversity/versed/versedbackissues/may2005abcd/reese.htm> (August 2007).
- <sup>4</sup> P.A.G., "Hayden Presidency to Center on Diversity and Equity of Access," *American Libraries* 33.7 (August 2002): 11.
- <sup>5</sup> Carol Verny, "Ohio Goes Recruiting for Minority Librarians," *American Libraries* 33.7 (2002): 52.
- <sup>6</sup> David M. Harralson, "Recruitment in Academic Libraries: Library Literature in the 90s," *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 8.1 (2001): 37–68.
- <sup>7</sup> Margaret R. Rogers, and Ludwin E. Molina, "Exemplary Efforts in Psychology to Recruit and Retain Graduate Students of Color," *American Psychologist* 61.2 (2006): 143–156.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Pasi Raatikainen, "Contributions of Multiculturalism to the Competitive Advantage of an Organisation," *Singapore Management Review* 24.1 (2002): 81–88.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Occupational Outlook Handbook. U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics, August 2006. <http://stats.bls.gov/oco/ocos066.htm#outlook> (August 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Sam Roberts, "Minorities Now Form Majority in One-Third of the Most Populous Counties," *New York Times Online*, August 9, 2007: 14A. <http://www.nytimes.com> (August 31, 2007).

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## REMCo Student Writing Contest

In order to encourage library science students to appraise and write about ethnic library resources and services in North Carolina libraries, the Round Table for Ethnic Minority Concerns (REMCo) of the North Carolina Library Association (NCLA) sponsored a writing contest in spring 2007. One of the objectives of REMCo is to serve as a resource for those North Carolina libraries desiring to positively reflect ethnic cultures in their respective collections; the contest is an embodiment of this organizational objective.

The contest was open to any student currently enrolled in a library science program. The winner of the contest would receive a monetary award of \$250.00, possible publication in NCLA's refereed journal *North Carolina Libraries*, and a certificate of achievement to be presented at the NCLA Biennial Conference in October 2007. REMCo plans to make the contest an annual event.

The 2007 winner of the writing contest is Ms. Kynita Stringer-Stanback. Kynita was enrolled in the UNC School of Information and Library Science (SILS) for the 2006-2007 academic year. Fall semester, 2007, Kynita will be participating in a study abroad program at the University of Carlos III in Madrid. She is the first UNC Chapel Hill library science student chosen to participate in this program.

REMCo is quite proud of Ms. Stanback; she obviously is an excellent choice as the 2007 winner of the writing contest. Congratulations, Kynita!

Anne Coleman, Chair  
REMCo Student Writing Contest Committee