

Fueling the Profession with Diversity

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Abstract:

The authors discuss the North Carolina Library Association's (NCLA) efforts to promote and support diversity. They mention the NCLA's 2014-2016 strategic plan for diversity which includes opportunities for minorities, and encouraging diverse leadership. The authors attribute the success of diversity programs to the collaboration of the University Libraries (UL), and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Department of Library and Information Studies.

Keywords: North Carolina Library Association | Academic Libraries | Career development | Public libraries | Leadership

Article:

The North Carolina Library Association (NCLA) has made a long-term commitment to supporting and embracing diversity efforts for its libraries and the profession. NCLA's 2014-16 strategic plan reflects this commitment with diversity being one of the four primary purposes of the association. The organization hopes to make great strides in this area by promoting respect and inclusion; providing opportunities for minorities and diverse leadership; and raising awareness for issues and concerns related to diverse communities. NCLA's leadership and membership currently reflect a diverse mindset and inclusive point of view and those successes can be seen in the diversity represented in association leadership and programming provided for the membership.

Part of what has fueled this success is programs and initiatives from collaborative efforts undertaken by the University Libraries (UL) and the Department of Library and Information Studies (DLIS), from the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Greensboro. Since 2008, UL has had a diversity coordinator position, leading a diversity committee and supporting a diversity residency program since 2012. In addition, UL, in partnership with DLIS, recruited and supported three cohorts of library school students from IMLS grants for Academic and Culture Enrichment (ACE) Scholars beginning in 2010. The purpose of these grants and ACE Scholars was to recruit and promote diversity within the profession and train librarians to work with underserved populations.

This combination of diversity residents and ACE Scholars worked together to gain professional development opportunities as well as contribute their perspective and point of view to the profession. This made a big impact on NCLA, as membership in the association was included in the program content for the cohorts and the diversity residents all became members in order to participate in local programs and events. Over the years, UNC-Greensboro has had four diversity residents and more than fifty graduates through the ACE Scholars program, participating in state and local events through the association.

NCLA provides opportunities for librarians and paraprofessionals from across the state to participate in a wide variety of activities and developmental events. With conference programming, inclusiveness has been a goal, by establishing a process of acceptance for programs and posters for all individuals, library types, and program topics. An expectation for both diversity residents and ACE Scholars has been to take advantage of this venue in order to achieve career development goals. Membership in section and roundtable activities was also encouraged, in order to have those voices heard, as well as the personal gain of career development.

NCLA's Round Table for Ethnic Minority Concerns (REMCo) serves as a voice for ethnic and minority members. Many ACE Scholars participated in the events sponsored by this group and many of the members have served as mentors for ACE Scholars as part of their field of study. This includes local public library directors who worked with those students that had a public library interest or wanted the experience to broaden their range of understanding for the profession. NCLA REMCo also established the Road Builders Award to recognize ethnic minority librarians. Ten public librarians have been recognized since the award was first presented in 1989. The award recognizes ethnic minority librarians in the library education, academic, public, school and special libraries, who have served as pioneers in librarianship and also as positive role models.

Another NCLA round table that influences and promotes diversity within the organization is Woman's Issues in Libraries Roundtable (WILR), providing a forum for the discussion of the concerns of women in libraries and how these concerns affect the profession as a whole. It also provides a venue for exchange of information among all NCLA components with the goal of increasing understanding of current issues affecting women within the profession. WILR has specifically driven programs and activities to help address issues that impact women in professional positions and provide professional development opportunities to strengthen skills and promote value.

Conference programming has been a major vehicle for offering opportunities for both diverse librarians to share their experiences and to provide the NCLA membership a view of diversity initiatives across the state. These presentations and posters over the years have covered many ethical issues and a broad range of diverse topics, including multicultural experiences, both in-house and abroad; LGBT users and their needs or preferences for information services; and providing accessibility, resources, and services to patrons who need them. This forum of sharing ideas and information on diverse subjects has provided a wonderful sense of inclusion for the membership and inspired others to participate. Here is a sample list of programs and posters that have been presented:

- Latinos, Libraries and Literacy: Lessons Learned from Three NC Libraries
- Diversity: Being Able to Serve by Knowing the Difference
- The Library Diversity Committee: Serving Knowledge, Serving You
- Creating an Inclusive Library Collection for Children
- Transforming the Education of Diverse Students: Learning Through Dialogue with the Next Generation of Librarians
- Diversity Initiatives: An insider's perspective
- Ten Libraries, One Goal: Recruiting Future Librarians with Diverse Backgrounds through a Collaborative Project in North Carolina
- Stronger Together: Multicultural Competence--From Ideas to Action
- Making the Connection: the HBCU/ASERL Exchange
- The Diversity Toolbox: A Survey of Library Diversity Committees Among Southeastern ARL Member Libraries

Many of these individuals have taken career paths into **public libraries** and have influenced NCLA leadership and programming, both as students and professionals. NCLA has embraced the ideals that have supported the diversity programs at UNC-Greensboro and as an association of blended library types, has found ways to share other experiences from outside the region. ACE Scholars and diversity residents have also participated nationally through PLA, the American Library Association, the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, the Association of College and Research Libraries, and other venues. NCLA welcomes the sharing of these experiences in order to enlighten its membership of issues and trends occurring outside the state.

Some great examples exist of UNC-Greensboro students who utilized the advantages afforded by NCLA and have been able to apply successful skills gained from their experiences into the public library sector. Ace Scholar Touger Vang is now a programming and outreach librarian for Yolo County (CA) East Region Libraries and is responsible for programming four branches. As a graduate assistant, Vang worked with several NCLA conferences as well as other students, faculty, and librarians on their presentations.

NCLA sponsors a leadership institute in the off conference years to help grow leaders and leadership skills within the state. While diversity is not a criterion for selection, several members of recent cohorts have been chosen from diverse backgrounds. Several of these leadership institute graduates have advanced in their positions or obtained higher-level positions within their systems. Another example is Marcellaus Joiner, who graduated with his MLS from North Carolina Central University, volunteered in the libraries at UNC-Greensboro, and was admitted into the North Carolina Leadership Institute. Joiner is currently the archivist at High Point Public Library, working on several projects for the High Point Historical Museum.

Other leadership institute graduates from the public library section include Tanika Martin from Durham County Public Library, who is now a children's services manager, successfully completing a leadership institute project that increased the visibility and familiarity of public library resources and services that cultivate academic acumen. Another leadership institute project was proposed as an opportunity for the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library to continue to increase, strengthen, and diversify its outreach and relationship with the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Schools. Leadership institute graduate Brian Hart got the program up and running before

he moved on to become assistant director/head of public services of the Middle Georgia Regional Library System.

NCLA's membership is made up of librarians from all types of libraries. This adds to the diversity and inclusiveness shared through other diverse and ethnically different factors such as race, cultural background, and sexual orientation. The 2013 conference theme was Stronger Together, celebrating a collective desire to learn from one another. The 2015 conference theme was Make it Matter, recognizing the value that North Carolina librarians and paraprofessionals provide to their patrons.

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