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Latino Librarians on Becoming LIS Educators:

An Exploratory Investigation of the Barriers in Recruiting Latino Faculty

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Abstract

LIS schools have produced a limited number of Latino MLS graduates, but they have not attracted them back to pursue doctoral studies and teaching positions. Using a semistructured interview technique, eight "expert" Latino librarians were interviewed for their perspectives on the barriers preventing Latino LIS professionals from pursuing positions as LIS faculty. This exploratory investigation identified four specific barriers which were perceived as contributing to the lack of Latino LIS faculty: isolation from the academy, ethnocentrism within LIS education, financial concerns, and personal concerns.

Introduction

In the 1998-1999 academic year, ALA-accredited library degrees were awarded to 144 Hispanic students. Those 144 students constituted less than three percent of the total number of students receiving MLS degrees. In 1998, the American Library Association reported that 1.8 percent of academic librarians, 2 percent of school librarians, and 2.95 percent of public librarians were of Hispanic origin. LIS schools have produced a limited number of Latino MLS graduates; however, they have not attracted those students back to pursue doctoral degrees and teaching positions. In the 1998-1999 academic year, no Hispanic students received doctoral degrees whatsoever, and of the 605 full-time faculty who indicated their ethnicity in the *ALISE Statistical Report*, only 15 (2.5 percent) were of Hispanic origin. The 2000 Decennial Census counted 35 million people in the "Latino or Hispanic" category – over 12 percent of the

population. Vi While the low numbers of Latino LIS faculty are proportionate to the low numbers of Latinos in the profession, both figures are dramatically disproportionate to the numbers of Latinos in the nation.

Nonetheless, Latino LIS professionals do exist. REFORMA, The National Association for Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking, had over 900 members in 2000, vii the majority of whom were Latino library professionals. REFORMA's position as "the largest and most established" of professional organizations dealing with library service to Latinos viii and its two successful conferences have indicated that Latino LIS professionals are committed to their profession and to educating other LIS professionals. What prevents these active, involved librarians from becoming LIS faculty? LIS literature and informal conversations with practitioners suggested reasons including a lack of role models and mentors, insufficient money and time, and a general sense that LIS faculty had little community involvement. To answer the question more fully, however, eight "expert" Latino librarians, librarians who were active in their communities and their professions, were interviewed, and their responses illuminate some reasons why Latino LIS professionals do not pursue LIS education.

Literature Review

The lack of faculty diversity is not a problem for LIS alone – it is acknowledged as a university-wide problem, crossing disciplines. In each transition between levels of education – high school to a bachelor's program, bachelor's to master's, and master's to doctoral – students of color are lost. In 1999, 83.4 percent of whites had graduated high school, 25.2 percent had completed four or more years of college, and 8.5 percent held advanced degrees. Only 56.1

percent of Hispanics had completed high school, 10.9 percent had graduated from four-year colleges, and 3.0 percent held advanced degrees. Astin found that 52 percent of Hispanic graduate students dropped out before completing a degree program. A study of LIS master's students at the University of California, Los Angeles determined that minority students have twice the dropout rate of the total population of students. This transitional loss produces smaller and smaller pools of candidates from which Latino doctoral students can be found.

Nettles' study of 953 black, white, and Hispanic doctoral students found that students of color were more likely than white students to perceive their institutions as racially discriminatory and had significantly lower grade point averages. Despite this, students of color felt more satisfied with their doctoral programs; the rationale for this satisfaction was not discussed. Nettles' conceptual model indicated that background characteristics (gender, socioeconomic status, and race or ethnicity) were directly related to undergraduate education. Undergraduate education had a direct relationship with transition between undergraduate and doctoral programs; the transition then related to graduate school experiences, and graduate school experiences in turn related to doctoral outcomes. xiv

Minority graduate students experience feelings of isolation and alienation, and have trouble building relationships with white faculty. In a survey of 204 Mexican American and American Indian doctoral students, Williamson & Fenske found that role models from the same ethnicity and gender as the student were especially significant to the production of doctoral recipients. The importance of same-sex role models is mirrored in LIS literature.

Even after Latino doctoral faculty have been recruited and supported through the program, they can still be lost in the transition point from being a doctoral recipient to taking a position on teaching faculty at a college or university. Less than half (42 percent) of Williamson

& Fenske's survey population expected to join college faculty after graduation. *viii University faculty positions have traditionally been filled by white males; "women faculty are much less satisfied with their positions than their male counterparts.... [and minority faculty] feel isolated and unsupported at work. *viii*

Women in particular have responsibilities in the home – child care, household maintenance, and supporting a spouse financially or emotionally – which may detract from their ability to meet the demands of the tenure system. Females are also more likely to teach in female-oriented disciplines^{xx} – like library science. A 1993 faculty survey found that female faculty tend to be younger than their male counterparts, with less education and less experience. They spend more time in teaching and service than male faculty, and were less likely to work in research-oriented universities.^{xxi} This is particularly noteworthy, as the majority of LIS doctoral recipients in the 1980s were female.^{xxii} The *ALISE Statistical Report* indicates that in the last two academic years, more female than male LIS faculty have been doctorate degree holders.^{xxiii}

Minority faculty feel that their student advising and counseling loads are heavier than those of non-minority faculty, while their pay may be lower and while they face discrimination. XXIV Black and Hispanic faculty tended to earn less than white faculty, and were less likely to be tenured. XXV White faculty were more likely than black and Hispanic faculty to have a doctoral degree, and Hispanic faculty were more likely to teach in 2-year colleges than white faculty, and were more likely to be employed in the Southwestern United States. XXVI LIS literature has advocated the presence of faculty of color for fostering an ethnically diverse student population at the Masters level. "The importance of minority faculty members in predominantly White institutions cannot be overemphasized." XXVII Beyond the teaching, research,

and service normally expected of faculty members, faculty of color also become mentors and supporters of students of color. xxviii

However, doctorate production in LIS has lagged behind doctorate production in fields such as social work, public administration, and communications. *xxix* Reeling notes that in the 1980s, a "higher percentage of doctorate recipients ... were black than was the case for the total population of doctorate recipients. The majority of LIS doctorate recipients were older, with a median age of 41 years, and female, "xxxx* but only 35 percent of 1990 LIS doctoral recipients intended to teach. *xxxi* Respondents to a survey of deans and directors indicated that several had recently made "efforts to advertise for minority applicants." While the demand for Latino LIS doctorate recipients is considerable, the supply is not.

Method

This project used an exploratory, qualitative methodology. In-depth, semistructured interviews were conducted with eight Latino LIS professionals who were active in their fields, involved in LIS issues, and able to articulate the concerns of Latino librarians generally and illustrate their own cases specifically. A survey would have restricted respondents to short answers chosen by the investigator, but the interview encouraged respondents to use their own words, share their experiences, and introduce subjects that the investigator might have overlooked. Interviews were conducted via telephone, tape recorded, and transcribed; the transcriptions were evaluated for trends and commonalities. In order to preserve their anonymity, comments are labeled as being provided only by Respondent A, Respondent B, and so on.

Of the eight respondents, six (75 percent) were female and two (25 percent) were male.

This reflected the gender distribution in the profession. **xxxiii* Five were employed as academic

librarians. One was employed as a public library manager, and three had previously been employed as public librarians. Two were employed in non-library fields at the time of the interviews. One respondent was a recent MLS graduate with extensive experience working with Latino communities. The rest had over five years of professional experience, and six had over 15 years of experience. One respondent had a doctoral degree, and one was pursuing a doctoral degree. Neither of these had decided to pursue an LIS doctorate.

Some of the interviewees had made a commitment to LIS education through involvement in LIS school advisory boards, mentoring, previous adjunct teaching, and guest lecturing.

Respondent A did guest lectures at an LIS school. Respondents C and G served on advisory boards, and Respondent D was active on the advisory board of an LIS education foundation.

Respondent C mentored LIS students and new librarians, explaining, "Somebody mentored me through all of my programs, and I'm just passing the gift of whatever expertise or help I can share based on my experience." Respondent B had done adjunct teaching in an LIS school earlier in her career, and indicated that mentors were crucial in her decision to enroll in a doctoral program. Given the high levels of achievement of all the respondents, these results may not be generalizable to every Latino LIS professional.

Results

Several themes emerged from discussions with Latino LIS professionals which explained a lack of formal commitment to LIS education. Themes of isolation from academe, ethnocentrism within LIS education, financial concerns, and personal concerns were evident when discussing LIS education and teaching with these respondents.

Isolation from the Academy. Respondents named several individual problems which, when taken as a whole, speak to a larger one: a perceived isolation of the academy which separates LIS faculty from LIS professionals, their universities, and their communities.

Respondent A noted a lack of interdepartmental relationships between LIS programs and Chicano studies or bilingual education programs, while Respondent F noted the lack of relationship between the Association for Library and Information Science Education and the ethnic caucuses of ALA. "I can't think of the last time I noticed somebody from a library school, a faculty member, attend any of our [ethnic caucus] meetings. They have their conference beforehand, and then they leave just as we're starting to get there," she said, referring to the ALISE conference taking place before the ALA Midwinter conference. And Respondent E echoed the common concern that LIS faculty are disconnected from libraries, especially public library branches in multicultural neighborhoods.

Respondent B said, "LIS schools really need to reach the community, get the support of the other Latino organizations in local area.... I think the community has always been a strong part of who we [Latinos] are." When asked if she had seen LIS schools involved in community action or outreach, Respondent B answered with a definite "No." Respondent D had to think for a full minute before coming up with an example of an LIS professor active in the community, and Respondent F said about a particular school, "The connection to the community wasn't there.... There's a lot going on, on campus, that impacted minority students, and there never was much participation from the [LIS] school. All of [the action] sort of just went right by it."

Several respondents indicated that they would need to have an invitation – an active solicitation – before they would presume to approach an LIS school. When Respondent A was asked how LIS schools could get committed Latino librarians like herself to teach as adjuncts,

she responded, "I think you just have to ask. We're not in the education world, so that's out of our experience.... If you can recognize librarians who know the literature and can do this, you just have to ask." Respondent D said, "If you wanted to get more involvement, maybe identify professionals who would contribute to a curriculum, or maybe just to a class. I guess then you would need to invite them, to see if they would be interested in participating." When asked how LIS schools could encourage more Latino professionals into teaching, Respondent G replied, "As for adjunct instructors, [schools] have no excuse. I don't even see them trying.... I don't seem them going around to people and asking them, 'would you be an adjunct instructor?' And as far as getting the doctorate, that doesn't happen either. I don't see people trying to get Latino librarians to get their doctorates." Respondent C added, "I don't think many Latino librarians know about doing this, and if they do, I think they probably think their hands are full with professional activities.... I don't think library schools are that proactive in trying ot get people with an ethnic background to be part of their [educational] programs."

Respondent B, who was earning her doctorate at the time of the interview, mentioned a lack of knowledge about the requirements of doctoral studies. "We need to do more with working with how to do research ... we need to do a lot more in the profession to talk about, what are the qualifications for a faculty member? How do I prepare myself to become a faculty member? ... If you're going to have adjunct professors, what do you want in an adjunct? How do you recruit them? ... What's the process for retention, promotion, tenure? Do I need to publish? If so, how do I increase my writing skills? How do I increase my research skills? What does it take to become an LIS teaching professional?"

Respondent D said, "I don't know whether Latino librarians think of [getting a doctorate] as an option, unless someone stimulated them into thinking that this is an option.... I don't think

I ever gave it much thought.... I don't know what would encourage people to do that option other than to make it more visible. Maybe there's a [conference] program that those who have earned a doctorate can do, where the option becomes more visible [to Latino LIS professionals]."

Ethnocentrism within LIS Education. Some participants talked about the lack of ethnic representation in their experiences with LIS education, while others discussed insensitivity toward students. This perception of ethnocentrism becomes a barrier to Latinos' participation in doctoral education. Said one respondent, "Our experiences, even when we were in [library school], were so intimidating that we don't go back."

Several respondents were disappointed with the low numbers of Latino faculty. Respondent A commented that the number of Latino faculty was "really, really terrible, and what's really awful is that library schools, they're not even fazed by this." Respondent H indicated that "more Latino educators and professors with real passion and expertise" would draw increased numbers of MLS students. She suggested offering "Lecturer, Instructor, and Assistant Professor status to experienced Latino librarians who are willing to teach. Right now I could name a few that could be teaching from their experience in the field.... Students getting their MLS should be recruited to continue on and become professors." One of the respondents told of her experience serving on an LIS school advisory board, "I'm the only voice in the advisory meetings that even brings [the need for Latino faculty] up. It's really, really difficult when you're one voice." Respondent B agreed that "the hiring of faculty, diverse faculty, is really critical."

However, there was a sense from respondents that LIS education would not be a comfortable career alternative. Respondent G said, "Particularly at the professorship level, the library school does not look like a place for us [Latinos]." Having followed the careers of several

multicultural LIS faculty, Respondent F concluded that, "There are very, very few [LIS] faculty who are tenured faculty or seem to be supported by the schools.... The schools seem to get away with it." She noted a distinct lack of support for multicultural studies in LIS education, and a move toward a more technology-oriented, less people-oriented profession. She said, "I thought about [getting a doctoral degree], and every so often still think about it. I would be more interested in working in a library school, but I just really don't see a fit, what with what's going on with library education in the last several years."

Some respondents noted cultural barriers which would prevent students from getting their MLS degrees and dissuade them from pursuing further education. When describing her experience with a specific school, Respondent A said, "You've got to have a really thick skin to be able to put up with the attitudes.... When I was in library school, you so much as try to do cooperative learning and you were called a leech; you were chastised for working in groups." She also noted that she had spoken to a woman who had been discouraged from studying library use within her own ethnic community. Respondent E said that he had observed a situation in which a faculty member consistently mispronounced a Latino student's name. "Things like that, although they seem like little things, they were enough to drive him away from the [LIS] program.... For anyone who's done ESL teaching, it's obvious: one of the things you can do to make the classroom more welcoming is to be cognizant of not only cultural factors, but you know, getting someone's name right."

Respondent F described a situation in which a Latina student was getting lost in the system at a library school, "The whole thing was just so artificial. The school acknowledged, without really acknowledging, that they had nothing for this woman in their school and that there was no one who could help her." Respondent B noted that, "If [Latino students] don't get the

opportunity for mentoring, [or a sense that the faculty] really understand their cultural differences, there's a great opportunity for people to drop out."

Several respondents felt that the lack of ethnic diversity in the curriculum dissuades

Latino students from pursuing doctoral curriculum. "One thing LIS educators can do, if they
have a [goal of] recruiting more Latinos into the field, is including Latino studies, infusing that
into the whole curriculum," said Respondent G. Respondent H said, "Courses in collection
development, book selection, outreach services, programming especially designed to address the
needs of the ethnic minorities would be a start." According to Respondent A, "[Library schools]
do nothing with bilingual education, don't even try to understand the issues.... The one course
that approaches libraries as a whole, approaches libraries from a management perspective and
not from an outreach perspective. Why don't we have any courses on outreach or
programming?"

Respondent C said, "I think that serving multicultural communities, understanding different ethnic groups, all of that should be integrated or diffused throughout the curriculum." Respondent E suggested that professors should be "willing to devote their time in class to talking about language issues or cultural issues in the delivery of information services.... If professors were willing to make that part of the meat and potatoes of their course, that that might just strike a chord with students who are from [culturally diverse] backgrounds."

Financial Concerns: Respondents were very concerned about the cost of doctoral education. Financial concerns were mentioned by a majority of interviewees, with a definite indication that increased financial aid was necessary to attract people to doctoral programs.

Respondent G said, "Latino students want to do something meaningful. They're not particularly attracted to corporate America, but they have financial burdens that need to be addressed." Said

Respondent A, "In order for you to go to graduate school, you can't just have your tuition paid and not have any kind of income. ... There's not enough financial aid out there, and more and more, Latinos shy away from [taking out educational] loans." Respondent B said, "Oftentimes economics plays a significant part. [Students] have to go back and work to provide help for the family ... so that takes a longer bit of time to graduate.... [Financial aid] is critical." Referring to a Latina librarian who was earning her Ph.D., Respondent F said, "She's unusual in being able to do it. It's very expensive."

Time is also a critical concern to working professionals. Respondent D said, "You know, going to school and getting the doctorate is something that will require time.... When most people think of the doctoral degree, they think of a lot of time and energy." Respondent B said, "I'm working on my doctorate ... I went every Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday for eight hours, once a month. The class was only four days a month, but it was intense.... It enabled me to work full time and still go to school."

Respondents also considered the expense of career advancement that might be jeopardized by spending too much time on doctoral studies. "[Latino librarians] probably think that [the benefit of participating in LIS education is] more indirect than being on a committee, that serving on that committee would help them in their job or at their home library," said Respondent C. Respondent D added, "It could be financial, where you're working very hard to get your MLS degree and then working for a living, you get immersed in a career track where your [advancement] is based very much on a work experience type of exposure."

Personal and Family Concerns: Personal and family concerns were least mentioned, and considering the success of this group, clearly they have found ways to work around personal and family concerns to further their education. However, Respondent B noted that for first-generation

college students, families are not able to be as supportive as they would like to be. She added, "If you're the first to go to college, sometimes your family doesn't really understand what's involved."

In addition, the time commitment necessary for completing doctoral coursework means that less time is available for personal and family commitments. Respondent A said, "People like me, who are ready to teach ... I would have to go back to school and get a Ph.D., at age 51.... It's too intimidating, starting all over again, having to tackle a totally different animal, with tenure and all that." Even younger people are daunted by the idea of the time commitment for doctoral studies. Respondent G said, "I recently have really developed an interest in [pursuing a doctoral degree]; I think it would be great to be a library school educator, but I've got to tell you, I'm already 37 years old. And that can be a barrier, the age at which we come to librarianship."

Respondent D said, "I don't know whether many of us even consider the doctorate degree.... It's the [MLS] that gives you an opportunity to enter the profession. I don't know whether there's much of a focus or outreach for people to think ... that there's still that doctorate degree there. We're all eager to just find some work and begin a career."

Implications for LIS Educators and Librarians

Literature suggests that transitional loss rates, family responsibilities, and a lack of role models or mentors are barriers for producing faculty of color. The Latino LIS professionals interviewed here have indicated that other potential barriers include the isolation of faculty from the community, ethnocentric attitudes, and a lack of communication with LIS faculty. As these barriers are identified, LIS educators must ask, "How can we help prospective Latino faculty overcome these barriers?"

To create Latino doctoral students, LIS programs might consider beginning an active recruitment campaign among their alumni or current students. Per the suggestion of one of the respondents, this campaign should tell prospective doctoral students exactly what is involved in doctoral education, from the GRE to the defense. Flexible class schedules would appear to be essential, as most Latino librarians cannot quit their jobs to pursue full-time doctoral studies. A support system for doctoral students of color is necessary, and not just to provide financial support. Writing and research advice, teaching experience, and social networking should be provided. A community service component might be added, to connect Latino resident students to the type of cultural environments they might have left behind.

LIS educators have to share the necessary requirements for becoming faculty, as well as the excitement and joy to be had in research and teaching. Many Latino LIS professionals are already qualified to be adjunct faculty, available for teaching classes in basic or specialized subjects, and serving as role models to Latino students – but do not wish to put themselves forward. Others want to pursue doctoral degrees, but have not been encouraged to do so. The current LIS faculty need to open the door for them to become involved, and invite them to become the next generation of LIS faculty.

Of the struggle to recruit and retain librarians of color, Kravitz writes, "If as a profession we want to continue to recruit and retain talented librarians of color, then we need to first acknowledge the barriers to advancement and second and most importantly, work to eliminate them." This is equally true for recruiting and retaining Latino LIS faculty. The Latino LIS professionals interviewed herein have suggested that communication is key. LIS educators may feel that some of these charges are untrue or unjust, but the truthfulness of these comments is not

at issue. The larger issue here is the perception that Latino LIS professionals have of LIS education, and what LIS faculty will have to do to change those perceptions.

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