

Library Access Midwest Program (LAMP): A Regional Initiative to Recruit and Retain Diverse Professionals

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LAMP Emergence

Schools of library and information science (LIS) in the Midwest have long-standing traditions offering exemplary educational programs. While many outstanding professionals emerge from regional schools, racial and ethnic diversity has not been achieved in these institutions. In consequence, libraries in this region have considerable difficulty recruiting diverse staff from the limited pools of candidates emerging from these programs. These deficits are reflected in the service regional institutions provide. As Reese notes, “the lack of ethnic minority librarians in administrative or management positions within the library profession has had a devastating impact on the quality of library service available to the ethnic minority community...The shortage of ethnic minority staffing in these situations impairs the [overall] quality of the library.”¹

Recognizing the negative impact inherent in perpetuating a homogenous pool of library and information science graduates in the region, leaders from several regional LIS schools and academic libraries gathered in Chicago in April, 2005 to discuss the current state of minority representation, or lack thereof, in the library schools and libraries. Participants included faculty and

administrators from Dominican University, Kent State University, University of Chicago, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Iowa, University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. All of these institutions, except the University of Chicago, house schools of LIS (in addition to an academic library). This group considered many issues and options for change. Participants concurred with Reese in that “there is a very real need to funnel more minority students into the pipeline of graduate school programs in library and information science in order to produce more ethnic minority librarians.”²

In considering strategies to improve recruitment and retention, it could be argued that some of the current shortage be addressed by hiring from outside the region. However, this solution has considerable limitations. According to the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), only 17 percent of librarians move to other regions to seek employment.³ In addition, external recruits, especially those without local support networks, are less likely to thrive and/or remain in positions. Thus, even if pools of candidates were available, it would be illogical for Midwestern libraries and the

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communities they serve to rely on hiring staff from other areas, especially when there is so much potential to draw on the diversity that already exists in the region. A single-institution initiative could also be considered. However, the resources, options, and impact afforded by a sole institution are limited. As Aire notes, “it takes a family to graduate a minority library professional.”⁴ Pooling institutional resources offers more and broader opportunities and supports stronger recruitment and retention outcomes.

In order to increase the number of LIS graduates from underrepresented groups in the Midwest, a regional approach promoting collaboration between LIS schools and major libraries was proposed. As Wheeler and Hanson explain, both libraries and library schools must commit to seeking solutions to underrepresentation. “Libraries, as stake holders, must now become major players and contributors to the educational careers of their future staff. Library and information science schools and programs must be supported and held accountable for demonstrating sustained commitment.”⁵ To this end, a regional alliance of library schools and academic libraries committed to creating, retaining, and promoting a diverse workforce was formed. Regional representatives call this collaborative initiative Library Access Midwest Program (LAMP). In 2006, LAMP received funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and representatives from a ninth institution, Wayne State University, began collaborating.

LAMP Goals

LAMP seeks to develop and implement a model for the promotion of careers in LIS, with special emphasis on recruitment of students from statistically and historically underrepresented populations, drawing on the efforts and resources of a regional alliance dedicated to this goal. Involving multiple institutions enables a strong support network for LAMP scholars. It also increases flexibility for scholars in terms of finding the right fit, seeking areas of specialization, and accommodating personal and professional situations as they progress through their studies.

Specifically, LAMP aims to:

1. Foster collaboration between regional library schools and academic libraries in order to develop a comprehensive regional recruitment model.
2. Proactively recruit promising undergraduate students to participate in activities and events designed to increase their awareness of career opportunities in LIS.

3. Create a regional support network for undergraduates considering educational options and careers in LIS providing access to peers and professionals who will guide and encourage them.

4. Provide financial support in the form of internships, fellowships, and assistantships for LAMP scholars.

5. Significantly increase the diversity of students in LIS schools in the region, and subsequently, the professional workforce.

These goals are discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

1. Develop a collaborative recruitment model

In keeping with Wheeler and Hanson’s observation that “efforts to change the face of librarianship have overlooked a prime source of the prospective non-traditional librarians in our midst every day: the ranks of undergraduates,”⁶ representatives from LAMP institutions are collaborating in developing and implementing a recruitment model to attract students. As library staff at major academic libraries have access to large pools of undergraduate student workers, they are charged with identifying students with potential for graduate study and careers in librarianship each year to participate in LAMP. Special attention is given to attracting college juniors, who could benefit from participation in LAMP activities during the most critical period for considering graduate school options and completing the application process. In addition, particular emphasis on identifying members of underrepresented populations is encouraged.

Each institution employs strategies that fit their local context to recruit students into the LAMP. For example, these strategies include announcements in staff listservs and newsletters, asking supervisors to identify and nominate potential candidates, partnering with other local organizations to offer general information sessions for students, etc. The LAMP website serves as a clearinghouse for promotional materials (both those developed for specific institutions as well as links to more general resources available through organizations like the American Library Association (ALA) and its affiliates) as well as listings of all of the LAMP promotional strategies. Thus, other institutions are able to borrow ideas and materials to apply to their own initiatives.

2. Early recruitment activities

Speaking on current recruitment theory, Winston presents several factors which impact recruitment of underrepresented students into LIS, including:

- influence of role models;
- experience in libraries as support staff or student assistants;
- knowledge and appreciation of LIS work and working environments;
- availability of financial aid and scholarships.⁷

Building on previously developed recruitment models, LAMP employs a multifaceted approach to recruitment, incorporating all of the factors cited above into its initiatives. The two principal segments of early recruitment are summer institutes and internships:

a. Summer institutes

LAMP will facilitate an intensive summer program in which potential LIS scholars (identified by regional librarians), current LIS students, and mentors will gather at a host institution (rotation annually among LAMP members) for a concentrated exploration of the opportunities in LIS. Employers, LIS faculty, current LIS students, and library faculty and professionals will address these issues, and emphasis will be placed on building a sense of community.

Topics will provide students with new knowledge of:

- the full range of careers in librarianship
- library systems
- principles and methods of project development and research
- information technology and information literacy

In addition, field trips to local libraries and other cultural centers to foster exploration and group building and strengthen interactions between research institutions and community-based civic and youth organizations will be incorporated in the institute. The University of Wisconsin-Madison will host this first institute in 2007.

b. Summer internships

LAMP library partners will develop summer internship opportunities for students to allow them to gain new experiences in LIS and work closely with professional librarians. Internships ranging from three to six weeks will be available. Sufficient internships will be developed to meet the demand of students participating in the summer institute. Although some students may not be able to participate in internships because of other responsibilities, it is hoped that the range of venues and flexibility of duration will facilitate participation by most.

Internships will provide LAMP scholars “with a picture of the varied and challenging kinds of work in

which librarians engage.” Wheeler and Hanson identify this “first-hand familiarity with the field through personal acquaintance” as a key factor influencing individual’s “choice of librarianship as a career.”⁸

3. Regional support network

Each participating institution is charged to identify librarians, LIS educators, and experienced peers interested in serving as LAMP mentors. Their names, profiles, and contact information is accessible on the LAMP website. Mentors are committed to supporting LAMP scholars in all phases of participation, from early recruitment through completion of the professional degree. As LAMP scholars progress through the program, it is anticipated that their mentoring roles will also shift from one of being mentee to mentor, thus perpetuating growth and effectiveness.

Mentors who live within close proximity of scholars will contact them and be available to provide information and support both in person and through other means of communication. As part of LAMP summer institute and internship activities, scholars will have additional opportunities to connect with mentors from other regional institutions. As well, both scholars and mentors will be encouraged to initiate contact with each other based on mutual interests.

During the summer institute, LAMP scholars will be introduced to Internet communication technologies designed to promote collaboration between scholars and mentors on an ongoing basis. During the academic year, participants will have opportunities for engagement in both asynchronous (via electronic bulletin boards) as well as synchronous (live seminars and discussions) modes. In addition, online gatherings, informal discussions and formal presentations will be used to maintain and enhance relationships formed during the initial stages of the program and allow scholars to broaden their support networks.

4. Financial support

LAMP scholars will be identified for demonstrating professional promise. In order to foster their development, financial support for study in the form of assistantships and scholarships is necessary. According to Reese, this is especially important for increasing diverse representation because “once potential ethnic minority students have decided that they are interested in pursuing the graduate program in library and information science, the greatest obstacle is financial...Special funding to support library education for ethnic minority students

is essential.”⁹ Upon entering LIS graduate programs, LAMP scholars will be eligible for twelve months of fellowship support (including full tuition waivers).

5. Increase professional diversity

LAMP recruitment strategies present a flexible, multi-faceted model to attract and support potential students in considering LIS careers, entering regional LIS programs, and subsequently moving into professional positions. These strategies are particularly important to provide points of entry for students from underrepresented populations. As part of the program, each library is charged with identifying two potential students each year to participate for a total of 16 LAMP scholars per year. LAMP collaborators anticipate nearly all of these scholars will decide to pursue graduate study. Even with only 75 percent participation, the number of students from underrepresented populations in regional LIS schools could double within five years of project initiation.¹⁰

LAMP participants are working to develop effective regional recruitment and retention strategies for LIS. The strategies will seek to increase both the number and quality of applicants seeking education and subsequent careers in the field. Highly qualified, well-supported, diverse cohorts of incoming students will significantly benefit:

1. the quality of regional educational programs;
2. the institutions where graduates find employment; and
3. the communities served by library staff.

Looking Ahead

LAMP collaborators recognize that critical, long-standing challenges, such as underrepresentation of minorities in LIS programs and in the library profession, require long-range commitments, large-scale solutions, and a degree of institutional altruism. With that in mind, organizations pledge to remain involved in LAMP for at least five years, and they understand that in any given year, there may be no direct benefits to their individual

organization, though each participating organization can and should expect to see improvements in quality and diversity over time. Fundamentally, participants understand that a single institution working alone cannot address the problems of recruitment as effectively as a regional cooperative of different kinds of institutions is able to do and they are committed to working together to find creative, effective, and sustainable solutions. Additional information about current and future LAMP activities is available at www.lisaccess.org.

Notes

1. Gregory L. Reese, “Library Schools and Recruiting Ethnic Minorities,” in *Stop Talking, Start Doing! Attracting People of Color to the Library Profession*, ed. Gregory L. Reese and Ernestine L. Hawkins (Chicago: American Library Association, 1999), 87.
2. *Ibid.*, 88.
3. Association of College and Research Libraries, *Recruitment, Retention, and Restructuring: Human Resources in Academic Libraries* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2002), 16.
4. Camila A. Alire, “Mentoring on my Mind: It Takes a Family to Graduate a Minority Library Professional,” *American Libraries* 28 (1997): 41.
5. Maurice B. Wheeler and Jacqueline Hanson, “Improving Diversity: Recruiting Students to the Library Profession,” *Journal of Library Administration* 21 (1995): 142.
6. *Ibid.*, 139.
7. Mark Winston, “The Role of Recruitment in Achieving Goals Related to Diversity,” *College and Research Libraries* 59, no. 3 (1998): 240–47.
8. Wheeler and Hanson, “Improving Diversity: Recruiting Students to the Library Profession,” 140.
9. Reese, “Library Schools and Recruiting Ethnic Minorities,” 95–96.
10. Based on data presented in Association for Library and Information Science Education, *Library and Information Science Education Statistical Report 2003*, <http://ils.unc.edu/ALISE/2003/Contents.htm>.