

*Project Title:* Future of Youth Public Librarian Education; *Category:* Lifelong learning; *Maturity Level:* Exploratory

## Introduction

The School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the State Library of North Carolina propose a one-year National Forum Grant (\$150,000). Over twelve months, we will facilitate a national conversation — to include roundtables with LIS faculty at ALISE and practitioners at ALA Midwinter, a website, webinars, and social media - to broaden and deepen our understanding of the future of LIS youth services education. The capstone activity will bring together 40 innovators, scholars, and practitioners from LIS and related fields to Chapel Hill, NC for a two-day, intensive exploration of today's youth and the developing trends in youth services in public libraries to imagine how higher education LIS curricula could change to meet the needs of future youth library professionals. This project will address the IMLS Strategic Plan for 2018-2022 goals of **building capacity** through “community dialogue,” “identifying trends,” and “sharing best practices and innovations” and **achieving excellence** through “incorporating new ideas” for “attracting an effective and dedicated workforce.”

The Future of Youth Public Librarian Education project will achieve these goals through collaborative brainstorming, experience sharing, and collective data analysis, as we explore the future skills, content knowledge, and social awareness needs of youth librarians. This project will be led by PI Brian W. Sturm and Co-PIs Sayamindu Dasgupta, Sandra Hughes-Hassell, and Casey H. Rawson. (Project team bios are available at <http://ysfuture.web.unc.edu>).

## Statement of National Need

As public libraries extend their purview from information centers to community engagement centers of experiential, connected, and informal learning; as definitions of literacy expand to include digital, media, computational, and critical literacies, among others; and as the nation becomes a more pluralistic and diverse society, youth librarians need new skills and an expanded knowledge base to fill current and future positions. Recognizing this, ALSC and YALSA revised their professional competencies to include concepts such as cultural competency, formal and informal learning environments, youth and family engagement, and equity of access. To support practicing youth librarians, both have developed continuing education programs that focus on topics such as career and college readiness, media literacy, connected learning, design thinking, and coding. Members of this project team recently completed and released the IMLS-funded Project READY online racial equity curriculum to address gaps in cultural competency and equity of access among youth services librarians. While these efforts are important steps toward ensuring that librarians can meet the needs of today's youth, they are primarily opt-in offerings.

Other national forums have addressed the future of LIS education in general, but this will be the first focused on youth services curricula. As a preliminary environmental scan, we examined the top 2017 *US News and World Report* youth services programs' course offerings and conducted a national survey of recent graduates with LIS degrees. Our analysis of course titles and descriptions suggests that most schools continue to emphasize traditional library skills such as reference, cataloging, and collection management and offer traditional youth services courses such as children's and young adult literature and library programs and services for youth. Few offer youth courses addressing more recently identified competencies such as cultural competency, social justice, community engagement, or digital literacy. Preliminary, unpublished findings from our survey echo these findings that graduates feel prepared for traditional roles but not for the emerging demands of today's libraries. This evidence, paired with rapidly changing contexts for public library work, points to a need to reimagine LIS curricula on a national scale.

Our goal for this year-long project is to create a deeper understanding of the youth of today, their lived experiences, their challenges and aspirations and what that means for the education of public librarians serving youth. Our intent is to provide a platform for youth experts and advocates from LIS and related fields to engage in zero-based

thinking, so that future curricular decisions are guided by, but not limited by, past directions. We wish to be future-oriented and innovative in our approach to education while still being guided by the profession's core values.

## **Project Design**

**Phase 1: Facilitate National Conversation:** Identify advisory board members representing a broad spectrum of stakeholders. Develop the project website. Host roundtable discussions at ALISE 2020 and ALA Midwinter 2021. Host webinars and social media chats. Conduct an environmental scan focused on identifying the issues facing today's youth; understanding the perceptions of other youth-focused organizations that study and work to strengthen youth success in schools, youth programs, families, and communities; discerning what today's youth need to thrive, and establishing what innovative public libraries are already doing.

**Phase 2: Capstone Symposium:** Work with advisory board members and a trained professional workshop facilitator to plan a two-day symposium, including identifying potential participants. The resulting symposium will include keynote speakers, expert panel sessions, and facilitated brainstorming by participants. The symposium will be a working meeting; participants will be divided into working groups to explore questions and issues that emerged in Phase 1. The symposium will be fully documented by student assistants and project staff and will provide data for the final report and project website. Data will include evaluative feedback on the symposium itself from attendees.

**Phase 3: Deliverables, Dissemination, and Evaluation:** Conduct data analysis and generate a preliminary report that includes recommendations for curriculum changes, as well as next steps. The preliminary report will be shared with the advisory board and symposium participants for review and posted for public comment. The final report will be shared nationally.

## **Diversity Plan**

The proposed project will be interdisciplinary in nature, involving participants from a variety of domains and perspectives including LIS, education, learning sciences, media literacy, and information science. We also plan to engage a variety of stakeholder voices, such as: youth services librarians and library administrators, academics, educators and parents, youth-focused nonprofits, afterschool coalitions and providers, and youth themselves. We will actively recruit participants of color and participants from other marginalized groups, and participants who work in communities that are geographically and demographically diverse.

## **National Impact/Dissemination**

The forum should engender a refreshed vision for the future of youth services librarian education, informed by interdisciplinary conversation and collaboration. We anticipate the outcomes including a nationally disseminated report and publicly available website of the ideas generated throughout the year-long project, along with recommendations for the curriculum changes necessary to address them. These materials should have value for stakeholders beyond those who participate in the project itself, including LIS program deans and directors, LIS faculty, LIS professional organizations including ALSC and YALSA, and ALA's Committee on Accreditation, among others. The long-term intent of this project is to serve as a call to action for future work with other LIS educators to develop and implement a new curriculum for youth services librarianship via a Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian proposal.

## **Budget Summary**

The estimated budget for this project is \$150,000. The proposed budget will support personnel (PI and Co-PI summer stipends plus fringe benefits, 7 student assistants on an hourly basis (\$58,017); participant support costs for food, travel, lodging, room rental, honoraria, and equipment and supplies for the symposium (\$58,993), travel for the Project team to ALISE and ALA Midwinter to disseminate results (\$6,900), IT support (\$2,000) and indirect costs at the negotiated rate of 36% for eligible costs (\$24,090).