

Building Bridges Across Cultures: Meeting the Information Needs of the Hispanic Community

Pittsburg State University is seeking funding of \$530,334 and contributing \$360,105 in Cost Share (Total \$890,439) for a Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program Grant to supply scholarships and mentoring for 25 teachers from Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Arkansas who are Hispanic and/or teaching in one of 22 partnering districts with Hispanic student populations ranging from 10% to greater than 50%.

Statement of Broad Need. In 2013, PSU was awarded an IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program grant with the goal of empowering future school librarians with knowledge of regional American Indian culture to better serve students and tribes in schools and communities. 92% of participants responded that the project made a difference in their ability to apply culturally responsive teaching practices to meet the information needs of American Indian students, along with an enhanced ability to include diversity in their everyday teaching practices. A needs assessment given to local districts for the currently proposed project indicated that over 90% of respondents felt information needs of Hispanic students were not currently being met by the school or community library. 100% indicated their schools could benefit from having educators specifically trained in meeting the information needs of the Hispanic community, and that collaborating with community libraries to share Hispanic cultural resources would benefit their schools. Likewise, a 2017 IMLS report cited a lack of diversity in LIS graduates, supporting the need for improving diversity and cultural sensitivity in the field. Over the past 5 years, districts in the 4-state region of Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, and Oklahoma have experienced significant growth in Hispanic populations. In the state of Kansas, Hispanic student population ranks as the 2nd highest in the state and is the fastest growing demographic group. Districts report a growth trend with Hispanic student populations ranging from 10% - 65%. In contrast to the changing demographic makeup of the student population, the American Library Association reported in 2017 that 81% of school librarians identified as being Caucasian females, while only 4.7% identified as being Hispanic or Latino. IMLS statistics from the 2017 report also reinforce the need for formal education programs to be intentional and proactive in recruiting a diverse pool of future librarian candidates. As a result, we recognize a need to continue training future school librarians in the discipline of culturally relevant education. This project addresses the IMLS Lifelong Learning Category through cultivation of cultural competencies, helping candidates form a deeper understanding of other cultures and backgrounds through critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication.

Project Design. The project will recruit 25 teachers from Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Arkansas who are Hispanic and/or teaching in 1 of 22 identified partnering districts having Hispanic student populations ranging from 10% to more than 50%. Candidates will be provided a full scholarship to earn a Master of Science degree with a Library Media emphasis along with a laptop, all textbooks, and a stipend to provide funding for licensure tests, professional membership fees, and expenses associated with travel to leadership mentoring year meetings. The project will consist of 4 phases.

Phase 1 (4 months) begins with creation of an advisory council to oversee planning and progress, curricular and course changes, and candidate recruiting/selection. Through advisory council collaboration, program curriculum will be enhanced to heighten awareness of providing information services to Hispanic children and adults, strengthen existing culturally responsive methodologies, and cultivate partnerships with public libraries.

Phase 2 (2 months) includes planning and implementing a **Jump Start** experience in cooperation with the university library, local agencies, and [REFORMA](#) where project candidates will meet together as a cohort and be exposed to local and national speakers, events, and presentations emphasizing cultural expectations of the Hispanic community.

Phase 3 (18 months) will consist of 6 continuous semesters (4-16 week semesters, and 2-8 week summer terms) of coursework and field experience, resulting in a Master of Science degree with a Library Media emphasis. Program curriculum will focus on best practices for library and information science, technology

integration, and culturally responsive methodologies for learning and assessment along with an emphasis on critical thinking, leadership, creativity, and collaboration. Both project Co-Directors were faculty delivering all instruction and advising in the previous project and are for this project. They continually refine their expertise through practical research in culturally relevant teaching practices, library science, and online learning. Project Co-Director, Dr. Michelle Hudiburg, has been a licensed library media specialist in Kansas. She was part of the KSDE committee that revised both state library licensure standards and curricular content standards for library information and technology. Project Co-Director, Dr. Elizabeth Mascher, holds expertise in online learning and technology leadership. She has been instrumental in improving online learning experiences for university students, bringing new ideas for integrating practical experience into theory-heavy courses. The culmination of Phase 3 will see candidates taking required licensure exams.

Phase 4 (12 months) provides candidates supervised leadership experience through collaboration with community librarians and cultural experts. The goal of Phase 4 is to promote Hispanic cultural and literacy events, working with community librarians to learn the information needs of Hispanic children outside the school environment, creating virtual experiences/sites for meeting those needs, and sharing experiences with a national and international audience. As in the “*Jump Start*,” program leaders will cooperate with the university library, local agencies, and [REFORMA](#) to plan leadership experiences.

Diversity Plan. This project will address the information needs of traditionally underserved Hispanic individuals from PK-12 public schools in Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. As identified in the IMLS 2017 report, the project is designed to support the need for diversity in the library profession, ensuring members of the local Hispanic community have professional librarians who can serve as advocates and promote cultural change while championing an unbiased climate and curricula in schools. During the prior grant project, candidates expressed how ties to community gave them a “better understanding of the local Native American tribes, their cultures and histories.” The current project will further support this connection through the “*Jump Start*” experience, with exposure to local and national speakers, events, and presentations emphasizing cultural expectations of the Hispanic community. The Practicum (field experience) further supports this goal through completion of 120 hours of practical library experience, and will seek to include planning for cultural events, family programming, literature immersion, and other practical opportunities through strategic collaboration with community groups and public libraries.

Broad Impact. The project will reach the 4-state area and beyond through collaboration with others at local, regional and national levels. A professional network will be established through creation of a project Advisory Council consisting of program, ESOL, and university library faculty; alumna from the prior project; local public libraries; REFORMA; and partnering school districts to inform project activities and progress. Broadening the regional capacity to influence national needs for a diversified profession, the project will collaborate with REFORMA through online and in-person support for project candidates now and in the future. Project specific curriculum will be shared as OER and be available through Creative Commons licensing. Project results will be disseminated on a broad basis through conference proposals (ALA, AASL, KLA, etc.) and manuscript submissions to peer reviewed and trade journals for possible publication (School Libraries Worldwide, School Library Connection, School Library Journal, REFORMA newsletter, etc.), informing other library professionals on how this project strategically sought to target and recruit diverse individuals to the profession. Social media outlets, including the project hashtag and candidate blogs, will continue communicating project impact even after grant funding has ceased.

Budget. Estimated funding cost is \$890,439. Direct Costs (\$44,540 salaries, wages, and fringe benefits; \$29,360 travel; \$1,500 supplies, materials, and equipment; \$19,500 contracts and subawards; \$414,500 student support for tuition, books, laptop computer, mentoring year stipend, and professional membership fees) together with \$20,934 IDC and \$360,105 cost share.