

American Library Association

Spectrum Doctoral Fellowship Program: Catalysts for Change

In partnership with nine LIS degree doctoral programs, this project will recruit a cohort of 8-10 racially and ethnically diverse doctoral students focused on advancing racial equity and social justice in the LIS curriculum. The ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach Services, administrator of the Spectrum Scholarship Program, which has supported over 1,240 graduate students and 18 doctoral fellows, requests \$952,674 in funding from the IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian program to support a cohort of future LIS faculty committed to fostering racial equity through teaching and research while also building partnership models among degree programs to support new course development and cross-listing of courses in a social justice curricula.

Statement of Broad Need

The library profession suffers from a persistent lack of racial and ethnic diversity. In 2019, over 83 percent of librarians were White, non-Hispanic, while just 5.3 percent of librarians identified as Black/African American, 7.1 percent as Hispanic/Latino, and 3.5 percent as Asian American/Pacific Islander ([AFL-CIO Department for Professional Employees](#), 2020). And while there is promise - across the United States, enrollment of students of color in graduate programs is on the rise ([Okahana & Zhou](#), 2017) - the U.S. still maintains a seventy percent attrition rate for minority students ([Brunisma, Embrick, & Shin](#), 2017) and nearly two-thirds of Black doctoral candidates do not complete their degrees ([Joseph](#), 2012).

Within graduate programs, systematic oppression hinders the socialization process of students of color, resulting in an often exhausting and unpleasant graduate school experience ([Twale, Weidman, & Bethea](#), 2016). Multiple variables differentiate the graduate experience for students of color, including the persistence of racism and microaggressions, increased isolation, and unsupportive faculty and environments ([Brunisma, Embrick, & Shin](#), 2017; [Granados & Lopez](#), 1999). In alignment with IMLS' community catalysts category, this project supports a goal of building capacity for library workers to improve the well-being of their communities through the recruitment, training, and development of library and museum workforce with a central focus on the successful participation of students from diverse backgrounds.

Project Design

This four-year project, co-directed by Dr. Nicole Cooke and Gwendolyn Prellwitz, will provide Spectrum Doctoral Fellowships to up to 10 racially and ethnically diverse applicants. Fellowships include tuition and stipend for four years of study towards a PhD in LIS, participation in a diverse national cohort of peers, advisors and mentors, and support systems within their programs. Research shows cohort learning increases student feelings of belonging, confidence, and motivation while encouraging both academic and professional success (Yerks et al., 1995; Twale & Kochan, 2000).

ALA has engaged nine LIS doctoral degree programs as potential partners who will 1) collaboratively strengthen existing community pipelines for recruiting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) doctoral students; 2) provide tuition and stipend for fellows through the completion of the degree in combination with IMLS support; and 3) contribute teaching faculty to participate in the co-development of course(s) advancing racial equity and social justice. Courses will be taught to the cohort of fellows as a pilot and will be available for each program to re-offer.

This project will be guided by an Advisory Group of BIPOC tenure-track Assistant/Associate Professors from previous IMLS-funded doctoral diversity initiatives who will oversee the recruitment and selection of fellows, provide feedback on curriculum development, and serve as a mentoring network for fellows. Fellows will participate in monthly online affinity group sessions led by a racial

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healing/trauma intervention practitioner, receive guidance on specific topics (e.g. combatting isolation, imposter syndrome, discrimination and racism), consult mentors on academic progress, and build community as a cohort. Fellows, advisors, and faculty will convene at three doctoral institutes. While LIS doctoral colloquia focused on research exist, our institutes fill a gap by focusing on mentorship and career professionalization for BIPOC LIS faculty, exploration of alternatives to traditional modes of educational reform, and expanding ideas of intersectional justice.

Diversity Plan

A 100% BIPOC advisory group, teaching faculty with research backgrounds in racial equity and social justice, and a racial healing practitioner will design curricula and support systems centering the needs of racially and ethnically diverse graduate students. The project is led by individuals who have created and sustained initiatives that have bolstered LIS education's ability to recruit and retain students from diverse backgrounds such as the Spectrum Scholarship Program, Project Athena, UW's Indigenous Knowledge initiative, Knowledge River, and Circle of Learning. The project is designed around the strengths and opportunities identified through Project Athena and two prior rounds of Spectrum Doctoral Fellowships, utilizing a similar cohort model which has resulted in 83% of participants completing their degrees or being actively in progress. Combined, these two programs alone have matriculated 25 doctorates, 15 of whom have served as LIS faculty.

Broad Impact

By partnering with programs with connections to BIPOC communities through their existing faculty, ethnic studies departments, and recruiting pipelines, the project seeks to be a catalyst for change within each degree program for increased support for current faculty and doctoral students invested in racial equity and for the development of LIS learning spaces truly designed for BIPOC master's and doctoral students. The two courses developed by faculty will be available for reoffering by each of the partnering degree programs. Partnering degree programs will be encouraged to consider models such as the UW Indigenous Knowledge initiative. This project will have broad impact on existing and future recruitment and retention efforts as it will foster graduate programs being built around the needs of faculty and students of color and result in curricular change which will advance the entire profession's understanding of racial equity and social justice. These classes fill a current gap and need in doctoral curricula, only 21.3% of LIS graduates feel prepared to work with diverse populations, even librarians of color often feeling unprepared to work with other diverse populations (Subramaniam & Jaeger, 2011). The evaluation plan will focus not only on this project's outcomes, it will provide a state of the profession review of recent diversity initiatives to identify elements of progress and success in mitigating the effects of structural oppression in LIS graduate education.

Budget

The overall four-year project budget is \$1,461,411. ALA requests \$952,674 in grant funding. This budget includes \$187,650 in travel; \$19,500 in supplies and meeting expenses; \$105,000 for contracts for a racial healing facilitator and project evaluation; \$568,480 in student support; and \$72,044 in indirect costs at ALA existing federal rate of 23.08%. Should COVID-19 continue to impact travel, funding will be reallocated into additional Fellowships and virtual cohort building. ALA and partnering programs are providing \$508,737 in cost share on \$384,194 in direct costs excluding student support. While not noted in the formal cost share or total project costs, participating degree programs are contributing an additional \$1,297,830 of in-kind student support through tuition waivers and stipends for fellows.