

# **DIVERSITY AND EQUITY IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE (LIS)**

## **RECRUITMENT, EDUCATION, AND READINESS**

by R.N. Sharma

Libraries, Library Associations, and library schools have been talking about diversity for over thirty years in the United States but they have not succeeded in fully implementing it in the profession and in library schools. If you log on to Google and Yahoo, you will find over 5.5 and 6.1 million articles respectively on the subject in these two databases. Many conferences and seminars have been conducted all over the country on diversity but the situation has not improved. In my view, library schools have failed to attract more students from minority groups to join the schools because diversity has not been the primary goal of library schools. It has certainly created more problems rather than solving the existing problem.

During 2003-2004, a total of 26,521 students were enrolled in all degree programs in American and Canadian library schools offering B.A., M.L.S., and Ph.D. programs. 68.2% students in these programs were white, 5.6% black, 3.7% Hispanic, 4.4% Asian, and 0.4% of American origin. In fact, the picture has not changed much during the last ten years. About 10% of the student enrollment has been of minorities.

During 2003-2004, there were 783 faculty members in all library schools including 148 professors from minority groups and 635 white male and female professors.

It is clear from the above figures that library schools have not been successful in their efforts to recruit more minority students and faculty – why? Because there are many obstacles and barriers which have prevented administrators to complete their mission. If schools of Business Administration, Computer Science, Engineering, Law, and Medicine can attract many minority students and faculty, and appoint them as their deans and directors, why can't schools of Library and Information Science attract minorities? There are many reasons for it and we need to pay attention to them in order to be successful.

Lack of diversity is a wake up call to recruit. First of all, it is very important to hire more qualified faculty members from minority groups. There are many highly qualified and experienced professional librarians who have passion for teaching, have been active in research and publishing and have presented research papers in national and international conferences but have not been hired as professors. If a former chairman of a prestigious Asian university library school, who was educated in the United States, is working as a cataloger in a public library, it is a disgrace to the profession. If a highly qualified and experienced professional and a former professor from an Asian university is working as a south Asian librarian it is a disgrace to the profession. If a highly qualified and an active professional, who perhaps has published more than a majority of professors in the country and who always wanted to teach, is leading a small academic library, it is a disgrace and insult to his qualifications. In my view, talent has been wasted. Many minority librarians are under-employed and under-paid. Many minority librarians have accepted non-library positions with better salaries, and/or have left the country for good. It clearly shows that racism and discrimination is still alive in hiring practices in library

schools. At present, there are forty seven library schools in the United States but there is only one black dean. There is only one Asian and there is only one Hispanic serving as dean/director of library schools in this country. It shows that there is certainly something wrong in the selection process. How can you introduce diversity in library schools when you do not have minorities as deans and/or directors? How can you introduce diversity when you do not have enough faculty members and administrators from minority groups in your library schools? You need them to be mentors for your minority students. You need them to attract minority students because they know their culture, language and the needs of these would be students.

It is not healthy for library schools to hire a majority of their faculty from one race. In addition, library schools should introduce required courses in diversity and world cultures for all students and faculty to help them to understand diversity. According to Rush Mille, Director of The University of Pittsburgh Library, "we should make it our business not only to bring more people of color into librarianship, but we ought to see to it that they are nurtured and promoted to the positions we now hold...and until we share "leadership" and "authority" with others who are not like us (or most of us), we will not address these issues (of diversity, recruitment, retention, and readiness)."

Many minority students do not join library schools to become librarians because they know it will be difficult for them to find good jobs, even if they find one, it will be a dead end position for them with little or no chance for promotion and better salaries because of their color, religion, and nationality. A few years ago, a minority librarian joined the

profession but was very disappointed and wrote "one week after I celebrated my first anniversary...I found myself in tears...I cried because I felt the library administrators were not functioning as I thought they should...I felt that new approaches, focuses, and directions needed to be channeled into our library schools..."

The new approach should be to establish goals to recruit more minority students and faculty members and administrators, find ways to change behavior and attitudes of many professionals and faculty members. Only then will we succeed. "While diversity, recruitment, retention, and placement are important, they must be reinforced by sound management and leadership... Progressive management upholds the integrity of diversity and maintains fairness on a long-term basis. Diversity and sound management should be integrated into one set of management practices."

We need to educate people including search committees, deans/directors, chairs, and faculty members of library schools about the realities of the changing America of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For your information, 31% of the population at present in the United States is now of minorities and by 2050, over 50% of the population will be of minorities.

Therefore, many role models and better mentors from minority groups are needed to make diversity a reality in this nation's library schools. Otherwise, someone else from outside the profession will take over and solve the problem for us.

In my view, diversity will make library education and the profession of librarianship more colorful, stronger, attractive, better, challenging, meaningful, and progressive. In addition, it will bring more variety and quality into library schools and library education. Harvard University has decided to spend \$50 million to make faculty more diverse, more

minority faculty members will be hired and present faculty members will be taught the importance of diversity. Library schools should also come up with a solid plan to hire more minority faculty and implement it. Only then will the present picture change.

Forty seven universities in the United States have over one billion dollars each in their endowments, including four states which have seven library schools. These schools should get money from their administrators for scholarships to attract minority students because there are not enough scholarships like the spectrum scholarship program from the American Library Association for students of library schools. All library schools should be held responsible if they fail to recruit more minority students and faculty for the benefit of the profession. Minority librarians can help library schools to enroll more minority students and even minority faculty. You need commitment to diversity – only then will you succeed. It should be the top priority in all library schools for the twenty first century. It should be achieved in the next five to ten years. I am confident that it will result in a healthier atmosphere and start attracting ethnic minorities to library schools on a regular basis. Eventually, diversity will become a natural part of library schools and library education. Until this happens, we will have to keep working as a team to achieve our goal of diversity.

R.N. Sharma is Dean of the University Library, Monmouth University,  
West Long Branch, NJ, USA.