

Diversity Action Plan
Rare Books and Manuscripts Section,
Association of College and Research Libraries,
A Division of the American Library Association

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RBMS Task Force on Diversity
Julie Grob, Chair
Caroline Duroselle-Melish
James Fox
Adan Griego
Suzy Taraba

Note: This version of the Diversity Action Plan has been modified slightly for publication on the web.

I. Introduction

Anyone who has attended an RBMS Preconference will have observed that RBMS is not a racially or ethnically diverse organization. A member survey conducted in 1997 by the RBMS Membership Committee revealed that 96% of the members were white. This lack of diversity is a trend for academic librarianship in general - a 1998 ALA survey of academic librarians found that 87% were white. However the trend is particularly strong in special collections librarianship, perhaps because the field is historically linked to the privileged world of rare book and manuscript collecting.

In 2002, the RBMS Executive Committee took two significant steps towards furthering diversity in the section. One was to approve a Statement on Diversity, which can be found on the section's web site at <http://www.rbms.nd.edu/about/index.shtml#diversity>. The other was to appoint a Task Force on Diversity, which would work on an action plan to encourage diversity in the section. The task force was given the following charge:

Charge of the RBMS Task Force on Diversity

The committee will investigate ways to promote diversity in the RBMS section. Specifically, it will:

-explore strategies for encouraging librarians of various backgrounds, particularly underrepresented ethnic and racial groups, to join RBMS;

-examine the broader issue of promoting Special Collections librarianship as a career to members of underrepresented ethnic and racial groups; and

-develop an action plan of recommended steps for RBMS to follow in order to foster increased diversity in the section. These steps should include expanding existing activities and establishing new initiatives.

While the RBMS Statement on Diversity is quite broad, encouraging participation in the section by “people of any race, color, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, and physical ability,” the charge of the Task Force on Diversity is more narrowly focused on people from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. It was felt that the most glaring problem for RBMS is the section’s lack of racial and ethnic diversity, and that a focused plan for addressing this critical issue would be more successful than a broad plan that tried to address all diversity issues.

The Task Force on Diversity chose to structure the action plan around a set of five goals which are drawn directly from the task force’s charge:

- 1. To encourage librarians of various backgrounds, particularly underrepresented ethnic and racial groups, to join RBMS*
- 2. To promote Special Collections librarianship as a career to members of underrepresented ethnic and racial groups*
- 3. To liaise and pursue initiatives with other groups that focus on diversity or diverse collections*
- 4. To encourage Special Collections in collecting materials from diverse communities*
- 5. To promote diversity as a value to RBMS members*

II. Implementation of Action Plan

In crafting an action plan for RBMS, the Task Force on Diversity chose to focus on strategic actions that would have potentially high impact on the organization while at the same time being practical and achievable. Because RBMS has a great deal of work ahead of it in promoting diversity, the task force felt it best to concentrate on specific actions which can reasonably be expected to be carried out.

Each strategic action lists the party responsible for implementing the item, and the party responsible for oversight of that implementation. Wherever possible, implementation has been assigned to an existing committee, in order to diffuse the activity of promoting diversity throughout the section. In some cases, action items do not fall naturally under the purview of an existing committee. For this reason, The Task Force on Diversity (which was appointed for a one-year term) recommends that the Executive Committee form a new Diversity Action Plan Implementation Task Force to carry out those action items. The Diversity Action Plan Implementation Task Force could also serve as a contact point for committees who are carrying out strategic actions related to diversity, and ensure continuity of message and coordination of effort across various committees.

By necessity, the RBMS Executive Committee must provide oversight for the implementation of most of the strategic actions in the Diversity Action Plan. Regular progress reviews by the Executive Committee will help ensure that the Diversity Action Plan becomes an effective blueprint for substantive and ongoing change.

III. Action Plan

Goal 1. To encourage librarians of various backgrounds, particularly underrepresented ethnic and racial groups, to join RBMS

Strategic Actions:

A. Offer Preconference scholarships to librarians from underrepresented ethnic and racial groups

Rationale: Librarians from underrepresented ethnic and racial groups who work with special collections materials may be interested in RBMS activities, but hesitant to attend a first RBMS Preconference for financial reasons. A scholarship would give some of these librarians the opportunity to attend a preconference, and could potentially lead them to become members and full participants in RBMS. Delineating one scholarship as being geared to librarians from underrepresented groups might encourage such a professional to apply, and would reinforce the public perception of RBMS' commitment to diversity.

Implementation: Rachel Howarth, who helped to develop the current RBMS scholarship program as a member of the Membership and Professional Development Committee, recommends that this scholarship be folded into the current scholarship program, which gives awards to first-time attendees to RBMS Preconference. One of these awards would now be reserved for librarians from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups who were also first-time attendees. If there are no applicants from among this demographic, the scholarship could go to another general applicant.

The scholarship program is currently administered by a member each from the Membership and Professional Development Committee, the Executive Committee, and the Budget Committee. A member from the Diversity Action Plan Implementation Committee should be added to this group.

The current scholarship program is hampered by the fact that it must depend on Preconference extra revenues for funding. The Task Force on Diversity encourages the Executive Committee to continue seeking more stable funding for the RBMS scholarship, and hopes that the diversity component may encourage outside funding whether from ALA or other sources.

Responsible Party: RBMS Membership and Professional Development Committee in conjunction with Diversity Action Plan Implementation Task Force.

Assessment/Oversight: RBMS Executive Committee

B. Expand buddy program to include mentoring for new members from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups

Rationale: The RBMS Buddy Program, which pairs new members with more experienced members, is intended to make Preconference and other meetings less daunting for new members in hopes that this will encourage them to remain active in the section. Because RBMS may feel particularly intimidating to a new member from an underrepresented racial or ethnic group, a special mentoring program should be set up for these members.

This new mentoring program would also have an experienced RBMS member working with a new member at the Annual Preconference, but the work would continue after the conclusion of the Preconference. The RBMS mentor might also show the person around at RBMS meetings at ALA Annual and Midwinter, or at the ACRL Conference. If the person being mentored is in library school, the RBMS mentor might advise them on the best courses to take to prepare for a career in Special Collections librarianship. The relationship would formally last for a year or two rather than ending after one Preconference.

Implementation: Henry Raine, the current chair of the RBMS Membership and Professional Development Committee, endorses the idea of such a mentoring program. He thinks it would be most appropriate to advertise the program on the RBMS website, in the Preconference brochure, on ExLibris and other listservs, and by sending an announcement of the program to the ALA Ethnic Caucuses.

RBMS should also undertake an effort to promote the mentoring program to individuals from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups who are pursuing library degrees. The committee that is responsible for the mentoring program should contact groups such as library schools and the Spectrum Scholars (via the ALA Office for Diversity).

Responsible Party: RBMS Membership and Professional Development Committee

Oversight: RBMS Executive Committee

C. Revise introductory membership materials to mention underrepresented groups

Rationale: Many people have their first encounter with RBMS through introductory materials such as the RBMS brochure and the membership section of the RBMS web site. These points of entry to the organization are places where RBMS can communicate its commitment to diversity and reach potential members with the message that RBMS is inclusive. Both the RBMS brochure and the web site should be revised to integrate the notion of a diverse membership and support for diverse collections.

Implementation: While future revisions of the brochure should include mention of RBMS' commitment to diversity, it would be prohibitively expensive to revise the brochure at this time because it was just revised in 2002. A more cost-effective solution in the meantime would be to print an insert about special collections librarianship and diversity that could be included with the brochure (See Strategic Action 1D).

RBMS' commitment to diversity should be stated on the "Membership" page. In addition, RBMS should create a separate web page that promotes our diversity initiatives for the benefit of potential RBMS members and others outside of the section.

Responsible Party: RBMS Publications Committee and RBMS Webmaster

Oversight: RBMS Executive Committee

D. Create brochure targeted to underrepresented groups

Rationale: A brochure targeted to underrepresented groups could give information about RBMS' commitment to encouraging diversity among its membership, the section's encouragement of diverse collecting by its members at their own institutions, and the section's interest in forging relationships with both special collections professionals and community members from underrepresented groups. This brochure could serve as a tool for outreach to library school students, educators, librarians, archivists, and community members from underrepresented groups, describing both the mission of RBMS and the work of special collections librarians and archivists. The brochure could promote RBMS as an inclusive organization that exists to serve the needs of all special collections professionals, and could promote special collections as a means for preserving the distinct history and culture of diverse groups.

Implementation: Because RBMS revised their section brochure in 2002, at this time it would make the most sense to create a one-page insert for the existing brochure which is targeted to underrepresented groups. In the future RBMS might choose to produce a stand-alone brochure for this audience. Funding is a potential stumbling block for this critical action item, and it will be important to promote the concept of the brochure insert as a low-cost, flexible tool for addressing the long-neglected lack of diversity in the section.

Responsible Party: RBMS Publications Committee in conjunction with Diversity Action Plan Implementation Task Force

Oversight: RBMS Executive Committee

Goal 2. To promote Special Collections librarianship as a career to members of underrepresented ethnic and racial groups

Strategic Actions:

A. Offer Preconference scholarships to students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups

Rationale: Special Collections librarianship remains a field elected by few library school students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. A student who is considering specializing in this branch of the profession might be encouraged to do so by attending an RBMS Preconference. Having a scholarship geared to applicants from underrepresented groups might invite such a student to apply, and would reinforce the public perception of RBMS' commitment to diversity.

Implementation: Like the scholarship for librarians from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups (Strategic Action 1A), this scholarship should be folded into the current scholarship program for first-time RBMS Preconference attendees. One award would be reserved for students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, in addition to the award reserved for the librarians from underrepresented groups. Again, if there are no applicants from among this demographic, the scholarship could go to another general applicant.

Concerns about erratic funding are the same as those mentioned in Strategic Action 1A.

Responsible Party: RBMS Membership and Professional Development Committee in conjunction with Diversity Action Plan Implementation Task Force.

Assessment/Oversight: RBMS Executive Committee

B. Hold presentations on Special Collections at heavy minority enrollment institutions in cities where RBMS Preconference or ALA Conferences are held

Rationale: RBMS could take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the changing locations of the Preconference to reach out to students in different cities across North America. These presentations would create an awareness of Special Collections materials among students from underrepresented groups, and would introduce them to the idea of Special Collections librarianship as a potential career choice. They would also help present RBMS to non-members as an organization that values diversity.

Implementation: A person from the Diversity Action Plan Implementation Task Force and a person from the Preconference Local Arrangements Committee should be assigned to work together to organize the presentations. The presentations should be designed as a lively general introduction to Special Collections librarianship, with an added emphasis on cultural heritage materials. A call for volunteers could be placed on the RBMS listserv, and members of the Preconference Local Arrangements Committee could use their network to find appropriate venues, such as upper-level history classes at largely minority enrollment universities.

Responsible Party: RBMS Conference Development Committee and RBMS Preconference Local Arrangements Committee in conjunction with Diversity Action Plan Implementation Task Force.

Assessment/Oversight: RBMS Executive Committee

Goal 3. To liaise and pursue initiatives with other groups that focus on diversity or diverse collections

Strategic Action

A. Liaise and pursue initiatives with ACRL Committee on Racial and Ethnic Diversity

Rationale: As a section within a larger division and a larger association, RBMS should take advantage of the structures that already exist in the parent organization for fostering diversity. Making contacts within existing committees and offices, and letting other members of the organization know about our interest in diversity, are steps that may lead to new opportunities for encouraging diversity within RBMS.

Implementation: Loanne Snavely, chair of the ACRL Committee on Racial and Ethnic Diversity (through June 2003), expressed interest in having an RBMS member act as

a liaison to that committee. She will need to run the idea past the other members of the committee for approval.

Responsible Party: RBMS Executive Committee

Assessment/Oversight: RBMS Executive Committee

B. Liaise and pursue initiatives with ALA Office for Diversity

Rationale: As a section within a larger division and a larger association, RBMS should take advantage of the structures that already exist in the parent organization for fostering diversity. Making contacts within existing committees and offices, and letting other members of the organization know about our interest in diversity, are steps that may lead to new opportunities for encouraging diversity within RBMS.

Implementation: The chair of the RBMS Task Force on Diversity spoke to Tracie Hall, Director of the Office for Diversity and the Spectrum Initiative. Ms. Hall was extremely enthusiastic about working with RBMS on the section's diversity initiatives. According to Ms. Hall, the most appropriate committee for a liaison from RBMS to join would be the newly restructured ALA Committee on Diversity. This committee includes the subcommittees the Spectrum Advisory Committee, the Diversity Council, and potentially a Collection Development Committee. Committee members are appointed by the ALA President, and RBMS would be welcome to submit a name for consideration.

In addition to having a formal liaison to the Committee on Diversity, RBMS could nurture a more informal relationship with the Director of the Office for Diversity. This would enable RBMS to remain up-to-date on diversity initiatives throughout ALA, and would remind ALA of RBMS' interest in encouraging diversity.

Ms. Hall also made a suggestion for attracting graduate students in cultural studies programs to the field of Special Collections librarianship. She proposed that a joint marketing letter be sent from the ALA Office for Diversity and RBMS to chairs of departments that offer terminal degrees in cultural studies.

Responsible Party: RBMS Executive Committee

Assessment/Oversight: RBMS Executive Committee

C. Liaise and pursue initiatives with ALA Spectrum Initiative

Rationale: The Spectrum Initiative is a significant effort by ALA to develop a representative workforce primarily by awarding scholarships to members of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. Some of the previous Spectrum scholars have had student jobs or a special interest in special collections or archives. At the 2002 Spectrum Leadership Institute, the Chair of the Task Force on Diversity participated in Professional Options Night, informing Spectrum Scholars about special collection librarianship. RBMS members should continue to make themselves available to these future library professionals.

Implementation: The same person can serve as the RBMS liaison to both the ALA Office for Diversity and the Spectrum Initiative (see Strategic Action 3B). Tracie Hall,

who serves as both Director of the Office for Diversity and Director of the Spectrum Initiative, suggested three additional ways that RBMS could become involved in supporting the Spectrum Initiative:

- One or two RBMS members could volunteer to serve as mentors for Spectrum Scholars. They should contact Theresa Byrd, Chair of ACRL Spectrum Mentor Task Force, to volunteer.
- An RBMS member could write an article on "A Day in the Life of a Special Collections Librarian" for the Spectrum e-newsletter.
- RBMS could collaborate on a panel discussion on "hidden professions in librarianship" at the next Spectrum Leadership Institute. The Spectrum Leadership Institute is a 3-4 day institute for Spectrum Scholars that occurs the week prior to ALA Annual Meeting, in the same city. The Spectrum Institute is held every other year, with the next one scheduled for 2004.

Responsible Party: RBMS Executive Committee

Assessment/Oversight: RBMS Executive Committee

Goal 4. To encourage Special Collections in collecting materials from diverse communities

Strategic Actions:

A. Hold a workshop or conference program on how to approach relevant community organizations and faculty and begin building culturally diverse collections at your own institution

Rationale: Special Collections have a responsibility to reflect both the increasing multiculturalism of our society and the increasing scholarly interest in different cultures when developing our collections. But our individual institutions may not have the historic commitment, cultural knowledge, language skills, and community contacts needed to build diverse collections. A workshop or program on networking with ethnic communities and building culturally diverse collections might encourage RBMS members to initiate more diverse collecting at their own institutions. Such a program could feature examples of library partnerships with community organizations, and accounts from librarians who have built culturally diverse collections.

Implementation: Workshops or programs for Preconference can be generated through several avenues in RBMS – the Preconference Planning Committee, the Seminars Committee, or by an individual who chooses to organize a workshop or program. The Diversity Action Plan Task Force may want to work with a committee to identify potential presenters or put out a call for volunteers.

Responsible Party: Individual coordinating workshop or program, RBMS Preconference Planning or RBMS Seminars Committee, and the Diversity Action Plan Implementation Task Force

Assessment/Oversight: Diversity Action Plan Implementation Task Force

B. Hold a workshop or conference program on special issues related to culturally diverse collections

Rationale: Collecting materials from culturally diverse communities may be a new area for many in the Special Collections community. Documenting this multiplicity of voices poses a challenge, as we have to go outside our usual means of collecting. Because of this, a workshop or program on special issues related to collecting these materials would be very useful to RBMS members. Topics might include acquisition outside traditional rare book and manuscript channels, reallocation of resources for acquiring and processing these materials, and the need to collect ephemera (free weeklies, newsletters, etc.) related to different cultural groups.

Implementation: Workshops or programs for Preconference can be generated through several avenues in RBMS – the Preconference Planning Committee, the Seminars Committee, or by an individual who chooses to organize a workshop or program. The Diversity Action Plan Task Force may want to work with a committee to identify potential presenters or put out a call for volunteers.

Responsible Party: Individual coordinating workshop or program, RBMS Preconference Planning or RBMS Seminars Committee, and the Diversity Action Plan Implementation Task Force

Assessment/Oversight: Diversity Action Plan Implementation Task Force

C. Co-sponsor programs on collecting with other ACRL committees or ALA ethnic caucuses

Rationale: RBMS should encourage institutions to collect materials from diverse communities by presenting programs on this topic. To ensure that repositories document a culturally diverse experience, we need to focus on not only where such materials may be, but also who can be a resource. Building connections with colleagues who work primarily with diverse materials or directly serving diverse populations becomes a very logical first step.

RBMS should seek opportunities to co-sponsor programs on collecting with the following ACRL sections and ALA ethnic caucuses:

- AFAS (African American Studies Librarians Section), ACRL
- AAMES (Asian, African, and Middle Eastern Section), ACRL
- AILA (American Indian Librarians Association)
- APALA (Asian Pacific Librarians Association)
- BCALA (Black Caucus of ALA)
- CALA (Chinese American Librarians Association)
- REFORMA (National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking)

Implementation: The ALA Annual Meeting probably offers the best opportunity for RBMS to co-sponsor a program with another ACRL section or an ALA ethnic caucus. The co-sponsored program could either be the RBMS program organized by the Conference Program Planning Committee, or a program organized by the co-sponsoring organization. The RBMS Executive Committee must formally approve

any co-sponsorship opportunities. Once the committee gives its approval, the RBMS chair appoints a liaison to the co-sponsoring group to participate in planning and execution of the program.

Responsible Party: Individual organizing program, probably in consultation with the RBMS Conference Program Planning Committee and/or the Diversity Action Plan Implementation Task Force

Assessment/Oversight: Diversity Action Plan Implementation Task Force

D. Urge Preconference Planning Committees to arrange tours to institutions with culturally diverse collections

Rationale: This initiative will benefit both RBMS members and institutions with culturally diverse clientele and collections. RBMS members will benefit by being exposed to potentially new types of collections and by having an opportunity to talk with a culturally diverse group of librarians, archivists, scholars, and readers. The institutions will benefit by the increased exposure of their collections and by the relationships that might be forged between their staff and other librarians from across the country.

Recent Preconferences have included visits to libraries with culturally diverse collections, such as the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University in Washington D.C. and the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African-American Culture and History in Atlanta. Including such institutions among the tour options should become a standardized part of the Preconference planning process.

Implementation: The RBMS Preconference Planning Manual should be revised to include arranging tours to institutions with culturally diverse collections. This task should be added to the checklist in the Planning Timeline, and “cultural diversity” should be included as one of the criteria for selecting sites of interest under “Local Arrangements Committee, Facilities and Events Function.”

Responsible Party: RBMS Preconference Local Arrangements Committee

Assessment/Oversight: RBMS Executive Committee

Goal 5. To promote diversity as a value to RBMS members

Strategic Actions:

A. Hold a workshop or program at RBMS Preconference on what RBMS members can do to help improve diversity in their own corner of the profession

Rationale: As well as furthering diversity in the section, RBMS seeks to encourage individual section members to promote diversity in their own institutions. A workshop or program on such a topic would encourage members to share ideas that have worked for them at their own libraries. Topics might include minority internships, promotion of diverse collections, and community outreach. Such a program might lead to the adoption of some of these ideas at other institutions, or the publication of articles on these topics.

Implementation: Workshops or programs for Preconference can be generated through several avenues in RBMS – the Preconference Planning Committee, the Seminars Committee, or by an individual who chooses to organize a workshop or program. The Diversity Action Plan Task Force may want to work with a committee to identify potential presenters or put out a call for volunteers.

Responsible Party: Individual coordinating workshop or program, RBMS Preconference Planning or RBMS Seminars Committee, and the Diversity Action Plan Implementation Task Force

Oversight: RBMS Diversity Action Plan Implementation Task Force

B. Submit an article to *RBM* on the work of the Task Force on Diversity

Rationale: One of the primary tasks of the Task Force on Diversity is to encourage people, both members and non-members, to perceive of RBMS as an organization that values diversity. One way that RBMS can demonstrate that it values diversity is by promoting the fact that the section formed a Task Force on Diversity that has produced a Diversity Action Plan. By letting people know that RBMS has taken initiative in addressing the section's lack of diversity, we may begin to decrease perceptions that RBMS does not value diversity.

On a more practical level, the publication of an article on the work of the task force would be an excellent way to disseminate the Diversity Action Plan, and to let people know about opportunities for participation and collaboration on diversity initiatives.

Implementation: *RBM* editor Richard Clement would be very open to such an article. The article would need to give a larger context and have greater philosophical interest to *RBM* readers as professionals than a simple reprinting of the Action Plan. All articles submitted to *RBM* are subject to a review process.

Responsible Party: Chair, RBMS Task Force on Diversity

Oversight: RBMS Executive Committee

Revised: RBMS Executive Meeting, June 23, 2003