



Bridging Boundaries to Create a New Workforce

A Survey of Spectrum Scholarship Recipients, 1998–2003

Executive Summary

In 1997 the governing body of the American Library Association (ALA) approved the expenditure of \$1.35 million toward the Spectrum Initiative, now known as the Spectrum Scholarship Program, a groundbreaking effort to diversify the national library workforce. The Spectrum Scholarship Program has been described as bold, far-reaching, and innovative—a rallying call to the profession as a whole.

Applications for the Spectrum Scholarship Program are accepted from individuals from the Library and Information Science field's five most underrepresented groups: American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American or African Canadian, Hispanic/Latino and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. The scholarship combines financial support with leadership development to fast-track scholars along their careers and professional activities. Valued at over \$6,500, the scholarship package includes a \$5,000 monetary award for expenses associated with obtaining a master's degree or library media certification from an ALA-accredited program or NCATE-accredited school library media certification program; free student membership in ALA; free travel and lodging to support attendance of the Spectrum Leadership Institute following completion of the first year of study; and free admission to ALA's annual conference. Additionally, some library schools and professional associations have provided supplemental funding and pre-professional development opportunities for Spectrum Scholars. Throughout their scholarship year and beyond, the Spectrum Scholars are provided with opportunities to network with other scholarship recipients and library leaders via electronic discussion lists and other professional development tools and activities.

When accepting a Spectrum Scholarship, students are asked to participate in future evaluations of the Spectrum Scholarship Program. Findings represented here are based on a voluntary survey distributed in electronic and print formats in May 2004 to the first six Spectrum cohorts, years 1998 to 2003. Of the 257 Spectrum Scholarship recipients as of that date, 164 (or 64 percent) completed the eighty-nine question survey.

Survey construction and evaluation were guided by the following question:

If the American Library Association provides scholarships for students from racially and ethnically underrepresented groups to attend ALA-accredited master's programs or National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) library media programs, will the number of library professionals of color increase because this financial support offers a sufficient motivator for students to complete their LIS programs?

While the primary hypothesis of this survey focuses on whether the Spectrum Scholarship Program creates an influx of librarians of color, the survey also analyzes data regarding respondent demographics including race, disability and citizenship; development of interest in librarianship as a career; factors contributing to academic program selection; post-graduation employment and salary status; professional activity; and respondents' evaluation of the strengths, weaknesses, and overall effectiveness of the Spectrum Scholarship Program.

Selected Summary Data

The Respondents

The survey was distributed both online and in print to a possible pool of 257 scholarship recipients from the 1998-2003 scholarship years. One hundred and sixty seven (64 percent) responded. Eighty-six percent of the respondents were female and 14 percent male. Ninety-six percent of the respondents were United States citizens, 3 percent permanent US residents, and 1 percent Canadian citizens. The racial breakdown of the respondents was as follows: Black/African American/African Canadian (42 percent); Hispanic/Latino (30 percent); Asian (22 percent); American Indian/Native American (6 percent). Six percent of the respondents reported having a disability.

Factors Related to Respondents LIS Education and Career Choices

More than half (57 percent) of respondents decided to enroll in a LIS program after completing an undergraduate degree. Eighteen percent made the decision while still undergraduates. Fifteen percent enrolled in a LIS program after completing another graduate program.

The single most predictive indicator for choosing to enter a LIS program was prior experience working in a library. Seventy-six percent of the respondents had previously worked in paid positions in libraries, with 20 percent working both before and after receiving undergraduate degrees.

Sixty-seven percent (111) of respondents were working in a library at the time they applied for a Spectrum Scholarship, with the majority (80 percent) almost equally divided between academic and public library settings. Whether in libraries or other fields, 95 percent of respondents were employed while pursuing their MLIS degrees, with more than half (57 percent) employed full-time.

Respondents resided in 38 states at the time they applied to LIS/NCATE programs. Of those states, ten or more respondents were residing in the following five states: California, Illinois, Maryland, New York and Texas. Although the majority (87 percent) of respondents indicated proximity to home as a key factor in choosing programs, the average relocation distance was 1000 miles.

Respondents attended forty-one different LIS programs. Factors associated with choosing LIS as a career included the potential ability to use their full range of talents (96 percent); the opportunity to help others (95 percent)—including those from their own ethnic/racial backgrounds (79 percent); and enjoying past library experiences (93 percent) as among the most significant reasons for choosing to enter library school. The perceived marketability of LIS-related skills (83 percent) and familiarity with a librarian who enjoyed his or her work (79 percent) also served as important motivators.

Forty-one percent of respondents were enrolled in a LIS/NCATE program at the time they applied for the Spectrum Scholarship. While some scholarships did support respondents already pursuing the degree or certification, a greater number of scholarships (59 percent) aided in recruiting students into LIS programs.

Respondents reported a high degree of satisfaction with many aspects of their graduate programs. However, some were least satisfied with two environmental features of student life: extra-curricular experiences and diversity. Although diversity was a major factor in only 54 percent of respondents' decisions to attend a specific school—cost (85 percent) and program reputation (83 percent) ranking most highly—diversity, or lack thereof, ranked highest (41 percent) as the element of their LIS educational experience with which respondents were the least satisfied.

Twenty-three percent of respondents reported receiving some type of honor while enrolled in their LIS/NCATE program. Fifteen percent (or 25) respondents reported being members of the Beta Phi Mu International Library Science Honorary Society. Over half of respondents (69 percent) reported that they had received formal or informal mentoring. The four most cited mentoring sources were library practitioners, faculty advisors, professors or course instructors, and co-workers. Twenty-eight percent of respondents participated in residency or internship programs while students.

Respondents' mean time to completion of the MLIS or NCATE program was around two years (24 months). Of those completing programs more than 46 percent (or 55) indicated that they were highly or somewhat interested in pursuing a Ph.D.

Excelling at work and professional activities

The vast majority of Spectrum Scholar respondents (85 percent) were currently employed full-time in a library setting, with 39 percent holding positions in academic libraries and 37 percent in public libraries. Slightly more than 11 percent of respondents worked in school libraries, with the remainder divided among medical and state/governmental libraries, archives, non-profit organizations, law and corporate libraries, historical societies, and vendors.

Among those respondents employed full or part-time, the most popular areas of responsibilities were: reference (42 percent), library instruction (19 percent), and administration (16 percent) and collection development (14 percent).

Respondents employed full-time reported an average income of \$40,000-\$49,000, well above the mean beginning salary of \$38,918 for librarians nationally and comparable to the national average salary of \$45,554 for librarians in non-supervisory positions. Salary and benefits, the opportunity to develop new skills, and the match between position and respondent skills/interests, ranked highest among factors affecting job choices. Diversity was cited as a key consideration for 72 percent of respondents.

Involvement in a professional organization can prove instrumental in advancing one's career. Librarianship is no exception; therefore, the respondents were asked to provide information on their professional affiliations as students and graduates. After their initial free student membership in ALA, 68 percent of respondents renewed and held active memberships in the Association. Thirty-seven percent held additional division memberships, and 22 percent were members of one or more ALA roundtable.

While there was a somewhat high level of professional involvement among respondents, there was a significant difference in respondents' mentoring experiences during and after graduation. Only 12 percent of respondents reported participating in or receiving any type of post-graduation mentoring through their institutions or professional organizations. The primary reason cited was lack of knowledge about mentoring programs.

Thoughts about the Spectrum Scholarship Program

Throughout the survey respondents were given the opportunity to provide narrative answers to questions dealing with the Spectrum Scholarship Program. They were specifically asked to comment on the most effective aspects of the program and suggest areas for future improvement.

Thirty-five percent of respondents learned about Spectrum via ALA's website and found it an effective marketing tool. However, respondents also felt that traditional, grassroots, one-on-one recruiting efforts have proven effective. Suggestions for improving recruitment included targeting potential candidates at the undergraduate level; increased presence at career fairs; and local and

national media advertisement.

Respondents cited two major strengths of the Spectrum Scholarship Program: funding and leadership training. Respondents reported that the monetary award “helped ease the financial burden” associated with pursuing an educational degree and improved their quality of life. They also acknowledged that the Spectrum Scholarship Program equipped them with the networking and leadership skills necessary to succeed in librarianship. Twenty-nine percent attested that they would not have pursued their education without a Spectrum Scholarship. Seventy-four percent of respondents found the distinction of being a Spectrum Scholar beneficial in seeking employment opportunities.

Mentoring and communication after the scholarship year were areas respondents identified as needing strengthening. Phased out in favor of more informal networks, formal mentoring was a feature of the early Spectrum Scholarship Program. However, some respondents reported having little or no contact with their mentors beyond the initial introduction, while others stated frustration with their matches, or relationships that never flourished. In terms of communication, some respondents felt a “sense of disconnection” after graduation. Though there is an active Spectrum Scholar list serve and Spectrum Scholar chapters do exist in several regions, respondents voiced the need for a more consistent mechanism for connecting Spectrum Scholar alumni on a national level.

In addition to the psychological benefits of improved self-esteem, pride and greater personal and professional confidence, respondents expressed that being a Spectrum Scholar made a tremendous impact on their careers. Some felt that being a Spectrum Scholar put them professionally ahead of their peers by at least five years, while others simply stated that the Spectrum name alone opened doors which might have been closed to them otherwise.

In closing, this summary offers four critical recommendations for ALA; LIS faculty and practitioners; professional organizations; Spectrum Scholars; and other stakeholders.

- 1) Broaden the LIS applicant pool by developing recruitment initiatives targeted specifically toward undergraduate students.
- 2) Identify and promote mentoring opportunities for Spectrum Scholars within ALA, its units, and the profession at large.
- 3) Create new and strengthen existing mechanisms for Spectrum Scholarship Program alumni to engage in ongoing communication and networking, peer mentoring, and support services.
- 4) Consider ways of leveraging the Spectrum Scholarship Program’s accomplishments and influence to promote diversity in LIS educational and workplace environments.