

# Chapter 4

## Librarians for Tomorrow at the San José Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Joint Library

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### ABSTRACT

*Recruitment initiatives at San José State University date back over a decade. SJSU and local librarians and faculty from the School of Library and Information Science and local libraries have been partnering with professional organizations by sponsoring recruitment fairs, ice cream socials and other gatherings at SJSU and in the broader communities to recruit individuals to attend library school. This paper provides a review of the literature regarding recruitment and retention of students of color in library schools. Also included is a review of the factors that lead to the decision to become a librarian. It provides a description of the IMLS Librarians for Tomorrow Program at San José State University. Challenges and recommendations for future study followed.*

### INTRODUCTION

Recruitment initiatives at San José State University date back over a decade. Librarians from San José State University (SJSU), San José Public Library (SJPL) and other local librarians and faculty from the School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) have partnered with professional organiza-

tions such as REFORMA, CALA, and BCALA to coordinate focused recruitment to library staff and SJSU undergraduates to increase the number of minorities entering library school and the library profession. For many libraries, the percentage of minority librarians in the work place has not equaled the minority populations of the communities they serve. Additionally, there exists a projected decrease in minority librarians due to retirement. The need to find and train new minority librarians is critical.

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Although this is the 21<sup>st</sup> century information age, the digital divide still exists for many in the United States especially for the minority populations, low-income, undereducated, and elderly. One way to bridge this divide is through recruitment, training and hiring of minority librarians who understand the needs of these diverse populations because of their bilingual and bicultural competence.

This chapter includes a review of the literature regarding recruitment and retention of students of color in library schools. An overview of the factors that lead to the decision to become a librarian is provided. In particular, we will discuss the previous recruitment efforts that lead to the IMLS grant award for the Librarians for Tomorrow program, and its strengths and challenges as a new cohort of librarian train to help users move into the twenty-first century's technology and access to information. Challenges and recommendations for future study follow.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Role of Libraries in the Digital Divide**

Accessibility to technology and information has increased for many people across the United States especially as new technologies are adopted by many of the younger generations. Daily there are examples of this growth as people use their cell phones or laptops to tweet, send instant messages to friends and family, check Facebook accounts, and play with their iPhone applications.

Access to and use of these new technologies represents a positive step towards filling the digital divide gap of the "haves" and "have-nots" as reported in the National Telecommunication & Information Administration's profile, *Falling through the Net* (1995). However, almost fifteen years later, some populations such as Latinos, African Americans and Native Americans experience the digital divide more than Whites and

Asians. A Pew survey indicates that Hispanics use the Internet less (56%) compared to Blacks (60%) and Whites (71%), (Fox and Livingston, 2007). People with higher education and income levels had higher levels of Internet use. Internet users who have completed high school education indicated a higher Internet usage at 63% compared to 44% for people who had less than a high school education, (Fox & Vitak, 2008). People who earn less than \$30,000 a year use the Internet less (53%) compared to people who earn \$75,000 (95%). People whose dominant language is not English use the Internet less as well. Only 32% of Spanish-Dominant Hispanics use the Internet as compared to English Speaking Hispanics use at 78%, (Fox & Livingston, 2007). Senior citizens over the age of 65+ continue to have lower rates of access and use (35%), (Fox & Vitak, 2008).

In response to the digital divide, libraries and librarians have played an important role in helping to facilitate access to computers and information. Most public libraries in the United States provide Internet access for their patrons by providing computers (95%), and applying for federal E-rates to help pay for telephone and Internet services, IMLS (2004). Many libraries train their staff to help patrons use the technology. In fact, librarians who can teach their users how to use the computers, and search the Internet are the most important factor in helping their communities learn how to access needed information, IMLS (2004), funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

### **Diversity**

Does diversity matter? Recruiting and retaining library school students from underrepresented groups has been a challenge for the profession for decades. The lack of diversity is an especially important issue in light of the upcoming shortage of librarians and changing demographic trends. Howland (1999) stated that, "at the heart of the issue of building a more inclusive profession, however, is the retention and promotion of librarians

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