



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“That the library’s existence is necessarily predicated on its relevance to the communities it serves demands that we pay more than cursory attention to our burgeoning national diversity and our ability thus far, to fully reflect that diversity among our ranks.”

-Foreword of *Diversity Counts*, from the American Library Association Offices for Research and Statistics and Diversity, September 2006

I recently read the extensively researched and reported ALA document, *Diversity Counts*. The 36 pages of this report give a realistic look at libraries and how well they reflect the communities they serve. It is obvious after reading it and looking at the various tables and graphs, that changes need to come about.

For instance, between 1990 and 2000 the “the racial and ethnic minority...population grew by a combined 152% (U.S. Census Bureau).” It goes on to say, “During roughly this same period...the number of racial and ethnic minorities receiving accredited MLIS degrees grew by only 4%.” And while there was a slight increase, “existing Library and Information Science minority education and recruitment programs are able to yield just enough new graduates to provide for the replacement of retirees and those leaving the profession prematurely.”

Another point made in this study is that “credentialed

and non-credentialed librarians, as well as library technicians and assistants are predominantly female, white and are not limited by disability.” Non-credentialed librarians have a slightly better showing, while library assistants are more predominantly female, white and under 35 years of age. The study looks at general findings across all positions and library types and then uses all the information to look at the implications of this study. Implications for professional participation, recruitment and retention, retirement, employment opportunities, library setting and LIS education are all examined.

It is a huge amount of information that could be overwhelming and disheartening. So I particularly appreciate these two sentences: “But the real power of this data lies not in what is presented here, but in what we will do with it. The evidence provided is compelling enough to influence library education, recruitment initia-

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tives, human resource and staff development, continued education, collection management, program and service planning, and grant and policy-making for the next decade, but will it?”

Certainly the ALA affiliate, REFORMA (Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking) has recently devoted much discussion on its Listserv on how to address the issues highlighted in this report. And the ALA website has numerous links to documents about diversity, including diversity plans prepared by various institutions. One of these is University of Arizona, which has a web page (blog.ltc.arizona.edu/uadiversity) called Diversity @ The University of Arizona, with links to the various parts of their program. Included on this page are statements from UA campus leaders, such as “Diversity, fairness, and hospitality...are essential to our future...essential to our funda-

mental mission of serving students and preparing them for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century world.”

Another excellent document is the Ocean County, NJ Library system’s 44 page *Diversity Plan for Branch Managers 2006-2007*. While this plan addresses the challenge of meeting the needs of a diverse population, in the long run it will help to encourage a more diverse group of people interested in becoming part of such a dedicated and responsive library system.

The idea of increasing diversity in libraries is an ongoing and challenging one and there is no one action that will make it happen. Instead, it will be small steps in every library and every library school and library organization. Together, we will help to ensure our libraries are enriched and invigorated by the same wonderful diversity as the communities we serve.