

# ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT

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## GETTING A PLACE AT THE TABLE

The American Library Association's  
Spectrum Initiative and  
Leadership Institute  
are models for  
recruiting more diversity

BY PAULA TSURUTANI

Many organizations have pursued activities to boost diversity, but the American Library Association (ALA) took a bold and creative approach and it's working. In 1997, thanks to activists and leaders who mobilized, waged difficult battles, and sometimes broke the rules, the 64,000-member ALA earmarked \$1.5 million in seed money that would, in part, fund the Spectrum Initiative. Its goal: to double the number of African American, Latino/Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American students in graduate programs for library and information studies, where only 10 percent of graduates were people of color.

Elizabeth Martinez, then ALA executive director, was a guiding force in creating the Spectrum Initiative. With six months left before her contract expired, armed with an insider's knowledge of ALA's finances and protocol, and driven by a dream to create a concrete program that would improve diversity within the

profession, Martinez assembled a working group to craft the principles and objectives of the Spectrum Initiative. The group was composed of 12 ALA members chosen because of their activism, commitment, and interests and representing a wide variety of professional environments.

"The proposal addressed many minority recruitment issues recognized over the last 25 years," says Martinez, "It recommended the use of investment income from \$1.5 million of ALA unallocated funds for 150 scholarships—50 a year for three years, for students of color to become librarians."

The proposal was ambitious and forceful, provoking a debate that, at times, turned ugly and personal. "Some complained the use of funds

was fiscally unsound. One trustee resigned in protest. Others questioned details of the scholarships—the monetary award, the time frame, the requirements," says Martinez.

After a series of meetings over several months and a controversial hearing, the Spectrum Initiative was approved.

"Within six months we had a committee vetting scholarship candidates and in-house staffing to administer the program," Martinez says. A series of promotional posters was designed and distributed to all the divisions

within ALA membership; announcements were placed in newsletters and on e-mail lists; and representatives worked booths at career days and events for target audiences. Within a year, Spectrum was well known throughout the profession; minority



Spectrum Scholar Chisa Uyeki says she feels a personal responsibility to diversity and wants to help build information literacy.

organizations were providing mentors; and members and graduate schools were providing matching funds and showcasing their resident scholars.

For the last four years, the Spec-

## Expansive programming

The Spectrum Leadership Institute is not a typical leadership conference. Last June an African dance and drum ensemble performed at the opening ceremony. ALA's top financial offi-

tute's programming. They wanted the content to instigate specific actions.

**Deep change**—the kind of inspired transformation that affects both individuals and institutions.

**Coalition building**—an ability to engage others to create synergies, efficiency, power, and better solutions by learning how to cooperate and work constructively with individuals and groups.

**A spirit of service**—Communities depend on librarians to be living resources in providing access to information and librarians, in turn, must accept the challenges of serving and meeting the needs of diverse constituencies.

**Leadership development**—Management skills can be studied, acquired, and developed; leadership originates from action, commitment, and courage. In founding the institute, the Spectrum committee wanted to help scholars understand basic leadership qualities and learn from role models within and outside the library profession.

“As a group, the founders believed these concepts were essential to move the profession forward,” says Sandra Rios Balderrama, who served on the Spectrum committee and is now director of ALA's Office for Diversity. “We wanted to teach Spectrum scholars how to advance in their careers as well as encourage them to see the big picture.”

Seeing the big picture means infusing cultural, ceremonial, and management curricula into the Spectrum Institute agenda so attendees note and respect different communication styles, values, and traditions. Spectrum exposes scholars to a larger world filled with complex

## WHAT IS THE SPECTRUM SCHOLARSHIP INITIATIVE

Since 1998, in a concerted effort to diversity the profession, the American Library Association's (ALA) Spectrum Scholarship Initiative has awarded a scholarship of \$5,000 a year to 50 African American, Latino/Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American/American Indian students in graduate programs in library and information studies. Applicants can be part-time or full-time students, attending an ALA-accredited MLIS program or ALA-recognized School Library Media program. An ALA committee of practicing librarians and educators carefully reviews candidates, seeking individuals who demonstrate a commitment to diversity, library service, and community involvement as well as academic achievement, professional potential, and aptitude.

Scholars are required to attend the annual Spectrum Institute, a three-and-a-half-day training program designed to equip them with practical leadership skills. Educators, consultants, authors, poets, industry advisers, and information experts serve as faculty at the institute, guiding discussions, team exercises, and creative work projects to expose scholars to a wide range of multicultural, educational, and diversity-related topics.

trum Initiative has focused on recruiting a diverse student pool as a first step toward having a workforce that reflects changing demographics. The Spectrum Scholarship, a major effort of ALA's diversity initiative, provides a monetary award of \$5,000 to defray school costs. And as an added perk, scholars have the opportunity to attend a unique leadership institute.

The intense four-day Spectrum Leadership Institute is the year-end finale of the program. In its multidisciplinary and inclusive approach, ALA has developed a framework to help create a sustainable and long-term diversity approach for the profession. “The Leadership Institute is probably the element that makes the Spectrum Initiative so unique,” says Hector Escobar, a 1999 scholar.

cer gave a crash course on budgets and financial management. A professor discussed the responsibilities of shaping a diverse global library community. One of Sitting Bull's direct descendants talked about leadership, the role of the ordinary person, and community responsibility. A marketing consultant to Fortune 500 companies provided insight about the buying habits of the Asian/Pacific-American community. And a top development officer from the Smithsonian outlined fundraising strategies.

## Defining the big picture of diversity

Unconventional? Eclectic? Actually, key diversity values unite these wide-ranging sessions. From the start, the Spectrum committee established strong, basic values about what they wanted to see in the insti-

sounds, different vocabularies, cutting-edge data, and worldviews.

Although critics may find fault with this approach, viewing some content as soft or “touchy-feely,” ALA is convinced a broader approach is necessary to make a substantive shift in the profession.

“You have to develop a more universal consciousness that supports the mission of the global community,” says Ismail Abdullahi, professor at Clark Atlanta University’s School of Library and Information Studies. “You must realize the importance of oral, traditional, cultural, and electronic communication that help build working relationships and networks (in a diverse world).”

Librarians can leverage a more diverse approach to information gathering and dissemination “by continuing to keep an open mind about the way to engage people of different backgrounds, ethnicities, beliefs, and cultures,” says Bill Imada, chair and CEO of the IW Group, Inc., of Los Angeles, who walked the scholars through several group sensitivity exercises during the June 2002 Spectrum Leadership Institute.

“Diversity initiatives are meaningless if people don’t learn how to listen, empathize, and respect, even when they don’t understand,” adds Balderrama. “Not everyone will agree with the content or feel comfortable with the approach used in every session. That’s understandable. The point is to be exposed to the nuances of a diverse community so you can provide meaningful service and, hopefully, prompt change.”

### **Networks, connections, and responsibility**

Also crucial to the success of the Spectrum Leadership Institute are the

networking opportunities and the camaraderie among scholars, who usually are meeting face-to-face for the first time. “It brings everyone together in one place, which helps illustrate you are not alone,” says Escobar, who now is librarian in residence at the University of Notre Dame. Escobar is one of a number of returning scholars who attend the institute to serve as mentors, committee members, and program fa-

cilitators. “The colleagues you meet will be out there, ready to help and advise,” he notes. Tamika Barnes, another returning scholar, says, “I stay in contact with about four scholars throughout the year. And I always look for opportunities to catch up with others.”

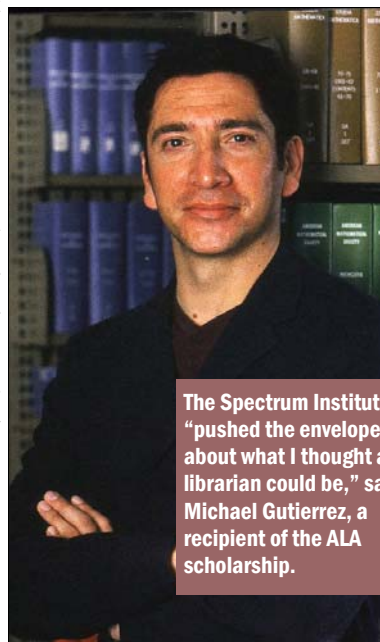
Aside from the networking opportunities, the institute has served as a springboard for professional growth and commitment. “When I won the scholarship, I actually wasn’t looking forward to going to the institute,” says Michael Gutierrez. Now, however, Gutierrez is a visible advocate for the institute, serving as a member of the institute’s planning committee. “It’s certainly helped open doors for me professionally. But more than that, it opened my eyes to other possibilities: academia, consulting, international work. Exposure to great leaders within and outside the profession is a big reason the institute is successful. It pushed the envelope about what I thought a li-

brarian could be.” Plus, the Spectrum experience instills a sense of responsibility, a need to become a role model, and a commitment to give back. Gutierrez has become a mentor to at-risk children and college-bound students.

The program also has helped scholars land jobs. Mantra Henderson says, “Spectrum has opened many wonderful doors for me.” Lee McQueen adds, “The opportunities have increased ten-fold because of a larger network of support afforded by Spec-

trum Leadership Institute.”

At a grassroots level, some students have leveraged their Spectrum scholar roles to help make diversity differences on campus. Three of this year’s scholars from UCLA were part of a group that submitted a successful proposal to their school outlining goals and recommendations to integrate diversity and social justice issues in the curriculum. “I feel a personal responsibility to diversity,” says Chisa Uyeki, who was involved in the proposal. “It is a responsibility as a scholar, having been selected by ALA for this honor, to carry out Spectrum’s mission.” How does she hope to translate the lessons of diversity into her career goals? “I am interested in working to ensure access for people who have been denied or restricted access to information. I hope to help individual library users build their information literacy as well as work on institutional, national, and international levels to



The Spectrum Institute “pushed the envelope about what I thought a librarian could be,” says Michael Gutierrez, a recipient of the ALA scholarship.

achieve more balance between the information rich and the information poor. This may sound idealistic, but I think it's important to be hopeful."

### **Traits of a successful diversity program**

ALA's Spectrum Leadership Institute is the largest ALA initiative devoted to diversity, providing a venue for fulfilling the association's diversity mission and equipping a new generation of professionals. Regardless of the approach to diversity solutions, there are several general ground rules:

**Top-level commitment.** A successful diversity program needs senior-level buy-in and active involvement to ensure adequate resources and progress. At ALA, diversity is an acknowledged association core value. Its leaders, President John W. Berry and Executive Director William Gordon, support Spectrum and have demonstrated substantial commitment. Diversity was one of Berry's key presidential goals, and he contributed all his speaking fees during his tenure to the Spectrum scholarship fund. Gordon, who retired last July, was recognized for his legacy of leadership in ALA and Spectrum by a \$5,000 scholarship named in his honor.

**Recognizing the business case for diversity.** By examining mem-

bership demographics, ALA realized its current ranks did not represent the communities it served. To maintain relevance, quality of information services, and responsiveness to its patrons, the association recognized it needed to recruit, train, and retain a more diverse profession. Statistics, financial data, and performance metrics, when available and appropriate, can be powerful levers.

**Networking.** Establishing connections with peers is one way to deal with diversity challenges. Building a sophisticated and informed network helps overcome isolation and creates leverage in negotiating a place at the table with decision makers.

**Collaboration.** The Spectrum Leadership Institute is a collaborative effort among staff, volunteers, external diversity experts, academia, business, cultural entities, and diverse local communities. The institute practices the message of successful diversity programs: Get to know your community. A successful diversity program forges relationships with individuals and organizations that work in communities outside your own and that may not be adequately represented in your institution. By getting through to people who can influence others, a diversity program has a better chance of maintaining momentum, funding, and

supporters.

**Persistence.** Persistence is crucial, especially in organizations with tight budgets or environments that are ambivalent about diversity. Those who care about diversity "must constantly voice their vision of diversity and explain its value. Sometimes you have to come back again and again before you get support," emphasizes W. Michael Havener, dean of the University of Rhode Island's School of Library and Information Studies. The payoff can be substantial. Havener's commitment and persistence have been rewarded by a \$232,000 federal grant supporting Project Prism, a program to increase diversity at his school through recruitment, practical training, and development of teaching skills.

**Patience and energy.** Ron McNeil, a descendant of Sitting Bull, who spoke about leadership at the 2002 Spectrum Leadership Institute, aptly noted, "You'll be asked to be the model, the expert, because you are a minority or have an advanced degree. But when you take action, remember change takes time." Martinez says diversity proponents must have an ample supply of energy. "You'll need it. The universal kind that lights up our worlds and gives strength, tolerance, and hope."

Keeping a long-term view during ongoing discussion about diversity is vital. Celebrate the triumphs, as Martinez did last June at the institute's closing ceremony: "Today, there are 200 more librarians of color than there were in 1997. Think about this. It was worth the battle."

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## **BENEFITS TO SPECTRUM SCHOLARS**

**The \$5,000 monetary award to Scholars is a significant prize. In addition, the ALA provides other benefits to Spectrum Scholars, including:**

- **free attendance to the Spectrum Institute, a 3-4 day institute that highlights leadership principles, cross-cultural models, and library and information current developments and trends**
- **free admission to the ALA Annual conference during the scholarship year**
- **free ALA student membership during the scholarship year, as well as certain ALA divisions**
- **participation in a national library diversity initiative**
- **access to colleagues via an electronic discussion list**
- **networking opportunities with other Spectrum scholars and library leaders**
- **access to job, internship, and residency opportunities across the country and in different types of libraries.**