

## “You Can’t Hurry Love”: Slow Library Education in Culturally Diverse Society

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### Abstract:

*IFLA adopted its Multicultural Library Manifesto in 2008. Meanwhile, contemporary scholarship in library and information studies suggests that North American Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) graduates are not completing their degrees with a solid foundation in the core library value of diversity. The School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alberta (Canada) recently approved a new course in the University Calendar. Titled LIS Services in Culturally Diverse Society, the course examines the central concepts of diversity and inclusion and a range of related issues and contributions with respect to specific populations and traditionally underrepresented groups, and their support systems, in library and information settings. Drawing on the experience of an intellectual freedom and social responsibility scholar who developed and delivered the course, this paper lays open the importance of acknowledging tension between a tripartite of sister core library values - diversity, intellectual freedom and social responsibility. This paper asserts that the enduring debate about library neutrality and concomitant dilemma over what constitutes library work and what is or is not a library issue plays into the complexity of teaching and learning about diversity in library and information studies education. Recognition of how acceptance of differences can place individual and collective values in conflict, including in inside library culture and not just for the public served, is a necessary component of MLIS education.*

**Keywords:** Diversity, Inclusion, Education, Intellectual Freedom

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The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) adopted its Multicultural Library Manifesto in 2008 (IFLA/UNESCO, 2008). Meanwhile, contemporary scholarship in library and information studies (LIS) suggests that North American Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) graduates are not completing their degrees with a solid foundation in the core library value of diversity. For example, we can look to the following two recent articles for indicators:

- Jaeger, Paul T., Subramaniam, Mega M., Jones, Cassandra B., Bertot, John Carlo. “Diversity and LIS Education: Inclusion and the Age of Information”. *Journal of Education for Library & Information Science*, Summer 2011, Vol. 52 Issue 3, p166-183.
- Jaeger, Paul T., Bertot, John Carlo, Franklin, Renee E. “Diversity, Inclusion, and Underrepresented Populations in LIS Research”. *Library Quarterly*, April 2010, Vol. 80 Issue 2, p175-181.

In the first piece, Jaeger et al.(2011) note that within LIS “there has been tension about whether the field should focus on diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, in terms of legally protected populations, or in broader terms.” (p. 167) They argue that

LIS as a profession cannot limit itself to focusing on increasing inclusion based on race and ethnicity or even based on populations protected from legal discrimination (Jaeger et al., 2010). As information professionals facilitate access to information, to prepare students to work with the information needs and information behavior of diverse populations, LIS education should shift its focus from diversity in terms of simple demographics to a focus on diversity as the populations that are underrepresented, disadvantaged, and underserved in terms of information. This definition of diversity should encompass populations that have traditionally been mistreated and marginalized in relation to information needs and information behavior, as well as populations that are traditionally underrepresented in the LIS professions. Such a definition would be large enough to include legally protected populations based on race, ethnicity, gender, and disability, as well as populations with access challenges related to literacy, poverty, language, sexual orientation, and age, among others. In an information age, diversity should embrace the underrepresented, the disadvantaged, and the under-served if information professionals are to provide truly inclusive services. Preparing professionals for such practice begins in LIS schools (p. 167).

I agree with Jaeger et al. Canadian author William Gibson stated: “The future is here. It’s just not widely distributed yet.” We do not have inclusion, as yet, throughout all levels and aspects of organizational and professional life or in the communities we serve. There are many forms of discrimination (e.g., racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, ageism) that exists inside our own institutional cultures as well as in society more broadly. In my twenty years of personal-professional experience as an MLIS educator, I have seen first-hand that teaching and learning in LIS programs reinforces the notion that hierarchy is normal. It is wise to wonder to what extent our curriculum addresses subjects such as imperialism, patriarchy and colonialism. At the 2011 Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) conference in San Diego, I was present at a presidential diversity session where then outgoing president, Dr. Lorna Peterson, said something to the effect that: *Well you know what people were saying at the early stages of the I-school movement? That it was white male Directors who were breaking away from library schools.* This comment serves as a cue to be critically minded about all levels of influence in higher education, within and without our field.

The ALISE (2012) Diversity Statement defines diversity as “the difference among us” and states that “it refers to the representation of the wide variety of backgrounds that people possess and is often used to address quantitative requirements/agenda/goals, whereas *inclusion* refers to what happens to people once they are in an organization, institution or social context.” The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) (2011) Equity Policy explains how “a commitment to equity begins with the acknowledgement of inequity and demands proactive redress for the effects of systemic discrimination”. It continues: systemic discrimination “results from normative practices” (e.g., barriers to access, employment, governance, inclusion, respect and acceptance) that negatively impact marginalized groups.” Diversity, then, requires strategies of inclusion and these approaches, the ALISE (2012) statement acknowledges, are “not about quotas or different standards.” Rather, we strive for equity and equality of opportunity, better decision-making and problem solving, more mutual respect, and inroads on intercultural understandings. The ALISE (2012) Statement continues: success or failure is rooted in “how we think, act and know, individually or collectively as communities or organizations” - especially with respect to power. Influence features in contested subjects that are often internalized, and at times unlocked, at both the personal and professional level, even in the classroom.

As I developed and thrice taught an experimental course in diversity and inclusion at the School of Library and Information Studies (University of Alberta), power was a running theme in our examination of topics, such as: recruitment into library schools; diversity in the hiring process; gender, information and documentation; Métis (one of the recognized Aboriginal peoples in Canada) Byte back; digital library labour, digital citizenship, and group information rights; race and civil rights; globalization and global migration; traditional cultural expression; and universal access to information for people with disabilities. Student discussions demonstrated the value of recognizing differences in power, privilege and position held by library and information workers. We acknowledged uncomfortable insights, including the perceived false consultation and imposition of administrative whim/fiat despite ‘consultation’, advisory boards and expertise, as well as an over-reliance on surveys as popularity contests to determine priorities.

Students delivered informal oral reports on multiple going concerns, including the: Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty Task Force of the Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association (ALA); ALA’s Status of Women in Librarianship Committee; Greater Edmonton Library Association Women’s Prison Committee; Visible Minorities Librarians of Canada Network; Indigenous Librarians Forum; Joint Conference of Librarians of Color; Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Round Table of ALA; HumanLibrary.org; and, The Network: Tackling Social Exclusion in Libraries, Museums, Archives and Galleries. Thus, they learned to examine diversity internally or within our institutional ranks and cohorts, as well for the public we serve. Sample student presentations included: the narrow face or depiction of librarians in popular culture; male and white privilege in North American librarianship, unpacking the phrase ‘problem patron’, as well as library and information services for two-spirited people, for people with mental illness and for sex workers.

In fall 2012, our course went through shared governance and was approved as a permanent course in the University of Alberta Calendar, titled “LIS Services in Culturally Diverse Society”. It fits in line with select sister MLIS courses offered elsewhere in North America (e.g., “Information Divides and Differences in a Multicultural Society”; “Ethics, Diversity and Change in Information Professions”)<sup>1</sup>

In my city, Edmonton, the emergence of the course coincided with a significant development at the Edmonton Public Library (a leading local employer). The Library moved to requiring a commitment to the Canadian Library Association (CLA) position statements on intellectual freedom and on diversity and inclusion as a stated qualification for many professional positions. The 2008 CLA Position Statement on Diversity and Inclusion states:

The Canadian Library Association believes that a diverse and pluralistic society is central to our country’s identity. Libraries have a responsibility to contribute to a culture that recognizes diversity and fosters social inclusion.

Libraries strive to deliver inclusive service. Canada’s libraries recognize and energetically affirm the dignity of those they serve, regardless of heritage, education, beliefs, race, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental capabilities, or income.

Libraries understand that an acceptance of differences can place individual and collective values in conflict. Libraries are committed to tolerance and understanding. Libraries act to ensure that people can enjoy services free from any attempt by others to impose values, customs or beliefs.

See also: [CLA Statement on Intellectual Freedom](#)

We should pay strict attention to that ‘see also’. As individuals apply for, or interview candidates for, a position, we need to unpack the concept of a personal commitment to intellectual freedom and diversity. What about a professional commitment? How do we measure the applicant’s, or the

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<sup>1</sup> There are a few select specialized streams within MLIS programs. For example, the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland offers an MLIS diverse populations track while the University of British Columbia offers a First Nations Curriculum Concentration.

employee's, personal commitment to these core library values? If a librarian ventures out on a limb in defense of these values, who will back them up? Who has the authority to do so? Who has the resources? Is the law on their side?

This is complicated work. And the seriousness of it was reinforced for me at the CAUT Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee meetings held in Ottawa in March 2013 (a Committee I have served on for the last six years). At that time, this Committee engaged in a joint meeting with the CAUT Equity and Diversity Committee. Reflecting on that memorable session, the Committee chair, Len Findlay, noted that we need to generate "discussion of the extent and tractability of problems of perception and the sources of potential, actual, and inevitably damaging tensions, fissures, and conflicts between and among colleagues, many of whom are ostensibly committed equally to equity and to academic freedom." His caution carries over into librarianship. In an MLIS diversity and inclusion course, for example, it is important to consider: how intellectual freedom might bump up against freedom from discrimination; to what extent intellectual freedom can be mainstreamed in ways that discourage, diminish, or silence questions about equity and diversity; and, if intellectual freedom is sometimes used as a pretext to encourage or 'justify' the reading of difference as grounds for exclusion.

Working in a profession that holds both diversity and intellectual freedom as core library values requires great social responsibility (another core library value) on our part; this is not the place and space to be reductive. Currently, the ALA houses both an Intellectual Freedom Round Table (IFRT) and a Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT). Meanwhile the Black Caucus of ALA (BCALA), which formed in 1970 soon after SRRT was minted, did not fold under the SRRT umbrella. BCALA founders committed to prioritizing the issue of race in a conscious effort for it not to be diluted by repressive tolerance and bureaucracy within the largest and oldest library association in the world (Samek, 2001).

There is much to learn from library history. As noted in *Wikipedia*

Clara Stanton Jones (1913 – 2012) was the first African-American president of the ALA, serving from 1976 to 1977. ... In May 1977, Clara Stanton Jones, acting as president of ALA, responded to the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee's (IFC) recommendation to quash the ALA's "Resolution on Racism and Sexism Awareness" because its language remained unclear. Jones opposed the IFC's proposal, declaring that the resolution required further adjustments and amendments to the language before the committee considered annulment. The IFC feared that the resolution favored censorship as a means to purge library materials of racist and sexist language, and thereby opposing the Library Bill of Rights pledge to sustain access to information and enlightenment despite content, and encourage libraries to challenge censorship. ... Jones asserted that the resolution did not conflict with the Library Bill of Rights, and instead promoted awareness by encouraging training and outreach programs in the libraries and library schools. In agreement with the Library Bill of Rights, she advocated for more enlightenment, not repression, to combat the effects of racism and sexism in library materials.

The enduring debate (Armitage et al., 1973; Berninghausen, 1972) about library neutrality and concomitant dilemma over what constitutes library work and what is or is not a library issue plays into the complexity of teaching and learning about diversity in library and information studies education. Is poverty a library issue? What about class and universal health care? Librarians have been arguing about the boundaries or limits of library work for decades. But today there is a new twist on the question - do cuts to library and archives funding constitute a professional issue? It appears that library and information workers can get into trouble voicing their concern about the impact of cuts to library and archives funding in Ottawa (Decker, 2012).

The tripartite of sister core library values - diversity, intellectual freedom and social responsibility – shift around on stressful ground. Consider the following 2011 newspaper coverage (Reis, 2011) in Worcester, USA:

The library is a marketplace of ideas, but sometimes they mix like oil and water. Tomorrow night, for instance, scheduled events at the Worcester Public Library were to include Black Culture Movie Night — and the monthly meeting of North East White Power. When the white power group scheduled its meeting, it did so under its acronym, NEWP. It wasn't until third parties recognized the acronym and e-mailed the library last weekend that Head Librarian Mark J. Contois realized he might have a volatile situation. He conferred with the city manager's office and the Police Department, who recommended asking one of the groups to reschedule. The Black Culture Movie Night — which planned to view the movie “Souls of Black Girls” — had been scheduled first, so Mr. Contois asked the white power group to postpone its meeting. Russell A. James of New Hampshire, who is a representative of the white power group, said yesterday the group has not set a date yet and is skeptical the library will let them meet there. “What we're going to find, of course, is that they're going to have another excuse,” he said. Mr. Contois, however, said that is simply not true. The Worcester Public Library adheres to the American Library Association's Bill of Rights, which states that meeting rooms should be available to the public “regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.” “I don't believe you counter intolerance with intolerance,” Mr. Contois said. “I'm proud to be part of a profession that has such high ideals about the free exchange of ideas in a democratic society.”

North East White Power has been meeting at the library since November, and typically draws between five and 25 people, Mr. James said. Some of those who attend are libertarians, and others “who probably call themselves Nazis” are in allegiance to national socialism, he said. Parlee L. Jones-Thompson, who organized the Black Culture Movie Night with her Worcester-based agency, Our Story Edutainment, said she was relieved to hear the white power group had rescheduled, but noted that NEWP will come back. ...

One People's Project, a Philadelphia-based website that monitors white supremacist groups and individuals, posted the planned white power meeting on its website and alerted the library and others what NEWP stood for. Daryle Lamont Jenkins, spokesman and founder of One People's Project, said it was the first time he had seen the group meet at a library. “I think they fly under the radar,” he said. His group spreads information about such organizations to “try to diminish their ability to function,” he said. Mr. James had other words for One People's Project. He said his own group would not have been a security issue at the library. “We would never, ever have problems” with blacks, he said. “It's Jews, homosexuals and radical feminists who are causing the problems.”

Realizing equity is both an individual and a collective responsibility. “Success requires openness, transparency, and accountability in all aspects of institutional life including but not limited to anti-discrimination, anti-harassment, employment equity, accommodation and salary equity.” (CAUT, 2011) We also have to fight for the very right to protest discrimination. Notably, SRRT adopted the following resolution at the 1974 annual conference.

WHEREAS, the prohibition of discrimination is Federal law; and WHEREAS, Governmental agencies have been provided to correct conditions of discrimination; and WHEREAS, The existence of discrimination in libraries has been abundantly documented; and WHEREAS, In observance of ALA's support of the principles of Intellectual freedom, people exercise their right to protest discrimination and to attempt to correct it by filing complaints of discrimination with appropriate governmental agencies; and WHEREAS, Retaliation, harassment (such as blacklisting and defamation) and other punitive practices against people who have filed such complaints violate Federal regulations designed to protect complainants

in their efforts to eradicate discrimination; THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED That ALA endorse the right of library workers to protest discrimination, of whatever nature by utilizing appropriate local grievance procedures, through the appropriate governmental agencies provided for this purpose, and through private attorneys, and BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED That ALA support the right of these persons to protest discrimination without fear of retaliation (ALA, 1974).

At the 2013 IFLA World Library and Information Congress in Singapore, who is giving a paper at which they are representing their place of employment? Do they need to bear in mind a loyalty oath they signed? Does their organization have guidelines about speaking with one voice that instructs them how to negotiate the tension of showing the public face of an organization consistently and professionally while allowing them as a professional within that organization to seek autonomy and freedom of speech? Are they permitted to speak freely to the media (should they be approached for a quote)? Is there a media relations policy at work that they should be aware of? If they plan to twitter or blog from the conference, do they know if they will violate a social media guidelines policy at their institution? Would it make a difference if the language they used was styled as advocacy vs. activism or action vs. protest?

The final question posed in ALA's Question and Answer on Speech in the Workplace (ALA, 2007) is: "If I speak out in the workplace on a matter of professional policy, and my employer retaliates against me, will the ALA support me?" The answer is:

The ALA does not at this time provide mediation, financial aid, or legal aid in response to workplace disputes. Your employer has an array of sanctions that may or may not be imposed on you, including but not limited to: reassignment, passing you up for promotion, passing you up for raises, denying you tenure, passing you up for the best assignments, and ultimately dismissal. If you decide to speak out on a matter involving professional policy, it will be a matter between you and your employer. The ALA does administer the LeRoy C. Merritt Humanitarian Fund, which has provided financial assistance for librarians who have been discriminated against or denied employment rights because of their defense of intellectual freedom including freedom of speech."

The CLA (2011) has an Intellectual Freedom Fund, but provides little information about it. There is one line on the CLA website stating: "This fund provides financial assistance in cases involving intellectual freedom."

The new August 2012 IFLA Code of Ethics for Library and Other Information Workers states in section five (on neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills): "Librarians and other information workers have the right to free speech in the workplace provided it does not infringe the principle of neutrality towards users." The Code acknowledges, though, that IFLA has no enforcement authority over library administrations. No library cohort, I would guess, is more attune to this kind of personal-professional vulnerability than new librarians. They should pay attention to related rhetoric and reality. Because as John Berry noted on March 10, 2009

There is a sad message from many of the "mentors" on NEWLIB-L, a discussion list for new librarians that is one of my favorites. The list has a home page at NEWLIB-L. The message in several posts is to "express yourself with great care not to offend anyone else who reads the list." Several posts have ranted about postings that were considered "unprofessional" or "off topic." What they really tell the "new" librarian is that free expression doesn't apply in professional discourse, only out in the street or in your personal debates. This same syndrome haunts many discussion lists from ALA units and others. It is as if free expression must be limited or at least tempered if it is to be allowed online. It is the wrong message, especially in a profession where so many have sacrificed so much for free expression.

As stated above, a gut diversity issue is the enduring debate about library neutrality and concomitant dilemma over what constitutes a library issue. The quickest of learners amongst us intuit that diversity requires slow education. It demands our deepest commitment to reflection about perception, communication (including expressive freedoms), status, and embodiment. We need to consider diversity and inclusion processes that acknowledge a tripartite of sister core library values (diversity, intellectual freedom and social responsibility) while balancing the status of: human rights; lobby groups; family values and community standards; legislation; workplace behaviour policies and civility codes; codes of ethics; and media relations management. In the interests of culturally diverse society, perhaps every MLIS student should struggle with the question: what is a library issue? In closing, intellectual freedom advocate Jo Goodwin is famous for sharing the line: "A truly great library contains something in it to offend everyone." Does the same rule apply to every library issue?

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