
The Urban Library Program: Challenges to Educating and Hiring a Diverse Workforce

MARY M. WAGNER AND DEBBIE WILLMS

ABSTRACT

From 2003 through the fall of 2009, St. Catherine University (formerly the College of St. Catherine) and the Saint Paul Public Library collaborated to create the Urban Library Program (ULP), an Institute of Library and Museum Services (IMLS) supported project to recruit, educate, hire, and retain a diverse paraprofessional workforce in the metropolitan Twin Cities of Minnesota. Studies of graduates of the ULP demonstrate its success in educating diverse individuals for employment in libraries in spite of the complexity of their language, economic, and educational challenges. These same studies also reveal institutional and professional barriers to hiring a qualified, diverse workforce. This case study investigates challenges to attracting and educating a diverse workforce, structural barriers that inhibit hiring, class conflicts arising in the workplace, and unexpected results from the program. The authors conclude that for the population targeted in this project, education alone is not the answer to diversifying the workforce. A strong support network is necessary to navigate higher education systems, the hiring practices of libraries, as well as the professional library community.

INTRODUCTION

Building and retaining a workforce that represents all parts of the community is a goal shared by employers in the public and private sectors. Diversity of perspective grounds an organization and fosters the trust and communication necessary to meet changing needs. The tax funded public sector has particular concern for meeting statutory equal employment opportunities mandates. Public libraries, the most democratic subset of

the public sector, have determined that their ability to fulfill their mission actually depends on attracting employees who look like, sound like, understand, and advocate for the needs of the entire community. For all of these logical, legal, and moral reasons, hiring a diverse staff is essential for libraries but it is not easily accomplished.

A stereotypical and oversimplified table of public library organization finds white, female MLS librarians leading hierarchies, which include support and maintenance staff. Diversity, if it exists, tends to be in the lower paid jobs since the library profession historically has not been particularly successful in attracting people of color to its professional ranks. During the past several decades, the American Library Association has taken up the challenge to change this reality by providing Spectrum Scholarships and by documenting their efforts through their Office of Research and Statistics.

On the local level many factors conspired to thwart these best efforts of the national organization. For example, in Saint Paul, Minnesota, years of support by the public library of the state "Librarians of Color" initiative yielded no change in its essentially white public library professional staff because the financial commitment to the program was not backed up by a serious commitment to changing the status quo. This case study describes the Saint Paul Public Library's concerted effort to increase diversity in its support staff while also addressing the issues that impeded progress.

The strategy that became the Urban Library Program was guided by innumerable resources written by library scholars across the country. In the introduction to *Stop Talking, Start Doing!* by Gregory L. Reese and Ernestine L. Hawkins, the authors describe the situation:

Of course, many in the library industry agree that there should be more minorities in the business. However when the question changes to why this state of affairs exists, and whether or not anything can or should be done about it, the answers are tellingly various. Some feel that there are cultural, if not racial, biases among library professionals; others contend that there are indeed racial causes. And still others conclude that it is still a mystery why there aren't more non-white people in the library business. (1999, p. xi)

The Urban Library Program (ULP) was an audacious experiment undertaken by St. Catherine University (SCU) and the Saint Paul Public Library (SPPL) and funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, to recruit, educate, hire, and retain a diverse paraprofessional workforce. Five cohorts of students, who reflected the diversity of Saint Paul, completed the program and received a certification in Urban Library Services from SCU. After six years, and significant change to both SCU and the SPPL, the partners concluded that the problem they were attempting to solve is a complex tangle of cause and effect involving organizational inertia and deeply held values and beliefs about how library service should be provided and by whom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What would a culturally and racially diverse library system look like and how can it be achieved? These are questions confronting all public library directors and staff in a time of demographic changes across the cities and counties of the United States. During the early years of the twenty-first century, the best minds of the library profession challenged practitioners to bring about the changes and define or design the best practices that everyone agreed would provide equal access to all library customers. The questions themselves were easily posed; the answers were elusive.

A large body of literature reports the activities and efforts of library systems to address these needs. Colorado and California library associations report on successful conferences (Greenblatt, 2008; Schuckett, 2007). Academic libraries similarly address the diversification of both staff and the student bodies they serve (Love, 2007). Indeed the International Federation of Library Associations, IFLA, in 2008 promulgated the IFLA Multicultural Library Manifesto (IFLA, 2008). The Institute for Library and Museum Services (IMLS) has consistently funded projects designed to recruit and educate individuals for positions in libraries including support staff as the Urban Library Program demonstrates.

There have been two National Diversity in Libraries Conferences, with a third planned for summer 2010 (Dewey, Parham, & Burger, 2005; Campbell, 2008). In 2006, the first Joint Conference of Librarians of Color was held in Dallas, Texas (Bell, 2006). These conferences bring together library workers to sort through new initiatives, best practices, and collegial conversation addressing the varied issues "diversity" raises. The American Library Association, Office of Diversity provides through its "initiatives and programs, resource development, active consultations and training on diversity issues that impact the profession, the workplace, and information service delivery" information and support to its individual and institutional members (ALA, Office of Diversity, Mission, n.d., p.1).

Like all areas for growth and change, there are levels to achieve in seeking diversity integration. Many libraries begin with a conscious decision to include more diversity in programming, often seeking the input of members from identified communities generally underrepresented in the library programming efforts (Love, 2007). Another strategy is to review collections and actively seek to grow a world language collection. These efforts lay a foundation for valuing a more diverse staff. Mentoring and residency programs to encourage emerging leadership from minority employees are reported as an effective strategy for diversifying the workforce (Hankins, Saunders, & Situ, 2003). Balderrama identifies additional levels of diversity beyond programming and efforts to diversify staff. She adds visible diversity, that is, that those around the decision-making table represent all stakeholders, libraries form coalitions with others seeking to

diversify communities, and, finally, the ultimate achievement is of mutual respect, which results in a new shared vision (Balderrama, 2004).

If mutual respect and exchange are to be achieved in communities continually growing in diversity, attention is needed to show the face of the library, that is, the staff, how to mirror and reflect the community diversity. Clearly and understandably, the emphasis of research was on how to educate librarians. Students in library schools are overwhelmingly white. In the early part of the century, there was clearly not a pool of interested, qualified candidates of diverse individuals waiting to begin their course of study. The Urban Library Program sought to recruit, educate, and retain library support staff to better reflect the communities and neighborhoods served by the Saint Paul Public Library. The initiative proved both successful and inadequate as the following findings report.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There are four reasons why the authors determined to focus on barriers to diversify the workforce. First, there is a gap in the literature discussing achievement of the goal of diversifying the workforce. There are many descriptive studies of programs implemented, activities engaged in and strategies used for successful hiring of minorities. In spite of many determined library managers and multiple approaches to the problem, the goals of a diversified library workforce have not been met. There is no corresponding body of literature discussing reasons why the goal of achieving diversity in the workforce and the subsequent retention of those recruited and hired has not been met by the programs intended to address the issue. Second, the assumption that the library administration and library employees were sincere in their desire to diversify the workforce proved accurate, however during program implementation there was strong resistance from some library supervisors and co-workers toward the ULP participants. The third reason to look at barriers was guided by the findings in the grant evaluation conducted by an outside grant evaluator. The evaluations over the two grants identified a pattern of response from library staff and ULP graduates indicating resistance to accepting ULP graduates as ready for library employment as support staff. Fourth, observations of the authors and anecdotal storytelling of the program participants indicated a need to examine the reasons why the ULP was not easily adopted and implemented in the library. The authors perceived that a discussion of the barriers to fully implementing this program (ULP), which was designed as a solution to a local problem, could provide insights and be applicable to solving the problem at the national level. Barriers identified are both unique to the Saint Paul Public Library and yet common to all. The information gleaned from this program can be informative to other libraries and organizations serving the public.

Focusing on the barriers encountered in attempting to reach the ULP goal of educating and preparing individuals to diversify a local library opens an avenue for analysis as to why the goal has not been realized more widely and by more libraries throughout the United States.

Realizing that barriers existed to a successful program implementation raised questions that this case study attempts to illustrate through analysis and discussion. These questions are:

- What personnel policies, procedures, and practices help or hinder increasing diversity in the library staff?
- Are these policies, procedures, and practices something the library administration can change or are there other stakeholders with power to influence programs designed to increase diversity in library staff?
- What characteristics of the applicants themselves became a barrier to successful completion of the ULP program and integration into the library workforce?
- What characteristics of professional library culture become barriers to diversifying the library staff?

Identifying the barriers and confirming these barriers through analysis of data from various sources provides information necessary to develop strategies addressing and eliminating the barriers.

METHODOLOGY

The sources used to identify and categorize barriers included:

- mid-grant and final grant reports from two IMLS grants supporting the ULP conducted by an independent evaluator;
- essays submitted by program applicants as part of the application process;
- notes from program applicant interviews;
- statistics describing program applicant and student characteristics;
- exit essays of students completing the program;
- interviews with six program graduates;
- interviews with five library supervisors;
- field observations by the authors.

Case Study

In 2009, at the Sun Ray Branch of the Saint Paul Public Library, a young Hmong man is in charge of the agency in the absence of his supervisor, a librarian. He answers questions from the public, manages problems as they arise, copes with a staff person calling in sick all the while organizing a class in Microsoft Word that he will offer in the workforce training lab. He is confident of his skills and trusted by his supervisor to oversee the daily program in this busy agency. Until very recently, the library would

not have deemed him qualified to do the job he manages with ease today. When he graduated from high school in 2000, he had no plans beyond continuing his part-time job as a library clerk. In 2005, encouraged by his supervisor, he enrolled in the Urban Library Program. After ten months of study and praxis, he was promoted from a clerical to his current para-professional position, a goal he accomplished by his own competence and nearly three years of work by library administrators to change the minimum qualifications for the job.

This young man exemplifies both the best outcome of the Urban Library Program and the enormous amount of support he required to take advantage of the institutional change. The process of building a program to diversify the public library workforce has been fraught with challenge punctuated by hope and tempered by economic downturn. Not all of the students of the program were successful either by the program's standards or their own expectations, and the ultimate outcome of the program will not be known until the stories of the students have played themselves out. The administrators of ULP encountered unexpected barriers in their six years of work on this project but they also discovered that their work and the success of many of the students of the program reaped some unintended benefits both for the individuals and the institutions involved. Unintended benefits included the opportunity to discuss the issues of a multicultural workplace in many venues, creating synergies for ongoing dialog. Finally, the issues ULP sought to address are not ones that can be resolved easily or quickly but they are issues which the administrators of this project steadfastly believe require our best attempts to find solutions. Finding these solutions and reporting on them can help other libraries and public institutions hoping to diversify their staffs reap the same or similar benefits.

In 2001, St. Catherine University and the Saint Paul Public Library began discussions of the perennial problem of creating a more diverse library workforce in the Twin Cities and suburbs of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Early data from the 2000 census revealed what every public librarian knew to be true: the face of Saint Paul and other communities had changed dramatically. For a number of years both the library and the university had struggled with how best to reach out to the newest Minnesotans in order to provide needed services, to offer employment, and make available opportunities for professional education. The result of these conversations was the concept that eventually became the Urban Library Program although in its early iterations the focus was on professional education. The key to communicating with and serving a multicultural community was clearly dependent on gaining the intimate perspective of staff members from those communities. The best intentions, however, did not translate into a pool of qualified individuals who were ready, interested, and willing to commit to a career in librarianship. As the concept of the

Urban Library Program evolved, it became clear that the strategy in Saint Paul needed to be one that developed the very pool of individuals both the library school and the libraries lacked. Instead of creating another scholarship program at the graduate level, the partners made the decision to recruit for a program to educate paraprofessional workers. In 2002, the first grant application to IMLS requested funds to recruit, educate, hire, and retain a public library paraprofessional workforce that reflected the community it served. Research into best practices in educating staff at this level did not reveal models that could be replicated. The partners determined that they needed to design a program that would utilize their resources and meet their needs.

The IMLS award in 2003 provided for curriculum development, a plan for implementing a comprehensive recruitment strategy, and support for two cohorts of students. Urban Library Program became an intensive ten-month certificate program that combined classroom and experiential learning as students rotated between assignments in a public library setting. The recruitment plan included targeting culturally specific media outlets, speaking engagements in faith communities, contact with clan elders, canvassing social service organizations, and use of other various community organizing techniques. The response to the recruitment blitz was an overwhelmingly positive and diverse flood of applications.

A second, larger grant in 2006 supported three more cohorts, planning aimed at replication of the program, and research into the barriers to hiring diverse workers. Between 2003 and 2009, ULP accomplished most of its goals: recruitment and education of five cohorts, seventy-two students, sixteen nationalities; placement of twenty-nine graduates currently working in libraries; creation of a workbook for other libraries who want to replicate some or all of the process. Many of the students in the program were the first in their families to attend college, three have received baccalaureate degrees; a significant number were refugees or immigrants; one completed her MLIS; most, including the new librarian, would not have considered the library to be a profession that would either accept or interest them. St. Catherine University and the Saint Paul Public Library identified a need, proposed a solution, and implemented a program that was successful by its own academic and employment standards. Table 1 provides educational and employment data on the applicants and participants in the Urban Library Program from 2004 to 2009. Table 2 provides data on the gender, ethnicity, and disability status for students in the program.

In spite of this success, in 2009, at the end of the second IMLS grant, ULP administrators made the decision to suspend recruitment for a year while they conducted a thorough analysis of the program. Several key factors informed this decision including the dismal economic climate that has stopped all library hiring in the eight public library systems in the

Table 1. Urban Library Program Application Data, 2004–9

	2004–5	2005–6	2006–7	2007–8	2008–9	Totals
Applicants	26	75	39	30	20	190
Accepted	10	24	20	16	17	87
Enrolled	9	23	13	12	15	72
Completed program	8/9	18/23	9/13	9/12	11/12	56
Currently working in library	7/8	12/18	3/9	4/9	3/12	29

Table 2. Urban Library Program Gender, Ethnicity, Disability Data

Gender	2004–5	2005–6	2006–7	2007–8	2008–9	Total
Male	3	5	1	2	2	13
Female	6	18	12	10	13	59
Ethnicity						
African	2	2	2	2	2	10
African American	4	4	2	2	2	14
Asian	2	7	1	3	5	18
Caucasian	1	9	5	4	5	24
Hispanic	0	0	1	1	1	3
Multi	0	1	2	0	1	4
Native American	0	0	0	0	0	0
Countries Represented	China Eritrea Japan Togo USA USA USA Vietnam USA	Cambodia Ethiopia Laos Sudan Taiwan USA	Laos Liberia Somalia USA Sudan Taiwan	China Laos Russia Somalia Nigeria	Burma China Ethiopia Laos	
Disabilities	1	3	1	1	0	6

Twin Cities. In addition to this overarching challenge, the administrators have recognized that education alone cannot guarantee a diverse workforce and that the very individuals targeted for ULP—immigrants, people of color, displaced workers, people with disabilities, and women reentering the workforce—require support far beyond the capacity of most organizations to provide. The employers—public libraries, for the most part—also unknowingly erect barriers to hiring and retention embodied in the very systems designed to protect workers and, by extension, the status quo. Civil service rules, union contracts, hiring practices, testing procedures, and workplace norms all conspire to make change difficult. In the original grant application, the administrators did not anticipate the level of difficulty or the amount of time these barriers represented.

Finally, the students of the ULP were, almost by definition, a challenge to the image of the stereotypical library worker. Most of them did not have college degrees; they did not always speak flawless English; they often

came from poverty; they were sometimes displaced from jobs they had held for many years; they often had never considered working in a library; and the previous education experiences of immigrant students did not easily adjust to the American model of higher education. To some library staff they were seen not as a link to the broader community, but as a threat to the very standards of librarianship. This was evident in interviews with some supervisors who questioned the ULP as an academic credential and the graduates' knowledge of the canon of American library literature. The idea that the ULP was "dumbing down" the work of the library became the major, unexpected barrier to the success of the program.

The summative evaluation of ULP, prepared by Pat Kovel-Jarboe after extensive interviews with ULP staff, students, and graduates, concurs with these observations. Her report states, "It was clear that the future success of ULP students would be, at least in part, dependent on the willingness of the various library systems and the profession as a whole to make reasonable accommodations in removing barriers" (2009, p. [4]).

BARRIER: SUPPORT FOR SUCCESS

A major goal of the Urban Library Program was to seek individuals who reflected the community but who were not adequately represented in the workforce. The recruitment plan developed during the first years of the program was very successful and ULP attracted the student demographic the program hoped to reach. Applicants and those students selected for the program represented a variety of ages and cultures. Appendix A summarizes the characteristics of applicants to the Urban Library Program. Non-traditional students required extensive academic support and mentoring to successfully complete the program. This was particularly true for immigrant students. Often these students came from cultures unfamiliar with American education and library systems. They were required to assimilate rapidly to academic and library cultures and a new work ethic often in a language they struggled with in order to communicate their ideas and questions. The curriculum demanded a four evening a week commitment for ten months. For students who had never experienced the rigors of academia, the routine of reading and writing was challenging. In addition, the English language learners had the stress of class lectures in English. The university provided resources to students in the form of a writing lab, study sessions, tutoring, and career counseling. Several students finished their first terms on academic probation but were able to secure the help they needed for a successful outcome. Since they were earning academic credit for their work and had the future option of continuing toward an undergraduate degree, it was important for all standards to be met.

A significant part of the curriculum for English speakers included exposure to a language other than English. Requiring study of a second language provided students with a potential capability of greeting library

patrons in their own language, thus creating a welcoming atmosphere in the library.

As noted in the evaluation of the language component of the curriculum, two hours of instruction and one hour of tutorial help per week was insufficient exposure for the students to become proficient, even for the minimum use expected (Kovel-Jarboe, 2009). One native English speaker graduate of the program currently employed as a library associate commented that "the language [Spanish] piece was the hardest. I need to continue on with it. I'm not using it like I should." This same individual also commented in her interview on on-going communication difficulties of her non-native English speaking ULP colleagues.

The students' struggles challenged both Saint Paul Public Library and St. Catherine University. The premise of the program was that the value of non-traditional, diverse staff would enrich the library's workforce. Urban Library Program students potentially contributed language skills, life experience, immigrant perspective and profound, first-hand appreciation of the rich resources of the library to an excellent, if essentially homogenous staff. The community itself voiced the potential value these students represented. Feedback from a needs assessment of underserved communities funded through an LSTA grant to SPPL in 2005 revealed a desire by non-white communities to see themselves reflected in library staffing. This was particularly true of older adults (Cytron-Hysom, 2004). As in most requests for service, the difficulties of implementation were immaterial to the customer.

Most ULP students worked hard to meet expectations. Library staff, who understood the depth of the program, admired the tenacity and commitment of the students. A supervisor who worked closely with two ULP students reflected on her growing recognition of the level of homework the students were required to accomplish in addition to their rotations in the library. The two students would arrive early for their praxis work in order to complete homework. The supervisor talked to and reviewed work with the students thus gaining a better understanding of the classroom portion of the curriculum.

Hard work alone did not equal success in the library praxis. Some students required intensive orientation into the norms of the workplace that strained both the program administrators and the library staff overseeing the praxis rotations. The normal training infrastructure designed to provide orientation for new employees made the assumption that individuals understood and accepted the cultural norms of the workplace. Under normal circumstances, lapses in performance were dealt with as disciplinary issues. As noted in several interviews, the struggles of some ULP students were perceived to be a lack of commitment or preparation for work in the library. In some cases, they were considered to be given preferential treatment because of their status as ULP students.

A study of youth job programs conducted by the University of Chicago's Chapin Hall reported,

Disadvantaged youth attempting to engage with employers through youth program providers have a variety of needs, such as education about workplace expectations and personal relationships that will meet their needs throughout their experience with employers. . . . all the employers and program providers we interviewed agreed that youth must be ready for the workplace, but there is no consistent definition of ready. (DeCoursey & Skyles, 2007)

While the ULP students were not youth or necessarily disadvantaged, the experience of entering the library milieu revealed the same variety of needs. Similarly, the ULP students were also challenged by transportation issues, family demands, and time constraints required by meeting four evenings a week in a ten-month course of study. The administrators failed to address fully either the needs of the students or the perceptions of staff. This failure is reflected in many of the negative reactions to the program.

When staff were asked what challenges they faced in mentoring and/or supervising the ULP students or graduates several reported the need for more training on how to work with the students. While there was a clearly defined curriculum for the praxis in technical services the praxis in public services was more open and fluid. This coupled with the varied abilities of the students led to frustration and staff feeling that the ULP students were not as capable of working with customers as those with more education, that is, a college degree. As one supervisor noted, "We [supervisors] need more in-house training or the ULP graduates need to begin in a smaller branch with more time to absorb the system. If they are placed in a larger branch then they need to be a 'trainee' for some time and receive more tutoring in order to maintain the level of service we aspire to."

The administrators noted throughout the ULP program that a staff education component providing ongoing training and education was essential for staff to fully engage with ULP participants. Although noted, administrators failed to fully act on the need and are thus responsible for barriers that occurred in the workplace setting.

BARRIER: STATUS QUO

The ULP curriculum was built upon the foundation of Minnesota Voluntary Certification (2008). In fact, students receive certification from the State of Minnesota, Department of Education, State Library Services as well as from the university when they graduate from the program. The curriculum proved very effective for most students regardless of their education at the beginning of the program. A ULP graduate noted, "I learned a lot in ULP. The broad spectrum of learning was cool. Everyone who works in the library should have this coursework." Another ULP graduate explained, "I am a very introverted person. I'm used to not having friends,

to working alone. I was surprised how well I got to know each one of my classmates. I was surprised that I could do that and now see the value and good of it.” In the same vein one of the staff commented, “ULP curriculum gave confidence to students. ULP took students through the whole picture, the overview of the whole library and this built their confidence in work performance.” The full curriculum description for ULP is found in appendix B.

A large percentage of graduates also found work in libraries or chose to continue their education. As a condition of admission to the program applicants were informed that on completing the program they were expected to apply for a position in a library, to continue their education, or do both. Each student signed an intent form indicating their intent prior to graduating from the program.

A review of applications revealed a wide range of reasons for applying to the program. They included:

- “I see the program as a way of finding out about the library.”
- “To learn what goes on in libraries and how they work.”
- “A whim: my husband saw a story in the newspaper and said, ‘this is you.’ I thought why not and applied, but it was a total whim.”
- “Get credible qualifications for future work in a library.”
- “I like to work with people.”
- “I love books, reading and writing and I want to help people.”
- “Find a job.”

Most applicants had some acquaintance with public libraries but had not considered the possibility of working in a library. Students commented in the initial course evaluations that they were amazed that libraries had so many different formats available to library users. They also grappled with understanding the multiple levels of staffing within public library organization. Those who saw the program as an opportunity for employment discovered that they would need to continue their education in order to have a professional career. For some this was daunting and discouraging, but for others it was both an opportunity and a challenge. One graduate of the program who began the program as “a whim” had never thought of pursuing a college education or being part of an academic program, “I’m not stupid or dumb, but I came from a family where it was assumed I would finish high school, get married and raise children.” For her, participation in ULP led to part-time clerical work in a library and the opportunity to consider further education. She will complete her baccalaureate degree in May 2010.

Those who saw the program as a way to employment were often frustrated in their attempt to enter the library workforce. Many were hired to do clerical work including shelving but had expected to work in a professional capacity. Expecting to move from student to employee with full-

time work eluded those who were not already working in libraries when they began the program. As noted, the economy was a significant factor in why positions were not readily available. Other and more significant factors were present. One ULP graduate explained, "You can only clerk, that's it. ULP won't help you advance in the library. I picked up quicker on clerk duties because of the program. Any other skills learned in the program unfortunately you don't get to use in the clerk position. If you take the initiative and try to do something you are told 'it's not your job.'" Another graduate stated, "Some staff didn't like ULP. They believed you must have a BA degree. Staff doubted that ULP students could do the work—no BA, no MLIS—not good enough for library associate work." This sentiment expressed by the ULP graduate was also reflected in interviews with supervisors. One supervisor explained, "Library associates need college background. The ULP curriculum was not long enough to prepare people for good work. The lack of a liberal arts background is the biggest gap. Technology and interpersonal skills [are] perhaps a challenge for some but not for all, but the lack of a college education means they are under-qualified for a library associate position." However another supervisor countered with, "For the most part, ULP grads were more prepared in ability to do library work. It was a matter of how determined and committed they were to whether they succeeded."

The hiring process of the Saint Paul Public Library is governed by civil service rules and union contracts. Unique to Saint Paul is a rule that is fondly known as "absolute promotion," which requires that any qualified candidate who is also promotional (at least two years service and a minimum of 2,080 hours worked) will be hired before any candidate from the outside will be considered. This rule should have helped SPPL promote its diverse clerical staff to the paraprofessional title "Library Associate." However, archaic class specifications for the Library Associate title required a BA or two years reference experience and did not allow for alternate avenues such as ULP. The only way that SPPL clerical staff could use their promotion rights was to complete a BA since their contracts prohibited them from gaining reference experience without working out of title.

The administrators recognized these enormous barriers and understood that nothing less than a complete overhaul of both the class specifications and the minimum qualifications for the job title of Library Associate would allow them to hire ULP graduates from promotional or original entry eligible lists. Fortunately, SPPL had already committed to moving to a competency based performance management system when they were awarded the IMLS grant, so all of the titles in the library system were being rewritten to reflect competency language. This work provided an opportunity to add titles to job series—in this case creating a Library Associate I and II where only a single title previously existed. The new title would provide a position where new library associates, either ULP

graduates or individuals without previous library experience, could serve an apprenticeship while learning the important “on-the-job” skills.

The work on overhauling the class specification was happening concurrently with the curriculum development and the first two cohorts of the ULP. Since SPPL was and continues to be committed to an inclusive labor/management process, the issues involved required painstaking examination and negotiation. In the end, the bargaining units did not feel comfortable with the creation of the new title since they had recently experienced a situation elsewhere in the city where the higher of two titles in a series was eliminated as the result of a budget cut. Their very real and tangible fear that this could happen in the library created an impasse. In the end, the ULP administrators were forced to choose between keeping the restrictive qualifications (thus eliminating all of their graduates from consideration for employment) or settling for broadening the minimum qualifications for a single Library Associate title to include ULP certification. The latter choice, which they took, placed individuals without college degrees who also needed additional support to meet workplace norms side-by-side with underemployed paraprofessionals with MLS degrees and little chance to advance in an increasingly dismal economic climate. To some in the SPPL, “broadening” of qualifications effectively “lowered” qualifications.

BARRIER: QUALIFICATIONS

The Strategic Plan for the Saint Paul Public Library 1991–93 identifies this strategic issue: determine library needs of people of color; develop marketing plan to meet those needs. In the plan dated 1998–2000, it had become: reflect diversity through staffing, collections, and facilities. And in 2002–4: recruit, develop, and nurture a competent staff that fully represents the community it serves.

In spite of SPPL’s best efforts, by 2003 it still had not complied with citywide goals to increase diversity in its workforce. After five years of the Urban Library Program, it had significantly increased the number of people of color in its clerical and paraprofessional complement. However, some question whether the cost of the program was worth the gain. In the heat of discussion, the phrase “dumbing down the library” was used to describe the effect of hiring individuals to work in non-clerical public service positions without college education. This is an issue that requires dispassionate discussion and, to a certain extent, the passage of time to allow the program to bear fruit.

Several factors complicate the situation at SPPL and, in all likelihood, would do so in other libraries. The workforce is very stable. Among senior staff, most have tenure of thirty years or more. In the past decade, opportunities for promotion have contracted and in the next five years the whole landscape of the library will change dramatically. Decreased state

aid to the city and falling property tax revenue will require unprecedented action to create a sustainable model for library service. Current staff includes MLS qualified individuals working in both clerical and paraprofessional titles. On the other hand, traditional library services are decreasing or remaining flat while classes, computer use, program attendance, and homework help is increasing. The 2010 census will also reveal a continuing increase in the rich diversity of Saint Paul. The need for a staff that reflects the community is as great as it ever has been.

This final barrier to hiring ULP graduates is in many ways the most difficult to address. Objectively, most of the individuals who have been hired by SPPL to work as paraprofessionals are providing high quality service. A supervisor claimed, "One ULP graduate is much better equipped to run the library than some of those with library degrees. ULP provided opportunity for training to do the real work of the library." Another supervisor also claimed that "as far as what can be taught in classroom they were very prepared. A lot of the job is what cannot be taught. Students separated among those who were going to be successful and those who were just trying something out. Factors involve mostly personality, not academic training." Yet others point to the perceived lack of academic competence as a disqualifier without considering different competencies. Unfortunately the perception, right or wrong, can lead to hiring decisions that effectively exclude ULP graduates as viable candidates. One ULP graduate working in the Saint Paul library as a clerk took the test for library associate. Although ranked within the top three candidates the individual was not hired for the position. Wondering why, the candidate was concerned that even though receiving a high rank, the fact of coming from the ULP meant the interviewers perceived the individual as less qualified in spite of doing well on the test.

Most newly hired library staff members come to the job needing to learn part of their duties working beside more experienced colleagues. College educated, mostly Caucasian, mostly monolingual women are attracted to work in libraries. They are usually competent to answer the wide range of questions coming to them, as long as those questions come in English and if the questioner has felt confident enough to approach the reference desk and ask. Urban Library Program graduates may need to ask for assistance from their co-workers as they work to develop the confidence and breadth of general knowledge to answer some questions but they bring insight into immigrant communities and they invite people who look like them to ask them for help. A Muslim woman in the program mentioned being approached by other veiled women who did not want to bother the library staff working at the desk. How many people do not ask their questions or use the library's services because of the value the institution places on academic training over functional competence?

CONCLUSIONS

The expected benefits of the Urban Library Program include the knowledge the partner organizations gained about recruiting in diverse communities; increased representation of communities of color in the workforce of the public library; transformational changes in the performance management system of the library; increased attention to recruiting for diversity in the university's MLIS program and new ways of thinking about the educational support required for an increased student of color population. The unexpected benefits include the many transferrable skills the students gained during the program and the conversations the program opened at both the library and the university about the relative importance of a variety of skills at the public service desks. To return to the wisdom of Gregory Reese and Ernestine Hawkins:

Valuing diversity translates into enhanced productivity, profitability, and competitive advantage. Specifically,

- library management must first view diversity as a business issue that affects the library industry's ability to compete effectively;
- second, library management must view diversity as a top-down initiative that requires overhauls in the library's traditional culture;
- third, library management must create an environment that reflects that commitment. (1999, p. xi)

To return again to the Hmong library associate providing service in English or Hmong at the Sun Ray Library: the barriers were not insurmountable and the benefits are tangible. His plan for the future is to complete his undergraduate education and perhaps, to pursue an MLS. Whether he follows through on this plan or not, he has transformed the face of the Saint Paul Public Library.

REFERENCES

- American Library Association, Office for Diversity. (n.d.). Retrieved August 13, 2010, from <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/diversity/index.cfm>
- Balderrama, S. R. (2004). Deep change-diversity in its simplest. *OLA Quarterly*, 10(4), 15-19.
- Bell, G. S. (Ed.). (2006). Gathering at the waters: Embracing our spirits, telling our stories. Paper presented at the *Proceedings of the 1st National Joint Conference of Librarians of Color*, Dallas, Texas. Retrieved August 14, 2010, from www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/hall-erickson/jclc_2006conf/
- Campbell, D. (2008). National diversity in libraries conference 2008. Retrieved August 14, 2010, from http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/nmrt/news/footnotes/november2008/national_diversity_in_libs_campbell.cfm
- Cytron-Hysom, T. (2004). *Community needs assessment: Library services for underserved communities*. St. Paul: St. Paul Community Literacy Consortium.
- DeCoursey, J., & Skyles, A. (2007). *Making connections: Engaging employers in preparing Chicago's youth for the workforce*. (Working Paper No. 2). Chicago: Chapin Hall.
- Dewey, B., Parham, L. O., & Burger, J. (2005). Diversity in libraries: Making it real (2004 national diversity in libraries conference report). *The Southeastern Librarian*, 53(3), 19-22.
- Greenblatt, E. (2008). Diversity connects; Colorado's first statewide diversity summit. *Colorado Libraries*, 34(3), 43-44.

- Hankins, R., Saunders, M., & Situ, P. (2003). Diversity initiatives vs. residency programs: Agents of change? *College and Research Libraries News*, 64(5), 308, 310–315.
- IFLA multicultural library manifesto. (2008). *IFLA Journal*, 34(2), 204–205.
- Kovel-Jarboe, P. (November, 2009). *The urban library program phase two: Summative evaluation*. n.p.
- Love, E. (2007). Building bridges: Cultivating partnerships between libraries and minority student services. *Education Libraries*, 30(1), 13–19.
- Minnesota Certification for Library Employees. (2008, May 21). Retrieved August 14, 2010, from www.arrowhead.lib.mn.us/certification
- Reese, G. L., & Hawkins, E. L. (1999). *Stop talking, start doing! Attracting people of color to the library profession*. Chicago: ALA.
- Sannwald, W. W. (2000). Understanding organizational change. *Library Administration and Management*, 14(1), 8–14.
- Schuckett, S. (2007). Diversity: Do you walk the talk? *CSLA Journal*, 31(1), 17–18.

Appendix A. Characteristics of Applicants to the Urban Library Program, 2004–9

	2004–5	2005–6	2006–7	2007–8	2008–9	Totals
Age range	Early 20s to to mid-50s	Late teens to early 60s	Late teens to mid-60s	Late teens to late 50s	Late teens to late 60s	
Education range	GED to Masters	GED to Bachelors	HS diploma to some college	GED to Bachelors	GED to Bachelors	
# receiving financial aid	3/9	13/23	9/13	9/12	13/15	34
# receiving IMLS scholarship	8/9	23/23	13/13	12/12	15/15	56
Metro area representation:	Edina Minneapolis St. Paul Hastings Inver Grove Heights Minneapolis Roseville St. Paul St. Paul Park Woodbury	Blaine Bloomington Eagan Heights Minneapolis Oakdale St. Paul So. St. Paul	Bloomington Hopkins Inver Grove St. Paul West St. Paul Woodbury	Bloomington Maple Grove Minneapolis	St. Paul Minneapolis Woodbury	
# completing ULP	8/9	18/23	9/13	9/12		44
# in compliance with service contract	8/8	18/18	9/9	9/9		44
# receiving certificate from CSC	8/8	18/18	9/9	9/9		44
# receiving MN Certification Certificate	8/8	18/18	9/9	9/9		44
# employed in libraries	7/8	12/18	3/9	4/9		29
# enrolled in higher education	5/8	6/18	2/9	4/9		17
# actively seeking employment in libraries	2/18	1/9	3/9			6
# volunteering in libraries	1/23	2/9	1			

APPENDIX B. Urban Library Services Certificate Curriculum

The Urban Library Program encourages people to consider a career in a library setting. It prepares participants for employment in libraries by using a teaching-learning model that combines theory and hands-on work experience. The program also provides career opportunities for members of diverse communities historically under-represented in the library workforce. Upon completion of the Urban Library certificate, students have the option to seek employment in a library or to continue their studies. To earn a certificate, students must complete six required courses plus three practicum rotations in the Saint Paul and Hennepin County Public Library Systems for a total of twelve undergraduate credits. Four courses focus on libraries and library services. Two courses provide instruction and practice in a language that is not the student's first language.

Course Listings:

LIS 1000	FOUNDATIONS OF LIBRARY SCIENCE: THE URBAN LENS
2 credits	Fall Term
LIS 1100	TECHNICAL SERVICES IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES
2 credits	Winter Term
LIS 1200	COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC SERVICES
2 credits	Spring Term
LIS 1300	THE URBAN LIBRARY: COMMUNITY LENS
2 credits	Spring Term
LIS 1050	HMONG FOR LIBRARY PARAPROFESSIONALS I
2 credits	Fall Term
LIS 1060	HMONG FOR LIBRARY PARAPROFESSIONALS II
2 credits	Winter Term
ASL 1050	AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE FOR LIBRARY PARAPROFESSIONALS I
2 credits	Fall Term
ASL 1060	AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE FOR LIBRARY PARAPROFESSIONALS II
2 credits	Winter Term
ENGL 1050	ENGLISH FOR LIBRARY PARAPROFESSIONALS I
2 credits	Fall Term
ENGL 1060	ENGLISH FOR LIBRARY PARAPROFESSIONALS II
2 credits	Winter Term
SPAN 1050	SPANISH FOR LIBRARY PARAPROFESSIONALS I
2 credits	Fall Term
SPAN 1060	SPANISH FOR LIBRARY PARAPROFESSIONALS II
2 credits	Winter Term