

# ALA Defines Important New Strategy to Increase Minorities in Library Profession

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The 1997 American Library Association (ALA) Midwinter Conference was the official unveiling of ALA Executive Director Elizabeth Martinez's Spectrum Initiative proposal. The proposal was shared and discussed widely at the Midwinter Conference. The initiative addresses "the under-representation of critically needed minority librarians within the profession" by proposing that five graduate library education schools create a consortium in an effort to graduate 150 racially diverse librarians in three years. Each school would receive incentive money to be used for scholarships and enrichment activities.

The Spectrum Initiative proposal highlights the disproportionately low numbers of racially diverse individuals graduating from library and information science schools and concludes that *the library profession as a whole is losing ground in recruiting and educating minorities to library and information science professions while the ethnic make-up of the U.S. continues to change*. The proposal also cites a recent study by Kathleen de la Pena McCook, University of South Florida and Chair of the ALISE Recruitment Committee, that finds that the 1994/95 academic year graduation rates for ethnic minorities were: African American 4.21%, Asian Pacific 3.37%, Latino/Hispanic 2.12%, and Native American .16%.

This most recent of ALA's steps to address racial diversity in the profession is a welcome and positive development for all libraries. ARL's own Diversity Program is founded on the belief that only by adding different perspectives and talents to the research library profession, will such libraries continue to be the vibrant and evolving institutions needed for the increasingly diverse communities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In spite of significant programmatic efforts by many library organizations and associations, including ARL and ALA, and a heightened awareness of the issues associated with diversity and minority recruitment, survey results compiled by the ARL Statistics and Measurement Program reflect continuing low numbers of minority professionals represented in ARL libraries. According to the *1996-97 ARL Annual Salary Survey*, 11.3% of professional librarians in ARL institutions are U.S. racial minorities (853 of 7,561 total). Of that 11.3%, 46% are Asian American, 32.7% are African American, 19.2% are Hispanic, and 2.1% are Native American.

ARL is committed to a diversity program that includes the pursuit of strategies for recruitment and retention and is highly supportive of all efforts to increase minority representation in libraries. The ALA Spectrum Initiative is a very significant new effort, deserving of support by libraries of all types as a mechanism that will have a substantive impact on the number of minorities prepared to enter the library and information science profession. More racial minority librarians in the workforce help all personnel become more attuned to issues of diversity, thus broadening the spectrum of knowledge and improving the quality of service to all communities. While the ALA Spectrum Initiative is not focused specifically on research libraries, the availability of trained and qualified professionals will inevitably benefit ARL institutions.

In February, the ALA Executive Board approved the Spectrum Initiative in principle; implementation plans will be developed in the months to come. ARL has communicated its support and congratulations on this action to the ALA leadership and will keep the research library community informed as further information on the program becomes available.

© *ARL: A Bimonthly Newsletter of Research Library Issues and Actions* 190 (February 1997).  
Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries.

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**Last Modified:** Thursday, March 27, 1997- 10:37:36 AM