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# Variation on a Traditional Theme: The Question of Racial and Ethnic Diversity in MLA

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## **Variation on a Traditional Theme: The Question of Racial and Ethnic Diversity in MLA**

**Mark A. Puente and Susannah Cleveland**

Diversity in an organization can be a symbol of how seriously it approaches inclusivity, pluralism, and commitment to balancing multiple viewpoints and, as such, can be a sign of the health and vitality of a group. Such diversity takes many forms, including racial and ethnic diversity, gender diversity, and even regional and geographic diversity. The issue of racial and ethnic diversity, however, is one of crucial interest for the Music Library Association (MLA) because it is an area where the organization traditionally lags behind peer organizations and the profession in general.

MLA has a long history of commitment to inclusivity in its membership, but data show that this commitment rarely extends, in practice, to the creation or growth of a racially and ethnically diverse organization. A summary from MLA's Working Group Surveying Music Library Personnel Characteristics in 1999 provides a grim portrait of diversity, with 93% of members reporting European/Anglo American heritage, with the rest of the membership divided between Asian/Asian American heritage (3%), Hispanic/Hispanic heritage (1%) and Native American heritage (1%), and no members indicating that they were of

African/African American or Pacific Islander heritage.<sup>1</sup> A follow-up survey in 2009 reveals that the picture has changed little. While there was an increase to the Hispanic category (up to 3.4%), and some respondents in the African/African American and Pacific Islander categories (.7% and .3%, respectively), the category of “White” had grown to 95% with little change to the Asian or Native American categories (1.3% and 1%, respectively).<sup>2</sup>

To see how these data compare to national trends in the profession, it would be useful to look at several studies and data sets that track similar statistics for other associations and for the library and information profession as a whole. To date the most comprehensive demographic study in librarianship was published in 2006 by the American Library Association (ALA), updated in 2007. The ALA document “Diversity Counts” offers a comprehensive demographic profile of the library profession, analyzing data with regard to age, race and ethnicity, gender, and disability status, cross tabulating those data with information on types of libraries in which people work, geographic location, education, and so on. Speaking on the dramatic shift in racial/ethnic demographics that our country is currently experiencing, the authors of the report assert:

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<sup>1</sup> David Lesniaski, Tim Cherubini, Charles Coldwell, Richard Griscom, Pat Fiskien, Michelle Koth, Renee McBride, and Cindy Richardson, “Summary of Data from MLA Survey,” [http://library.music.indiana.edu/tech\\_s/mla/person/mladatasummaryfornotes.htm](http://library.music.indiana.edu/tech_s/mla/person/mladatasummaryfornotes.htm) (accessed February 23, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Susannah Cleveland and Mark A. Puente, “MLA Survey of Personnel Characteristics, 2009: Report and Statistical Summary,” <http://musiclibraryassoc.org/Publications.aspx?id=798#Demographics> (accessed February 23, 2011).

The implications of this mounting diversity on the future of libraries are significant. Though the institutional charge of the library historically has been to meet the information needs of users efficiently and equitably, contemporary library and information science (LIS) research provides compelling evidence that services to some user groups are greatly impeded by socio-cultural divides. That the library's existence is necessarily predicated on its relevance to the communities it serves demands that we pay more than cursory attention to our burgeoning national diversity and our ability thus far, to fully reflect that diversity among our ranks.<sup>3</sup>

The report provides a convincing argument for increasing diversity in the library workforce so that libraries better reflect the changing demographic profile of the communities they serve. Evidence of these rapidly shifting demographics can be found in the most recent reports issued by the U.S. Census Bureau (Figure 1).<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1: Race by Percentage of Population, U.S. Census, 2010 [table]**

Data from the 2007 article—which will soon be updated to reflect new Census data—cites estimates of minority representation among “credentialed librarians” in all types of libraries in 2000 (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Credentialed Librarians by Race/Ethnicity 2000, Diversity Counts [table]**

Several library and music professional associations track demographic statistics of their organizations regularly and systematically. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) has been surveying its membership since

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<sup>3</sup> American Library Association: Office of Research and Statistics, “Diversity Counts,” January 2007: 3. <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/diversity/diversitycounts/divcounts.cfm> (accessed February 23, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> United States Census Bureau: The 2010 Statistical Abstract, *Population: Estimates and Projections by Age, Sex, Race/Ethnicity*, December 2009. [http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/population/estimates\\_and\\_projections\\_by\\_age\\_sex\\_raceethnicity.html](http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/population/estimates_and_projections_by_age_sex_raceethnicity.html) (accessed January 3, 2011).

1989<sup>5</sup> and the Medical Library Association, on a triennial basis, since 1982.<sup>6</sup>

Other organizations that collect demographic information as part of larger surveys include the Special Libraries Association, the American Association of Law Libraries, the Society of American Archivists, and the Association of Research Libraries.

At the 2010 Music Library Association annual meeting in San Diego, Judy Tsou of the University of Washington Libraries contrasted the demographic profiles of several organizations with the latest data collected from MLA. Although it is difficult to draw exact parallels because of variations in the timeframes for data collection as well as differences in classifications of racial and ethnic minority groups used in respective studies, it is fair to say that minority representation in MLA (Music) trends consistently lower than other library associations (Figure 3).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Association of College and Research Libraries, *ACRL Member Survey: November 1989* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Mark Wallace, Thomas D. McMullen, and Kate Corcoran, "Findings From the Most Recent Medical, Library Association Salary Survey," *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 95, no. 4 (October 2004): 465-472. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC521518/> (accessed January 3, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Mike Norbut, Sheri Jacobs, and Beth McNamee, *2009 Membership Survey Findings: Final Report*, June 2009. <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/about/whatisacrl/index.cfm> (accessed January 3, 2011). Martha Kyrillidou and Les Bland, *ARL Annual Salary Survey 2009-2010*, 2010: 8. <http://www.arl.org/stats/annualsurveys/salary/sal0910.shtml> (accessed January 3, 2011). Hay Group and Medical Library Association, *2008 Salary Survey*, 2008. [http://www.mlanet.org/publications/hay\\_mla\\_08ss.html](http://www.mlanet.org/publications/hay_mla_08ss.html) (accessed January 3, 2011). Society of American Archivists, "A Census: Archival Census and Educational Needs Survey in the United States," *American Archivist* 69, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2006): 291-419.

**Figure 3: Percentage of Members Identifying as “White” in Library Organizations [table]**

Obviously, there is a significant difference between minority representation in MLA when compared with the racial and ethnic composition of the United States as a whole. Even when compared with more defined constituencies, the ratios are low. For example, since 88% of MLA members report being employed in academic libraries, it is useful to look at racial and ethnic composition of students enrolled in higher education. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), representation of ethnic and racial minorities in higher education has been on a steady increase (Figure 4).<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 4: Higher Education Enrollment by Race, 2007**

NCES projects that, by the year 2018, the White/non-Hispanic student population in the United States will increase by additional 4%. In contrast, projected enrollment increases for minority students, will range from 26% for African-Americans to 38% for Hispanic students.<sup>9</sup>

Data for students enrolled in music programs, specifically, also point to significant changes in the demographic landscape of the constituencies served by music librarians. According to reports issued by the Higher Education in the Arts Department (HEADS) overall percentages of minority enrollment of music

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<sup>8</sup> National Association for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 2008*. <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98> (accessed January 3, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> National Association for Education Statistics, *Projections of Educational Statistics to 2018*, 2009. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009062> (accessed January 3, 2011).

students increased by 12% between 1996 and 2007.<sup>10</sup> The comparisons are skewed slightly by the fact that, in 2003-2004, the HEADS reports added “Other/Race Ethnicity Unknown” as an additional category for identification in the instrument. In the 2006-2007 report, almost 10% of respondents placed themselves in this category.<sup>11</sup>

By way of contrast, data from HEADS also track minority representation in faculty of National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). The period from 1996 to 2006 saw a net increase of school of music faculty from traditionally underrepresented ethnic and racial minority groups of 68%, or a decrease of those identifying as “White/non-Hispanic” from 92% in 1996-1997 to 86% in 2006-2007.<sup>12</sup>

Although the argument, heretofore, has been focused on representation, it should be noted that there is a growing body of evidence that correlates an organization’s perceived commitment to diversity with levels of customer satisfaction. Most notable is the work of Dr. Paul Hanges, professor of Industrial and Organizational Psychology at the University of Maryland whose work with the Organizational Climate and Diversity Assessment (ClimateQUAL™) has shown this correlation through extensive work in academic libraries.<sup>13</sup>

### MLA’S EFFORTS

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<sup>10</sup> Higher Education Arts Data Services (HEADS). *Music Data Summaries* (Reston, VA: Council of Arts Accrediting Associations, 1997), p. 61.

<sup>11</sup> HEADS. *Music Data Summaries* (Reston, VA: Council of Arts Accrediting Associations, 2007), p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> HEADS, 1997, p. 60; HEADS, 2007, p. 60.

<sup>13</sup> Paul J. Hanges and Charles B. Lowry, “What is the Healthy Organization? Organizational Climate and Diversity Assessment: A Research Partnership.” *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 8, no. 1 (January 2008): 1-5.

Concern about racial diversity within MLA is not new. The desire to reach out to underrepresented populations has been a theme of conversations at many levels of the organization for some time, although documentation of these efforts is not extensive. When fundraising for the Kevin Freeman Travel Grant began in the early 1990s, increasing MLA's diversity was explicitly seen as a potential benefit of the scholarship.<sup>14</sup> In 2003, MLA appointed a Recruitment Task Force to investigate issues related to MLA recruitment and retention efforts, with an emphasis on drawing members from historically underrepresented communities. Ideas discussed at the time included translating membership brochures to other languages such as Spanish or Chinese, targeting recruitment from college and universities with significant populations of minority students, reaching out to other library organizations concerned with diversity, and sponsoring scholarships through ALA's Spectrum program—the longest standing minority recruitment program for librarianship in the United States.<sup>15</sup> That Task Force disbanded in 2005, but in subsequent years, MLA's Publicity and Outreach Officer has undertaken several of these efforts, including staffing exhibits at diversity-themed events such as the National Diversity in Libraries Conferences (NDLC), the Joint Conference of Librarians of Color, as well as professional development events at the Spectrum Scholar Leadership Institute (SLI). Since 2005, MLA's Placement

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<sup>14</sup> Music Library Association, Board of Directors, Minutes from the meeting in Kansas City, MO, March 1-6, 1994, [http://musiclibraryassoc.org/uploadedFiles/About\\_MLA/Administration/Board\\_of\\_Directors/Minutes9403.pdf](http://musiclibraryassoc.org/uploadedFiles/About_MLA/Administration/Board_of_Directors/Minutes9403.pdf) (accessed January 3, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Music Library Association, Board of Directors, Minutes from the meeting in Austin, TX, February 11-16 2003, [http://musiclibraryassoc.org/uploadedFiles/About\\_MLA/Administration/Board\\_of\\_Directors/2\\_03\\_boardmin.pdf](http://musiclibraryassoc.org/uploadedFiles/About_MLA/Administration/Board_of_Directors/2_03_boardmin.pdf) (accessed February 22, 2011).

Officer has also maintained a bibliography of articles relating to diversity and minority recruitment on MLA's web site in the Career Resources section,<sup>16</sup> and issues of diversity have been frequent conversation topics for MLA's Outreach Committee and the former Membership Committee.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

At the MLA Annual Meeting in San Diego, CA, Judy Tsou recommended a three-pronged approach to recruiting more minorities into music: 1) recruitment efforts association wide, 2) recruitment efforts on an institutional level, and 3) recruitment efforts on an individual level. The focus here will be on potential recruitment strategies that could be implemented on the association level, several of which were enumerated in the Tsou presentation.<sup>17</sup>

#### **1) Develop and institutionalize minority recruitment efforts for the Association.**

MLA is fortunate to employ a special officer whose main responsibility is to promote the mission of the Association as well as promote membership at library and music conferences nation-wide. Recent efforts by the Publicity and Outreach Officer have extended the reach of MLA into traditionally underrepresented populations. In addition to participation in diversity-themed events, she has also attended outreach events at North Carolina Central University, an historically black-serving institution. Similar events could be

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<sup>16</sup> Music Library Association, "Career Resources: Diversity and Minority Recruitment," <http://musiclibraryassoc.org/employment.aspx?id=269> (accessed March 9, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Judy Tsou, "Plan for a More Diverse MLA" (Presentation, Music Library Association Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA, March 19-25, 2010), <http://www.mlasc.org/mla2010/Cleveland2.pptx> (accessed February 23, 2011).

planned at other minority-serving institutions, or during meetings of music societies whose diversity exceeds that of MLA. The association might consider other strategies for outreach to diverse constituencies, including establishing profiles within the ALA ethnic caucuses by creating liaison positions to those organizations or to the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) and marketing MLA events and opportunities on relevant electronic mailing lists.

Other ways in which MLA can foster a more inclusive environment is by ensuring that the mission statement of the organization contains clear language about the value of diversity for MLA. Ideally, this should also be reflected in policy documents, promotional materials, or any platform that serves to inform those within and outside of the membership about the strategic concerns of the association. In addition, MLA could encourage the breadth of diversity in programming for regional or national meetings. This would aim to develop session topics based on musical expressions from various cultures and world music, or that provide significant social and political commentary about diverse populations.

**2) Provide scholarship opportunities supporting MLA membership or to attend the MLA annual meeting for minority MLIS or music students.**

Another approach for increasing minority representation in MLA and in the music library profession is to provide exposure to the work of the association and employment opportunities in the field by funding scholarships for students from underrepresented groups to attend the MLA annual or chapter meetings. MLA's Kevin Freeman Travel Grant offers opportunities for young members to

become more involved in the organization, to be sure, but it is not directed specifically at underrepresented students. Several professional organizations offer this form of support specifically for minority MLIS students or librarians, among them the Art Libraries Association of North America (ARLIS), the Society of American Archivists (SAA), and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). The ARLIS Student Diversity Award for Conference Attendance is open to any student with an interest in art librarianship or visual resources who is also enrolled in or within 12 months of graduating from an MLIS program.<sup>18</sup> SAA's Harold T. Pinkett Minority Student Award provides support for a student in a post-secondary program to attend the organization's annual meeting.<sup>19</sup> The ACRL travel grant is offered to a current or former ALA Spectrum Scholar who has not previously attended the ACRL conference and who is a member of the association.<sup>20</sup> All of these organizations offer other travel grants without restrictions to ethnic/racial identification as well.

**3) Offer tuition stipends in support of MLIS education or internships in music libraries, archives, and information centers.**

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<sup>18</sup> Art Libraries Society of North America, "Student Diversity Award for Conference Attendance," Art Libraries Society of North America, <http://www.arlisna.org/about/awards/diversity.html> (accessed January 4, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Society of American Archivists, "Archivists & Archives of Color Roundtable: Harold T. Pinkett Minority Student Award," [http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/aac/Awards\\_Pinkett.htm](http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/aac/Awards_Pinkett.htm) (accessed February 28, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> American Library Association, "ACRL Travel Grants for Spectrum Scholars," Association of Research Libraries, [http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/events/national/2011/scholarships/ALA\\_print\\_layout\\_1\\_594183\\_594183.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/events/national/2011/scholarships/ALA_print_layout_1_594183_594183.cfm) (accessed January 4, 2011).

The longest-standing minority recruitment program providing funding for students enrolled in MLIS programs is the ALA Spectrum Scholarship Program. The program was initiated in 1997 by a generous grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and has since provided scholarship support for over 680 students. The program includes opportunities for formal and informal mentoring, complimentary membership in ALA, and full funding to attend the Spectrum Scholar Leadership Institute, an annual event held in conjunction with the ALA Annual Meeting. Although the Spectrum program offers one-time funding of \$5000 to students, many ALA-accredited library and information programs offer matching funding.<sup>21</sup> Several associations have forged partnerships with the ALA Spectrum Program, most notably the Medical Library Association (MLA)/the National Library of Medicine, and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). MLA/NLM and ACRL donate funds (\$6500 per student), essentially, in support of one or two Spectrum Scholars per year. ACRL has provided the funding since 1999 and MLA/NLM since 2001.<sup>22</sup>

The Association of Research Libraries' (ARL) Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce (IRDW) is structured similarly to the Spectrum program and aims to recruit MLIS students from traditionally underrepresented groups into careers in research libraries. The IRDW provides \$10,000 of stipend funding over

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<sup>21</sup> American Library Association, "Spectrum Scholarship Program," American Library Association, <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/diversity/spectrum/index.cfm> (accessed January 4, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Medical Library Association, "Grants and Scholarships: MLA/NLM Spectrum Scholarship," Medical Library Association, [http://www.mlahq.org/awards/grants/mla\\_nlmspectrum.html](http://www.mlahq.org/awards/grants/mla_nlmspectrum.html) (accessed January 4, 2011).

a course of two years, a formal mentor program, leadership development training, and other benefits.<sup>23</sup> Currently in its eleventh year, the IRDW is funded by ARL member institutions as well as the IMLS. In addition to the IRDW, ARL administers another minority recruitment program entitled the Career Enhancement Program (CEP) that offers minority MLIS students a 6- to 12-week paid internship in an ARL partner library. The internship is part of an 18-month fellowship program that also offers scholarship funding, mentorship, and leadership development training delivered through ARL's annual Leadership Symposium.<sup>24</sup>

Several library associations provide generous scholarship funding for MLIS students from traditionally underrepresented ethnic and racial minority groups either through large-scale, grant-funded initiatives, member-supported and -administered funding programs, or through collaborations with national organizations such as ALA. For example, The George A. Straight Minority Scholarship of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) has provided scholarship funding for two to four qualified students annually since 1990.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the Society of American Archivists (SAA) established their Mosaic student scholarship in 2007, providing tuition awards in the amount of \$5000 per

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<sup>23</sup> Association of Research Libraries, "Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce," Association of Research Libraries, <http://www.arl.org/diversity/init/index.shtml> (accessed January 4, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Association of Research Libraries, "Career Enhancement Program," Association of Research Libraries, <http://www.arl.org/diversity/cep/index.shtml> (accessed January 4, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> American Association of Law Libraries, "AALL & Thomson West – George A. Strait Minority Scholarship Endowment," [http://www.aallnet.org/services/sch\\_strait.asp](http://www.aallnet.org/services/sch_strait.asp), (accessed January 4, 2011).

year to two students enrolled in MLIS programs with tracks in archival studies and who are interested in pursuing careers in archival administration.<sup>26</sup> MLA has begun to explore a pilot program to provide scholarship stipends and paid internships to a total of 15 MLIS students (over a three-year period) wishing to pursue music librarianship. The program would be structured similarly to the ARL IRDW and the ALA Spectrum program and would integrate formally with MLA's existing mentorship and career placement programs that serve to support students' transitions into the profession. Funding opportunities are being explored with governmental agencies and private foundations in order to accelerate diversity recruitment efforts now and to provide a basis for developing an association-funded effort at a later time. Such a scholarship program could be an important step in shoring up MLA's commitment to building a more diverse membership.

Even with these numerous and varied approaches serving as models for successful minority recruitment programs, creating an association-level initiative may be the most work-intensive strategy for increasing the diversity of MLA. However, it is evident that the existing committee and personnel structure of the association would lend itself easily to the creation of such a program. ALA and ACRL take advantage of their membership base for fund development in addition to seeking corporate sponsorship and foundational and federal funding (i.e. IMLS). The efforts of the MLA's Publicity and Outreach Officer have already

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<sup>26</sup> Society for American Archivists, "Mosaic Scholarship," Society for American Archivists, <http://www.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section12-mosaic.asp> (accessed January 4, 2011).

made inroads towards establishing important contacts and forging strategic partnerships with other associations and societies for whom minority recruitment is a priority. Operational and financial partnerships with schools of library and information science or other library associations could be appropriate strategies for initiating a program for MLA. Such partnerships could help to leverage resources and, perhaps, lend the hand of experience to MLA for developing and administering a program as well as systematically and longitudinally assessing its effect. If the aforementioned programs are to serve as models of successful minority recruitment initiatives in the MLIS profession, it seems a comprehensive program could have as many of the following components as necessary:

- Scholarship funding in support of MLIS education;
- Support for membership in MLA and for attendance to attend the annual meeting and important networking events;
- One or more internship or practicum experience to develop key skills and learn knowledge vital to modern music librarianship;
- Required coursework in music librarianship or musicology;
- A structured (formal) mentorship program;
- Skills or leadership development training.

Whatever the outcome, it is also apparent that such a program would benefit from a group or committee who would serve to advise the association on key diversity issues, recruitment being only one piece of the puzzle. Again, MLA might look to ARLIS, SAA, ACRL, or even scholarly groups such as the Society of Music Theorists (SMT), the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM), and the American Musicological Society (AMS), all of whom have a Diversity Committee or other body charged with providing advisory services or recommendations to their respective memberships and governing boards for diversity recruitment and other multicultural, multiethnic concerns.

## CONCLUSION

A great deal of time could be spent reviewing literature from other disciplines (psychology, business, higher education) that provide evidence of improved customer satisfaction, better workplace climate, improved bottom lines, and similar advantages to organizations that are diverse and that value diversity in workplace culture. The focus on the question of representation is a logical starting point for beginning conversations about possible strategies for improving ethnic and racial minority representation in MLA. Indeed, in spite of apparent shortcomings with respect to ethnic and racial diversity within MLA, the association does fare better with respect to other dimensions of diversity (i.e. sexual orientation, gender, geographical location) if representation of the membership is the primary metric. However, diversity in these integral human dimensions appears to have happened organically without the aid of targeted initiatives or special programs aimed at promoting these types of diversity. If MLA aspires to be an organization that is truly diverse and inclusive, recruitment efforts aimed at racial and ethnic diversity of music library personnel should not be initiated out of a sense of dissatisfaction with the work done, historically, by practitioners from majority cultures. Neither is there any insinuation that library and information professionals from historically underrepresented groups should or would serve patrons who share their ethnic or racial identification any better than those who don't share those characteristics. It is however, beyond mere altruism, perhaps more common sense, to recognize that recruitment of ethnic and racial minorities into the profession is necessary for survival of the profession,

particularly given the dramatic demographic shifts underway and anticipated in the next decades. Moreover, the recruitment of a more diverse library and information workforce should be seen as efforts that bring value to the profession, to organizations, and to services provided to musicians, theorists, and historians, all served by a dynamic and relevant professional workforce.

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Following the findings from MLA's Survey of Personnel Characteristics, 2009 that pointed to discrepancies between the racial and ethnic diversity of MLA members and general population, an analysis of the diversity of MLA's patron base and an assessment of other organizations' efforts at diversity are analyzed. Recommendations for efforts by MLA to address these discrepancies as well as justification for making such efforts follow.