

## Promoting Diversity to Add Value to the LIS Profession

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### Abstract:

#### Purpose

The purpose of this article is to discuss the impact the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's (UNCG) Library and Information Studies Academic and Cultural Enrichment (ACE) Scholars Program has had on promoting diversity and adding value to the library and information studies profession.

#### Design/methodology/approach

This article is presented as a case study in which three iterations of the ACE Scholars Program are discussed, including program design and suggested impact the program has had on educating and engaging diverse individuals for careers in the library and information studies professions.

#### Findings

Nearly 50 ACE Scholars program participants, representing ethnically, racially, and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds, have graduated from UNCG with their MLIS degrees since 2011. In the five years since the first ACE cohort graduated, Scholar alums continue to impact the LIS profession through their professional roles as well as through their community engagement, professional association memberships and leadership roles, professional presentations, and numerous publications.

#### Originality/value

This article presents a model that has helped to promote diversity in the LIS field in way that can be adapted by other graduate programs that are preparing individuals for successful and engaged careers as library and information studies professionals.

**Keywords:** MLIS degree | LIS education | diversity | academic librarianship | community college librarianship

### Article:

## Introduction

*“My participation in the ACE Scholars program was an experience I will never forget, as it shaped who I am today. In addition to acquiring confidence in myself as being someone who can function in and contribute to professional environments, my peers and professors made indelible marks on my heart in terms of serving others and doing everything I can to protect and appreciate diversity” Yvonne – Class of 2014, ACE 3.*

In 2008, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro’s (UNCG) Library and Information Studies (LIS) Department and UNCG University Libraries, in partnership with nine other four-year public and private universities across the state of North Carolina, including four Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s), came together to apply for and were awarded a 3-year grant (2008-2011) from the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). These funds helped to initiate the first Academic and Cultural Enrichment Scholars (ACE 1) program at the university. The Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program is designed to “support professional development, graduate education and continuing education to help libraries and archives develop the human capital capacity they need to meet the changing learning and information needs of the American Public (IMLS, 2016). The goals of this first ACE Scholars program were threefold: (1) to recruit individuals from under-served communities and with diverse backgrounds for future positions in academic libraries, (2) collaborate between the LIS Department and the ten participating libraries to build on our commitment to diversity, and (3) promote diversity by recruiting and educating librarians with diverse backgrounds into the library profession.

Building upon the efforts and success of ACE 1 and to continue to promote diversity in the LIS field, the UNCG LIS program, UNCG University Libraries, and the original partner institutions applied for and were awarded a second 3-year grant (ACE 2) in 2010 to continue their work through 2013 with the same program goals identified for the ACE 1 program. In 2012, a third IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Grant (ACE 3) was awarded to the UNCG LIS program, UNCG University Libraries, and a new subset of North Carolina community college partners to increase the diversity among community college librarians by providing opportunities for New Americans (immigrants and refugees) to achieve postsecondary education in the field of librarianship. In the third iteration of the grant, individuals who represented diverse populations were recruited and prepared for professional positions in community college libraries, with emphasis on serving diverse populations.

Diversity is an essential component of any civil society and has become a global necessity. The library and information science profession promotes the need for skilled librarians and library staff to serve and advocate for racially and ethnically diverse constituencies (ALA “Diversity Standards”, 2012). Traditional recruitment methods did not provide the diversity needed in the profession, thus the IMLS grants became the vehicle to move diversity recruitment forward. The authors and contributors to this project wanted the experience to be engaged in the development of skills related to cultural competence for both the educators and those being educated, with the hope that participants would “pay it forward” (Cooper, He, & Levin, 2011).

UNCG is large public, coeducational, doctoral granting institution in the southeastern United States with a 2015-2016 student population of approximately 19. Ethnic minority enrollment is approximately 43%, making it the most diverse of the UNC system's historically white campuses (UNCG, 2016). However, ethnic minority student enrollment in the UNCG LIS Department has lagged behind that of the university. In 2007 only 8.5% of enrollees in the LIS department were ethnic minorities, with this lag continuing through 2015, with 12.4% ethnic minority student enrollment (UNCG, 2016).

The Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) degree that is offered at UNCG is fully accredited by the American Library Association (ALA). Until 2011, the program was offered primarily as a campus-based program. In Fall 2011, a fully-online program was also made available, allowing students to enroll as either main campus or online learners. To earn a MLIS degree from UNCG, students must complete a minimum of 36 credit hours that includes a series of core requirements and electives. Though not required, (with the exception of school library media), completion of a practicum (also referred to as "internship") is strongly encouraged, particularly for those students with limited library related work experience.

By the end of the third cohort, the LIS department had graduated over 45 students destined to make an impact on diversity in the profession. While the ACE Scholars program prides itself on increasing the number of diverse individuals working in the library and information studies profession, the impact of this program runs much deeper. Earning an MLIS degree has changed the Scholars' lives in ways that have allowed them to make a positive and meaningful impact on the larger profession. This article discusses the impact the ACE Scholars Program has had on educating and engaging diverse individuals for careers in the library and information studies profession using a case study approach in which the three iterations of the program are discussed, including noteworthy elements of program design.

### **ACE Scholars Program**

With each iteration of the ACE Scholars program, a cohort of individuals was admitted by the LIS department who fit pre-defined selection criteria including minority status, academic and professional potential, and a desire to make a positive impact upon the profession and their communities. Individuals selected into the program were provided full tuition assistance, living stipends, laptop computers (ACE 1 and ACE 2 only), professional association memberships, registration and travel support to attend local, regional, and/or national professional conferences, were assigned mentors, participated in specially designed workshops to prepare them for their future careers, and completed internships relevant to their fields of interest. Though there were many similarities with how the three iterations of the ACE Scholars programs were designed, each cohort provided participants with a unique set of experiences that helped to shape their educational experiences, career trajectories, and ultimately, their impact on their communities and the LIS profession. Each of these programs, and the components which made them unique, are outlined in Table 1 and discussed in greater detail below.

**Table 1: ACE Scholars Programs and Activities**

	<b>ACE 1 (n=14)</b>	<b>ACE 2 (n=25)*</b>	<b>ACE 3 (n=11)</b>
Funding Yrs	2008 - 2011	2010 - 2013	2013 – 2014
Program Yrs	Fall 2009 – Spr 2011	Fall 2011 – Spr 2013	Fall 2013 – Fall 2014
Focus	Academic Librarianship	Academic Librarianship	Community College Librarianship
Curriculum	General	General	Multicultural, multilingual, community engaged
Internships	70-130 hours	60 hours min.	80 hours min.
Mentorships	Included	Included	Included
ACE Gatherings / Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Profess. Careers</li> <li>• LIS Research</li> <li>• Resume/Job Seeking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing Rapport</li> <li>• Active Listening, Networking, &amp; Relationship Bldg.</li> <li>• Resume/Job Seeking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional Intelligence</li> <li>• Professional Presence</li> <li>• LIS Research &amp; Assess.</li> <li>• Resume/Job Seeking</li> </ul>
Professional Meetings and Conferences			
Local / Regional	UNCG IDEAL Summit (Attended)	UNCG iDEAL Summit (Organized & Attended)	UNCG iDEAL Summit (Attended)
		2013 Conference for Entrepreneurial Librarians (Presented)	
Statewide	NCLA (Attended)	NCLA (Presented)	NCLA (Attended) NCCLRA (Presented)
National	ALA (Presented)	JCLA (Presented)	N/A
Other	UnHushed (Organized & Presented)	UnHushed (Organized & Presented)	N/A
# Graduates	14	22	11

### ACE Scholars I

The first cohort of 14 Scholars commenced their UNCG LIS curricular program in Fall 2009. The cohort was racially and ethnically diverse and included 11 African Americans, one Native American, one Latina, and one white student. With the infusion of the IMLS grant, the total number of students with diverse and ethnic backgrounds enrolled in the MLIS program in Fall 2009 represented a 60 percent increase from the previous year (UNCG, 2016). All ACE 1

Scholars graduated on their targeted completion date in May 2011. Three key components of the program helped to achieve the goals of the project: (1) mentoring, (2) internships, and (3) professional association memberships and conference participation. Additionally, Scholars attended periodic cohort meetings in which they shared their experiences and conveyed feedback about the program, gave presentations, and engaged with LIS faculty and library administrators who presented on a variety of topics. The Program also hosted three brown bag sessions for the Scholars in Fall 2010 during which librarians from partner institutions talked with students about professional career choices in academic libraries, LIS research and learning projects, and resume building and job seeking. In their last semester of the program, Scholars participated in a series of mock interviews and resume review sessions sponsored by UNCG University Libraries which helped to enhance and increase their knowledge and presentation skills in a very tight job market. Of the 14 ACE Scholars, 13 received library positions within one-year of graduation.

Library partners were critical in providing both internships and mentors for Scholars. Internships, ranging from 70 to 130 hours, enabled Scholars to acquire practical library skills while also raising awareness of the demographic changes at some historically predominantly white institutions. Partnering libraries also provided mentors, allowing Scholars to be paired with experienced academic librarians. Mentors met regularly with their Scholars to strengthen their research and teaching skills, helped identify publication and presentation opportunities, provided on-going feedback on library and professional projects, and gave input relating to career preparation. The feedback from Scholars regarding their mentoring experiences was overwhelmingly positive. One scholar noted, "*[The ACE Mentorship Project] has given me the opportunity to develop professional relationships with library professionals while I was a library graduate student. Having mentors has literally and figuratively "opened the door" for me into the library world*" (Deborah, ACE 1 Scholar)." Another Scholar wrote, "*[My mentor] took the time to get to know me and assessed my career possibilities. ... [S]he took it upon herself to locate potential employers for me*" (Martha, ACE 1 Scholar).

Scholars were also provided opportunities to attend and present at local, regional, and national professional association meetings and conferences. Early in their program, ACE 1 Scholars participated in the first UNCG LIS iDEAL Summit in Fall 2009, which centered upon fostering diversity, engagement, and access. ALA President, Camila Aire (2009-2010) provided the keynote address and met with Scholars. Also during the Fall 2009, Scholars attended North Carolina Library Association's (NCLA) 58th Biennial Conference, centered on the conference theme *North Carolina Libraries: Serving Knowledge, Serving You*. Scholars found this conference to be eye-opening. One Scholar wrote, "*My experience at my first NCLA conference was awesome... In addition, the best takeaway from this conference was to see and to interact with many librarians from different fields within the profession.*"

Rounding out their conference experiences, ACE 1 Scholars attended and presented at the national ALA Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. in June 2010. As active participants in this conference, nine Scholars presented 3 poster sessions about fostering diversity and their ACE Scholars experiences. All Scholars volunteered at the ALA International Visitor's Center, allowing them to converse with librarians from over 80 countries. Scholar feedback regarding the conference was positive, with one Scholar noting, "*I thoroughly enjoyed it. With a year of the MLIS program already completed, this experience delivered a visual about many things I have learned during the MLIS program.*" Another Scholar wrote, "*I was excited and relieved that people were interested in my work. But more importantly, I was able to expand my outlook on my findings.*"

As they neared completion of their MLIS program, ACE Scholars organized and hosted a free one-day mini-conference held on the UNCG campus, *Un-Hushed: Speaking Up in the Library and Information Science Profession (Or, the Really Fun, Super Cool Library Conference)*. This conference, attended by over 50 participants from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Washington, D.C., is a particularly noteworthy achievement, as it was not a required element of the ACE program, but rather was initiated by the Scholars as an opportunity to give back to the LIS community.

## ACE Scholars 2

Following closely on the heels of the ACE 1 program, a second grant was awarded by the IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program in 2010 to continue the ACE Scholars program with a new cohort of students. In Fall 2011, 20 Scholars commenced the program, with 17 individuals graduating in May 2013. With remaining funds, the project requested a one-year no cost extension to add and support five additional Scholars, who graduated in December 2013 and May 2014.

Similar to the structure of ACE 1, the ACE 2 program included periodic meetings/gatherings, internships, mentoring, and attendance at local, regional, and national conferences. Gatherings/meetings were held each semester and allowed Scholars to share about their experiences and participate in workshops covering a variety of topics including (1) developing rapport, (2) active listening, networking, and building relationships, and (3) resume and job seeking strategies. Like those in the ACE 1 cohort, ACE 2 Scholars also participated in internship opportunities at partner institutions (60 hour minimum), which included completion of an on-site internship project. These practical experiences provided Scholars with greater exposure to a variety of library functions than classroom experiences alone could provide. In the second iteration of the ACE program, mentoring relationship expectations became more formalized, with a written set of expectations developed for the Scholars to follow.

To promote professional engagement in the larger LIS community, ACE 2 Scholars attended local, regional, and national events. During their first semester (Fall 2011), ACE 2 Scholars helped organize and host the 2011 UNCG iDEAL Summit, *Rethinking the Local: Reimagining Libraries in a Flattening World*. ACE 2 Scholars also attended and presented at the NCLA 59th Biennial Conference, *Libraries: The Next Generation, in October 2011*. At this conference, several Scholars participated in a juried panel discussion about their ACE experiences in a session entitled, *Transforming the Education of Diverse Students: Learning Through Dialogue with the Next Generation of Librarians*, while other Scholars shared their ACE experiences during a juried poster session. Reflections about their experiences as first time conference presenters were overwhelmingly positive. One Scholar wrote, “*I enjoyed the panel; my group did wonderful work beforehand and the group discussion went well also. I enjoyed presenting and talking with professionals about the issues we face.*” Another Scholar reflected, “*This was the best experience by far for the simple fact that I gained experience presenting at a professional conference. That alone gave me tremendous confidence that I’m in the right field and that I belong.*”

As ACE 2 Scholars transitioned into their second year of the program, they attended the Joint Conference of Librarians of Color (JCLC) in Kansas City, MO in September 2012. At this conference, Scholars engaged in dialogue with librarians from diverse backgrounds from across the country and presented an updated version of their panel session, *Transforming the Education*

*of Diverse Students.* Attendance at JCLC not only provided Scholars with invaluable networking and presentation experiences, but opened their eyes to the LIS field and empowered them to make a difference. One Scholar wrote, “*JCLC has given me a greater world concept of the vast field of library science. Seeing others and their accomplishment empowers me to make my own mark upon the world.*” Another Scholar noted, “*Attending JCLC 2012 was definitely invaluable to me as far as helping me meet my career goals is concerned. ... I think it was very important for me to attend a conference like this to see that the face of librarianship has changed and that librarians can be any color and do almost anything with the profession.*”

In their final month before graduation, ACE 2 Scholars self-produced and hosted the UnHushed Conference 2: From Talk to Walk, A Multicultural Information Skillshare on the UNCG campus. This not only allowed ACE 2 Scholars to take on leadership roles in the local LIS community, but further allowed them to present in a professional setting. Finally, one week after graduation, several ACE 2 Scholars participated in a presentation at the 2013 Conference for Entrepreneurial Librarians that was held on the UNCG campus. In their session, *Igniting Change: Transforming Practice through Dialogue with Diverse Library and Information Professionals*, ACE 2 graduates facilitated a dialogue on issues that impact equity and inclusivity in the library information field and services.

### ACE Scholars 3

With momentum gained from the previous ACE Scholars programs, the UNCG LIS Department and University Libraries partnered together to apply for and were awarded a third grant from the IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program in 2013. A nuance to this new effort was to expand the cultural diversity and library type parameters for recruitment (Al-Qallaf and Mika, 2013). This third iteration of the ACE program provided support and services to select and enroll 11 students from underrepresented communities into the 2013-2014 cohort to complete the UNCG MLIS degree program. All 11 Scholars successfully completed the program, with 10 graduating on their target date in December 2014, while one Scholar continued an extra semester to take courses beyond the prescribed curriculum.

The ACE 3 program was designed to prepare Scholars for professional positions in community college libraries, with emphasis on serving diverse populations, including refugees and immigrants. The need for competent librarians in this environment was part of research work conducted by grant authors (Crumpton and Bird, 2013). In this cohort, Scholars completed internships in community college libraries, were mentored by experienced community college librarians, and attended and presented at professional conferences and meetings. Differing from the design of previous ACE programs, ACE 3 Scholars followed a prescribed MLIS course curriculum that not only included the core course requirements, but also a specialized multicultural, multilingual, community engaged curriculum that emphasized community college librarianship. This curriculum was designed to recognize the needs of the New American community college student, the practicing librarian, and the community at large. Adding an additional layer of complexity, the majority of ACE 3 Scholars were enrolled as distance students and completed their coursework in a completely online format. ACE 3 Scholars were a diverse group, which added a richness to the learning experiences for both the cohort and noncohort students in the MLIS program. Scholars represented a variety of races and ethnicities including Black/African American (n=5), White-Hispanic/Latino (n=3), Asian/Native

Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (n=1), and White-Non-Hispanic (n=2). Two individuals came from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Like their predecessors, ACE 3 Scholars participated in onsite cohort meetings with program faculty and staff at least once per semester. Since ACE 3 Scholars were primarily online learners, these gatherings provided a particularly valuable opportunity for them to form relationships with their peers and program faculty. One Scholar wrote, *“The best moments in the ACE program were when I was connecting with my cohort peers, many of whom I have developed a great relationship with.”* Another Scholar reflected, *“The best part of the program for me has been the building of relationships with my professors and others in the cohort. It's a once in a lifetime experience that I wouldn't trade for anything.”* These gatherings provided Scholars opportunities to voice their questions and concerns, share their experiences, and participate in workshops on a variety of topics including (1) emotional intelligence, (2) professional presence, (3) library research and assessment, and (4) resume building and job seeking. In particular, Scholars highlighted the value of the job preparation workshop. One scholar noted, *“... I have something special to offer employers and believe I will find the right position for me. My internship is also contributing to my confidence, as I usually feel very well received there and believe they would hire me if they had an opening.”* Likewise, another Scholar reflected, *“It was fantastic to have input from both a mentor and our peers. The suggestions discussed were helpful. The “breaking apart a job announcement” really helped because prior to that exercise I had not been able to connect some of my school experiences to those skills mentioned in the announcement.”*

During their second semester, Scholars were paired with mentors from community college libraries across North Carolina as part of their enrollment in one of the specialized courses in their curriculum, *Community College Library Administration and Management*, taught by the grant's co-principal investigators. Many of these libraries also served as sites where Scholars completed their LIS practica, which required a minimum of 80-hours working onsite in professional activities. Scholars found their community college placements to be particularly valuable for orienting them to this specialized field of librarianship. One scholar wrote, *“I really, really enjoyed assisting the patrons and being in the community college library environment”* and noted that she learned *“the types of reference questions most commonly asked in a community college library setting, how much I love working with students and helping people in general, and something about how a small community college library functions.”*

Throughout the ACE 3 program, Scholars became actively engaged in the LIS profession, particularly relating to community college librarianship. In their first semester, Scholars attended the 60th Biennial NCLA conference, *Stronger Together*. Reflecting upon his experience, one Scholar wrote, *“You leave feeling so energized. You get to meet some great people who you can bounce ideas from. It's wonderful being surrounded by other working professionals. I am glad this was my first conference and I know it won't be my last.”* During this conference, Scholars met with both Trevor Dawes, 2013-2014 President of ALA's Association of College & Research Libraries, and Barbara Stripling, 2013-2014 ALA President. ACE 3 Scholar Nichole noted,

*“It was an honor to meet Barbara Stripling, president of the American Library Association (ALA) ... I was able to meet and hear from so many amazing people, like Lori Special from the North Carolina State Library and Trevor Dawes, president of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). Mr. Dawes speech during the closing luncheon energized me about the future of librarianship and the possibilities that new and emerging technology give us.”*



It is these types of experiences and reactions that the ACE 3 grant writers hoped for as they envisioned how they might motivate Scholars to become professionally engaged. During their first semester (Fall 2013), ACE 3 Scholars also participated in the 5th Annual UNCG iDEAL Summit, Connecting Libraries and Autism, at which they attended a keynote presentation and engaged in breakout sessions focused upon serving patrons with diverse needs.

During the second semester of their program, ACE 3 Scholars became further engaged in the profession as they attended and presented at the 2014 North Carolina Community College Library Association's annual meeting/conference. Four cohort students, along with the project's co-principal investigators, presented a concurrent session, *Community College Libraries: Views from the Rookies' Bench*, while the remaining Scholars presented in a juried poster session on a variety of topics including working with ESL students, embedded librarianship, and cultural competence.

### ACE Scholars Institute

What began as the planning for the final gathering event for the remaining ACE 2 Scholars evolved into the first ACE Scholars Institute (ASI) which was held in June 2014 on the UNCG campus. By gathering input from Scholars past and present, ACE program administrators learned that they wanted to gain advanced and cutting edge knowledge and skills that will put them in a position to lead and transform diverse libraries and information institutions. The ASI was designed to advance the ACE Scholars program goals by engaging Scholars from all three cohorts in action learning during a free, one-day event. The ASI provided professional development beyond the grant, celebrated the Scholars' achievements, enhanced leadership skills, capitalized on the ACE Scholars' collective expertise, explored future opportunities, and strategized about ways to sustain the goals of the ACE Program and Institute.

This event was attended by more than 25 Scholars representing all three cohorts as well as ACE administrators, faculty, staff, and institutional partners. ACE 3 Scholars who were nearing the end of their program appreciated the opportunity to further prepare themselves to enter the LIS profession. One ACE 3 Scholar wrote, *"I enjoyed the ASI because I was able to meet with a coach, attend sessions, etc. to learn how to advance in the LIS career field and education."* ACE alumni also appreciated the opportunity to come together to network and learn. One ACE 2 alum noted, *"I am so appreciative for the ACE Scholars program and each developmental opportunity that has been provided."* Another ACE 2 alum reflected, *"It was great to see as many Scholars that were able to make it gathered together! ... The options for inclusion ... were fantastic..."*

### Impact of ACE Scholars Program

In Spring 2016, as the program celebrates the 5th anniversary of the graduation of the ACE 1 Scholars, the 3rd anniversary for the ACE 2 Scholars, and the 1.5 year anniversary for the ACE 3 Scholars, the UNCG LIS and University Library faculty and staff wished to assess the impact the ACE Scholars program has had on the LIS profession. While the program prided itself upon the successful graduation of nearly 50 individuals representing ethnically, racially, and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds, ACE administrators suspected the program's impact was much greater than numbers alone could portray. With this in mind, a brief survey was prepared and emailed to 46 ACE alumni with a 34.8% response rate that was nearly equally

distributed among ACE 1 (n=5), ACE 2 (n=5), and ACE 3 (n=6) graduates. This 5-question survey invited open-ended responses about the impact the ACE Program has had on Scholars' engagement in the professional community. Responses were overwhelmingly positive and suggested that the ACE program impact has far exceeded the initial program goals. The individual stories told through the survey responses suggest the ACE Scholars program has significantly impacted the Scholar graduates as individuals, the communities and patrons they serve, and the larger LIS profession. Snippets of these stories are woven together to illustrate the impact of the ACE Scholars programs and the value that diversity brings to the LIS profession.

It was a desired outcome of the program to pull Scholars into activities and expose them to speakers and programming that would strengthen their social identity as librarians within established communities (London et al., 2014). This included having a mentoring component for developing self-identity and exposure to adverse stories of bias or prejudice in hopes to fortify individuals through collaborative support. This development of cultural intelligence also impacted program faculty and staff as it helped to build leadership opportunities for continued influence (Groves and Feyerherm, 2011).

### Impact on Individuals: Opening Doors for Opportunities

Upon analysis of the survey responses, it became apparent to the authors of this article that the ACE program impacted individual Scholars by serving as a catalyst for creating new career opportunities and facilitating career growth and advancement. The ACE Scholars program, including the subsequent professional development opportunities, has helped provide graduates with the skills, knowledge, confidence, and contacts that have allowed them to become successful LIS professionals.

Opportunities to pursue new careers: For some, the scholarship, stipends, and academic support received through the ACE Scholars programs provided them with opportunities to pursue a career that they had not previously considered or otherwise thought possible. Alesha, ACE 1 alum and children's public librarian, noted that she had not considered a career in the LIS profession until encouraged by a supervisor to consider the ACE Scholars opportunity. Though initially resistant to the idea, she later reflected about how the program changed her career path, *"Through the ACE Scholars Program, I have found a career that I love. ... My instructors and mentors (both official and unofficial) helped me to tailor academic and professional experiences ... that would ultimately land me the career of my dreams!"* Another Scholar who felt stuck in a dead-end career expressed her gratitude for the opportunities made possible by the grant, *"I want to THANK the ACE Scholars program for the opportunity to give me the chance to change a dead-end career. I wished I discovered the library profession 10 years ago. I would be a director of a library system by now. :)"* Jewel, ACE 2 alum and education librarian in university library, further reiterated the value of the ACE program in prompting her to consider a career in the LIS profession, noting, *"I think the ACE Scholars program is an excellent way to support diverse individuals who may not have considered the library science profession as a career choice. Without this program, I don't think that I would have left graduate school with all of the internship and practical experience and the rich network of professionals."*

**Landing the first job:** In each iteration of the ACE Scholars program, faculty and staff made it a priority to provide opportunities for Scholars to network and form relationships with others in the profession. Before attending their first professional conferences, many Scholars participated in coaching sessions with ACE faculty on how to present themselves professionally

and engage in effective networking. These networking opportunities paid off for many of the Scholars in the landing of their first jobs in the LIS profession. One ACE 1 alum reflected,

*“The most important aspect of the programs was networking with UNCG's librarians, professors, and the partnering libraries at nearby universities. The program helped me get my first position in [an academic library]. ... That position allowed me to gain the professional experience that many employers were looking for in applicants along with their MLIS degree. Networking and experience are just as important as the MLIS degree itself, and the ACE Scholars Program doesn't come up short.”*

Jennifer, ACE 2 alum and youth services public librarian, also wrote about the value of networking, *“The networking that was able to happen within this program was fantastic for me. I was able to meet and learn from so many library professionals who love what they do and do it well. I hope that I can emulate their interest and drive in libraries and librarians and encourage future generations to serve and lead their communities through their library work.”*

Opening doors for career growth and advancement: Scholars who are now professionally employed in the LIS field continue to appreciate the benefits the ACE Scholars program brings to them in opportunities for career growth and advancement. Tammy, ACE 1 alum and lead technology instructor at a community college, wrote, *“So many doors have been open for me because of this event that happen[ed] in my life called Ace Scholars. I can't thank this program enough!!”* Similarly, Ingrid, ACE 1 alum and tenure track Assistant Professor and student success librarian for first year programs in a university library, noted, *“The ACE Scholars program was a great opportunity that I feel like open doors for me and supported my growth and development as a professional.”* Finally, Martha, ACE 1 alum, former diversity resident and now full-time digital services librarian at a university library, noted, *“I simply could not have had the experiences I have had in my four and a half years as a professional librarian without the ACE scholars program. The most amazing part for me is that after graduation, we are all still in contact. It is as if I have an extended family, and this is a wonderful feeling to have.”*

These comments and the myriad others received from ACE alums suggests that the three ACE programs have indeed had a significant and long lasting impact upon the individual Scholar graduates. While the opportunities provided through the ACE scholarships have opened doors to new careers for many, graduates also feel that being ACE Scholars helped them obtain their first jobs, played a role in helping to advance their careers, and motivated them to become involved in the profession beyond their day-to-day jobs. The enthusiasm and passion of these ACE alums to better themselves, their communities, and the profession continues to act as an impetus for serving the underserved. These sentiments are particularly noteworthy in the reflections of Martha, ACE 1 alum, who wrote, *“The ACE scholars program has been pivotal in my professional development. In fact, I do what I do as gratitude to the program and to all of the people involved who have worked many hours to promote and to improve the lives of others. Thank you!”*

### Impact on Communities: Diverse Professional Serving Diverse Communities

While the ACE Scholars program has helped prepare three cohorts of individuals from diverse backgrounds for careers in libraries and information organizations, the impact of this program has reached beyond these individuals and into the communities they serve. For

example, Harold, ACE 3 alum and public librarian, was recently featured as part of a video series highlighting Latinos serving others in the community. This series, created in honor of Hispanic Heritage Month last year, was a collaborative project between the public library and a regional museum, thanks to a grant that was part of a ¡NUEVO! Exhibit. Further highlighting Latino heritage and culture in America, Martha (ACE 1), in her role as an academic librarian, was awarded a *Latino Americans: 500 Years of History* grant, a nationwide public programming initiative produced by the National Endowment for the Humanities and ALA.

Numerous ACE graduates noted their involvement in community outreach as library professionals, particularly in their service to diverse populations. Alesha (ACE 1) wrote about the variety of community outreach activities in which she has been involved, noting, *“Outreach is a part of my job. ... My most memorable outreach experience was representing the Library at a career and college fair at [a local public high school with over 70% enrollment] ... I had a unique opportunity to talk with 11th and 12th grade students not only about working at the Library, but how they could use library resources to complete college and job applications.”* Maria Luisa, ACE 3 graduate and a native Spanish speaker from South America, serves her community not only in her role at a community college library, but also as a volunteer Spanish instructor at her public library.

Serving her community in a different way, Christina, ACE 2 alum and youth services public librarian, co-wrote and was awarded a Library Services and Technology Act grant from the State Library of North Carolina. With this project, the public library and several community partners are working together to create access to new technology, present the library in another way to patrons, and attempt to provide programs to teens that will better help them in an ever changing world. Christina explained, *“For this grant I am the project manager but really just a part of a wonderful group of collaborators that make this program possible. I am learning so much and really using a lot of what I learned as a student at UNCG and an ACE scholar to make this grant happen.”*

These stories are just a few of the many shared by ACE alumni as they described their passion for and commitment to serving the citizens in their communities. By celebrating their own diverse backgrounds, reaching underserved populations in new ways, sharing language and culture with others, and collaborating with community partners to bring about positive change, ACE scholars are making a mark in their communities. By sharing of themselves in their professional roles, these ACE alums continue to bring great value not only to the LIS profession, but to their communities.

### Impact on the Profession: A “Spark” for Professional Engagement

It has been a continual goal of the ACE program faculty, staff, and institutional partners to help Scholars develop the mindset, confidence, and spark to engage and become leaders in the larger LIS profession. Jewel (ACE 2) reflected that while a student in the program, her exposure to individuals who were highly engaged in the profession motivated her to become professionally engaged, *“Seeing how involved all the librarians who supported the program were helped to motivate me to become engaged in the profession. They were all local role models that impacted the profession, and it showed me that by being involved, you can really help to spur change in the profession.”* Likewise, Christina (ACE 2) found the ACE program helped motivate her to become engaged beyond her role as a public youth services librarian, noting, *“I feel that the exposure to the professional community really gave me the motivation to*

*stay a part of different part of the profession that I may not have been a part of. The conferences and presentations that we did as a part of ACE really set me up for being confident and aware of my own potential.”* Harold (ACE 3) also recognizes the importance of active engagement, *“The ACE Scholars program made me realize that being a librarian was more than just working at a location. It introduced me to the importance of building professional relationships and being an active member of the profession.”* Jennifer (ACE 2) further explains that engagement is more than for advancement’s sake, but serves to help librarians become *“better contributors to the community and be in a position to influence change within our community. Those values and sentiments drive much of what I do and how I do it as a librarian.”*

Professional association memberships: ACE Scholars alumni are active members of the LIS professional community. Scholars continue to maintain memberships in national, state, and regional associations. The list of professional association memberships held by ACE Scholars alums is long and includes the American Library Association (ALA), Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), the Public Library Association (PLA), the School Library Association (SLA), the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), the Society of American Archivists (SAA), the Arkansas Library Association (ArLA), the North Carolina Library Association (NCLA), the North Carolina Community College Library Association (NCCCLA), and the North Carolina School Library Media Association (NCSLMA). Many ACE alums are also active members of associations and committees that specifically address minority concerns, including REFORMA, the International Relations Round Table (IRRT) of the ALA, and the Round Table for Ethnic Minority Concerns (REMCo) of NCLA.

Professional presentations: ACE alums have taken advantage of opportunities to present on a variety of topics at professional association meetings and conferences. More than half of the survey respondents (n=10) indicated that they have presented at the national, regional, state, and local levels. Martha (ACE 1) noted that she attends and presents at about four conferences each year. Particularly noteworthy among her accomplishments, Martha co-presented the ACRL 2012 *Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries* which were developed by the ACRL Racial and Ethnic Diversity Committee. Jennifer (ACE 3) recently conducted a study and presented a session on *Effective Part-Time Librarianship at Community Colleges* at the NCLA conference held in 2015, while Alesha (ACE 1) presented a session at this same conference entitled, *Making it Happen with STEAM*. In follow-up to this presentation, Alesha was invited to present a STEAM workshop for early childhood educators and library staff from a three county area in North Carolina. These presentations are just a few of the many in which ACE alums remain engaged in their professional communities.

Leadership roles: More than half of the survey respondents (n=9) noted that they have increased their professional engagement by taking on leadership roles. Among these, Martha (ACE 1) has served as chairperson for several national committees, including the REFORMA Organizational Development and New Chapters committee and ACRL’s Diversity Committee. Other ACE alums are actively engaged in their state and regional professional associations, including Jennifer (ACE 2) who currently serves as the Mentoring Chair of the New Members Round Table of the NCLA and Jewel (ACE 2), who has served as the Leadership-Vice Chair of NCLA REMCO, Secretary of North Carolina Curriculum Materials Center Association, and Vice Chair of Western North Carolina Library Network (WNCLN) Web Services Committee.

Mentoring rising professionals: For many, professional engagement goes beyond participation in LIS associations and involves establishing one-on-one relationships with others in the field. As they continue to bring value to their communities through their engagement as

diverse professionals, they also serve as mentors to others who are beginning their careers. For example, Christina (ACE 2) serves as a mentor to several MLIS students by answering questions and participating in their class assignments. Martha (ACE 1) has also served as a mentor in her associations' committees, ACRL's Diversity Committee in particular. Jennifer (ACE 2) not only serves as a mentor, but is the Mentoring Chair of the New Members Round Table of the NCLA.

Professional publications: While professional association memberships, conference presentations, assuming leadership roles, and mentoring rising professionals impacts the profession in a myriad of ways, the published written word has the power to bring knowledge to and inspire change among a larger audience. Many ACE alums have taken to writing and publishing as a way to share their thoughts, ideas, and research. Ashanti (ACE 1) has authored several book on a variety of topics including librarianship, while numerous others have written book chapters (Ingrid - ACE 1, Martha – ACE 1, Jewel – ACE 2), published articles (Ingrid – ACE 1, Martha - ACE 1, Jada - ACE 3), contributed to association and university newsletters (Ronunda - ACE 2), and published numerous book reviews (Jewel – ACE 2).

## **Summary and Next Steps**

Regardless of the form that professional engagement takes, the willingness and passion of the ACE Scholars alums to share of themselves, their diverse perspectives, and their passion for making a difference within their professions and for their communities, brings great value to the LIS profession in ways that cannot be easily quantified, but are seen and felt in significant ways. The program prides itself on successfully graduating over 45 Scholars representing diverse backgrounds who now serve their communities and are engaged in the profession in myriad ways. Perhaps even more noteworthy, the ACE Scholars Program has changed the Scholars' lives in immeasurable ways that have allowed them to make a positive and meaningful impact on the LIS profession. Despite this progress, there is still a long way to go in “developing human capital capacity [needed] to meet the changing learning and information needs of the American Public” (IMLS, 2016). The ALA reported that in an updated Diversity Counts study using 2009-2010 American Community Survey analyses, data revealed a small gain (from 11 percent in 2000 to 12 percent in 2009-2010) in the percentage of ethnic minorities in the nation's public, academic and school libraries. In response to these findings, Maureen Sullivan, ALA 2012-2013 President, noted, “We must continue to offer initiatives like ALA's Spectrum Scholarship Program to recruit and educate librarians of color. We also must do the research necessary to discover effective ways to increase the numbers. This is a matter of urgency for all of us” (ALA “Diversity Counts”, 2012).

As the ACE Scholars program faculty, staff, and partners consider ways to promote and build a diverse workforce of LIS professionals, several ideas have presented themselves for how to further develop the achievements and progress made thus far. Ideas include:

- Hosting ongoing ACE Scholars Institutes and gatherings at professional conferences
- Organizing a Ten Years Recognition celebration of the ACE Scholars program
- Organizing and hosting a conference/institute in which ACE Scholars serve as instructors for the Library Community
- Creating an endowed LIS Development Fund to support the UNCG LIS Department's ACE Scholar initiatives and assist future students with tuition and

related projects. LIS Alumni and the overall Library Community, Friends and Supporters will want to support this effort.

- Identifying and creating an annual opportunity/event to recognize the ACE Scholar initiatives and Libraries, Librarians, Library Education Faculty, Community Supporters/Non-Librarians and LIS Students who have contributed to the ACE Scholar Program Initiatives.

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