

# A Snapshot of Indiana's Librarians Leading in Diversity Fellowship Participants After the Program Has Concluded

By Rodney Freeman, Jr.

*In 2008, the Indiana State Library and Indiana University received a million dollar grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to recruit, educate and fund minorities for the library profession. The fellowship program was called Indiana's Libraries Leading in Diversity (I-LLID) and produced four cohorts with a total of 31 graduates. Since the conclusion of the program, many participants have gone on to retain jobs in the library profession as librarians and some are in leadership positions. This paper serves as a brief snapshot of several fellowship members who are in leadership positions and how their ethnicity has impacted their careers.*

According to the 2012 Diversity Counts survey produced by the American Library Association (ALA), the number of African American, Asian and Pacific Islanders, Native American, and Latino credentialed librarians account for 12 percent of librarians in the United States (Morales, 2012). ALA's Diversity Counts survey pulls from several disciplines within librarianship ranging from academic to special libraries (Morales, 2012). The Diversity Counts survey was cited in an intriguing web article, "Diversity Never Happens: The Story of Minority Hiring Doesn't Seem to Change Much," by *Library Journal* Editor-in-Chief Michael Kelly, Kelly argues for more representation of minority librarians based off of the increasing use of libraries by minorities (Kelly, 2013). Kelly cites programs that are helping to change the landscape of librarianship such as ALA's Spectrum Scholarships, and the Association of Research Libraries' Initiative to Create a Diverse Workforce (Kelly, 2013).

With the afore mentioned programs in mind, in 2008 the Indiana State Library's Development Office Special Services Consultant, Marcia Smith-Woodard, and the Indiana University School of Library and Information Science at Indianapolis (now merged with the School of Informatics and Computing) Executive Associate Dean, Dr. Marilyn Irwin, undertook a massive effort to diversify Indiana's libraries. Together they created Indiana's Librarians Leading in Diversity (I-LLID) (Holliday & Fenton, 2012). In 2008, the Indiana State Library and Indiana University received a one-million dollar grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as part of the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian program (Holliday & Fenton, 2012). The grant's purpose was to recruit, educate, and fund minorities into the library profession in Indiana. The program resulted in a total of 31 participants broken down into four cohorts (Holliday & Fenton, 2012) with individuals with the following ethnicity and gender identities: five Asian, 23 African American, one Hispanic, and two Native American, comprised of 24 women and seven men

(Holliday & Fenton, 2012). In May 2010, the first nine I-LLID students graduated into a dejected job market. Some graduates were able to gain positions while others continued to look for employment. The I-LLID program produced its last graduate in December 2012. Since the program concluded in 2012, we wanted to see where some of the fellows are now, to record their perspective on librarianship, and ascertain whether their ethnicity contributed to any changes at their library or institution. To date, the program has already produced an Up-and-Coming Emerging Leader featured in ALA's *American Libraries* Magazine, a doctoral student who was recently named director, and other successful professionals.

For the sake of brevity, we are highlighting seven alumni who gained employment as librarians, then advanced to become department heads or to run their respective library, exceeding the grant's original mission. They were willing to open up and share their experiences about library school and the workforce, as well as their experiences in leadership and how their diversity has impacted their librarianship. To this end, several questions about their graduate school, career, and leadership experience are asked. Also asked is how their ethnicity has impacted their librarianship. While this paper does not propose to extrapolate any proven conclusions on the impact of the fellowship program, it is germane to the discussion of diversity to highlight and produce a snapshot article of fellows who are in leadership positions. The hope is that sharing this information will lead to greater discussion and research on diversity in libraries.

## I-LLID FELLOWS:

**Veronica Henderson** (cohort 2) is the Head of Archives and Special Collections at Alabama A&M Resources Center in Normal, AL. Veronica is in charge of the University Archives and the State Black Archives Research Center and Museum. She also assists with coordinating the weeding and selection of FDLP/ Government Printing Office publications. Veronica believes that by her working at a Historically Black University that her ethnicity may not be a factor in her librarianship. She cites that one of the most significant impressions of the MLS program was the camaraderie shared with all of the cohorts. Veronica does mention that one of her dislikes about the program was the treatment by non-I-LLID graduate level students in the MLS program. She states that while some students had knowledge of the program that sponsored her education, the lack of sharing critical information might have damaged many professional connections. Veronica was just recently named

the Head of Archives and Special Collections. Prior to this appointment she was a Technical Services Librarian. She is looking to pursue her PhD in the future.

**James W. Wallace Jr.** (cohort 3) is the recently appointed Director of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Multicultural Affairs at Indiana University Northwest. He has oversight of the campus Diversity Library: A collection of print material, research, and electronic resources. James states that his experience in the MLS program was thoroughly enjoyed. He was highly pleased with the amount of online course options that the program offered which was a must as he commuted from northwest Indiana. Even though the classes were challenging, he felt that faculty were attentive to his needs as a student. He also mentioned that his presence at work has brought a greater appreciation for the dimensions of diversity including race, age, sexual orientation, and physical disability. James recently announced that he will be attending IUPUI to pursue a PhD in Urban Education.

**JoAnn White** (cohort 2) is the associate director of the youth services department for the East Chicago Public Library. She is responsible for two additional youth services departments and oversees a staff of ten employees. JoAnn believes that some of her youth services staff (who are minorities) were and are inspired by her success at completing the degree. She shares that they have started taking classes towards completing an MLS degree. JoAnn states that the lack of minorities in the library field is unfortunate; however with more information circulating about librarianship more minorities will get on board. JoAnn attended the SLIS program on the Indiana University (IU) Bloomington campus. She enjoyed the program and states that the faculty were very professional. The IU Bloomington program was a big hit with JoAnn because of the internship that she had with the Neal-Marshall Black Cultural Center under the direction of Deloice Holliday. JoAnn was able to pick up valuable skills that aided her in passing one of her hardest classes, cataloging. JoAnn stated, "One of the greatest experiences I had with the program was meeting the I-LLID Project Director, Ms. Marcia Smith-Woodard. She had to work with every cohort group's personalities, faults, and imperfections. During the two and a half years I worked with her I never witnessed her losing her professional and caring personality. I will never forget her kindness, patience, and expertise in fulfilling her job duties in assisting me through this educational journey."

JoAnn believes that most of her experiences went well. However, as a commuter from northwest Indiana, she felt that her stipend was not sufficient to cover all of her living expense costs while on the IU Bloomington campus.

**Nichelle Hayes** (cohort 3) is a library media specialist at Challenge Foundation Academy of Indianapolis. Nichelle is the sole library media specialist and is in charge of collection development. Her graduate experience was favorable and she remarks that the opportunities to network and

attend conferences were memorable. Nichelle believes that the fellowship program would have also benefited from professional guest speakers who are engaged in entrepreneurial and other facets of librarianship. She has stated that her ethnicity has impacted her librarianship by encouraging her to broaden the diversity of material to which her students have access. Even though she is at the beginning of her career, she sees career opportunities outside of school librarianship. Nichelle is trying to create her own niche through professional speaking opportunities.

**Kisha Tandy** (cohort 1) is assistant curator of history and culture at the Indiana State Museum, Indianapolis. Kisha states that the MLS program was an excellent experience. "I improved my research skills and became aware of additional databases. I really enjoyed exploring the skills needed to be a research librarian." In an *Indianapolis Star* article entitled "Q&A with curator Kisha Tandy," she explains how her ethnicity has impacted her work. She states that she really is trying to make sure she is representing African-American history accurately. Kisha remarks, "I will continue to develop as a curator and researcher. I am in a good place. I am able to participate in a wide variety of activities from researching historical markers to leading post-show discussions for theatrical performances." Kisha says that one day after her museum curator days are done she will consider going into a library setting. For today, she is a curator.

**Elizabeth "Nikki" Johnson** (cohort 4) is the sole librarian at the International Business College in Indianapolis, Indiana. Entering her second year of working in the library profession Nikki believes her ethnicity urges her to raise cultural awareness at her library. This option may have otherwise gone overlooked due to the institution's narrow concentration on specific academic programs. She states that her, experience in library school was both enlightening and rewarding. "I feel that I gained a wealth of knowledge about the role that a library plays in facilitating the information seeking process, and the urgency for libraries to continuously and consistently adapt to the changes that technological and digital advancement make on how information is sought and understood." Nikki will eventually pursue a PhD in order to explore disciplines that will compliment her personal interests in library science.

**Dayna Masih** (cohort 1) was the first and only African American to be hired as a teacher at the Indiana School for the Blind. She initially started as a librarian for the School for the Blind but recently has been transitioned to the classroom. Dayna is passionate about helping students who often shy away from research and the library. A few highlights of her MLS program experience include opportunities to network with classmates and presenting at the Indiana Library Federation Annual Conference. Being able to benefit from attending the American Library Association's annual conference in New Orleans was also a great learning experience.

**Kirsten Weaver** (cohort 1) is a Teen Services Librarian for Frankfort Community Public Library in Frankfort. She was also selected to the ALA Emerging Leaders program for 2013. Kirsten states, "I and others like me fill a vital and needed role working with teens. They often get left behind and forgotten. The most proud I've ever been was having a teen I've worked with tell me later that I made a difference in what they have become. I'm sure that there are, have been and will be many opportunities for leadership but I will never be more proud than the one I participate in every day working with my teens." Kirsten has varying views on how her ethnicity has impacted her librarianship. She says,

"I personally don't think my ethnicity has impacted my librarianship. I'd like to think that I am me and the job I do would be the same no matter my ethnicity. Of course, in a realistic world, that statement is untrue because my ethnicity is a part of who I am. It is part of what makes me 'me'. I think that who I am definitely impacts my librarianship, but it is not limited to my ethnicity. My ethnicity involves where I'm from, how I grew up, where I've been, what I do for fun, and so much more. All of it plays its part and influences and impacts my style of librarianship. It provides a rich background upon which I get to paint a picture of who I am and say this is me, I'm a librarian and I am here for you. I don't care if you're not like everyone else or if you're a cookie cutter image of the rest of the world. I'm YOUR librarian and I'm here to help YOU! So if I had to choose one way my ethnicity impacts my librarianship I would have to say that it allows me to look at those around me and see and embrace the differences that make them who they are without judgment."

Kirsten was able to gain a lot from her MLS program experience. She was encouraged by, and learned a lot from, her fellow students and professors. Kirsten states that she is doing what she went to library school for and that she loves her job as a teen librarian and her library as well. She states that, "...everybody has something they are good at; something that makes them happy to get up in the morning and face the world. Working in my library field is that thing for me. Having a person, be it teen or adult, stop in and get excited about the library, reading, and the many opportunities we provide for them is one of the greatest feelings in the world and I couldn't see myself doing anything else!"

After a glance of past fellows and only showing a fraction of participants that are in leadership positions, demonstrated is that these fellows value the diversity they bring to a generally homogenous setting, and in turn, this difference is used to aid them in their career and decision making. Nikki has been able to raise cultural awareness which she believes might have gone overlooked. JoAnn has inspired her employees to go to

college and to complete their degrees toward a MLS. James was able to talk about the dimensions of diversity: race, age, sexual orientation, and physical disability. While Kirsten has been able to see that her ethnicity, being an integral part of herself as a person, is influential, she also acknowledges that it allows her to appreciate and embrace the difference in people without judgment.

In addition to paving the way for underrepresented minorities, all 31 fellowship participants have opened up new doors for their devoted patrons and their diversity has empowered them to provide underutilized resources to their profession. These strides should not be underestimated. Their diversity has brought up issues that would not traditionally be considered. Their diversity has started a conversation across Indiana libraries about the value of diversity and why libraries should value diversity. The hope is that this article sparks people to continue conducting research on the importance of diversity in Indiana libraries working towards an Indiana library that reflects a realistic portrait of society.

## REFERENCES

- Kelly, M. (2013). "Diversity Never Happens: The Story of Minority Hiring Doesn't Seem To Change Much." *Library Journal*. Retrieve from <http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2013/02/opinion/editorial/diversity-never-happens-the-story-of-minority-hiring-doesnt-seem-to-change-much/>
- Morales, M. (2012). American Library Association releases new data to update "Diversity Counts Report." *American Libraries Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/news/ala/american-library-association-releases-new-data-update-diversity-counts-report>
- Fenton, M., & Holliday, D. (2012). "We Need Some Color Up Here: Educating and Recruiting Minority Librarians in Indiana." In A. P. Jackson & J. C. Jefferson & A. S. Nosakhere (Eds.), *The Twenty-First Century Black Librarian in America: Issues and Challenges* (pp. 143-147). Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- Freeman, Rodney. "Questionnaire to all I-LLID participants." Survey. 29 December 13.

### About the Author



A former Indianapolis Library assistant and digital projects coordinator has been appointed Manager of the Spades Park Branch of The Indianapolis Public Library, 1801 Nowland Avenue.

Rodney Freeman, Jr. returns to head one of the two remaining Carnegie libraries in Indianapolis following a 15-month stint

as a branch manager with the St. Louis, Mo. Public Library. From 2009-2011, while receiving a Masters of Library Science from IUPUI, Freeman served as a library assistant at the Lawrence Branch of The Indianapolis Public Library and intern for digital projects highlighted by the digitization of images of the historic English Opera House as part of the library's expanding digital collection. He also participated on the Johnson County Public Library's digital project's team.

“Being able to show patrons the importance of obtaining a library card, how it can help to open up a wide range of opportunities through recreational reading, and how a library card can provide adults with the tools to obtain the information they need to improve both their personal and professional situation is both rewarding and gratifying,” said Freeman. Since 2009, Freeman has supplemented his library work by serving as Executive Director of the Indianapolis Book Festival.