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The IMLS Minority Scholarship Initiative

By Xinyu Yu

The IMLS Minority Scholarship Initiative at the University of Southern Mississippi's School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) is a three-year (2009-2012) project to increase the number of underrepresented minority librarians in the state. Southern Miss SLIS (Xinyu Yu, Principle Investigator) and University Libraries (Ann Branton, Co-Principle Investigator) have partnered with the Mississippi Library Association (MLA) and the Mississippi Library Commission (MLC) for the recruitment of students and professional mentoring. Through targeted recruiting of minority undergraduates in Mississippi's universities and colleges, the project awarded IMLS-funded scholarships to support 10 students earning a master's degree in librarianship. Ten scholarship recipients came from six major Mississippi colleges and universities. Each had their bachelor's degree from a different field. They met not only the federal guidelines of the minority status but also the admission criteria of both the Southern Miss graduate school and of SLIS. Along with 12 credit hours each semester, scholarship recipients work five hours weekly in the partnering organizations in order to gain experience and establish professional and interpersonal bonds with librarians through mentoring and work assignments.

In fall 2010, six minority scholarship recipients entered the SLIS graduate program and in spring 2011 four recipients started their graduate coursework. Each student is furnished with textbooks and laptops. Of the ten students, five reside in Jackson, one in Holmes County, three in Hattiesburg, and one in Port Gibson. Since fall 2010, all of these students have been trained and mentored by professional librarians at the Southern Miss University libraries, Mississippi Library Commission, Holmes County Community College Library, and Hinds County Public Libraries. These training sites are convenient to the students as they are assigned work on various library tasks and have the opportunity to engage with library patrons. They reflect upon their training activities and classroom learning in weekly blogs and monthly reports. Most scholarship students

attended the MLC workshops, Librarianship Institute 101 and 201.

As part of the grant goals, all of the scholarship students must attend professional conferences and advanced workshops for networking and career development. They all attended the 2010 and 2011 MLA annual meetings (Photo 1) and the 2011 American Library Association (ALA) annual conference in New Orleans, Louisiana. At MLA all scholarship students shared experiences in their journey to librarianship in panel discussions. At the 2011 ALA conference with Dr. Stacy Creel and Dr. Xinyu Yu, Jennifer Nabzdyk, Tiffany Coleman-Magee, Vanessa Jones, Natasha Arce, and Jessica Bryant presented in a student poster session titled "Serving African-Americans in Today's Public Libraries" (Photo 2). The poster highlighted several aspects of services to African-Americans in public libraries. It included a review of recent literature including historical and current issues, highlighted some of the nation's specialized libraries that are part of public library systems, introduced some renowned African-American librarians, and presented some of the innovative programming currently being done across the nation.

Other examples of the success of the scholarship students includes that the MLA Black Caucus Roundtable awarded the Virgia Brock-Shedd Scholarship to IMLS fellows Sonia Harper (2010) and Yvonne Slaughter (2011) for their attendance at SLIS. Also in 2011, SLIS awarded Jennifer Nabzdyk the Anna M. Roberts Scholarship for her outstanding undergraduate coursework.

All scholarship students have committed to completing 39 credit hours and weekly library learning experiences. Jennifer Nabzdyk, Tiffany Coleman-Magee, Vanessa Jones, Natasha Arce, Sonia Harper, and Virginia Hodges are expected to graduate in May 2012. Bernadette Birzer, Helen McComb, Yvonne Slaughter, and Jessica Bryant are expected to graduate in fall 2012.



Photo 1: 2010 Mississippi Library Association Annual Conference: Jennifer Nabzdyk (left), Tiffany Coleman-McGee, Vanessa Jones, Natasha Acre, Virginia Hodges, and Sonia Harper



Photo 2: 2011 ALA Annual Conference Poster Session: Dr. Stacy Creel (left), Natasha Acre, Jessica Bryant, Jennifer Nabzdyk, Bernadette Birzer, Yvonne Slaughter, and Dr. Xinyu Yu

Dr. Xinyu Yu is an assistant professor at the School of Library and Information Science at Southern Miss. She is the Principal Investigator to the IMLS-funded project titled "The IMLS Minority Scholarship Initiative at The University of Southern Mississippi School of Library and Information Science." She joined SLIS in August 2007 and has taught Cataloging, Introduction to Information Science, Digital Libraries, and Special Libraries. She has her Ph.D. in Information Science from the University of North Texas and MLIS from the University of Oklahoma.

