



## A Diversity Officer for AALL

by George Jackson

### Background and Purpose

Why diversity? American society is changing. The percentage of minority group members entering the workforce will be increasing and changing the composition of that workforce in the coming decades. It will be older, more female, and less white.

Diversity in libraries is a natural, because libraries are institutions that collect and disseminate intellectually diverse ideas. Libraries are also an American value. Diversity in organizations and institutions of higher learning is imperative if they are to reflect and value the diversity inherent in our culture and society. Focusing on diversity is necessary in order to increase the professional and societal participation of members of previously underrepresented groups. The goal of diversity is getting to the point where our activities reflect and represent all of us.

Within AALL, let's create an atmosphere that values and fosters awareness of diversity. Among other possible initiatives, it is time that AALL as an organization formally assess and report on the current diversity climate within our Association, our profession, and within all of our libraries. Furthermore, it is important to enunciate clearly our commitment to a broad definition of diversity that goes beyond affirmative action and values all differences and similarities generally, as well as individually. Then we can study and recommend strategies and programs for increasing diversity. This would be an ambitious plan requiring significant oversight and coordination, such as would be within the jurisdiction of a diversity

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officer.

The creation of a diversity officer position within AALL would be a concrete statement of our Association's ongoing and developing commitment to diversity. It would carry us further from talking the talk to walking the walk. It would stand us in good stead among our peer associations that already have diversity officers and a variety of diversity initiatives, such as the American Library Association (ALA) and the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). For example, in 1997 ALA launched the \$1.5 million "Spectrum Initiative" with the goal of doubling the number of librarians of color. One hundred students received \$5000 scholarships for graduate level study in library and information science in the first two years. The initiative inspired many library schools and ALA units to contribute matching funds, and a fund-raising campaign is underway to establish a \$1 million scholarship endowment. The project includes leadership training and mentoring for librarians of color. The ARL "Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce" offers a stipend of up to \$5000 to attract and expose new library professionals from underrepresented groups to careers in academic and research libraries. A diversity officer within AALL would help ensure the Diversity

Committee's ability to fulfill its charge(s) and could also develop similar, appropriate initiatives.

In 1994, by Executive Board resolution, the AALL Diversity Committee's name was changed from the Committee on Minorities to the Committee on Diversity. It is charged with:

- Identifying issues related to maximizing the diversity of the AALL membership.
- Exploiting the benefits and possibilities of a diverse and complex membership.
- Recognizing and celebrating the richness of an active, diverse membership.
- Advising the Board on mechanisms

and programs that encourage a diverse and complex membership.

- Encouraging participation by the whole membership; identifying barriers and how to remove them.
- Enriching the Association and profession through extensive integration of multiple perspectives and experiences.

In addition to the President-appointed Diversity Committee, there are numerous other AALL diversity activities, although they are currently somewhat disjointed. There are numerous caucuses (such as those for Asian-Americans and for African-Americans), as well as other like-minded interest groups (such as the Social Responsibilities Special Interest Section and its Standing Committee on Lesbian and Gay Issues). A diversity officer would perform any number of functions, among them coordination of disparate

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### Selected Diversity Officer Job Duties

- Provide leadership on diversity issues (both within and outside of AALL).
- Work with the Diversity Committee to facilitate resolution of problems and issues affecting minority librarians and culturally diverse AALL constituents.
- Provide organizational focus in addressing issues of culture, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, and equity.
- Participate in conference planning and diversity awareness programming, such as the Diversity Symposium.
- Identify opportunities and suggest possible incentives for becoming active in AALL diversity activities.
- Coordinate fund-raising activities for diversity-related scholarships and endowments, such as the George A Strait Minority stipend and the Alan Holoch memorial fund.
- Educate all members about the value of diversity throughout AALL.
- Serve as a resource for diversity-related consultation, programming, and informal counseling.

diversity activities and the provision of continuity over time. One look at the variety of Committee charges and diversity activities underscores the need for coordination and continuity. Our diversity officer would harness and build on the existing capacity and expertise of AALL members.

But diversity has to be even more than this. It has to be planned and incorporated throughout the entire Association. Diversity is an issue in:

- recruitment (to the profession, to library schools, to libraries, to administration, and to AALL);
- retention (within the profession and Association);

- delivery of service(s) to our (diverse) user constituencies (the diversity we experience affects our communications with those we serve, as well as our ability to understand and respond to their needs);
- promotion (within libraries and organizations);
- scholarships (for recruitment as well as continuing education);
- mentoring (within our Association and our individual institutions);
- organizational change and growth;
- leadership in the profession (recruiting, retaining, promoting, and mentoring diverse individuals creates meaningful access to positions of leadership).

Next spring, when the Diversity Committee submits its proposal for consideration of a diversity officer position within AALL to the Executive Board, a number of funding proposals may be considered. Modeled somewhat after the ALA Washington Office, a volunteer might be recruited for a number of years, followed by the creation of a part-time position, and finally leading to the establishment of a full-time position. Of course, a variety of other scenarios are possible, but even if the Board's consideration of the Diversity Committee's request and/or a forthcoming report on the AALL diversity climate don't support a full-time position immediately, it is a worthwhile goal for ensuring AALL's vitality in the future.

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