

# Catalysts for Change: The Spectrum Doctoral Fellowship Program Review and Impact

Nicole A. Cooke<sup>a</sup>, Aisha M. Johnson<sup>b</sup>, LaVerne Gray<sup>c</sup>, Joe Sanchez<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>University of South Carolina, USA

<sup>b</sup>Georgia Institute of Technology, USA

<sup>c</sup>Syracuse University, USA

<sup>d</sup>Queens College, USA

NCooke@mailbox.sc.edu, Aisha.Johnson@library.gatech.edu, lgray01@syr.edu,

Jose.Sanchez2@qc.cuny.edu

## ABSTRACT

### Challenges of Underrepresentation in LIS

The underrepresentation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPoC) within LIS poses significant challenges to the field's efforts to advance equity, access, and representation. The statistics from the Department for Professional Employees (AFL-CIO, 2020) clearly illustrate this issue, but the challenges extend beyond numerical gaps. There are deeply embedded biases in LIS pedagogy, faculty hiring, and the overall academic culture that make it difficult for BIPoC scholars to thrive. The lack of racial diversity within LIS faculty—where many programs still have minimal BIPoC representation—creates a situation where Black and Brown students do not see themselves reflected in the curriculum, the faculty, or the research agendas of their programs.

Moreover, the existing exclusionary practices within LIS academic institutions contribute to a climate where BIPoC students often feel marginalized. Research by Gibson and Hughes-Hassell (2017) highlights that Black students' experiences at libraries are often marked by negative encounters, including feelings of unwelcomeness. These experiences not only shape students' perceptions of LIS as a profession but also affect their investment in LIS education and careers. Furthermore, the burden of representing diversity within the LIS classroom often falls on BIPoC students, creating feelings of exploitation rather than inclusion.

The gap between institutional commitment to diversity and the lived experiences of BIPoC scholars is evident in the persistent low enrollment of BIPoC students in LIS programs. The lack of representation in LIS faculty, particularly in historically White institutions, exacerbates the difficulty of recruiting new scholars from these communities. This underrepresentation underscores the importance of creating more intentional pathways for BIPoC students to enter and succeed in LIS fields.

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This IMLS-grant funded program, Spectrum Doctoral Fellowship, seeks to address these systemic issues. The Spectrum Doctoral Fellowship Program has already demonstrated its effectiveness in advancing racial equity in LIS. By focusing on the recruitment of racially and ethnically diverse doctoral students, the program aims to develop a new generation of LIS faculty committed to racial equity and social justice in both teaching and research. The project builds on the success of earlier initiatives like Project Athena, which focused on cohort-based curricula, peer mentoring, and developing networks of scholars committed to anti-racist education and social justice in LIS.

A majority of past Spectrum Doctoral fellows have successfully completed their doctoral degrees, and a third of these fellows have already attained positions as assistant professors or higher. These fellows represent a growing and dynamic community of BIPOC scholars who are reshaping LIS from within. The Spectrum Doctoral Fellowship Program continues to emphasize building supportive, anti-racist community spaces, which have been critical to the success of BIPOC students in LIS. Through networking, mentorship, and collective action, these spaces create an environment where fellows can build solidarity and work together to dismantle institutional barriers to racial equity in LIS education and practice.

This panel will provide a platform for critical discussion on the role of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the future of Library and Information Science. It will also shed light on the impact of initiatives like the Spectrum Doctoral Fellowship Program in fostering an inclusive environment that supports BIPOC scholars and advances social justice in LIS curricula. In addition, panel will also discuss research conducted on diversity in higher education, LIS, and the impact and effectiveness of Spectrum and related BIPOC doctoral initiatives. By examining the challenges, successes, and lessons learned from these initiatives, the panel aims to contribute to the ongoing conversation about how LIS can evolve to better serve the diverse communities it aims to support.

## **ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS**

Education of information professionals; Information practices; Sociocultural perspectives.

## **AUTHOR KEYWORDS**

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Spectrum Doctoral Fellowship Program; social justice; BIPOC representation; LIS faculty; Mentorship and community-building; LIS curriculum.

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