

Dr. Mark Winston
Diversity Conference
New Jersey
November 22, 2004

As a member of the Statewide Planning Committee, I am pleased to welcome you to the first Diversity in Libraries Conference in New Jersey. The program has come into being, as the result of the vision and energy of a number of individuals and the support of a number of organizations. I'll indicate, in particular, that the collaboration of the State Library, InfoLink and Highlands Library Cooperatives, and the Rutgers University School of Communication, Information and Library Studies and the Department of Library and Information Science is a reflection of the realization of the importance of diversity as an issue that is integral to our organizational success and the success of the profession in fulfilling our broader societal mission.

My role in talking with you this morning is to say a bit about the structure of the program and the rationale that underlies that structure.

In a general sense, the issue of diversity is complex and emotion-laden. There is significant complexity associated with many aspects of diversity as an organizational and societal issue, including defining diversity (particularly, which segments of the population are in question), addressing the nature of demographic shifts, considering conflicting court and policy decisions, documenting public understanding of the value of

diversity, and determining how to articulate a rationale for diversity efforts that relates to issues of equity, fairness, and organizational performance.

Unraveling some of that complexity and ensuring an informed discussion of diversity issues are primary considerations with today's conference.

Traditionally, fostering diversity in organizations is generally identified to be a priority in relation to three concerns: 1) The need to provide services for and recruit from the increasingly diverse population, 2) As well as addressing past inequities and current unfairness, and 3) Eliminating underrepresentation. All of these factors--the increasing diversity of the population, past inequities, current unfairness and discrimination, and underrepresentation in the profession--are well-documented. However, experts in this area have noted that while it is difficult to dispute the factual nature of each of these concerns, there are many who are skeptical about or resistant to the notion of the value of diversity as an organizational, professional, or even an ethical principle. From a pragmatic perspective, recent research in the study of diversity has highlighted a connection between investment in diversity and overall organizational performance and success.¹ Among managers and researchers, there is the realization that the reasons for promoting and fostering diversity within organizations go beyond the fact that it is a good thing to do. In other words, the research has shown that the organizations (the companies, the colleges, and the libraries) which are the most diverse, are also more successful organizations overall.² The research points to the fact that more diverse organizations are reflective of a broader range of perspectives represented in their

decision making, causing them to be better able to understand the needs of target markets, to design and deliver products and services, and to make better, more-informed decisions overall.

In addition to the advantages of focusing on a rationale for diversity efforts that addresses the pragmatic considerations of organizational performance and success (and, we know that, in libraries, we define our performance in large measure, by our ability to provide quality services to users), while still acknowledging the importance of equity, fairness, and eliminating underrepresentation, such a focus goes beyond the fact that investment in diversity is a good thing to do and addresses the skepticism and resistance by using a substantive and research-supported rationale related to making our organizations more successful.

In some instances, discussions of diversity attempt to limit the focus to various segments of the population. The limitation here is both the controversy of which segment of the population is more underrepresented, more oppressed, or more important, as well as the very limiting focus of thinking of only those users or customers who are on the library's doorsteps. While we know that there are what I would call potential users, who are a part of our service population, but who are not being served, it is also the case that libraries have a broader societal mission, as reflected in issues such as the fact that representation among librarians is measured by national demographic data and the fact that our collections should reflect the need for a broad representation of perspectives and

viewpoints. Thus, our view should be valuing diversity as a principle that guides our work.

In the research and consulting that I have done on the issue of diversity in organizations and in our profession, I have determined that a more comprehensive look at library operations is appropriate in looking at the issue of diversity. Thus, this comprehensive framework related to diversity in libraries focuses on four issues: staffing, collections, services, and organizational climate.³ Such a structure for our thinking about diversity provides for this comprehensive look at library operations, from the standpoint of our users and customers, librarians and staff, as well as the products and services that we provide. In addition, this structure allows us to use segments of the population as examples for defining model programs, as is the case with the schedule today, but it also doesn't limit our thinking or let us run the risk of giving short shrift to any particular segment.

The afternoon portion of the program focuses on the issue of the design and development of action plans, providing each of you the opportunity to think about the nature of the needs in your organization and, with at least one content expert and a moderator in the room, to work through the development of an action plan for implementing at least one diversity-related priority in your library.

To reiterate briefly, the four aspects of this comprehensive look at diversity in library operations are Staffing, Collections, Services, and Organizational Climate.

The area of staffing includes recruitment and retention strategies and other considerations related to building and developing a diverse workforce.

Organizational Climate refers to the analysis of the library as both a workplace and a research/learning/social environment, that is conducive to the success of those who work in and use the library. Considerations include organizational assessment, diversity climate surveys, diversity awareness and sensitivity training, and conflict resolution. The brief presentation in the afternoon session on this topic will focus on the issue of training, in particular.

Services refers to our interaction with our user population and potential user populations in the design and provision of information services, programming, and outreach, for example.

And, the area of Collections includes collection assessment, collection development, and resource sharing, again, for example.

In summary, our focus today is to provide a structured and hands-on approach to better inform diversity efforts and public service provision in public libraries. Our goal is to provide an opportunity and a framework for this discussion, to provide examples of best practices, and most importantly, to provide a guided discussion and resources to assist in defining and implementing diversity-related goals in libraries throughout the state.

I encourage you to take full advantage of the experts, resources, and, most importantly, the time available to support this important priority. I thank you.

¹ Jerry J. Jasinowski, "Growth and the Imperative of Diversity in the Twenty-First Century," *Executive Speeches* 15 (December 2000/January 2001): 58-61.

² Geoffrey Colvin, "The 50 Best Companies for Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics: Companies That Pursue Diversity Outperform the S&P 500. Coincidence?" *Fortune* 140 (July 19, 1999): 53-54.

Sherry Kuczynski, "If Diversity, Then Higher Profits? Companies That Have Successful Diversity Programs Seem to Have Higher Returns. But Which Came First?" *HR Magazine* 44 (December 1999). Cited May 29, 2002. Available online from

<http://www.shrm.org/hrmagazine/articles/1299div.htm>.

³ Mark Winston and Haipeng Li, "Managing Diversity in Liberal Arts College Libraries," *College & Research Libraries* 61 (May 2000): 205.