Katrina and Haiti: Experiences after the disasters.

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2. Preserving Memories, Community, and Restoring Hope

Katrina: Experiences After the Disaster

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Abstract

Staffing shortages in south Louisiana libraries continue to exist as a result of damages caused to communities by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita of 2005. To address them, the Louisiana State University School of Library and Information Science, the State Library of Louisiana, the New Orleans Public Library, Southern University at New Orleans, Jefferson Parish Public School System, Algiers Charter School Association, Calcasieu Parish Public Library, Terrebonne Parish Public Library System, and the New Orleans Recovery School District formed a collaborative partnership to recruit and educate thirty new librarians for employment in the libraries of south Louisiana. Dr. Alma Dawson, Russell Long Professor at the LSU School of Library and Information Science, demonstrates how this program, Project Recovery, funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, is responding to the aftermath of these natural disasters. The presentation will show how library educators have been planning collaboratively with practitioners for various experiential learning opportunities for students who will fill these vacancies after graduation and aid in the recovery of the region's libraries.
Katrina: Experiences after the disaster

The Louisiana State University School of Library and Information Science (LSU SLIS) was awarded an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant in the amount of $763,901 through the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program. “Project Recovery” will recruit, educate, and enable thirty graduate students in library and information science to work in school, public, and academic libraries in those communities in southern Louisiana continuing to experience staff shortages as a result of the hurricanes and flooding in 2005.

**Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, 2005**

Hurricane Katrina struck Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana, at 140 miles an hour on the morning of August 29, 2005, and hit the Louisiana-Mississippi border later that day at nearly 125 miles per hour. The levees between Lake Pontchartrain and New Orleans gave way, flooding the city. Eight parishes were devastated (Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. Tammany, Terrebonne, and Washington). Less than a month later on September 24, Hurricane Rita swept through western Louisiana, hitting its Texan border. Nine parishes experienced flooding (Calcasieu, Cameron, Iberia, Lafourche, St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, St. Mary, Terrebonne, and Vermilion) (FEMA 2010a). According to the National Weather Service, Katrina was “the costliest and one of the five deadliest” hurricanes to ever hit the United States, with a death toll of at least 1200 people. It caused the displacement of another 700,000 people and the destruction of over 205,000 homes and 18,750 businesses (Dawson and McCook 2006, 292). Rita displaced thousands more and caused billions more dollars in damages (National 2009).

The libraries in these areas suffered along with their communities. Buildings had trees
fall through their windows, slime and mud cover their walls, and water rise above their lower shelves (LeBoeuf 2006b, 59) Almost immediately, people began to realize the potential for the loss of unique materials, from slave records to jazz sheet music (Traister 2005).

The libraries that were able to remain open focused on service. The biggest demand from the public was internet use. Mary Cosper LeBoeuf, Director of the Terrebonne Parish Library System, describes long waiting lists, allowing use of staff computers, and bringing in extra computers from area agencies and businesses (LeBoeuf 2006a, 3). Many evacuees were seeking information about missing friends and relatives, so library staff often took on the role of social worker, comforting those who received bad news.

In the immediate aftermath of the storms, libraries helped their patrons by providing free printing, copying, and faxing. They set up televisions for news coverage (LeBoeuf 2006a, 4). Jefferson Parish Library created “Katrina cards” that allowed anyone in eight parishes to borrow materials (Dickerson 2007, 104). As the months passed, donated computers and the purchase of several self-check stations helped them maintain services. In early 2006, returning New Orleans area residents were still seeking out libraries because— unlike their homes—they had electricity and therefore were warm places with internet (Phillips 2006).

Open libraries struggled with small and suffering staffs. Only ten of ninety-two employees of the Saint Tammany Parish Library had inhabitable homes (LeBoeuf 2006b, 59). Jefferson Parish Libraries were able to reopen three of their fifteen libraries on October 3, 2005, but were still faced with sixty-two vacant positions at the end of 2005 (Dickerson 2007, 108).

Geraldine Harris, then interim director of the New Orleans Public Library, indicated that NOPL lost 90% of its staff when Katrina struck. In its 2008 master plan, NOPL indicated that “Immediately before Katrina, there were 216 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members, or one
staff member per 1,142 square feet of library space, or 0.55 FTE per 1,000 people served” (NOPL 2008). The need for professional staffing was critical.

**Assessment of Needs**

As background for the Project Recovery grant, Dawson and Thomas conducted studies of school, public, and academic libraries in Louisiana. Their findings were current to 2008 when the grant was written, but have been corroborated by e-mail correspondence and continuing conversations with current partners in Calcasieu Parish Public, New Orleans Public, and Terrebonne Parish Public library systems.

**School Libraries**

School libraries have been particularly vulnerable in south Louisiana, a situation exacerbated by the devastating hurricanes of 2005 and 2008. “Statistics from the ALA six months after the hurricanes indicated that in Louisiana, more than 150 school libraries were damaged or destroyed, and New Orleans Parish lost 63 percent of its 126 schools, and school libraries” (“First Lady” 2006). In September 2006, a telephone survey conducted by project investigators revealed that only sixteen of forty-five schools had fully functioning school libraries in the (New Orleans) Recovery School District, which included the Algiers Charter Schools. Again in September 2007, Orleans Parish schools reported twenty-five schools without certified or degreed librarians. The exact figures for Orleans Parish school libraries were difficult to document given the changes in the organizational structure of the now three independent school districts and numerous charter schools, a chart of which can be found in the *New Orleans Parents’ Guide to Public Schools* (2009).

The school districts do not have professionally trained library coordinators. In November
2008, a third follow-up of interviews was conducted with similar findings. Staff shortages from
the hurricane-related issues continue. With its eighty-seven schools and a library media
consultant, Jefferson Parish has made the most progress in library media staffing and plans to
add librarians to its elementary schools to meet Southern Association Standards. Currently, there
are thirty-eight elementary schools with certified staff and about twenty-eight elementary schools
without certified or degreed librarians. In 2007, Orleans and Jefferson parishes combined
reported shortages of fifty-nine schools without either certified or degreed librarians. Schools in
Calcasieu, Cameron, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, and Vermilion parishes reported librarian
shortages in 2007 and again in 2008. The Laura Bush Foundation for America’s Libraries has, as
of October 30, 2008, granted over $4.7 million to public and private school libraries in
Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama for the rebuilding of school library collections in school
libraries affected by the storms of 2005 and 2008. Much of the funding went to public school
libraries in the greater New Orleans area. However, the grants stipulate that funds may not be
spent on staffing, but must be used for the purchase of (largely) print material, and with some
training provided by the Laura Bush Foundation itself (Laura Bush Foundation 2008). These
findings indicate a major need for library education for school media specialists.

LSU SLIS offers the only ALA-accredited library and information science program in
Louisiana. Requirements for certification as school library media specialists are embedded in the
LSU SLIS MLIS degree program. Research studies on school media programs completed in the
last fourteen years in nineteen states consistently found that school libraries led by professionally
trained, certified school library media specialists positively affect student academic performance
and test scores (Scholastic 2008).

Public Libraries
Impacts of the hurricanes of 2005 on public libraries have been also well documented in the professional literature. The State Library of Louisiana issued online periodic assessment reports of damages and losses of buildings (with maps) due to hurricanes Katrina and Rita. After Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans Public Library initially laid off 90% of its staff, which included half of its professional staff and key administrators. Today, New Orleans Public Library is serving a population of 238,124 individuals, 70% of the pre-Katrina population. In 2007, Jefferson Parish Library System reported 33% fewer positions pre-Katrina and continuing problems with recruitment of professional staff in 2008. Calcasieu and Terrebonne parishes, impacted by Hurricane Rita, reported the need for additional staff as populations return. Louisiana libraries sustained minimum damages from the hurricanes of 2008, though the Cameron Parish Library was completely destroyed by Hurricane Gustav. For all the public libraries reporting, preliminary survey results indicate the greatest need for staff are in youth services and programming, public relations and marketing, fundraising and event planning to attract all ages, and reference and technical services.

In addition to damages to property, displaced staff, and reduced populations, smaller budgets have affected staffing. Libraries are also establishing new services such as those in New Orleans Public Library with modular structures placed in communities to serve populations struggling with infrastructure problems.

**Academic Libraries**

In September 2008, the Collections Committee of the Louisiana Library Network Information Network Consortium (LALINC) found that eleven of the thirteen academic libraries surveyed experienced loss of professional staff. Of the libraries responding to a November 2007 survey conducted by the project directors, 100% indicated a need for additional professional
staff. These findings corroborated the findings of the Mellon Foundation funded study (conducted by SOLINET) of academic libraries along the Gulf Coast after the 2005 hurricanes (2006). The purpose of the assessment was to measure the damage to library collections and buildings, see what recovery efforts were underway, and determine what libraries needed to complete the recovery.

In Louisiana, fourteen academic libraries sustained damage from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Libraries of Southern University at New Orleans and Delgado Community College received extensive damage or were devastated, while other libraries sustained moderate or minimum damage. The report identified common staff issues including layoffs by the libraries with the worst damage and strained resources due to cost recovery and loss of revenue. Given the findings, the project investigators predicted that institutions would have difficulty attracting staff for open positions. From the hurricane staffing survey, academic libraries responded indicating need for professionals in reference and technical services, systems, outreach, serials, grant writing, cataloging, and library administration.

Responses of Current Partners

Louisiana’s libraries continue to experience staffing shortages in its professional ranks as a result of damages to property, displaced staff, reduced populations, and smaller budgets. According to Director Shatiqua Mosby-Wilson, the library was one of eleven buildings severely impacted by the storm when Hurricane Katrina caused massive devastation to the Southern University at New Orleans campus. As a result of the storm damage, 100% of the library’s physical collection had to be discarded and a temporary library was later constructed in a FEMA trailer. Currently, the library currently operates out of three trailers with less than 50% of pre-Katrina staffing. “This is a difficult task,” she said, “but we strive to deliver the best possible services to our users”
Project Recovery is helping Southern University at New Orleans (SUNO) as it builds a new library. It is not only building a new facility, the staff is looking at nontraditional methods of delivery of library services to the university. Mosby-Wilson said in an e-mail to the project director, “Participation in the project also allows me the opportunity to network with other libraries impacted by the storm. Together we can discuss our successes and trials. Together we can recover and provide for a new concept of librarianship that may not exist in other communities.” The partnership provides an opportunity for school, public and academic librarians to work together, and this benefits “the greater educational, recreational and research needs” of all of south Louisiana. SUNO has both hosted Project Recovery scholars and provided employment for one of the first Project Recovery graduates.

Pam Edwards at Calcasieu Parish Public Library is also enthusiastic about the potential influence of Project Recovery graduates on her staff. Staffing levels were down after Hurricane Rita, she said in a March 2010 e-mail. “Rita and Katrina made us look at our staffing ‘infrastructure.’ We did some restructuring to address catastrophic events and any economic downturns. We had a few staff not come back after the storm and they were replaced.” However, she said, the parish’s “biggest loss is professional staff because of better job opportunities, retirement, and relocation to other areas. It is very difficult to replace them. People with MLIS and other degrees are finding better salaries elsewhere.”

Edwards continued to say that her library system is “grateful and very proud that out of the six (6) Project Recovery scholars from Calcasieu Parish, three (3) are on staff at CPPL. We have never had more than 9-10 MLIS on staff; and mostly it was less. We currently have 9 (6.67 FTE) MLIS, but even more importantly we have eight in library school. This could almost
double our professional librarian number very soon.” An additional concern about her current staff is that “only one of the 6.67 FTE MLIS is under 50 years in age.”

**General Overview of Project Recovery**

The goal of Project Recovery is to recruit, educate, and enable thirty students in library and information science to work in academic, public, and school libraries in those communities continuing to experience staffing shortages as a result of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The grant period is July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2012. IMLS has granted $763,091 to the program, and LSU has contributed matching funds of $384,929.

Project Recovery staff has consisted of Dr. Alma Dawson, Project Director and Principal Investigator, who also provides specific expertise in academic libraries; Dr. Margie Thomas, Co-Investigator, whose focus is on school libraries, and replaced by Dr. Beth Paskoff when she retired; Dr. Robert Ward, Co-Investigator and public libraries specialist, replaced by Dr. Suzanne Stauffer when he unexpectedly passed away in February 2011; and Carol Hagy, Grants Administrator, who served a one-year appointment.

Project Recovery is comprised of three components. The first component was a public relations campaign for the recruitment and enrollment of a cohort of thirty students and for the selection and training of mentors who assist students at distance education sites and sit on an advisory board to the grant. In the second component, students complete degrees and find successful placement in school, public and academic libraries in those areas impacted by the hurricanes of 2005. This component includes establishment of service and follow-up with graduates on two-year service contracts. The third component focuses on professional development and advocacy training, which includes paid memberships in the Louisiana Library Association and the American Library Association, and participation in state and national...
Partners and Supporters


LSU SLIS has worked with representatives from Partner Libraries from the beginning. Partners were certainly interested in addressing the staffing needs in their libraries, and many had staff members who would be excellent candidates for the scholar positions. Partners participated in recruitment. Most partners agreed to provide flexible scheduling for staff taking classes and to mentor staff involved in coursework.

Partners agreed to assess projects that still needed to be resolved from the hurricane damage and provide them as opportunities for field experiences or internships for students. Some partners actually plan to hire students upon receipt of the MLIS degree although public library boards normally do not allow such agreements. The State Library of Louisiana, as an oversight body for public libraries, agreed to assist with library advocacy training and help conduct interview and job search training for all Project Recovery students.

Representatives from the Partner Libraries joined with the Project Recovery Team to become the Project Recovery Advisory Board, which meets quarterly, sometimes in person in Baton Rouge and sometimes over the compressed video system used for distance education. At
these meetings, members are updated on student progress, plan upcoming activities, identify projects related to Katrina and Rita, discuss internship possibilities for students, and share information regarding the supervision and evaluation of scholars.

**Support for Students**

Grant funds support students by paying the tuition and fees for all thirty. The ten full-time students receive $12,000 stipends for living expenses. Part-time students received $100 a month for the first year to help them pay for books and other school-related necessities. All students receive paid memberships in the Louisiana Library Association (LLA) and the American Library Association (ALA). Their travel to the LLA Conference each March is paid for, and the grant funds a trip to the national conference of their choice. For example, they may attend the ALA Conference, the Association for College and Research Libraries National Conference, the Public Library Association National Conference, the American Association of School Librarians National Conference and Exhibition, or the YALSA Young Adult Literature Symposium.

Project Recovery is providing scholars with a strong academic program, collaboration and mentorship with professionals within partner organizations, and opportunities for experiential learning through volunteer hours and field experiences. Scholars are receiving advocacy and leadership training, and chances to develop their workforce skills through special activities and workshops.

**Project Recovery Scholars**

The first cohort of twenty-five students was selected in late 2009 and began classes in January 2010. The Project Recovery team chose twenty part-time and five full-time Louisiana residents from among fifty-four applicants. This Project Recovery cohort had an incoming
average GPA of 3.52. All met or exceeded the requirements of the LSU Graduate School. They were from nine parishes. Half (twelve) were employed in public or academic libraries and five were employees of a school system. The diversity of the cohort reflected the diversity of the applicant pool—68% identified as white, and 32% identified as minority.

The second cohort of five full-time out-of-state students began the program in August 2010. They came from Arkansas, California, Massachusetts, Virginia, Washington DC, and Washington State. This cohort had an average incoming GPA of 3.73 and all met or exceeded the requirements of the LSU Graduate School. Two students described themselves as African American, and one identified as Hispanic.

Over the course of the program, a handful of scholars have been lost due to illness, relocation, and other personal circumstances. When necessary, replacement scholars have been found.

**Service Agreement**

In exchange for the funding of their MLIS degree, Project Recovery Scholars completed a service expectations agreement prior to admission. All promised to work for two years post-graduation in a Southern Louisiana library that was impacted by Hurricane Katrina or Rita. While in school, students also volunteer to help in these libraries. Part-time students were required to work one-time service project assignments during their first semester. Full-time students volunteer for ten hours per week projects in partner libraries their entire two years. In addition, all students can do optional 120-hour field experiences for course credit.

Partner and supporter libraries help place students in projects that complement their existing experience and abilities. Project Recovery students have volunteered in a wide range of
situations in academic, public, and school libraries. Their placements have included youth services, programming, university archives, public services, technical services, and event coordinating.

Public Relations Campaign and Recruitment

Project Recovery began with a series of press releases announcing the receipt of the grant and the need for applicants. Press releases were posted to local and national listservs. The Associate State Librarian for Louisiana, Dorothy White, sent one out to libraries throughout Louisiana. Small towns published the news in their local newspapers, and librarians shared it wherever they could. These brought invitations for the Project Director to appear on the Mitch Lewis Radio Program (from Arizona and broadcast throughout the Southwest) and on the local television show Around Town, broadcast throughout Louisiana.

The Project Recovery team created a brochure for easy distribution of information and set up a website (http://slis.lsu.edu/projectrecovery). The website was an essential resource for general information, application procedures, and forms. As the program has progressed, photos of staff, partners, events, and students have been added, as well as reports on events, conferences, and other resources for students, partners, and the interested public. By the beginning of December 2009, the site had already attracted 1025 unique visitors, 900 of which had come more than once.

News traveled quickly and the Project Recovery team received inquiring phone calls daily, about three or four per investigator. Project Recovery was featured in the “People” section of Louisiana Libraries (Pope 2009). SLIS staff made announcements and presentations at professional meetings.
The Project Recovery team traveled to hurricane-impacted areas to spread the word and meet with interested parties. Co-investigator Ward held information sessions in public libraries in Houma, Lake Charles, and New Orleans. The Project Director visited academic libraries in New Orleans, and she hosted an information session at LSU after a Diversity Interest Group program, which brought students and area librarians who would eventually serve as mentors to scholars. Co-investigator Thomas met with school librarians in New Orleans and in Lafourche Parish. Each session had ten to thirty attendees, with about half taking an information packet. The packets included the standard SLIS information and application as well as a cover letter from the Project Director, a brochure, the financial aid application, the service expectations, and the student placement document.

**Continued Publicity**

Even after the application period was over and all of the students had been recruited, the Project Recovery team continued to distribute information about the achievements of the Project Recovery Program. The Project Recovery Fact Sheet and the website are kept up to date as new events occur.

Publicity was also a part of the Louisiana Library Association Conference program that the students planned and presented in March 2011. Their “SLIS at Work in South Louisiana” spread awareness of the volunteer projects the scholars have been doing and the staffing shortages their education will allow them mitigate.

On June 22, 2011, Dr. Dawson provided a presentation on the Project Recovery initiative to the representatives of twenty-two nations through the Foreign Service National Education Program (FNEP) at the request of the New Orleans Citizen Diplomacy Council.
Progress Report

The first full-time students graduated at the end of summer 2011, and the second cohort of full-time students will graduate in May 2012. Part-time students will graduate in August 2012. All students have volunteered service hours, attended and participated in at least one conference, and completed advocacy, leadership, and workforce skills training.

Academic Progress

At the end of the third term, first-cohort Project Recovery scholars had earned an average GPA of 3.74. Four scholars maintained a 4.0. The average GPA for all thirty-four students who began the MLIS program in January 2010 was 3.64. By the end of their fourth term, spring 2011, the first cohort had earned an average GPA of 3.65. The second cohort of out-of-state full-time students had earned an average of 3.75 at the end of their first term. By the end of their second term, the second cohort had earned 3.60. They are consistently out-performing other students who entered the program at the same time.

All Project Recovery Scholars have been accommodated in the academic program and in the distance education schedule. More online courses are now being offered, which has helped scholars plan classes more efficiently. The Project Director checks schedules at the end of each semester before each registration and continues to request updates on Career Plans for purposes of keeping scholars on track for graduation. Each scholar has an academic advisor on the SLIS faculty.

Experiential Learning: Full Time Service Projects

Scholar volunteer projects are monitored closely. Supervisors provide semester work plans and students are held to specific schedules. Volunteers sign in as other employees do. They
keep journals documenting their activities and recording their reactions and observations. These journals are turned in three times a semester. At the end of each semester, students generally rotate to a new assignment so they are able to gain experience in a variety of libraries and tasks.

Libraries have been encouraged to find projects for their volunteers that directly relate to the hurricane damage of 2005. Melony LeMay was a tremendous help in southwest Louisiana. In Calcasieu Parish, she worked at McNeese State University. There, in addition to substituting at the reference desk, weeding periodicals and microfiche, and assisting with other tasks in the government documents department, she organized and cleaned out a map collection neglected since Hurricane Rita damaged that area of the library. She disposed of maps covered in mold and disinfected their cabinets. When she returned the salvageable items to their places, she resorted and relabeled the entire collection.

Later, in Cameron Parish, Melony LeMay sorted through plastic tubs of files that public librarians had hastily filled when Hurricane Rita was headed towards the parish. She found places for everything the library still needed and ensured that the files would be findable. But her biggest project was collecting oral histories of the area residents. She planned carefully how to publicize, collect, evaluate, and preserve these stories before she began. She worked 107 hours and traveled almost 1000 miles to record local residents and hear them talk about Hurricanes Audrey, Rita, and Ike. It was a very emotional project, but she captured some valuable footage and met musicians, politicians, and genealogists who were thrilled to have their history documented. It was definitely more than the sixty hours required for her summer project, but she was totally dedicated to completing the Cameron project and received an excellent evaluation from her supervisor, Bobbie Morgan.

In Calcasieu Parish, Laura Manuel had a variety of projects and was a great help
everywhere she volunteered. She assisted at a small branch library one semester. She shelved books, worked in circulation and reference, assisted with children’s programming, and taught the staff sign language so they could communicate with deaf patrons. In the summer, she moved to a larger library to help with teen programming and the children’s summer reading program.

The next semester, Laura Manual was at the Calcasieu Public School Board Library Services Office, where she worked with the library consultant on various projects. She designed a brochure and helped create recommended book lists for a new program for students with emotional problems. Then she moved back to the public library to the Collections and Computing Services Division. She helped librarians there with the classes they teach to other staff members and public patrons, eventually developing and teaching her own course on e-readers. Laura also gained experience in website maintenance, as she helped her supervisor monitor comments, delete spam, and check links on a monthly basis. She helped them set policies for their Facebook page, and she designed tutorials and quizzes for the continuing education of the system’s library staff.

For her last term, Laura Manual moved to the McNeese State University Library’s Technical Services Department. She helped the Acquisitions Librarian update their collection development policy. Smaller projects for her included creating and editing online tutorials, subject guides, and finding aids. Laura has graduated with a rich and diverse body of experience, and she has already been a significant benefit to the libraries of her area.

**Experiential Learning: Part-Time Service Projects**

All part-time Project Recovery Scholars spent ten hours working in a partner library their first semester. The types of work each did varied widely depending on the library’s needs. Angelique Carson, in Orleans Parish, received incoming books, began the cataloging process for
a collection, and located books patrons had requested for faster processing. Lacey Deroche spent her time in a one-person library in Vermillion Parish. She relabeled the books in the Louisiana section, weeded nonfiction, and assisted with daily procedures. In Terrebonne Parish, Lynette Fazzio worked in a library’s circulation, children’s, and reference departments.

Christy Duhon assisted with a local arts and humanities program’s events hosted by the public library in Calcasieu Parish. Lynette Hunter, in Orleans Parish, documented the contents of individual photographs of steamboats for a database. Not only have these students benefited from the placements, but the libraries have as well. Their work has eased staffing shortages and enabled libraries to complete small projects that they could not otherwise find staff time or energy for and thus have impacted the libraries.

**Professional Development**

In March 2010, twenty-one scholars attended the Louisiana Library Association (LLA) Annual Conference in Baton Rouge. They introduced themselves in a session containing an overview of the program and testimonials from partner library personnel. This was the first conference experience for almost all of them, so they received information on how to approach attendance at a large conference.

This year’s LLA Conference in Lafayette, Louisiana, provided a unique opportunity for students to see how a conference program is planned, scheduled, timed, and how a professional presentation is delivered. The Project Director worked with the scholars to plan and present their own presentation, “SLIS at Work in South Louisiana.” It included a description of Project Recovery, examples of their own volunteer work (with photographs), and updates on staffing. It involved all of the students and was well-attended and successful.
Eight students traveled to the annual American Library Association Conference in Washington, DC, in June 2010. They wrote reports on their activities and impressions there. They shared these in person at meetings later in the summer so that their peers could benefit from their insights and observations. They were predictably overwhelmed, but very enthusiastic about the experience. Student Deborah LeBeau wrote that it gave her “a sense of belonging to a wonderful profession and a sense of renewal.” The reports were also posted on the website for other scholars or interested parties to read.

In addition to receiving funding for conference experiences, scholars have benefited from special professional development events Project Recovery staff and partners have put together. Between the end of the fall 2010 semester and the beginning of the spring 2011 semester, students were asked to complete an online Library Advocacy Training session on the Project Recovery website (developed and graded by Dr. Robert Ward). Students followed the instructions, including reading and viewing materials online, then completed a short certification exam.

On June 11, 2011, the State Library of Louisiana led a “Get Hired” Workshop for Project Recovery Scholars. The session was engaging, interactive, and informative. Topics included how to locate available jobs, write polished resumes and cover letters, and how to prepare for an interview both as a candidate and as an employer. Students were asked to come in interview dress and to bring a job advertisement with a resume and cover letter tailored for that position. The team provided sample resources for practice sessions. These included booklets, sample resumes, exercises and other resources the students could take home with them for future use. In a five-question follow-up survey, the students praised the workshop, saying that they learned a lot about resumes, enjoyed the practice interviewing, and appreciated the general humor and
practicality of the day.

Assessment

The LLA Diversity Interest Group hosted a Project Recovery Scholar meeting at Xavier University in New Orleans on July 31, 2010, which culminated the first year of their program. Those who could not attend participated in a compressed video meeting a week later. At this meeting, scholars were asked to write down their reflections on the Project Recovery experience so far, and to offer any suggestions on how to improve the remainder of the program.

Students thanked Project Recovery for such benefits as the opportunities for mentoring and conference attendance. In Jennifer Martin’s words, they are “impressed w/ the professional connections, networking, & partnerships the faculty & SLIS program enjoy & maintain—feel the connection to the discipline & the libraries in the trenches—will make the transition to career much easier with the opportunities I’ve had thus far to network, ask questions, and learn about professional opportunities in the state.”

They agree that they feel like they have begun a career surrounded by support. Lynette Hunter simply stated, “I have been immersed in a new world with many networks.”

Most students were reluctant to offer any criticism, saying they thought the program was great as is. Several, however, mentioned they would like to meet in person more often. As distance students, they feel they do not have as much opportunity to socialize as they would like. Since then, they have been brought together more often. All during the spring 2011 semester Project Recovery Scholars met to plan the LLA program. A new mentor was also provided for the New Orleans group. Calcasieu mentors provided informal luncheons for the scholars in that area.
One student suggested that Project Recovery Scholars continue to meet after graduation and hoped that SLIS or Project Recovery would organize some continuing education activities for them. Some additional activities are being planned (including writing an article where all presentations will appear in the Louisiana Libraries) that will call for continued involvement. The Project Recovery team will provide an additional leadership development workshop to include both graduates and current scholars in spring of 2012.

The main theme of the evaluations was the value of interacting with others in the field. As Adele Marrs explained, “For me, inspiring this sense of gaining knowledge through collaboration is essential.”

Conclusion

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recently established new regulations in Section 403 of the Stafford Act which declare the library an essential community service, adding it to the company of police, fire protection, emergency services, medical care, education, and utilities (FEMA 2010b). This definition and support will help libraries keep serving the public in the wake of future disasters.

Many in south Louisiana already know the value of libraries in the aftermath of a hurricane, but they also know how destabilizing and disrupting of library services and staff hurricanes can be. Years later, area libraries are still feeling the financial and infrastructural burdens of Katrina and Rita. Project Recovery, through its education of future librarians committed to serving Louisianans, and through the volunteer work its scholars have already provided, is making a difference.
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