Intangible Factors Influencing the Successful Completion of Graduate LIS Coursework by Non-traditional Students: A Case of Two IMLS-funded Scholarship Projects

Linda R. Most

Master of Library and Information Studies Program, Odum Library Suite 4600, Valdosta State University, 1500 North Patterson St., Valdosta GA 31698-0133, Email: lrmost@valdosta.edu

Michelle M. Kazmer and Paul F. Marty

School of Library and Information Studies, Florida State University, PO Box 3062100, Tallahassee FL 32306-2100 Email: {mkazmer, marty}@fsu.edu

This paper examines two IMLS-funded scholarship programs that targeted non-traditional LIS students, documenting non-academic aspects of the programs that participating students identified as most important to the successful completion of their academic programs and to their establishment as contributing members of the professional library community. Formative analyses conducted during the programs pointed to the importance of ongoing and extensive administrative and emotional support for participants, and this paper provides an analysis of the value of these intangible sources of student support. Using online surveys and semi-structured interviews of selected participants from both scholarship programs, this study found that multiple forms of intangible support, from multiple sources inside and outside the academy, that surpassed institutional norms, were crucial to the academic and early career success of non-traditional LIS students.

Keywords: student support; non-traditional students; distance learning; intangible support; survey and interview methods

Introduction

For the future of the LIS professions and the success of individuals, it is crucial that LIS students begin to build their professional networks during their academic LIS programs (Kazmer, 2006). The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Laura Bush 21st Century Librarians program has been instrumental in funding the education of the next generation of LIS professionals. Many of the scholarship projects funded through this program have been designed to recruit and prepare librarians to serve underserved or at-risk populations. These projects often include activities intended to socialize scholarship recipients—many of whom are from backgrounds that lead to their being considered non-traditional students—into their professional communities and provide them with administrative and logistical support.

To determine which aspects of LIS students' educational programs have been most effective, it is important to look beyond the scholarship funding periods and follow the graduates as they begin their professional careers. Are IMLS-funded graduates benefitting from the educational initiatives in which they participated? Did the additional administrative support made possible by grant funding factor into their success? Are graduates connecting with the people and institutions that will help

them become effective library leaders? Do their professional networks include their classmates? This study addresses these questions by documenting the intangible factors recent graduates of two online IMLS-funded scholarship programs targeting non-traditional students at Florida State University identified as being instrumental to their academic and early career success.

Background

Research about the non-financial support of graduate students has tended to focus on support for learning (Shepherd & Bolliger, 2011), often within individual courses (Lee, Srinivasan, Trail, Lewis, & Lopez, 2011). Other research in the area of support has focused on how librarians can support students in a wide variety of educational settings and for varying purposes, including higher education (Mortimore & Wall, 2009; Stoffle & Cuillier, 2010) and K-12 schools (Farmer, 2009). Research about the support needed by online LIS students began soon after the first wave of LIS programs moved to web-based platforms in the mid-1990s (e.g., Hara & Kling, 2000; Kazmer, 2000), and continues to be an area of study as e-learning becomes more common and the technologies used for it change rapidly (Hank, Sugimoto, & Pomerantz, 2012; Mon, 2012).

Master's students in LIS are frequently in need of support beyond that offered at the level of the course (i.e., dedicated toward learning); they need support at the program and professional preparation level (Cherry, Duff, Singh, & Freund, 2011). This is especially true for distance students who may encounter more roadblocks in accessing traditional means of support (Lee, 2010). LIS master's programs are technologically demanding—face-to-face and online—and incoming students may need adaptable and just-in-time support to help them meet program expectations for technology skills (Kules & McDaniel, 2010). This increasing interest in how LIS pro-

grams can provide such support for their students is also evidenced by two panels on student support at the 2011 ALISE conference (Bajjaly, Bondy & Drulia, 2011; Miller, Montague & Stanik, 2011), as well as in the literature cited above.

LIS Scholarship Programs at Florida State University

Two recent IMLS-funded scholarship programs at the Florida State University School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS)—*Librarians Serving the Public (LSP)* from 2004 to 2009, and *Florida Leaders & Managers (FLM)* from 2007 to 2011—were designed to educate and socialize the next generation of library leaders in Florida. Both projects used online distance-learning technology to deliver student coursework, and both projects were conducted in collaboration with partner libraries and library cooperatives from different regions of the state. Together, these projects enabled 67 students—many already affiliated with Florida libraries as paraprofessionals—to earn their master's degrees in Library and Information Studies or a Certificate in Leadership & Management.

The LSP and FLM projects shared the same principal investigator, and had several objectives in common, including recruiting non-traditional students who had not previously considered pursuing graduate professional degrees for a variety of reasons and consequently providing student support beyond institutional norms (Heery, 1996; Sendall, Shaw, Round & Larkin, 2010; Virkus & Wood, 2004; Yi, 2005). Both projects also featured: online courses that participating students took in cohorts (via dedicated sections of regularly offered courses, or courses created or revised especially for each project); attendance by the students at on-campus (LSP) or regional (FLM) grant-funded professional development workshops; and funding for all enrolled students to attend the Florida Library Association's professional

conference each year. These opportunities added face-to-face components to an otherwise fully-online master's program (Kazmer, 2007). Formative analyses of both projects were conducted through annual focus groups, and summative analyses through capstone papers (FLM) and surveys (LSP).

Project 1: Librarians Serving the Public (2004–2009)

Librarians Serving the Public was designed to prepare librarians to assume professional leadership or innovation roles within academic, public or school libraries in north and central Florida (Florida State University, 2009). The service area for this project included 58 of Florida's 67 counties and the majority of its rural population. The grant partners for this project were representatives of three multi-county cooperatives serving northeastern and central Florida and the Panhandle. The partners' roles included recruitment, mentoring, and helping to place the project graduates.

The original timeline for the LSP project was severely affected by the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons, which decimated much of the state's infrastructure during the recruiting periods for the first two cohorts (Smith & McCarty, 2006). Potential scholars were so concerned with meeting the basic needs of life in communities without electricity or other basic infrastructure elements that attending graduate school became a dream to be deferred indefinitely. The project was granted a no-cost extension, and when conditions stabilized 55 students were ultimately accepted across three extended cohorts.

Many of the students recruited for the LSP project were categorized as non-traditional because they had not thought it would be possible to attend graduate school because they needed flexibility to accommodate familial, work, and financial obligations, or for geographic reasons, and therefore had not considered some of the challenges they would encounter once they began their studies (Heery, 1996; Yi, 2005). Key challenges the LSP scholars faced included learning how to manage their time, and coordinating and communicating with school, jobs, and families. Many LSP students did not understand the additional commitments they were making when they accepted their scholarships, commitments which exceeded those expected of regularly matriculated online graduate students (e.g., on-campus workshops and FLA conference attendance).

The LSP project's objectives were to recruit an ethnically diverse group of student scholars; provide an online educational experience focused on public service, community partnerships, and leadership; assign each student to one of five specially recruited and trained mentors; provide the students with the opportunity to attend three professional meetings within Florida to model aspects of leadership behavior and responsibility; place the students in library positions that would allow them to practice what they learned; and conduct formative and summative evaluations of student success and project goals. At the close of the LSP project, 48 students had completed, or were expected to complete, their master's degrees and were on track to begin professional library careers.

Project 2: Florida Leaders & Managers (2007–2011)

Florida Leaders & Managers, officially titled *Southeast Florida Library Leaders: Building the Next Generation of Service to Underserved Populations,* was designed to educate the next generation of public library leaders and managers who would serve underserved populations in Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties in South Florida (Florida State University, 2011). The project was intended to fund 15 ALA-accredited master's degrees and 15 Certificates in Management & Leadership. The project's main partners included the Southeast Florida Library Information

Network (SEFLIN), the Broward County Library, and the Miami-Dade Public Library System. The partners' responsibilities included recruitment, hosting local and regional workshops, and helping to place students.

As with the LSP project, FLM met with unexpected challenges from outside the academy. During the FLM recruiting period the nation fell into an economic downturn which was exacerbated in Florida by a property tax reform initiative that resulted in severe public budget cuts at all levels. Many potential project candidates wondered why they should put themselves through the stress and disruption of two years of graduate school when they saw no hope of promotion upon graduation. Ultimately 27 students were admitted to the FLM project and 24 graduated, earning 18 Master's degrees, 2 Specialist (post-master's) degrees, and 22 interim or terminal Certificates in Leadership & Management.

The FLM project's objectives were to provide scholarships to students who: demonstrated leadership and management skills; desired management positions; were committed to work with underserved populations in Southeast Florida; and demonstrated a knowledge and understanding of underserved populations through education, language skills, multicultural experience, and recommendations. Project activities included delivering the leadership and management curriculum to the students in cohorted online class sections, providing six regional workshops, funding participation in the state library association's annual conference, and adding two courses (on planning and evaluation, and human resources management) to the SLIS curriculum.

Many of the public library paraprofessionals identified as candidates for the FLM scholarships by their Southeast Florida library employers fit the non-traditional student category targeted by the grant because they had immigrated to the US from other countries, spoke English as a second or third language, were working full-time, had been out of school for many years, or were completely unfamiliar with the culture of higher education in the US (Heery, 1996; Sendall, Shaw, Round & Larkin, 2010; Yi, 2005). Once recruited, many found the university's online application processes daunting. Several were unable to arrange for their non-US undergraduate institutions to provide their transcripts in a timely fashion, and once those transcripts were secured they had to be translated into English and evaluated for equivalency to the US education system. Many were overwhelmed by the idea of having to take the GRE exam (required, in the English language version, by the university), even if they did speak English as the first language. These students were admitted to the project as certificate scholars (that is, non-degree-seeking according to the university) so that they would not need to negotiate all the university's administrative procedures and the standardized testing at the same time. As these students proved their capabilities to themselves by successfully completing their certificate coursework, they developed confidence and began to contemplate taking their GREs to seek full admission to the university as degree-seeking students.

The Challenges of Supporting Non-Traditional LIS Students

The LSP and FLM projects targeted less traditional scholars than those who typically pursue graduate LIS degrees (see Mehra, Black, Singh, & Nolt, 2011; Mehra & Lambert, 2008). To help students in both programs circumvent these difficulties, the principal investigators, the FLM project's graduate assistant, and the SLIS admissions and advising staff provided help that was well beyond institutional norms to guide these students through the university's process to become fully matriculated into the master's program. The FLM graduate assistant tracked each applicant's status and regularly made calls on the scholars' behalf to admissions per-

sonnel to clarify conditions for admission for non-traditional and non-US students and to lobby for extended deadlines and exceptions. All project personnel contributed to guiding the scholars through the matriculation process by supporting the scholars through the GRE process, checking in with the scholars every semester to make sure they knew what courses to take next, and regularly encouraging and responding to phone calls, discussion forum posts, and individual e-mails in an ongoing attempt to keep scholars from becoming discouraged by the challenges they faced. The project partners were very supportive of the required student travel and often attended the FLM regional workshops to mentor their employee scholars.

Literature indicates the need for a variety of kinds of support, including intangible and "non-academic" support, by the kinds of students who received scholarships in the LSP and the FLM projects (Hara & Kling, 2000; Heery, 1996; Kazmer, 2000; Kules & McDaniel, 2010; Lee, 2010; Lee, Srinivasan, Trail, Lewis, & Lopez, 2011; Mehra, Black, Singh, & Nolt, 2011; Mehra & Lambert, 2008; Shepherd & Bolliger, 2011; Yi, 2005). This in turn indicates a need to assess the influence of these intangible forms of support on the scholarship recipients' successful completion of the programs. To improve understanding of the value of intangible support in the successful completion of academic programs and the successful integration of non-traditional LIS graduates into a professional community, this study addresses the following research question: What are the non-academic aspects of the FLM and LSP scholarship projects that non-traditional students considered to be most important to their success in their academic programs and in establishing themselves as contributing professional members of the Florida library community?

Methods

This study employed survey and semi-structured interview methods to evaluate both projects simultaneously and answer the research question. After the conclusion of the FLM project, the researchers used the data collected via the formative assessments of each project to inform the development of a survey instrument and semi-structured interview schedule. A link to the survey was sent to each graduate from the LSP and FLM programs for whom SLIS had a viable e-mail address on February 15, 2011 and again on March 3, 2011. Participants were not asked to identify which project they had participated in when completing the survey.

The survey instrument (Appendix A) was designed to evaluate multiple aspects of both projects from the students' perspectives. It included questions about university procedures and requirements, the helpfulness and continuing value of different aspects of the project, and the sources of challenges the students faced. Additional questions intended to identify the students' future educational needs and desires were asked to inform future program planning. Two types of closed-ended questions were asked: those featuring differential scales used ranges from very difficult to very easy, very helpful to very unhelpful, very supportive to very unsupportive, and very valuable to very unvaluable; other questions featured lists of options with radio buttons participants could select if the option was relevant to their experiences or future interests.

The semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix B) addressed different aspects of the students' professional experiences since graduation. The different sections of the instrument addressed questions about career outcomes since graduation, service to the profession, the support participants did or did not receive during their programs of study, professional development, and long-term goals. Interviews were conducted over the telephone after the surveys were completed, and were transcribed for data analysis.

The survey was conducted electronically

using SurveyMonkey, and the responses were tallied and percentages collected. Responses to the questions considered in this study were dichotomized for analytical emphasis, and responses by category are presented in the findings below. Cross-tabulation was not attempted because the respondents were not asked to identify the program in which they participated (because the number of potential participants was so small, this decision was made to protect the anonymity of those filling out the survey); only aggregated findings over the two programs are reported. Content analyses of the responses to open-ended survey questions and interview questions were organized thematically to identify commonalities and exceptions among respondents.

The findings reported below focus on survey and interview questions that address the non-academic aspects of the projects that participants considered to be most important to their academic and subsequent career success (specifically, survey questions 1, 2, 3, and 8, and the interview questions labeled Support). Other survey and interview questions focused on topics unrelated to this study's research question (e.g., future program planning, or the usefulness or relevance of the programs' academic content) and are not reported in this study.

Findings

Invitations to participate were sent to 68 scholarship recipients from both programs in February 2011, and the online survey remained open for two months. 47 individuals responded to and completed the survey, resulting in a 69% response rate and a 100% completion rate. Nine individuals volunteered to participate in follow-up telephone interviews, and seven semi-structured interviews were conducted and transcribed in April 2011.

Facilitating Administrative Support

Survey responses indicated the positive value both groups of scholars placed on the extra administrative support they received during the application and registration periods (Table 1). Survey question 1 asked about the ease of use of various administrative aspects of the two projects. Seventy to 95% of respondents found the application, financial aid process, orientation, registration and method of instruction easy or very easy. Only 8.9% of respondents reported that they found the university's registration process difficult, and only 2% found the application process difficult. These small numbers reflect the large amount of administrative support the

Table 1. Ease of Use (n = 47).

Please rate the ease of use of the following:	Very Easy	Easy	Neutral	Difficult	Very Difficult	N/A	n
Application	25 (53.2%)	17 (36.2%)	4 (8.5%)	1 (2.1%)	0	0	47
Financial Aid Process	19 (40.4%)	14 (29.8%)	2 (4.3%)	2 (4.3%)	0	10 (21.3%)	47
Orientation	25 (53.2%)	13 (27.7%)	3 (6.4%)	1 (2.1%)	0	5 (10.6%)	47
Registration	21 (46.7%)	17 (37.7%)	2 (4.4%)	4 (8.9%)	0	1 (2.2%)	45
Method of Instruction	20 (43.5%)	24 (52.1%)	1 (2.2%)	1 (2.2%)	0	0	46
Access to Classroom (Blackboard Site)	19 (40.5%)	21 (44.7%)	4 (8.5%)	3 (6.4%)	0	0	47

Table 2. Helpfulness (n = 47).

Please rate the helpfulness of the following:	Very Helpful	Helpful	Neutral	Unhelpful	Very Unhelpful	N/A	n
Communication from Scholarship Program Leadership	33 (70.2%)	9 (19.1%)	4 (8.5%)	1 (2.1%)	0	0	47
Feedback from Instructors	31 (65.9%)	15 (31.9%)	1 (2.1%)	0	0	0	47
Interaction with Students (Virtually)	30 (63.8%)	10 (21.2%)	5 (10.6%)	2 (4.3%)	0	0	47
Interaction with Students (Face to Face)	22 (46.9%)	11 (23.4%)	0	0	0	14 (29.8%)	47

scholars received and the associated easing of difficulties in the process.

Encouraging Helpful Communication and Interpersonal Interaction

The importance of the intangible support the scholars received from a variety of sources is expressed in the responses to Survey Question 2, in which respondents were asked to rate the helpfulness of different program elements (Table 2). Almost 90% of respondents rated the helpfulness of the communication from the scholarship programs' leadership as being helpful or very helpful; over 70% of the scholars rated that communication as very helpful. These responses also help illuminate why so few respondents to Survey Question 1 found the application and registration processes to be difficult (above). Ongoing communication with the scholars during the application and registration processes was instrumental in the scholars' successful matriculation into their academic programs.

Eighty-five percent of both projects' scholars rated virtual interaction with fellow students as helpful or very helpful; 63% rated that virtual interaction with their classmates as very helpful. This response reflects the positive value the projects' scholars placed on being cohorted into their classes because both projects featured online courses that students took in cohorts either in dedicated sections of regularly offered courses or in courses cre-

ated or revised for each project. Seventy percent of the scholars rated face-to-face interaction with other students as helpful or very helpful; of that group 46% rated this face-to-face interaction as very helpful. Face-to-face interaction facilitated by the projects' leadership was restricted to attendance at project workshops and the annual Florida Library Association meetings, so the scholars experienced a maximum of three formal face-to-face meetings per year. The high value the students placed on even these infrequent opportunities is expressed in their ratings of the helpfulness of face-to-face interaction with other students.

In Survey Question 3, participants were asked to rank the supportiveness of a range of people they interacted with during the time they were enrolled in school (Table 3). Over 90% of respondents rated Other Cohort Members as supportive or very supportive. The interview respondents provided corroborating statements, reporting that each semester they found people in class that they knew they could rely on based on previous cohort-based experiences such as shared classes or face-to-face meetings.

The interview respondents expanded on the importance of the multiple networking opportunities for all the participants, as can be seen in the following statements:

The most valuable aspect was the ability to meet with other people who were going

through the school and programs—meet informally in person and talk about the classes and help each other out. [Interviewee #1]

I have to say that the cohort system was fabulous. It gave us a feel of camaraderie —you're at the same level, you have colleagues and peers you can talk to—talk about your problems. You feel like 'omg, I'm not the only one stressing about this'. [Interviewee #2]

The networking opportunities—people in my cohort were able to help me with my homework. I had a situation . . . but I knew people through the cohort who were able to give me information to finish the project. Even now if I'm working on something, I know who's around and who to contact to ask them what they think. [Interviewee #3]

As far as outside of classes, I enjoyed the fact that there were several people within the cohort that I could talk to outside of the classes. I actually just ran into someone the

other day, we serve on the same statewide committee, and so we were able to talk about the program. So that was really interesting. I think that was probably the best thing—it helped me focus my goals and get me to where I need to be. [Interviewee #4]

Other respondents discussed the importance of being part of a cohort in the context of the isolation some online learners experience:

. . . if I hadn't had that little cohort, that group, where we were all together . . . I think that made a huge difference. Because otherwise, if I didn't have that I think that I would have felt very alone. It would have been very hard to make friends and to have a group for yourself that would also understand. They were the only ones that understood how hard it was. Because my family didn't, my coworkers didn't . . . I remember one time, I told my Dad about how hard it was and he just scoffed. The little group I was in really helped. [Interviewee #5]

Table 3. Supportiveness (n = 47).

Please rate the supportiveness of the following:	Very Supportive	Supportive	Neutral	Unsupportive	Very Unsupportive	N/A	n
Work: Head of the Organization	19 (40.4%)	8 (17.0%)	6 (12.8%)	8 (17.0%)	3 (6.4%)	3 (6.4%)	47
Work: Direct Supervisor	28 (59.5%)	6 (12.8%)	1 (2.1%)	8 (17.1%)	4 (8.5%)	0	47
Work: Colleagues	20 (42.5%)	12 (25.6%)	7 (14.9%)	4 (8.6%)	2 (4.3%)	2 (4.3%)	47
Program: Leadership	33 (70.2%)	11 (23.4%)	1 (2.1%)	0	0	2 (4.3%)	47
Program: Professors and Instructors	33 (70.2%)	12 (25.5%)	2 (4.3%)	0	0	0	47
Program: Other Cohort Members	33 (70.3%)	10 (21.3%)	3 (6.4%)	0	0	1 (2.1%)	47
Program: Classmates	29 (61.7%)	11 (23.4%)	5 (10.6%)	1 (2.1%)	0	1 (2.1%)	47
Family	37 (80.4%)	5 (10.9%)	2 (4.3%)	0	0	2 (4.3%)	46
Other	5 (26.3%)	2 (10.5%)	0	0	0	12 (63.2%)	19

This response sheds light on the survey findings from Question 3 that, even though the majority of responses were positive, 23.4% of respondents rated the Heads of their Work Organizations as unsupportive or very unsupportive; 25.6% rated their Direct Supervisors at work as unsupportive or very unsupportive; and 12.9% rated their Work Colleagues as unsupportive or very unsupportive. These were the highest percentages of negative responses received across the survey questions. Some of the perceived lack of support from workplace supervisors and directors may reflect the challenges faced by employers to continue to provide library services with fewer available resources. Since 2007, library directors across Florida have been operating under rigid financial constraints as many found their budgets cut and their open positions frozen. On the other hand, interview respondent #7 reported that her workplace coworkers and supervisors were especially helpful, saying, "if I hadn't had their support I just wouldn't have been able to do it" and interviewee #2 reported that her colleagues:

> really wanted me to be able to become a librarian. I really did have a lot of support from my coworkers, but then again, I had great support from [the principal investigators]. They were willing to be there and answer questions.
> [Interviewee #2]

The third interviewee reported a unique situation, saying:

> My branch manager at the time is actually kind of notorious for not supporting students while they're in school and wanting them to focus on the job, but he was actually incredibly supportive of me doing stuff. He let me go to FLA even though we were strapped for the budget.
> [Interviewee #3]

Overall, most students found support from at least some of the social, work, and family groups to which they belonged and from their classmates and instructors.

Overcoming Personal Challenges

Many of the scholarship recipients faced personal challenges even after they successfully matriculated into their programs of study. Survey Question 8 attempted to identify these challenges by asking respondents to identify challenges that made it difficult for them to pursue and finish their programs of study (Table 4). In addition to five choices, respondents were given an open-ended "other" response they could complete. Some of the other issues respondents identified as challenges to finishing their programs of study included:

- Health issues
- Failure of employer to assure path to library career
- I switched employment in the middle of the program and lost the support of my employer
- I had two jobs, one full time and one part-time, and a sick parent that I was caring for (out of state) but was still able to complete the program due to the program support
- Nothing has made it difficult, the program was a pleasure
- None, the program was very flexible with our work and personal needs. It was structured very professionally and organized in a very helpful manner.

Networking among cohort members was a strong theme throughout the sur-

Table 4. Difficulties (n = 33).

Which of the following made it difficult to pursue and finish this degree:	n	%
Financial Strain	10	30.3%
Pressures at Work	10	30.3%
Pressures from Home Life	13	39.4%
Program Difficulty	2	6.1%
Hours and Time Commitment	17	51.5%
Other (Please Specify)	11	33.3%

vey and interview responses. Returning to Survey Question 2 in which respondents identified the importance of the face-to-face interactions they experienced during their studies, graduates of both projects reported that the relationships they built during their studies have endured beyond graduation and into their careers. Interview respondents provided examples of the networks they are building based on the face-to-face interactions they experienced with their classmates during their projects' funded workshops and conference participation. The respondents report that they are turning to their old classmates when they need advice about a current workplace issue. The following statements provide supporting evidence for the projects' objectives of helping the students build professional networks:

. . . Even now if I'm working on something, I know who's around and who to contact to ask them what they think. [Interviewee #3]

Quite a few friends [from the program] will e-mail me with questions or issues they might have that are related to digital services. [Interviewee #2]

There was someone else in the program with me who is also a [professional] in [. . .] County, so we see each other at a lot of meetings. So, if I have any questions about anything going on, I have someone that went through this with me that I can ask. Someone else in the cohort just recently became the branch manager at my local library. Several of us are also planning to meet up at FLA. [Interviewee #4]

We were a group and there's still people that I'm friendly with and fond of. [Interviewee #6]

I'm on the committee with another [program] graduate. In addition to that, I work with a fellow [scholarship] recipient and she and I have presented for our consortia. . . . It has been a wonderful opportunity to work with fellow scholarship recipients. [Interviewee #7]

Overall, the surveys and interviews indicate that the combination of administrative support and facilitated interaction, both face-to face and online, within the cohorts and among the project staff and scholars, led to the students successfully matriculating into and completing their degree and certificate programs and building the foundations for long-lasting professional networks.

Discussion

These findings indicate that multiple forms of intangible support, from multiple sources inside and outside the academy, that surpass institutional norms, are critical to the academic and early career success of non-traditional scholarship recipients. As the survey and interview data demonstrate, the LSP and the FLM scholars have been able to maintain the connections they established during their studies and are drawing upon these academic networks in their professional lives. The scholars have identified belonging to cohorts during their studies as being crucial to laying the groundwork for their professional networks.

Formative evaluations conducted as part of both scholarship programs found that the additional, intangible forms of support the project personnel provided, including checking with students regularly throughout their programs of study; providing extra advising on course selections; encouraging and responding to phone calls, discussion posts, and e-mails on non-academic issues that were impacting their schoolwork; and facilitating their required grant-funded travel all had a tremendous positive impact on the scholarship recipients, well beyond the monetary awards they received as part of their scholarships (Florida State University, 2009; 2011). Formative evaluations conducted throughout the FLM project also pointed

to the importance of ongoing extensive administrative and emotional support for the participants throughout the application, advising, and registration processes.

These survey data confirm that the grant-funded administrative support integral to both projects was crucial to the students' early successful negotiation of university administrative procedures and the online learning environment. The intangible support the projects provided beyond tuition scholarship dollars was crucial to the scholars' success, in their studies and in preparing them to go beyond simply graduating with their degrees to actually taking on professional leadership roles. The scholars themselves reported that intangible and tangible support from many different communities was integral to their successful completion of their degrees and the development of their professional identities. Their families, their workplace supervisors and colleagues, their classmates, their scholarship program leadership and support staff, and their other professors and university staff all provided different types and varying amounts of tangible and intangible support for the scholars as they moved through their studies and entered their professional careers.

Conclusion

While the results of this study are not necessarily generalizable, they suggest a variety of approaches to supporting non-traditional LIS students. For example, future research might explore changes in institutional policies or procedures that facilitate the matriculation of qualified students, such as providing additional support for applicants whose undergraduate degrees are from non-US institutions or considering scores from standardized tests other than the GRE. Another approach might to be to strengthen partnerships with the employers of part-time LIS students, affording those students more support at work and increasing their mentoring opportunities.

In 2010, IMLS issued a request for an overall evaluation of the entire Laura Bush 21st Century Librarians grant program (IMLS-RFP-10-003). The contract for the evaluation was awarded but the results are not yet available. This overall evaluation, when complete, will provide helpful context for our understanding of the experiences of scholarship students in general. Meanwhile, the present study provides a focus on the kinds of support that are helpful to such students and suggests that improving the out-of-classroom support for applicants to and students in LIS programs has the potential to improve student experiences and student morale, and to facilitate professional networking and upward career mobility.

Acknowledgements

References

Bajjaly, S., Bondy, J., & Drulia, M. R. (2011, January). *Putting students first: Best practices for LIS student support services.* Panel presented at the 2011 ALISE Conference, San Diego, CA.

Cherry, J., Duff, W., Singh, N., & Freund, L. (2011). Student perceptions of the information professions and their master's program in information studies. *Library & Information Science Research, 33*, 120–31. doi: 10.1016/j.lisr.2010.09.004

Farmer, L. (2009). School library media specialist collaboration with special education personnel in support of student learning. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice, 4*(2), p. 37–55.

Florida State University. (2009, January 30). *Final Report for Librarians Serving the Public.* (Institute of Museum and Library Services Award Number RE-01-04-0020-04). Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University.

Florida State University. (2011, October 29). *Southeast Florida Library Leaders: Building the Next Generation of Service to Underserved Populations* [final report]. (Institute of Museum and Library Services Award Number RE-01-07-0108-07). Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University.

Hank, C., Sugimoto, C., & Pomerantz, J. (2012, January). *Teaching in the age of Facebook and other social media: LIS faculty and students 'friending' and 'poking' in the social sphere.* Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Library and Information Science Education, Dallas, TX.

Hara, N., & Kling, R. (2000). Student distress in a web-based distance education course. *Information, Communication, & Society, 3*(4), 557–579. doi:10.1080/13691180010002297

Heery, M. (1996). Academic library services to non-traditional students. *Library Management, 17*(5), 3–13. doi: 10.1108/01435129610119584

IMLS-RFP-10-003 (2010). LB21 *Grant Program Evaluation* [Request for Proposal]. Retrieved from https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=71b404b9db76549c8a784def80f04ffb&tab=core&tabmode=list&=

Kazmer, M. M. (2000). Coping in a distance environment: Sitcoms, chocolate cake, and dinner with a friend. *First Monday, 5*(9). Retrieved from http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/791/700

Kazmer, M. M. (2006). Creation and loss of sociotechnical capital among information professionals educated online. *Library & Information Science Research, 28*(2), 172–191. doi:10.1016/j.lisr.2006.03.002

Kazmer, M. M. (2007). How do student experiences differ in online LIS programs with and without a residency? *Library Quarterly, 77*(4), 359–383.

Kules, B., & McDaniel, J. (2010). LIS program expectations of incoming students' technology knowledge and skills. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science, 51*(4), 222–32.

Lee, J. (2010). Online support service quality, online learning acceptance, and student satisfaction. *Internet and Higher Education, 13*, 277–83. doi: 10.1016/j.iheduc.2010.08.002

Lee, S., Srinivasan, S., Trail, T., Lewis, D., & Lopez, S. (2011). Examining the relationship among student perception of support, course satisfaction, and learning outcomes in online learning. *Internet and Higher Education, 14*, 158–63. doi:10.1016/j.iheduc.2011.04.001

Mehra, B., & Lambert, C. A. (2008). Priority information needs of African American graduate women: A pilot study. *Communication & Social Change, 2*(1), 105–123. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/comsocchg/vol2/iss1/

Mehra, B., Black, K., Singh, V., & Nolt, J. (2011). Collaborations between LIS education and rural libraries in the Southern and Central Appalachia: Improving librarian technology literacy and management training. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science, 52*(3), 238–247.

Miller, A., Montague, R.-A., & Stanik, L. (2011, January). *Advising for LIS master's students online.* Panel presented at the 2011 ALISE Conference, San Diego, CA.

Mon, L. M. (2012). Professional avatars: Librarians and educators in virtual worlds. *Journal of Documentation, 68*(3), 318–329. doi: 10.1108/00220411211225566

Mortimore, J., & Wall, A. (2009). Motivating African-American students through information literacy instruction: Exploring the link between encouragement and academic self-concept. *The Reference Librarian, 50*(1), 29–42. doi: 10.1080/02763870802546373

Sendall, P., Shaw, R. J., Round, K., & Larkin, J. T. (2010). Fear factors: Hidden challenges to online learning for adults. In Kidd, T. (Ed.), *Online education and adult learning: New frontiers for teaching practices* (pp. 81–100). New York, NY: Information Science Reference.

Shepherd, C., & Bolliger, D. (2011). The effects of electronic portfolio tools on online students' perceived support and cognitive load. *Internet and Higher Education, 14*(3), 142–9. doi:10.1016/j.iheduc.2011.01.002

Smith, S. K., & McCarty, C. (2006, November). *Florida's 2004 hurricane season: Demographic response and recovery.* Paper presented at the meeting of the Southern Demographic Association, Durham, NC. Retrieved from http://www.bebr.ufl.edu/files/SDA%202006%20(FL%20Hurr)_0.pdf

Stoffle, C., & Cuillier, C. (2010). Student-centered service and support: A case study of the University of Arizona Libraries' Information Commons. *Journal of Library Administration, 50*(2), 117–34. doi: 10.1080/01930820903455065

Virkus, S., & Wood, L. (2004). Change and innovation in European LIS education. *New Library World, 105*(9), 320–329. doi:10.1108/03074800410557277

Yi, H. (2005). Library instruction goes online: An inevitable trend. *Library Review, 54*(1), 47–58. doi:10.1108/00242530510574156

Appendix A: Survey Instrument

1. Please rate the ease of use of the following (select N/A if not applicable) as Very Easy, Easy, Neutral, Difficult, Very Difficult, N/A:
   a. Application
   b. Financial Aid Process
   c. Orientation
   d. Registration
   e. Method of Instruction
   f. Access to Classroom (Blackboard Site)

2. Please rate the helpfulness of the following (select N/A if not applicable) as Very Helpful, Helpful, Neutral, Unhelpful, Very Unhelpful, N/A:
   a. Communication from Scholarship Program Leadership
   b. Feedback from Instructors
   c. Interaction with Students (Virtually)
   d. Interaction with Students (Face to Face)

3. Please rate the supportiveness of the following where work refers to your place of employment and program refers to your IMLS scholarship program (select N/A if not applicable) as Very Supportive, Supportive, Neutral, Unsupportive, Very Unsupportive, N/A:
   a. Work: Head of the Organization
   b. Work: Direct Supervisor
   c. Work: Colleagues
   d. Program: Leadership
   e. Program: Professors and Instructors
   f. Program: Other Cohort Members
   g. Program: Classmates
   h. Family
   i. Other

4. Please rate the value of the following (select N/A if not applicable) as Very Valuable, Valuable, Neutral, Unvaluable, Very unvaluable, N/A:
   a. Attendance at the Florida Library

Association (FLA) Annual Conference
   b. Networking Opportunities at the Florida Library Assocation (FLA) Annual Conference
   c. Attendance at the Southeast Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN) Workshops
   d. Networking opportunities at the Southeast Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN) Workshops
   e. Attendance at the On-Campus (LSP) Workshops
   f. Networking Opportunities at the On-Campus (LSP) Workshops

5. Which of the following types of programming have you attended since the IMLS scholarship program ended?
   a. American Library Association Conference or Workshop
   b. Florida Library Association Conference or Workshop
   c. Regional Conference or Workshop
   d. Other (please specify)

6. Which of the following types of programming do you plan to attend in the future?
   a. American Library Association Conference or Workshop
   b. Florida Library Association Conference or Workshop
   c. Regional Conference or Workshop
   d. Other (please specify)

7. Please indicate whether you would be interested in attending programs that focused on the following topics:
   a. Library Advocacy
   b. Customer Service
   c. Emerging Technologies
   d. Marketing Library Services
   e. Customer Service
   f. Library Management
   g. Other (please specify)

8. Which of the following made it difficult to pursue and finish this degree?

    a. Financial Strain
    b. Pressures at Work
    c. Pressures from Home Life
    d. Hours and Time Commitment
    e. Other (please specify)

9. Please rate the following classes in terms of how often you utilize the skills and lessons you learned in them (select N/A if not applicable):

    a. LIS 5203: Assessing Information Needs
    b. LIS 5402: Human Resources Management
    c. LIS 5426: Planning, Evaluation, and Financial Management
    d. LIS 5487: Information Systems Management
    e. LIS 5916: Information Leadership
    f. LIS 5916: Marketing Library and Information Services

10. Which of the following are you considering pursuing in order to achieve your career goals:

    a. Certificates
    b. Master of Library Science Degrees
    c. Specialist or Advanced Master's Degrees
    d. Doctoral Degrees
    e. Other (please specify)

11. Please rate the helpfulness of the following in relation to pursuing additional education (select N/A if not applicable):

    a. Ability to take courses online
    b. Additional Financial Support
    c. Additional Guidance and Mentoring
    d. Additional Workshops or Professional Programming
    e. "Meet-ups" with other cohort members

12. In which of the following areas of the library do you currently work?

    a. Circulation
    b. Collection Management
    c. Reference
    d. Adult Services
    e. Cataloging
    f. Management
    g. Other (please specify)

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Career Outcomes

- Since completing your program of study, have you taken on any additional duties or increased responsibilities at your library?
- How have you incorporated what you learned in your program of study into your library?
- Outside of the library, have you taken on any additional responsibilities, such as becoming a mentor?
- Since completing the program, have you changed jobs or positions? If so, has the change been due to a promotion or a new job?
- How did the time spent on the program affect your experience in the workplace? Were you supported by your coworkers and supervisors? Was there additional ways that the program and its leadership could have been more supportive? What else would have been helpful?

Service to the Profession

- Since completing the program of study, how have you been involved with the profession of library science?
- Have you contributed to any publications?
- Have you offered your time or services to the profession some other way?
- Have you participated with the Florida

Library Association since the end of the program?

- Have you served your community outside of the library?

Support

- What did you learn in your program of study that supports your daily work activities?
- Were there any classes offered at FSU that you feel would have been beneficial but that you did not have the opportunity to take?
- Outside the program of study, what did you feel were the most valuable aspects of this program to you?
- How did being part of a cohort program support you in your goals, both inside and outside of the classroom?
- Where did you get additional support for the program from? Work? Family? Cohort Leadership? Or peers in the program? How did this support make your attendance in the program possible?
- What was the most valuable about each of the following: Speakers? Meeting with each other? Meeting with FSU faculty? Informal time together (lunch)?

Professional Development

- Have you kept any professional contacts that you made within the program?

- Which of the offered workshops did you feel was the most helpful and why?
- Did you feel that meeting face-to-face was an important aspect of the workshops? Do you think that they would have been equally effective if done virtually?

Long Term Goals

- How have your career goals changed as a result of this program?
- Do your career goals include management positions?
- What are your current needs for future education? What other programs and certificates will you need to complete/acquire in order to reach your goals? Certificates? Specialists or advanced Master's degrees? Doctoral degrees?
- What other support are you seeking to further your career goals? Mentoring and guidance? Financial Assistance? Personal or professional support? Additional professional programming?

Additional Comments

We would appreciate it if you would share with us any additional comments you might have about your experience in the program and how it has impacted your career in library science. Is there anything else you would like to discuss that we haven't touched on?