

How MLIS Programs Prepare Students to Serve Diverse Populations: The North American Context

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According to the American Library Association (ALA), organizational sustainability requires social equity, and serving diverse populations is mandated in the ALA Library Bill of Rights and its Policy Manual on Diversity. Preparation to serve diverse and marginalized populations is a key ingredient in creating the type of resilient leaders needed to promote and sustain systematic and lasting changes in LIS. Although the field promotes services to diverse populations through recruitment and retention of librarians, staff, faculty, and students from diverse backgrounds, there is still much work to do, and LIS programs must support students in obtaining the knowledge and skills they will need to develop inclusive library collections, services, and programs that reflect diverse patrons' lives and needs and understanding of the experiences of people whose lived experience differs from their own. This study analyzed courses that prepare students in North American ALA-accredited Master's of Library and Information Science (MLIS) programs to serve diverse populations. All programs' websites were examined to identify relevant courses, and 28 syllabi were analyzed for the study. The researchers employed descriptive statistics and content analysis to describe course offerings and identify course topics through themes emerging from the syllabi. Overall, the study found that course offerings and rotations vary considerably across programs and that the courses focus on how information organizations serve diverse users' information needs in the context of access, equity, and diversity and professionalism in LIS. The findings from this study add to previous research on this topic and provide data that can inform MLIS curriculum development.

Keywords: content analysis, curricula, descriptive statistics, diverse populations, LIS education, syllabi

For library and information science (LIS) professionals, serving diverse populations is mandated in the American Library Association (ALA) Library Bill of Rights (ALA, 2019b) and its Policy Manual on Diversity (ALA, n.d.). In 2018, the ALA Executive Board accepted the final report of the ALA Special Task Force on Sustainability and further emphasized the crucial role played by the libraries and librarians in empowering diverse populations. The task force adopted a tripartite sustainability framework: "To be truly sustainable, an organization or community must embody practices that are environmentally sound AND economically feasible AND socially equitable" (ALA Special Task Force on Sustainability, 2018, p. 4). If libraries and librarians are to recognize and help solve social problems and inequities, MLIS (Master's of Library and Information Science) students—the future librarians—should be well prepared to serve diverse populations that include users with various ethnic, cultural, ability, and gender and sexual identities, especially traditionally underrepresented, marginalized, and underserved population groups. In 2016, one of the researchers carried out a departmental reference curriculum review and invited the stakeholders, including employers, alumni, current students, and faculty members, to

KEY POINTS:

North American MLIS courses on services to diverse populations are predominantly electives, and many are not offered frequently or regularly.

Courses on services for diverse populations cover general services and programs for diverse populations in a context connecting the provision of library services and programs to the larger LIS conversation on diversity. They also focus on specific populations, including people with disabilities; marginalized, underserved, and impoverished communities; and immigrant and migrant populations.

The findings from this study can be used as a checklist for programs that are evaluating their existing curricula for coverage of services to diverse populations.

provide input. One of the discussion topics was the importance of curriculum development in preparing future librarians to serve diverse populations. This is an ongoing conversation among LIS researchers and practitioners; research on the coverage of diversity in MLIS curricula has been conducted to determine the state of course offerings and course content, and recommendations for building more inclusive curricula have been offered (Alajmi & Alshammari, 2020; Cooke & Jacobs, 2018; Mestre, 2010; Subramaniam & Jaeger, 2010, 2011). Such research must be updated frequently to reflect developments in MLIS course offerings and content. This exploratory study adds to this conversation by exploring the offerings and content coverage of a specific type of course: services to diverse populations in the North American context (i.e., courses on information services and/or resources to diverse populations, multicultural resources and services, library services to marginalized and traditionally underserved populations,

and library services to users with disabilities). We analyzed a corpus of course syllabi that focus on preparing future information professionals to be culturally competent in serving diverse populations, employing descriptive statistic and content analysis. The findings report the current state of MLIS course offerings in this area, identify the content coverage of the courses, and provide data that can inform MLIS curriculum development and future research.

Literature review

The topic of diversity in the LIS curricula has been discussed for many years, with that discussion ranging from program structure (e.g., whether the content should either be contained in stand-alone required courses or stand-alone elective courses or be infused across the curriculum) to how the courses should be named (Al-Qallaf & Mika, 2013; Alajami & Alshammari, 2020; Belay, 1992; Chu 1995; Cooke 2017, 2018; Dali & Caidi, 2017; East & Lam, 1995; Hill & Kumasi, 2012; Irvin, 2016; Jaeger, Bertot, & Subramaniam, 2013; Jaeger, Subramaniam, Jones, & Bertot, 2011; Jaeger et al., 2015; Josey, 1991; Kumasi & Hill, 2011; Mehra, Olson, & Ahmad, 2011; Mehra & Singh, 2016; Monroe, 1971; Pawley, 1998, 2006; Poole, Agosto, Greenburg, Lin, & Yan, 2021; Subramaniam & Jaeger, 2010). Although the field has been promoting services to diverse populations through recruitment and retention of librarians, staff, faculty, and students from diverse backgrounds, LIS “continues to not

reflect, and perhaps not fully understand, the diverse and dynamic communities it serves” (Cooke & Jacobs, 2018, p. 3), and Josey’s speculation from 1993 may still be operative:

One possible hypothesis is that there are some people in our library organizations and library schools who are members of the majority white population and who believe that racism or discrimination has been eradicated in the workplace; therefore, further effort at achieving diversity is unnecessary. (1993, p. 303)

This situation implicates the demographics of the current workforce and LIS student bodies and the efforts to diversify both populations. Much has been written about the role a diverse faculty plays in the recruitment of minority students to LIS programs (Abdullahi, 1992, 2007, 2008; Adkins & Espinal, 2004; Balderrama, 2000; Bonnici & Burnett, 2005; Jaeger, Bertot, & Franklin, 2010; Jaeger & Franklin, 2007; Jaeger et al., 2011; Josey, 1993, 1999; Kim & Sin, 2006, 2008; Neely, 2005; Poole et al., 2021; Randall, 1988; Subramaniam & Jaeger 2010; Wheeler, 2005; Winston, 1998; Winston & Walstad, 2006). The push to create a pipeline of culturally competent librarians is not a new one (Cooke, 2017; Overall, 2009). Efforts have been devised on many fronts but ultimately are rooted in the need to diversify the field, though such efforts have resulted in marginal success (Cooke, 2014; Montiel-Overall & Littletree, 2010). Despite programs such as Spectrum Scholars and Knowledge River that specifically target the recruitment and retention of Black, Indigenous, and POC (people of color) students (Montiel-Overall & Littletree, 2010), in the 2018–2019 academic year, minority groups’ percentages of ALA accredited Master’s degrees awarded were substantially lower than their percentage of the population (ALISE, 2020).

A key takeaway from the discussion of diversity in LIS is that programs must support students in obtaining the knowledge and skills they will need to develop inclusive library collections, services, and programs that reflect diverse patrons’ lives and needs and understanding of the experiences of people whose lived experience differs from their own (Andrade & Rivera, 2011; Cooke, 2018; Jaeger & Hill 2017; Noble, Austin, Sweeney, McKeever, & Sullivan, 2014; Overall, 2010; Poole et al., 2021). Students have been queried about their perception of this preparation. Kumasi and Hill (2011) conducted a gap analysis of students’ prior knowledge and cultural competence learning. The researchers employed a survey at two universities to determine student-reported reflections on education/knowledge gains after entering an LIS program. Levels of knowledge gained ranged from no or low to moderate gains, even though students found all concepts important. Bringing students into the conversation about diversifying LIS programs and curricula can also have a direct effect; an initiative to create a shared conversation with students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign’s Graduate School of Library and Information Science resulted in the addition of the Information Services for Diverse Users course, the regularization of the Social Justice in the Information Professions course, and the revivification and redesign of a doctoral course, Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Information Professions (Cooke, Sweeney, & Noble, 2016).

A librarian’s ability to meaningfully engage with diverse populations does not materialize out of thin air; cultural competence and cultural humility, self-reflection, and the skills to interrogate power and privilege must be learned and practiced (Andrade & Rivera, 2011; ACRL,

2012; Cooke & Sweeney, 2016; Singh, 2020; Winklestein, 2016). Principles and competencies for diversity practice have been promulgated by multiple professional associations, including ALA (2017), the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL, 2012), the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE, 2013), the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC, 2020), and the Society of American Archivists (SAA, 2020).

Diversity audits are one way of assessing whether and to what extent diversity topics have suffused a program's curriculum (Alajmi & Alshammari, 2020; Cooke & Jacobs, 2018). A number of methods can be brought to bear on such an audit (for example, Gibson, Hughes-Hassell, and Threats [2018] conducted an analysis of critical race theory readings in foundations courses, and in the same year Ndumu and Betts-Green [2018] analyzed diversity-related content on the websites of North American LIS programs), but syllabi analyses are a direct and "hands on" (Cooke & Jacobs, 2018, p. 3) approach. Two diversity audits of LIS programs have found the coverage of diversity-related courses lacking. Subramaniam and Jaeger (2011) identified 66 diversity-related courses from iSchools (<https://ischools.org>) that offered ALA-accredited MLIS programs. They reported that relatively few courses focused on diversity and were primarily electives covering a small number of diversity topics. Seven years later, in an audit of 108 syllabi from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's School of Information Sciences, Cooke and Jacobs (2018) determined that 46% of courses contained an inadequate amount of diversity-related content. And while diversity could be represented by entire courses, a class session or content unit, or readings about diverse communities or by diverse authors, in some cases it was represented only by a policy statement (e.g., about diversity, inclusion, and/or disability) or a statement from the instructor. Another study of 84 syllabi from 19 ALA-accredited MLIS programs (Alajmi & Alshammari, 2020) found a slow but significant increase in diversity content, with 90% of programs offering related courses as opposed to 81% in 2013. However, while others have agreed that some progress has been made (Adkins, Virden, & Yier, 2015; Cooke & Sweeney, 2016; Poole et al., 2021), the pace of change is not fast enough (Poole et al., 2021), and the ongoing discussion of the need to diversify curricula reflects the cyclical and insufficient nature of attempts to address this issue (Cooke & Minarik 2016; Cooke & Sweeney, 2016; Gollop & Hughes-Hassell, 2016; Poole et al., 2021) and deeply rooted structural problems in the LIS field (Cooke & Jacobs, 2018).

The review of the literature demonstrates the need for a continuing project of examining LIS curricula and, more importantly, using the findings to infuse topics and competencies that will support a more culturally competent library workforce into curricula. This study adds to the conversation by addressing a gap in the literature. While past syllabus studies have focused on either the full curricula of LIS programs or MLIS curricula on diversity, this study explores the offerings and content coverage of a specific type of course: library services to diverse populations.

Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this exploratory study was to develop a baseline view of the offerings and content coverage of courses on services to diverse populations from MLIS programs in North America. The research was designed to answer three questions:

- RQ1. To what extent do MLIS programs offer courses on services to diverse populations?
- RQ2. What are the characteristics of MLIS courses on services to diverse populations?
- RQ3. What topic areas do MLIS courses on services to diverse populations cover?

Study design and methods

A multiple methods approach was employed to analyze a small corpus of syllabi. The researchers developed a portrait of the courses and their characteristics using descriptive statistics and employed content analysis to explore course content coverage.

Data collection

Data collection began in early 2019. The websites of the 64 ALA-accredited MLIS programs in North America were examined to identify courses focused on serving diverse populations. Courses that have a focus on preparing MLIS students with practical skills and knowledge in developing collections, programs, and services for diverse user populations were selected. Course focus was inferred from the course titles, course descriptions, syllabi, and course rotation schedules when available. Such information is not always available or easily discoverable on all programs' websites. In the end, the researchers identified 45 course titles from 37 programs: 29 course titles were identified from 23 programs that are housed in library and information science schools, and 16 course titles were identified from 14 programs that are individual LIS programs or departments. These courses cover at least one of the following four topics:

- information services and/or resources to diverse populations;
- multicultural resources and services;
- library services to marginalized, and traditionally underserved populations; and
- library services to users with disabilities.

Courses that cover diversity-related topics but do not have an explicit coverage of practical skills and knowledge needed to serve diverse user populations were excluded from the study. This includes courses with a focus on multicultural materials, services, and programming for children and young adults to promote their understanding and respect for diversity and inclusion; courses on special needs students in K–12 libraries; courses that generally focus on diversity in the profession; and courses that focus specifically on social justice but not on services to diverse populations.

Descriptive statistics

Out of the 45 courses identified for this study, 28 syllabi from 23 programs were obtained from August 2019 to April 2020, either from the departmental websites or by emailing the instructors (when identified) or the program directors for a copy. The characteristics of the courses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Characteristics described are those available to the authors through examination of the collected syllabi: the delivery mode (e.g., online, face-to-face, or hybrid), whether the courses are required or electives, and how often

the courses are offered. The corpus of syllabi did not support examination of factors such as characteristics of faculty teaching the courses (e.g., full-time faculty members or adjuncts, and whether diversity-related courses are primarily taught by faculty who are Black, Indigenous, and POC) because such information was not available for all syllabi.

Content analysis

A content analysis of the collected syllabi was conducted to explore the topics covered by the identified courses. The researchers employed an inductive thematic analysis to develop a codebook and coding procedures (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) because a pre-existing coding instrument was not available and because this allowed for a holistic approach to exploring course topic areas. The codebook and coding procedures were developed over three rounds of coding (Dickey, Burnett, Chudoba, & Kazmer, 2007; Kazmer et al., 2016). A random sample of syllabi was selected for the first round of coding, with two researchers assigned to code each syllabus (the unit of analysis for this study is one syllabus). The researchers used open coding for this first round. Codes that emerged were compiled into an initial codebook, and additional syllabi were randomly selected for the second and third rounds of coding (with two researchers coding each syllabus in each round). Early in the coding process the researchers decided to constrain the analysis to syllabus sections related to course descriptions, course or student learning objectives, and topics covered by the courses. When topics were derived from course calendars, only the topics were included (e.g., not reading assignments). Assigned readings were excluded from the analysis because it is not clear why instructors assign specific reading material. Course assignments were excluded because during the early rounds of coding the authors determined that many assignments were out of scope and, rather than cherry-picking assignments, the decision was made to exclude these sections. Because the analysis was conducted at the syllabus level, once a code was assigned to a syllabus, the balance of the syllabus was not examined for further potential instances of that code. After each coding round, the authors discussed and resolved disagreements about the use and scope of the codes. A fourth round of coding was then employed to calculate inter-coder agreement, and the goal of an inter-coder agreement between each pair of the coders of 80% or higher was reached with both Cohen's Kappa and Krippendorff's Coefficient. Finally, the full corpus was divided among the researchers for coding. An inductive analysis of the codes was employed to develop themes from the data (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Findings

This section reports findings related to the research questions. It begins with a discussion of the courses offered and their characteristics and then describes the topic areas covered by the courses.

Courses and their characteristics

The first research question asks to what extent MLIS programs offer courses on services to diverse populations. Over two-thirds of the 45 courses identified have a general focus on services to diverse populations (37.78%) and multicultural resources and services (31.11%). Other courses focus on specific populations such as people with disabilities (8.89%),

Table 1: Courses identified and syllabi collected and included in the study by key concepts in titles

Title keyword categories	# of courses identified	# of syllabi included
Services for diverse populations	17 (37.78%)	13 (46.43%)
Multicultural resources and services	14 (31.11%)	8 (28.57%)
Services for people with disabilities and critical disability theories	4 (8.89%)	3 (10.71%)
Services for marginalized, underserved, impoverished communities	3 (6.67%)	3 (10.71%)
Cultural competencies for information professionals	2 (4.44%)	1 (3.57%)
Service for immigrant and migrant populations	2 (4.44%)	0 (0.00%)
Social justice in information services	2 (4.44%)	0 (0.00%)
Multiculturalism, information, and social integration	1 (2.22%)	0 (0.00%)
Total	45 (100%)	28 (100%)

marginalized and underserved populations and impoverished communities (6.67%), and immigrant and migrant populations (4.44%). The balance of the courses cover cultural competence (4.44%), social justice (4.44%), and multiculturalism (2.22%). Table 1 contains the 45 identified courses in keyword categories and details the number of syllabi in each category collected and included in the research. Title keywords were used for this analysis because course descriptions were not always available when identifying the relevant courses from programs' websites.

The descriptive statistics analysis also addressed the characteristics of the courses offered, the second research question. The 28 courses analyzed are predominantly electives, with only one listed as a core course. Three-quarters of the courses (21) are offered online, six (21.43%) are offered face to face, and one course is offered face to face in fall semesters and online in spring semesters. Fourteen of the 28 courses (50%) have prerequisites, but there is no observable pattern in the types of courses: Information sources and services and a foundations course are required for four courses, a management course is a prerequisite for two courses, and courses on the topics of information organization, information communities, information professions, collection development, research, community needs analysis, information and society, information structure, information search, access to information, user's information needs, methods and tools for the information profession, and the completion of MLIS core are required for one course each.

One-quarter of the courses are listed as special topics. Thirteen courses (46.43%) are offered at least once per year: One course is offered in every semester (spring, summer, and

Table 2: Codes emerging from 10 or more syllabi

Code	# of syllabi	Code	# of syllabi
library services	24 (85.71%)	demographic factors	14 (50.00%)
diverse populations	23 (82.14%)	policy	14 (50.00%)
collection development	22 (78.57%)	communities	13 (46.43%)
distinct groups	22 (78.57%)	professionalism	13 (46.43%)
cultural competence	20 (71.43%)	diversity in LIS	12 (42.86%)
information needs and behaviors	19 (67.86%)	power and privilege	12 (42.86%)
library	19 (67.86%)	ability	11 (39.29%)
library programs	17 (60.71%)	community building	10 (35.71%)
access	16 (57.14%)	equity	10 (35.71%)
cultural context	16 (57.14%)	inclusion	10 (35.71%)
information professionals	16 (57.14%)	information professions	10 (35.71%)
diversity	15 (53.57%)		

fall), two are offered twice a year, and 10 courses (35.71%) are offered once a year. Four courses (14.28%) are offered every other year. On the other hand, eight courses (28.57%) are offered irregularly, and four of these have not been offered for at least two years, although the courses are still listed on the departmental website. Information was not available to determine the frequency of three courses.

Topic areas covered

The content analysis was employed to answer research question three, which asked about the topic areas covered. This thematic analysis brought together information from course descriptions, learning objectives, and course topics to give a holistic view of the courses.

Forty-five codes emerged during the content analysis. Of these, more than 15 emerged from 11 syllabi, 10 to 15 emerged from 12 syllabi, 5 to 9 emerged from 16 syllabi, and fewer than 5 emerged from 6 syllabi. Overall, slightly more than half (51.11%) of the 45 codes emerged from 10 or more syllabi (Table 2; see the Appendix for a full list of the codes and their scope). Many of the most-used codes relate specifically to the idea of services to diverse populations, such as library services (85.71% of syllabi), diverse populations (82.14%), collection development (78.57%), and distinct groups (78.57%). Others describe adjacent concepts such as cultural competence (71.43%). This conforms with the findings of the title keyword analysis (Table 1).

Three themes were developed through the inductive analysis of the data: (1) diverse users, information needs, and outreach; (2) information organizations and library services

Table 3: Distribution of codes by theme

Category	# of codes	% of codes (N = 45)
Diverse users, information needs, and outreach	10	22.22%
Information organizations and library services and programs	12	26.67%
Access, equity, and diversity and professionalism in LIS	23	51.11%

Table 4: Codes focused on diverse users, information needs, and outreach

Code	# of syllabi	% of syllabi (N = 28)	Code	# of syllabi	% of syllabi (N = 28)
diverse populations	23	82.14%	communities	13	46.43%
distinct groups	22	78.57%	ability	11	39.29%
information needs and behaviors	19	67.86%	community building	10	35.71%
diversity	15	53.57%	patron groups	7	25.00%
demographic factors	14	50.00%	community organizations	7	25.00%

and programs; and (3) access, equity, and diversity and professionalism in LIS. Almost half of the codes (48.89%) developed by the researchers fell into the first two themes; they focus on diverse users and communities and the organizations that provide service. The other half of the codes (51.11%) fell into the third theme (see [Table 3](#)).

Diverse users, information needs, and outreach

The diverse users, information needs, and outreach theme focuses on the heart of the idea of providing services to diverse users. It represents slightly less than a quarter of the codes (10 codes, 22.22%), but these are some of the most-used codes in the project, with eight of them emerging from 10 or more syllabi (see [Table 4](#)).

This theme focuses on a wide range of diverse populations and their information needs, and on outreach to communities and community organizations. Many groups and populations were included in the syllabi. During codebook development, we made the decision to differentiate among multiple words and phrases that refer to people and groups that could be considered diverse. This was an iterative process, and the codes were developed over several coding stages. Three population-focused codes emerged in this process: *diverse populations*, *distinct groups*, and *patron groups* ([Table 4](#)). The *diverse populations* code that emerged was used for general diverse and underrepresented populations as groups (e.g., phrases such as diverse communities, marginalized groups and populations, and

Table 5: Codes focused on information organizations and library services and programs

Code	# of syllabi	% of syllabi (N = 28)	Code	# of Syllabi	% of Syllabi (N = 28)
library services	24	85.71%	local	7	25.00%
collection development	22	78.57%	national	5	17.86%
library	19	67.86%	research	5	17.86%
library programs	17	60.71%	international	3	10.71%
information professions	10	35.71%	literacy	3	10.71%
Information organizations	9	35.71%	management	2	7.14%

multicultural groups), while populations that constitute diverse library patron groups were coded as *distinct groups* (e.g., deaf/hard of hearing, homeless populations, immigrant). Several syllabi also referred to traditional library patron groups (adults, children, teens/young adults, and seniors); these were coded as *patron groups*. Examples of syllabus language for this theme include the following:

- “In particular, the course will consider how issues related to class, race, gender, culture, language, and sexuality operate in and exert an influence on the provision of information services.” [Course Overview, Syllabus #23]
- “Analyze the information needs of diverse populations, including the ways in which power, privilege, and oppression affect information needs, services, and outreach.” [Course Objectives, Syllabus #16]
- “Diversity in libraries has implications across all areas of librarianship.” [Learning Outcomes, Syllabus #28]
- “Community-based programming” [Tentative Course Outline, Syllabus #3]

Information organizations and library services and programs

Slightly more than a quarter of the codes (12 codes, 26.67%) focus on information organizations and library services and programs (see Table 5). Only five of these codes emerged from 10 or more syllabi, but four of those were among those most used in the project.

This theme focuses on how information organizations support diverse users, including developing and evaluating library services and programs and collection development activities. Examples of syllabus language for this theme include the following:

- “To make effective use of LIS resources with a critical disability approach” [Course Description, Syllabus #14]
- “Explores diverse cultural groups and the ways that information centers, museums, non-profits, and all types of libraries can effectively serve the informational and recreational needs of these populations.” [Catalog Description, Syllabus #1]

Table 6: Codes focused on access and equity, outreach, and diversity and professionalism in LIS

Code	# of syllabi	% of syllabi (N = 28)	Code	# of syllabi	% of syllabi (N = 28)
cultural competence	20	71.43%	accessibility	8	28.57%
access	16	57.14%	barriers	8	28.57%
cultural context	16	57.14%	critical approaches	8	28.57%
information professionals	16	57.14%	assistive and adaptive technologies	6	21.43%
policy	14	50.00%	bias	6	21.43%
professionalism	13	46.43%	communication	6	21.43%
diversity in LIS	12	42.86%	intersectionality	6	21.43%
power and privilege	12	42.86%	identity	5	17.86%
equity	10	35.71%	empowerment	2	7.14%
inclusion	10	35.71%	diversity initiatives	1	3.57%
advocacy and activism	9	32.14%	legal issues	1	3.57%
social justice	9	32.14%			

- “Identify best practices for developing programs and services to new Americans, other minorities and special populations” [Learning Outcomes/Competencies and Measures, Syllabus #12]
- “LIS Meets Social Work: Best Practices and Lessons Learnt” [Topic, Syllabus #20]

Access, equity, and diversity and professionalism in LIS

The access, equity, and diversity and professionalism in LIS theme includes a wide range of codes, almost half of which emerged from 10 or more syllabi (see [Table 6](#)).

This theme focuses on cultural competence; access and inclusion; policy, power, and structural issues; and how diversity affects LIS organizations. The codes that comprise the theme indicate that many of the analyzed courses position services to diverse populations within a broader context of cultural competence and structural barriers, as is evident in the language of the syllabi:

- “This course examines basic concepts, multicultural competencies, and recommendations from professional resources to work with cultural groups.” [Course Description, Syllabus #4]
- “Over the course of the semester, we will consider some of the effects of historical power imbalances in present day society in the areas of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and education paying specific attention to the ways

libraries, archives and museums may consciously or unconsciously support unjust social systems.” [Instructor’s Information, Syllabus #8]

- “Discuss barriers to information seeking, access, and use that may exist for diverse/underserved populations and formulate effective solutions” [Course Objectives, Syllabus #26]
- “Defining cultural competence” [Course Calendar, Syllabus #10]

Discussion

This study addresses a gap in the literature by focusing on a specific type of course: library services to diverse populations. It finds that North American MLIS courses on services to diverse populations are predominantly electives and offered online (with some offerings either face to face or a mix of face to face and online), and course rotations vary considerably, with a large minority (42.86%) not offered regularly or offered biennially. The courses require a wide range of prerequisites, including reference, foundations, and management courses, and there is no obvious pattern in these requirements. When one considers that these courses are primarily electives and that many are not offered frequently, they do not as a group contribute in a significant way to infusing diversity and cultural competence training into LIS. [Cooke and Jacobs \(2018\)](#) characterize the process of infusing these principles and competencies into curricula as requiring resources and long-term commitment. At the least, offering electives on a regular and frequent basis would be a start toward such commitment. Infusing diversity and cultural competence into the curriculum through existing courses is another approach that can be taken ([Kumasi & Manlove, 2015](#)). This project focused on stand-alone courses and so does not speak to that approach.

The researchers also found that, as might be expected, courses on services for diverse populations cover general services and programs for diverse populations as well as focusing on specific populations. The study found coverage of library services and programs, collection development, information needs and behaviors, policies, and outreach to communities and community organizations. The specific populations covered include people with disabilities; marginalized, underserved, and impoverished communities; and immigrant and migrant populations. The finding that only four courses cover people with disabilities comports with [Alajmi and Alshammari’s \(2020\)](#) study of diversity in LIS curricula, which identified this as a gap between practice and theory. The courses also focus on cultural competence and place services to diverse populations in the context of cultural factors; communities and community engagement; professionalism and diversity in LIS; access, equity, and inclusion; issues of power and privilege; and social justice. This context connects the provision of library services and programs to the larger LIS conversation on diversity and suggests that while it is important to understand the demographics covered by such courses ([Alajmi & Alshammari, 2020](#)), it is also important to explore how course content covers broader areas on which scholars of diversity in LIS focus.

As with all studies, there are several limitations related to the objective of the study and the study design and methods. This paper reports on a study of MLIS courses focused on services to diverse population and the findings cannot be extrapolated to courses with a broader focus on diversity, cultural competence, or social justice in LIS. To determine

what courses should be included for analysis, we used course titles and descriptions (when available) from the websites of ALA-accredited MLIS programs to develop the corpus of syllabi for data collection and analysis. It is possible that some courses that cover services to diverse populations were not selected, either because they were not included in the websites examined or because the coverage was not reflected directly in the title and/or the description (e.g., special topics or seminar courses). There may also be courses that cover services to diverse populations within a broader topic coverage that were not included in this study. In addition, the study's focus on a specific type of course constrained the number of syllabi available for analysis, and the corpus is smaller than studies focused on full program curricula or courses on broader topics of diversity and social justice. Other limitations relate to the coding process. Because the unit of analysis was an individual syllabus, the analysis is focused on the number of syllabi to which each code was assigned, and it was not possible to determine the full extent of how often codes would be used. Finally, because the data corpus consisted of course syllabi, we had to use our best judgment to determine meaning and context in the content analysis.

This study adds to the conversation about weaving diversity and cultural competence into LIS curricula by analyzing courses focused on services to diverse populations. The findings support further research in this area. Future research will expand on the findings by exploring the choices that faculty make when preparing and updating courses and exploring the competencies that support provision of superior services to diverse and underserved populations.

Conclusion and recommendation

ALA provides standards and competences related to serving diverse populations through the *Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies* (ALA, 2019a) and *ALA's Core Competences of Librarianship* (ALA, 2009). Standard II.2.4 specifies that the curriculum should "respond to the needs of a diverse and global society, including the needs of underserved groups" (ALA, 2019, p. 5), and the core competences weave knowledge needed to serve diverse populations throughout the document. There is no question that MLIS courses must prepare students to serve diverse populations, through stand-alone courses or by infusing knowledge of this indispensable segment throughout the curriculum, through electives or required courses.

The decision on whether to offer a stand-alone course or incorporate this material in existing courses is determined largely by the demand, existing expertise, and available resources in each program. Findings from this study provide useful information on current stand-alone courses, including course content and offering arrangements. These findings can inform curriculum development in MLIS programs.

The codes developed in this study illustrate the wide variety of topics covered in stand-alone courses on serving diverse populations. Although the primary topics in most of the syllabi focus on diverse populations; library services, programs, and collections; information professionals; and cultural competence, topics such as power and privilege, equity and inclusion, social justice, and professionalism are also covered. These findings can be used as a checklist for programs that are evaluating their existing curricula for coverage of those concepts.

It is crucial for MLIS educators to continually educate themselves on the constellation of issues and topics connected to serving diverse populations. Unlike the subject knowledge in specific LIS areas, this area represents intrinsic knowledge that impacts all of LIS. Continuing research to understand how best to support students in developing this knowledge through stand-alone and integrated courses would inform this education process.

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Appendix:

List of Codes

Code	# of syllabi	% of syllabi (N = 28)	Scope
ability	11	39.29%	includes ableism, disability rights; does not include disability access
access	16	57.14%	access issues generally; equity of access, digital divide, digital inclusion, digital equity; not for accessibility or disability access; includes information access
accessibility	8	28.57%	includes disability access, ADA standards, universal design, web accessibility, website accessibility, building
advocacy and activism	9	32.14%	includes activism in libraries, professional activism.
assistive and adaptive technologies	6	21.43%	includes technology-assistive technology

(Continued)

Code	# of syllabi	% of syllabi (N = 28)	Scope
barriers	8	28.57%	don't use for access
bias	6	21.43%	includes personal bias; stereotypes
collection development	22	78.57%	includes collections, diverse materials, resources
communication	6	21.43%	refers specifically to an area of the project like culture, diversity, etc. includes cultural communication
communities	13	46.43%	use for local communities
community building	10	35.71%	includes community outreach (all outreach from libraries and from community to libraries), marketing, and social media
community organizations	7	25.00%	includes community agencies and working with/partnering with community agencies.
critical approaches	8	28.57%	theory; knowledge; critical race theory (CRT)
cultural competence	20	71.43%	includes cultural knowledge; cultural humility; ethnocentrism
cultural context	16	57.14%	include sociocultural factors
demographic factors	14	50.00%	includes age, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, income
distinct groups	22	78.57%	includes incarcerated populations, non-native English speakers, immigrant, homeless population, neurodiverse populations, people with disabilities, deaf hard of hearing; indigenous people
diverse populations	23	82.14%	use for all diverse and underrepresented populations as groups: diverse communities; diverse groups; marginalized groups and populations; multicultural groups special populations; traditionally underrepresented communities; underserved groups and populations
diversity	15	53.57%	includes multicultural, multicultural identity, multicultural library, multicultural terminology, multiculturalism
diversity in LIS	12	42.86%	includes hiring and other HR issues
diversity initiatives	1	3.57%	not used for diversity generally or diversity programs or services
empowerment	2	7.14%	empowering diverse and underrepresented populations

(Continued)

Code	# of syllabi	% of syllabi (N = 28)	Scope
equity	10	35.71%	use for issues of equity and providing equity in information organizations; includes equality when used for equity.
identity	5	17.86%	use for term identity
inclusion	10	35.71%	use for issues of inclusion and creating inclusion in information organizations
information needs and behaviors	19	67.86%	includes information environment, meeting cultural needs, meeting educational needs, meeting information needs, meeting needs, meeting recreational needs
information organizations	9	32.14%	includes museums and archives; nonprofits as information organizations (as opposed to community organizations)
information professionals	16	57.14%	use for LIS/information professionals in general; not for diversity in LIS, hiring, etc.
information professions	10	35.71%	use for LIS/information professions
international	3	10.71%	e.g., as in local, national, and international
intersectionality	6	21.43%	use for term intersectionality; intersectional approaches in LIS and information organizations
legal issues	1	3.57%	includes law
library	19	67.86%	use for specific mentions of libraries; includes US libraries; includes academic, archives, prison, public, school, special, law
library programs	17	60.71%	includes implementing programs, evaluating and assessing programs, impact, literacy activities, needs, needs assessment, program sustainability, programming
library services	24	85.71%	includes implementing services, evaluating and assessing services, impact, information services, interests associated with providing information services to diverse groups, issues associated with providing information services to diverse groups, readers' advisory
literacy	3	10.71%	includes literacy activities
local	7	25.00%	e.g., as in local, national, and international
management	2	7.14%	includes leadership, management competence
national	5	17.86%	e.g., as in local, national, and international
patron groups	7	25.00%	use for traditional patron groups: adults, children, teens/young adults, seniors

(Continued)

Code	# of syllabi	% of syllabi (N = 28)	Scope
policy	14	50.00%	includes regulations, policies, institutional issues/policies, library policy
power and privilege	12	42.86%	includes microaggressions, racism
professionalism	13	46.43%	includes ethics/ethical issues
research	5	17.86%	refers to research in the library (not activities in the course to get to learning outcomes or to learn the material). includes analyze, analyze research, conduct research, research techniques, library assessment, library evaluation. Do not use for assessing library programs or services.
social justice	9	32.14%	includes social justice in information fields, social justice in libraries
