

September 4, 2008

Thank you, Chairman George Miller and members of the Committee, for the invitation to be a witness at the Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities of the Committee on Education and Labor of the U.S. House of Representatives, hearing on "Examining the Role of Museums and Libraries in Strengthening Communities."

I am honored to contribute to your examination of the roles that libraries play in strengthening communities, and in particular, on the contribution of the program at the School of Information Resources and Library Science, funded by the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program and titled "Knowledge River. This program recruits Native American and Latino students in a program leading to a master's degree in library and information science and includes community outreach to teens to address health concerns in Tucson.

Background:

Libraries and librarians have changed greatly in the last several decades. They now see their role as connecting individuals and communities with information, both print and electronic, to improve and enhance their lives. Public libraries see themselves as service agencies, often working with other service agencies to use information as part of a unified strategy to address community problems. Public libraries also work with health agencies and with health libraries, as a distribution and outreach point for consumer health information. And, increasingly, public libraries have after school programs, providing a safe place for children and teens to gather, have fun, and learn. Libraries in high schools, community colleges and universities see their role as information coaches, providing students, often first generation college students, with help to find and use information.

Additionally, as our society has become increasingly digital, libraries are a public resource for providing computers to those who don't have other access to them. Access to computers alone is not enough. Librarians also provide instruction in how to use computers to find accurate and trustworthy information. In the information world of the Internet, with its chaotic mix of fact, advertising, and misdirection, learning to find and identify trustworthy information is probably one of the new literacies Americans need to improve their lives.

Education to be a professional librarian requires a master's degree. Any subject studied at the undergraduate level can be the foundation for graduate work in library and information science. Schools that grant a master's degree in library and information science are accredited by the American Library Association (ALA). The grant that is the subject of this testimony, the Knowledge River grant, was given to the School of Information Resources and Library Science, at the University of Arizona, as part of its ALA accredited master's program

Knowledge River

The Knowledge River (KR) grant, awarded by the Institute of Museum and Library Studies in 2005 to the School of Information Resources and Library Science (SIRLS), had as its overarching goal to ensure that the work of librarians, described above, extends into Hispanic and Native American communities, historically communities that have not had access to library and information services, and also communities where information is vital to improving and enhancing their lives.

KR employed two strategies to achieve this goal:

- Recruiting and educating Hispanic and Native American graduate students to be librarians, including coursework that focuses on library and information issues and services from Hispanic and Native perspectives.
- Providing opportunities for KR students to participate in outreach and workforce development by mentoring high school students in health information-seeking skills and showing them firsthand the power of information to change lives. In addition, the mentor/mentee relationship provides role models for Hispanic and Native American teens and makes them aware of the routes through college and graduate school available to be health care professionals or library and information professionals.

Each of these strategies will be described briefly.

1. **Recruiting and educating Hispanic and Native American graduate students to be librarians, including coursework that focuses on library and information issues and services from Hispanic and Native perspectives.**

During the period of this grant, 52 Knowledge River scholars were recruited, 19 Native Americans and 33 Hispanic/Latinos. The grant exceeded its projected outcome by four students. Thirty students have already graduated, and when the remaining students graduate, we will have met our target goal of graduating 45 Hispanic and Native American librarians. These librarians are well trained in the fundamentals of Library and Information Science, in library and information services from Hispanic and Native American perspectives and in the use of information technology to find and use information.

The importance of adding nearly 50 Hispanic and Native American librarians during this grant to the workforce of trained professional librarians cannot be underestimated as an essential part of providing library and information services to these cultural communities. Only 2% of librarians are Hispanic and less than 1% are Native American, according to a recent study by the American Library Association based on the 2000 census. Increasing the number of these librarians is vital, because “institutions must have the face of the communities they serve,” according to Patricia Tarin, who helped start the program and was its director from 2001 to 2007. Again from Patricia Tarin: “For many people who don’t have access to books and technology, libraries can be the gateway for information, knowledge and empowerment. But many won’t use a library if there’s nobody there who shares their culture or speaks their language.” (Appendix 4: Tucson Citizen, January 4, 2007).

And a 2006 study conducted by researchers at the School of Information Resources and Library Science demonstrates that having Hispanic and Native American librarians in libraries DOES increase services to these communities. Although the data indicate that information services to Latino and Native American cultural communities among institutions employing Knowledge River graduates remains problematic, fully 80% of the respondents indicated that they personally provide information services to these cultural groups, and more than half report that they or their institutions are offering new services to these communities since beginning their employment. (Appendix 1: Fulton, Tarin, Bradley, 2006).

2. Providing opportunities for KR students to participate in outreach and workforce development by mentoring high school students in health information-seeking skills and showing them firsthand the power of information to change lives.

The WE Search (Wellness Education) program is one of the highlights of the Knowledge River program. I strongly suggest that you glance through Appendix 3, which is the summary of the program in the KR students' own voices. This is authentic testimony to the truly amazing accomplishments of both the KR graduates and the WE Search high school students in the six-month program.

I also suggest that you visit the website created by the KR graduate students and the WE Search high school students, showing graphically who they are, what they did, and an annotated list of trustworthy health information resources they discovered. The url is <http://wesearch07.googlepages.com/>. Another way to experience the authentic voices of both the KR graduate students and their high school mentees is to visit the blog they created as the course progressed. <http://wesearch.wordpress.com/>

Highlights of the program are described below:

- The WE Search program is a partnership of the Knowledge River program and Sunnyside High School, a high school of predominantly Latino and Native American students. The KR graduate students served as mentors to the high school students.
- The KR graduate students prepared for their role by taking two graduate courses during the summer, one on health disparities and cultural competencies, and another on health information resources.
- The KR graduate students and their high school mentees participated in a week-long summer institute, filled with bonding activities, fun and games, and also serious learning. The high school students learned presentation skills and other information technology skills, while the KR graduate students were instructed in teaching skills.
- During the fall semester, the KR mentors and mentees met in small groups once a day. The KR graduate students themselves met and planned the curriculum and the teaching modules so that all the high school students received the same material.

Topics and activities were:

- Health disparities and valid resources documenting these (Center for Disease Control, U. S. Census Bureau, etc)
 - Learning about free, authoritative resources addressing health disparities (Medline Plus from the National Library of Medicine, etc)
 - Creating information pamphlets for their peers and giving presentations to classes
 - Taking information to the community through outreach events, such as
 - Junior Scientists Kids Day at the University of Arizona
 - Tucson Hopefest
 - Academic Night at Sunnyside High School
 - Creating a permanent web resource documenting what they had done
- The KR graduate students took their high school mentees on a field trip to a predominately Latino neighborhood library that had an after school program for children and teens. The high school students got right into the spirit, playing games and Dance Revolution with the kids. This gave them a firsthand view of the role many libraries are playing in their communities by providing safe places for children and teens to congregate and constructive games and activities for them, often when there are no other such services in the community.
 - Outcomes: All the high school students reported that they had a new understanding of the importance of health information and the roles librarians could play. Several indicated interest in health careers or careers as librarians or information professionals. All the KR graduate students can serve as consumer health information resources, no matter what type of library they choose.

We at SIRLS and Knowledge River are very proud of our Knowledge River graduates and all they have accomplished, and will accomplish, and it is our pleasure to share these accomplishments with you.

Annabelle Nunez

Testifying on the behalf of Knowledge River and the School of Information Resources and Library Science

Appendices:

1. **Knowledge River: Community Impact and Service to Latino and Native American Cultural Groups.** This is a study of the impact of KR graduates on their workplaces and communities after graduation.
2. **WE Search Final Report.** This is a report written by the Knowledge River graduate students, summarizing what they and their mentees did, and their evaluation of the success of the program.

3. **Turning the Page.** This is an article that appeared in the student newspaper, the Arizona Wildcat, in 2007 about the Knowledge River program
4. **UA Pushes for More Minority Librarians.** This is an article that appeared in the Tucson Citizen, a local Tucson newspaper, about the Knowledge River Program