

**Training of Community-Embedded Social Justice Archivists & Activist Librarians [SJ4AAL]**

**Project Justification:** *Project Summary*--“Training of Community-Embedded Social Justice Archivists & Activist Librarians” (SJ4AAL) is a three-year proposal (Implementation - Project Type) that meets the requirements specified in IMLS’ Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program – FY 2022 Guidelines to achieve its Goal 3 (Objective 3.2). The University of Alabama’s (UA) School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS) in partnership with multiple state archives and libraries<sup>1</sup> request \$427,238 IMLS funds (with an additional \$263,228 cost shared) to meet the project goal of recruiting and training 12 community-embedded paraprofessional archivists and activist librarians from underrepresented backgrounds to get their master’s degree part-time in the UA SLIS’ synchronous distance education program. SJ4AAL meets an urgent need for archivists and librarians to apply social justice competencies in an innovative program that combines work experience and community-embedded practice with graduate instruction and curriculum support. It addresses current gaps in diversifying the workforce and operationalizing the how-to’s of social justice and social equity practice within galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAMs) while proposing systematic, intentional, action-oriented, community-engaged, and impact-driven education [1, 2]. Archivist and activist library paraprofessionals from underrepresented backgrounds living in their communities are in a strong position to integrate social justice principles of fairness, justice, equity, inclusiveness, empathy, and empowerment in developing information solutions that address their communities’ injustices while engaging with underserved populations [3, 4, 5]. Students will receive a structured, individually tailored cohesive and comprehensive curriculum drawing upon intersections in archival studies and social justice scholarship and practice. They will receive formal/informal professional mentoring by educators and practitioners and require an integrated internship with community-based agencies external to their workplace. Students will learn and apply archive management and social justice skillsets incorporated into the curriculum to develop work applications and practices that create tangible deliverables that are especially tailored towards meeting underrepresented needs of their embedded communities. If funded, SJ4AAL will begin August 1, 2022, and be completed by July 31, 2025.

*Statement of National Need*--During its Annual and Exhibition virtual conference in June 2021, the American Library Association Council unanimously adopted a new Code of Ethics principle on racial and social justice to dismantle systemic biases, confront inequities and oppression, enhance diversity and inclusion, and advance social justice advocacy [6]. This new professional guideline spotlights an immediacy to learn the how-to’s of integrating impact-driven and community-engaged social justice and inclusion activism via information-related work [7, 8, 9, 10]. Both the Core Values and Core Ethics of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) identify the importance of diversity and the need to “advocate for archival collections to reflect that rich complexity”; they also “acknowledge that, both historically and currently, not all members of the profession abide by these beliefs or guidelines” within a reality of archival work that has historically stayed privileged and biased while representing a semblance of neutrality [11]. As a result, today archive and library institutions increasingly recognize the lapses of the past and a need to center social justice in their special collections, illustrated in a recent emergence of community archives, preservation literacy programs, community archives consulting programs, and co-stewardship initiatives [12, 13, 14, 15]. While these developments are encouraging, the question remains as to whether the profession possesses the necessary capacity to support these initiatives outside of larger, well-resourced, institutions [16, 17]. Further, the racial/ethnic demographics of graduating archivists and those in the workforce continue to stay white-centered majority and few minorities gravitate towards the archival and related librarian professions. For example, in the last SAA A\* Census [Part 6. Report on Diversity], conducted in 2004, the total of all minorities in SAA membership was only 7%, with just 2.8% being African minorities [18]. The critical role of mentorship and networking in supporting professional development are major barriers to recruiting and retaining archival professionals from underrepresented backgrounds [19]. SJ4AAL proposes a solution to this dilemma, by educating a seed cohort of diverse archivists and activist librarians, which will contribute to the emergence of social justice driven archival practices within their home institutions.

**Project Work Plan:** The overall project design covers six phases that include: recruitment and applications of SJ4AAL students from diverse archives and libraries; needs assessment of social injustices and GLAM services in their communities; implementation of educational/training activities and mentoring; ongoing evaluation of program outcomes; career growth placement tracking post-graduation assessment; dissemination of program results. Community-embedded part-time students are expected to enroll in two courses per semester (including summer) over two years with the grant covering their tuition and fees. Five major components in the curriculum will include: (1) Knowledge of core

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<sup>1</sup> For a list of committed SJ4AAL personnel involved in select roles and responsibilities, click [here](#).

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functionalities (with introduction to archives and social justice intersections); (2) Archival studies (e.g., intellectual foundations; archival appraisal/management; technical dimensions; archival representation, access, and use); (3) Social justice scholarship (e.g., social justice activism and advocacy; diversity and inclusion leadership; community-engaged scholarship; intercultural perspective; outreach programming); (4) Archivist and activist internship; (5) Comprehensive ePortfolio (tailored to represent SJ4AAL experiences, including philosophy of LIS practice and artifacts related to student learning outcomes).

*Key Personnel & Strategic Collaborations*--The UA SLIS PI/co-PIs [Bharat Mehra (Professor & EBSCO Endowed Chair in Social Justice) and Robert B. Riter (Assistant Professor; Marie Drolet Bristol-EBSCO Endowed Professor; Program in Archival Studies Coordinator)] will strategically collaborate with multiple archives and library agencies to facilitate all the grant activities integral to its work plan success and implementation. These include committed SJ4AAL partners (e.g., Alabama Department of Archives and History, Alabama Public Library Service, California State Library, Multnomah County and the Oregon Country Fair, President-Elect Society of American Archivists, and New Mexico State Library); Advisory Board (ten state archive and library representatives) to provide feedback in all aspects of project planning, design, and operationalization; Practitioner-Mentoring Board (12 members, one for each student) to assist in situating grant and course experiences to the professional work settings; and others from national, regional, state-level, and local settings. Many have indicated commitment if proposal is funded; others will be elicited moving forward.

**Diversity Plan:** SJ4AAL will train community-embedded social justice archivists and activist librarians from underrepresented backgrounds, with an emphasis on: 1) Recruiting a diverse cohort of paraprofessionals, focusing on mentorship, training, and community engagement. 2) Preparing emerging professionals for working with diverse constituencies, including the skills necessary to assess underserved community's needs and develop/implement workable archival solutions that generate relevant social justice outcomes [20]. SJ4AAL responds to critiques of whiteness in the archival and library profession through intentional recruitment and mentoring of participants from diverse backgrounds. These students will decolonize archival practice and develop archival services capable of supporting diverse constituencies [21, 22].

**Project Results:** SJ4AAL will serve as a pilot case example in cohesive curriculum integration creating a social justice and inclusivity certificate program implemented in synchronization with an existing archives studies concentration. It will serve as a testbed for other pathways that can serve as a model framework for GLAM education at the national level in the future. In this process, SJ4AAL will educate 12 social justice archivists and activist librarians from underrepresented backgrounds to meet an urgent need in the GLAM professions for extending themselves beyond their traditional practice toward greater social responsibility, at the following multiple levels of intersecting impact: (1) Community level: SJ4AAL students will be selected based on their existing paraprofessional roles in GLAMs with close ties to their communities; their student training and course deliverables will be contextually tailored to uniquely impact their communities embedded across the country [not only at big institutions]. They will apply much needed social justice-related skills to provide better services as a result. (2) Educational program level: In addition to social justice-archival studies curriculum and certificate development, SJ4AAL students will interact and disseminate their experiences with non-SJ4AAL students who will spread knowledge about these intersections in their own settings. (3) Professional level: Social justice intentionally weaved through the archival studies concentration will serve as model for GLAM professions to go beyond current practice and make an impact outside their privileged workplace settings. (4) National level: SJ4AAL students will have national impact as they continue to participate in national, regional, and local conferences to share their experiences in integrating social justice skillset in archival and library work towards achieving tangible outcomes in their communities.

**Budget:** The funds requested from IMLS are \$427,238 (direct = \$371,504, indirect = \$55,733). An additional \$263,228 (direct = \$176,663, unrecovered indirect = \$86,565) will be cost shared. The budget includes: 1) salaries and wages, including those for the PI, Co-PI, and a graduate assistant, at \$80,662 (cost share = \$133,836); 2) fringe benefits at \$14,080 (cost share = \$42,827); 3) student support, including tuition and fees, books, laptops, and a travel allowance, at \$222,079; 4) other direct costs, including graduate assistant tuition, adjunct instructor payments, advisory board stipends, and practitioner-mentoring board stipends, at \$54,683; and indirect costs at the University's federally-negotiated indirect rate of 49%, applied to modified total direct costs, at \$55,733 (cost share = \$86,565 unrecovered indirects).