

Julieann V. Nilson InULA Scholarship Winner's Essay

The Grants and Scholarship Committee received 11 applications for the 2012 Julieanne V. Nilson Scholarship. The applicants were insightful and filled with interesting goals and plans for their roles in the profession. The InULA Board has approved the committee's recommendation that this year's Nilson Scholar should be Ms. Jaminnia R. States.

Ms. States, a former teacher, is a student in the Indiana University Bloomington School of Library and Information Science graduate program and expects to graduate in May 2013. Her professional goal is to become a public librarian with a literacy-driven focus. Her personal statement reflected an understanding of the evolving role of the public library in its community and a vision based on professional collaboration and community partnerships. Ms. States exhibits a strong sense of professionalism and leadership and is seen as a catalyst for student activities focused on supporting young library users and literacy. Her recommender noted her continued efforts to find ways to make evident the value of libraries and that "Jaminnia shares with Julie Nilson a sense of the potential and diversity in every community."

Catherine A. Lemmer,
Chair, InULA Scholarship and Grants Committee

Jaminnia States Essay

In ancient Egyptian mythology, Seshat is the divine essence of the librarian. As the sister-wife of Djehuty (memory and the recorder of history as memory for the Egyptian people), she is the organizer and keeper of all of the knowledge and information that her husband records. He records all of the history of the people and the records of the intellectual work that they produce; Seshat organizes and preserves the records so that future generations can access the world's information. I found out about Seshat when I was an undergraduate, and as a life-long learner and lover of books, I was inspired. I originally thought I wanted to be a librarian because I could work in a building that is filled with books and always have an excuse to read. When I was introduced to this concept of preserving and organizing knowledge as my most ancient ancestors designed it, I began to regard librarianship as a noble professional undertaking, a way to fulfill a higher calling of responsibility to the people of the world as a preserver and organizer of information, knowledge, culture, history, and intellect.

I have been a graduate student in the School of Library and Information Science for almost a year now. From what I have gathered in this short time, a simple definition of librarianship indicates that it is a profession dedicated to the collection, organization, and dissemination of information with an emphasis on making the resources containing the information easy to access. That is the textbook definition. However, by default, libraries become repositories of culture and history. In addition, all libraries, public libraries especially, have unique relationships with the people that they intend to serve. Andrew Carnegie famously referred to public libraries as the "poor man's university." More than a place to seek information, many libraries are places where people meet, organize, and generally pass time. I currently work in a public library and many schoolchildren either visit the library after school until a parent comes to pick them up or spend Saturday afternoons there because parents drop them off. Those children are potentially future

doctors, lawyers, scientists, caregivers, and engineers. They are the very people who will solve world problems, cure diseases, and govern cities. On the other hand, if they fail, they become societal problems, criminals, outcasts, and homeless people; beneficiaries of the tax dollars paid by and to people like librarians. The library, as a central component of a community, should nurture these children to see that the former becomes the reality.

As a former teacher (a profession with a similar, if not greater responsibility and significantly less pay) with a passion for literacy that parallels my enthusiasm about libraries, I am dedicated to combining my interests to contribute to making public libraries, where so many children spend their time outside of school, a space that actively promotes literacy. Once I procure a position as a public librarian, I would like to collaborate with local teachers beginning with the schools closest in proximity to find out what the library can do in order to help educate children. While the campaign may be aggressive in approach, I think it is important to create fun events; as a student, I remember the best learning experiences being the ones in which “learning” was not the stated goal. In my experience, students are so inundated with pressure to perform that the process of learning is transformed into a burdensome, unyielding process because of a terribly high-stakes, sink-or-swim type goal. Students should not be so aware of strategy or the stakes involved. Instead, they should be engaged in activities that allow them to practice what they have learned as much as possible.

I imagine a world in which community partnerships like the one I describe are commonplace and overtly stated. In many places, libraries are well-resourced institutions and should be involved in their patrons as much as, if not more than, patrons are involved in them. Because of the strong connections between people and libraries as well as the link between libraries and the intellectual products of the world, libraries have the potential to create thriving, dynamic community-based partnerships. Librarians could use their resources to aid the people in a given community to contribute to affecting positive change in a constantly shifting world. It is our responsibility and our calling. The challenge of meeting that expectation is exhilarating.