

ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians, July 2015
Jonathan Koffel

The AAHSL Leadership Scholarship enabled me to attend the Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians (LIAL) at Harvard University from July 27th-31st, 2015. I strongly recommend LIAL for anyone in a leadership position as well as those (such as myself) interested in taking on leadership roles or wondering if that path is right for them. I felt that there were three core elements that made the program work so well.

First, the quality and breadth of the instruction. The instructors, to a person, are all faculty who love to teach and care deeply about how to do it well and it shows. They were funny, insightful, and achieved the magic trick of creating effective dialogue among a group of 107 recent strangers. The foundation of the program are the four frames or methods of looking at a situation: structural, human resource, political, symbolic. The Institute encourages you to step outside your comfort zone and see how the same situation looks through different filters. We did this primarily by working through a variety of case studies, some focused on higher education and others on topics like Apple Computer's distribution network. I think this was the most cognitively difficult part of the workshop and I recommend future attendees know the cases well to get the most out of the discussions. During the Institute, I had a number of "aha!" moments when I looked back at an old event through a new frame and realized what had been happening. Since the Institute, I have been consciously cycling through the frames in my work and feel it has made me more balanced and conscientious.

Second, the workshop succeeded due to the strong community created amongst a diverse group of attendees. We had librarians from all sizes and types of academic libraries and from at least ten countries, but by the end of the first day, I felt there was a sense of community and common purpose and respect between us. Large group discussions were lively and the faculty encouraged a range of voices and perspectives. I think what I enjoyed most, though, was the time with my small group. There is something very exciting about working with peers from other institutions, sharing the challenges that you each face, and getting to learn from others' experiences and see the same situations in a new light. I developed a peer network there that I hope will continue for years to come.

Finally, LIAL allows you space to actually think about leadership in the abstract and yourself as a leader in the concrete. At the beginning, we were encouraged to turn off the email, stop worrying about our home institutions and even, jokingly, ignore our families. Most of us were able to do this and it allowed us to think deeply in a way that you cannot in a blocked-off hour on your calendar or even day-long retreat.

I want to thank AAHSL for the opportunity to attend the Institute and encourage them to keep funding leaders (and leaders-to-be) to attend transformative workshops such as LIAL.