

## **AAHSL Leadership Scholarship Report**

Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians

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Submitted by:

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### **Recipient of AAHSL Leadership Scholarship 2017**

I am truly honored to have been awarded the 2017 AAHSL Leadership Scholarship in sponsorship of my attendance at the [2017 Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians \(LIAL\) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education](#). Conducted in Cambridge, Massachusetts from July 30 to August 4, 2017, the LIAL program cultivated my general leadership aptitude as well as guided me in evaluating and refining my personal leadership influence at my home institution at the [Florida State University College of Medicine Maguire Medical Library](#).

I attribute much of my professional growth, successes, and accomplishments over my career to the patient, kind, and wise guidance I have received and continue to appreciate from informal mentorships with supervisors and colleagues in my library. Having previously worked as a student intern and library assistant, I began my work as a professional faculty librarian in 2012 when I was hired as Public Services Librarian. Through acquired experience, guidance, and willingness to learn, I committed to my leadership development by sustaining strong relationships within my organizational community. However, I discovered that I needed to remove myself from my immediate organizational and individual landscape in order to grow as a leader. After a recommendation from one of my mentors, I chose to apply for the LIAL program with the hope that it would be the next step in fostering stronger leadership skills; LIAL exceeded my expectations.

The LIAL's distinguished leadership curriculum is based in peer-led large and small group discussions and exposure to other academic librarians with diverse leadership experiences at their respective organizational contexts. LIAL instructors teach from a conceptual framework for understanding leadership in real time. As a LIAL instructional methods focus on sharing experiences, exchanging ideas, and challenging oneself alongside others from various circumstances in pursuit of similar goals. As a LIAL participant, my ultimate objective was to hone awareness, anticipate challenges and opportunities, and respond with deeper understanding. In

addition to reading *Reframing Academic Leadership* by Bolman and Gallos<sup>1</sup>, LIAL participants were expected to complete daily readings consisting of articles, case studies, book chapters, and other relevant materials that demonstrated and expanded on ideas to be discussed in class. Any leader can be stronger in some frames than others, so daily discussions provided alternative perspectives from people with a variety of frame-based strengths.

Through the reframing process, I made a conscious choice to perceive situations from a different perspective. My objective was to improve sensemaking by using the four frames: Structural, Human Resources, Political, and Symbolic. The Structural frame emphasizes formal strategic planning as well as organizational rules, roles, and policies. It highlights skill in mapping out the complex machine of the organization. The Human Resources frame focuses on empathy, as well as understanding the strengths and difficulties of others by acknowledging and accepting other people's stories as part of an organization's success. Leaders in Human Resources lead by example, model desired behaviors, and act as stewards of service to the institution. The Political frame describes leadership skills in negotiation and advocacy. Leaders strong in this frame adeptly survey the social terrain, create alliances and relationships of reciprocity and trust, defuse opposition, negotiate compromise, build a power base, and influence key players internal and external to the organization. The Symbolic frame represents skills in using symbols to instill belief in an organization among its stakeholders. Leaders who use the Symbolic frame create cultures of commitment, respect, hope, and meaningful self-expression in one's work.

These frames were applied during small and large group discussions and served as a communal language among our network of leaders in academic libraries. Small group sessions were scheduled every morning with the same group of six to seven people with diverse professional and personal backgrounds. These small group sessions primed our conversation during daily large group discussions and additional small group sessions scheduled throughout each day. The morning small group discussions also provided opportunities for retrospective analysis in which we could reflect on prior-day discussions or expand on additional thoughts. Before attending LIAL, each morning small group member was assigned to write a case study that described a challenge at his or her own library. Morning small group members could choose to discuss their case vignettes using tools learned from readings and class discussions; any insights that resonated with us could be applied in a focused and targeted way for challenges within our own contexts. Morning small group sessions were the place to be vulnerable—open up to our group members about our fears, doubts, and challenges in a safe and confidential space. I still maintain communication with my small group members via email, and I hope to continue to soundboard ideas and exchange knowledge with them in the future.

The LIAL's utilization of the case study learning method facilitated analytical thinking by forcing me to slow down, understand a situation, diagnose problems, recognize preconceived notions and biases, flip frames, and extend beyond my personal preferences as a leader. Analyzing and mapping other real-life industry conflicts allowed me to extract myself from my own context and analyze important networks of people and exchanges of function, communication, and power. In an effort to solve problems, I was able to detect and distill

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<sup>1</sup> *Reframing Academic Leadership*. Lee Bolman and Joan Gallos. 2011. ISBN 9780787988067.

similarities with transferrable application to my own organization and role as leader. Group mapping and discussion of assigned case studies essentially served as balcony tools to refine our skills of broad-view thinking.

When I left from my week at Harvard, I was determined to apply my newfound knowledge and skills at my home institution. I considered my goals entering the program: 1) facilitating collaboration and partnerships within my community; 2) recognizing my aspirational peers in leadership; 3) assessing and articulating the value of our library to its stakeholders; 4) considering multiple perspectives while challenging implicit biases; 5) welcoming risk and recognizing opportunities in a changing environment; and 6) integrating our library's strengths and resources within our stakeholders' organizational paradigm. After leaving the LIAL program, I believe I have the toolkit to accomplish these by striving to pivot among the frames with agility, mindfulness, and self-awareness that I can apply to any context. I am more flexible in my perception of myself and others in a professional setting, and I can approach challenges with a sense of learning, and direction. I am better able to take risks and accept failure as opportunity. I understand better how my influence as a leader can be communicated to others; if I am successful, I can hopefully influence others to be leaders as well.

Exiting the LIAL program, I have decided to strengthen my skills in the Political and Symbolic frames. My focus is on cultivating coalitions of persuasion by demonstrating authentic passion, respect, reciprocity, loyalty, and caring. My strength in Human Resources will allow me to approach this broader scale of leadership by fostering relationships and building trust among diverse networks of allies. I would like to take a multipronged approach and encourage others in my library to demonstrate our message. This is where developing my strengths in the Symbolic frame becomes even more important. In order to instill belief in my library and actualize shared beliefs among allies, I will need to understand and communicate my library's story internally and externally. To do this, I will have to choose and communicate the appropriate symbols and with sincerity, consistency, and patience.

During the intense week of LIAL's curriculum, participants established an "a-ha moment norm" in which we agreed to give a few minutes to discuss and capture any insights or spontaneous learning moments. I will describe one now: one of my biggest "ah-ha moments" occurred when I told a fellow LIAL attendee and newfound friend that I believed being a leader is not who you are but what you do. The intensity of the LIAL program changed my way of thinking that will indelibly leave a mark on my career and personal life. I have already had discussions with my mentor referencing the LIAL shorthand. We can use the power of the balcony to avoid the temptation for self-entrapment and comfort-driven shortcuts. I am confident that I can advocate for my library by adapting my way of thinking to address complex challenges and by tapping into a diverse network of leadership peers. I have made longstanding connections with future leaders who have established themselves in libraries and beyond, and I have felt assured that they too have encountered challenges and felt self-doubt. We share an experience that can be modified to our own personalities, strengths, weaknesses, and needs—and that can help us serve the libraries and people we care about very much.