

# The Research Brief



College of Education  
Sam Houston State University

Volume 2, Issue 6

Fall, 2010

## *Cultural Implications Related to Attending Graduate School*

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### **Introduction**

In 2009, the SHSU Department of Library Science was excited to be awarded the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program grant. The grant proposal was written to pay for 40 students in the Region 1, 2, and 20 Education Service Centers (ESCs) of Texas to earn a Master of Library Science (MLS) degree primarily through online coursework. The group of 40 graduate students chosen as grant scholarship recipients was from 3 ethnic groups: 18 White, 20 Hispanic, and 2 African-American. When the researchers began to think about research to conduct with these grant students, the first thought that came to mind was whether the ethnicity/culture of each person had an impact on their decision to attend graduate school and what that impact might be.

### **Research Design**

Using an online tool, a survey of ten questions was designed to ascertain why these particular grant applicants chose to participate in earning an MLS degree. Some questions were open-ended giving respondents an opportunity to explain their answers while other questions required a simple yes or no answer. Although the primary purpose of the questionnaire was to see what impact culture had on the respondents' decisions to attend graduate school, there were questions designed to answer secondary research questions.

The primary questions asked of participants in this study follow:

Question 1: With which ethnic group would you most closely associate yourself?

Question 2: If this scholarship was not available, would you have still pursued a Master of Library Science degree? Why or why not?

Question 3: How does your family (immediate and extended) feel about you pursuing a graduate degree? Explain.

Question 4: If you were not receiving a

scholarship, would your family (immediate and extended) feel differently about your pursuit of a Master of Library Science degree? Please explain.

Question 5: What impact, if any, do you perceive your ethnicity and/or culture may have on your desire and ability to go through graduate school?

### **Data Collection**

All 40 grant scholarship recipients were invited to participate in the research via invitations with the link to the survey sent by email. Twenty-eight people completed the survey.

### **Results of Analysis Regarding Ethnicity of MLS Candidates**

Of the 40 people who could have participated in the study, 28 (70%) actually participated. Of those 28 people, 2 (7.1%) were African-American, 13 (46.4%) were Hispanic, and 14 (50%) were White.

### **Results of Analysis of Motivation for Pursuing a Master's Degree in Library Science**

A question was asked to determine whether each respondent would have pursued an MLS degree even if this scholarship had not been available. Overall, 46.4% of people said they would still have pursued an MLS degree without the scholarship while 53.6% of people said they would not have pursued an MLS without the scholarship award. A further breakdown of these percentages by ethnic group shows that 100% of African-American respondents, 41.7% of Hispanic respondents, and 42.9% of White respondents would pursue the MLS if the scholarship were not available. Without the scholarship, 58.3% of Hispanic respondents and 57.1% of White respondents would not pursue the MLS.

### **Results of Family Influence on Attending Graduate School**

This study hoped to uncover whether culture in

*The Research Brief provides a synthesis of research on current educational or counseling issues. Each brief is authored by graduate faculty and/or graduate candidates in the College of Education at Sam Houston State University.*

*Published by the College of Education Graduate Programs with funding from SHSU University Advancement.*

*Sam Houston State University is a Member of The Texas State University System.*

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regard to family influence was a factor in a subject's desire to obtain an MLS. The African-American respondents reported that their families were 100% supportive of them going to graduate school. Hispanic respondents also reported that their families, including extended family members, were 100% supportive of their decision to attend graduate school. The most commonly used words to describe the feelings of the families were "proud," and "willing to make sacrifices." White respondents reported that 85.7% of families were supportive with 14.3% being "mostly supportive." Of the two who reported that their families were "mostly supportive," one stated that her daughter was worried about having quality time with her mom who would be busy with schoolwork. One respondent also stated that his mother and stepfather did not see the point of him continuing his education but his wife and children were supportive.

## **Results of Family Influence if No Scholarship were Available for Attending Graduate School**

While a large majority of families were very supportive of the candidates attending graduate school on a fully paid scholarship, this research sought to discover whether that support would be as strong if the candidate did not have a scholarship available and whether there were differences in this level of support from one ethnic group to another. Results showed that 50% of African-American respondents reported that their families would still support his or her choice to attend graduate school without a scholarship, while 50% reported that they would not have gone forward without a scholarship. In regard to the Hispanic group, 64.3% reported that their families would still be supportive of their attending graduate school without the scholarship. One respondent stated, "They would be happy and excited for me either way. Being a librarian is great! I am proud, and they are proud to be in support of literacy for all. The fact that I can be a larger part of literacy makes them very proud, no matter what." 35.7% of Hispanics said that their families would not be supportive without the scholarship. In the White group, 64.3% reported that without a scholarship they would lack their family's support while 35.7% said that the support would remain.

## **Results of Respondents Ethnicity on Attending Graduate School**

The final research question sought to determine whether the person attending graduate school felt that any cultural influence in any way had an impact on their choice to attend graduate school. In the African-American culture group, 50% stated that their ethnicity had no impact on this decision while 50% stated that their ethnicity had a huge impact: "My culture and ethnicity had a big impact on my choice to go to graduate school. Many within my culture choose not to finish high school. I want to be an example for minority children/parents and show them that if I can do it then they definitely can to!" In the Hispanic culture group, 33.3% said there was no impact, 25% felt that culture had some impact, and 33.3% felt that culture had a big impact on the decision to seek an advanced degree. Responses to this question included the following: "My parents are immigrants to the US. I would be the first in my family to go through graduate school. Both my parents have an elementary school education, so school

for their children has been very important. I'm excited to see this challenge through!" In the White culture group, 100% of respondents indicated that culture had no impact on their decision to attend graduate school.

## **Typing It All Together**

From the results of this study, certain conclusions regarding this group about whether culture has an influence on a person's desire and ability to attend graduate school can be made. Generalizations may not be made to the larger population because of the small sample size and distribution across cultural groups.

1. Without a fully paid scholarship to attend graduate school in pursuit of a Master of Library Science degree, a small percentage of Hispanic and White students would go ahead and pursue further education. For both of these ethnic groups, a larger portion of the people surveyed would not go forward in pursuing an MLS degree. The group most highly motivated to pursue an MLS degree based on this survey was the African-American ethnic group with 100% saying they would have gone ahead and attended graduate school without a scholarship if necessary.
2. While family support levels were high for all three cultural groups, the Hispanic and African-American ethnic groups both reported 100% family support while the White group reported a less than 90% approval level. This could indicate that the Hispanic and African-American ethnic groups have slightly more family support in the of an advanced degree than the White culture at this period in time in Texas.
3. If there were no scholarships available, the Hispanic group reported the highest levels of family support with over 60% saying their families highly valued education even if it meant sacrificing financially. The African-American group reported 50% support while the White culture lagged behind with only 35% support if money was a factor. These results could indicate that the African-American and Hispanic cultures value higher education a bit more than the White culture or the results could be interpreted to mean that funding in the two minority groups would assist if finances were needed, or it may mean the White groups are less concerned with finances.
4. While the Hispanic culture and African-American cultures both reported that ethnicity and cultural influences overall had a significant impact in some way on their desire to attend graduate school, the respondents from the White ethnic group responded 100% that culture had no impact on their decision to attend graduate school.

## **References**

Kuon & Weimar. (2009) "Cultural implications of attending graduate school." ; Sam Houston State University, Department of Library Science. Unpublished.