

AASHL Leadership Scholarship Awardee Report–Reflection on My Experience in Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians

Submitted by Carol Ng-He, January 2026

PART 1: Activity Summary

Program Preparation

Before the program began, I completed pre-work assignments, including thematic readings, a narrative on their personal leadership stories, and a mini-case study regarding a library leadership challenge. I also submitted a one-page professional profile for the course portal.

Day 1 Commencement

On Day 1, Program Chair Alex Hodges, Director of the Monroe C. Gutman Library, delivered opening remarks, followed by a "meet and greet" reception in the Gutman Library gallery.

Day 2 and Day 3: Critical and Political Leadership

Day 2 featured faculty presentations by Dr. Nicole Cooke on cultural responsiveness and Dr. Alexia Hudson-Ward on authentic and inclusive leadership. On Day 3, Professor James Honan discussed political leadership in complex academic contexts, followed by a session on strategizing disruption and stakeholder management co-led by Evan Simpson and Ken Kimura. Dr. Nicole Cooke returned to present on radical empathy, after which participants engaged in a zine-making activity as a creative reflection on their leadership practices.

Day 4 and Day 5: Synergy, Resilience, and Burnout

On Day 4, William Mayer and Elliot Felix led a session focused on breaking down organizational silos to create "connected colleges". Rachel Lowell then introduced her SHIFT Framework through two interactive presentations: "Regulate—Reclaiming Your Center Amid Pressure" and "Lead From Strength—Starting from Your Natural Strength to Lead with Confidence and Clarity". On Day 5, Rachel Lowell conducted a third session on aligning teams around uncertainty and fostering an adaptive culture. The day concluded with Jerome Offord, Jr. addressing the critical issue of burnout among librarians in higher education.

Day 6: Conclusion

The program concluded on Day 6 with group discussions and personal evaluations.

Collaborative Engagement and Networking

Throughout the week, participants were provided with daily meals and attended a special group dinner at the Harvard Faculty Club, which facilitated deeper, informal networking with colleagues. Formal collaboration was fostered through four scheduled group meetings where participants discussed their mini-case studies. Additionally, affinity groups met during lunches and on the final day to explore specific shared interests and leadership topics.

PART 2: My Reflection—The Reflective Art of Academic Library Leadership

The program proved to be an extraordinary and transformative experience, challenging me to view academic library leadership through various lenses, including building inner strength, fostering diverse stakeholder relationships, and balancing introspective cultural understanding with outward-facing anticipatory planning. This immersive journey highlighted that leadership is inherently dynamic, fluid, and constantly evolving. Through faculty presentations, interactive activities like zine-making, and small-group discussions, I had the opportunity to re-examine organizational structures and the impacts of institutional culture. This process fostered a renewed sense of empowerment and a commitment to authenticity, humility, and cultural responsiveness within my professional community.

My primary takeaway is that library leadership is both a reflective practice and the art of creating space for others to grow, even within challenging environments. Leaders must remain intentional and curious, critically evaluating workplace culture to identify opportunities for growth and the resources necessary to realize them. As Alex Hodges noted, change management is essential; the way a leader handles and directs change is critical to a library's continued existence. By choosing a constructive lens to frame difficult situations, as a leader I can initiate necessary change through dialogue and the exploration of alternatives.

Effective leadership requires active listening and building connections, which sometimes necessitates slowing down to pace oneself correctly. Presentations by Dr. Nicole Cooke and Alexia Hudson-Ward emphasized the importance of acknowledging the gap between one's values and actions, encouraging me to become "comfortable with the uncomfortable" to expand their empathy. Furthermore, Professor James Honan's concept of "smart power" provides a framework for navigating resources by combining "hard power" (authority and legitimacy) with "soft power" (networks and relationships) to align organizational goals.

Creating space for others is a vital method for growing organizational capacity. This requires a careful balance between reactive and anticipatory thinking, which directly influences stakeholder management and advocacy efforts. As library leaders, it is essential to create, convey, and contextualize the mission and vision through consistent communication up, down, and across the organization. Following the insights of William Mayer and Elliot Felix, healthy relationships serve as the foundational base for developing a robust organizational structure and culture.

To sustain leadership through uncertainty, Rachel Lowell's SHIFT Framework identifies five anchors of leadership:

- Security: Building trust and navigating difficult conversations.
- Horizon: Maintaining a future focus and skills orientation.
- Impact: Connecting work to purpose and measuring performance.
- Fluidity: Adapting to change and uncertainty.
- Ties: Fostering collaboration and connection.

By systematically modeling these behaviors, leaders can cultivate a supportive, positive, and adaptive environment for their teams.

The Institute opened my mind to embracing leadership as an intentional, reflective practice. I look forward to applying the concepts and strategic tools, such as the SHIFT framework, to build a resilient team and an empowered culture rooted in collaborative growth.



Image: Carol Ng-He in front of Harvard University's Monroe C. Gutman Library, where the Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians took place. July 2025.