

AAHSL Leadership Diversity Scholarship Report
11 August 2026
AAHSL Future Leadership Committee
Emily J Glenn, Chair

Dear Members of the AAHSL Future Leadership Committee:

Thank you to the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AAHSL) for awarding me a Leadership Scholarship to support my participation in the Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians. The funding made it possible for me to engage in an important leadership experience, particularly in the areas of strategic planning and AI leadership.

The Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians (LIAL) at Harvard is an intensive leadership development program designed specifically for academic library leaders who must navigate organizational complexity, institutional change, technological disruption, and evolving workforce expectations. The curriculum emphasizes leadership as a relational, strategic, and reflective practice. At LIAL I learned from, and shared my experience with, academic librarians from around the world.

Core Themes

1. Strategic and Political Leadership - We explored leading within complex institutional environments. Using case studies and Harvard's case method, the program examined coalition building, political leadership, stakeholder influence, organizational legitimacy, and strategic decision-making. We were challenged to think beyond operational management and focus on creating institutional value and building support for library initiatives. I will be building on my experience at LIAL to rethink our approach to strategic planning.

2. Adaptive Leadership - Several sessions addressed the realities of leading during disruption, including budget pressures, restructuring, and higher education transformation. We used tools to work through stakeholder management, strategic planning, coalition building, and leading through uncertainty and resistance. I found the stakeholder identification exercises thorough and will apply what I learned to creating public value in our library.

3. Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Leadership - A substantial portion of the curriculum focused on culturally responsive leadership, critical self-reflection, and equitable decision-making. We looked at how leadership practices affect organizational culture and were encouraged to develop leadership approaches grounded in responsiveness and community engagement. One phrase that I continue to think about is, "culture eats strategy" which says a lot about the necessity of a supportive, curious, and diverse library team.

4. Self-Awareness and Personal Leadership Development - The program incorporated leadership assessments, reflective exercises, portraiture methodology, and creative activities to help us

better understand our leadership styles, strengths, and values. The curriculum emphasized emotional intelligence, self-regulation, resilience.

5. Team Dynamics - We explored how organizational structures, workplace culture, and interpersonal relationships influence effectiveness. Sessions addressed building connected organizations, breaking down silos, fostering collaboration, managing conflict, and creating healthy workplace cultures that support innovation and achievement. These lessons became especially helpful during our small group exercises, when we worked through individual case studies. It was clear that the challenges we each face at our home institutions often revolve around team dynamics and workplace culture.

6. Leadership During Ethical and Emotional Challenges - Recognizing the pressures facing higher education and libraries, the curriculum addressed moral injury, emotional labor, burnout, decision fatigue, and self-care. We discussed practical strategies for preserving well-being. I realized that I need to help articulate the difference between personal and professional values in decision-making, especially regarding AI.

7. Artificial Intelligence and Digital Transformation – One of most useful discussions was about guiding libraries through emerging technologies, particularly AI and digital transitions. Discussions focus on strategic planning, institutional readiness, governance, ethics, workforce development, stewardship responsibilities, and balancing innovation with accountability and organizational values. The session on AI and emerging digital transitions was especially beneficial, as it provided practical frameworks for assessing organizational readiness, aligning AI initiatives with institutional priorities, and leading technology adoption in a way that balances innovation, ethics, and impact. I am now guiding our leadership team to write an AI values statement for our library.

Summary

The Harvard LIAL program is not a traditional management training workshop. Rather, it focused on helping academic library leaders to operate effectively in higher education environments. Through case studies, self-assessment, strategic planning, stakeholder analysis, and discussions of emerging challenges such as AI and workforce well-being, we explored the skills needed to strengthen institutional partnerships and advance the strategic role of libraries within colleges and universities. I am grateful I was able to attend with AASHL's support.

Kindly,

Shandra Lee Knight, MLS
Deputy Director
Strauss Health Sciences Library
University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus

C: Melissa DeSantis