

Certificate: Social Justice in the Information Professions, Advanced Certificate

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Information professionals are increasingly expected to engage with issues of equity, collective action, and social rights—areas that intersect with interdisciplinary and intersectional concerns in contemporary society. As information environments become more complex, the need for LIS professionals to address systemic inequities grows more urgent. The American Library Association’s *Core Competencies* emphasize the importance of preparing graduates with a comprehensive education in social justice—one that enables them to recognize inequities, foster strategic coalitions, and serve diverse communities more effectively (ALA, 2023).

A growing body of scholarly literature supports this imperative. Scholars have called for dismantling racial inequities (Homma, 2005; Mehra & Gray, 2020; Pawley, 2006), advancing cultural competence (Cooke & Jacobs, 2018; Hurley, Kostelecky, & Townsend, 2019; Overall, 2009), and cultivating a workforce that is representative, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of marginalized communities. Increasingly, employers across the information professions seek candidates who have received formal training in diversity, equity, and inclusion (HR Consulting Group, n.d.; HR Dive, 2019; Raconteur, 2023; San José State University School of Information, 2024; Singh, 2024).

The Certificate in Social Justice in the Information Professions prepares culturally competent leaders capable of embedding diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice (DEI-SJ) values into the core practices of information work. The program equips students with the conceptual foundations, critical thinking skills, and practical tools required to promote systemic change and collective well-being through a social justice lens. The curriculum draws from both theoretical and applied dimensions of social justice and engages students in issues of access, representation, identity, and advocacy across diverse information environments.

To ensure its relevance to the evolving LIS landscape, the curriculum is guided by several key professional frameworks. These include the ALA’s *Core Values of Librarianship*—particularly its emphasis on equity, diversity, and inclusion (ALA, 2020)—and the *Core Competencies of Librarianship* (ALA, 2023), which now include social justice as a distinct competency area. The *Cultural Proficiencies for Racial Equity: A Framework*, developed collaboratively by ALA, ACRL, ARL, and PLA (ALA/ARL Task Force, 2022), serves as both a theoretical and practical foundation for advancing racial equity at individual, organizational, and systemic levels. Additional guidance comes from the *Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice* (NASW, 2015), which highlight key concepts such as intersectionality, cultural humility, power, and privilege, and from the World Health Organization’s *Infodemic Management* course series (2025), which situates information access and credibility within broader social justice and public health contexts.

As the accrediting body for LIS programs in the United States, the American Library Association (ALA) embeds equity, diversity, and inclusion not only as guiding values but also as essential

learning outcomes within its accreditation standards. ALA incorporates the concepts of social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout its *Core Competencies of Librarianship* and designates social justice as a distinct, stand-alone competency (ALA, 2023). Furthermore, the *Standards for Accreditation* emphasize “equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice with regards to information and its use,” affirming the critical role of these values in professional preparation (ALA, 2023, p. 2).

Collectively, these professional guidelines and frameworks reinforce the necessity of comprehensive social justice education for all LIS graduates and practicing professionals. Aligned with these competencies and values, the Certificate’s four courses (12 credits) are designed to support both current LIS students and working professionals. The program provides a foundation for those seeking to center equity and inclusion in their work, as well as a pathway for continued professional growth in increasingly multicultural and socially complex environments. A brief description of the Certificate’s courses is provided below:

### **LIS 222 Materials and Services to Diverse Populations**

This course explores the information needs, seeking behaviors, and use patterns of diverse user groups. Emphasis is placed on serving racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse communities, older adults, individuals with disabilities, and those with limited access to print and digital resources. Topics include needs assessment, resource evaluation, program planning, the digital divide, and barriers to information access. The course also addresses relevant federal regulations and compliance issues while encouraging the development of practical attitudes and strategies for working with historically underserved populations.

### **LIS 275 Cultural Competence for Information Professionals**

This course prepares students to operate effectively at both individual and organizational levels by applying the principles and practices of cultural competence. It focuses on inclusive decision-making, problem-solving, and the development of equitable programs and services. Students examine organizational expectations for cultural competence in both managerial and service contexts and engage in reflective and experiential learning designed to support DEI-centered leadership in information environments.

### **LIS 283 Social Justice in the Information Professions**

This online graduate seminar explores the intersection of social justice and information work through individual reflection and collaborative dialogue. Topics include theories of social justice, the history and philosophy of human rights, and the role of activism in librarianship. The course examines the relationship between information access and human development, with a particular focus on services for underserved populations, including individuals with disabilities, those living in poverty, older adults, and members of ethnic, religious, sexual, and linguistic minorities, as well as global populations in the Global South.

### **LIS 320 Fake News and Misinformation**

This course frames access to authoritative and accurate information as a core issue of social justice. It examines the rise of fake news, misinformation, and conspiracy theories, along with

their social, civic, and public health impacts. Students analyze the cognitive and emotional dynamics that shape information consumption and explore strategies to counter misinformation, promote critical media literacy, and support informed democratic engagement in both digital and physical information environments.

**Credits:** 12

## **References**

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