Statement from the Music Library Association Board Regarding St. Olaf Librarian’s Resignation Due to Bias and Discrimination

We, the Board of the Music Library Association, are saddened by the experiences of one of our members, Ellen Ogihara, during the two years of her employment as a librarian at St. Olaf College. The events described in Ms. Ogihara’s resignation letter suggest a culture antithetical to the inclusive environments that libraries support.

We recognize that there are many perspectives in any situation and that we only have access to Ms. Ogihara’s letter and the College’s direct responses. It is nevertheless deeply disheartening to read those administrative responses that seem to focus on the comfort of the privileged at the expense of the oppressed.

Ms. Ogihara is one of the recent recipients of MLA’s Diversity Scholarship, endowed funding that is intended to increase the diversity of the profession. But that purpose is impossible if our scholars cannot receive the support they need to contribute, thrive, and belong. When one of our most promising new music librarians feels unable to succeed in a position without sacrificing her own principles, that is a call to us for collective action.

We strongly believe that no single individual should bear the responsibility of recognizing and dismantling white supremacy in our institutions and organizations, and our BIPOC peers should not be the only ones enduring the risk that comes with breaking from long-held cultural norms. Librarians with privilege--both inside and outside of MLA--must share this responsibility and advocate vehemently for our peers who don’t enjoy the same privilege. This work must happen within MLA to promote change in music libraries beyond St. Olaf. To this end, the Board will work to increase opportunities for mentorship for all music librarians, but most especially those who have few music-librarian peers at their local institutions. We will also share similar position descriptions with faculty at St. Olaf as they work to support the success of the next incumbent of the position. We will reach out to the incumbent with networking support and opportunities when one is selected.

The Board commits to promote cultural change within our Association and workplaces and calls on MLA members to engage with the important DEI work that is our collective duty in all our workplaces. See our recent post about anti-Asian violence, for activism resources: http://blog.musiclibraryassoc.org/mla-statement-opposing-anti-asian-violence/.

--MLA Board of Directors, April 2021