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I NEVER LEARNED ABOUT THAT IN LIBRARY SCHOOL: Curriculum Changes in LIS

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If you work as an information specialist in a corporation, government agency, hospital, library, or as an independent information professional, you have probably thought to yourself at least once, I never learned about that in school. Depending on when you graduated, that might be Web-page design, Java, budgeting, intranets, knowledge management, telecommunications, or teaching end-users how to search.

Professional organizations hear these statements from their members and are concerned that programs in Library and Information Science (LIS) may not be teaching up-to-date skills to prepare new information professionals for their first jobs. But good schools also need to provide the broader knowledge that will allow graduates to adapt and continue to function in a constantly changing information world. Due to these ongoing concerns, the Special Libraries Association (SLA), Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE), Medical Library Association (MLA), American Library Association (ALA), and others are all looking into what LIS curricula includes now and ought to include in the future, to ensure that our educational programs are keeping up with the knowledge needs of the field. This article examines some of the findings in recent reports from these organizations, plus takes a look from the LIS school perspective at the kind of changes that are being made.

YOU WILL FIND CHANGES

If you graduated from a school of library and information science 10 or 15 years ago--or even five or six years ago--and went back today for a visit, you would certainly find changes. Almost every school of library and information science in the United States and Canada accredited by ALA has rethought the population it serves and the way it reaches it. The most common changes involve enhancing the curriculum, offering degrees or classes that appeal to a broadly-defined information professional workforce, and expanding distance education programs. Many times, the name of the school or the degrees are altered to reflect these changes.

THE L WORD

The first change you might notice is a difference in the name of the school or program. Of the 56 ALA-accredited master's degree programs in the United States and Canada, an increasing number are housed in schools that no longer have the word "library" in them. The University of Tennessee, for example, is the School of Information Sciences; Syracuse University is the School of Information Studies; and the University of California, Berkeley is the School of Information Management & Systems. The University of Michigan is simply the School of Information. All but UC Berkeley actively recruit future librarians and still seek ALA accreditation.

In almost all cases, the name changes indicate service to a wider range of information professions. Most schools still seek to prepare students for careers in all types of libraries, but also for information-intensive jobs beyond libraries, including electronic publishing, information brokering, corporate information specialty, Web-mastering, and intranet management.

According to the director of one school--quoted in the preliminary KALIPER (Kellogg-ALISE Information Professions and Education Renewal) report--"The School made a substantial change in its vision within the last few years, and this change had substantial impact on curriculum and staffing needs. We moved from a mostly library science-based vision to one that emphasizes the depth and breadth of the information sciences, although library science remains notably important. We are attempting to meet the professional needs of a much greater number of information agencies."

Leigh Estabrook, Dean of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois, says, "The School's faculty believes strongly that librarianship and newly emerging related fields must be held together to prevent libraries from becoming obsolete and other fields from being unconcerned about issues of access, privacy, and service."

The mission statement for Michigan's School of Information explains the school's name change by saying the new School "inherits the rich traditions of service, leadership, research, and access from the School of Information and Library Studies, and extends these values into the digital age. Students and faculty with a broad range of perspectives and interests are forging a new body of theory, principles, and practices from the best of past and present scholarship in library and information science, computer science, the humanities, and the social sciences."

The name changes and broadening of missions beyond libraries have not been without controversy. In May 1999, under a charge from the ALA Executive Board, the Congress on Professional Education debated issues surrounding the initial preparation of librarians. Prominent among the issues that sparked this debate was the concern by some in ALA over the disappearance of the word "library" in the names of programs, in addition to a "perceived omission of core competencies in the field of librarianship, perceived lack of preparation to serve particular groups, etc." (For more information, see <http://www.ala.org.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/congress/>.)

Invited presentations to the Congress pointed out some perceived weaknesses in the ALA accreditation process. Surprisingly, ALA accreditation standards do not specify a core curriculum--each school may design its own curriculum to meet its own specified goals and objectives. According to Janet Swan Hill of the University of Colorado, Boulder, "The most prescriptive that the standards get are to state that, 'The curriculum is concerned with recordable information and knowledge, and the services and technologies to facilitate their management and use. The curriculum of library and information studies encompasses information and knowledge creation, communication, identification, selection, acquisitions, organization and description, storage and retrieval, preservation, analysis, interpretation, evaluation, synthesis, dissemination, and management.'" (For more information, see http://www.ala.org.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/congress/swan-hill_print.html.)

CORE COMPETENCIES

Because the accreditation standards may be somewhat vague and are not targeted to any specific type of information setting, the Special Libraries Association published a document in 1996 that set forth the Competencies for Special Librarians of the 21st Century, and the Medical Libraries Association published a similar document titled Platform for Change.

These documents identified essential professional competencies, which can be grouped into six "Essential Areas of Knowledge for Special Librarians":

1. Information Resources
2. Information Management
3. Information Access
4. Information Systems and Technology
5. Research
6. Information Policy

To find out how LIS curricula are covering these competency areas and to identify needs for continuing professional education, in 1999 SLA--together with ALISE and MLA--surveyed 372 international programs and all 56 North American ALA-accredited LIS programs. (For more information, see www.sla.org/professional/competency/index.shtml).

The majority of ALA-accredited schools require at least one core course in all of the Essential Competency Areas. More than one-fourth of the schools, however, do not require courses in the three areas of Information Systems and Technology, Research, and Information Policy. The most courses (electives or core) are offered in the competency area of Information Resources (23% of courses). The next highest number of courses offered are in Information Management (20%), Information Access (19%), Information Systems and Technology (18%), Research (10%), and Information Policy (10%).

CURRICULUM CHANGES

Nearly every school has made curricular changes in the last few years, ranging from a total revamping of the curriculum to minor tinkering. In the 1999 annual report on Library and Information Science Education, ALISE summarizes information about the current curricula of ALA-accredited schools and how it has changed from previous years (Library and Information Science Education: 1999 Statistical Report, Edited by Evelyn Daniel and Jerry D. Saye, Arlington, VA: ALISE, 1999).

While only a few schools completely revise their curriculum in any given year, almost all add new courses, delete some old ones, or review specific areas of the curriculum each year. New additions in 1999 included courses that focus on people, as well as those that focus on technology. The people-centric courses include studies on the following: information-seeking behavior, ethics, information-needs analysis, user education, library services to special populations, and knowledge management. Other new courses center on technology and its use, including digital libraries, visualization of information structures, telecommunications, internet applications, networking technologies, electronic publishing, information security, and metadata. Nearly all programs offer experimental or one-time courses to provide students with an opportunity to take courses that focus on hot topics.

The KALIPER Project

For the last two years, a special task force has been taking an in-depth look at LIS curricular changes to see if they are, indeed,

substantive. The KALIPER Project is supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and ALISE, with the stated goal of analyzing "the changes which are being undertaken in LIS programs and to share our findings with educators." KALIPER consists of five teams of US scholars (including senior faculty, junior faculty, and students) who have surveyed ALA-accredited schools and are now analyzing the current and past curricula of these schools. A final report is due out this spring, but some preliminary results are available. (For more information see <http://www.alise.org> and follow the links to KALIPER.)

KALIPER Scholars are looking for "patterns of change, in new courses, curricula changes, modes of delivery, changes in specializations, records management, and school librarianship, new relationships with departments, the development of undergraduate programs, and the disciplines drawn from."

Almost all schools make changes to the curriculum regularly and will continue to do so. The KALIPER report makes it clear that the Internet and related technologies are the primary driving forces behind rapid and seemingly constant curricular changes. Sometimes this means new courses—courses with titles such as "Internet Search Engines," "Web Resources," "Issues in Electronic Information Retrieval," "Web Server Administration," and "Internet Applications." But the Internet is also influencing the content of existing courses, with information about search engines, Web resources, HTML, digital libraries, copyright, privacy, security, etc., being incorporated into traditional courses. Marketplace demand in certain types of jobs also drives curricular changes, with some schools adding regular or experimental courses in data mining, business intelligence, or competitive intelligence.

One Director told the KALIPER team, "We expect to introduce and test approximately four new courses per year." Another explained, "The new courses respond to the need for information professionals to manage new knowledge-work environments, and to make use of the array of information technology which is rapidly changing the basis for the creation, preservation, and dissemination and use of information in digital formats."

The KALIPER project found that recent changes in core curricula are less common, because some schools made major revisions four or five years ago and others plan major changes in the next three years. The overall trend is to reduce the number of required (core) courses in the master's degree programs to allow more individual flexibility and chance for specialization. Core areas commonly offered in today's programs include: "social contexts and foundations of information"; "the representation, organization, and storage of information"; "information services and sources"; "management of information organizations"; and "research methods".

The KALIPER report is also revealing larger trends in LIS programs. Many are offering interdisciplinary degrees, joint degrees, or courses with other campus departments. Several schools have split their master's degrees into subject-specialty degrees, and more are adding undergraduate or other graduate degrees. New faculty are bringing new courses and more flexibility. Adjuncts from the professional community provide strengths not included in the regular faculty.

LEARNING AND TEACHING AT A DISTANCE

Forty-five of the fifty-six accredited LIS programs offer some sort of distance-learning program. Some programs offer the entire master's degree or select courses as distance-learning opportunities. Some courses are offered completely over the Internet, such as at the Universities of Illinois and Syracuse. Courses can also be delivered via interactive television, as at the University of Hawaii or the University of Tennessee, or faculty may travel to off-campus sites such as at Kent State or Emporia. Many plan to rely more on Internet delivery in the near future. Courses are taught by a combination of full-time faculty and adjuncts. The adjuncts don't even need to be close to campus—Ernest Perez, editor of *Library Computing* and librarian at the Oregon State Library, for example, is teaching a course for Emporia State in Kansas from his home on the West Coast.

Distance learning means more opportunities to earn a degree and—since many of these courses are also open to working information professionals who already have a degree—more opportunities for continuing education. Some of the new courses that have been added since you graduated may be available at your desktop.

DEGREES

Learning everything there is to know about information science and every information profession, in only 36-52 credit hours, is becoming nearly impossible, so many schools now offer chances for students to specialize. Specialties range from archives and records management to children's literature, from software engineering to information economics. (According to U.S. News Online, the best places to go for archives and preservation are the University of Texas, University of Maryland, and University of Michigan; and the best places to go for Services to Children and Youth are Rutgers, Florida State, and Texas Women's.) The specialization may be done by careful selection of classes within a generic degree program, or it may be accomplished by separating the program into departments.

The MLS (Master of Library Science) degree in some cases is being replaced with a more generic degree (such as a Master of Science in Information at Michigan, or just Master of Science at Tennessee). In other cases, separate degrees are offered depending on student's focus. The University of Pittsburgh, for example, offers three Master's degrees: Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS), Master of Science in Information Science (MSIS), and Master of Science in Telecommunications (MST). Indiana University is planning to add a master's degree in Informatics this year, along with its MLS degree.

For many years, the master's degree has been the first professional degree in LIS. It remains so today for librarianship and many information professions, but 10 LIS schools now offer an undergraduate major or information science and 13 schools offer an undergraduate minor. Most of these undergraduate programs focus on information systems and technology, and often, like Syracuse, Drexel, and Florida State, have attracted many more undergraduate than graduate students.

Students armed with a Bachelor's degree in information science and technology are not competing for librarian jobs, but may get jobs

as Webmasters, technology coordinators, or intranet managers-jobs that may also appeal to graduate students. Only the Master's degree is accredited by ALA. A minor in information science may be used to enhance a major subject degree or to facilitate entry into Master's programs.

Changes in professional curricula reflect the changes in the information environment. The Web has made information access an expectation in the workplace, schools, and at home. Even retirement homes support email and Web access. US. News seems to get it-in the introduction to its ratings of Master's degree programs, author Marissa Melton describes, "Library science is a field transformed by the cyber-revolution."

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Comments? Email letters to the Editor to editor@onlinejnc.com.

Measuring the best programs

U.S. News regularly ranks U.S. colleges and universities, and specific degree programs within these colleges and universities. In 1999, for the first time, it included graduate programs of LIS in the rankings. These rankings are done by a vote of the deans, directors, and faculty in each eligible program (so, like any popularity contest, it must be viewed with a bit of skepticism). Still, the programs that rank at the top are commonly recognized to be good schools, with Master's and PhD programs, with long traditions, many graduates, and well-known faculty. (For more information, see www.usnews.com/edu/beyond/gradrank/gbinfos.hem).

Chart with Top Twenty Library Science Programs (1999) as ranked by U.S. News.

1. (tie) University of Illinois--Urbana-Champaign
1. (tie) University of North Carolina--Chapel Hill
3. (tie) Syracuse University
3. (tie) University of Michigan--Ann Arbor
6. (tie) Indiana University
6. (tie) Rutgers State University--New Brunswick (NJ)
8. University of Wisconsin--Madison
9. Drexel University (PA)
10. (tie) University of California--Los Angeles
10. (tie) University of Texas--Austin
12. (tie) Florida State University
12. (tie) Simmons College (MA)
14. University of Maryland--College Park
15. (tie) SUNY--Albany
15. (tie) University of North Texas
18. (tie) SUNY--Buffalo
18. (tie) University of Washington
20. (tie) Kent State University (OH)
20. (tie) Texas Women's University
20. (tie) University of Tennessee--Knoxville
20. (tie) University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee
20. (tie) Wayne State University (MI)

These top schools reflect all of the changes described so far. They offer coursework both on campus and at a distance, they incorporate user-centered and technology-centered courses, they continually examine their curricula, and many offer joint or interdisciplinary degrees. No matter how much they are committed to change, however, these programs need the feedback and

scrutiny of working professionals and professional organizations. The next time you encounter a situation in your workplace that you didn't learn about in school, check out the Web sites for these top LIS schools--they just may have a course now that covers it. If not, let them know what courses you would find valuable for yourself and the new information professionals you hire. And, if there is an important topic you know well, that is not being covered by your favorite school, consider offering your services as an adjunct!

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