

Changing Times and Requirements: Implications for LIS Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to identify how library and information studies educators are refining curricula to ensure students are learning the knowledge and skills necessary to work in our rapidly changing field. This study, utilizing a mixed-method approach, interviewed and surveyed over 100 participants from a broad cross section of graduates, employers, senior administrators, faculty, and students at a library and information science/studies (LIS) department in a mid-size university in the southeastern United States. The results suggest a continued tension between teaching library and information science curricula, the continued importance and value of accreditation, the need for closer relationships with employers, and emphasis on courses that teach both technical and intellectual content especially in the areas of communications and customer service within the context of library and information science. The primary limitations of the study include a low student sample size (19%) and that it represents a single case study, which lowers its overall external validity and the ability for the results to be generalized. Implications of the study centers on how one program is evolving to redefine itself and the significant role played by the accreditation process within the context of a larger systems framework that attempts to ensure collaboration is taking place between major constituencies of an LIS department to ensure appropriate alignment between expectations and its curriculum. The major significance of this study is a rich, descriptive overview of how one LIS department is dealing with the changing field and expectations from its diverse constituents. These expectations are articulated both in terms of policy and expected skills covered in its curriculum.

Keywords: LIS education, Organizational Management, Accreditation, Systems Design

INTRODUCTION

The world continues to change and flatten with the proliferation of information and technology access and integration. Significant questions are being raised in LIS programs about the optimal focus to take in preparing students for such a rapidly changing future. In the past 20 years, a debate between the merits of moving away from a specific library education orientation into the more theoretical, research-based focus of the “i-schools” has become popular. Other programs have chosen to take a more multidisciplinary approach emphasizing a specific aspect of librarianship or information science. The need for change is a common factor in LIS programs, which leads to a number of issues focused on departmental reorganization, integration, and alignment; also under scrutiny are issues surrounding the needs of the workplace.

The discussion about information science has been ongoing since the 1950s, resulting in the gradual introduction of the word “information” into program names starting in the 1970s (Buckland, 1996). The rise of the “i-schools” in the 1990’s resulted in looking at information in a broader context than librarianship and this resulted in many traditional LIS programs dropping the term “library” altogether and a greater overall emphasis on theory as opposed to professional preparation (Lynch, 2008). In the early 21st Century, however, the tide may be turning back toward professional education in newly developed programs, such as the University of California Northridge and Valdosta State University in Georgia. Hildreth & Koenig (2002) suggest that

successful programs increase the focus on information science while not completely divorcing themselves from libraries.

The literature suggests that the greater emphasis on information, however, may be driven largely by opportunities for more funding, especially given budget cuts, and it can be hard to ignore the potential for increased levels of grants and funding within more research-intensive programs (Johnson, 2008; Arms, 2005; Conrad & Rapp-Hanretta, 2002). A case study of a new “i-school” at Cornell University found that successful programs, such as Berkeley and Michigan, have (1) changed their names, (2) revamped their curricula, (3) emphasized federally-funded research, and (4) changed leadership (Arms, 2005). Factors emphasized at Cornell also included a strong multidisciplinary focus (all faculty and courses are based in other departments) and a selective admission policy, the goal being to provide not only a strong foundation for a library career, but also options for many other career paths.

The trend towards “loosening up the ties with the practical field of librarianship” (Audunson, 2007, p.96) presents a number of potential problems. Some researchers suggest that a loss of educational quality is often the result of this pursuit (Conrad & Rapp-Hanretta, 2002) as well as the occurrence of theoretical impoverishment and a loss of visibility, distinctiveness, and credibility within the eyes of the university (Chu, 2001; Warner, 2001). By attempting to be too diverse, the problem of becoming a “service station program”, trying to be all things to all people, ultimately waters-down the curricula, leaving an “...overextended and unresponsive faculty and ambivalent ‘dabbling’ students (Conrad & Rapp-Hanretta, 2002, pg. 98). Also, while many i-schools feature a dramatically altered curriculum and other drastic changes, many programs had changed little other than their names (Juznik & Badovinac, 2005; Chu, 2001).

Many researchers suggest that embracing the explicit advantages of research in more heavily funded areas of information science while emphasizing the professional orientation is essential to preserving the identity of LIS taking a hybrid “profession-oriented” approach, more akin to medicine than social science. Such programs promote research as an essential and integral part of the program, but is practitioner-based rather than merely theoretical in nature, providing students with both professional skills, a theoretical framework, and context on which to analyze them (Audunson, Nordlie, & Spangen, 2003). Furthermore, by taking a more interdisciplinary approach, LIS faculty are able to better demonstrate a more distinct role of the field and department within the university as a whole through research and service (Weech & Pluzhenskaia, 2005; Johnston & Webber, 2004; Hjørland, 1999; Raber & Connaway, 1996; Budd, 1996). Specific ways to pursue a distinct identity and become a more visible and integral part of the university at large are by pursuing a context-specific niche through expanding the curriculum, retraining faculty, and working closely with other departments (Markey, 2004).

In the rush to prepare students with the skills necessary to work in environments that are highly technology oriented, some researchers argue that the theoretical underpinning of library and information studies have been left behind. For example, while traditional topics such as cataloging, reference, and collection development may appear outdated in light of the emergence of public access databases, digital libraries, and much heavier reliance on third-party database vendors, there is the risk of losing the theoretical foundation for which libraries are designing,

developing, and maintaining such information environments (Gorman, 2004; Myburgh, 2003). For many, fluency in information technology and information management should be considered more a means, not an end and

there should not be so much focus on specific information resources and how to use them, but rather on how knowledge is created and organized in different fields, where it comes from, how to assess it and finally the discipline-specific problems with assessing it (Myburgh, 2003, p. 223).

While a lack of focus often tends to render LIS programs somewhat invisible, issues of departmental organization can also be a factor. For example, there is tremendous internal pressure for LIS departments to reorganize and integrate with other departments to better offer a more diverse, interdisciplinary curriculum (Conrad & Rapp-Hanretta, 2002). While many anticipated benefits of these mergers and reorganizations may have not been realized, they have resulted in a certain level of security, allowing threatened programs to continue; LIS programs, however, must be careful not to become “adoptees” or “junior partners” in a merger (Hildreth & Koenig, 2002, p.132).

Regardless of focus or alignment, the acquisition of skills most valued by employers continues to be of paramount importance to most students within LIS programs. Due to the lack of distinction within the profession, however, the employment perspective is highly variable and eclectic, leading to a vague set of skill employers seem to value (Kennan, Cole, Willard, & Wilson, 2006). Research suggests that these employers may be more concerned with “soft skills”—analytical ability and communications skills, customer service skills, business and marketing skills, flexibility, and adaptability—than on traditional technical skills (Bronstein, 2007; Robinson & Jacobson, 2003; Blankson-Hermans & Hibberd, 2004). Some predict that “LIS professionals will place larger emphasis on locating, filtering, and evaluating information, and will be primary instructors in the use of new information technologies” where librarians are first and foremost evaluators and educators of information and information sources and services (Baruchson-Arbib & Bronstein, 2002, p. 397). Experience, however, appears to remain the biggest single factor in the current job market, and LIS programs may want to put a high priority in their curricula emphasizing internships, networking, mentoring, and leadership skills (Shannon, 2008; Kennedy, Gonzales & Cenzer, 2007).

During this period of transition, the American Library Association (ALA) has also continued to try and ensure its accreditation standards have also evolved to meet the changing needs of the discipline and the LIS programs preparing its future workforce. While standards have evolved to reflect the new realities of the programs, there is some debate about the necessity for accreditation and whether there may be a need to create a different process for information-based programs and IT programs in general (Burnett & Bonnici, 2006). They conclude that accreditation will be important as long as the process remains viable and universities continue to value it. Despite the growing tension between ALA accreditation and changing LIS programs, rarely are American LIS or “i-schools” ever put on conditional status and not one has had its accreditation revoked since 1999 (ALA Website, 2011; Library Journal, 2004).

The purpose of this study is to identify how library and information studies educators can most appropriately refine their curricula to ensure students are properly prepared with the knowledge and skills necessary to work effectively in the rapidly changing LIS field. To do this, a mid-sized LIS program in the southeastern United States, which has been placed on conditional accreditation status¹ two consecutive times, 2005-2008 and 2009-2011, has been thoroughly examined along with the primary stakeholders of the program. The study's three research questions are:

1. What are the factors necessary for a quality, ALA accredited program?
2. What are the reasons behind the consecutive conditional accreditations awarded to this program?
3. How should this program evolve to most appropriately prepare students for a career in library and information studies?

The unique circumstances of the program that was studied represents an opportunity to examine the real and perceived gaps as identified by the ALA accreditation process that represents one specific standard and metric in determining how well a program has evolved to meet the changing demands and requirements of the LIS field. It is a story of the first and oldest accredited LIS program in its state and how the expectations of the ALA and the discipline itself have evolved more rapidly than it was able to follow. The value of this study is multifaceted – summarizing the existing research on how LIS programs have evolved, detailing a contemporary example of one LIS program's modestly successful attempts at doing this within the context of ALA accreditation standards, and to put forth a theoretical process model that suggest both the organizational structure and curricular requirements necessary for an ALA accredited LIS program.

METHODOLOGY

Utilizing a mixed-method approach, qualitative and quantitative data was collected from 117 participants of an ALA accredited LIS program located in the southeast region of the United States. After a comprehensive literature review in fall 2008 of how LIS departments have been evolving to meet the changing field, a combination of interviews, surveys, and focus groups were conducted with the program's four primary stakeholder groups: current students, faculty, administration (the Chair of the Department, Dean of the School, Dean of the University Library), and local and national library leaders (representing academic, public, school librarianship, and information technology).

Primary Case

The LIS department that participated in the study is the oldest accredited program in the state (1925) with an enrollment of approximately 300 students spread through statewide campuses. The faculty is comprised of a Department Chair and 11 faculty members. The school library

¹ The American Library Association's (ALA) Committee on Accreditation reviews all accredited LIS programs in the U.S. and Canada on either three year (conditional accreditation) or seven year (full accreditation) cycles.

media component of the Department is widely considered the top program in the state and approximately 60% of all practicing librarians statewide are graduates from this program. The program only confers the Masters in Library and Information Studies (MLIS) degree and does not have a doctoral program. It is one of six departments housed within the University's School of Education.

The program first became ALA accredited in 1982 (Carmichael, 2011) was put on conditional accreditation in 2005 and was recently placed on a second conditional accreditation in 2008. This Department's problems with accreditation represent an excellent opportunity to observe and document the operational expectations behind ALA accreditation standards and in what ways this program has not met these expectations.

Participants (n=117)

Participants in the study included observations from the four authors of this study (one tenure track faculty member and three master's students) who served as participant observers; online survey responses from 52 current students (19% of the program's 275 students); personal interviews of all nine current faculty members excluding the chair (100% response rate; two open faculty positions were present at the time of the study); personal interviews with three educational administrators responsible for establishing and maintaining the direction of the department including the Department Chair, Dean of the School, and University Librarian; and online survey responses from a broad cross section of libraries – public, academic, and school library media – about the most important requisite skills they expect a quality library education to provide for MLIS degree holders they employ.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The study's data collection involved participant observations, interviews, and online surveys supplemented with analysis of qualitative documentation over a two semester period during the 2008-2009 academic year. The faculty and school administrator survey involved a 30-60 minute personal interview with one or more of the researchers. Student researchers recorded the data by using a tape recorder and writing notes. The student survey was administered online through Survey Monkey, a Web based software application (see Appendix A). Students in the LIS program were notified and invited to participate in the online survey through the Department's listserv and through an announcement on the Department's website. The survey was available to students for ten days.

All participants agreed to a consent form before participating in the study. The consent form listed the associated risks, benefits, and a statement of confidentiality. The research faculty supervisor did not participate in the data collection process with other faculty or educational administrators to prevent a conflict of interest and potential bias that reflected his own perceptions and to ensure other faculty members were able to speak as candidly and openly as possible. The content of the three types of surveys is described below.

Faculty Interviews (n=10)

The interview designed for faculty members focused on the LIS topics of curriculum, professional skills, and departmental organization. The interview consisted of seven questions.

All questions were open ended. One question identified whether the LIS Department is equipping students to meet the changing needs of the industry. Another question asked if the LIS Department should focus more on library skills or information science skills. The faculty members were asked for thoughts about a LIS program being located in a school other than the School of Education.

Educational Administrator Survey (n=3)

The questions selected for the educational administrators that participated in the study - the Department Chair, the School's Dean, and Dean of Libraries - were customized based on each respondent's particular role in influencing how the LIS Department was managed. The number of questions ranged from three to seven. Each participant was asked about how a LIS curriculum should negotiate providing students with instruction in both traditional library science and information science components. A third question focused on how well each administrator felt the specific LIS program was equipping students to meet the changing needs of the profession.

Student Survey (n=52)

The student survey consisted of seven questions and included three sections. In the first section, students agreed to the consent form. The second section included demographic questions about the students. Students were asked to identify their year of graduation, at which campus they took the majority of courses, their gender, and their ethnicity. The third section focused on the topics of curriculum, quality, and skill sets for the LIS field.

When the survey was administered, there were approximately 275 admitted students in the LIS program. Approximately 19% of the student body completed the survey. 52 students answered some part of the online survey and 28 students completed the survey. Respondents were 47 females, 4 males, and one student who skipped the question. Forty-five students identified themselves as white (88.2%), three students identified themselves as black (5.9%), one student identified as Asian/Pacific Islander (2.0%) and one student identified as multiracial (2.0%).

Employer Survey (n=53)

A survey was sent out to collect information on the opinions of library managers in North Carolina. The survey was sent out electronically April-July 2009 to 120 library managers in Charlotte and Greensboro. From the survey sent out, 53 responses were received (44%). 77% of respondents (n=39) were public libraries, 16% (n=8) were academic libraries, 6% (n=3) were school library media programs – 2 elementary schools and 1 secondary school. The survey questions were based in four areas of interest: Demographic Data, Professionalism and Performance of Employees, and Satisfaction ratings. The questions gauging demographic information made a basic assessment of the type of library being surveyed and the daily tasks of the employees of the library. Some of these tasks were cataloging, administration, reference, acquisitions and circulation.

RESULTS

Conditional Accreditation (2005-2008; 2008-2011)

The Department was formally placed on three-year conditional accreditation by the American Library Association's Committee on Accreditation (COA) during the summer of 2005. The eight major issues cited were found in five of the six accreditation standards – Standard I (Mission, Goals, and Objectives), Standard III (Faculty), Standard IV (Students), Standard V (Administration & Finance), and Standard VI (Physical Resources). One of the central problems found was the lack of a formal planning process that included input and representation from the Department's major constituencies. Another prominent issue was a disproportionately high student-to-faculty ratio that stemmed from open faculty positions that remained unfilled and a perceived insufficient number of overall members of the faculty conducive to appropriate advising and teaching loads. The ALA also felt that students were not being supported to a high enough degree as they found a lack of systematic planning of student programs of study as well as insufficient examples for how student accomplishments were assessed. In addition, they found that the study body was not diverse enough and were not receiving adequate placement services. The final issue had to do with lack of adequate funding appropriated in a consistent fashion that was aligned with meeting the Department's organizational goals and ensured that it would be able to maintain a viable teaching and learning environment for its students.

In 2008, the Department was placed on its second consecutive three-year conditional accreditation by ALA. While four of the eight major issues had been successfully addressed, four major concerns were still present – insufficient evidence of comprehensive assessment, the need for systematic curricular review and alignment of syllabi, the need for managed growth and class sizes, and allocation of an adequate budget to meet departmental goals.

Educational Administrator Interviews

Overall, the educational administrators had a positive attitude about the Department. Strengths included general support for the program and unity in the state, the strength of the Department, the fact 40% of school library media (SLM) professionals in the state have degrees from the university, and the program's value to the institution. Two administrators felt that there should be a balance between library science (LS) and information science (IS) components in an LIS program. They agreed that their LIS Department has a balance of both, and the need for both was emphasized. One noted, "We do a good job with traditional LS. If we didn't teach library skills, we shouldn't be in business" (Administrator interview, 2009); another said the Department does a good job with LS curriculum, but emphasized the need to address IS curriculum more. Both respondents identified automation, information storage and retrieval, and technology as important examples of IS curriculum.

In terms of creating and maintaining a quality program, two administrators mentioned quality of faculty and another emphasized that even more important is the need for quality students and available resources to make a quality program. Keeping up with rapid changes in the field and the changing demands of students, employers, and accreditation bodies entailed curriculum development and research. One mentioned the need to continue building on its existing strengths

such as the school library media component of the program where "[It] is the strongest school library program in the state". Adequate faculty and resources were identified as paramount and it was important to avoid duplication of what other state schools were doing. The further development of online programs that were interchangeable with sister institutions, which took into account the strengths of other programs in the state to cater to student interests was also mentioned.

There were different views on whether the ALA accreditation standards reflected current needs and on whether an LIS program should be located within the School of Education. One said the standards were in essence "obstructionist and vague" in some ways and the standards should focus more on processes rather than results as, "standardizing the output yields a low level of expertise and qualification." Another administrator felt, however, that the ALA standards do reflect current needs and expectations. In terms of where the Department should be housed, two said they were open to discussion about this issue, pointing out that it is most common for LIS programs in the U.S. to comprise their own schools where a central benefit was direct access to funding sources rather than indirect access as merely a department. Another administrator said the program's positioning within the School of Education is a good fit and seems to work well.

Faculty Interviews

The faculty members, despite issues with accreditation, had positive feelings toward the Department and the overall accreditation process. Reasons for this included an engaged and caring faculty (n=4) and the fact that the Department is in a state of positive change (n=6). While the overall opinion was favorable, all had concerns relating to the curriculum, to the turnover rate in faculty, and to keeping up-to-date with technology.

The faculty felt the Department and its curriculum was properly equipping its graduates to meet the needs of the changing field (60%, n=6) and that there was a need for a balance between library skills and information skills (70%, n=7). Reasons included a 100% first time pass rate of its school media students on the state teacher's exam and consistent feedback from employers indicating that they were pleased with its graduates. Two faculty members also noted that "librarianship overlaps and is also a subset of information science" and that because the two are inter-related, there is no choice to make. Other faculty members noted that the Department should focus on information skills while still retaining a focus on the "librarian's role in society in relation to freedom of rights, censorship and privacy..."

In terms of ways to appropriately change with the field and maintaining a quality program, the faculty identified updating the curriculum aligned with Departmental and student goals (60%), alignment with ALA accreditation standards (80%, n=8), and a high quality faculty (70%, n=7).

The faculty was split on whether the Department's current location within the School of Education was a positive factor - four in favor of staying in the School of Education, four feeling it should move elsewhere, and two expressing no preference. Suggestions for change varied from moving into the Communications Department or becoming a separate department within the Graduate School.

Student Results

A majority of students (52%) said the program needs both library and information science components and more specifically they considered essential to an LIS program reference and cataloging (25%), Management training (n=6), collection development (n=4), and training how to use Web 2.0 technologies in libraries (n=4).

In addition to curriculum, students identified skills they should possess to meet professional standards. Students identified skill sets that are considered in the IS as well as LS camps. The most predominant skill set identified by students (46%) were skills relating to the usage of technology and computers. Two of nine students said reference skills and interpersonal skills are important for meeting the professional standards. Students emphasized the need to learn how to integrate research (n=5) as well as cataloging skills (n=5).

Significant disagreement was found when students identified the most and least valuable aspects of the LIS program and how it could be improved. There were a total of 78 responses between these three questions. Nine students identified the faculty as the most valuable component of the LIS program. Seven students emphasized the program curriculum as being valuable to the program. Three students said the most valuable component is the core courses. In contrast, some students expressed dissatisfaction toward the curriculum. Five students said the curriculum was outdated or limited in what is offered. When asked for suggestions on how to improve the program, the majority of students (42%) suggested restructuring the course curriculum. Courses suggested for restructuring were those on reference, cataloging, and management. Additionally, three students suggested the Foundations of LIS course was the least valuable aspect of the program.

Employer Survey Results

The main skills applied, keeping in mind the majority of respondents were public librarians, were 90% reference, 88% circulation, 66% youth and children's services, 66% adult services, 62% collection development, 58% cataloging, 52% bibliographic instruction, 48% administration, and 36% acquisitions. The group also had the option to choose "other", which was chosen by 34% (See Figure 1 below). Other tasks included adult and teen services, computer and technology instruction, archives, outreach, and working on trouble shooting within the library.

Employee skills they found to be most critical included communication, people management, team/cooperation, technology skills and information retrieval (see Figure 1). Important skills included analytical/critical skills, innovation/creativity, and information organization. One manager stated, "Librarians come into contact with a lot of diverse people. They need to be able to work together with co-workers on teams and patrons from backgrounds unlike theirs. They need more than book knowledge; they are expected to be leaders" (Public library manager, 2009). Another noted, "...communicating positively, and showing the customers that the library wants them to be in the library are really crucial to continued success of the public library".

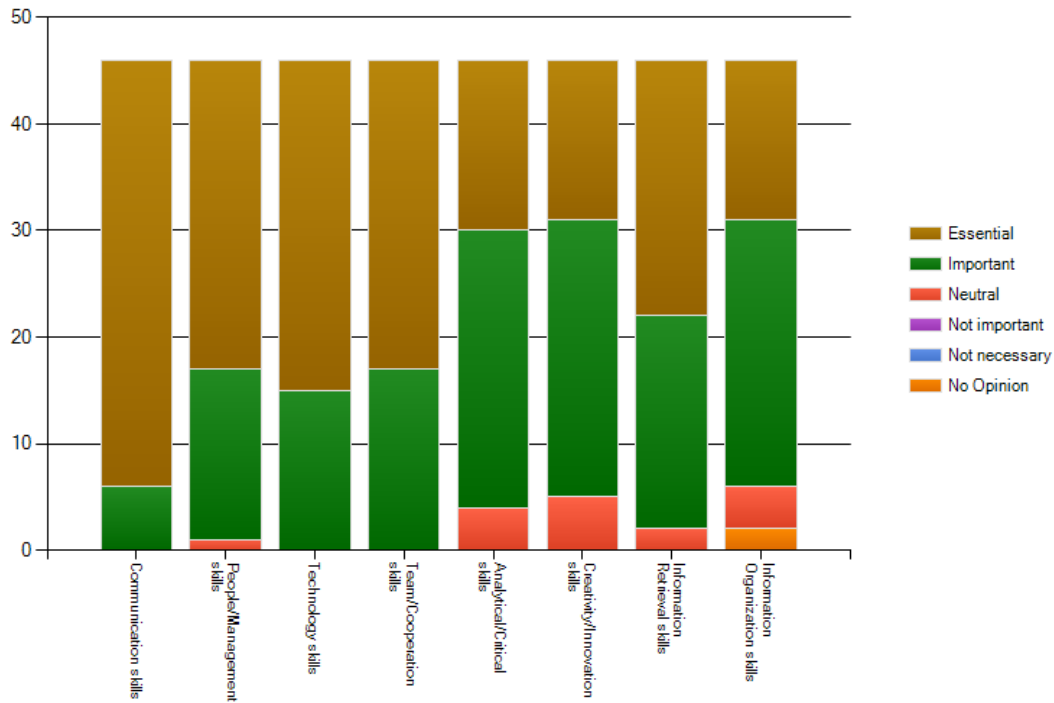


Figure 1 - Importance of On-the-Job Skills

The managers were also asked to rate their satisfaction levels with employees on these skills. The only question which received “Very Satisfactory” as an answer was information retrieval skills; other “satisfactory” skill areas were communication, technology, team/cooperation, analytical/critical skills, creativity/innovation, and information management skills. One skill that received a majority “neutral” response was people/management skills and almost 18% rated this either unsatisfactory to very unsatisfactory (see Figure 2 below).

In general, how satisfied are you that employees who hold an MLIS degree or higher, possess and are able to effectively implement these skills on-the-job?

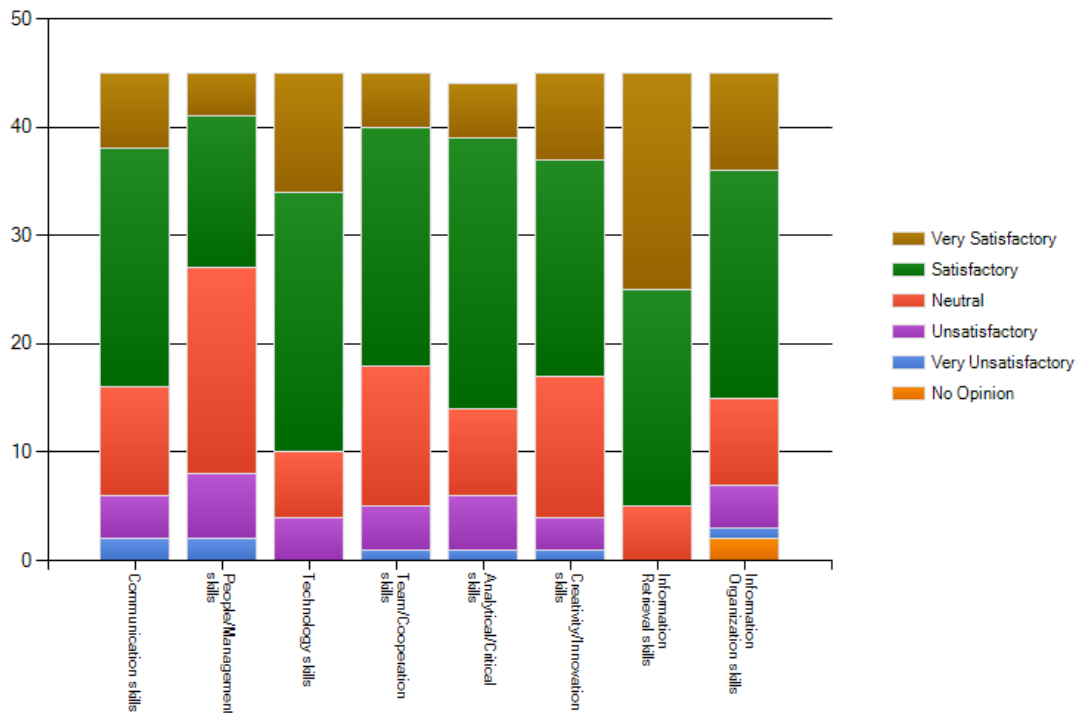


Figure 2 - Satisfaction with employee skills?

According to one manager, “some employees do not communicate to the customer the type of service attitude which customers have come to expect today. The kind attitude of the employees will ensure that the customers will return to the library, perhaps as much or more than the books on the shelves or the computer resources we make available”. Another noted, “I find that a majority of the MLS classes are focused on traditional library functions rather than real world expectations in regards to communication and management.” A third was more candid, “I do not think enough people management skills or communication skills are being taught in MLIS programs for the public library setting”. Lastly, “Many librarians I have worked with do not realize library work is people work. They also do not always cooperate interdepartmentally or in teams”.

Managers did feel that employees were adequately prepared to deal with the technology that is required in the workplace with 91% answering “yes”. When questioned about what they felt to be essential skills, 100% of respondents stated email and word processing, and most felt that database management and hardware/software support were crucial as well (see Figure 3). Respondents stated that additional skills were troubleshooting, understanding the Internet, social networking, web 2.0 skills, groupware skills such as Office Live, and spreadsheets.

Please select the technological skills needed for staff with MLIS degrees or higher in your workplace.

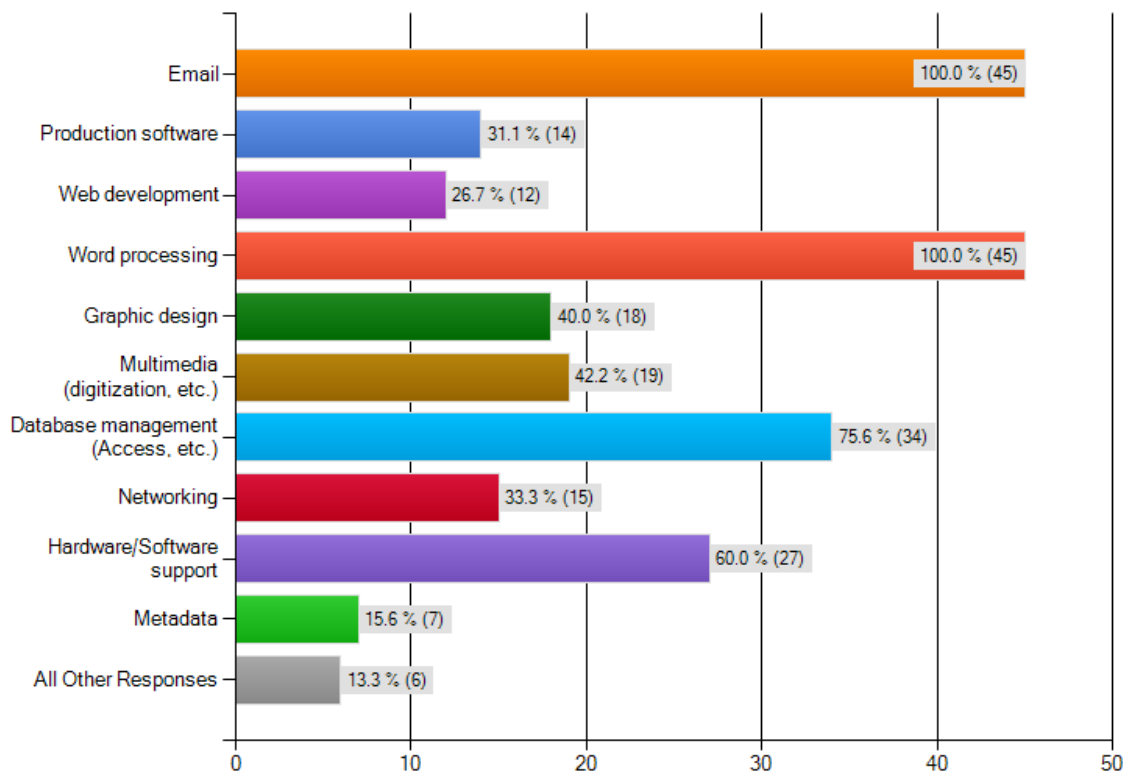


Figure 3 - Important Technology Skills

One manager stated staff needs to be prepared technology wise because, “patrons expect you to be able to help them at all levels of technology; from their personal laptops to email to twitter to how to download songs to their I-phone”.

Many managers also felt that library students should learn how a library is run on a day-to-day level, especially through internships, while they are still in an MLIS program. One manager stated, “...internships and work experience would be a big help. Sometimes the simplest tasks can seem overwhelming because of a lack of actual hands on experience”. Another noted, “LIS programs should do a better job of preparing students to deal with real world challenges when working in a public setting. For example, at least one class should address how to deal with patrons who have mental illnesses, substance abuse and disruptive behaviors in general.” A third felt the best employees are ones “who has worked in the library while or before going to library school and is familiar with the ins and out of how a library functions”.

The majority (34%) stated that on a scale from 1-10, they rated their staff as an 8. Complaints and concerns about employees fell into a need for improvement in communication skills and developing real library experience. As one respondent stated, “most are highly qualified as

librarians coming out of graduate school, however a major component of customer service and working with the public is lacking at times”. Another stated, “there can be better training that is more relevant to what they will experience in the work place. We spend too much time training customer service and management skills that should be acquired while in school”.

Managers also commented on the most valuable skills held by MLIS candidates. There were many responses to this question, many of them falling into a focus on reference, knowledge of materials and an eagerness to improve upon oneself. The majority of managers commented on improvements in people skills or communication, or both. According to one library manager, “maturity, open-mindedness, with the ability to get along with others (which may be the MOST important skill)”. Another noted that “people and communication skills. The importance of communicating effectively... value of being flexible and understanding the libraries are constantly changing and they need embrace change”.

Finally, the managers were given the opportunity to further comment on other areas that the survey might have overlooked. The respondents took this section to comment more specifically on their previous answers and interestingly enough, the majority of them echoed that the areas of developing people skills, technology skills, and real library experience were what is lacking in many library programs. One emphasized, “people must be reminded that they will be working with a lot of different kinds of people now, especially if they are going into public library work, they can no longer hide behind books OR technology. Classes on how to deal with difficult people as well as difficult situations might help to better prepare them for what we have to deal with on a daily basis in a public setting”. Another echoed the need for, “more real world experience” and another noted “that program participants spend real time shadowing a real library on day to day tasks. I learned as much in my first month as a librarian as I did in the full MLIS program. MLIS= provided perfect view of libraries. Real World= what real libraries are like”.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The issues of curriculum and departmental focus were the primary areas of interest and concern expressed by all constituents. This is consistent with the findings of Arms (2005), Markey (2004), and others, and with the ALA Committee on Accreditation's emphasis on a curriculum which is “based on goals and objectives, and evolves in response to a systematic planning process” (ALA 2008, p.7). The ALA standards further state that the curriculum should “integrate the theory, application, and use of technology” and that it “must be reviewed and evaluated by a variety of stakeholders, including students, faculty, and potential employers” (ALA 2008, p.7).

From the survey results, students and some faculty members seemed somewhat concerned that this may not currently be the case. Although overall impressions of the Department and its faculty were generally favorable, many students and several faculty members suggested that the current curriculum needs updating and “alignment”, and also suggested that they were unsure of the Department’s focus. What is less clear from the faculty results is whether these concerns are best served by emphasizing library science vs. information science, or by concentrating more on theoretical research vs. practical professional education. Students seemed more clear about this

issue, as a significant majority who responded said both LS and IS are integral components to an LIS program.

All stakeholders seem to agree on the desirability of a traditional library studies framework combined with a more technology-based focus. Although there was some variation as to the suggested "balance" it is clear that most stakeholders do not view this as an "either/or" situation. Students frequently cited technology as a necessary skill upon graduation. Most faculty members agreed, but several offered the caveat that theoretical underpinnings were more important. They felt that rather than focusing on specific technologies, the program should provide students with knowledge and skills that will help keep themselves educated on new technologies and trends once they graduate.

While several faculty members mentioned that engaging in research was an essential component of a successful LIS program, none of the students did. Although accreditation standards stress the importance of research, they are purposefully vague with respect to the actual balance between teaching, research, and service. That distinction is left up to the individual school; the ALA merely requires that the "school demonstrates the high priority it attaches" to each aspect (ALA, 2008, p.8). It cannot be ignored, however, that increased research activity results in both increased funding and increased visibility for the department, both within the university, and within the field. Audunson (2007) also suggests that a practitioner-based research program actually benefits students in the program, providing needed context for professional skills. The Department has a generally good reputation among practitioners, which, as one administrator notes, situates it nicely within the state university system's mandate to promote career opportunities for state residents; however, the University is also placing considerably more emphasis on research as part of its new mission and goals statement. Finding a balance within this environment will be essential in the coming years.

As to the question of the Department's positioning within the University as a whole, the ALA standards are again purposely vague, requiring only that the program be an "integral yet distinctive academic unit within the institution" (ALA, 2008, p.10) and that it be sufficiently autonomous, adequately funded, and represented on an equitable basis within all functions of the university. The question, then, is whether this can best be accomplished by remaining within the School of Education or through a different arrangement, such as locating within a different school, implementing a multidisciplinary program, or relocating within the Graduate School itself? While there are advantages and disadvantages to each approach, there are also some particular benefits to inertia; a majority of the faculty members suggested that the current arrangement is not at all problematic, assuming that a certain level of cooperation and administrative support can be achieved. Several faculty members also noted that the Department's high proportion of students in the successful SLM program offers considerable justification for its placement within the School of Education. This contrasts with two of the school administrators, who suggested reconsidering the placement of the LIS program into another organizational model such as its own school; one of these administrators noted that only seven of fifty-seven ALA accredited programs nationwide are located within schools of education.

The survey results from the library managers indicated an overall satisfaction with the skills of graduates from the MLIS program. However, when asked for specifics, the most important skills that managers look for were more general skills, including communication and people management. When rating satisfaction with graduates' skills in this area, the results were only neutral to unsatisfactory. Some of the comments reflected the opinion that working in a library means working with people, and librarians need to be equipped with "people skills".

The survey results also indicated that managers were very satisfied with information retrieval skills of graduates. This was the only area which was rated overall as "very satisfied". The generally accepted library skills of cataloging and reference were listed as less important skills necessary for successful library work. Some of the comments reflected the opinion that these skills are better learned on the job because they can differ based on the type of library.

Overall, the employer survey focused on technology and people skills as being the most important. Some suggested internships as a required part of the program to give students real-world experience in dealing with patrons and their needs. Courses on technology and its uses in libraries were also listed as being important. These are some areas that it may be well for LIS departments to investigate in determining the future direction of the Department to prepare students to work in libraries in the future.

The Educational Performance Model: a strategic and systems approach

Systems thinking is based on alignment between goals (ends) and the resources necessary to get there (means). One of the central goals for formal education at any level is a "quality" education for its students. Dr. Joe Harless (1998), a forefather and eminent scholar and practitioner of the systems approach, would urge that "quality" be further defined in terms of tangible performance referred to as *accomplishments*. These identified student accomplishments represent one of the essential end goals of education and are the starting part from which to build a curriculum. Understanding what performance is required as students graduate and move into practicing and applying the skills of library and information science in the field is difficult and requires a strategic and systems approach.

This approach involves eight interconnected variables, articulated as the educational performance model (EPM) below, that represents one continuous loop of analysis, teaching, assessment, and curricular development and revision based on constituency feedback.

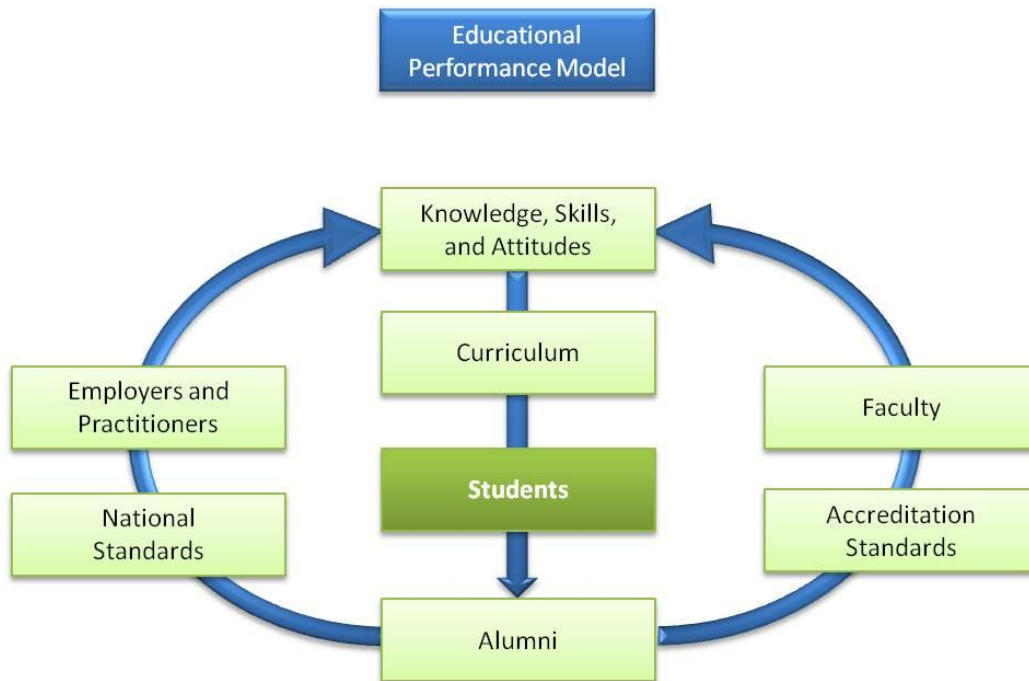


Figure 4 - Educational Performance Model

Lack of systematic planning was one of the principle accreditation issues for the LIS Department researched for this study. In response, the Department created a strategic plan that embraced the need for maintaining constant communication with its constituencies and governing standards so that the expected knowledge, skills, and attitudes required by the field are designed and represented in its curriculum.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

There are three major limitations to the study all of which impact the overall internal and external validity of the study and generalizability of the results. Firstly, as a case study of one mid-sized LIS program from the south-eastern United States, the results themselves cannot be generalized explicitly to other programs. Secondly, a low student response rate of 19% or 52 of 275 enrolled students decreases the overall validity of the student results. The authors attribute this poor response rate to multiple issues – low program morale at the time of the study, a short survey window of 10 days, an open ended question design requiring students maximum effort to complete the instrument, and poor timing as it was administered just before the Thanksgiving holiday. Lastly, the library employer survey responses reflected predominately the public library perspective (77%), which was caused by two primary issues – lack of equal stratification of the 120 libraries asked to participate in the study and timing of the survey, which occurred at the end of the academic year for academic libraries and during the end-of-grade testing for school libraries (April) and then concluded during the summer months (July 1).

The implications of the study revolve around how one mid-sized LIS department in the United States is redefining itself to meet the expectations of the changing field. Seminal questions that

are also appropriate for other LIS departments are considered and answered through the lens of this Department's unique context. The exploration, struggles with accreditation, and affirmative responses, especially in the development of a theoretical, systems-based performance model, will help illuminate potential pathways for addressing the rapidly changing times in our field and the necessary changes in requirements that must take place to remain relevant in effectively preparing 21st Century librarians and information scientist for the challenges ahead.

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APPENDIX A Current Student Survey

1. Informed Consent

Dear LIS Student,

My name is Anthony Chow and I am on the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's School of Education, Department of Library and Information Studies. In conjunction with my research assistants, master's students David Gwynn, Teresa Shaw, and Dan Martensen, we will be collecting data regarding the overall effectiveness and satisfaction of current topics in the LIS program at UNCG.

Your participation will involve giving us your consent by selecting [I accept] at the bottom of this form and then answering a set of 6 questions covering basic demographic data, assessment of the LIS Department and ways to improve.

Completion of this survey will take approximately 20 minutes. There is minimal risk to participating in this study. The only potential discomfort may be possible frustration in providing us feedback on how the department could be improved to better serve the students and faculty within the program. The societal benefits of your participation include a larger amount of feedback about current issues within UNCG's LIS which potentially will lead to an overall increase in satisfaction and effectiveness in reaching LIS program goals.

We will do the following to maintain confidentiality of your records to the extent allowed by law: Participants will only be identified by an artificial code, which will not be traceable to any other personal information, unless you explicitly provide your contact information for follow-up interviews. The results of this research study may be published but your name or identity will not be revealed. Participants will not be identified or tracked by name and all data will be destroyed within one year of the initial data collection. All data, written and electronic data on CD, will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at all times and destroyed by paper shredder by no later than June 1st, 2009 with the exception of the signed consent forms, which must be held for a three year period in accordance with federal regulations.

By accepting this consent form, you agree that you understand the procedures and any risks and benefits involved in this research. You are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty or prejudice; your participation is entirely voluntary. Your privacy will be protected because you will not be identified by name as a participant in this project.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which insures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and this consent form. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions regarding the research itself will be answered by Anthony Chow by calling (336) 334-3411 or email at aschow@uncg.edu. Any new information

that develops during the project will be provided to you if the information might affect your willingness to continue participation in the project.

By selecting the [I Accept] button, you are agreeing to participate in the project described to you by Anthony Chow, David Gwynn, Teresa Shaw, and Dan Martensen.

Page 1

Year of Graduation

- 2008
- 2009
- 2010
- 2011

2. On which campus did you take the majority of your classes?

- Greensboro
- Charlotte
- Asheville

3. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

4. What is your ethnicity?

- What is your ethnicity? White
- Black
- Hispanic/Latino
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Native American
- Multiracial

- 1. In what ways should an LIS program consist of "Information Science" and "Library Science" components in its curriculum?*
- 2. What would you consider are essential areas of a curriculum in an LIS program?*
- 3. What specific skills or competencies do you feel students of LIS programs should possess to meet LIS field standards?*
- 4. What aspects of the LIS program do you feel are the most valuable?*
- 5. What aspects of the LIS program do you feel are least valuable?*
- 6. What suggestions do you have for improving the LIS program?*
- 7. Please add any additional comments about your experience in the LIS program.*

Thank you for completing this survey. Your time and effort are very much appreciated.