

## The Value Added or Added Value of the LIS Master's Degree

By: [Michael A. Crumpton](#)

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### **Abstract:**

#### Purpose

This is the introduction to the special issue on the value of the LIS degree.

#### Design/methodology/approach

The introduction provides an outline and recap of the articles presented in this issue.

#### Findings

Nine articles are presented in this special issue.

#### Originality/value

These articles are all original contributions for this special issue.

**Keywords:** LIS degree | library | education

### **Article:**

Within our profession of library and information science, a large debate has taken place, one that I consider ongoing, over the value that is represented by obtaining a master's degree. This issue will use the terms LIS, MLIS and LIS education to discuss graduate master's degree level education in library and information science programs and schools. Of course other considerations also become apparent related to accreditation of these programs and/or certification criteria for public librarians, for example. Some of these points of debate and concern are referenced in an article I published last year in this same publication, Determining the Value of Your Library Science Degree, (Crumpton, 2015).

I also had the pleasure to be involved in a recently formed ACRL Interest Group for LIS Education. This group was first convened in 2013 and included points of view and discussion from LIS faculty members, practitioners and doctoral students in discussing the value of a library and information studies education. This was happening at the same time many "library schools" were removing the word 'library' from their program and school names. This group sponsored a panel discussion at ALA 2015 in San Francisco, titled Collaborative Influences of LIS Educators

and Practitioners Regarding Hiring the Profession to discuss the changes in the profession and how that impacts the curriculum and the needs of employers who hire these graduates.

Much discussion has centered on the need for specialization within the curriculum, but also in providing guidance to students who are pairing LIS education with other education and experience in order to fit specialized roles being created in library workplaces. This special issue is meant to focus on these issues of how to add value to the LIS education arena while also recognizing that the LIS degree can add value to a broader set of employment needs within the profession.

The nine contributions in this issue span a beginning and end point of view at how our profession is changing particularly in academic libraries. The first 4 articles are from recent graduates or those continuing their education and provide a recent perspective of how their degree impacted the progress of their career, as well as research perspective on specific competencies and skill development. The next three articles represent value added programs in specific areas of librarianship and what that has meant to those involved, especially from emerging trends of health science and the need to increase the diversity within the professional ranks. The last two articles are from LIS educators sharing important aspects from their point of view about the profession and the value of what we do.

We start with an offering by Melissa Fraser-Arnott, who shares her research on transferable skills. Her research looks at competencies and skills obtained in LIS programs and how this knowledge is useful beyond traditional library employment. Through interview-based data, she makes a sound argument that skills obtained in library science programs have a broader impact for personal development and gain through employment opportunities.

Our second article represents a point of view from a recent graduate, Philip White, who recognized the need to approach his education collaboratively in conjunction with other experiences and skills. He viewed his MLIS as added-value to his other interests in order to apply his combined skills in a meaningful way. His focus is on technology and the importance of keeping current technological trends at the forefront of LIS education.

The next two articles are also from recent graduates sharing research and perspectives on how their MLIS degree added value in unique ways. Breanne Crumpton and Emily Porter-Fyke conducted a literature review and added their own perspective to craft a contribution that demonstrates the value of LIS degrees to employment opportunities in special libraries. Sarah Long Loo and I share our experience in how outreach and partnership opportunities with other non-profits can highlight the skills and competencies gained from LIS education. Both of these articles show the breadth of how LIS education can add value to individuals, organizations and institutions needing information seeking specialized expertise.

The next three articles demonstrate the value that LIS education adds to strengthening our professional footprint and creating credibility for our end users. Mary Grace Flaherty has contributed insight into the role of LIS education in the health science field and why that added value is critical for the general public to understand. Dr. Flaherty provides examples of how

librarianship can make a significant difference in disseminating health science information to health care professionals and the end user, who is hoping the Internet has all the answers.

Promoting diversity in the profession has been a goal for many years to close the gap between demographic characteristics of information professionals and end users while also sharing a larger perspective on how our profession must recognize a diverse set of backgrounds, cultures, experiences and educational needs. I am proud to have been a part of a highly successful program, funded by the Institute of Library and Museum Studies, at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro for diversity recruitment in our Department of Library and Information Studies program. Along with my colleagues, Becky Croxton and Gerald Holmes, we share the story of three cohorts of ACE (Academic and Cultural Enrichment) Scholars that graduated almost 50 new professional librarians to help meet the diversity needs of our profession.

Community colleges are another area where the master's degree makes it possible for library professionals to provide a broad perspective that includes everything, from vocational training to information literacy skills, for those transferring to a four-year university. As part of the chain of information literacy development, community college librarianship can add significant value to the libraries credibility on any given campus. Suvanida Duangudom and Nora Bird give us a glimpse of how important this value can be for preparing individuals with career and workplace development needs.

Our last two articles from LIS educators broadens our view of how our profession matters and how important it is to add this value to our society. Dr. James Walther shares his view of teaching ethics to library school students and how important that can be in a profession vulnerable to ethical challenges. Teaching problem-solving solutions adds the value of providing communities and society at large professionals who maintain intellectual integrity and ethical considerations for developing information and data solutions for all to use.

Finally, as a wrap up to understanding the value that we as LIS professionals can represent, Robert Holly shares insights from his distinguished career as an LIS educator. This added value premediates our society and our culture, and defines our professional identity by ensuring that we are educators, practitioners and colleagues. Dr. Holly's experience and interaction within the profession over the years provides an amazing perspective on who we are and how we, as professional librarians, add value.

The value of an LIS degree, or the added value that a LIS degree can offer those who seek this credential or educational experience, is personal but also has broad impact. It's personal because the value is determined by the individual application of library and information science, theory and educational premise, sometimes combined with other education and experience. The broad impact of the profession is the value added to local communities, other professional information integrity and as part of an informed society. The ARCL LIS Education Interest Group will continue to discuss needed changes or reform in order to keep this value relevant. Enjoy this issue and these contributions as insight as to who we are and our collective value to the profession.

My thanks to all of these contributors, the peer reviewers and to our publisher who recognizes that The Bottom Line for our profession is how we perceive and explore our value to others. Special thanks to Nora Bird for her editorial contributions and the ACRL LIS Education Interest Group for being a venue to explore these thoughts and ideas. As a librarian reading this issue, please recognize the value you present to others. If you don't have an LIS degree, hopefully this issue will inform you of the value of having one, so get to know a librarian or seek programs that can offer you the chance to be one.

Michael Crumpton

Guest Editor-in-Chief