

**Academic Libraries Looking Forward:
The Role of Schools of Library and Information Science**

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Writing in 1976, Jesse Shera noted, “the library school’s goal is to educate students who are prepared to function as practitioners hospitable to change and competent to deal with change in a field that is experiencing rapid and sometimes drastic innovation” (p. 152). Schools of library and information science (LIS), he emphasizes, must reflect the philosophy and expectations of higher education and the institutions of which they are a part. The education of these students, he reminds us, should not be too technique oriented—focusing more on why than how—while viewing LIS as a social science, one committed to the advancement of research and scholarship.

A number of the present and future perspectives on the profession and the discipline appear to build on Shera’s vision; however, some schools focus more on how than do others. The foundation of LIS, at least for academic librarianship, involves managing a library’s infrastructure (collections, staff, facilities, and technology) on a short-term and a long-term basis. For the transformation through which academic libraries are going, leadership becomes an essential component of the educational process and it is not confined to those in managerial positions. There is a need for such leadership at all levels of the organization, and that interacts with assorted stakeholders. Within the content of continued transformation, this essay highlights the knowledge and skills areas that librarians of today and tomorrow need, recognizes that LIS schools are one venue that supply the new workforce, discusses challenges that LIS schools and the profession face together, and notes some strategies that require greater collaboration than has existed in the past.

Emerging Workforce

Much attention has focused on the workforce in academic libraries and the extent to which libraries value the master’s degree in library and information science. Keyes Metcalf and others at the New York Public Library in the 1930s tried to elevate the position and prestige of librarians and were strong advocates of advanced education in LIS.^{*} Today the master’s degree is widely accepted, but those in the workforce need not hold it in LIS. The demands placed on libraries, and the creation of new services and programs, has led to a realization that areas such as development and fundraising, information technology, and marketing have much to offer and that schools of LIS do not attract or turn out sufficient number of high-quality individuals with such backgrounds.

^{*} In 1937, Metcalf declined and later accepted the combined position of Director of the University Library and College Librarian at Harvard. In a private letter written after his decline, he emphasized that the position should go to a library professional rather than a faculty member, given the issues Harvard faced. See Hernon, 1983.

Needed Competencies

Academic libraries seek a professional workforce that is conformable with change and accepting new roles and responsibilities. Such individuals must not want to confine themselves to the library, and they should welcome interaction with different people. The workforce provides the face of the library on a daily basis (requiring greater diversity among the staff) and needs to be problem solvers, able to engage in critical thinking, and to be outstanding communicators, both orally and written. As part of problem solving, they need the ability to engage in planning, evaluation, and assessment, and they need to be able to work in teams or groups to accomplish stated goals and objectives. In addition, those making a difference in the workforce must have intellectual curiosity, flexibility, adaptability, persistence, and the ability to be enterprising (Association of Southeastern Research Libraries, 2000, as cited in Herson, Powell, and Young, 2003, p. 43). To this list, I add a commitment to career development and lifelong learning as well as competencies associated with leadership and a commitment to ensuring that the workplace is a learning organization that is highly respected.

As people advance in management positions, any set of competencies expands to include, among others, effective engagement in development; effective management of people, resources, and services within a political context; the ability to implement and evaluate research for accountability and service improvement; and the possession of more leadership competencies as well as an understanding of leadership theory and practice.

Integrating Those Competencies into Education

Increasingly the student population in LIS schools is much younger, but they express little interest in academic librarianship, and a number of the students have never worked in libraries or at all. They might lack an understanding of the transformation through which libraries are going and what is expected of them. They also may not understand what the library of today and tomorrow is; their knowledge might be based on a view of libraries that existed 20 or more years ago. It is my assumption that the LIS schools, in cooperation with area librarians and employers, are trying to correct this image. Still, students may not understand what comprises theory, especially for research, and the cross-disciplinary foundations of relevant theory. This adds to the educational challenge of preparing students to master student learning outcomes that LIS schools lay out for their master's program.

It is all the more essential that the faculty within LIS schools, as well as members of the American Library Association's Committee on Accreditation, understand what comprises student learning outcomes, that they differ from outputs, and that they ensure the evidence gathered is used for better accountability and improvement in the learning process. Three questions arise: (1) What are the perspectives of employers, professional associations, and other stakeholders about the particular set of student learning outcomes that LIS schools have set? (2) How well do these schools meet their learning goals? (3) How do they use any evidence gathered to improve student learning?

Going Beyond the MLS

In my experience, many students in LIS programs and perhaps a number of the faculty do not see value in management, leadership, and research courses. If a school offers a course in evaluation and assessment, students might take it toward the end of their program and not build on that foundation. The profession has not found a good way, in my opinion, to help those in the workforce, even those advancing to positions of senior management, gain the research competencies they will need to manage complex organizations and demonstrate accountability. I am told that a number of leadership institutes do not have a research component, or even if they originally did, they dropped it due to complaints from the participants.

I have seen numerous individuals in high positions within libraries who cannot identify a research study, realize the components it should contain, and offer an effective critique. Any organizational culture of evaluation or assessment depends on decision making and planning based on evaluation or assessment research: evidence gathering, analysis, and review as based on problem statements and study questions. With this in mind, the question arises: What is the role of LIS schools beyond supplying the profession with graduates holding the master's degree in LIS? The answer, in my opinion, goes beyond the offering of courses and workshops related to continuing education. After all, advancement requires greater knowledge and abilities than one can obtain from a brief educational experience. Although mentorship will always play a critical role in shaping managerial leaders of the future, other strategies emerge.

Collaborative Partnerships

Such partnerships between LIS education and practice involve, for instance, the program of the Association of Research Libraries to educate those holding doctoral degrees but lacking formal knowledge of libraries about academic librarianship as a career; efforts to educate, retain, and advance people of color; and involvement in leadership institutes. This section highlights another example—one that involves me. Creating a full partnership with assorted library leaders and directors, the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Simmons College, supported by two grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), focuses on managerial leadership in the information professions (MLIP). This flexible, innovative doctoral program nurtures and strengthens the intellectual and interpersonal assets of students as working managers, actively involves leading practitioners in shaping the educational experience, and generates rigorous research to improve the knowledge base and the practice of managerial leadership (Hernon, Schwartz, and Anderson, 2007). Guiding the program and serving as the basis for program and student assessment is a leadership model developed by the National Center for Healthcare Leadership, which consists of 25 distinct leadership competencies in three broad areas: transformation, accomplishment, and people (Simmons College, accessed 2010). These are competencies that MLIP is uniquely qualified to address.

MLIP is an expensive program to replicate, but other LIS schools, as well as major libraries themselves, could become partners and extend the program nationally with regional satellite campuses. Such a partnership would require faculty well-versed with managerial leadership and research. Given the low productivity of a number of LIS faculty, and their limited research perspective, this might be difficult to achieve. They would also need a good

understanding of academic and other types of librarianship. Still, there is need for such a program that is both national and international in scope.

Conclusion

Quality used to be an easy concept to document and to serve as an indicator of a library's value. Quality was equated with collection size, and the research library director of yesterday wanted to be known for the number of titles added to the collection during his or her tenure. For LIS education, quality was equated with possession of the master's degree in LIS. Quality has become a more complex concept, one that focuses on the workforce and its ability to lead and play a pivotal role within the institution. In this context, not all graduates of master's programs have the label *quality*. Boeing made a clear statement about quality when it expressed dissatisfaction with many of the engineer graduates that it had hired. The company declared a desire to reassess its workforce and only hire future engineers from those programs it holds in the highest regard (Baskin, 2008). Would academic libraries do the same?

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