

# Brecha entre investigación y práctica bibliotecológica. Cómo reducir la distancia

The gap between research and library  
practice. How to reduce the distance

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Coordinadora  
Georgina Araceli Torres Vargas



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# New Opportunities for Change in Library Science Education

ANDREA WYMAN

*Edinboro University of Pennsylvania*

## INTRODUCTION

A review of global programs related to preparing future librarians is relevant and critical because of the vast changes in technologies and applications for working with libraries and library patrons. Finding differences with other Library and Information Science (LIS) education programs globally can be as important as finding similarities. What has been interesting is that the significant LIS curricular changes and program transformations have been achieved but often through various unrelated actions. Similar significant trends found in the literature suggest that dramatic change is on the horizon for LIS programs.

## PROGRAM NAME TRANSFORMATIONS

One of the earliest changes took place in the late 1990s: Program name transformations. As examples, many schools changed the names of their programs and major from Library Science to include the word “information”: Information Science; Information

Management; Information Studies; School of Information; and Informatics (Jain and Jorosi 2017). Many of these name changes were related to shifts in information availability, information exchange modes, new library job markets and data management (Katuli-Munyoro and Mutula 2017, 915-926). Some universities also made the move toward changing the information science school names from Library and Information Science to iSchool (Kaur 2015, 4-5).

Another venue for program change for many schools was to review job ads to see what employers were looking for in LIS graduates. The job titles came in all shapes and varieties: Digital Curator, Information Architect; Open Education Librarian; Student Enrichment Librarian; Information Broker; Entrepreneurship Librarian; and Outreach and Training Librarian (Římanová and Melichar 2017, 46-50). This gleaning of job titles from ads also helped move programs toward curricular re-designs. In Azerbaijan and Turkey, LIS programs began adding modular components to their courses to broaden the student experience (Çakin 2012, 262-290).

## CURRICULAR REDESIGN

Tailoring courses such as medical resources, rare manuscripts and web design were just a few of the options presented to students. Plus, producing new skill sets through courses like proposal writing and modern publishing technologies provided future employers with graduates ready to “hit the ground running.” Other schools have approached curricular transformations by shifting focus on courses toward more digital applications (Roy, Hallmark, and Polacek 2015, 25-29). Those job titles reflect information handling: Digital Media Manager; Coordinator of Digital Products; and Information Security Coordinator. The review of job ads also produced the need for programs to expand on additional areas of focus. Course materials were developed and added to support Middle Eastern studies, global policy standards, gender studies, Latin American studies and training for classroom education. It has long been known that while someone may hold a PhD and be

an expert in their field, they may also have no formal training in classroom management or course delivery.

## REVIEW OF JOB MARKETS

LIS programs delving further into what future employers are looking for yielded the need for students to have important attributes such as soft skills, flexibility and trainability. “Hire the Smile, and then Train the Skill” is the human resources motto for a large department store chain in the Pacific Northwest in the U.S. (Nordstrom, n.d.).

Soft skills entail various aspects of communication, customer service and commitment to continuous learning. Simple skills such as improving listening skills, developing conflict-resolution abilities and also working on how to articulate messages and paring down information to its essential points make up the core of soft skills (Saunders 2015, 427-453). And what goes hand-in-hand with the aforementioned skills is the ability to learn to accept criticism. And according to Massis, having a positive and winning attitude could also result in a more positive work place environment (Massis 2015, 467-470).

Authors Casey and Stephens also believe that real keys to soft skills are versatility and flexibility (Casey and Stephens 2009, 23). Other authors have focused on the ability of LIS graduates to be able to handle multi-tasking and solving complex on-the-spot problems (Massis 2015). Flexibility will be key for LIS students in the future since the current literature has demonstrated that as libraries move away from warehousing book collections, information will be in more fluid forms and will need to be brokered and disseminated electronically (Kennan, Willard, and Wilson 2006, 17-37).

Trainability for future LIS students will involve new skill sets such as digitization for indexing and archiving, documents and records management and 21st century cataloging (Wilson 2017). Some programs are even recommending that their students in field placements and internships be given actual problems to solve and

also incorporating internships into programs much earlier and not waiting until the final semester of their program (Mackenzie and Smith 2009, 129-142). Many schools who reviewed employer expectations realized that students needed more preparation in research and grant writing and returned to the task of having students researching and writing a thesis as a culminating or capstone event for graduation requirements.

### REVAMPING INTERNSHIPS AND TIMING OF COURSEWORK

In Denmark as well as the US, some program models have been inverted and theoretical coursework semesters have been alternated with project semesters (Martens 2015, 69-79) thus forcing students to examine information roles in real practice. In these settings LIS students take on practical problem-solving roles while on the job. Pratt Institute in the US also has moved to support their graduates by hosting a special website for their graduates to showcase their portfolios for future employers to review (Scharf, *et al.* 2007, 462-477).

One school suggested that the degree name be changed to Master of Library Design because librarians were no longer just sorting through or warehousing books but having to re-think the design of buildings and patron programming based on new sophisticated technologies and children encountering technology and using it in much more savvy ways much earlier (Bird 2017, E-mail). A brave colleague even ventured the suggestion that current LIS faculty spend time working in libraries, a reverse internship of sorts for teaching LIS faculty to bring them up to speed for what was really going on in the world.

Certainly, more emphasis could be placed on research and writing skills has been suggested since undergraduates seem to be lacking these skills under numerous themes along with real-time practice um problem-solving activities for LIS students. Follow-up with graduates would also be another possibility for graduate programs to keep LIS programs more current and

keeping tabs on employer advertisements for what is trending in the current job market.

## CONCLUSION

A review of global LIS program changes provides insight into the vast dynamics of the new frontier for LIS educators. From a curricular perspective, challenges will be what courses to add and what to remove as well as promoting components of soft skills training into previously static and staid library courses. To some extent curricular change will work nicely for those LIS students freshly entering programs. But what about librarians already planted firmly in their careers? This appears to be another opportunity for LIS programs: the venue of providing post-graduate retraining for those who want to keep up with the ever-changing nuances of information plus information technology and delivery.

Another emerging trend is for melding LIS students with specialized backgrounds to work in an emerging field: the eScience Professional (Stanton, *et al.* 2011, 79-94). A study supported by the LIS faculty at Syracuse University promoted the use of student logs kept during internships in the sciences along with focus group discussions to help identify and generate new areas of study. The original work identified 11 areas of possible study but the reality of course loads meant students had little room for adding that many courses. Instead, the faculty realized that embedding students in targeted science and engineering endeavors could produce the same results and lead to an enhanced eScience Professional. This type of enhanced platform certainly prepares market-ready graduates.

As information delivery systems and new technologies continue to burst onto the information scene, opportunity for change will be abundant, but the good news is that the generation coming into the LIS workforce is a savvy group, growing up with technologies such as video games and accessing the world through smart phones. Their innate skills will be put to good use to keep LIS education and educators ahead of the learning curve.

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La bibliotecología, como área que se dedica al estudio del conocimiento intencionalmente registrado, tiene dos vertientes: la profesional y la disciplinar. En cada uno de esos territorios, el practicante y el investigador de la bibliotecología hacen tanto una labor loable como aportes sustanciales; sin embargo, practicante e investigador pocas veces se observan y complementan. Hay diversos trabajos que han tocado el problema de la división o brecha entre práctica e investigación en bibliotecología; aun así, la convergencia entre ambas no se nota, por lo que ésta sigue siendo un tema pendiente.

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