



MEMO

**To:** Alexander J. Nagle, Associate Dean  
301 South Hall  
**From:** Louise S. Robbins, Director *L.S. Robbins*  
**Re:** Revised Assessment Report  
**Date:** May 18, 1998  
**cc:** Mary Anne Fitzpatrick

Here is the revision of the Assessment Report, as requested by Mary Anne Fitzpatrick.

## ASSESSMENT REPORT

### Introduction

The School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS) offers two graduate degrees--the Master of Arts and the Ph.D. The master's program leads to a professional degree; the Ph.D. is a research degree. The School also offers a post-master's program of study leading to a specialist certificate in Library and Information Studies, a program individually tailored to the needs of the student. There is no undergraduate program, although many introductory (400 to 600 level) courses are open to juniors and seniors. This report deals chiefly with the master's program, on which the vast majority of the instructional effort is expended and toward which most of our assessment efforts are directed.

The professional master's degree is accredited by the American Library Association (ALA). Two specializations within the master's program are approved by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: 1) a special sequence of 15 credits that, taken with appropriate undergraduate education credits, leads to the Initial Library Media Specialist license (901); and 2) the Master of Arts program in School Library Media, which leads to the regular Library Media Specialist license (902). In addition, the School provides, as one of a number of specialties, a nationally recognized specialty composed of a sequence of courses in archives management.

### Assessment

The SLIS master's programs is **accredited by the American Library Association's Committee on Accreditation**. This accreditation consists of periodic self-studies followed by site visits. Between accreditation visits, SLIS responds to annual statistical surveys regarding curriculum, faculty, students, facilities, and financial support. Concerns raised by the COA after receipt of these reports must be addressed. The School last underwent a self-study in 1990-91, with a visit in Spring 1992. The next accreditation visit is scheduled for Fall 2000. We will begin our next formal self-study in the Fall of 1998.

### Direct Indicators

Direct indicators of student learning as measured against the **stated goals and objectives** of the program include the following: **embedding testing, student evaluations of teaching, student portfolios (including--for example-- reflective journals, course papers, reading critiques, scripts of presentations, web pages and accompanying process papers), performance evaluations by field experience supervisors, and (rarely) pre and post-testing.**

## Indirect Indicators

Annually the **faculty reviews the SLIS program goals and objectives**. In addition, the School employs periodic **student, alumni, and/or employer surveys** to assess the curriculum in relation to changing professional demands. SLIS maintains **statistics on job placement** of its students. The director regularly conducts informal **exit interviews** with graduating students. The School keeps in regular **communication with the supervisors of field experience students**. An **Advisory Council** meets at least annually to provide input into the program.

## Narrative

In 1996, under interim director James Krikelas, the School adopted an assessment plan. This plan highlighted current, ongoing assessment approaches and suggested implementing several others. Some of these steps have been taken; others are still in preparation or have been re-ordered to address current priorities. Those ongoing approaches include the following:

- **Self-study and accreditation.** The ALA accreditation process occurs roughly every seven years. Updates include two styles of reports: annual statistical summaries and bi-annual narrative reports addressing areas of ALA concern. SLIS faces a major re-accreditation process to culminate in a site visit in the Fall of 2000. Prior to that time the School must engage in a comprehensive self-study, which includes surveys of graduates and of employers. Alumni respondents are asked to evaluate the programs in terms of their expectations and the degree to which their education prepared them for their work. Employers are asked to indicate how well our graduates are prepared to perform their jobs and how they compare with graduates from other schools.
- **Advisory Council.** Since 1992, SLIS has had an Advisory Council that meets at least once per year. Part of its agenda always includes opportunities for members to interact with students and to advise the director and faculty on various aspects of the program.
- **Placement assessment.** Each year the School gathers information about students' job placement, including time to placement, job title and location, and beginning salary. The figures are used to monitor our success from year-to-year and in relation to other schools and the field as a whole. The cumulative results from all schools are published annually in *Library Journal*.
- **Faculty review of objectives and curriculum.** The first faculty meeting of each year is generally devoted to a review and discussion of the School's objectives, the degree to which the curriculum meets these objectives, and suggestions for modifications. Concerns arising out of that review are referred to the appropriate committee (SLIS committees are generally composed of faculty, academic staff, and students).

The assessment report recommended additional assessment strategies, some of which are being

implemented on a course-by-course basis or in the process of curriculum revision. These additional strategies include:

- **Fieldwork/Practicum.** Students not only assess their own learning through fieldwork, but their faculty and site supervisors also have the opportunity to assess their learning. While SLIS has informally used feedback from fieldwork supervisors to inform program review, this year the director and members of the faculty have met formally with site supervisors to determine the strengths and weaknesses of our program as they manifest themselves in our students.
- **Portfolios.** A number of courses have begun using portfolio assessment as a means to evaluate students' integration of material learned. Adoption of portfolio assessment as a strategy for the entire program is still under study.
- **Graduate/employer surveys.** SLIS will survey employers and graduates in the 1998-99 school year as a part of the re-accreditation self-study and will consider making it a regular (perhaps triennial) event.

#### **Current Assessment Focus**

Over the past several years, SLIS has revised its required core courses in an effort to keep up with changes in the field, to provide an adequate background for emerging new specialties, and to cope with reductions in the numbers of teaching faculty. For various reasons, neither faculty nor students have been entirely happy with the revisions. Through exit interviews, course evaluations, and student and faculty discussion in the curriculum committee it became obvious that the core needed to be re-examined. Thus this year the curriculum committee has undertaken a thorough assessment of the core. Various strategies have been used for this purpose.

First, in July 1997, the director of SLIS invited librarians from around the state to come to the School to share their vision of the needs of professionals for the future. While there were few surprises, the professionals' responses pointed up areas of the curriculum that need emphasis. Second, the curriculum committee asked all the instructors who had taught courses within the core during the last two to three years to share their syllabi and describe what they were trying to accomplish with each aspect of the syllabus--which SLIS curricular objectives their course was designed to meet and how. Third, the School hired an independent consultant to conduct a series of focus group interviews with first and second year SLIS students (49 students participated) to determine strengths and weaknesses of the core courses from their perspective. Finally, a group of practicing professionals who have supervised a number of SLIS students in their field projects met and were asked to identify core knowledge, skills, and attitudes for professionals today and to reflect on SLIS students' relative strengths or weaknesses in these areas. The data from these various sources have been synthesized into a report which will be presented first to the Advisory Council, which meets in May 1998, for their input, and finally to the SLIS faculty for action.

Some of the results of the assessment will be implemented immediately. For example, the faculty discovered that we have not adequately explained the structure of the curriculum and the purposes of the core. This problem is easily remedied through improved information at our student orientation and through graphic representations of the curriculum structure within our web site and on bulletin boards in common areas of the School.

### **Summary**

Because it is a professional school accredited by an outside agency and concerned with the placement of our students in professional positions after graduation, the School of Library and Information Studies uses various assessment approaches on an ongoing basis. We evaluate student learning in courses through a variety of strategies and assess the effectiveness of our overall program through the accreditation process, gathering statistics for the purpose of comparison and charting progress toward targets, placement success of graduates, and constant feedback from practitioners. From time to time, such as during reaccreditation or when a core curriculum revision is needed, we employ multiple strategies that can inform our decision-making process as we constantly strive to improve our program.

Submitted on behalf of the faculty  
By Louise S. Robbins, Director  
May 17, 1998