

ASSESSMENT IN THE SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION STUDIES:
PLAN AND ACTIVITIES
May 2006

The School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS) offers two graduate degrees—the Master of Arts and the Ph.D.—and a specialist certificate. The master’s program leads to a professional degree, which is accredited by the American Library Association. The majority of our assessment efforts are of necessity focused on this program, which enrolls about 200 FTE students. During the 2005-2006 academic year, we will graduate 91 master’s degree students; According to the *Data Digest* in only one year out of the past ten have we not been one of the five producers of master’s degrees in the university. Our students work toward positions of many kinds in school, university, corporate, and medical libraries, archives, research organizations, and Internet-based companies. Our doctoral students number about 20 at any time, and we generally have one or two students pursuing additional specialization through the advanced studies certificate.

The goals and objectives of our master’s and doctoral programs follow, as found in our program planning guides:

Goal of the MA Program

Graduates of the master’s of arts degree program will have knowledge, skills, and understandings sufficient for the practice of librarianship and information service at a basic professional level in a technologically and culturally diverse global society. The MA program will also provide a foundation, including relevant concepts from fields outside library and information studies, upon which students can build further competence and specialization.

Objectives

A. All graduates will:

Demonstrate understanding of theoretical and historical perspectives that provide a critical grounding for practice, including and not limited to:

- Theories of information and information seeking behavior
- Theories, concepts, and issues in the organization of and access to information
- History of American librarianship, reading, information technology in society
- Theories and issues of the relationship of information and power

Demonstrate professional, technical and technological proficiencies, including research skills, which make them job-ready and confident in their abilities to keep up with the demands of a rapidly changing environment, including and not limited to:

- Knowledge of all types and formats of information sources and the ability to evaluate them
- Familiarity with technical services and public services and how they work together
- High level of skill at negotiating information needs from the reference interview to community analysis
- Competency with software and hardware that provides the foundation for confidently and quickly learning new systems and programs

Understand and practice good teamwork and communication skills, and demonstrate a reflective, problem-solving mindset, and the creative vision to take on and grow with leadership roles, including and not limited to:

- Ability to work effectively in groups and with diverse people
- Ability to give excellent presentations and facilitate meetings effectively
- Ability to write an effective memo, review, process documentation, policy, plan, summary report, annotation

Demonstrate understanding of formal and informal information policies and ethics from the global to the local level, and possess the strong service ethic and commitment to intellectual freedom required to cope with the necessary tensions pervading information provision, including and not limited to:

- Knowledge of organizational, governmental, and international policy
- Understanding of societal communication processes, including scholarly communication
- Commitment to excellent customer service

B. Knowledge, skills, and understandings beyond the foundation level sufficient to practice library and information services at the basic professional level in a context or contexts chosen by the student, such as:

- Library and information services for a particular client group, context, or type of agency (e.g., children, small public libraries, the disadvantaged, humanities scholars)
- Library and information services within a particular functional area or type of service (e.g., cataloging and classification, reference services, collection management)¹

The doctoral program in library and information studies is designed to meet two major professional needs: (a) the development of the body of principles and theory that will elaborate and make effective the field of library and information studies, and (b) the preparation of research-competent scholars who will exercise their understanding and skills in a diversity of teaching and research functions in the field.²

Accreditation consists of periodic self-studies followed by site visits. Because of this cycle and the university's program review, which we completed in conjunction with our 2000 accreditation self-study, we have paid a great deal of attention to assessment, and in particular, to Outcomes Assessment, which is stressed by our accrediting agency.³

In 1997, under then director James Krikelas, the School adopted an Assessment Plan. This plan highlighted current, ongoing assessment approaches and suggested implementing several others. To date, all have been implemented except portfolio assessment, for which we received an assessment grant in 2004-2005, and which is now being piloted by a group of master's students.

The SLIS Assessment Plan includes:

- Direct indicators: Student learning is measured against stated goals and objectives of the program through embedded testing, student evaluations of teaching; class-specific student portfolios (mandated by the Department of Public

¹ From Program Planning Guide for the M.A. degree .Approved by the Faculty 2/25/04.

² From Doctoral Student Program Planning Guide, Revised and approved, May 2005.

³ Our program review used our accreditation self-study for the master's program; the doctoral program and continuing education were reviewed by a campus committee.

Instruction for school librarians and used as well for evaluation of field work); performance evaluations by field project supervisors, and rarely, pre-and post-testing.

- Self-study and accreditation, which includes ongoing surveys of graduates and their employers.
- Advisory Council: this group of graduates and friends of the School meets usually once per year. This year, we have focused on development and fund-raising, and our committee has assisted with that. In addition, our Alumni Association Board serves to assist us in monitoring our performance.
- 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 success from year-to-year and in relation to other schools and the field as a whole. Cumulative results from all ALA-accredited schools are published annually in *Library Journal*.
- Faculty review of program objectives and curriculum. Program objectives are reviewed at least annually at the first faculty meeting of the year. The curriculum is then reviewed for how well it meets those program objectives. Concerns arising out of the review are referred to the appropriate committee.
- Exit interviews. The director (or sometimes another faculty member or a doctoral student who is skilled in focus group interviews) conducts exit interviews with graduates. Students self-select to participate.
- Feedback from field project supervisors. Feedback on the program, rather than an individual student, is not gathered systematically every year, but is gathered every few years in a systematic way through focus group and one-on-one interviews. Every year, however, one-on-one interviews are conducted with field project supervisors regarding the performance of individual students as well as ways in which the field work experience could be improved.

The plan also proposed portfolio assessment, which we have not yet implemented except in the School Library Media Specialist licensure area, largely because of its heavy time commitment. Nevertheless, we believe that this type of assessment is becoming more and more important as competencies such as leadership and advocacy are being highlighted by employers. Our students need avenues through which to document skills and knowledge they learn through both the classroom and extracurricular activities.

Assessment activities the past three years.

1. Development and implementation of a portfolio assessment of school library media competencies. This process was mandated by law and new licensure standards. Madge Klais, with the assistance of a project assistant hired through an assessment grant, identified needed competencies within each of the courses, and their corresponding assignments, and developed rubrics for gauging levels of competencies for each required area. This was a very difficult and time consuming task, but the school library media specialist (SLMS) students appear to take this very seriously. Professor Klais signs off on each one as they complete their requirements, and certifies them to the state for licensure.

2. Because portfolio assessment was the one area of our plan we had not implemented, a second assessment grant strove to build on the SLMS portfolio concept. Upon closer examination, it became clear that the variety of career goals and diversity of background of our students—as well as the small size of our faculty—necessitated a flexible and less labor intensive process. Following exploration of other LIS programs' portfolio models, we proposed a pilot project for the current year. The portfolio committee should be reporting at the next curriculum committee meeting.

3. Last year we surveyed graduates from the classes of 1999 through 2002, using a web-based survey very comparable to the paper/web-based survey we used prior to our last accreditation visit in 2000, which covered the years 1993-1998. Next year we plan to survey the 2003 and 2004 classes. In addition we surveyed the employers of those graduates, if we were able to identify them, and will repeat that next year using the same survey. We also surveyed current students. There has been a preliminary analysis of the completed surveys. While we work immediately to deal with glaring deficits if there are any, the results will inform the work of the faculty, especially in revising the curriculum in the coming year. In addition, we will compare the merged findings with next year's and compare with the results from our last accreditation, to see if we have improved areas of weakness. The biggest challenge in implementing assessment plans is finding the resources to make changes based on the findings. For example, we consistently hear that our core classes are too large for a graduate school, but if we split those classes up, we would be unable to offer an appropriate array of electives with a faculty as small as ours.

Since we will have a much larger faculty next year, we will be able to refocus on needed curriculum revision as indicated by our various assessments.

4. Since we were launching our master's program in a distance mode in partnership with the Prairie Area Library System in Illinois, we secured a modest amount of funding to do some comparative assessment of our distance versus our face-to-face model.

In short, we have a fully developed and active assessment program which informs our curriculum, our advising, and our program development.

Submitted for the faculty
Louise S. Robbins
May 2006