

ASSESSMENT IN THE SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION STUDIES:
PLAN AND ACTIVITIES
July 2008

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 that is accredited by the American Library Association. The majority of our assessment efforts are of necessity focused on this program. We enroll a total of 255 students, 138 of whom are full time. According to our Graduate School profile, we graduated 95 master’s degree students during the 2006-2007 year; according to the *Data Digest* in only one year out of the past ten have we not been one of the top 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. The largest number of our graduates go to work in academic libraries, with public libraries the second largest destination. According to the Wisconsin Alumni Association, just under half of our graduates remain in Wisconsin. Our doctoral students number 15-20 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

The Master of Arts (MA) degree program aims to provide students with the values, skills and knowledge to enter the information professions, and in particular to:

1. Understand the characteristics of, and interactions among, information, information technologies, and the people who provide and use these sources and services, from all segments of a multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual society;
2. Comprehend the philosophies and uphold the principles of information ethics, and ethical information policies;
3. Aspire to leadership in a continuously changing field;
4. Envisage and plan how to meet the varied and changing information needs of individuals and groups in a global society;
5. Provide public service through continuing education programs, consulting services for library and information centers, and participation in professional organizations;
6. Promote excellence in research contributions to the base of theoretical and practical knowledge in libraries and archives, and in information studies.

Students who successfully complete the Master of Arts degree in Library and Information Studies demonstrate knowledge, understanding of, and proficiency in:

1. Theoretical and historical perspectives that provide a critical grounding for practice, including theories, concepts, and issues in the organization of and access to information, the history of American librarianship, reading, information technology in society, and theories and issues of the relationship of information and power;
2. Professional, techniques and technologies, including research skills, 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, and competency with software and hardware that provides the foundation for confidently and quickly learning new systems and programs;
3. The practice of good teamwork and communication skills, a reflective, problem-solving mindset, and the creative vision to take on and grow with leadership roles, including the ability to work effectively in groups and with diverse people, to give excellent presentations and facilitate meetings, and effectively to write planning and other administrative documents;
4. Formal and informal information policies and ethics from the global to the local level, a strong service ethic and commitment to intellectual freedom required to cope with the necessary tensions pervading information provision, including knowledge of organizational, governmental, and international policy, understanding of societal communication processes, including scholarly communication, and commitment to excellent service;
5. Library and information services for a particular client group, context, or type of agency (e.g., children, small public libraries, the disadvantaged, humanities scholars);
6. Library and information services within a particular functional area or type of service (e.g., cataloging and classification, reference services, collection management)¹

Goals of the PhD Program

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

¹ * Goal and objectives of the master's program, revised and adopted March 2007

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.

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. Our deliberation on portfolio assessment is described below.

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 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, the Council reflected on changes in our curriculum, especially information literacy instruction and management skills. They also emphasized the opportunity for SLIS to branch out into various forms of online education, both for the master's degree and for continuing education. They helped us think about succession planning. In addition, our Alumni Association Board, which meets four times a year, 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 or staff 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

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

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.

- 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. Continued to implement portfolio assessment of school library media competencies. This process was mandated by law and new licensure standards.
2. Because portfolio assessment was the one area of our plan we had not implemented, a 2005 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 2006. Following the report of the portfolio committee, the faculty decided not to implement school wide on a formal basis, although we will encourage students to build individual portfolios.
3. In 2005 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. In 2007, we surveyed the 2003 and 2004 classes. In addition we surveyed the employers of those graduates, if we were able to identify them. We also surveyed current students in both 2006 and 2007.

A major concern that emerged from the surveys was the redundancy found in some of the core courses. A second was that neither school library media licensure students nor archives students had enough room in their programs for electives, since there were so many required courses. The curriculum committee has taken these issues seriously and has revised the core, reducing redundancy, and restructured the curriculum to allow much more choice. In the fall we implement a three-tiered curriculum: a first tier of three required core courses; a second tier of strongly recommended courses from which at least nine credits must be chosen; and a third tier of electives from which students can build a specialty.

4. During this past year we have looked carefully at the operation of our distance program and at the process for hiring lecturers for all aspects of our program. We looked, for example, at whether there was a significant difference in the grading of distance

courses in relation to face-to-face courses. There was not. We did find, however, that short term staff tended to give slightly higher grades than full-time faculty—but only slightly. We have begun the process of providing for a certain number of ongoing adjuncts who can become expert at the courses they are teaching.

5. Perhaps our most significant assessment activity of the past two years was our preparation for re-accreditation by the American Library Association. Starting in the spring of 2006 we began an examination of the School in the light of the ALA Standards for Accreditation. This resulted in

- A reaffirmation of our Mission Statement and a revision of the Goal and Objectives of the Master's Degree Program (Standard I. Mission, Goals and Objectives).
- A close look at the curriculum with the assistance of students and practitioners who participate in the curriculum committee as described above and a probing discussion around our distance program (Standard II. Curriculum).
- A close look at the accomplishments of the faculty and issues and concerns around adequate support for short term staff, as well as a discussion of the direction in which we need to go with new hires as senior faculty retire; a recognition of our need to do better with grant proposal writing (Standard III. Faculty).
- A reaffirmation of our desire to recruit a more diverse student body, as well as to develop additional sources of funding for all students. According to the Graduate School's Profile of SLIS, 11% of our students in Fall 2007 were minority students, an accomplishment of which we are proud. In addition, we continue to work at improving advising (Standard IV, Students).
- An appreciation of the support we receive from the College of Letters & Science and from our alumni, who have provided us with some flexibility through their generous contributions to the UW Foundation on our behalf. We recognize we cannot let up on development. In addition, it is essential that we continue to do succession planning as Robbins intends to retire in August 2009 (Standard V. Administration and Financial Support).
- Our identifying a need for expanded computer lab space; we are currently upgrading our lab through a lab modernization grant and adding laptop space in the library (Standard VI. Physical Resources and Facilities).

Our program presentation (attached) was published and sent to the Committee on Accreditation and to the members of the External Review Panel who visited in October, 2007. Although we were unhappy with the quality of the visit and visitors, the process is generally a useful one, in that we are required to look at every aspect of the School and its master's program.

Submitted for the faculty
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