3-2016

Are Library Science Programs Preparing New Librarians? Creating a Sustainable and Vibrant Library Community

Mandi Goodsett  
*Cleveland State University*, a.goodsett@csuohio.edu

Amanda Koziura  
*Case Western Reserve University*

Follow this and additional works at: https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/msl_facpub

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Repository Citation

https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/msl_facpub/125

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Michael Schwartz Library at EngagedScholarship@CSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michael Schwartz Library Publications by an authorized administrator of EngagedScholarship@CSU. For more information, please contact library.es@csuohio.edu.
Are Library Science Programs Preparing New Librarians? Creating a Sustainable and Vibrant Librarian Community

Mandi Goodsett
Performing Arts & Humanities Librarian, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University, Cleveland, OH, USA

Amanda Koziura
Digital Learning & Scholarship Librarian, Kelvin Smith Library, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH, USA

With the ALA Committee on Accreditation’s recent re-evaluation of its standards, and the flood of articles being published on the changing job

© Mandi Goodsett and Amanda Koziura
Address correspondence to Mandi Goodsett, Michael Schwartz Library, RT110-D, Cleveland State University, 2121 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115, USA. E-mail:a.goodsett@csuohio.edu
market for librarians, the topic of library and information science (LIS) education continues to remain one of heated discussion. The careers that LIS graduates follow after graduation vary considerably, leading some to wonder what really defines library and information science as a field. This discussion is also particularly relevant for LIS graduates who struggle to find positions after graduating despite employers stating there is a lack of qualified candidates (Bonfield, 2011). This raises the question: What gaps exist between the skills employers require from potential employees and those which LIS students gain in school?

This study is based on a survey of 581 information professionals and LIS students, through which the perceptions of librarians at various stages of their careers—especially recent LIS graduates—are revealed. The information gathered in this study will be of use to library school administrators and faculty, those in libraries responsible for hiring and/or training new LIS professionals, recent LIS graduates, those in LIS graduate programs, and those considering which LIS program to attend.

The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How do librarians, especially recent LIS graduates, perceive the effectiveness of their LIS education in preparing them for their first position?
2. What could be done to improve LIS education to better meet the needs of new librarians?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of the LIS education and its effectiveness in preparing new librarians has emerged as a topic of contention in the LIS field a number of times in the past. While the current discussions about LIS education bring new issues to light, many of the concerns presently debated have their roots in previous discussions, and their persistence in the professional conversation is telling.

A HISTORICAL CRISIS

One peak in the tensions about the LIS degree occurred in the mid-2000s, beginning with Gorman’s controversial opinion piece, titled “Whither library education?” (2004). In the article, Gorman argues that library schools are being overtaken by information science and information studies courses, which are “at best, peripheral to professional library work, and, at worst, inimical to it” (p. 377). He attributes this trend to the focus of female LIS professors on traditional library topics and the growing influx of male professors who
focus their teaching on information science. He also points out that librarianship as a profession has historically had difficulty defining its core values and deciding whether LIS education should be about “education or training” (i.e., theory or practice) (p. 377). This led, in Gorman’s view, to a disconnect between what is taught in library school and what librarians actually do in practice, as well as a disconnect between “pure research,” presented by LIS educators, and the “how we did it good” research often presented by LIS graduates and library professionals (p. 377).

Gorman’s opinion piece led to a flurry of responses by the library science community, including a direct attack on the piece by Dillon and Norris in their article, “Crying Wolf: An Examination and Reconsideration of the Perception of Crisis in LIS Education” (2005). These authors point out that the “crisis” described by Gorman is, in fact, a perception that has existed a number of times in the past when the profession was truly struggling, especially during the 1980s, when a large number of LIS schools closed their doors and the number of graduating professionals greatly decreased. The authors also examined Gorman’s claims about the gender of LIS professionals and its relation to the subject areas being taught in LIS education, attempting to provide the supporting data that Gorman did not. Through careful sampling and evaluation of LIS professors’ research concentrations, the authors found that there were actually more females teaching information science-oriented courses than males. In addition, Gorman’s concerns about information science becoming a more central focus of LIS education have certainly come to pass in many LIS programs. However, Dillon and Norris argue, this is only presented by Gorman in a negative light due to his sense of discomfort with the influx of technological advances in the mid-2000s and the occasionally disorienting changes accompanying them (2005). At that time, almost a third of LIS programs accredited by the ALA no longer had the word “library” in their titles (Dillon & Norris, 2005, p. 296). Time, however, would show that a focus on data, information science, and information technology was inevitable for the LIS profession if it was to continue and thrive.

However, concerns about the balance between theory and practice in LIS education remain. Dillon and Norris (2005) found flaws in many of Gorman’s claims, but maintained that there is inconsistency in the quality and rigor of LIS programs. This discrepancy, they argue, is also found in the preparedness and quality of graduates of LIS programs in the United States. Their proposed solution is not a change in accrediting standards or a push to increase the level of research performed by practitioners, but an increase in confidence and a sense of authority by the profession in addressing both theory and practice in the preparation of LIS students.

Holt and Strock also address the supposed LIS “crisis” of the mid-2000s in a Library Journal article titled, “The Entry-Level Gap” (2005). The crisis described in their article is a lack of entry-level jobs for graduates juxtaposed
with a perceived lack of hirable candidates by library administrators. By analyzing nearly 900 job advertisements, Holt and Strock found very few positions that seemed to be directed at new librarians, and, according to position requirements, only 11% were even available to new librarians. The authors also found that recent LIS graduates often observe a disconnect between their own expectations of LIS education and what ALA accreditation standards require. Graduates experience a harsh awakening when they graduate, the authors argue, and, not knowing the importance of gaining experience in school and subsequently facing a competitive market, they find themselves unable to get a job. New librarians are valuable because they provide the workplace with new ideas, enthusiasm, and up-to-date knowledge of trends in the profession. Losing these motivated new professionals to another field due to frustrations with a lack of preparation from LIS programs and unanticipated competition would be a loss for the profession. Holt and Strock’s recommendations for avoiding this loss include career training or mentoring for all graduating LIS students, a required experience component in the LIS curriculum, and a more welcoming attitude toward new LIS graduates by hiring libraries.

Since the discussion about LIS education in the mid-2000s, deliberations about the LIS degree began to gain momentum again in the early 2010s. Many studies at that time examined the job market for LIS students (Reeves & Hahn, 2010; Triumph & Beile, 2014), the knowledge and skills of LIS graduates (Attebury & Finnell, 2009; Westbrock & Fabian, 2010; Riley-Huff & Rholes, 2011), the effectiveness of various aspects of LIS programs (Ferrer-Vinent & Sobel, 2011; Sche, 2012; Welch, 2014), and the perceptions of new LIS graduates (Combes, Hanisch, Carroll, & Hughes, 2011, Creel & Pollicino, 2012).

THE JOB MARKET FOR NEW LIBRARIANS

Job market studies throughout the 2000s have demonstrated a less than encouraging employment outlook for new LIS graduates, but the market has become especially difficult in the past few years. In 2012, a Forbes article named the library and information science degree the worst to earn that year, citing both the low average salary and slow estimated growth in the field (Smith, 2012). These statistics are backed up by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, which predicts slower than average growth for the profession in the coming years and warns jobseekers that they “may face strong competition for jobs … as many people with master’s degrees in library science compete for a limited number of available positions” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). This apparent shrinking of the profession has affected many LIS graduates, and has led others to call for changes in the
structure of the LIS degree. These suggested changes range from decreasing the number of students graduated, to updating the skills that graduates bring to the job market, to broadening the range of positions for which the LIS degree prepares graduates.

Tewell’s 2012 article effectively captures a contemporary snapshot of the job-market situation for new librarians. Focusing primarily on employment opportunities for new academic librarians, Tewell used over 20 different aggregators to collect job advertisements over the course of one year. Positions were categorized as entry-level if they did not require more than a year of experience, and if they did not require experience that a typical recent graduate would not possess. Using these criteria, almost 75% of all positions were not classified as entry-level, and more than 57% required more than a year of experience. To determine if, of the few entry-level positions available, entry-level librarians were being hired into these positions, Tewell conducted a follow-up e-mail survey of 50 randomly-selected positions he had classified as entry-level in his initial research. Each hiring library was asked to describe the amount of experience the hired librarian had acquired before accepting the position, and 25 of 33 respondents reported that they had hired someone with more than one year of experience. This demonstrates the low likelihood that entry-level positions are filled by job-seekers with entry-level experience. Without having gained a fairly significant amount of experience, LIS graduates face a “potentially insurmountable challenge,” according to Tewell’s findings (2012, p. 422).

Library Journal’s annual “Placements & Salaries” report for 2014 echoes the findings of Tewell’s study, showing that LIS graduates must be flexible and patient in order to find success in the job hunt (Maata, 2014). Increasingly, job titles reflect the growing focus on digital content, user experience, and library instruction. Graduates are expected to have skills in these areas upon entering the job market, as well as plenty of professional experience. As one participant in the Library Journal survey remarked, “You are on the job hunt from the moment you enter into your MLIS program” (Maata, 2014). While the market seems to be turning around (unemployment for LIS graduates had dropped to 4.3% and post-graduate job search length had shortened to an average of 4.2 months), the number of graduates who are leaving the profession to find jobs elsewhere has also increased considerably (Maata, 2014).

The literature clearly suggests that new graduates face a difficult job market. The fact that, of the few positions available to new professionals, many will be given to experienced candidates only compounds the issue. The LIS degree does not seem to be enough for potential employers; in order to have a chance in the competitive job market, new graduates must also have gained experience in a library.
LIS CURRICULUM

In 2009, the ALA Executive Board released the Core Competences for Librarianship statement for graduates of ALA-accredited LIS programs (ALA Executive Board). The report acknowledged the need for these competencies because of the “perceived gap between what is taught in ALA-accredited LIS programs and the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed for work in the libraries of the 21st century” (2009, p. 5). ALA’s formation of a task force to create a set of core competencies for LIS graduates reveals the profession’s deepening concern about the curriculum of the LIS degree and the skills gained by LIS students in a rapidly changing library world. Even after the creation of these core competencies for LIS graduates, there remains a lack of consensus about the core skills and ideas LIS students should learn (Creel & Pollicino, 2012).

At the core of these discussions regarding the LIS curriculum lies the debate between theory and practice as the foundation for LIS education. Recent graduates seem to value hands-on courses and opportunities to gain experience, and potential employers support this attitude by soliciting job-seekers with more experience (Creel & Pollicino, 2012). However, others worry that, without a focus on theory, students will lack the necessary skills to adapt to new environments, which are inevitable in such an unstable, technology-driven field (Moran, 2001).

For some, the answer lies in teaching LIS students skills that have become central to the library work place, such as the ability to work with technology and the ability to teach. Studies have shown that while LIS programs overall are offering more technology courses, many that might be considered essential, such as Web development, systems development, and systems application, are not present in a large number of LIS programs’ curricula (Riley-Huff & Rholes, 2011). Singh and Mehra also explored information technology and other technology competencies present in the curricula of the top 25 American LIS programs in their 2013 study. They found an increasing emphasis on technology in LIS programs as Riley-Huff and Rholes did, but also evidence that graduates still perceive a gap between their LIS education and the technology skills required in the workplace. The study concludes that the absence of IT courses is “a terrible disservice to our students . . . preventing them from staying competent and relevant” (Singh & Mehra, 2013, p. 229). The ability for LIS program curricula to be nimble when it comes to technology courses is essential to student success.

While most LIS programs still do not require students to take instruction courses, and some do not even offer such courses, potential employers greatly value new employees with teaching skills and training. In many ways, instruction has become just as essential to the LIS curriculum as other “traditional” areas, such as collection development and reference skills (Westbrock & Fabian, 2010). Brecher and Klipfel (2014) identify this lack of training as “a
fundamental problem within library education” (p. 45), and call for increased coursework both within and beyond LIS degree programs. The literature supports the growing concern that LIS programs are not responding sufficiently to this gap in the education of new librarians (Walter, 2006; Westbrook & Fabian, 2010; Brecher & Klipfel, 2014). Studies have also shown that while LIS graduates can find ways to improve their instruction skills outside of their LIS education, they expect and prefer to learn the skills as part of the LIS curriculum (Westbrook & Fabian, 2010).

The expectation that new graduates will have teaching and technology skills reflects a general sense of dissatisfaction by hiring libraries with graduates’ abilities to adapt to a changing field. A more general examination of the skills of LIS graduates by Mullins (2012) acknowledges that they face a “post-print” (p. 1) library world that often requires a new set of skills and abilities. As part of his study, Mullins asked ARL directors to indicate whether or not LIS programs are preparing students adequately to fill new roles that are emerging in the field. Library directors were generally found to have little confidence in LIS programs to prepare students, although they singled-out specific programs that seemed to do a better job addressing the new skill sets required of graduates. Overall, he reports there is a consensus among ARL directors that LIS programs’ preparation of graduates is uneven and, in some cases, greatly lacking (Mullins, 2012). Whatever core competencies LIS programs have embraced, they seem to be at odds with the competencies employers expect of new librarians.

On-the-job training seems to be expected in the field of library science, and the changing nature of the library world requires librarians to be able to learn new skills and content quickly and as-needed. However, these studies show that LIS graduates may not have the opportunity to learn on the job unless they have learned in the classroom or in a practicum first. Without changes to LIS education, graduates may face the job market lacking the skills and experience potential employers seek in new employees.

PERCEPTIONS OF NEW LIS GRADUATES

A central voice in the discussion of the LIS degree should belong to those who both experience an LIS education and attempt to apply it in job searches and in the workplace. Several articles published in the last 10 years address the perceptions of new graduates directly. One, conducted in 2004, focuses on new public librarians. The results show an optimism on the part of librarians regarding their LIS education and their jobs, but also an underlying dissatisfaction with the perceived dramatic differences among LIS programs, the lack of practical work required by most programs, and the absence of courses that would have benefitted these librarians in their new positions (Newhouse & Spisak, 2004). The survey also examines the attitudes of
new graduates toward their current positions, and the clear consensus from respondents is that, while LIS programs encourage their students to try new things, many employers shut this kind of experimentation down because “that won’t work/we’ve never done that before” (p. 45). While the focus of the article is on what libraries can do to accommodate new librarians, it also emphasizes that LIS programs need to embrace change in order to help bridge the apparent gap (Newhouse & Spisak, 2004).

Sare, Bales, and Neville (2012) address the issue again in their article, “New Academic Librarians and Their Perceptions of the Profession.” The authors interviewed recent graduates working at libraries in universities and colleges across the state of Texas in order to understand their perceptions of the field, their work, and the journey that brought them to librarianship. When asked about their graduate school experiences, many of the participants said that they had found earning their LIS degree to be relatively easy, and complained that they had “expected it to be more academic” (p. 190). Many of them were pleased, however, with the opportunities they had been given to network and explore different paths to librarianship. The participants also seemed to value librarianship as a hands-on activity, not as an abstract set of theories; they appreciated the practical elements of their degrees most, and even argued that they were unable to fully learn what it means to be a librarian until they become professionals in the workplace (Sare, Bales, & Neville, 2012).

While the job market and the skills and experiences of LIS students have been examined from many perspectives in the literature, no study has attempted to determine how LIS graduates from across the United States perceive the effectiveness of their programs. This study attempts to fill this gap in the literature, and touches on many of the issues illuminated by the analysis of job advertisements, the examination of the skills of new graduates, and the discernment of alternative approaches to the LIS curriculum. The results of this study capture only the perspectives of LIS graduates, not of the many other stakeholders in this complicated issue. However, the outpouring of responses to the initial survey of this study indicate that LIS graduates have strong feelings about this subject, and can offer important insights to LIS programs and hiring libraries about how to better prepare new members of the profession.

**METHODOLOGY**

To collect data about perceptions of LIS education, an online survey was hosted via a secure link at SurveyMonkey and distributed to various librarian listservs. The participants for the survey were solicited through the ALCTS-Announce listserv (the list service for the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services), the NMRT listserv (for the American Library Association’s
TABLE 1 SPSS software was used to calculate Cohen’s kappa coefficients, which measure inter-rater reliability. For each open-response question, only the codes assigned as “Priority One” and “Priority Two” by the researchers were compared, and no cross-priority comparison was carried out. A value greater than or equal to 0.700 indicates strong agreement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey question</th>
<th>Priority of code</th>
<th>Kappa value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.773</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New Members Round Table), the RUSA listserv (for the Reference and User Services Association), the AASL-Forum listserv (for the American Association of School Librarians), and the ILI listserv (the ALA Information Literacy list service). For a list of the survey questions, please see Appendix A.

By analyzing the open-ended survey question results, the researchers identified trends and descriptively coded them to identify larger themes. These codes, as well as their definitions, were developed by mutual agreement between the two researchers. All responses to the open-ended questions were coded by both researchers separately. Up to four codes could be assigned to each answer, and codes were ranked by researcher-determined priority (i.e., the code that the researcher felt applied most was considered Priority One, the second-most as Priority Two, etc.). See Appendix B for a list of the open response data codes used by the coders.

To ensure that the researchers agreed upon the interpretation of the data, SPSS software was used to calculate Cohen’s kappa coefficients, which measure inter-rater reliability. For each open-response question, only the codes assigned as Priority One and Priority Two by the researchers were compared, as there were few responses that required additional codes. No cross-priority comparison was carried out; Priority One codes from each researcher were compared only with each other, not with Priority Two codes, and vice versa. The resulting coefficients, shown in Table 1, were all calculated to be >0.70, thereby indicating strong agreement between the two researchers on their interpretation of the data.

Additionally, the researchers used the report functions from SurveyMonkey to create statistical graphs and figures, further illuminating trends in the data. For the open-response data, all results were limited to those claiming to be recent LIS graduates (i.e., those respondents who had completed their degrees within the past 5 years).

RESULTS

There were 581 respondents to our survey, 559 of whom indicated that they work in the United States. As Figures 1 and 2 show, 73% (n = 380)
FIGURE 1 Percent of responses from new librarians \((n = 295)\) by reported occupation. A “new librarian” is defined as a respondent with fewer than five years of post-graduate experience.

FIGURE 2 Reported professional experience of all survey respondents \((n = 547)\), with a “new librarian” defined as a respondent with fewer than five years of post-graduate experience, and an “experienced librarian” defined as a respondent with five or more years of post-graduate experience.
of respondents identified as academic librarians, 17% (n = 87) as public librarians, 6% (n = 30) as LIS students, and 11% (n = 59) as archivists, school librarians, or special collections librarians. A total of n = 57 contacts did not respond. Fifty-seven percent (n = 317) identified as librarians with fewer than five years of postgraduate experience, and all data discussed and shown in these figures are limited to this population of recent graduate respondents.

While the spread of responses was not even between schools, 51 of 60 institutions with ALA-accredited programs were represented in the sample, as shown in Figure 3. Figure 4 shows the format of the LIS degree earned by new librarian respondents, and Figure 5 shows the amount of time recent graduates spent looking for a professional position, either while a student or post-graduation. Figure 6 shows the elements of new librarian LIS programs that were required, while Figure 7 shows the elements that were offered optionally. In this context “work in a library/archive/special collections” is defined as any professional experience gained outside of a credit-bearing practicum.

When asked what respondents found most valuable about their education, by far the most common answer was hands-on experience, as seen in Figure 8. Of the 317 recent graduate respondents, 31% (n = 99) indicated that the opportunity to participate in a practicum or internship, volunteer, or work as a professional in a library was the most valuable aspect of their LIS degree. After hands-on experience, respondents found networking and theoretical courses to be most valuable. Many mentioned specific courses that they found to be valuable, such as courses on research methods, instruction, cataloging, and management/administration.

Figure 9 shows that the most commonly identified gap in LIS education, according to respondents, is, once again, opportunities for hands on work; 19% (n = 59) of respondents listed this as a gap in their LIS education, followed closely by 16% (n = 52) of respondents who felt their LIS education lacked courses in instruction. Many respondents also felt unprepared by their LIS programs to work with emerging technologies, and regretted the absence of management and administrative courses while earning their degree. Overall, the responses call for more practical, directly job-related courses, and additional opportunities to strengthen those skills in the workplace. Very few graduates commented about the lack of a thesis or culminating research project requirement in their LIS program, although an analysis shows that few LIS programs require this component for graduation. Respondents were also asked to describe activities they are currently, or have previously, participated in to fill perceived gaps in their LIS education, and the results are represented in Figure 10. Participants found participating in courses, both in person and online, to be the most valuable forms of remedial library education. A variety of other continuing education opportunities were mentioned by participants, including reading professional literature, networking,
attending webinars and conferences, and volunteering or participating in an internship. Approximately 19% (n = 60) of respondents indicated that they filled in gaps by teaching themselves or conducting personal research. This
FIGURE 4 LIS program format of earned degree reported by new librarian respondents (n = 300). A “new librarian” is defined as a respondent with fewer than five years of post-graduate experience.

indicates a breach not only in LIS education, but in the professional development support offered by libraries for new librarians, who may be forced to develop skills largely through self-education.

FIGURE 5 Amount of time new librarian respondents (n = 285) spent looking for a professional position post-graduation. A “new librarian” is defined as a respondent who graduated fewer than five years before the time of the survey. “Employed pre-LIS degree” is defined as professional library experience gained before beginning an LIS education program.
FIGURE 6  Required elements of LIS programs, as reported by new librarian respondents (n = 287). A “new librarian” is defined as a respondent with fewer than five years of post-graduate experience. “Work in a library/archive/special collections” is defined as any professional experience gained outside of a credit-bearing practicum.

DISCUSSION

The quantitative and qualitative (open-response) data of the survey revealed to the researchers several distinct overall themes, which are explored in more detail below. Each theme is framed as a discussion for further examination by the LIS community.

Online or In-Person

Comments from survey participants reveal that having an online option for completing an LIS degree is greatly valued by some students for its convenience and its ability to expose students to online learning technologies.
FIGURE 7 Availability of elements in LIS programs, as reported by new librarian respondents (n = 299). A “new librarian” is defined as a respondent with fewer than five years of post-graduate experience. “Work in a library/archive/special collections” is defined as any professional experienced gained outside of a credit-bearing practicum.

However, some online students—mostly those who were not already employed before beginning their degrees—found an online educational experience lacking in rigor and/or opportunities for networking. Whether or not online courses are indeed less pedagogically rigorous than face-to-face courses, online degrees seem to have a stigma with employers, and new graduates aren’t convinced of their effectiveness.
FIGURE 8 Arithmetical mean of researchers' code totals for responses to survey question #11: “What was most valuable about your LIS education?” Responses are limited to new librarians, defined as respondents with fewer than five years of post-graduate experience ($n = 275$).

Course Selection Freedom or Tracks

Participant responses differ about whether it is preferable to have the freedom to choose courses and explore new areas of librarianship, or whether it is better to have a track or specialization to guide students' course choices and provide them the necessary skills to be hirable. Participants also identify a number of courses that they found inadequate or unavailable in their LIS programs. The unavailability of instruction and research methods courses is mentioned most frequently, but graduates also wish they had had access to more courses in marketing, management, and technology.

Practical Experience or Theoretical Knowledge

The most heated discussion in the open comments related to the amount of practical knowledge or experience that should be required in a library school education. An overwhelming number of respondents commented on the value of obtaining practical experience during library school, even saying that library school should be structured around obtaining practical experience rather than learning theory and concepts. This is not a new idea, and it has been thoroughly explored in the literature (Newhouse &
FIGURE 9 Arithmetical mean of researchers’ code totals for responses to survey question #12: “If applicable, after being employed as a librarian, what do you feel was missing in the preparation your LIS education gave you?” Responses are limited to new librarians, defined as respondents with fewer than five years of post-graduate experience (n = 268).

FIGURE 10 Arithmetical mean of researchers’ code totals for responses to survey question #13: “What have you done to make up for the gaps in your LIS education, if any exist?” Responses are limited to new librarians, defined as respondents with fewer than five years of post-graduate experience (n = 269).
Respondents frequently referenced experience as an essential prerequisite for success in gaining employment post-graduation. However, recent graduates also found hands-on experience helpful for networking with working librarians, learning how library systems work, and, most of all, applying the theory discussed in classes. Many respondents did not seem to doubt the value of theory in library school programs, but instead questioned its value in the absence of practical experiences in which to contextualize it.

No Degree or More Rigorous Degree

Some survey respondents felt very strongly about LIS education and the directions it should take, suggesting that the LIS education needs to undergo drastic changes in the near future. Suggestions for how this might be done vary greatly, with some respondents arguing that the professional LIS degree could be completed as a bachelor’s degree, or entirely as an apprenticeship. Others argue that instead of scaling the LIS down, it needs to be made much more rigorous—accepting fewer students, requiring more demanding, research-based coursework, and addressing some of the issues of promotion and tenure that recent graduates find so difficult to face in their new positions.

CONCLUSION

There is much yet to be explored in this area of study, including, but not limited to how online LIS programs differ from on-campus programs in the preparation of their students for the workplace; how the availability of certain curricular tracks helps LIS students face a changing job market; whether LIS programs should be more rigorous in their curricula and acceptance policies; what perceptions hiring managers have about the skills LIS graduates bring to the job market; and whether or not the recent graduates who participate in surveys such as ours will have a different perspective in 5 or 10 years. Answers to these questions will help members of the LIS profession understand what might be done to better prepare new graduates for success.

There are a number of limitations to this study. The external validity of the study is threatened by the use of a voluntary, rather than a random, sample. The sample for the study consisted of respondents to a voluntary survey sent to several listservs; therefore, not every information professional had access to the survey, and only recipients with the time or proclivity to complete a survey responded. In addition, the results were limited to
the perspectives of newly-graduated librarians, not seasoned librarians with the benefit of hindsight. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the answers of participants were largely focused on whether or not elements of library school would—or did—lead to employment. This could have significant implications for how the views expressed by respondents should be interpreted.

It is important to consider the perspectives of the past when discussing LIS education. Are the current discussions about LIS education echoes of past ones which “cried wolf” about a crisis? Is there indeed a need for change in the structure of the LIS curriculum? The input from many stakeholders is needed to satisfactorily answer this question, but the consensus of recent LIS graduates seems to be an emphatic “yes.” New librarians bring value to the library profession, and it is worthwhile to contemplate how changes to LIS education could alleviate their struggles and help them succeed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank Evan Meszaros for his thorough copy editing and Ann Holstein for her assistance with SPSS calculations.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Survey Questions

1. Do you currently live in the United States?
   - Yes
   - No

2. What do you identify as?
   - academic librarian
   - public librarian
   - archivist
   - school librarian
   - special libraries librarian
   - library school student
   - other

3. Which of the following describes you?
   - library school student
   - new librarian (less than 5 years' experience)
   - experienced librarian (more than 5 years' experience)
   - retired

4. What school did you (will you) earn your LIS degree from?

5. Did you earn your degree online, in-person, mostly online, or mostly in person?
   - Online
   - Mostly online
   - In-person
   - Mostly in-person

6. Are you currently employed?
   - Yes
   - No

7. How long was your job search?

8. Which of the following things did/does your LIS education require?
   - Significant research assignment
   - practicum
   - work in a library/archive/special collections
   - research methods course
   - instruction course
   - teaching assistantship
   - subject specific courses

• variety of courses in diff. areas of librarianship
• advisor
• multiple advisors
• mentor
• job seeking help
• academic support
• opportunities to network with classmates
• specification/track

9. Which of the following things did/does your LIS education allow you to pursue?
• Significant research assignment
• practicum
• work in a library/archive/special collections
• research methods course
• instruction course
• teaching assistantship
• subject specific courses
• variety of courses in diff. areas of librarianship
• advisor
• multiple advisors
• mentor
• job seeking help
• academic support
• opportunities to network with classmates
• specification/track

10. What was most valuable about your LIS education?

11. If applicable, after being employed as a librarian what do you feel was missing in the preparation your LIS education gave you?

12. What have you done to make up for gaps in your LIS education, if any exist?

13. Other comments/concerns.

APPENDIX B
Open Response Data Codes

What was most valuable about your LIS education?

2. Hands-on work: Any work related to the field in a library, cultural institution, or other environment outside of the classroom. This includes all
volunteer positions, practicums, internships, and paid positions (student or professional).

3. Networking: Met and/or collaborated with faculty, fellow students, and/or professionals in the field. This could be in person or electronically through list-servs or other means.

4. Variety and availability of courses: The variety and availability of courses available in the LIS program. This includes the ability to gain exposure to a variety of fields through coursework, flexibility in choosing courses, and availability of courses of interest.

5. Concentrations: Having particular concentrations, dual-degree programs, or tracks available.

6. Technology: Exposure to and/or training in technology through coursework or other school-supported means.

7. Reference and liaison work: Exposure to and/or training in reference skills, liaison duties, and collection development, etc. through coursework or other school-supported means.

8. Instruction: Exposure to and/or training in information literacy instruction or other teaching skills through coursework or other school-supported means.

9. Management and administrative skills: Exposure to and/or training in management, leadership, project management, marketing, outreach, budgeting, grant writing, financial skills, etc. through coursework or other school-supported means.

10. Technical services skills: Exposure to and/or training in cataloging, e-resource management, interlibrary loan, etc. through coursework or other school-supported means.

11. Research methods: Exposure to and/or training in research methods through coursework or other school-supported means.

12. Professional development support: This includes financial support to attend conferences or workshops, availability of career services (includes resume review and interview preparation assistance), and offerings by the program or its student organizations on the topic of job preparedness, finding a job, and continuing education.

13. Professors: High quality professors; this includes both full-time and adjunct faculty. This incorporates both classroom and outside of class interactions, such as advisement and/or mentorship.

14. Degree: Simply being able to say you have the degree.

After being employed as a librarian, what do you feel was missing in the preparation your LIS education gave you?

2. Hands-on work: Any work related to the field in a library, cultural institution, or other environment outside of the classroom. This includes all volunteer positions, practicums, internships, and paid positions (student or professional).

3. Networking: Met and/or collaborated with faculty, fellow students, and/or professionals in the field. This could be in person or electronically through list-servs or other means.

4. Variety and availability of courses: The variety and availability of courses available in the LIS program. This includes the ability to gain exposure to a variety of fields through coursework, flexibility in choosing courses, and availability of courses of interest.

5. Concentrations: Having particular concentrations, dual-degree programs, or tracks available.

6. Technology: Exposure to and/or training in technology through coursework or other school-supported means.

7. Reference and liaison work: Exposure to and/or training in reference skills, liaison duties, and collection development, etc. through coursework or other school-supported means.

8. Instruction: Exposure to and/or training in information literacy instruction or other teaching skills through coursework or other school-supported means.

9. Management and administrative skills: Exposure to and/or training in management, leadership, project management, marketing, outreach, budgeting, grant writing, financial skills, etc. through coursework or other school-supported means.

10. Technical services skills: Exposure to and/or training in cataloging, e-resource management, interlibrary loan, etc. through coursework or other school-supported means.

11. Research methods: Exposure to and/or training in research methods through coursework or other school-supported means.

12. Professional development support: This includes financial support to attend conferences or workshops, availability of career services (includes resume review and interview preparation assistance), and offerings by the program or its student organizations on the topic of job preparedness, finding a job, and continuing education.

13. Nothing: There was nothing missing from the preparation given by LIS education.

**What have you done to make up for the gaps in your LIS education?**

1. Volunteer or intern: Any post-graduate work related to the field in a library, cultural institution, or other environment without pay.
2. Courses: This includes enrollment in additional graduate or undergradu-
ate courses (either within or outside the LIS field), MOOCs, continuing 
education courses, workshops, and webinars.
3. Attended conferences: Attended conference events in which professionals 
within the field share research and experiences either online or in-person.
4. Networking: Met and/or collaborated with faculty, fellow students, and/or 
professionals in the field. This could be in person or electronically through 
list-servs or other means.
5. Mentorship: Received guidance from a designated, more experienced in-
dividual in the field; includes observing or shadowing other librarians.
6. On the job training: Either self-taught or other training received while in 
the workplace. This includes all post-graduate temporary, part-time, or 
full-time paid positions, including internships with pay.
7. Literature: Kept up with publications in the field, both peer-reviewed or 
not. Following library blogs is included.
8. Committee work: Participated in committees at their own institution or in 
a professional organization, library-related or not.
9. No gaps: There were no gaps in LIS education to be addressed through 
professional development.