21st Century Information Workers: What Core Competencies Should MSIS Students Learn?

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Abstract
The day-to-day work of information workers charged with information creation, organization, presentation, preservation, analysis, and retrieval is changing dramatically because of rapid advances in technology, the ubiquitous availability of information, and the increasing diversity and globalization of users, patrons, and co-workers. Further, the jobs themselves are changing, such that information workers are not likely to focus on one traditional information task, but must integrate other knowledge and skills, such as data analysis (with large data) and social media. The array of jobs and tasks leads us to ask: what are the core competencies for all information studies students? The authors conducted a survey of more than 2,000 information professionals focusing on six information work roles (archivy, data analysis, librarianship, records/digital assets management, social media, and user experience) to find out about their day-to-day work and their recommendations for formal curriculum. In this special session, we will organize a lively discussion debating professionals' conflicting recommendations for formal iSchool curriculum.
Keywords: Information work, education, curriculum, core competencies in information studies

1   Purpose and Intended Audience: Exploration of Choices for MSIS Curriculum

Information work is changing due to the advances and increasing use of technologies, the ubiquitous availability of information to users, changing expectations of information experiences among users, the increasing diversity of users and co-workers, and the increasing need for information workers to perform multiple roles. This interactive session will allow iSchool educators and decision makers to explore how or if iSchool core curriculum should change, given the rapidly changing landscape of information work. The co-presenters conducted a survey of more than 2,000 information professionals in a variety of occupations asking them to describe specific work roles (archivy, data analysis, librarianship, records/digital assets management, social media, and user experience) and to give advice on curriculum for formal iSchool education. In thousands of open-ended comments, respondents presented conflicting views of what should be prioritized in School of Information curriculum. For example, conflicting views include:

- authentic, practical experiences should be part of every course
- theory and improving analytical skill are most important for preparing students to work with constant change
- nothing is more important than technology, including the ability to write code
- specific technology learning is a waste of time, because it will always change—it's more important to teach people how to stay relevant
- understanding and serving users is the foundation of information studies
- being able to design effective information experiences, including physical spaces, is most important

- being able to manage and analyze data are the foundation of information work today
- practical management skills are critical, including budgeting, negotiating, leadership, and teamwork, regardless of organizational type
- understanding how to learn the needs of diverse users and serve them is essential
- marketing the information knowledge set is critical (i.e., knowing how to explain to a variety of stakeholders how information work makes a difference)

We will create an environment in which debate and discussion engenders learning from each other so that curriculum providers can better prepare students for leadership in information professions.

2   Proposed Activities: Role Playing, Debate, and Discussion

Using survey responses as cases, the authors will present a series of opposing work role and curriculum recommendation vignettes, inviting the audience to exchange their views and knowledge after each. The goal is not to encourage contentiousness, but to engender dialogue about the changing nature of the professional roles for which we prepare students and how iSchools can improve educational practice. We welcome suggestions from the SIE co-chairs on making sure that the format allows all voices to be heard and co-learning is maximized.

3   Significance to the Field

As educators, we have an ethical obligation to the professionals we prepare and to society. Opening this discussion to a broad audience of participants is critical for gathering and sharing a wide range of ideas, serving our stakeholders, and enhancing the standing of information education.

4   Length: 90 Minutes