

# Are iSchools More Adaptable than Library Schools? Analysis of LIS Student Engagement in Programmatic Changes and Improvements

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## Abstract

The iSchools organization and its 65 member schools frequently reference their roles and responsibilities as leaders in information education. With the iSchools' commitment to advance the information field (iField) through collaborative academic and research endeavors, it would logically follow that individual iSchool constituents are engaged in promoting improvements to their own educational programs, thus strengthening the future of the iField. This poster examines how iSchools and non-iSchools engage their master's student constituents in implementing programmatic changes and improvements to their library and information science (LIS) degree program(s). The results of a content analysis of 15 American Library Association (ALA) accreditation self-study documents were compared based on iSchool membership status to determine whether iSchools were more likely to implement programmatic changes and improvements based on student engagement than non-iSchools. Our results revealed little difference between how iSchools and non-iSchools use LIS student engagement to implement programmatic changes and improvements.

**Keywords:** Accreditation; content analysis; LIS education; student engagement; systematic planning

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## 1 Introduction

iSchools use a particular discourse to frame their role in educating library and information science (LIS) professionals. From early on, iSchools have obligated themselves to be LIS education leaders through collaborative partnerships between schools (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003). iSchools are described as having flexible, innovative curricula to accommodate their students' diverse goals (Unsworth, 2009) and better educate leaders in the dynamic information field (iField) (Larsen, 2009). Membership in the iSchools organization is considered an aspirational marker that signifies the quality and impact of its members' research and educational pursuits (Bruce, 2011). The iSchools organization has codified this discourse of leadership, collaboration, innovation, and impact through its vision and goals (iSchools, n.d.-a). While iSchool applicants must demonstrate their research-based qualifications for membership, the iSchools organization does not assess whether applicants' organizational operations align with the iSchools' codified vision and goals (iSchools, n.d.-b).

## 2 Motivation

This poster examines whether the iSchools' discourse was reflected in schools' internal organizational operations and programmatic decision-making processes. We draw upon a study of master's LIS student engagement in systematic planning, which explores the methods and outcomes of student engagement in program planning, assessment, development, and improvement (Lieutenant & Kules, forthcoming). Based on the iSchools' discourse, we posit that iSchools are more likely to implement programmatic changes and improvements based on student engagement than non-iSchools.

## 3 Methodology

We performed a qualitative content analysis of 15 *Program Presentations*; of these, 10 were iSchool members at the time of their comprehensive accreditation review. *Program Presentations* are comprehensive self-study documents United States and Canadian LIS programs are required to produce when seeking American Library Association (ALA) accreditation. The ALA's *Standards for Accreditation in Library and Information Studies* emphasize constituent engagement in systematic planning, a broad-based, continuous improvement approach to education program planning (ALA, 2008, 2015). Thus, programs have a strong incentive to provide comprehensive explanations and examples of how their constituents, including students, have been engaged. *Program Presentations* were located online through the ALA's website and each programs' websites. We created a coding scheme with mutually exclusive

categories and definitions (Table 1) and used it to code specific examples of programmatic changes and improvements that were implemented, at least in part, due to master's LIS student engagement. The lead author coded all data using the coding scheme, and the contributing author coded a subset of the data to establish inter-rater reliability. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Coding results were segmented based on iSchool membership status and analyzed to produce the preliminary findings.

Coding Category	Selected Examples of Defined Topics and Themes
Mission, Goals, and Objectives	Vision, mission, goals, objectives, and program-level student learning outcomes statements
Assessment and Planning Processes	Assessment tools and methods; Governance bodies
Curriculum: Program-level	Overall curricular changes that impact all students: Degree specializations; Required courses; Graduation requirements
Curriculum: Course-level	Individual course changes: Assignments; Readings;
Faculty Affairs	Teaching, research, and service activities; Communication with students
Student Affairs and Services	Advising, placement, recruitment and admissions; Student performance evaluations; Communication of program information
Administration and Finances	Student financial aid and monetary support; Administrative head and staff activities
Physical and Digital Resources and Facilities	Classroom, study, and common spaces; Library resources and services; Online courses and learning platforms; Technology services and tools

Table 1. Abbreviated Coding Scheme Used to Classify Specific Changes and Improvements Based on Student Engagement

#### 4 Context

Table 2 presents median summary data on the schools in this study (ALA, 2014). One non-iSchool outlier was removed for three of the four data points (e.g. FTE ALA enrollment was more than double that of the other four non-iSchools combined). iSchools had substantially larger human and economic capital than non-iSchools, with median iSchool full-time faculty, full-time equivalent enrollment, and total income being three to four times that of the median non-iSchool.

	iSchools Median (n = 10)	Non-iSchools Median (n = 5)
FT Faculty	26.0	8.0
FTE ALA Enrollment (ALA-accredited degree programs)	221.3	127.0
FTE Enrollment (entire school, all programs)	266.7	127.0
Total Income	\$9,176,186.50	\$2,157,141.00

Table 2. Selected Statistical Data on Human and Economic Capital of Schools

#### 5 Results

Table 3 summarizes how LIS student engagement was used to implement programmatic changes and improvements, organized by total frequency. Most *Program Presentations* provided specific examples of changes to their curricula and student affairs and services, followed by physical and digital resources and facilities and assessment and planning processes, and faculty affairs and administration and finances. A greater percentage of iSchools provided specific changes to their curricula, physical resources, and administration and finances. A greater percentage of non-iSchools provided specific changes to their students, assessment and planning, and faculty. iSchools and non-iSchools were equally likely to provide specific changes to mission, goals, and objectives.

	Total <i>Program Presentations</i> (n = 15)	iSchool <i>Program Presentations</i> (n = 10)	Non-iSchool <i>Program Presentations</i> (n = 5)
Curriculum: Program-level	73% (11)	80% (8)	60% (3)
Curriculum: Course-level	73% (11)	80% (8)	60% (3)
Students	73% (11)	60% (6)	100% (5)
Physical Resources	67% (10)	70% (7)	60% (3)

Assessment and Planning	67% (10)	60% (6)	80% (4)
Faculty	20% (3)	10% (1)	40% (2)
Administration and Finances	20% (3)	30% (3)	0% (0)
Mission, Goals, and Objectives	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)

Table 3. *Program Presentations* Referencing Changes and Improvements Based on Student Engagement

Table 3 summarizes how student engagement was used to implement programmatic changes and improvements, organized by total frequency at the specific case-level. Case-level data reflects multiple changes made within a single category by a single *Program Presentation* (e.g., if one *Program Presentation* specifically references creating degree specializations and implementing a new core curriculum based on student engagement, this would count as two cases of program-level curriculum changes). iSchools ( $n = 10$ ) referenced a mean of 9.0 specific changes (SD: 4.78) and non-iSchools ( $n = 5$ ) referenced a mean of 10.2 specific changes (SD: 6.57), for a mean of 9.4 specific changes (SD: 5.23) in each *Program Presentation* ( $n = 15$ ). iSchools provided more mean specific changes to their curricula at the program-level, physical resources, assessment and planning, and administration and finances. Non-iSchools provided more mean specific changes to their curricula at the course-level, students, and faculty.

	Total Cases	Mean iSchool Cases	Mean Non-iSchool Cases
Curriculum: Program-level	39	2.8 (2.53)	2.2 (2.49)
Physical Resources	28	1.9 (1.85)	1.8 (1.79)
Curriculum: Course-level	25	1.2 (0.92)	2.6 (3.29)
Students	24	1.4 (1.71)	2.0 (1.22)
Assessment and Planning	18	1.3 (1.25)	1.0 (0.71)
Faculty	4	0.1 (0.32)	0.6 (0.89)
Administration and Finances	3	0.3 (0.48)	0.0 (0.00)
Mission, Goals, and Objectives	0	0.0 (0.00)	0.0 (0.00)
Total	141	9.0 (4.78)	10.2 (6.57)

Table 4. Specific Cases of Changes and Improvements Based on Student Engagement

These results are limited by the following factors:

- The 10 iSchools included in this study do not reflect the geographic or interdisciplinary scope of the iSchools organization's 65 members.
- 11 iSchool and 11 non-iSchool *Program Presentations* aligned with this study's timeframe; of these, 10 iSchool and 5 non-iSchool *Program Presentations* were published online at the time of data collection.
- *Program Presentations* may not document all programmatic changes and improvements.
- These initial quantitative findings can be complemented by additional qualitative analysis.

Nevertheless, our results provide an indication of the changes occurring within iSchools.

## 6 Discussion

Our preliminary results reveal little difference between how iSchools and non-iSchools use LIS student engagement to implement programmatic changes and improvements. While non-iSchools referenced more mean instances of specific course-level curricular changes, iSchools referenced more mean instances of specific changes to their assessment and planning processes and their overall program-level curriculum. This suggests that iSchools may have stronger outcomes assessment and systematic planning processes. Non-iSchools referenced more mean instances of specific changes to their student affairs and services than iSchools. Smaller FTE enrollments may provide non-iSchools more flexibility in adapting their student affairs and services than iSchools.

iSchools have more human and economic capital to implement changes and improvements than non-iSchools. Thus, the marginal difference between iSchools and non-iSchools indicates that iSchools may not be capitalizing on their resources as effectively and efficiently as they could. Ultimately, our results raise more questions than answers: Do iSchools experience difficulties in balancing the competing interests of ALA-accredited and non-ALA-accredited degree programs? Does specialized accreditation hinder iSchools from changing and improving their programs? Should the iSchools organization's

membership criteria also consider educational advancements within individual iSchools? These questions warrant further consideration, discussion, and research.

## 7 Conclusion

The evolving nature of the iField, increasing calls for accountability, and challenges in demonstrating the value of an iSchool education are unlikely to subside anytime soon. iSchools must balance the competing interests and needs of their constituents, institutions, and the iField. iSchools can draw strength from within and outside their respective schools by continuing their emphasis on collaboration across iSchools and disciplines. However, to prepare innovative and adaptable leaders who advance the mission of the iSchools organization and the iField, they must also ensure students are fully engaged in program development and provided opportunities to shape and improve their own educational programs.

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