

# A path towards LIS profession at the University of Milan

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to give a short overview of Library and Information Science teaching at the University of Milan from its beginning to the present. Starting in the forties with the first professor of Library science, the paper give information about period and activities of all the professor that succeeded in LIS teaching, and describe the current organization of studies after the Bologna Declaration in order to meet European criteria of internationalization.

Keywords: University of Milan, Library and Information Science, LIS education, Bologna Process, Bologna Declaration, Internationalization

The University of Milan was founded in 1925, and soon after its founding, in the forties, Library and Information Science teaching was activated among the courses offered; the teachers of this course were some of the most important figures of scholars and librarians in the national landscape.

During those years, in Italy, librarians were mainly scholars and men of letters understanding the meaning and value of legacy and heritage they had to preserve and safeguard; these librarians and scholars became the first library science professors, they managed to add techniques to knowledge and to write handbooks for vocational courses and training, as well as high level textbooks for University programmes.

The first teachers of library science at the University of Milan were in fact scholars and high level librarians as well as directors of important libraries, even national ones. As far as LIS teaching in our University is concerned, we can say that the first course, called *Bibliography and Librarianship* began around the forties, and it was held by professor Alessandro Cutolo who taught for twenty seven years until he retired. Previously he was professor of Medieval History, a friend of Benedetto Croce, one of the greatest Italian thinkers, a philosopher, historian, writer and politician; later, professor Cutolo was also one of the founders of Italian television and the first to conduct, in the fifties, a cultural program that helped to spread education among the people, a kind of first distance learning to combat illiteracy.

When professor Cutolo retired in 1960, the teaching of Bibliography and Librarianship was held by Emma Coen Pirani, an important librarian and scholar of librarianship. Emma Coen Pirani was born in Pisa in 1910, and in 1933 she had already begun to work as a librarian at the Estense Library in Modena. Then she was director of the Biblioteca Universitaria in Bologna in the 1948, director of the Estense Library in 1949 and, lastly, director of the National Braidense Library in Milan from 1955 to 1971, with an important and active role in founding and developing the Italian Library Association. Furthermore she wrote one of the most important handbooks of Librarianship: the *Manuale del bibliotecario*, a kind of Bible for generations of Italian librarians, first published in 1954, and reissued and revised until the last reprint in 1999, year of her death when she was 89. Emma Coen Pirani taught Bibliography and Librarianship in our University for a long time, nearly twenty years, from 1960 until the end of the seventies.

The next professor after Emma Coen Pirani was Giulia Bologna, she also a director of one of the most important libraries in Milan, the Trivulziana library, with a

rich collection of manuscripts, incunabula and valuable ancient and rare books coming from one of the oldest aristocratic families of Milan, the Trivulzio family, that collected books and manuscripts from the second half of the XV century up to the XX century. Giulia Bologna was in charge as director of Trivulziana library from 1975, and soon after the University of Milan gave her the teaching of Bibliography and Librarianship that she held until 1985.

After Professor Bologna, in order to hold the course of Bibliography and Librarianship, the University of Milan called in 1986 professor Giorgio Montecchi, a young professor, graduated in Medieval Studies and with a two-year post-graduate specialization course in library studies, course organized at Parma University from the seventies to the early eighties. He was the first full professor of Bibliography and Librarianship at the University of Milan and with his coming the teaching of our discipline started to grow: he started a new course on Print and publishing history calling a new and valuable professor, Lodovica Braida, and then, with my coming in 2003, he split the original course in two more specific ones, that means Bibliography, more focused on the history of books and textual bibliography, and the course of Library Science. In that period many changes occurred in the organization of University studies with particular reference to the internationalization process.

As you know, in Italy, as a consequence of the commitment to the Bologna Declaration, and following the Bologna process as well, a significant reform in Higher Education started in 1999.

This reform, and the subsequent further changes decreed in 2004, transformed higher education in Italy, by introducing a three-tier structure, that is a three-year study course, awarding a first level degree called “Laurea Triennale” which needs 180 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System); first level graduates can then attend a two-year course awarding a second level degree, the “Laurea Magistrale”, called “Laurea Specialistica” until 2004, that needs 120 ECTS; graduates holding a Laurea Magistrale, who pass an entrance selection, can enter the third cycle of University education, which is the Doctorate, and which usually lasts three years.

Specialization courses, also considered as third cycle courses, are available with the purpose of providing students with the knowledge and abilities needed for certain professional activities, they were established by law, the study period could vary, but it can be no less than two years though; finally, some specialization courses like that in Medicine or Surgery, could last five or six year and they give from 300 to 360 European credits.

In our University, LIS student can be awarded a first and a second level degree, as for the third cycle, the Research Doctorate, students who hold a Laurea Magistrale can take the entrance exam to the “Research Course in Bibliographic, Archival and Documentary Sciences and in Preservation and Restoration of Archival and Book Heritage”, a joint collaboration initially of the Universities of Udine, Rome Milan and other 5 universities, that now is joining other universities every year.

Speaking about our University and the Department of History and Historical Documentation, to which Library science and other related courses belong, we can say that the Department is formed by 50 courses, and it could be ideally divided in two sections: History studies and Documentation studies.

*History studies*, that is built with 42 courses on several aspect of Ancient, Medieval, Modern and Contemporary History, besides these four main courses, others are studying the religious, economical, social and cultural aspect of these historical periods.

*Documentation studies*, more formally, *Historical documentation studies* section, which represents the courses that investigate knowledge recording and transmission

through the generations and inside the same generation. Documentation studies section is built with 8 courses focused on the main aspects of that *recorded knowledge area*.

These courses are:

1. Archival studies, that is concerned with archive history, theory and methods
2. Archive automation, that analyses the contemporary document, the organization and management of a current digital archive, how to build and preserve the digital memory. Using computers for a modern documental information systems
3. Special Archives, which studies the private and public archives in the 19th and 20th century
4. Bibliography, which considers the history of bibliography, history of ancient printed books and textual bibliography, bibliographic research methods and resources evaluation
5. Library and Information science: this course studies and teaches several aspects about library history, Library organization and use, cataloguing and classification theory and practice, Library automation principles and techniques,
6. Print and publishing history, where Book history in modern Europe and the Italian publishing history between 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, are studied
7. Book history, a course which studies surveys and research methods in cultural history, the Italian publishers between 19th and 20th century and the book market
8. Diplomatics and palaeography, where students are given of skills in reading and understanding ancient handwritings and historical documents, studying the notary documents and the “*libri iurium*” in the medieval Italy.

Each of these courses is structured in 3 or 4 modules, each module requires 20 hours of formal lectures that have to be attended and at least twice as many hours of individual study. Students who pass the exam are awarded 3 ECTS for each module attended or, if they can't attend, they study on the basis of a given enlarged bibliography. One more module can be assigned to allow the students to deepen subject knowledge on the basis of individual study.

Normally, based on the degree level, on the curriculum and on the program that has been chosen, 6, 9 or 12 ECTS for students are given when they pass the exam.

#### **Courses from other faculties or curricula,**

Students can choose to attend courses from other faculties or curricula, like the faculty of “Mathematical, Physical and Natural Sciences” or the degree in “Science and Technology for the Study and Preservation of Cultural Heritage”, and these courses can be attended to complete their curricula, it means that courses as “Fundamentals of computing for the humanities”, or others come from the curricula in Information science and ICT courses, Digital communication, or data processing, can be chosen.

#### **Seminars and Laboratories**

Students can count on laboratories (that is seminars) on several aspects of the “recorded knowledge area”. The aim of these laboratories is to offer the students a specific practice and professional application of theories and principles they learnt attending the courses, but students whom have not attended the courses can apply the laboratories as well.

Each laboratory requires 20 hours of attendance and twice as many hours of individual study to obtain 3 ECTS. Each student can attend laboratories up to reach 12 ECTS.

Students can count on a great number of laboratories, (31 only in our Department) and on these LIS laboratories:

- The public library
- Archival studies
- Bibliography, publishers catalogues and communication
- Library automation and information management
- Medieval sources and documents, which will take place at the State Archive of Milan
- The ancient hand printed book, which will take place at the Lombardy Historical Society

These courses and the related exams can be attended by student that are studying to award a First level degree, the Laurea Triennale, that is in Cultural heritage studies, and in History, or, with different programs, by student that are going to be awarded a second level degree, the Laurea Magistrale, that is in Archival and Library Information Science, or in Historical studies as well.

### **Stages**

To facilitate an initial contact with the world of work and enable the acquisition of professional skills, undergraduate and graduate Student are allowed and even better encouraged to experience an a stage that takes place at an Institution or in a Company which have an agreement with the University.

- curricular Stages are related to the learning trail and give students the right to obtain ECTS
- extra-curricular Stages can be carried out along the learning trail but are not included in it, and don't give student any credit
- post laureat Stages are focused on acquiring technical skills and cross-cutting and develop their professional project.

Students of any kind of curriculum of Humanities faculty, can apply to develop and discuss a thesis in Library and Information Science, or in any other course or subject of the *recorded knowledge* area, as long as they have attended some courses in the disciplines related to the topic of the thesis, acquired the needed skills and set the correlated exams.

To sum up , then, we can affirm that our graduate students are welcome in all the libraries of Lombardy and their degrees are appreciated by the Institutions and well valued within the competition to win a position in a library.

These results were obtained thanks to the high level of teaching, the work and good relationships and student stages with libraries and the Government of Lombardy initiated and maintained in time by my colleagues and predecessors.