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Diversity and Multiculturalism of LIS Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the panel is to raise the common questions about diversity and multiculturalism training in library schools, and engage the audience in a meaningful discussion about diversity and multiculturalism. We will discuss the importance of diversity and multiculturalism training in library and information science curricula by examining multiple countries/regions as case studies. We would be seeking answers to two major questions: “What do responsible library science educators need to do to educate librarians on diversity/multiculturalism/internationalism?” and “How can we educate future librarians so that they will have a greater perspective on diversity and multiculturalism?”

Keywords

Diversity, multiculturalism, global librarianship, LIS curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the panel is to raise the common questions about diversity and multiculturalism training in library schools, and engage the audience in a meaningful discussion about diversity and multiculturalism. Since Dewey established the first library school in 1887, the nature and content of LIS education has received considerable criticism in scientific literature (Aytac et al., 2011; Buarki et al.; Dillon & Norris, 2005; Hallam, 2007;

Irwin, 2003; Joudrey & McGinnis, 2014; Pawley, 2006; Tenopir, 2002). Particularly, the issues pertaining to multiculturalism have been revisited numerous times (Al-Qallaf & Mika, 2013). It is also stressed that there have been substantial obstacles to teaching diversity and multiculturalism in LIS programs (Pawley, 2006). However, ALA core competencies section 5F clearly states that a person graduating from an ALA-accredited master’s program should know and be able to employ, “The principles of assessment and response to diversity in user needs, user communities, and user preferences” (ALA..., 2009). Furthermore, the ALA Committee on Accreditation also underlines the importance of recognizing diversity, and educating library and information science professionals in this direction as one of the student learning outcomes. Section 1.2.6 states that, “The role of library and information science services in a diverse global society, including the role of serving the needs of underserved groups (American...,2015).” While diversity and multiculturalism is one of the main goals of ALA, we are still lacking in providing education and training for library science students. While creating or adopting new courses with a special emphasize on diversity and multiculturalism can be difficult, one can utilize existing courses and curricula rather than innovate with new courses in the field. This is not just a shortcoming in the US LIS programs, but also an issue for library and information science education in the world.

Librarians are a crucial component of any public, school, or college and they serve a very diverse group of patrons. However, do we tailor our course offerings to accommodate diversity and multiculturalism in our classrooms? Library Science programs and courses should be acquainted with a wide range of relevant curriculum materials, media, and instructional methods, as well as encourage the awareness of global civics and international events as vital across library science curricula and activities (Thornton, 2004).

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In this panel, we would like to seek an answer to the question, “What do responsible library science educators need to do to educate librarians on diversity/multiculturalism/ internationalism? And most importantly, how close are we to our goal of training “Global Librarians” in our programs? Noddings (2004:2-3) defined a Global Citizen as “one who can live and work effectively anywhere in the world.” Moreover, she underlined important points such as “appreciation of diversity”, “longing for unity”, and “promotion of global citizenship.” In this panel, we would like to extend the definition of a global citizen to that of a global librarian, and seek an answer to the question, “Are we training future librarians within this definition? and how can we apply the “Global Librarian” concept to the current picture in order to educate future librarians with a greater perspective on diversity and multiculturalism?”

Our notion of diversity and multiculturalism is not just limited to race, nationality, gender, or ethnicity in this study. We propose developing a new culture of interdisciplinary academic training in LIS curricula that would lead to an innovative group of LIS graduates. For instance, one of our panelists Potnis expands the general understanding of the terms diversity and multiculturalism in the context of LIS education by demonstrating the way in which interdisciplinary training can create unconventional technology consulting jobs in libraries and not-for-profit organizations for LIS graduates. This diverse training would prepare librarians to have a combination of technological, business, management, and information science perspective for better serving patrons using mobile technologies.

Curriculum reform and a coursework devoted solely to diversity and multiculturalism is also essential for iSchools as all information services revolve around human-computer interaction.

This panel connects international scholars whose research and teaching interests intersect around diversity and multiculturalism. Panelists will consider the following general questions:

- How is the current LIS curriculum in the region/country you are examining?
- How diverse/multicultural is the curricula?
- Do you observe a specific course just dedicated to the topic?
- If not, do you observe an integral diversity/multiculturalism internationalization component in the courses general?
- How important to educate future librarians as global librarians?

PANEL STYLE

The panel will last 1.5 hours. Panelists will present their research and teaching focus and will give a short presentation. We will be using a lightning talk/PechaKucha model and each speaker will have about 7-10 minutes to present.

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PANELISTS

Lai Ma (perspective on LIS Curricula in Ireland and the United Kingdom)

Dr. Lai Ma is Lecturer in School of Information and Communication Studies, University College Dublin, Ireland. She is Immediate Past Chair of ASIS&T European Chapter and she currently serve as Co-Chair of Award Nominations Committee and SIG Cabinet Advisor.

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) states the “[C]oncern for the public good in all professional matters, including respect for diversity within society, and the promoting of equal opportunities and human rights” as one of their ethical principles. Topics pertaining to multiculturalism and diversity, however, are not usually directly offered in the curricula. The seemingly insufficient mapping is partly due to the length of programmes in Ireland and United Kingdom, as well as the emphasis on skills-based learning according to the Professional Knowledge and Skill Base (PKSB). Consequently, coverage of multiculturalism and diversity is determined in individual modules.

As residents in Ireland and the United Kingdom are from many countries of origin, library holdings and information services should cater for diverse populations. It is also a responsibility of librarians and information professionals to engage dialogues about multiculturalism and diversity with the public. It is hence necessary to consider incorporating relevant topics across modules and/or offering a dedicated module in information ethics.

Selenay Aytac (perspective on LIS Curricula in Turkey)

Dr. Selenay Aytac is an Associate Professor at Long Island University and an adjunct faculty at Pratt Institute, NY and St. Johns University, NY. She thought summer seminars at the Polytechnic University of Valencia, Spain and presented numerous lectures at the Turkish Universities.

When we look into the history of higher education and LIS programs in Turkey, we see a few predominant institutions. The first public university, Istanbul University, was

established in the 15th century while the first LIS program formed at Ankara University of Turkey in 1954. The second LIS program formed by Istanbul University in 1963 and the third one established in 1972 by Hacettepe University. Although higher education has traditionally been the responsibility of the state universities in Turkey, private universities are now also competing for leadership and greater academic success.

Till the emergence of private universities in Turkey which began with the changes in the law in 1982, those were the only three LIS degree granting state institutions in Turkey. On the other hand, in 1987, two more state universities namely Marmara University and followed by Ataturk University in 1994 started to offer LIS degree. A first private university which has offered LIS degree in Turkey was the Baskent University and the program formed in 2002. Currently, there are about 20 universities offering LIS degrees in Turkey. Most of them are private universities which were established after the change in higher education law in 1982.

However, when we examine the websites of these newly formed private universities, there is so little or no information about their LIS programs which makes one to think if these new programs currently admitting students. For this reason, we analyzed the course offerings of Ankara, Istanbul, Hacettepe, Marmara, the first four state universities and the first private university Baskent University. According to findings, while there is no specific course addressed the issues pertaining diversity and multiculturalism, there is a course titled “Communication and Society” at Hacettepe University, with course code BBY165 and “Mass Communication Tools and Society” ILF102 at Baskent University somewhat addressed the issues related culture and society in connection with diversity. Further analysis regarding course offerings will be discussed during the panel presentation.

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Abebe Rorissa (perspective on LIS curricula in Africa)

Dr. Abebe Rorissa is an Associate Professor in the Department of Information Studies, University at Albany. As a multidisciplinary scholar, his research interests include multimedia information organization and retrieval, measurement and scaling of users' information needs and perceptions, and use/acceptance/adoption and impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

One of the common misconceptions about Africa is that it is monolithic or even a country. Africa is not only the second largest continent with 54 countries and a number of cultural/geographic regions, it is also the second most populous, after Asia. Notwithstanding historical underdevelopment, a number of African countries are experiencing relative stability and peace as well as seeing a healthy growth in their GDPs (see, for instance, International Monetary Fund, 2015). With improving economic outlook, demand for an educated workforce in all sectors of society will also rise. The same is true with respect to LIS professionals and the need to improve LIS education/curricula in Africa.

However, due to a number of factors, little is known about the continent compared to almost every other continent. What is generally known/accepted is that LIS education, library and information services, and LIS professionals can play crucial roles in addressing, among others, education, social, and development goals. In addition, they can assist a country's progression towards a knowledge economy.

Some LIS schools in Africa (including regional schools such as SISA in Ethiopia & ARCIS in Nigeria) were created decades ago with the help of foreign support (Ocholla, 2000) to address lack of diverse trained LIS professionals at regional and country levels. Nevertheless, it is not apparent from the extant literature, albeit limited, that the schools and their current curricula prepare globally aware professionals. As more and more African countries attain middle-income status and their economies transition to and integrate into the global knowledge economy, educating LIS professionals attuned to both local and global issues as well as the needs of a fast growing diverse user population, in all sectors of society, should become one of their priorities.

Therefore, to provide a well-rounded and global discussion about diversity in LIS curricula, this presentation will focus on findings from an analysis of existing LIS courses and invite the audience to participate in the discussion with the help of a number of relevant questions, including: How diverse should LIS curricula be in the African context? What types of courses should African LIS schools adopt from programs such as those accredited by ALA? What would an African information professional need, in terms of knowledge, skills, and dispositions, in order to be effective in a knowledge economy? Would those (knowledge, skills, and dispositions) be different from what an LIS professional in, say, North America need?

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Devendra Potnis (Perspective on LIS curricula in the USA)

Devendra Potnis is an associate professor in the School of Information Sciences at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. He holds a PhD in Informatics, a master's degree in Computer Science, and another master's degree in public administration with focus on IT management in public sector

I am excited to share an array of diversities that I study and promote through my research and teaching, thereby strengthening our field. To equip library and information science (LIS) graduates for the 21st century job opportunities, we need technological diversity in our curricula. For instance, in response to a rising popularity of mobile technologies, a large number of libraries invest in mobile technologies to better serve their patrons. However, libraries often lack the in-house IT expertise required to (1) implement mobile applications and related technologies; (2) attain maximum re-turn on investment including patron satisfaction for using mobile apps and related technologies; and (3) reduce reliance on expensive IT consultants. Based on secondary analysis of the experiences and advice offered by librarians and IT professionals engaged in implementing mobile apps and related technologies in libraries, my research team at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville identified four core and six supplementary competencies needed to help libraries better serve their patrons using mobile apps and related technologies. LIS graduate programs need to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to build 10 competencies so that they could serve as *mobile technology consultants* for libraries (Potnis et al., 2016). Core competencies are mobile application development, human-computer interaction, computer networking, and planning and management of mobile technologies; and the supplementary competencies are: project management, change management, negotiation, data management, policy management, and grant writing. In April 2016, the Institute of Museum and Library Services awarded us a planning grant of around \$40,000 to develop a grant proposal to recruit and train 8 diverse LIS students to select, purchase, design, develop, deploy, and maintain mobile apps and related technologies effectively and efficiently in libraries.

I also train LIS students for the unconventional job opportunities available outside of our field. For instance, my graduate course titled *Social Informatics* at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville covers the application of a wide range of information and communication technologies for the empowerment of disadvantaged

communities across the world. Concepts such as digital inclusion, women empowerment through STEM education, financial inclusion and information literacy, and mobile banking, among others, equip students to be champions of diversity and multiculturalism at their organizations. Importantly, a wide range of strategic planning and management tools introduced throughout the semester equip our LIS students to serve as *information consultants*. The field project in this course requires students to serve as information consultants mainly for local not-for-profit organizations. In the last five years, over 60 students have offered pro-bono information consultancy to local schools, libraries, professional associations, medical clinics, small businesses, and churches. This diversity in terms of applying LIS education to non-traditional fields opens up new, unconventional job opportunities for our graduates. They could even end up setting up their own consultancy firm after gaining enough relevant, work experience few years down the line. Thanks!

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Hsin Liang Chen (Perspective on LIS curricula in Taiwan)

Dr. Hsin-liang (Oliver) Chen is an associate professor in the Palmer School of Library and Information Science at Long Island University. His research interests are digital media design and management, human computer interaction, open educational resources, and user studies.

Currently, no special courses are dedicated to multiculturalism and diversity at the LIS programs in Taiwan. However, the user/information services courses are required at the undergraduate and masters levels. The multiculturalism and diversity components may be covered in those required courses. There are three master theses focusing on the library multicultural services between 2006 and 2012.

Major public libraries in Taiwan started providing multicultural services in the beginning of the 21st century as the international population grew. Yeh (2004) suggested that Taiwan's libraries should develop a set of multicultural policies to serve a great diversity of readers. The Taipei Public Library published a special issue of its bulletin on *Multicultural Services in Public Libraries* in 2006. In that issue, several library professionals and LIS scholars addressed the role of public libraries in the multicultural society (Liu, 2006; Ying, 2006). Lu (2006) advocated to

develop library multicultural services is to meet the needs of the general public in current multicultural society. Tseng (2006) emphasized the importance of multicultural library collections and services in the globalization era.

Major public libraries have included multicultural collection development and services in their library policies. In doing so, public libraries are able to fulfill their cultural function among the four basic functions, that is, educational, informational, cultural, and recreational functions.

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Xiao Hu (Perspective on LIS curricula in Hong Kong and China)

Dr. Xiao Hu is an Assistant Professor at the University of Hong Kong. Dr. Hu's research focuses on the intersection of information technologies and user behaviors.

As Hong Kong an international city, globalization is generally regarded as important among Hong Kongers. The University of Hong Kong offers the only Master degree in Library and Information Management in Hong Kong. The program and its undergraduate counterpart (the Bachelor of Science in Information Management program) have been accredited by Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) recently. Although there is no course on diversity and multiculturalism, the ideas are covered in the curricula through topics on user services such as equality and customization of user services.

For LIS programs in China, we will survey the curricula posted on their websites and check whether there are diversity related courses and which aspects of diversity they cover. We will try to contact some of the programs for more detailed information.