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## LIS Education in America: The Present, the Past, and the Future.

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### **Current Job Market for LIS Graduates in the United States**

The United States is slowly recovering from an economic crisis that reached its height in 2009. While the economy has recovered up to a point, reductions have been significant and budgets are unlikely to return to pre-recession levels. As is the case for all countries, there is competition from alternative sources of information and information providers. Taxpayers, government officials, and university administrators are questioning the value of libraries in this time of Google and personal electronic devices. Our libraries, colleges, and universities are seeing a reduction in their funding and are being required to prove their accountability and worth to state and municipal legislatures and governing bodies. There is a wave of anti-intellectualism, anti-government, and fiscal conservatism among many of our citizens.

For a recent LIS graduate, obtaining a library job can be competitive. Library job growth is slower than average and recently Forbes magazine ranked the MLS as one of the worst graduate degrees for jobs. Libraries are facing budgetary constraints, hiring freezes, and the shift to part-time and/or non-professional positions. In academic libraries there is more hiring of part-time or adjunct librarians, employees that do not receive the employment benefits or job security granted to full-time or tenured librarians. In public, school, and academic libraries, the trend is shifting from hiring LIS degree librarians to non-LIS degreed employees that possess alternative expertise such as sociology, education, public health, technology, and web design. To get a job, students need to receive a Library Science education that provides them with the professional skills that reflect the needs of their communities, changing technologies, and talent for leadership.

### **Demographic and Education Trends in the United States**

Our communities in the United States are changing. They are becoming more diverse and increasingly technology and information-savvy. The population is growing rapidly, with a higher birth rate, a higher number of aged, and immigration. All of these factors have an effect on the economy and the environment.

With the gap between our older and younger communities, libraries are forced to examine our services and address the generation gap with conflicting interests. Libraries will need

to meet the needs of an aging population with motor, visual, and/or other disabilities. And at the opposite end of the age spectrum, the future careers of US youth are increasingly technology-centered and reflect changing instructional needs. As our users' become more tech-savvy, our MLS graduates need to be at the forefront of data and technology, so that they may offer instruction—both formal and informal—in social media, apps for personal devices, and effective information retrieval. Librarians, particularly those of us that have been in the profession for 20 years or more, need to adapt to understand and meet these technical needs.

As minority populations grow in the United States, libraries and librarians must be prepared to address the complex needs of increasingly diverse user groups. By the year 2050, minorities will be a higher percentage of the population in the US than the traditional Anglo Population. Librarians must be prepared to address the needs of these diverse user groups, understanding their cultural norms and information needs.

Education is changing in the United States and it affects the role of libraries. One trend in higher education is Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) that allow anyone to enroll, either for free or for a fee. MOOCs rely on video lectures by professors, some student interaction, and online educational tools. One MOOC can have thousands of enrolled students, making personal contact with a professor virtually impossible. Questions remain about the librarians' role in supporting such large-scale distance education offerings. How can we best partner with our universities and instructors to support these massive courses?

Distance education and online learning are also affecting librarianship and LIS education in the United States. The availability of LIS online programs has revolutionized the opportunity for many students to receive their MLS degree in the United States. Twenty years ago, there were only a limited number of universities offering the MLS degree and it was impossible to obtain the degree in many US states, particularly in the Western section. Now, students can receive their MLS degree online through more than 30 universities.

### **Library Education Reflects the Changes in our Communities**

In the United States, as is the case for libraries throughout the world, the library's focus is on the user. But we are in the processes of re-defining who belongs within the community of users. Too often in the past, US libraries focused on serving the needs of long-time library users. Instead we must address the needs of the entire community we serve, to reach out to those unfamiliar with our services. As librarians, we need to ensure that our services are designed and implemented based on community input and not on traditional roles and limitations within our profession.

All types of libraries in the United States are re-examining their roles within their community and asking themselves how they need to change to remain relevant to their users. The truth is that circulation statistics of print book collections are dropping, more people are going to Google for their information needs, and reference librarian help desks are not being used as they were in the past.

In order to remain relevant, libraries are de-emphasizing their print book collections. Many libraries are reducing the size of the library collections by 10-30 percent. The space previously occupied by books is now being used as collaborative spaces where people can work alone or together to create new knowledge, new skills, and make use of available technology. One example of such a space is being called the “maker space.” Simply stated, a library maker space is a place where people get together to make things. A maker space can be technology-rich and focus on STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), or it can be a place for hobbies and crafts, such as knitting, sewing, bicycle repair, or a table full of LEGOs. Maker spaces are appearing in school, public, and academic libraries throughout the United States. In these spaces, patrons can work alone or collaboratively, often with assistance from library personnel and with tools or technology not readily available in most homes.

One big trend in maker spaces is 3-D printers. A 3-D printer is roughly the size of a breadbox with an opening in the middle. A tube moves back and forth inside, dabbing molten plastic into layers that harden, creating 3-D tactile objects, such as chess pieces, small-scale models, and replacement parts. A small object, the size of a smart phone, takes about an hour to complete. The 3-D printer, a 3-D scanner, and filament cost between \$4,000-\$5,000.

Maker spaces that are technology-rich draw many individuals to the library to try their hand at the new technology. Entrepreneurs and inventors are coming to libraries to produce prototypes and models. Students come to see something cool and are exposed to technology that embraces STEM education. In order for librarians to be experts in these new technologies, considerable education and training is required—education and training that should be included in the course offerings for the LIS degree.

### **Technology in ILS Education**

The world and libraries are becoming more tech-savvy. Technology is becoming increasingly integrated into our everyday lives through cloud computing, the Internet, and gathering information through Google via our smart phone, personal tablet, or computer. Information professionals must be comfortable with technology and have a desire to always adapt and update their skills. They should be eager to learn how to use new devices, be comfortable with social media platforms, apps, analyzing data, and developing coding skills. And they should be able to train others to use a variety of technologies.

This increase in technology has led to the proliferation of the iSchool in the United States. iSchools are rapidly replacing MLS programs and focus on specific tracks such as information technology, library science, informatics, and information science. Currently in the US, 46 ILS educational institutions now self-identify as iSchools, with a significant increase in the number of information technology related courses in the curriculum.

Looking at the names of the MLS programs ranked as the top five in the US, one can see the change in focus from libraries to information:

1. School of Library and Information Studies (Univ. of Ill., Urbana-Champaign)

2. School of Information and Library Science (UNC-Chapel Hill)
3. The Information School “iSchool” (Univ. of Washington)
4. School of Information Studies (Syracuse)
5. School of Information (Univ. of Mich.)

### **New Library Skills Required for New Library Positions**

In the past, there were two main career paths for the librarian. You could either go into Public Services to become a reference librarian, or you could go into the Technical Services branch and become a cataloger. All IT personnel at the time seemed to evolve out of the Technical Services branch and they mainly worked with the library’s ILS system. But now, things have drastically changed due to the current trends in libraries. This list of positions currently advertised within the United States demonstrates the great variety of new positions in libraries requiring a much wider array of technical skills.

- Maker Space Librarian
- Emerging and Instructional Technology Librarian
- Digital Librarian
- Data Librarian
- Assessment Librarian

Many academic and some public libraries are putting a lot of their resources (money and staff) into the digitization of their “hidden” special collections, making these items available to the world via the web. Digital curation includes the work of selecting, preserving, maintaining, and archiving digital assets. This represents a whole new set of skills that did not exist in libraries 20, even ten years ago.

Other new career paths are the “data librarian,” “assessment librarian,” or other forms of information professionals who work with data. One major shift in U.S. libraries is that our administrative and governing bodies are now holding us accountable. Libraries are collecting their own data in order to assess and prove our impact and value. In addition, it is required that all researchers that receive federally funded grants make their data openly available. Libraries are helping researchers to format and store this data, plus acquiring the expertise to manipulate the data.

In addition to technical skills, librarians must learn “soft skills” to connect with their communities and with their colleagues. The University of Maryland’s iSchool has recently issued a report titled, *Re-Envisioning the MLS: Findings, Issues, and Considerations*, summarizing their research into the attributes of successful professionals.

In their report, they state that library professionals must thrive on change, embrace public service, and seek challenges that require creative solutions. They need to have strong leadership and management skills, with the ability to communicate and effectively address the changing needs of organizations. They should possess a strong knowledge of fundraising, budgeting, and policymaking skills.

Information professionals need to know how to advocate on behalf of their organizations and communities through contact with government officials, trustees, and other

administrative bodies. They also need to know how to market the library as a valuable community resource. This requires a willingness to engage in constant and ongoing analysis and change, supported by documentation and assessment of programs that prove the library's impact.

Instructional skills are another desired quality of the MLS graduate in the US. No longer is the library a place for individuals that desire to work alone in the back rooms of the library. Librarians need to be able to facilitate learning and education either through direct instruction or other interactions. They should possess a strong desire to work with the public and need to be collaborative problem solvers. The reference help desk is not used as it was in the past and academic reference librarians need to adapt to new models, working as "library liaisons" that proactively reach out to students and faculty.

Information professionals must be creative and critical thinkers, willing to try new things. They should be willing to take risks, create new programs, not afraid of failure. They must actively seek information about trends and best practices. They must be willing to let go of the past and create the future, working to foresee users needs 5, 10, 15 years from now.

But perhaps most importantly, MLS graduates need to be adaptable. Librarians must be willing and eager to continually learn and adapt to new needs and services. They must be comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty and be willing to continuously learn new skills

### **The Future is Libraries. But What About Librarians?**

According to the report, *Re-Envisioning the MLS*, survey results gathered from library professionals reflect a sense that an MLS degree is not always required for all aspects of library work. Specific examples may include jobs requiring expertise in human resources, information technology, and web design.

Yet for leadership positions in libraries, the general consensus among librarians is that individuals need the MLS degree for the overall understanding of librarianship and the information professions, and our core values such as intellectual freedom, privacy, access, equity/social justice, open government/civic participation, and learning.

Some indicated that an MLS wasn't always sufficient for some positions, and perhaps was best pursued in addition to core subjects in which a student passed his graduation or PG course. For instance, a Humanities Librarian may need an advanced degree in Art, Literature, or History. Additional specialized areas included education and instruction backgrounds and degrees, those with skill in design and creative activities to work in maker spaces, and individuals with social service related backgrounds.

In summary, there are big changes on the horizon for Library Science education in the United States. Libraries need to evolve to remain relevant to the communities they serve and LIS education needs to adapt as well. The day of the reference and cataloging paradigm is gone. Instead we are ushering in a new generation of tech-savvy, collaborative, and courageous librarians that are able to adapt in an ever-changing and

sometimes disruptive reality.

Bertot, J. C., Sarin, L. C. and Percell, J. (2015). *Re-Envisioning the MLS: Findings, Issues, and Considerations*. College Park, Maryland: University of Maryland's iSchool.