

# What is the Purpose of Librarianship and How Can We Teach This?

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## ABSTRACT

Over the past 20 years, Library and Information Science (LIS) programs have greatly diversified what they teach beyond librarianship to include many related, relevant topics, like information needs, human computer interaction, information policy, or knowledge management. As they have done so, many LIS programs have expanded to encompass these interconnected topics, re-positioning themselves within universities as I-Schools with explicit teaching and research agendas addressing information broadly—and even dropping the “L” word from their names.

This has contributed to ongoing conversation and debate as to the nature of the LIS discipline and its place within information education and research, e.g. the 2019 ALISE plenary Session led by Dr. Jaya Raju and the successful SIG Curriculum Session, “What About Librarianship in LIS Curricula?”, delivered at the 2020 ALISE Annual Conference. This Session will be a follow up to these previous sessions. It will examine two important questions: 1) What is the purpose of librarianship/libraries? and 2) How can LIS programs teach this purpose well?

One answer to the first question, that of librarianship’s purpose, is that librarianship provides access to recorded content, but this question has been answered in many ways. Librarianship’s activities select recorded content from the bibliographic universe, describe it, organize it, make it available at specific times and places, and assist content users in making sense of and using these content items. But why does this occur? In other words, what contribution to individual human beings or to society does this make?

The answer to the second question, that of how to teach librarianship’s purpose, can vary depending upon the program. Most LIS programs offer courses in the essential activities mentioned above, e.g. classes in content management, information organization, or research and public services. They also offer courses in information ethics, in types of libraries (e.g. academic or public libraries) or even in a generic course, e.g. a class covering the library’s role in society.

How else might librarianship's purpose be conveyed within a curriculum? How might these means for doing so be improved?

Drawing upon a literature addressing the essence and philosophy of librarianship, and especially upon Charles Osburn (2009) *The Social Transcript, Uncovering Library Philosophy*, this SIG Session will address these questions and their proposed answers.<sup>1</sup> Including a mix of LIS educators and information professionals, this session, sponsored by the ALISE SIG Curriculum, will spur conversation and consideration of these important issues. Each panelist will present briefly (approximately 10 minutes)—providing context for 45 minutes of discussion among panelists and attendees.

### **ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS**

academic libraries; public libraries; school libraries; special libraries; pedagogy

### **AUTHOR KEYWORDS**

librarianship; library philosophy; teaching librarianship

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<sup>1</sup> Osburn, Charles B. (2009). *The Social Transcript: Uncovering Library Philosophy*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited