The Similarities and Differences of Vision and Mission Statements: A Comparison of ALA-Accredited LIS Programs and iSchools

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ABSTRACT

Vision and mission statements describe an institution's hopes and aspirations, guide their strategic planning for the near and distant future, and help the public better understand the roles these institutions perform in their communities; they represent institutional identity. For this work, the vision and mission statements were collected from the websites of ALA-accredited LIS Programs and iSchools and compared using basic text analysis techniques. The most frequently occurring keywords were identified in current vision and mission statements and results indicate that they are very similar in the terms used across both the vision and mission statements; the key difference being the use of "library" for ALA-accredited programs and the use of "technology" for iSchools. The results presented here demonstrate that while iSchools sought to distinguish themselves by establishing a new culture and organizational identity, the vision and mission statements of iSchools today are still very similar to those of ALA-accredited programs.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Scholarly communications; Standards; Information governance

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Vision Statement; Mission Statement; ALA-Accreditation; iSchools; Organizational Identity

INTRODUCTION

Many, if not most, North and South American universities, colleges, and schools have vision and mission statements on their websites and in their marketing paraphernalia. Morphew and Hartley (2006, p. 456) stated that "[m]ission statements are ubiquitous in higher education." These mission and vision statements are intended to let prospective and current students, prospective and current faculty, staff, and administration, and others understand the university, college, and/or school's guiding principles and what it believes the future will entail, respectively. Meachum and Gaff (2006, p. 6) defined an educational mission statement as "an institution's formal, public declaration of its purposes and its vision of excellence." In essence, the university, college, and or/school is identifying its public identity for both the present and the future.

The vision of iSchools, according to Larsen (2018, p. 2359), is to provide "the venue that enables scholars from a variety of contributing disciplines to leverage their individual insights, perspectives, and interests, informed by a rich, 'transdisciplinary' community." The iSchool movement began in the late 1980s and was formerly established as an organization in 2005. The iSchool organization states that its members are "dedicated to advancing the information field in the 21st Century" and share "a fundamental interest in the relationships between information, people, and technology" (iSchools, n.d.).

Many of the members of the iSchool Organization also contain ALA-accredited programs. The American Library Association (ALA) began accrediting schools in 1925; there are currently 62 ALA-accredited programs. The ALA's (ALA, n.d.) mission is "[t]o provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all."

Based on the stated vision/missions of the parent organizations, both the ALA-accredited programs and iSchools should adapt to the changing roles of information professionals, the changing demands of technological advances and adoption, and the changes faced by universities as they adjust to a 21st Century mode of business and the global community at large. While the current missions of the iSchools organization and the ALA organization are different, the main premise of this exploratory work is to discover if the vision and mission statements of ALA-accredited degree programs and iSchools are also very different or more similar than one might think. In addition to determining the similarities and or differences between the vision and mission statements of ALA-accredited degree programs and iSchools, this exploratory study also hopes to inspire others to reflect on how the global 2020 pandemic affected their institutions and what that means for them moving forward.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the changing outlook of not just the information professions but also the global community, this exploration of vision and mission statements of ALA-accredited degree programs and iSchools is a critical exercise in identifying the ways in which these units define their public identity. No discovered research has compared the vision and mission statements of ALA-accredited LIS programs and iSchools. Because of this, the literature review takes a more comprehensive approach, exploring vision and mission statement research that spans various domains. There is a clear gap in the literature on vision and mission statements for ALA-accredited LIS programs and iSchools. Topics discussed below include academic libraries, universities (as a whole), and business and medical schools.

With regards to academic libraries, Nous (2015) argued that mission statements were an important tool to display and communicate an academic library's purpose to both employees and patrons. Salisbury and Griffis (2014) conducted a study on how well academic libraries communicated their mission statements on their website and found that only 84% of the surveyed academic libraries had mission statements available. Saddhono et. al. (2020) used textual analysis to examine typical characteristics in vision and mission statements at academic libraries in Indonesia and found that most statements were textually and socially dominated by aspects of information and technology. Bangert (1997) employed content analysis to analyze 58 California academic library mission statements (and formal statements of purpose) and argued that "the analysis of language provides a generalized picture of what academic libraires are stating about purpose and vision" (Bangert, 1997, p. 4).

With regards to vision and mission statements of academic institutions, Pioquinto et. al. (2019) discovered that the acceptability and awareness of vision and mission statements at a college in Pangasinan State University often varied among levels of staff with college administrators having the

highest awareness, while students, faculty and staff struggled with the acceptability of vision and mission statements. Velcoff and Ferrari (2006) reported that senior administrators indicated they generally have similar perceptions about their institutional mission statement and that their activities support this mission. Meachum and Gaff (2006, p. 10) argued that the divergence found between undergraduate education goals and mission statements was partially due to "a lack of educational leadership among presidents, the senior administrators reporting to them, and members of board of trustee."

Literature on vision and mission statements for medical and business schools reveal common elements across institutions. A study by Orwig and Finney (2007) on mission statements from AACSB-accredited business schools indicated that most of the statements examined were less than one page long, addressed several different stakeholders, and typically did not provide vision statements, goals, or objectives. Lewkonia (2001) conducted an international study of medical school mission statements from the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, and Australia noting three integral roles outlined in their mission statements: education, advancement of knowledge, and service to society.

There were no research documents found exploring the similarities and differences of vision and mission statements from ALA-accredited LIS programs and iSchools. When examining higher education and academic libraries, researchers point to the similarity in brevity of the documents, the common themes of the vision and/or mission statements, and the need for administration, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders to be involved in the development of a successful document (Meacham & Gaff, 2006). It is essential that ALA-accredited LIS programs and iSchools consider the impact their vision and mission statements impress upon the public in order to "become viable in our rapidly changing environments" (Mattson, 2021), especially during this time of deep reflection and reckoning after the global 2020 pandemic.

To this point, the authors sought to conduct an exploratory analysis of ALA-accredited programs and iSchools to determine 1) the similarities and differences between both iSchools and ALA-accredited programs, 2) the similarities and differences across ALA-accredited programs, and 3) the similarities and differences across iSchools.

METHODS

In Feb 2020, the websites of the 62 ALA-accredited LIS programs[1] websites were examined to locate the vision and mission statements of each program. A total of 73% (n=45) of the vision statements and 90% (n=56) of the mission statements were located and downloaded for analysis. Similarly, the websites of the 50 iSchool Organization[2] members from North and South America were examined to the locate the vision and mission statements. A total of 66% (n=33) of the vision statement and 88% (n=44) of the mission statements were located and downloaded for analysis. After removing overlap between ALA-accredited programs and iSchools (ALA-accredited programs were only collected once and categorized as ALA-accredited), there were a total of 12 iSchool vision statements and 13 mission statements used in the analysis. Each of the vision and mission statements were examined, and words were removed relating to geographic locations, department names, school names, and abbreviations.

The corpus analysis toolkit AntConc (Anthony, 2020) was used to analyze the saved vision and mission statements from the iSchools and ALA-accredited LIS programs. Four separate CSV (comma-separated

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[1] http://www.ala.org/educationcareers/accreditedprograms/directory
[2] https://ischools.org/Directory

value) files were created; one for the vision statements of ALA programs, one for the vision statements of the iSchools, one for the mission statements of the ALA programs, and finally one for the mission statements of the iSchools. Each CSV file was then imported into AntConc separately. Geographic locations (e.g., Detroit, Michigan, etc.), school and department names, and abbreviations were removed from the text and the Buckley-Salton[3] stopwords list was applied before determining the keyword list and clusters/N-grams.

RESULTS

There were 443 unique words (438 of 1705 total words; 26%) remaining in the vision statements from the ALA accredited programs after removing stop words, geographic locations, department names, school names, and abbreviations. There were 11 keywords that were found at least 10 times across all vision statements as shown in Table 1 and 26 keywords found at least 10 times across all mission statements as shown in Table 2. Below Table 1 and Table 2 an example of collocation is shown with typical context for the term "information" in each of the vision and mission statement analyses. On average there were 38 words for vision statements with a minimum of 6 words and a maximum of 151 words. With regards to mission statements, there was an average of 54 words with a minimum of 10 words and a maximum of 241 words.

For comparison, Table 3 and Table 4 display the information from the iSchool vision and mission statement analyses, respectively, with an example of the term "information" in context. For the iSchools there were 12 vision statements located with 210 unique words (68% of 307 total words) and 13 mission statements located with 642 unique keywords (43% of 1500 total words) after removing stop words, geographic locations, department names, school names, and abbreviations. On average there were 44 words for vision statements with a minimum of 8 words and a maximum of 171 words. With regards to mission statements, there was an average of 76 words with a minimum of 20 words and a maximum of 225 words. In all tables below, the gray highlighting of a term indicates use in both vision and mission statements for the respective source (ALA-accredited programs or iSchools).

Table 1
ALA Program Vision Statement Keywords
(>10 occurrences)

Frequency	Keyword
77	information
25	research
15	learning
14	communities
14	knowledge
13	education
13	world
12	library
12	school
12	society
11	service

CONTEXT example:

Table 2
ALA Program Mission Statement Keywords
(>10 occurrences)

Frequency	Keyword
133	information
34	research
31	knowledge
25	library
23	professionals
23	service
22	mission
21	school
21	science
20	university
19	society
17	leaders
17	professional
16	communities

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[3] http://www.lextek.com/manuals/onix/stopwords2.html

"information"
⇒ accessibility
⇒ age
⇒ and technology
⇒ communication
⇒ field
⇒ professionals
⇒ science
⇒ studies
⇒ world

16	diverse
15	education
15	prepare
14	people
13	learning
12	students
11	creative
11	global
11	innovative
11	management
11	teaching

CONTEXT example:

"information"
⇒ and access
⇒ challenges
⇒ environment
⇒ field
⇒ in society
⇒ institutions
⇒ leaders
⇒ management
⇒ professionals
⇒ science
⇒ society
⇒ studies
⇒ users
⇒ world

Table 3
iSchool Vision Statement Keywords
(>3 occurrences)

Frequency	Keyword
18	information
13	research
7	education
6	world
5	data
5	human
4	global
4	technology

CONTEXT example:

"information"
⇒ accessibility
⇒ and technology
⇒ changes
⇒ environment
⇒ field
⇒ policies
⇒ privacy
⇒ technology

Table 4
iSchool Mission Statement Keywords
(>10 occurrences)

Frequency	Keyword
86	information
33	research
26	knowledge
20	mission
19	people
17	education
17	technology
16	society
16	students
14	professional
14	school
13	service
12	university
12	world
11	diverse
11	faculty
11	leaders
11	professionals

⇒ world	10	communication
	10	communities

CONTEXT example:

"information"
- ⇒ age
- ⇒ and access
- ⇒ and computer sciences
- ⇒ and knowledge
- ⇒ and media
- ⇒ and machines
- ⇒ and technology
- ⇒ creates
- ⇒ field
- ⇒ in society
- ⇒ management
- ⇒ professionals
- ⇒ school
- ⇒ science
- ⇒ studies
- ⇒ users

The results presented above demonstrate very similar vision and mission states across ALA-accredited programs and iSchools today. There were two terms not found frequently across both sets of vision and mission statements: "library" and "technology." The term "library was only found in ALA-accredited programs, as expected, and the term "technology" was found most frequently in iSchools. Most of the other terms overlap and are used just as frequently in both sets of vision and mission statements when compared. One could, if warranted, combine the keywords from the ALA-accredited programs and iSchool programs to develop a generic statement that could be used for both vision and mission statements in either type of department/school. In Table 5, the most common keywords from both ALA-accredited programs and iSchools are displayed side-by-side and a generic vision statement is developed. Similarly, Table 6 shows similar information for a generic mission statement.

Table 5
Combining Vision Statements from ALA-accredited programs and iSchools

ALA-accredited	iSchool	Generic Vision Statement
information	information	information/data
research	research	library
learning	education	research
communities	world	learning/education
knowledge	data	world/global
education	human	human/community/society
world	global	technology
library	technology	expertise/innovate
society	based	
	expertise	
	innovative	

Table 6
Combining Mission Statements from ALA-accredited programs and iSchools

ALA-accredited	iSchool	Generic Mission Statement
information	information	information
research	research	research
knowledge	communication	knowledge
library	sciences	professional
professionals	education	library
service	technology	science
science	knowledge	service
society	society	world/society
leaders	professional	technology
professional	world	leaders
communities	dedicated	diverse
diverse	future	future
education		

DISCUSSION

Morphew and Hartley (2006, p. 470), in their analysis of university mission statements, argue that identifying mission statement "commonalities of purpose could potentially provide an alternative means of categorizing institutions along the dimension of institutional ideolog." An exploratory analysis of the vision and mission statements from both ALA-accredited programs and iSchool members from North and South America has revealed that the vision and mission statements for both are more similar in length and keywords used than one might imagine given the different mission and vision statements of the parent organizations (American Library Association (ALA) and iSchool organization). This should not be surprising given that the iSchool organization contains many ALA-accredited programs. As Leazer (2016, p. 1) stated, many iSchools came from "professional training programs for librarians, and later, archivists." However, Dillon (2012, p. 272) argued that iSchools distinguished themselves from traditional LIS professional programs through "a formal commitment to research and the interdisciplinary study of information in the life of people, society, and culture."

The results presented here, however, demonstrate that while iSchools sought to distinguish themselves by establishing a new culture of interdisciplinary study and commitment to research, the vision and mission statements of iSchools today are still very similar to those of ALA-accredited programs. The generic vision and mission statements highlighted in Tables 5 and 6 demonstrate the similarity between the two with the exception of two keywords: "library" and "technology." While this analysis does not reflect the actual differences in research production or interdisciplinary culture of iSchools and ALA-accredited programs, it does suggest that these two academic entities are marketing themselves in very similar ways and establishing very similar public identities. As found by Ezekwe and Egwu (2016), mission statements can serve to inspire the community, boost performance, and identify the future direction of the institution. The vision and mission statements of both iSchools and ALA-accredited programs tell a very similar story as both look toward the future with similar missions and visions – one referencing "library" as a unique trait (ALA-accredited programs) and the other referencing "technology" as a unique trait (iSchool programs). In future work the authors will use the Internet Archive to examine how these vision and mission statements have changed across time and provide a more in-depth textual and thematic analysis of the vision and mission statements against the vision and mission of their parent organizations.

LIMITATIONS

First, this analysis looked at only the vision and mission statements from websites of iSchools and ALA-accredited programs. The authors acknowledge that the vision and mission statements not found or used

in this analysis could exist in another format. Second, the authors set the frequency of occurrence for words in the ALA vision and mission statements and the iSchool mission statements at >=10 and the iSchool vision statements at >=3; changing this frequency limit either higher or lower could result in different interpretations and the different thresholds are not consistent due to number of statements and number of words used across the two sets of data. Third, a more in-depth content or thematic analysis comparing the mission and vision statements would be ideal for a more nuanced approach.

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