LIS Programs in Pandemic: Challenges, Resilience & Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Panel overview:

Library & information science programs and their parent schools and universities are no strangers to experiencing natural disasters. Many are situated in environments prone to hurricanes, flood, winter storms and wildfires and have experienced one or more of such events in the past. As a field that prides itself for supporting people's informational needs, especially of those under-served populations, we as LIS educators have often stepped up to support our students and broader communities in a time of need. However, the experience of global COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to not only our organizations and profession but also to our personal lives. In this difficult and complex situation how are LIS programs coping and looking into the future? A panel of four LIS Program/School directors and program chairs will share their personal experiences in leading their organizations during the time of COVID-19. The panelists will reflect upon challenges that their programs experienced as the pandemic crisis emerged and evolved, the lessons we are learning about our preparedness and resilience to function during the time of crisis and the emerging opportunities for the future.

Panel structure:

The panel will be organized into three thematic units. Each unit will start with panelists' sharing their reflections through illustrative examples and narrative stories reflecting their own experiences and experiences of their faculty, staff and students. Following introductory remarks on each of the themes, the audience will be invited to contribute their own experiences and observations.

Panel Topics:

COVID-19 is here! This topic will focus on the first signs of pandemic and how the LIS programs were prepared, especially the emergency activation mechanisms, immediate challenges and first responses. From the perspectives of their different geographical locations and settings (large urban, small urban, rural) and program modalities, the panelists will share how they experienced "pivot" to functioning under conditions of COVID-19.

It's a marathon, not a sprint! In this topic the panelists will discuss the issues and creative solutions for organizing continuity and success of educational processes in their programs under the conditions of pandemic. The panelists will discuss actions taken to ensure physical safety and mental health of both faculty and students; academic accommodations that were provided and monitoring mechanisms for ensuring engagement and feedback from LIS communities in their programs.

Challenges are new opportunities! The final topics will explore challenges that still need to be addressed (such as the impact of pandemic on faculty productivity; concerns about student enrollment) and new ideas that are emerging about providing LIS education (e.g., flexibility of instructional formats; online collaboration; unique LIS research contributions). The panelists will identify lessons learned and changes that are being evaluated and planned in their programs.

Prior to the panel the panelists will create a collaborative digital whiteboard (Google Jamboard - https://jamboard.google.com/) that will include the three main themes of the panel. During the presentation, audience participants will have an opportunity to contribute personal comments and artifacts related to the panel topic. Following the panel, this digital white board will be preserved to commemorate our collective experience with pandemic.

Panelists:

Sanda Erdelez, Professor and Director at Simmons University School of Library and Information Science. She is a human information behavior researcher and educator with more than 25 years of experience in the LIS field, including teaching at University of Texas and Austin and University of Missouri- Columbia. Dr. Erdelez' contribution to the panel will focus on the importance of effective and participatory communication processes during pandemic and on LIS programs/schools taking on a leadership role at their home institutions in the areas of specialized expertise, such as online learning and information needs and uses research.

Jenny Bossaller, LIS Program Chair and Associate Professor at the iSchool at the University of Missouri – Columbia. Her teaching and research focus encompasses public libraries, information policy, and the history of libraries and information. She co-developed a public library leadership program, with Denice Adkins, that emphasizes community and professional immersion (PuLL). She is currently working on an interdisciplinary team to revitalize the iSchool's health librarianship program, which focuses on community engagement, which has proven to be especially difficult to manage during COVID. Dr.

Bossaller will discuss problems and opportunities that arose during COVID regarding students' community engagement and practicum options.

Lisa O'Connor is Chair and Associate Professor of the Department of Library and Information Science at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. Previously, she taught at the University of Kentucky and was an academic librarian, serving as both an information literacy education coordinator and business librarian. She has published in the areas of IL assessment and information behavior. Dr. O'Connor's contributions to the panel will address the challenges of managing growth in the midst of the pandemic, including enrollment management and onboarding and mentoring new faculty.

R. David Lankes, Professor and Director of the School of Information Science and Associate Dean, College of Information and Communications at the University of South Carolina. He has served on advisory boards and study teams in the fields of libraries, telecommunications, education, and transportation including at the National Academies. Lankes has been a visiting fellow at the National Library of Canada, The Harvard School of Education, France's national library school Enssib, and was the first fellow of ALA's Office for Information Technology Policy. Dr. Lankes will present how through active research and advocacy agendas with a focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion LIS programs are well situated to help our society in a time of need.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Education programs/schools; administration; students; online learning; teaching faculty.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

LIS education; LIS programs; pandemic; COVID-19; challenges; opportunities; strategy; preparedness.