A Media Librarian's Education: An Assessment of the Availability and Need for Specific Training in Media Librarianship Issues and Practice

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Abstract

This article articulates the findings of two research studies. The first, a national survey, explores the educational background and current job responsibilities of media librarians. The second, a web analysis, assesses media-related curriculum components of accredited library and information science programs. Conclusions support anecdotal evidence that media librarians receive the majority of their education regarding media-related issues on the job.

Each area of expertise within the field of library and information science requires its own special training, background, and/or criteria for success. Media librarians often exchange stories of how they "fell" into media-related responsibilities, either because of changes within their institution or organization or because a job opportunity came along that they couldn't resist. Anecdotally, there is a pervasive sense that "if only" appropriate courses had been offered in library and information science programs current media professionals could have either been better prepared for the challenges of media librarianship, or have discovered earlier on an interest in pursing media-related opportunities.

Literature Review

As with most explorations relating to the media profession, there is a pervasive problem with definitions. Media can be defined in a multitude of ways, and the definition of a media professional invariably differs not only by type of library but from institution to institution. Investigating any aspect of media librarianship is particularly difficult due to the wealth of information available regarding School Library Media Specialists, whose

job responsibilities may or may not bear any resemblance to those of their academic and public counterparts with similar job titles, and the lack of literature relating specifically to academic, public, and corporate media professionals.

Research pertaining to school library media specialists displays a singular lack of focus on the media portion of the title, focusing instead on teacher certification, pedagogy of the appropriate age ranges, and interaction with school curriculums. That being said, however, many of the concepts inherent in this literature are relevant to other settings. According to Donna Shannon (2002, §39), "Commitment to lifelong learning and reflective practice is imperative for all educators. Continuing education programs and professional development activities are acknowledged as essential for information professionals." She goes on to comment that "Candidates should leave their library education programs with the mindset that they have just begun their professional preparation and that it will never end" (§52). Susan Turner, in her article "Educational Preparation of Library Media Professionals" (1999, §10) also draws comparisons between School Library Media Specialists and other information professionals, stating that "Classroom teachers and school library media specialists share the professional mission of all librarians in creating environments to enhance lifelong learning skills and to help students become effective creators and critical users of ideas and information."

Even within the literature relating specifically to School Library Media Specialists, there are many discrepancies in expectations. As Anita J. O Neal (2004, p. 299) concludes, "significant differences exist within and among administrators, teachers, and media specialists in their perceptions regarding the current and ideal roles of the media specialist in instructional programs." In many cases the focus in educating School Library Media Specialists is moving away from audiovisual training towards a heavier focus on new technologies and instructional programming (Tilly & Callison, 2001).

Unfortunately, in all areas of media librarianship (and the library profession in general) there seems to be a growing gap between the courses taught in library school programs and the on-the-job training and professional development required for continued expertise and growth, and has been for quite some time. Ronald R. Powell, in his article "Sources of Professional Knowledge for Academic Librarians," notes that respondents to his survey "indicated that library school and on-the-job experience provided most of their professional education and training but suggested that they would prefer to acquire more of their knowledge from continuing education and staff development programs than is presently the case" (1988, p. 332). Meeting the demand for continuing education opportunities is necessary to maintaining the requisite expertise of the profession.

> Graduates of library school programs should have a broad understanding of the academic environment and the function of libraries within that environment. As professionals, librarians must then meet the challenge of maintaining and developing their knowledge and skills throughout their careers. Major changes in higher education, the rapid development of library technologies, and substantial expansion of the tools and services offered through academic libraries are factors which combine to make continuing education imperative. (ACRL Professional Education Committee, 1992, p. 590)

As with other areas of the library profession, mentoring is beginning to be recognized as one of the leading ways in which new professionals can be brought up to speed. In some cases the only preparation an incoming professional may have is coursework rather than hands-on experience (Singleton, 2003). As noted by Merchuria C. Williams and Juanita W. Buddy, "Mentoring programs are invaluable to new library media specialists and veteran professionals. Each individual learns the art of sharing and receiving information, of interpersonal communication skills, and of gracefully maturing professionally and personally" (2001, p. 257). This model is popular with academic libraries as well. Deanna L. Roberts comments that the mentor relationship "allows new people to observe departmental activities, divisional functions and goals, in addition to the policies and procedures of the organization, through consultation with the experienced professional" (1986, p. 117). Continuing to find innovative ways to foster collaboration between graduate students and media professionals is vital to the ongoing health of media librarianship as a profession.

Methodology

The assessment of the availability and need for specific training in media librarianship reported here was carried out in two parts: a national survey of media librarians and a web analysis. The survey was posted online using a free web resource (*Free Online Surveys*, http://freeonlinesurveys .com) and participation was sought through the VIDEOLIB listserv (http:// www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/vrtlists/html), a heavily trafficked national listserv for media professionals that is associated with the American Library Association Video Round Table. A message was distributed to the listserv on April 25, 2005, calling for voluntary participation, with a follow-up message sent on May 2, 2005. The original web analysis consisted of examining the information that was readily available on the websites of the 56 institutions listed on the 2004-2005 Directory of Institutions Offering ALA-Accredited Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies, and was conducted throughout the 2005 academic year. A follow-up analysis of the same websites was conducted in 2009 to assess the growth or decline in available media-related courses offered, as evidenced by the public information shared with prospective students online.

Research Results

National Survey

Survey Respondents. The survey was designed to assess how current media librarians were educated, what types of services they currently are involved with, and what skills and factors are most beneficial for media librarianship education. The first portion of the survey collected demographic information about the participants. There were ninety-eight respondents to the survey with degrees from a number of different institutions and with widely varying job responsibilities and titles. Seven of the respondents did not have any form of a Master's of Library Science degree, and the remaining ninety-one respondents received their degrees from forty-three different accredited institutions. Participants were also asked to indicate the subject of their Bachelor's degree and any other degrees they hold and to include the name of the degree-granting institution. The only degree held by a significant number of respondents was a Bachelor's degree in English (seventeen respondents) from different institutions. None of the respondents currently work at school libraries, public or private, but otherwise were a fairly representative sample from various types of institutions.

Current Areas of Service. Media librarians not only come from a variety of backgrounds, they also have differing job titles and areas of responsibility. Survey participants submitted their official job titles, and though there were a few commonalities such as "librarian" showing up in the majority of the titles, many were unique. A few commonalities were as follows: forty-six respondents (47 percent) had the word "media" in their title, sixteen (16 percent) had a form of "audiovisual" in their title, five (5 percent) had "non-print" and five (5 percent) had "film" in their title. Only six respondents (6 percent) were required to have any degree other than an MLS for their current position. Required degrees ranged from an additional master's degree in any area to a degree in film studies. Though seventy-two respondents (73 percent) knew that media services were part of the position responsibilities when they were hired, only thirty-four respondents (35 percent) intended to become a media librarian when they were still in graduate school or first starting their career.

Job responsibilities varied greatly from person to person. Even the media portion of a media librarian's job can vary widely. Respondents indicated what types of media services they are currently engaged in.

In addition to a variety of responsibilities with media services, the majority of media librarians (80 or 83 percent of respondents) are also responsible for many other library services. The entire spectrum of possible responsibilities were represented including administration, reference services, collection development, literacy instruction, inventory control, acquisitions, cataloging, serials, reserve services, programming, and staff
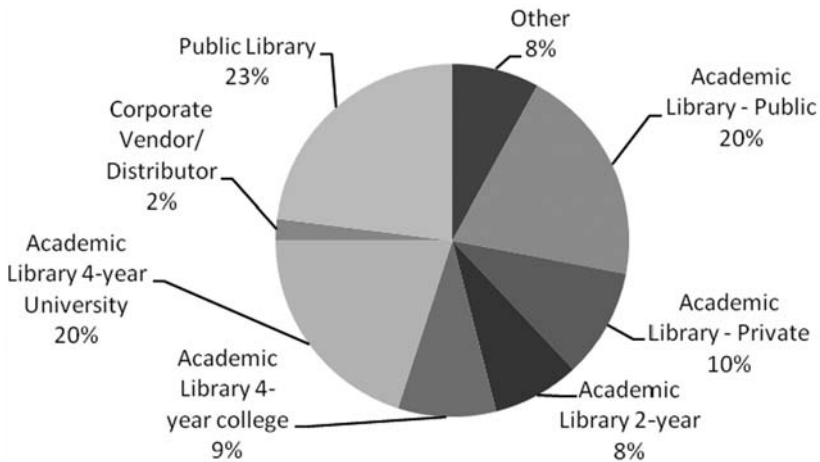
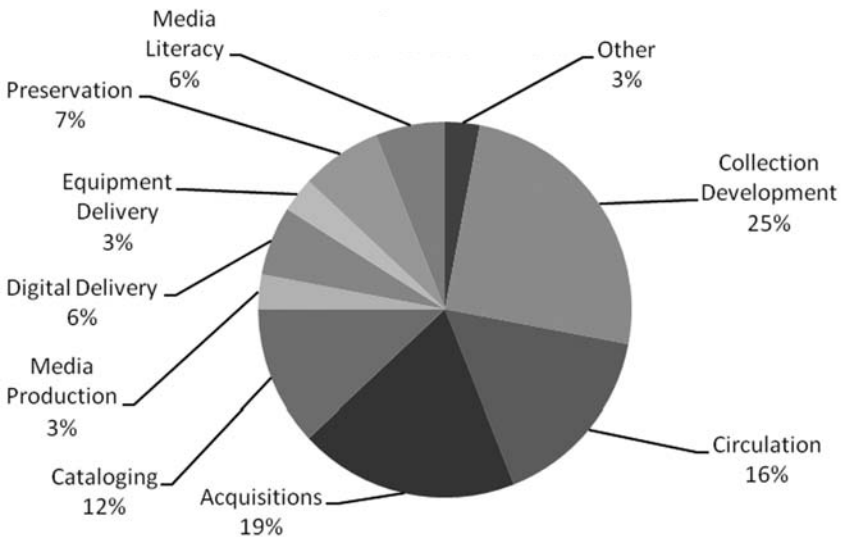Figure 1 – Type of Institution Represented

Figure 2 – Media Services

supervision. There was no apparent correlation between media responsibilities and assignment of other responsibilities within the library.

Acquiring the Necessary Skills to Succeed. Survey respondents were asked to rank the factors that were most influential in acquiring the necessary skills to succeed as a media librarian. The highest ranked factor was self-

tutoring/training on media issues at point of need, followed in descending order by on-the-job training by colleagues, professional publications, continuing education through professional organization or societies, courses taken as part of an MLS or equivalent program, and mentoring with media librarians at other institutions. Only thirty-four respondents (35 percent) indicated that courses specifically relating to media librarianship were offered in their graduate program during their enrollment. Of those thirty-four respondents who indicated that courses were offered, twenty-eight (82 percent) indicated that courses were only offered on an elective basis and at uncertain frequency. Twenty-four (69 percent) took advantage of the opportunity to take formal courses relating specifically to media librarianship. In general this means that only twenty-four percent of the total respondents to the survey had ever taken courses on media librarianship as part of their MLS program. The largest number of courses that were offered were specific to a K-12 media specialist program, which is in keeping with the results of the web analysis section of this assessment. Very few (11 or 13 percent) of the respondents had ever taught a course relating to media librarianship issues themselves. Those that had taught a course centered on selection of nonprint formats, media reference, media production, and media programming for various groups.

The final question on the survey encouraged respondents to identify one issue or skill set that relates to media librarianship that they found particularly helpful or wish had been covered in their graduate program. Though there were many individual comments and suggestions, the prevailing sentiment was that the most important aspect of media librarianship is recognition and understanding of the differences between media collection management and print collections. The uniqueness of the formats and services involved carry over to all aspects of media librarianship including selection of materials, acquisitions, cataloging and marking, preservation, programming, and copyright and public performance rights.

The results of this survey are further informally corroborated by the kinds of discussion that are taking place in the ALA Media Discussion Group, an ad hoc group of interested individuals who meet yearly at ALA conferences. As noted in the minutes posted online (ALA Video Round Table, 2007) the 2007 discussion framed four basic trends in media librarianship: the impact of new formats on collections and services, the increasing demand for multimedia production centers, the role of libraries in offering streaming multimedia resources, and video gaming in libraries. The heavy demand (participants in the discussion more than doubled in two years) for such opportunities to discuss current media trends supports the fact that most media librarians indicated that self-tutoring/training on media issues at point of need was the best or only way they have to further their knowledge and skills as they relate to media collections and

services. The second part of the study being reported here, a web analysis of available courses in library graduate programs, unfortunately supports that premise as well.

Web Analysis

Data Collection. The original web analysis was conducted during 2005-2006 academic year, with a follow-up analysis conducted in 2009. The web-sites for all fifty-six ALA- accredited institutions listed on the 2004-2005 Directory of Institutions were reviewed. One institution's website was un-available during the web analysis and one institution's website was only available in French. The remaining fifty-four websites were analyzed, and information was collected in the following categories: institution's name, institutions URL, institution's location, the name of the institution's li-brary science program, and availability of media-related course offerings. When media-related courses were offered, the following additional infor-mation was collected: course name, course frequency, and the availabil-ity of course descriptions. When course descriptions were available, they were collected for analysis. Additionally, course topics and instructor in-formation for media-related courses were collected when available.

Courses Offered in 2005. Fifty of the fifty-four (93 percent) programs offered some type of media-specific courses at the time of analysis. There were a to-tal of 131 separate courses offered between the fifty programs. The courses available on media-related topics fell into three primary categories: school media librarianship; media or multimedia production; and development, access, and preservation of audiovisual collections. Twenty-two (17 percent) of the courses offered were on development, access, and preservation of au-diovisual collections. Seven (5 percent) of the courses offered were on the development of audiovisual collections for children or young adults, spe-cific to school media libraries. Twenty (15 percent) of the courses offered were on the production of media or multimedia. The majority of courses offered were in school media librarianship, with 82 (63 percent) of the 139 courses offered being in school media librarianship.

Despite the fact that academic, public, school, and special libraries' collections typically include some form of audiovisual material, only three (6 percent) of the fifty-four universities required a media-specific course or courses. Twenty (37 percent) of the fifty-four universities did not re-quire a media-specific course or courses. The remaining thirty-one (57 percent) programs did not clearly indicate on their web sites whether or not a media-specific courses was required. This, combined with the rela-tively low number of courses in general development, access, and preser-vation of audiovisual collections lends itself to the conclusion that media has not been identified as an area of particular interest or concern within the curriculums of library science degree-granting institutions.
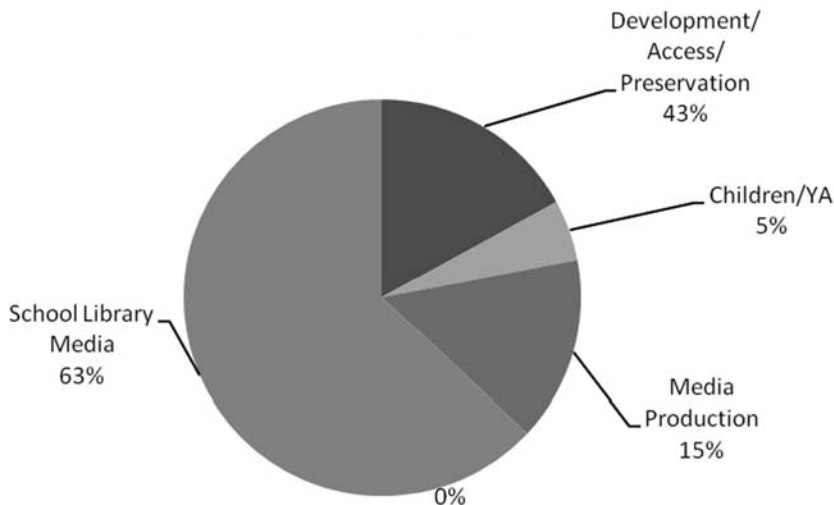
Figure 3 – Types of Courses Offered in 2005

Courses Offered in 2009. The web analysis conducted in 2009 as a follow-up to the original study resulted in a slightly different picture of the media environment. Only forty-eight of the original fifty-four programs are currently offering courses specific to media services. Eighteen (14 percent) out of the original 131 courses listed were no longer offered. One institution added a course on media production where none had previously been offered, leaving a net loss of thirteen percent of courses that relate to media services. Two (1 percent) of the courses had changed their focus from media production to gaming services and the study of gaming in society. It was not possible to determine how often any of the courses listed in the course catalogs had been taught within the last few years, so there is no comparison data for the popularity of media courses versus other courses offered at the same institution. It was assumed that if a course was still listed in the catalog it was still offered at least periodically. The overall distribution of the types of courses offered also changed significantly since the earlier web analysis, with a much greater emphasis on media collection development, access, and preservation.

Based on course catalogs, it is virtually impossible to determine the true scope and depth of a topic that any course may cover, and there are numerous possible reasons why media is not now stressed as a vital component in library and information science curriculums. The anecdotal evidence suggests that when many current media professionals were enrolled in graduate school there simply was no demand for specialization in media services except as related to the school (K-12) environment.
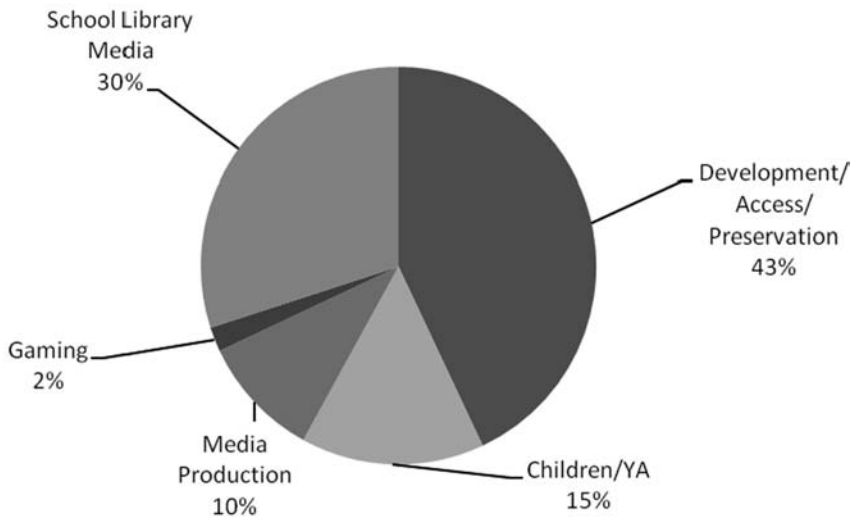
Figure 4 – Types of Courses Offered in 2009

The drop in the number of courses being offered between 2005 and 2009 relating specifically to media services could be indicative of a lack of understanding of the complex nature of managing media collections or services. Alternatively, viewed from a positive standpoint, it could be that media has become so pervasive that it no longer can be distinguished from other, more traditional formats, and therefore is being incorporated into the curriculum across the board.

The four major trends in media librarianship identified earlier in the Digital Media Discussion Group Report from 2007 (ALA Video Round Table, 2007), the impact of new formats on collections and services, the increasing demand for multimedia production centers, the role of libraries in offering streaming multimedia resources, and video gaming in libraries are not reflected in any significant changes in graduate school curriculums.

Perhaps most disappointing is the complete lack of evidence that the intricacies of streaming multimedia is addressed in any of the library science media education programs. As noted in the meeting minutes from 2007, "Although there were a number of librarians present who have been providing streaming access to users for two years or more, it is still a very new and unsettled area in regards to delivery systems, pricing models, and licensing negotiations" (ALA Video Round Table, § 5). This topic continues to be of major concern, warranting a special day session at the 2008 National Media Market based on the White Paper on Digital Video

Licensing prepared by Gary Handman and Lawrence Daressa (Handman & Daressa, 2008). Surely a topic of such great concern to the profession should be reflected in the coursework taught to new professionals. While it is encouraging that the two newly added courses on gaming and society indicate that some media trends of active interest to the library profession are in fact being recognized as specializations worth pursuing, the reduced offerings relating to multimedia production, as well as media services in general, seem to indicate that emerging media professionals will face at least the same on-the-job learning curve as their predecessors, if not with a greater handicap.

Conclusion and Opportunities for Further Research
Media collections, both now and in the future, present unique challenges to library professionals. Collection development, preservation, and access to audiovisual materials, whether in physical formats or online digital forms, require an ever-evolving understanding of technologies that are becoming or that have actually become outdated, of new technologies, and of changing patron use patterns. Too often media collections are viewed as secondary to print collections, or, perhaps more damaging, as though the same issues pertain to both print and nonprint. It can be argued that quite the contrary is true. Audiovisual materials must be selected, acquired, cataloged, and preserved based on their own special attributes. For that goal to be achieved, media professionals must be educated appropriately, whether through official programs of coursework, on-the-job training, mentoring, or self-initiated ongoing professional development.

The results of the survey suggest that, though many current media professionals were hired into their current positions knowing that they would have at least some level of responsibility for media collections or services, only slightly more than a third had any intention of becoming a media librarian when they were in graduate school. That being the case, it would be impossible to attribute the perceived dearth of media librarians' education and experience to a lack in library and information science programs. However, as the majority of library and information science programs do not require or do not seem to stress the importance of media in the curriculum, it is also impossible to determine how much of the underlying problem could be resolved by an increased emphasis in these programs on media librarianship as a growing field. This is particularly true since the majority of survey respondents who indicated that media-related courses were offered at their program did take advantage of that opportunity.

Further assessment of the education of media librarians might include a comparison of job-preparedness with library professionals who deal with other types of special collections. It is to be hoped that by drawing attention to the perceived lack of education and experience of profes-

sionals new to media librarianship, that library and information science programs, teaching faculty, national organizations such as the American Library Association, and individuals with media expertise will be able to work collaboratively to create a support structure in sync with changing educational needs.

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