

A UNIFIED APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF LIBRARY STUDIES
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Abstract

Argues that there is a unified field of library studies (librarianship) that can be mapped and enumerated. Defines that field as being studies of interaction with the human record. Describes the components of the field of library studies. Argues for library education based on a universal core curriculum supplemented by national core curricula and institution-specific curricula. Discusses the role of professional associations in library education and the nature of the faculty in library education program.

Introduction

At one time, library studies and library practice were localized and rooted in local, regional, or, at best, national policies and practices. The trends toward globalization in all aspects of human life and the decades-long drive for

standardization in many aspects of library work have made the localization of library practice neither desirable nor sustainable. If library studies are to be a universal and unified field, it follows that education (teaching and research) in library studies must be based on internationally accepted notions of the boundaries of the field and internationally accepted definitions of the components of the field. Because those notions and definitions have not been delineated fully, there is a general lack of consensus on the nature and boundaries of librarianship in the 21st century. The boundaries between librarianship and information science (and between library studies and information studies) are little understood and less charted. I propose a definition of librarianship that is centered on the human record—that vast assemblage of messages and documents (textual, visual, and symbolic) in all formats created by humans since the invention of written and visual communication. Given that focus, library studies is seen as the field of those professionals who assemble and give

access to sub-sets of the human record (collections); who list and organize those sub-sets so that they can be retrieved; who work to ensure that records of those sub-sets are integrated to allow universal access to the whole human record; who are dedicated to the preservation and onward transmission of the human record; and who give help and instruction in the use of the human record. Library studies embrace all forms of recorded human communication—print on paper, manuscript, recorded sound, audio-visual materials, electronic resources and documents, etc.—and seeks to provide equal access to all those forms. Library studies are informed by a set of core universal values—intellectual freedom, service to individuals and society, stewardship of the human record, universal access, etc.—and are conducted within an ethical framework that embraces those values. This paper outlines a framework for education in library studies based on this definition.

Education in library studies

I wish here to delineate the essential features of programs of education that prepare library professionals to work in libraries or in related areas. Also, I wish to describe what those professionals need to have acquired in the course of attaining an appropriate qualification that is accredited by a national or supranational professional association. That qualification may be a university degree (at the bachelor's or master's level) or may be a professional qualification, depending on the educational structure of the country in which the qualification is obtained. This description, of course raises two questions—what is the appropriate venue and level of library education? Also, what is the role of the professional association in authorizing and/or accrediting the qualification?

Basic library qualifications. One valid definition of a “profession” is “a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and arduous training.”¹ We are gathered here to talk about the nature of that specialized knowledge in librarianship, the form that the training can take, and if

there is a unified approach to education in library studies. That specialized knowledge is best acquired after a general education of a suitable quality and at a suitable level. In many countries, a general education will be acquired in the course of taking a bachelor's degree at a university or college and, therefore, an education in library studies will be at the post-graduate level—in the form of a master's degree or diploma. In other countries and educational systems, that general education will be acquired in school, normally up to the age of 18, and education in library studies will be within a bachelor's degree or as structured professional training of another kind. Whichever of these is chosen, there is a general consensus that a librarian should be someone who not only has specialized knowledge but also a broad knowledge and understanding of the liberal arts and sciences. In general, we can say that, in all countries, library education should be built on the basis of the best general education that is available. The important thing is that the qualification to be a librarian should certify that that

the holder of the qualification is an educated person who possesses specialized library knowledge and is well equipped to use that knowledge in library work. Further, that library qualification, whether acquired in a university, college, professional school, or other venue should be of a consistent quality and reflect a consistent content within the educational system of the country in question.

The role of professional associations. One hallmark of a profession is that the members of that profession exercise control over professional education. This can be done in a variety of ways, ranging from complete control by the professional association—in which the curricula, examinations, etc., are prescribed—to loose oversight of the educational process. Each country and each association will have to decide how to approach this question, but a national profession that has no, or minimal, control of its education will reap the inevitable consequence of an ever-growing gap between professional education and professional practice.

The field of library studies

As I have stated before, the essential character of the field of library studies is defined by reference to the human record. In other words, it is concerned with recorded knowledge and information in all formats and with the services and methods to assist in access to that recorded knowledge and information. It is concerned with the management and use of the human record and deals with the creation, communication, identification, selection, acquisition, organization, description, storage and retrieval, preservation, analysis, assessment, dissemination, and management of recorded knowledge and information. Library studies are based on shared values and ethical standards—statements of those values and codes of ethics will vary from country to country but each statement and code will contain a kernel of values (e.g., intellectual freedom, equality of access, service) and ethical conduct (e.g., confidentiality with respect to library use, openness to

all points of view, no discrimination against any group in society) that are common to all libraries and all librarians.

This definition of the essential character of library studies contains, in outline, the broad subjects with which programs for professional librarians should be concerned. Libraries, great and small and of all types, have a variety of services (listed below) in common and use all appropriate technologies to increase the cost-efficiency and cost-benefit of those services. It follows that a core professional library curriculum should cover those services and the various forms they take in different types of library as well as the impact of technology on those services.

Information and knowledge creation and communication. It is very important that librarians understand the processes by which published and unpublished carriers of recorded knowledge and information (hereafter "documents") are created. Libraries are concerned with published and unpublished printed documents (books, printed journals, music, maps, etc.), manuscript texts, sound recordings,

videorecordings, microforms, sundry A/V materials, three-dimensional created objects, realia, and, of course, digital documents and resources of all kinds. Bibliography (the study of printed documents) has a long scholarly history not matched for other means of communication, but the educated librarian should also have detailed knowledge of all the processes by which all forms of communication are created; the means by which they are disseminated; their history, present, and future; and, the role that each plays in library services.

Identification and evaluation. Librarians have to be able identify relevant documents in all media in order to carry out the great majority of their professional tasks. Knowledge of the widest range of resources in which documents can be located is, therefore, an essential component of a library education. Once identified, those documents have to be evaluated and the critical thinking necessary for that evaluation is an essential tool for the educated librarian.

Selection. Libraries today have a variety of “collections.”

The most obvious is the collection of tangible objects that the library owns and houses. There is also the universe of such collections owned by other libraries to which the library has access by means of union catalogues, inter-library lending programs, document delivery processes, etc. Then there are the intangible objects (electronic documents and resources) for which the library pays (by subscription and otherwise). Lastly there is the universe of intangible documents that are available to the library and its users by means of the computer access provided by the library.

Selecting documents to add to the first and third of these “collections” once relevant documents have been located, identified, and evaluated (collection development) is a primary professional activity in which all librarians should be educated. Further, the educated librarian should be aware of policies and approaches by which all libraries build their collections.

Acquisition. Once tangible and intangible documents and resources have been identified and selected they must either acquire them or arrange access to them. This task (acquisitions) is often performed in great part by library workers other than librarians, but an educated librarian must have a more than passing acquaintance with acquisition and access processes (including such acquisitions mechanisms as approval plans). Although libraries acquire and give access to documents and resources from both public and private sources, the latter involve some specific issues. A library studies graduate should be conversant with the private (and increasingly internationalized) sector that encompasses publishers and vendors and the legal and financial implications of interacting with that private sector.

Organization and description. The organization and description of documents by means of cataloguing, classification, and indexing (hereafter "cataloguing") is the intellectual heart of librarianship. The bibliographic architecture that results from cataloguing according to

national and international standards is the vital element in all library cooperative programs and the structures (codes, classification schemes, subject heading lists) that create that architecture are among the basic documents of librarianship. It is worth noting that cataloguing is applied to all four types of "collection" (see *Selection*, above) and, in fact, makes each type of "collection" (each sub-set of the human record) feasible and accessible.

Storage and retrieval. Each medium used for documents is stored in ways appropriate to that medium and retrieval of those documents is facilitated or hindered by the means of storage. The educated librarian must be fully conversant with storage and retrieval systems for all documents (tangible and intangible).

Preservation. There is considerable concern about the preservation of the human record. That concern began with the "slow fires" of books printed on acidic paper, the brittleness and fragility of microfilms and films, the impermanence of manuscripts, and all the other threats to

the tangible media, and has grown because of the mutability and instability of electronic records. The educated librarian should be conversant with all the perils to human record in all formats and with all the methods and procedures for averting those perils.

Interpretation. Users of libraries, both on-site and remote, require assistance in the use of the collections to which those libraries give access. That assistance can take many forms. The latter encompass reference and advisory services; librarian-faculty consultation processes; informal help of all kinds; librarians working as part of research teams in specialized institutions; recommended readings lists, lists of web sites, etc.; library instruction/information competence programs; and all other human-to-human interactions. The educated librarian should be aware of the details and strategies of all these approaches, and the scope and limitations of all sources used in these interactions.

Assessment. All library collections (tangible and intangible) and all library services and programs should be subject to

continuing evaluation and assessment. That evaluation can be evidence-based or can be on the basis of professional experience. The educated librarian should be conversant with all assessment techniques and their applications in a variety of library contexts.

Dissemination. Libraries, especially special libraries, have moved beyond library services based on “waiting to be asked,” to the anticipation of user needs by bringing materials and services to the attention of potential users (often called selective dissemination of information). The use of techniques such as user profiles is facilitated by computer technology. The educated librarian should be knowledgeable about such programs.

Management. Libraries vary greatly in mission, size, and funding sources. They may have hundreds of employees of various types or only one employee. They may own and give access to vast general collections or they may be concerned with smaller, intensively specialized materials. No matter what the type of library, there are management,

personnel, and financial implications requiring librarians with and education in all administrative/management issues.

This part of the field of library studies is heavily influenced by, and draws upon, the wider field of management and business studies.

Furthering literacy and learning. All libraries have a role to play in improving literacy levels in their society and in furthering a culture of learning. That role can vary greatly from library to library (depending on the type of library and the community served) and from country to country. The unifying principle lies in commitment to literacy and the belief that societies are improved—intellectually, financially, and in all ways—when their citizens are literate and have every opportunity for learning.

Values and ethics. Almost all library professional associations have a published code of ethics, statement of values, and/or other statement embodying their ethical beliefs. A survey of those statements reveals both difference and unanimity. For example, the statement of policies of the Library and

Information Association of South Africa (LIASA)ⁱⁱ contains a reference to the importance of intellectual freedom, the statement on professional conductⁱⁱⁱ and the core values statement^{iv} of the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) refer to intellectual freedom and the free flow of information and ideas, and the code of ethics of the Librarians Association of Malaysia (Persatuan Pustakawan Malaysia)^v refers to “the principle of intellectual freedom” and “free and equal access to sources of information.” Other key concepts such as service, privacy and confidentiality of library users, and preservation of the human record are also commonly encountered in the many codes and statements. It is evident that librarians throughout the world have enumerated, and believe in, values and ethics that are common to all and that a thorough understanding of those values and ethics and their application should be a part of library education.

The curriculum

A curriculum for library education must provide opportunities to study the theory, principles, practice, and values that underlie library service. That study should be by means of a variety of educational methods and experiences. The preceding section of this paper delineates and defines the parts of the field of library studies, each of which should be included in the curriculum. I believe that the library profession in each country has a duty to devise and implement a "core curriculum" of courses based on a definition of the field of library studies within that country (the national core). Further, I believe that a careful examination of the field will show that there is a core *within* each core that is shared by all. In other words, that the central field of library studies (the universal core) applies in all countries, and should be accommodated within each country's core curriculum and within the wider curriculum of library education.

Think of the curriculum of any institution giving library education as three concentric circles.

Universal core. The smallest, inner circle is the core of courses that are common to all library education in all countries.

National core. The second circle, which contains the universal core, consists otherwise of courses that make up the core curriculum for that country.

Wider curriculum. The third circle, which contains the universal core and the national core, consists otherwise of the courses that are special to the particular institution. The third wider curriculum will vary from institution to institution and will include subjects not defined in the analysis of the field of library studies given above.

The subjects that comprise the field of library studies can appear as part of the universal core, the national core, and/or the wider curriculum. For example, the universal core would include study of the principles and practice of cataloguing, the national core the practice of cataloguing in the country or region, and the wider curriculum applications of cataloguing in specific contexts. The aim must be to

produce librarians whose education has given them an understanding of the theory, principles, and practice of each of the parts of the field and who understand the core values of librarianship and their application to each of those parts of the field.

The faculty

A program of library studies should not only cover all the parts of the field as defined and delineated earlier within a core curriculum, but should also have qualified teachers who are intimately involved with the major share of teaching and research in the subjects encompassed by the field preferably by direct teaching or, at a minimum, by curriculum development and coordination. Their teaching and research will be supplemented (but not replaced by) by part-time teachers (usually practicing librarians), many of whom will teach in specialized areas. Those part-time teachers can enrich the quality and diversity of a program, because practitioners as part-time teachers bring real world experience and practical knowledge that can benefit their

students greatly. In many cases, a program of library education will be within a grouping of programs or a larger institution devoted to related but non-library topics (information science, education, computer studies, etc.). It is imperative that the integrity of the library program and adequate staffing of that program be preserved in such circumstances.

Summary

- There is a field of librarianship based on interaction with, and the transmission of, the human record.
- This field can be mapped and defined for the purpose of library education.
- Each area of the field can be taught at three levels:
 - As part of a universal core curriculum common to all countries.
 - As part of a national core curriculum common to all library education in a country or region
 - As part of the wider curriculum specific to a given teaching institution.

- All library studies programs should have a teaching faculty that is adequate, in number and types of specialization, to teach and do research in library studies
- Professional associations should accredit library studies programs that create a curriculum embracing both the universal and national core curricula; teach that curriculum effectively; create research in that field; and maintain and support a teaching faculty dedicated to those aims.

ⁱ Webster's Third international dictionary of the English language. Merriam, 1976.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.liaias.org.za/policies/policies.php>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.alia.org.au/policies/professional.conduct.html>

^{iv} <http://www.alia.org.au/policies/core.values.html>

^v http://www.pnm.my/ppm/ppm_about.htm