

What is Librarianship and What Does a Librarian Need to Know?

ALA President Michael Gorman's Forum on Education for Librarianship; January 20, 2006, at the ALA Midwinter Conference, San Antonio.

Reactor: Madeleine Lefebvre, University Librarian, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

My comments were informed by Fiona Black's paper: *Patterns, Perceptions and Predictions: Librarianship in the Early 21st Century*, and by the comments of presenter Carol Brey-Casiano and my fellow reactors, Leslie Burger and Jenna Freedman.

To set the context for my remarks: I am an employer of librarians, a past president of the Canadian Library Association, and an active participant in the Dalhousie University School of Information Management, where I am a professional partner of a current student, an occasional lecturer, and soon to be researcher in residence. My university library employs students during their education as well as after graduation. So we have the opportunity to develop a relationship with some of the students over a period of time.

Let me say straight away that I do believe in the need for a core curriculum. As with some of the other speakers today I did not enjoy cataloging; it was not my forte but I recognized the need for it to be a required component of my degree program. I am a member of the Canadian Library Association President's Council on the 8Rs Study, which is a major human resources study in Canada. (www.ls.ualberta.ca/8rs). It is clear from this study and its precursor that leadership, management and advocacy skills are key to the career success of LIS graduates in the 21st century. My colleague and friend, Wendy Newman, who is also speaking here today, has developed a very successful Advocacy course at the University of Toronto.

Research and data analysis, marketing and community development skills are also necessary. Graduates must also possess superior communication skills in their widest sense. Just as content is being unbundled in the sphere of our work, so it seems that elements of librarians' education are also being unbundled. They graduate with a basket of skills and experiences but what seems to be missing in some cases is an ability to 'join up the dots': to see the integrated nature of what they have learned, and how to apply it to different aspects of library operations. I have heard new librarians say "You didn't warn us there would be so many meetings." I've also seen several situations where recent graduates didn't know how to organize or chair a meeting effectively, or map out a project strategy.

I also see a tendency for new graduates to be inward looking towards the profession they have joined. I believe they should be outward-looking, recognizing how to apply their knowledge; recognizing the value of other professionals (such as systems analysts, HR specialists, accountants, etc) who may be working alongside them; and recognizing the need to share library values as they work towards common, larger goals. The graduates

need to be adaptable, open and flexible – nimble and responsive to change: to expect change, rather than resist it. In a unionized academic environment I see a tendency in some new librarians to focus more on developing a union network rather than a professional network. In public service positions, new librarians need to think from the user's point of view rather than their own.

I also see a desire for constant professional development to be much stronger in some than in others. I would like to see all students graduate with a fundamental understanding that lifelong learning in their chosen profession is a given. Students seem to have more awareness now of the value and necessity of professional association involvement, but I rarely hear students and new graduates demonstrate or even express a desire for leadership. What I do see very often now is a gratifying global focus. To follow up on Carol's remarks, this bodes well for the library to be seen as a centre for community development. I am heartened by the global and community values I have seen regularly in recent graduates. Quite often I see a passion for the profession, and a desire to contribute to the public good, which is very encouraging.

What I would *like* to see is a tri-partite relationship between the LIS schools, the employers and the professional associations. A strong and dynamic collaboration between these three pillars will build in the student a strong grounding of three elements essential to their career success: core knowledge, experiential learning, and professional networking.