

Report on Education Forum Discussion

There was general consensus that there were misconceptions on both sides, i.e., faculty of library science schools and practicing librarians. They agreed that the issues of practice versus theory were important, but that the curriculum varies because the professors are educating students for so many kinds of positions and kinds of settings. They felt that the teaching of classes is very personal and it is difficult to make generalizations about the teaching of library and information science.

They focused mainly on face to face classes versus on-line delivery. They believe that the trend is towards on-line courses whether we like it or not. This is the trend. Currently many buy books on-line and they asked who would have dreamed we would be doing this so soon. They contended that there are many misconceptions and false assumptions about teaching on-line and even misconceptions on what on-line means. This can vary all the way from lists of assignments on-line to actual teaching on-line. **They emphasized that we should not argue about the direction towards on-line teaching, but rather how to improve it.**

At one large library school on-line courses began as early as 1996 for students who could not move to the school. According to the professors, economics is driving the trend towards on-line. It is an option for those who can't have access. There is a mixed course offering with blended or hybrid courses. The on-line part of the course is sometimes on the weekend and students will fly in from elsewhere to attend. It was noted that we live in a mobile society, and some students who begin the courses at the campus move elsewhere and the on-line capacity allows them to complete their degree. Someone mentioned that members of military units are better able to take courses.

The professors pointed out that one needs to concentrate on the quality of on-line courses and document the best types of on-line instruction. They pointed out that in their view the classroom can be an artificial situation whereas on-line instruction can even take place in a library.

One school is starting an on-line "portfolio" requirement instead of a comprehensive exam. At the beginning, students get a one week immersion in library school and they attend from 8AM to 8PM. They have set up a web base and will be reviewing the portfolios. They have core requirements and the elective requires six courses from the non-core options.

Another school does a comprehensive examination on-line. Questions are sent out and they do a research paper on each question. The students have 14 competencies that they have to meet and they do this through artifacts and projects.

Theses are optional these days. No one does a thesis anymore. One professor said that doing a thesis was too focused. She felt that students should have a broader knowledge. Although I argued that the value was in the process, she strongly felt that the "portfolio" requirement was better.

In summary, there was consensus in my group that there was a misunderstanding about the value of on-line education. They felt that it was the way of the future, and that library schools should concentrate on improving it rather than resisting it.

Frederick C. Lynden
Reporter
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