

The State of the Schools

By Prudence W. Dalrymple

TODAY'S LIBRARY SCHOOLS ARE
CULTIVATING NEW FIELDS AND REAPING A
BUMPER CROP OF NEW PROFESSIONALS

When was the last time you visited your library school? Last year? Ten years ago? When you graduated? Chances are, you haven't been back since you graduated. It's easy to think of library school as it was "back then," especially if you are among the majority of currently practicing librarians who attained their master's degrees from programs accredited under ALA's 1972 *Standards for Accreditation*—standards written before the microcomputer.

Why should currently practicing librarians care about library and information studies (LIS) education, when it may be well in their past? Among many reasons, libraries still hire the largest proportion of LIS graduates, and library directors want to know about the number of graduates available for hire and the knowledge, skills, and values they possess.

How can librarians influence education? Accreditation offers the profession the opportunity—indeed the obligation—to set the standards for entry-level practitioners. High-quality education is a shared responsibility of both the LIS schools and the profession itself. Together, we work to ensure that LIS graduates are capable of performing the information and library functions needed by society.

It's been five years since the ALA Council approved new standards for accreditation (*AL*, Mar. 1992, p. 251), broadening their scope from "librarianship" to "library and information studies." And while not all changes in LIS programs since then are due to the new standards, the five-year mark

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since their approval provides a fine occasion to survey the current state of education for the profession. This article focuses on accredited master's programs in LIS in the United States and Canada, except where noted. Currently, there are 49 accredited programs in the United States and seven accredited programs in Canada.

School closings: Is the decline real?

Many of the articles appearing in the popular library press over the last several years have lamented the closing of library schools and struggled to explain it (*AL*, Dec. 1995, p. 1095–97). While no one welcomes the idea of joining the "AWOLS" (Alumni Without Library


Schools), it is worth noting that fluctuations in the number of educational programs in a profession is not uncommon. As both higher education and the professions themselves respond to changing societal needs, programs are established even as others are phased out.

In library and information studies, 73 different colleges and universities have offered master's programs that were accredited by ALA at some time during the past three decades (1966–96). (The greatest number of programs in existence at any one time was in March 1982, when there were 70 accredited programs.) In 1966, there were only 38 accredited master's programs in North America; 10 years later, there were 64. And although 15 schools have closed since 1976—the last was Brigham Young University's in 1993—other schools have opened.

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How many students 10 years ago?

Despite the decline in the number of LIS programs, which gives rise to the perception that LIS education is shrinking, the number of students enrolled and the number of graduates both show that LIS is expanding. From 1986 to 1996, the number of master's degrees awarded annually in the U.S. and Canada rose from 3,596 to 5,273, an increase of 1,677, or 46%. 

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Enrollment is strong and growing, whether you look at the number of students enrolled or their full-time equivalents (FTEs). In 1986, there were 8,557 students enrolled. Ten years later, the number of students in accredited LIS programs was 12,586. This remarkable 47% increase is, however, still shy of the growth as it is reflected in FTE students. Many students attend classes part-time, making the number of enrolled students expressed as an FTE an important one. In 1986, there were 5,478 FTE, a number that had grown 52% to 8,321 FTE students. Based on these numbers, we can anticipate a good supply of LIS graduates, many of whom will seek employment in libraries—although a growing number will likely target careers in other aspects of information work.

No matter how you look at it, LIS is a growing field.

How many students 30 years ago?

Longitudinal analysis can indicate patterns and correlations that assist in understanding and predicting trends.

Comparable data from different time periods is often difficult to obtain, however, and so some compromise is necessary. To examine the past 30 years of LIS education, we took basic data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) and current figures from data the schools submitted in October 1996 to the Association for Library

and Information Science Education (ALISE) and to ALA's Committee on Accreditation.

Though NCES reports only U.S. schools and does not distinguish between accredited and nonaccredited programs, it is still clear that the number of degrees awarded in the U.S. has varied greatly over three decades (see Table 1): 3,939 in the 1965–66 academic year;

8,037 in 1975–76; 3,626 in 1985–86, and 4,845 in 1995–96.

In 1980, ALISE began issuing an annual compilation of statistical

data. Unlike NCES, ALISE data reflect only accredited programs and includes Canadian data. Table 2 (below) shows the number of degrees awarded annually in the U.S. and Canada through 1996. The peaks and valleys reflected in each set of data suggest cyclical patterns that might be even more informative if comparable data were available for the full three-decade period.

How many faculty?

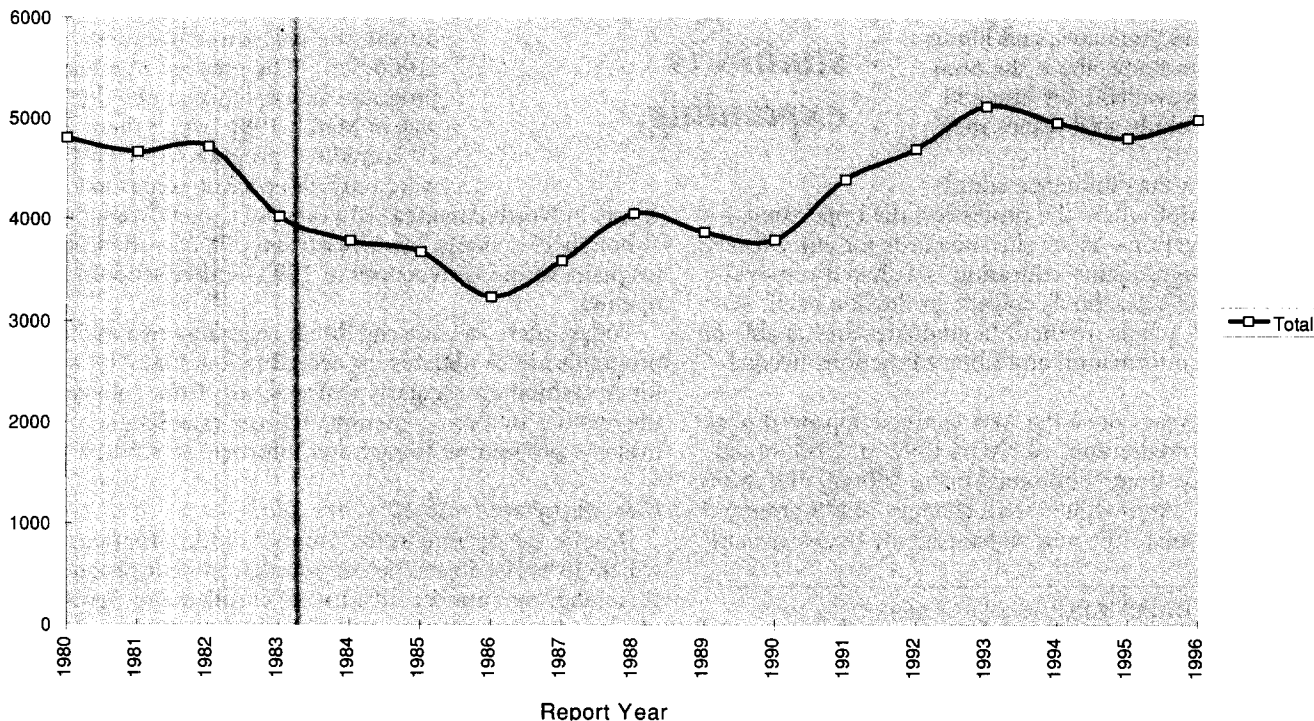
Faculty members are often the most memorable part of an educational experience. The number, quality, and interests of the faculty give a school its character. In any profession, it is frequently the full-time faculty who are the major source of the basic research that advances the knowledge base for practice. ■

Table 1: Degrees Awarded in U.S. Only

1965/66	1975/76	1985/86	1995/96
3,939	8,037	3,626	4,845*

**Source: Data submitted to COA and ALISE, adjusted to reflect U.S. accredited programs*

Table 2: Degrees Awarded Annually by ALA Accredited Programs in North America 1980–1996



Despite the changing population of LIS schools and the growing number of graduates, the number of full-time faculty has remained stable, increasing only slightly. The number of full-time faculty in 1986 was 561; by 1996 it was 601, an increase of 7%.

Most LIS schools employ part-time adjunct faculty to teach additional courses, enhancing the breadth and depth of the programs and enabling partnerships between the academy and the field to develop. As enrollments have increased and the field's scope has expanded, the number of adjunct faculty has risen. Part-time faculty increased 23% in the last decade, from 609 FTE in 1986 to 752 in 1996.

While this corps of talented adjunct faculty may participate actively in the life of the LIS school, the full-time faculty have the ultimate responsibility for issues such as mission and goals, curriculum, and governance. The size of the full-time faculty affects the character of the program in many ways. A school offering distance education programs may deploy additional staff, both full- and part-time. Schools that emphasize research may have a large full-time faculty who have reduced teaching responsibilities.

Larger faculties are generally found in schools offering a doctoral program. Of the 56 currently accredited programs, 24 offer doctoral degrees, and all of the eight largest faculties (ranging from 15 to 30 members) are in schools with large PhD programs. The nine smallest faculties are comprised of 4–6 individuals. The typical program has a full-time faculty of 11; a decade ago, the typical size was 10.

How has the student body changed?

Accredited programs meet standards, but they are not necessarily standardized. Because ALA's *Standards for Accreditation* emphasize the importance of the fit between an LIS program and its parent institution, there is considerable diversity among programs.

Several factors—whether a university is public or private, urban or rural, large, small, or medium-sized—affect how a school determines its goals and objectives. There is considerable variety among programs, but by meeting standards set by the profession, each program strives to graduate students who can enter the field with comparable knowledge and skills.

Schools differ substantially in the number of students they en-

roll. In 1996, the largest program enrolled 638 students, the smallest only 71. More than half the schools have enrollments of 150–400.

Obviously, the number of students enrolled affects the number of degrees awarded. In 1996 the three largest schools had graduating classes of 206, 212, and 213; the three smallest schools graduated 23, 33, and 34 students. Schools are getting bigger—in 1996 four schools had graduating classes of more than 200, and the overwhelming majority came from classes of 50 to over 200. Most 1986 graduates came from LIS classes of fewer than 100.

So, while only 56 programs produced 4,744 graduates in 1996, it took 60 LIS schools to produce 3,679 professionals in 1986.

The diversity of the student body is changing as well. In the U.S., where diversity in recruitment is a high priority to the profession, enrollment of minorities went from 529 in 1986 to 1,138 in 1996, more than doubling during the decade.

Minorities comprise just about 10%

of enrollment in U.S. programs. (Many Canadian programs do not routinely collect data on minority enrollment.)

While minority enrollment has increased, the ratio of women to men has stayed about the same—slightly more than three females to every male.

What's happening on campus?

Like most of higher education, LIS programs are doing more with less. Despite the stagnation of full-time faculty size and the reduction in the number of schools, innovative delivery methods and adjunct faculty enable programs to meet society's need for librarians and information specialists each year.

Universities, like corporations and government, are reinventing and restructuring themselves. One technique has been to merge two or more degree programs into one administrative unit. The first occurrence was in 1982, when the Graduate School of Library and Information Studies at Rutgers University merged with the School of Communication Studies (including the departments of Communication and Journalism and Mass Media), creating the School of Communication, Information, and Library Studies (SCILS). Of the 56 accredited programs today, eight are partnered with other disciplinary or professional programs and more partnerships are anticipated. Some of LIS's typical academic partners are communications, computer science, and education.

Other notable trends are:

➤ Advisory boards and focus groups of employers, faculty, and

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SCHOOL SELECTION MADE EASY

The Library and Information Studies Directory of Institutions Offering Accredited Master's Programs, published by the Office for Accreditation, is available for \$8 or free via ALA's Web site (<http://www.ala.org/accreditation.html>).

All or part of an ALA-accredited master's program is available in 38 U.S. states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. In Canada, five of the 10 provinces have a school offering an accredited master's program. The electronic version of the directory links entries to LIS school Web sites, enabling prospective students to browse programs and select one that meets their needs.

students keep programs vital and responsive to society's needs.

> Grants, outside government funding, and increased revenues from a host of entrepreneurial initiatives enable schools to deliver high-quality education.

> More than half the accredited LIS programs have recently completed, or are in the midst of, major curricular reform. Some of the change is driven by the need to integrate technology into coursework, but some schools have totally revised their curricula.

> Instruction is no longer confined to the lecture method; students learn in electronic classrooms and through modular, self-paced, computer-based instruction, either on- or off-site. The distinction between classroom learning and real life blurs, as students undertake group and community outreach projects.

> Interdisciplinary arrangements with other departments broaden students' perspective and stimulate various joint-degree programs.

> The need to provide increased access to education for traditionally underserved populations (minorities and those living in geographically remote areas) drive the stepped-up recruitment efforts of universities and LIS schools.

Where are the programs?

Librarians frequently express concern about the uneven geographic distribution of LIS programs. For example, compare Denton, Texas, which enjoys two LIS programs, and metropolitan New York City, where there are five schools, with the vast Rocky Mountain region—Nebraska, the Dakotas, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, and Nevada—where there are no ongoing accredited programs. (The University of Denver has a program in candidacy.)

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Distance education has done much in the last decade to increase access to accredited master's programs in underserved areas. Some schools use the traditional model of extension sites, to which full-time faculty travel to teach. But many more are taking a high-tech approach. Two-way interactive video, multimedia Internet conferencing, as well as the use of videotapes are increasingly common.

Schools sometimes arrange their course offerings to include an intensive on-campus portion followed by Internet communication. Other schools deliver a full master's degree off-campus using a cohort model—with course sequences enabling students to complete their degrees within a specified period of time. Once the entering complement of students has completed the degree, the school either starts a new sequence or withdraws the program, depending on demand.

At this time, approximately 75% of accredited schools either offer distance learning or are contemplating doing so. LIS educators expect distance learning to challenge the old rule of thumb that geographic

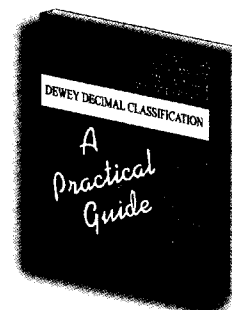
proximity is the most important factor in students' selection of a program. The ability to draw from a national pool of applicants should both encourage and challenge programs to exercise an entrepreneurial spirit to diversify and develop special areas of focus or expertise.

Much more could be said about LIS education, past and present. Programs have responded to society's need for library and information professionals who are able to meet the needs of individuals, industry, educational institutions, and government. The mission has stayed the same—only the pathways to accomplish it have changed. LIS education prepares professionals to empower others to find and use information. ❖

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