

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

**MASTER OF ARTS PROGRAM IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE
ACCREDITATION REPORT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA**

Action Requested: Receive the accreditation report for the Master of Arts Program in Library and Information Science in the Graduate College at the University of Iowa.

Executive Summary: The Master of Arts Program in Library and Information Science (1) underwent a self-study that addressed the standards and criteria defined by the accrediting body; and (2) had an on-site visit by peer evaluators. The program was accredited for the maximum seven-year period through 2016. This accreditation report addresses the Board of Regents Strategic Plan priority to provide “educational excellence and impact.”

Background:

- ◇ **Description of Program.** The School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) offers one graduate program – the Master of Arts Program in Library and Information Science. This graduate program provides professional and academic preparation for careers in libraries and information centers; contributes to the knowledge base of library and information science; and serves the School’s local, regional, national, and international constituencies. Students are prepared to work in such contexts as information and communication technology, public and private information policy, managerial policy, and regional, national, and international economics.
- ◇ **Purpose of Accreditation.** An accredited educational program is recognized by its peers as having met state and national standards for its development and evaluation.
- ◇ **Accrediting Agency.** The accrediting body is the American Library Association (ALA) Committee on Accreditation.
- ◇ **Review Process.** The self-study prepared by the Master of Arts Program in Library and Information Science contained the responses to the standards required by the accrediting body – mission, goals, and objectives; curriculum; faculty; students; administration; and physical resources and facilities.
- ◇ **On-Site Visiting Team Report.** In February 2009, the visiting team determined that the Master of Arts Program in Library and Information Science met the requirements for accredited status although a number of concerns and questions were identified.
- ◇ **Sample Strengths Identified by the Visiting Team.** The following strengths were identified by the Visiting Team:
 - ⇒ “Despite its small size, SLIS has successfully capitalized on its location in a Research I institution by identifying relevant courses in other academic units with which it shares common areas of theory and/or practice and cross-listing these courses as part of the SLIS curriculum. This strategy enables students to broaden the scope of their coursework at the elective level.

- ⇒ Faculty are aggressively reaching out to incorporate emerging electronic technologies into the curriculum.
 - ⇒ The school is successful in its efforts to instill in its students both leadership skills and a commitment to continuing professional development.
 - ⇒ The SLIS is committed to diversity as evidenced by the composition of its faculty and this commitment is also reflected in the curriculum where students are introduced to the issue of diversity in libraries in the Cultural Foundations course and provided the opportunity to explore the idea further in elective courses.”
- ◆ Sample Opportunities Identified by the Visiting Team. The Visiting Team identified the following opportunities for the program:
- ⇒ “Adjunct faculty indicated the need for better and more systematic communication with the School and more predictability about when their services will be needed.
 - ⇒ The School has participated in the LIS Access Midwest Program (LAMP), a regional network of 10 Midwest universities and their libraries that encourage students from historically underrepresented groups to enter the field of library and information science. The School reports that this project has been worthwhile, but they have seen no major shift in demographics as a result of their participation.
 - ⇒ The alumni survey revealed the need to promote placement services more extensively.
 - ⇒ The director indicated that he is not currently able to devote much attention to important activities, such as alumni relations, development, recruitment, and publicity.
 - ⇒ The budget does not appear robust enough to ensure needed upgrades to computing equipment on an ongoing basis.”
- ◆ Accreditation Status. In March 2010, the Committee on Accreditation of the American Library Association awarded continued accreditation to the Master of Arts Program in Library and Information Science. “However, the Committee had a number of very serious concerns and questions.” The School was asked to provide the following information in a Special Report, due March 15, 2010. (The School’s responses are in italics.)
1. “A statement of the program’s planning process. The absence of a formal strategic plan since 1997, policy documents regarding planning, and evidence that the SWOT analysis has been used in program planning suggest the lack of a ‘broad-based systematic planning process’.”

SLIS provided the ALA with a statement approved by the faculty that commits the school to strategic planning as a regular part of the business of the department and a timeline for creating a formal strategic plan by January 2011. SLIS submitted its new Strategic Plan as part of the Biennial Narrative Report in December 2010.
 2. “A clear statement of program goals and student outcomes, and the process by which they are developed and approved. The differences between the Program Presentation’s description of program goals and student learning outcomes, and inconsistencies within the Program Presentation mean that those goals and outcomes are unclear, and thus cannot form the ‘essential frame of reference for meaningful external and internal evaluation’.”

SLIS faculty held two retreats to update the program goals and student outcomes. The faculty created seven categories of goals and identified the student outcomes from those goals. They also developed a process to measure the level of student mastery through the curriculum. As a result of this review process, SLIS changed two courses which were deemed essential for the program outcomes – (a) Search and Discovery and (b) Organizational Management; both courses are now required for graduation beginning with the incoming class in Fall 2010. The School's Curriculum Committee also began a new process to align specific course outcomes with program goals in an effort to standardize the student experience and provide more advising guidance.

3. "Additional evidence of how the program collects and analyzes systematic multifaceted data on student achievement and uses it for program and curricular evaluation and planning."

SLIS provided more explicit information on what sources the program uses to track student achievement and how the data are used to inform evaluation and planning. To ensure that students who are struggling are identified, the School instituted policies to survey the graduate students each semester as well as advising practices; the School also developed a procedure on exit interviews to obtain student feedback to determine if the program met students' expectations. Through its work to respond to the concerns on systematic use of data, the School realized it had the data; the data just needed to be used more effectively.

4. "Additional data on courses taught by full-time faculty and part-time or adjunct faculty. We have serious concerns regarding the heavy reliance on adjunct faculty (unreported in the Program Presentation and the Association for Library and Information Science Education statistical report) which became evident during the meeting."

SLIS provided detailed data, such as charts and graphs, on courses taught by full-time, part-time, and adjunct faculty. SLIS explained that the data is somewhat skewed by the higher percentage of adjunct faculty used to deliver an Institute of Museums and Library Services grant-supported course targeting teacher librarians which is not the case in the regular program. SLIS also explained that adjunct faculty primarily teach electives where the enrollment averages 10 students in contrast to the 35 students in a required course taught by full-time faculty.

5. "A plan for more consistent and predictable scheduling of electives to assist students in constructing coherent programs of study."

SLIS developed a plan to publish the course schedule three semesters beyond the semester in session. Other courses may also be listed, but all courses listed in the published rotation will be taught as scheduled. This predictable schedule should assist students to construct coherent programs of study. As noted in the Biennial Report, the School began an entire overhaul of its website to make current, accurate and easily accessible information on the School and its program available to students.

6. "The status of and prospects for the search for a new program director."

The Dean of the Graduate College responded to the status of and prospects for the search for a new program director. The Graduate College is committed to working with SLIS to conduct a search in 2010-2011 with an anticipated appointment starting in Summer/Fall 2011.

- ◇ Response from Committee on Accreditation. On April 18, 2010, the Committee on Accreditation informed the School that the Committee had accepted the annual statistical and special reports submitted by the School. It also directed the School to “give particular attention to providing additional information related to Standards II and IV in the biennial narrative report due on December 1, 2010.

⇒ “Additional evidence on how the program collects and analyzes systematic multifaceted data on student achievement and uses it for program and curricular evaluation and planning.” (The School’s responses are provided in italics.)

During the past two years, the School has been involved in ongoing curriculum revision, beginning with a retreat in Spring 2009 to identify program goals and outcomes. A standing curriculum committee recommended that the school add requirements for students to take ‘Search and Discovery’ and ‘Organizational Management’ as central concepts in the field (II.2). These courses had previously been part of a suite of courses from which students could choose. Course offerings have been stabilized with all required courses offered annually and on a set cycle. New classes have been initiated targeted to specific student goals and interests (specifically Conservation and Preservation, which merged two previously existing courses into a more attractive option). Grants have allowed the School to establish tracks in School Media and Digital Librarianship. The School Media track required work with the College of Education and the State Board of Education to align program outcomes with accreditation requirements. This work led to an initial licensure program for teachers seeking a teaching endorsement in librarianship.

Most recently, the faculty asked for an advising document to help them guide students to appropriate classes for career tracks. The Curriculum Committee has begun to align specific course outcomes with program goals to standardize the student experience and provide more advising guidance (II.1). This work aligns with the university’s strategic goal to improve advising to graduate students. The most specific goals are encapsulated in Standard II.4. The school’s objective is for students to ‘construct coherent programs of study that allow individual needs, goals and aspirations to be met within the context of program requirements.’ The processes reflect Standard II.7 – ‘the curriculum is continually reviewed and receptive to innovation; its evaluation is used for ongoing appraisal, to make improvements, and plan for the future.’

A student with a journalism background was hired in Fall 2009 as the web editor. This student is provided a graduate assistantship to report on events around the school and to be a student voice in making the website more useful. This decision has dramatically improved the usefulness of the website while providing the School with a valuable student perspective on how the site is used. This year, the School began an entire overhaul of its website architecture. The School moved to more stable servers in the Graduate College and began working with their web designer to improve navigability and usability. These changes directly addressed Standard IV.2, to make ‘current, accurate, and easily accessible information on the school and its programs’ available to ‘students and the general public.’ The admissions committee continues to function with clearly articulated standards for admission, and students continue to construct ‘coherent programs of study that allow individual needs, goals, and aspirations to be met within the context of program requirements (IV.4).’

The School has developed ways to ‘provide an environment that fosters student participation in the definition and determination of the total learning experience (IV.5).’ Students have established an Open Access Journal, B--Sides, to publish their coursework and practice-based projects. The University of Iowa’s Digital Library Services publishes the journal as part of its Institutional Repository (<http://ir.uiowa.edu/bsides/>). This initiative has provided students with experience in the scholarly process of refereeing and negotiating with vendors. The editors of B--Sides have a student conference planned for spring semester, further extending their initiative in providing their own professional development. The Library and Information Science Student Organization (LISSO) continues to be a strong presence in the school. The LISSO president attends all faculty meetings and meets regularly with the Director to address programmatic questions.

Recent efforts to consolidate data resources across campus have helped the school track student performance; the school continues to work on improving ways of capturing data about the program. However, the strongest efforts to-date are directed at human intervention on a regular basis. The school has a small student body (80-100 students at any given time). Policies have been instituted that involve a semester-by-semester survey of grades and advising to ensure recognizing students who are struggling. The school has also developed a procedure governing ‘exit interviews.’ Each student is surveyed upon finishing the program to determine if the program met the student’s expectations. Through its efforts to address concerns about the systematic use of data, the school has realized that, while there is a significant amount of data, it needs to be used more effectively. The goal of bringing qualitative assessment into the data process is directed at making sense of the data and putting it to use in student advising and program development.