



Johnna Percell, Lindsay C. Sarin, Paul T. Jaeger, and John Carlo Bertot, eds. *Re-envisioning the MLS: Perspectives on the Future of Library and Information Science Education*. Advances in Librarianship, volume 44B. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing, 2018, 239pp. \$114.95 USD (Hardcover or eBook).

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This timely two-volume collection on the future of the MLS degree started as a reconceptualization exercise at the University of Maryland College of Information Studies. The call for chapters generated numerous responses, mostly from the United States, but also from Canada and Australia, all assessing the value of LIS education and its relevance to 21st-century librarians and other information professionals engaged in a varied and rapidly changing field.

With its 25 original chapters, this collection offers several approaches to address what appears to be three main concerns with the current LIS curriculum: a significant gap between the theoretical knowledge imparted in classrooms and the practical skills early career professionals believe they need upon graduation; the multidisciplinary nature of information science that offers students many choices, yet leaves graduates underprepared to adapt and innovate in a constantly changing environment; and the persistent homogeneity of information schools and the profession.

Several chapters address the overly theoretical curriculum in LIS schools and the need to address these concerns as students seek other opportunities outside the MLS to develop practical skills. There are some hints that the iSchool movement is partly to blame with its focus on theory. According to surveys of recent graduates in Canada, only half said they could apply what they learned to their job or were satisfied with the overall quality of education they received in their MLS program, proportions that have remained constant between 2004 and 2014 (Vol. 44A, 61). These are the kinds of numbers that can make potential students reconsider investing their time and money into a degree that does not seem to match the needs of the workplace. While the iSchool approach has helped “break down academic silos with related disciplines and ... can contribute to evidence-based practice” (Vol. 44A, 171), students



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want practical experience to counterbalance a theory-heavy curriculum. Culminating experiences like e-portfolios, capstone projects or practica should not be isolated projects, and need a more user-centred approach that would allow students to engage with the communities and individuals they will serve. Looking to other professions, apprenticeships, service learning, fieldwork, residencies, and creative exhibitions, are also suggested.

Beyond the theory-practice gap, as a “meta-discipline” (Vol. 44B, 141) information studies also leaves MLS graduates feeling unprepared because they were unable to fit into their schedule the wide range of courses now available in some schools, reflecting instructors’ varied disciplinary backgrounds. The possibility of customizing one’s program can contribute to graduates acquiring ultra-niche skills resulting in reduced career flexibility. Upon completion of their program, many students will lack the management, leadership, business and IT skills needed to engage in strategic planning, budgeting, human resources, negotiations, communication, marketing, and advocacy. Indeed, “librarians are increasingly expected to be multifaceted experts” (Vol. 44A, 140). One chapter in particular highlighted the importance of political literacy, while a few others focused on pedagogy, instructional design and assessment. The last chapter revisits cataloguing, metadata and information organization courses, which have often become electives and relegated to more technical positions, and argues they should again be required as foundational knowledge for any kind of information career. The MLS needs to be a “Swiss Army degree” (Vol. 44A, 139) and as such, information schools should collaborate “with other departments...to deliver these skills” (Vol. 44A, 139) to “prepare adaptive and innovative librarians who not only manage change, but also thrive in change” (Vol. 44A, 147).

Compounding these two issues is a continuing lack of diversity in LIS education and the profession. One chapter submits that the cost and investment of time (including a prerequisite undergraduate degree) have made the MLS inaccessible for many, which “can be recast as a threat to the diversity of the profession as a whole” (Vol 44A, 28). Furthermore, in the LIS curriculum itself, exposure to diversity is minimal and rarely required. There is a need for more counter-storytelling that includes people of colour, of differing abilities, and the LGBTQ community. Critical theory should be included in all course offerings to help students develop cultural competency instead of being isolated to a single assignment, a section of a course, or an optional course on diversity. Another chapter recommends training in social work as a way to make LIS professionals “true agents of change” (Vol. 44B, 83) and to ensure that they “are better prepared for working with diverse individuals and communities...” (Vol. 44B, 98).

A recurring theme throughout the collection is that a re-envisioning of LIS education should be guided by the core values of librarianship: access, inclusion, equity, learning, intellectual freedom, and a focus on people and communities. There is also a recognition that it may not be realistic to expect a two-year degree to be sufficient preparation. Three proposed approaches stand out. First, apply design thinking throughout the program to prepare students to manage ambiguity and solve challenging problems with different tools and methods not covered in a traditional LIS program. Second, hire non-MLS professionals and PhDs with subject experience to “fill emerging roles in the library” and to contribute “skills and diversity of thought” (Vol. 44A, 158) that are currently missing. Finally, reintroduce an undergraduate LIS degree, which would provide a solid foundation that can be built upon with a more specialized MLS program.

This collection will prove to be an insightful read for anyone advocating for changes to LIS education, including students, recent graduates, instructors, school administrators and the information profession generally. The approaches and challenges discussed in these two volumes should provide much food for thought for years to come since “re-envisioning will (and should) never be complete” (Vol. 44A, 1).