Education for Library and Information Science Professionals

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INTRODUCTION

Libraries and information centers today are very different places from those that existed at the beginning of the 20th century, and very different as well from the libraries of only 25 years ago. Education for library and information science has striven to keep pace with all the myriads of changes. Within the last 100 years, fortunately and necessarily in order to retain its relevance, professional library education and practice has evolved from the centrality of teaching and writing the “library hand” to providing modern curricula such as services for distance learners and Web-based instruction using course management systems such as Blackboard, WebCT, and so forth. Along the way, the library profession has often been first not only to accept but also to adopt and apply the technological innovations now common to modern civilization. One of the newest trends involves the “I-Schools” where information is taught as the overarching discipline with librarianship just one of the programs in a larger college offering programs in informatics, information science, information architecture, knowledge management, and so forth. Throughout, library and information science educators have paved the way to the acceptance of innovation in libraries and information centers by instructing students to use and apply new technologies.

BACKGROUND

The revolutionary changes over the past 25 years in the educational curriculum for schools of library and information science, which are necessitated by the exponential expansion of computer-based technologies, require an almost constant and continuous reexamination of the skills and expertise needed to be acquired by the next generation of librarians. Although much has changed in libraries, the core of who we are and what we are truly remains the same. Librarianship is and will continue to be a profession devoted to bringing users and information together, as effectively and efficiently as possible. To meet that ideal, librarians have used technology to enhance and create services. In addition, it is important to meet emerging educational needs of our increasingly multicultural and diverse society. Librarians have recognized that changing expectations and lean budgets require organizations to call upon the talents of everyone (Butcher, 1999). And, librarians have become more engaged in teaching and research in order to serve the needs of users better (Bahr & Zemon, 2000).

THE I-SCHOOLS

The I-Schools are a group that has been coming together over the last few years of schools/colleges that are taking a broad approach to the study of information. The deans and faculty of those schools held their first conference in September of 2005 to explore the similarities and differences among the schools present and basis upon which to build a foundation for a new type of College. The I-Schools include a number of schools with traditional LIS programs such as Syracuse, Pittsburgh, Rutgers, and others, plus a number of other programs such as the College of Information Sciences and Technology at Pennsylvania State University. John King describes the I-Schools thusly:

The I-School movement is made up of novel academic programs that embrace new intellectual and professional challenges in a world awash in information. I-Schools move beyond traditional programs, while building on the intellectual and institutional legacies of those programs. I-Schools straddle the academy’s ancient engagement with information and the contemporary challenges of ubiquitous information affecting all aspects of society. (King, 2006)

The I-Schools bring together a variety of disciplines that are scattered among different colleges and departments into one college of information. Some areas of what is traditionally in computer science departments are also a part of this movement (Carroll et al., 2006). The proximity and interaction among these programs by being brought together in a new college should lead to an enriched research and teaching environment.

IMPORTANCE OF PEOPLE AND PEOPLE SKILLS

Computer technologies and communication systems have had an undeniable impact on society as a whole and our