

Education in Library and Information Science

An overview of Contemporary Librarianship Education

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Abstract

The author makes a survey on the evolution of the library education, beginning with the 19th century until today, pointing out the contemporary developments and their consequences on the library profession. The author pays a particular attention to the American library education, given the development of the new modern information technology and the ever growing number of digital publications.

Keywords: *History of library education; American library education; Accreditation of the library schools*

It was in the 19th century that librarianship was introduced in schools, following a previous well-established curriculum, as soon as the great libraries developed, with their complex activities and therefore their need of highly qualified personnel.

However, the history of librarianship mentions famous librarians who acquired a librarianship education without attending specialized schools. The most famous is Gabriel Naudé, no doubt, the author of the well-known book “*Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque*” (1627), which was for centuries the basic working tool for several generations of librarians. He was followed by Claude Clément, Louis Jacob, the members of the Bignon family, all in the 17th century, then Charles Nodier, Saint-Beuve, Lecomte de Lisle, Pierre Gustave Brunet, librarians and famous men of letters, by the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. All of them learned librarianship by themselves or from their predecessors.

Therefore, the *apprenticeship* or the *individual practical learning*, and later on the *independent study*, were the first forms of the librarianship education.

In Europe, the librarianship education developed after 1850: Austria 1864, France 1869, England 1877 etc., but only as loose and accidental courses.

The first librarianship notions are to be found in the curriculum of École Nationale de Chartre, a higher education institution founded in France, in 1821. However, the auxiliary sciences of history were the basic study here. The graduates received a diploma of paleographic archivist, thus being able to perform jobs such as archivists and librarians.

In the second half of the 19th century, there takes place a change in the attitude towards a more appreciative regard as to this profession and specialists are more and more needed to lead libraries. In France, even beginning with 1839, the Regulations of Bibliothèque Nationale stipulated the right of all graduates of École Nationale de Chartre to work in this important library in the country.

Especially after 1850, a part of the graduates of this school began to form a plied of famous librarians and bibliographers who developed the librarianship and bibliographic techniques. The most important was Léopold Delisle, who, as administrator of Bibliothèque Nationale, hired several graduates of École Nationale de Chartre. They were to have remarkable achievements especially in the cataloguing. Delisle is the first to put high emphasis on the technical *character of the professional training of the librarian*. He is of the opinion that “apprenticeship is as important to administrate a library as it is for leading a ship, building a construction or an edifice, servicing and making to function different parts of a complex mechanism”. He also states that “bibliography and librarianship have become sciences or arts whose complexity becomes greater and greater each day. He welcomes “the evolution of technology, impossible to be stopped, that renews and develops the specific library tools, a phenomenon similar to scientific or industrial ones”(1). In 1897, he coordinates the “Catalogue general des imprimés de la Bibliothèque Nationale”, probably the most important bibliographic repertoire in the world.

Inspired by the French Revolution ideals, Melvil Dewey shares the same innovative ideas as to the role of the librarian. He stated that “there is no greater and important honor than the job accomplished by a competent and hard working librarian in the service of the community. There was a time when the library looked more like a museum and the librarian like a library rat /.../ where the visitors contemplated curiously the rare books and manuscripts”(2).

Gabriel Naudé and Melvil Dewey are the most frequently mentioned names among all the personalities of the world librarianship. Both were autodidacts.

While Gabriel Naudé remains the founder of librarianship as a science, owing to its famous work, Melvil Dewey is the founder, in 1876, of the longest lasting ever created classification system for the library, *Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC)*, later on completed by Institut International de Bibliographie, in Bruxelles, becoming *Universal Decimal Classification (UDC)*. In 2001, the Americans, and the whole library world at the same time, were celebrating, at the IFLA Conference, in Boston, 125 years from the founding of the Dewey classification Dewey system is also the founder of the first American librarianship school.

The school opened at the 1st January 1887. The School of Library Economy, as it was called, was of a university level and functioned at Columbia University. The initial curriculum established by Dewey included issues such as selection, bibliography, administration, books restoration and cataloguing. Although the school had a practical character, it tried to develop in the students' mind the idea that the librarian is a social commissioner with a special mission, i.e. to develop the moral spirit of the library readers.

The first students were 17 women and 3 men. Given the fact that Columbia University did not permit women among its students, the school moved at New York State Library. Here, after two years study the students graduated in librarianship and after one more year of study they got the master diploma.

Many of the former graduates became heads of the numerous librarianship schools opened in America between 1887 and 1925.

In 1926, the Carnegie Foundation established at the Chicago University the famous Graduate Library School. One could get here the diploma of Doctor in librarianship, based on an apprehensive study of the theory and scientific research in this domain.

In 1948, the American Library Association (ALA) established *the title of "Master" as standard level for the specialists in librarianship*.

ALA introduced the first standards of quality regarding the librarianship education even in 1925, but it was only in 1956 that the Committee on Accreditation was founded inside ALA and it had a major part in accrediting the curricula for the librarianship schools.

Beginning with 1977 since 2000, ALA accredited over 70 curricula of the librarianship schools from USA and Canada.

In 1983, there was founded the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) instead of the Association of the American Library Schools, functioning ever since 1915. ALISE aim is to promote excellence in librarianship research and education and in library services,

too(3). It publishes annually statistics as to the librarianship universities, curricula, students, financing, programs of continuous education in librarianship a.s.o. ALISE and ALA have a major contribution to the LIS (Library and Information Science) education.

Between 1960 and 1970 the library education is thoroughly transformed and adapted owing to the ever growing number of publications and the increase in demand for information, mainly in the economic domain. New opportunities for learning developed especially owing to the new technology of computers and microcomputers and the subsequent communication online.

Nowadays, the library education or, more appropriate, the education in librarianship and information science is completely different as that of 30 years before.

In 1975, analyzing curricula of several librarianship schools, Michael Buckland(4) came to the conclusion that the traditional domains, such as bibliography, documentation, librarianship, communications, archives and editing, were overprevailing in these curricula. He also remarked a certain “feminization” of the profession which, in his opinion, was a hindrance in its development and modernization. Even the school names were obsolete. The first school changing its name was that within the University of Syracuse, becoming in 1970 the School of Information Studies. Following its example, several other schools will change their names and curricula, as a consequence. The theorist of these changes was Roger Greer who compares the library education with the Copernican system whose center is the transfer of information(5).

The efforts of modernizing the educational structures go hand in hand with the development of the information technology.

Van House and Sutton note that the library education is a part of an ecosystem.

The LIS education, as he writes, is developing in a competitive dynamic environment, where “the surviving of the contemporary curricula does not mean their survival in the present form”(6).

Within a program financed by Kellogg Foundation(7), there were analyzed the recent changes in the LIS programs in USA. The results showed six major trends in LIS education, as following:

1. The schools disseminate information on a very large scale.
2. Most of the programs are centered on the user and have a interdisciplinary character.
3. The programs have an ever growing number of disciplines related to the information technology.
4. They experiment specialized structures.
5. The schools have curricula in different formats.

Nowadays, the American education is renewing permanently: there appear new levels of study, improved curricula etc.

The most visible change is in the schools names, rendered in English in order to preserve their initial meaning: *School of Library and Information Sciences, School of Library and Information Studies, School of Library and Information Management School of Information Science and Policy, School of Library, Archival and Information Studies, School of Communication Information and Library Studies, School of Information Science and (Learning) Technology, Information School, School of Information.*

The information science and the Information Science became *multi- and interdisciplinary.*

In 1986, an ALA commission published the study *New Directions in Library and Information Science Education*(8) that analyses the education curricula in training the specialists for all kinds of libraries: university, public, school, medical, of firms, and specialists in museums, archives, publishing houses, data bases and information centers, as well. These programs include in their essence: acquisition, cataloguing and classification, book circulation, collection development, indexing and summary, interlibrary loans, references and serials control.

After a decade, almost all the study disciplines were influenced by the information technology: management, information organization, searching in data bases, collection development, mathematical searching methods, socio- and cultural aspect, non-print materials, rare materials, conservation techniques, information sources, reference materials, literature and services for children etc.

According to a survey published by ALISE, in 2000, the number of the hours of study in order to obtain the Master Degree varies between 36 and 54 according to the school(9). Before 1970, no program had more than 36 hours. The number of optional hours increased to 100. Only a small number of accreditations are allowed from school to school. A special attention is given to the practical activities developed under the direct supervision of the university personnel, disciples and practitioners. The same statistical report shows the master studies are followed by women in a proportion of 70%, and the graduate studies, by men in the same percentage. For the Doctor title the percentages are equal. The foreign students following LIS programs in USA represent only 6% of the total number. They come from China, South Korea, Thailand, Taiwan and India. The report also points out that the master diploma is obtained by 86% white students, 5% Afro Students, 2% Asiatic students, 3% Hispanics, 4% Indians from America and Alaska.

Nowadays, the education programs are grouped around four key elements: *the information users, technology, access and information.* There

elements are to be found in different combinations in all American librarianship schools(10). According to the informational policy of each school, the accent is put on one or another of the four components. The above-mentioned report also shows that 34% of the school disciplines do not properly belong to the domain.

Within the study programs, most of the faculties take into consideration the training of the specialist in the information technology in general, not only for a future job in a library, but also in economy that needs these specialists. The distance education is widely spread in the USA - 80% of the universities have such programs.

The American LIS education faces a great problem, i.e. its reconfiguration. As in our case, before applying the decisions of the Bologna Conference, in the USA the LIS training may be accomplished in parallel with another discipline (mostly with communication and computer science).

As soon as the information and communication sciences develop and the data bases and the digital literature extend their importance, the LIS education achieves an ever greater importance in the American universities. More and more schools training specialists in librarianship have included in their name the term *information* (school of information, information studies, information research etc.).

Let's come back to the problem of accreditation. The accreditation of LIS schools is optional in USA. As a rule, the accreditation has the role of protecting those who want to follow a certain school, the services and quality of education being thoroughly verified for each school apart. The accreditation commission for the schools specialized in librarianship and the information science is made of specialists appointed by ALA. The master title given by an institution accredited by ALA is very often a preliminary condition to applying for a job in a university or public library.

Since 1992, in USA there are new accreditation standards adapted to the specific of these schools, beginning with a clear definition of the special demands for a master degree. As a rule, the accreditation is given for a period of 7 years. However, there are some American schools which deny the accreditation, on the grounds that it follows certain routines.

In 1999, there took place the ALA 1st Congress on Professional Education that tried to establish a consensus of all the professors in schools of librarianship and information science on the basic skills and abilities the LIS education was supposed to offer, as opposed to the old accreditation standards from 1992.

At the same time, the Congress defined the abilities of a "generalist librarian" who was supposed to deal efficiently with different library activities, such as: principles and methods of organizing and selecting the documents, producing, disseminating and using of the information,

analyzing and evaluating different information needs, creating and developing methods of information training, the leader's strategy, an ability of analyzing the tendencies in LIS education and of applying them to the domain, basic knowledge in information retrieval. The Congress also ventured the idea of renewing the accreditation principles and promoted a new commission of evaluating experts within ALA, able to represent all the professional tendencies, and its continuous improvement.

The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) is also concerned with the problems raised by the library education. In 2000, IFLA Section on Education and Training publishes *Guidelines for Library/Information Professional Programs*. This document provides a large framework for the development and evaluation of universities, their curricula and personnel, students, administration, budgets, educational resources etc.

Which seems to be the future of LIS education for the whole world in the twenty-first century? Hardly predictable. Nowadays, the main trend is oriented towards the information technology - organization, management, usage.

Notes-Bibliography-Webgraphy

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