

Transforming Library Education

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2006-2007

I never meant to get involved in the library education discussion.

I am supportive of efforts by others to create more synergy between library education and professional practice. And, I sincerely appreciate ALA Past President Michael Gorman's efforts to move the discussion along.

However, I found myself drawn into the professional education discussion last fall when I participated in the Salt Lake City Library's Thinking Ahead conference.

OCLC Vice President George Needham (a former state librarian and ALA staffer) challenged those in the audience to think about a new way of educating librarians. Actually, his "new way" is something that's been discussed in education and professional circles for some time.

In his proposal Needham suggested that:

- A B.S become the entry degree for a beginning professional librarian
- The MLS be focused on managerial, leadership or area of practice training for those interested focusing their career on library management
- PhD be retained as the research and teaching degree

While Needham's proposal may appear radical to some, he was attempting to get at some core issues:

Does the entry-level library job require post-baccalaureate training?

What knowledge and skills do we need for the next generation of librarians?

Could those same skills now taught at the MLS level be taught at the undergraduate level? In fact, in some cases they are already.

How do we provide career opportunities and advancement within the profession for those who don't want to become managers?

Are we adequately preparing those who lead our libraries to be the visionary leaders we need in order to secure a place for libraries in the future?

How Can We Affect Change?

ALA can't change the basis of library education. But ALA can work together with ALISE, and others in the profession to ensure that our library school education creates a 21st century workforce that is highly valued and compensated.

We can effect that change is several ways.

Through creating accreditation standards that define the core elements of library education and the competencies we expect in every library school graduate.

By thinking honestly about the level of education required to work in 21st century libraries.

By creating a library education experience that instills students with the core values of our profession, provides a foundation for understanding library service, and offers the tools and knowledge necessary to transform libraries for the next generation.

The Education Forum

Here are some issues I hope everyone will discuss during the upcoming Education forum at ALA Midwinter:

- 1) Does accreditation still matter?
- 2) Should we create a new way to educate library workers?
- 3) Should certification and continuing education credits be mandatory for library workers?
- 4) Should we offer an alternate route to librarianship similar to that being offered for those who want to teach in public schools?
- 5) What would a core curriculum for librarianship look like? Should it be a standard for accreditation?

We have to stick with this, be persistent about promoting the changes we want to see, one step at a time and more importantly not be afraid of asking ourselves some tough questions. Our future depends on it.