

# Comments on the Task Force recommendations sent directly to the Office for Accreditation

The Office for Accreditation has received comments in response to the Task Force recommendations to the Standards. They are listed in chronological order, with the most recently received comment appearing first.

## **Letter from SAA (Society of American Archivists):**

Received October 8, 2009

### **SAA Comments on ALA Task Force on Library Education 2009 Report**

We are writing this letter to express the concerns of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) in response to the January 2009 final report of the ALA Library Education Task Force. With more than 5,000 individual and institutional members, SAA is the largest professional association representing archivists and the archival profession. In recent years the profession has relied increasingly on graduate education programs to fill its ranks with competent and well-educated practitioners. Many of these archival programs are found in ALA accredited programs in LIS and iSchools. For some time, ALA has recognized SAA's interest in accreditation, citing the Society's 2002 Guidelines for a Graduate Program in Archival Studies (GPAS) as a set of requirements for an acceptable archival specialization. ALA has also recognized that SAA has its own Code of Ethics that is in substantial agreement with that of ALA.

First, we are very concerned with the Task Force's Recommendation 7, which calls for the majority of full-time faculty teaching in the program to be "grounded in librarianship. If archival practice is not seen as a part of librarianship for the purposes of accreditation, we are concerned that schools with unified archival – library programs and smaller schools might find it impossible to offer an archives specialization and still meet the new, mandatory ALA standards. This would be particularly unfortunate since many archives contain reference book collections and employ librarians; rare book libraries house collections of unique manuscripts and use archival methods to care for them; cataloging practices have been converging between libraries and archives for years; and in the new world of digital libraries, techniques and standards of archival preservation are increasingly important to the operation of libraries.

Presently, graduate archival programs are experiencing an enormous influx of new students—in some LIS and iSchools where an archives program is present, up to a third or even a half of incoming Master's students are opting for the archives specialization. As a profession, we are also moving to develop a new cadre of archives Ph.D.s to teach and do research. Since most of these doctoral students represent a minority of the student body in programs whose Master's degrees are ALA accredited, we foresee that the impact on faculty makeup of some of the Task Force's requirements might stand in the way of this progress.

In a related issue, ALA accreditation visitors evaluate archival programs as part of an entire school's offerings or an LIS program, but the requirement that all members of visitation

committees have at least a Master's degree from an ALA-accredited school has meant that it has been and continues to be difficult for ALA's accreditation office to find qualified archival educators to serve on these committees, even when evaluating a leading program. A number of current archival educators who also have rich experience as practitioners hold postgraduate degrees in history and are thus ineligible to serve. We suggest that this issue—which we anticipate will be ameliorated as current archival educators retire and rising cohorts of archives Ph.D.s emerge from LIS schools—is nevertheless symptomatic of some of the problems that might arise under a strict construal of who is actually “grounded in librarianship.”

Additionally, we are concerned with the implications of the report. Accredited programs should have the autonomy to decide what they teach in their own universities, and this listing in effect hands over autonomy to ALA. Diversity in programs and approaches is what makes the profession richer. While archival studies shares a good number of those competencies with librarianship, we are concerned that such a lengthy list might dominate a program and make it difficult to accommodate the growing amount of knowledge and the increased number of courses that SAA agrees are necessary to prepare archivists for the 21st century. We agree with those discussants who have pointed to the importance of local discussions and negotiations over what shall constitute core courses. Even though the Task Force claims that it is not calling for core courses, there is really nowhere else for the competencies to go if all students are to be held accountable for them.

We agree with the iSchool deans that in the face of the changes we are seeing in institutions of cultural memory and transmission, there is a need for serious research on how best to formulate strategies and tactics going forward that will enable us to preserve the values that have been important to us in the past as part of a culture in which free inquiry is so important. SAA demonstrates our commitment to archival education through both a continuous reevaluation of the GPAS guidelines and through a process for developing an extensive curriculum of continuing education workshops that assist our members in remaining abreast of new competencies through the lifelong learning that our field requires. Flexibility is vital to all of us, and we hope we can discuss with you how we can work toward a relationship that can help preserve it.

Our members have followed the recent discussion of ALA's report, and in closing we would like to express our concern that many of the discussants seem to misunderstand the relationship between SAA and the Academy of Certified Archivists, thinking that the Academy is sponsored by SAA. In fact, the Academy is an independent entity that accredits individual archivists who may or may not be SAA members. Although we do not discourage this certification process, particularly for those who do not or cannot seek postgraduate education in archival studies, we think that postgraduate education is central to our profession and that individual certification is not a replacement for a well-rounded graduate archival program.

SAA Committee on Education

---

## **Letter from MLA (Medical Library Association):**

Received July 10, 2009

Members of the Continuing Education Committee of the Medical Library Association (MLA), in response to the invitation to comment from the Library Education Committee on Accreditation Task Force, offer the following comments:

- 1) We agree that the ALA Standards are important to the provision of well-qualified graduates of Library and Information Science (LIS) programs who are able to function in today's technological libraries; however, competencies should not be so prescriptive to cause an LIS Program to alter its mission to fit institutional requirements, or withdraw from the accreditation program.
- 2) We believe that faculty in LIS Programs should be qualified educators, and each educational institution must also provide adjunct faculty who are working in the field and who have experience in the library workforce in public, academic and special libraries.
- 3) We believe that related curricula should be available to library students who wish to specialize in medical or other special libraries. We ask that the ALA standards formally recognize the competencies developed by other library organizations (such as MLA) and use them as appropriate for curriculum support. MLA's Competencies for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success can be found at <http://www.mlanet.org/education/policy/>

Sincerely,

The Continuing Education Committee of the Medical Library Association  
65 East Wacker Place • Suite 1900  
Chicago, Illinois 60601-7246  
PHONE: 312.419.9094  
FAX: 312.419.8950  
EMAIL: [info@mlahq.org](mailto:info@mlahq.org)  
WEBSITE: [www.mlanet.org](http://www.mlanet.org)

---

## **Letter from ALISE (Association for Library and Information Science Education):**

Received June 22, 2009

Office for Accreditation  
American Library Association  
50 E. Huron St.  
Chicago, Illinois 60611

In response to the ALA Committee on Accreditation (COA) invitation to comment on the recommendations of the Library Education Task Force in their final report issued January 13, 2009 to the ALA Executive Board for referral to COA, the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) Board has prepared this statement. In particular we have sought to represent the interests of our institutional members who have ALA-accredited programs or who may seek ALA accreditation in the future. The programs vary along many dimensions, including size of faculty and student body, institutional context, location, mode of delivery, and student recruitment and placement patterns. In seeking accreditation, these programs are guided by point I.1 of the *2008 Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library & Information Studies*:

I.1 A school's mission and program goals are pursued, and its program objectives achieved, through implementation of an ongoing, broad-based, systematic planning process that involves the constituency that a program seeks to serve. Consistent with the values of the parent institution and the culture and mission of the school, program goals and objectives foster quality education.

Furthermore,

I.3 Within the context of these Standards each program is judged on the degree to which it attains its objectives. In accord with the mission of the school, clearly defined, publicly stated, and regularly reviewed program goals and objectives form the essential frame of reference for meaningful external and internal evaluation. The evaluation of program goals and objectives involves those served: students, faculty, employers, alumni, and other constituents.

As faculty members and administrators at ALA-accredited schools (and in several cases as past members of the Committee on Accreditation and/or External Review Panels), members of the ALISE Board can attest to the rigor of the current accreditation process and the thoroughness of the *Standards*. As the Introduction to the *Standards* states, "Accreditation serves as a mechanism for quality assessment and quality enhancement with quality defined as the effective utilization of resources to achieve appropriate educational objectives and student learning outcomes." Further, "institutions seeking accreditation of master's degree programs in library and information studies have an obligation to use the results of their evaluations for broad-based, continuous program planning, assessment, development, and improvement." Programs must continually monitor and be responsive to both their institutional context and the professional practice contexts where their graduates seek employment.

The Office for Accreditation compiles information about each of the schools, showing accredited degrees and other degrees offered (e.g., other Master's, School Library Media, Post-Master's Certification, PhD), but many schools offer only a single master's degree (<http://www.ala.org/ala/educationcareers/education/accreditedprograms/directory/pdf/index.cfm>)

Depending on program goals and objectives, students pursuing that degree may have quite varied career goals, both within and outside of libraries.

Given this context, we have compiled a response to the various Task Force recommendations. As the ongoing discussion on jESSE (<http://listserv.utk.edu/archives/jesse.html>) and the Committee on Accreditation Standards Review blog (<http://www.oa.ala.org/accreditation/>) demonstrates, ALISE members hold a range of views. This response reflects a number of concerns raised by institutional members with which the members of the ALISE Board concur.

### **Task Force Recommendations**

1. That the Association adopt the *Core Competences of Librarianship* as redrafted by the Task Force.
2. That the Association incorporate those core competences and ALA's Core Values of Librarianship into its *Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library & Information Studies* together with the recommendations on those standards listed below.

### **Discussion**

As reported to our members in the Spring 2009 issue of *ALISE News* (p. 3) (<http://data.memberclicks.com/site/ali/spring2009newsletter.pdf>), ALA Council approved the *Core Competences* on January 27, 2009. The 2008 *Standards* specifically include statements regarding the need to consider such policies when developing the LIS program curriculum, and the Office for Accreditation now includes the *Core Competences* in the Educational Policy Guidelines section of its web site along with statements from various ALA divisions and other LIS professional associations (<http://www.ala.org/ala/educationcareers/careers/corecomp/Core%20Competencies%20by%20Specialization/knowledgecompetencies.cfm>).

### **Response**

We concur that programs should consider all of these guidelines rather than giving primacy solely to one.

### **Task Force Recommendations**

3. That the standards be revised to be written using imperatives and in the active voice – stressing that adherence to them is required for accreditation.
4. That the standards be stated to be prescriptive, not indicative – mandates not suggestions.

### **Discussion**

The Introduction to the 2008 *Standards* explains: “The *Standards* are indicative, not prescriptive, with the intent to foster excellence through the development of criteria for evaluating educational effectiveness. Throughout the *Standards*, the requirements for evaluation include assessments, not only of educational processes and resources, but also of the successful use of those processes and resources to achieve established objectives expressed as student learning outcomes.”

### **Response**

We endorse this emphasis on framing the wording of the *Standards* as indicative so as to “foster excellence through the development of criteria for evaluating educational effectiveness.”

### **Task Force Recommendation**

5. That the standards use the terms “program” and “school” with exactitude to make it crystal clear that they are concerned only with programs and not with schools, except in areas in which the activities and policies of the program are inextricable from those of the school.

### ***Discussion***

The Introduction to the *Standards* makes it explicit that COA is responsible for accrediting “graduate programs of library and information studies leading to a master’s degree.” Library and information studies “is understood to be concerned with recordable information and knowledge and the services and technologies to facilitate their management and use. Library and information studies encompasses information and knowledge creation, communication, identification, selection, acquisition, organization and description, storage and retrieval, preservation, analysis, interpretation, evaluation, synthesis, dissemination, and management.” This definition incorporates a “field of professional practice and associated areas of study and research.” Assessment of the program is considered in the context of the school’s mission; “when the school offers other educational programs, the contribution of those programs is also relevant.”

### ***Response***

While it is possible that the revision of some statements in the *Standards* could clarify that it is the *program* seeking accreditation that is the primary focus, the overall intent of the *Standards* in this regard is already clearly stated.

### **Task Force Recommendation**

6. That it is made clear to programs seeking accreditation that the Association is not interested in prescribing a “core curriculum” (though it should be clear that the Core Competences are the bedrock of the curricula of accredited programs). Accordingly the standards should be written to concentrate on the outcomes of the education received in accredited LIS programs and that these outcomes not only be achieved but documented in the accreditation process.

### ***Discussion***

Standard I.2 explicitly states: “Program objectives are stated in terms of student learning outcomes.” The need to document outcomes is already emphasized at various points in the standards. For example, Standard II.7: “Evaluation of the curriculum includes assessment of students’ achievements and their subsequent accomplishments” and Standard IV.4: “Students receive systematic, multifaceted evaluation of their achievements.”

### ***Response***

The need to document student learning outcomes is consistent with trends in higher education accreditation in general and is already emphasized where appropriate in the *Standards*.

### **Task Force Recommendations**

7. That ALA’s accreditation standards prescribe that a majority of the permanent full-time faculty teaching in the program are grounded in librarianship by virtue of their educational background, professional experience and/or record of research and publication.

8. That ALA's accreditation standards prescribe that the full-time faculty of ALA-accredited programs are sufficient in number and diversity of specialties to carry out the major share of the teaching, research, and service activities required for accreditation.

9. That ALA's accreditation standards prescribe that temporary and part-time faculty of ALA-accredited programs are appointed to balance and complement the teaching competences of the full-time faculty, not to replace them in their teaching activity.

### ***Discussion***

Embedded in these recommendations is the assumption that a particular mix of faculty is required to ensure a quality program. The diversity of accredited schools in faculty size and composition is evidence that this is not the case. Also "grounded in librarianship" is operationalized in terms of "educational background, professional experience and/or record of research and publication." These criteria are neither always necessary nor sufficient. Faculty from diverse disciplinary perspectives can develop a deep awareness of and appreciation for aspects of librarianship relevant to the courses they teach. And faculty initially "grounded in librarianship" must continually maintain and update that awareness.

### ***Response***

An entire section of the *Standards* is devoted to expectations for the Faculty, beginning with "III.1 The school has a faculty capable of accomplishing program objectives." Already through the accreditation process, schools must be able to demonstrate that those involved in teaching in the program, full-time and adjunct, collectively enable the accomplishment of program objectives. Given the varied institutional contexts in which programs are offered, it is not reasonable to prescribe a particular faculty composition to accomplish this.

### **Task Force Recommendation**

10. That the standards make it inescapably clear that assessment processes must be such as to show that the outcomes dictated by the standards are achieved demonstrably – that is, with sufficient objective evidence to show that those outcomes are achieved by all graduates of the program.

### ***Response***

See discussion above under recommendation 6.

### **Concluding Observations**

It should be emphasized that practitioners play a vital role in the accreditation process. They are the alumni and employers who are among the stakeholders engaged in providing feedback on the program. They serve as members of external review panels and the Committee on Accreditation.

Practitioners also participate directly in the education of master's students in numerous ways: as guest speakers in classes, sources of class projects, supervisors of practicums and internships, and adjunct faculty. All these forms of collaboration contribute to the preparation of our master's students for careers in the 21st century workplace, which will demand lifelong learning.

As faculty we recognize the value of research studies that enhance our understanding of graduates' preparation for the workforce and of how their careers develop over time. As one example, the Workforce Issues in Library & Information Science (WILIS) study, funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, is a collaborative research project designed to study the educational, workplace, career and retention issues faced by library and information science (LIS) graduates (<http://www.wilis.unc.edu>). Members of the ALISE Board serve on the Advisory Committee and are contributing to the next phase of the study that will gather data for several more programs beyond the six North Carolina programs that participated in the initial study.

In conclusion, we note that the Afterword of the *Standards* emphasizes that they “stress innovation, and encourage an active role and concern for future developments and growth in the field.” This is an important stance to preserve in any discussion of standards revision.

Linda C. Smith  
President, Association for Library and Information Science Education  
On behalf of the ALISE Board of Directors

---

### **Letter from iSchools:**

Received May 29, 2009

Office for Accreditation  
American Library Association  
50 E. Huron St.  
Chicago, Illinois, 60611

This letter is being written in support of positions communicated to you by the American Society for Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T) and by the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) in response to the January 2009 report of the ALA Library Education Task Force. It is also intended to communicate the particular perspective of the deans of the iSchools ([www.ischools.org](http://www.ischools.org)) and members of the iCaucus.

The iSchools currently include 25 schools in North America, Europe and Asia, 15 of which offer graduate professional programs accredited by the ALA. The foundation of common interest among the iSchools lies in our shared interest in understanding the evolving relationship between information, people and technology. This is characterized by a commitment to learning and understanding the role of information in human endeavors. The iSchools take it as given that expertise in all forms of information is required for progress in science, business, education, and culture. This expertise includes understanding the uses and users of information, as well as information technologies and their applications. As such, each of the iSchools engages in exploratory research and curricular innovation and brings a set of unique strengths to the advancement of graduate education in the information professions. It is against this backdrop that

we, the deans of the iSchools, have reviewed the January 2009 report of the ALA Library Education Task Force.

The task force report advocates a shift towards a prescriptive core curriculum, linked to accreditation, as a means of assuring that graduates share a common and well-understood set of knowledge and skills. While we understand the appeal of a process that makes it easier for ALA to assess programs, we observe that the task force recommendations introduce collateral problems. Stability of any “core curriculum” is infeasible during such a period of rapid change as we are currently witnessing. In addition, the diversity of professional goals among the current generation of LIS masters students requires curricular flexibility, particularly in light of the relatively short duration of a masters program. Unless the substance of the core curriculum, and its articulation, are annually revisited and subjected to debate among educators, researchers, and practitioners, the curriculum will become outdated, and will act to retard the timeliness and relevance of the courses in which it is instantiated, and the programs in which they exist.

The current “descriptive” method of accreditation strikes a balance between the need of the accrediting body to assess and the need of the educational program to be responsive to its clientele and responsible for its curriculum. It reflects an appropriate division of responsibility. Moving to a prescriptive curriculum shifts an inordinate amount of responsibility to the ALA, requiring it to make curricular decisions for many from afar. The ALA is not an educational institution; it is a professional association.

Caution is further suggested from the outcomes of other prescriptive learning initiatives. The Standards of Learning imposed by many state governments on public education, for example, were motivated by similar ideals as those espoused by the ALA task force. Frederick Hess (“Reform, Resistance, . . . Retreat? The Predictable Politics of Accountability in Virginia” *Brookings Papers on Education Policy* 2002, 69-122) provides an insightful view of the complex interactions among Virginia’s educators, politicians, and the public that should humble anyone considering a mandated curriculum coupled with a high-stakes accreditation process.

Few educators in LIS professional programs and library practice would dispute that some things are “core” and others are not, and the individual lists would surely overlap substantially. The question raised by linking a specific curriculum to accreditation, however, is whether the uniformity of a mandated common core would be worth the price, and whether it would (in practice) eliminate peripheral variation that enables innovative responses both to regional needs and to changing circumstances. Again, we encourage the ALA to consider the experience of Virginia with the Standards of Learning.

As deans of the iSchools, we suggest that the most efficient means of achieving the outcomes that you desire would be to conduct empirical research leading to a genuine understanding of the needs of the profession and to consider how those needs are, or are not, being met by programs such as ours. We envision this work being conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect between those who teach and those who practice, and would willingly engage the expertise and resources of the iSchools in the achievement of such an outcome.

We note that the recommendations of the task force focus on programmatic inputs (LIS PhD requirements for faculty, for example). We suggest that ALA accreditation focus rather on programmatic outputs (quality of students, placement, faculty research publications, etc.). By emphasizing the empirical checking off of inputs, accreditation processes become distracted from the qualitative evaluation of output. Evaluation is more difficult, and perhaps therefore more important..

Our schools take pride in the leadership roles we exercise in the education of information professionals, and we value highly our relationships with ALA and the other professional associations with whom we work. Appropriately conceived, accreditation provides a foundation of quality assessment we value, as it provides an objective, independent, and critical assessment of the outcomes of our programs. We also appreciate the effort and dedication invested by those engaged in these processes. We are not, however, persuaded that the kind of accreditation program recommended by the Library Education Task Force will serve either our institutions or our profession well.

Sincerely,  
John Unsworth  
iCaucus Coordinator & Dean of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science  
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, on behalf of the Deans of the iSchools

To see a list of the iSchools, view the [letter in PDF format](#).

---

### **Anonymous comment**

Received May 28, 2009

I have read the proposed changes carefully and think they are a step backward from the 2008 standards. The proposed change of language to “must” is too rigid to take extenuating circumstances into account and does not allow for flexibility, which an outstanding program must have. The faculty education requirements are too rigid as well and they do not allow for or reflect the diversity of our field. Since LIS is an interdisciplinary field, grounded in both traditional librarianship and the new technologies and research related to information science, I think the proposed changes are the wrong direction for COA to take

---

### **Anonymous comment**

Received May 28, 2009

While I understand some of the sources of these recommendations, I feel pretty slapped around after reading them. The dictatorial approach rarely works well, and at an academic level some universities will simply say “good bye”; practitioner research is not typically acceptable for

tenure and promotion nor is it typically attractive to large funded grants, now critical to any graduate program's survival. Service is critical to library science, but it gets nothing toward tenure and promotion, in fact it is almost ensured to undermine it. Universities are not fond of having special interest groups dictate faculty composition – and considering how long we have fought to try to bring all types of diversity to the field, it does seem a step backward. The very schools the TF are interested in making toe the line are capable of, and likely to tell ALA and COA to 'stick it'...when the names are big enough to not need the brand. Does the TF think a library won't hire a graduate of Drexel, Syracuse, Rutgers, etc, because their degree is not ALA accredited? It appears to me the anger about changes in the field and academy has boiled over into attempting to cleanse the programs of anything someone thinks is "un-library" in nature. Funny, all librarianship – activities, ethics, values – has to do with information, in all its forms, configurations and implications, but it should only be delivered by people who want to be called 'librarian'? Such rigid guidelines resemble the ultra-conservative anti-intellectual arguments intended to prevent freedom of information, stifle freedom of thought, and dam-up social and cultural growth by silencing any ideas that are not expressed exactly as their own.

---

### **Anonymous comment**

Received May 28, 2009

Every school should have an established core rooted in reference, cataloging, information ethics, and history of the field. That does not mean that they should not teach current and emerging technology and research.

---

### **Anonymous comment**

Received May 28, 2009

I am disappointed by the tone and implications of the TF recommendations to the Standards. They evidence a lack of understanding of the educational process, which requires us to provide theoretical basis as well as practical overviews to prepare graduates to do what they must when they leave us – adapt to whatever environment they find themselves in while supporting (as best as we can influence them to) the foundational ethics of the field. We teach traditional cataloging with examples and work assignments, it is the best way I know to teach information organization theory, or to illustrate how to make database structures efficient. I remember someone...speaking once about Library School preparation for the field, and it boiled down to sometimes she felt that she had had an excellent education to prepare her, and other times she felt she had been failed...in her reflections she reported that it was not that her education had been faulty, but that she sometimes failed to grow with the field after she left school and had to catch up...or something like that.

---

**Email from Anthony Costa, Library Coordinator, Mission Campus, City College of San Francisco**

May 15, 2009

I am sending a very brief response to Jim Rettig's message in *American Libraries*. I don't have a concrete thought-out proposal, but I have been struck by the mismatch between the high-level technical skills that are needed in libraries today and the relatively low technology skills of most recent library school graduates.

I know that some library schools have more emphasis on higher level technology backgrounds. UNC and Drexel come to mind as places that are shifting focus in that direction.

I am most familiar with the programs in California where classes in higher level technology skills are offered but not required and not taken by most students. I am encouraged by Drexel's new campus in California and have high hopes for what this may mean for future applicant pools. But in the past, I have been in the position of hiring for entry-level librarian positions which require a strong technology background, and I was very surprised at how difficult it is to find qualified candidates.

My suggestion would be to look at ways to encourage more library schools to get more students to take courses that will prepare them for developing Web-based library services. It would be beneficial for most new grads to have some background in at least a couple of the following areas: computer programming, scripting, database management, Web design, networking, etc.

Thank you for your consideration.

---

**Email from Donna L. Ferullo, J.D., Director, University Copyright Office, Associate Professor of Library Science, Purdue University**

May 15, 2009

I read Jim Rettig's message in the May issue of *American Libraries* and thought I would add my two cents. During 2007, I was on sabbatical and my research looked at legal content in LIS programs. It was a fascinating study, and I am in the process of writing about the results. However, my hypothesis going into it was that LIS programs should have a core competency in legal issues for libraries. It is not my intent that librarians should be armchair attorneys but that having legal knowledge can help identify the issues before they become a problem. I was quite heartened by the Task Force's recommendation that there should be a legal framework in a LIS program. However, I think that there needs to be a broader view of what is needed for legal education for librarians and courses that deal with it in great detail. I also agree with Jim that the standards for the core competencies should be mandates and not suggestions.

---

## Email from Nancy Churchill, M.S., M.L.S.

May 15, 2009

I'm sorry to say that I am not responding directly to your Task Force's recommendations below, but I have read them and do agree that the education must be lead by individuals with solid backgrounds in the field and that the standards and values must be clearly and strongly outlined. I believe that we are in a quiet crisis in the field of library science, knowing so much while the general (public) library user generally knows so little, just wants to get information quickly, and is unconcerned about its authority.

Below I offer my other comments which, although I know that you do not prescribe core-curriculum, I thought you might have some interest in reading.

These have been put together hastily without much revision or editing. I hope in some way they will be helpful.

**My background:** 25+ yrs teaching K-6 followed by 5 years substitute teaching K-12 (all subjects) all in NYS

**Present position:** part-time librarian in a busy suburban public library

**My opinion:** Individuals (except the very young) visiting a library are dealing (or have dealt) with complicated standards, completing assignments chosen by the teacher, and 'covering ' endless 'material' need kindness, understanding, and usually minimal instruction tailored to their specific, at the moment needs.

With public schools now considering a 4-day week and many students choosing home schooling, I expect that the public libraries will eventually have much more demand by these groups as well as other groups such as seniors, disabled, unemployed, and thrifty individuals.

Although some users are familiar with how things are organized and accessed in the library, many are not. If they are assisted by a knowledgeable, skilled and understanding librarian, their needs can be met AND they will be encouraged to return.

Librarians need to pick up on clues early in a reference interview. What contact with an individual is not a reference interview? A woman who comes to the circ desk speaking loudly, looking at the list, making comments about something she's just put in the dropbox, finally gets out her magnifying bifocals to look at her list of audio books but is still having difficulty reading it. She doesn't have the hearing problem I originally suspected. Rather, she can't see very well but never mentioned that. I take her to the audio book section, locate by browsing what is on her list, read the titles I take off the shelf and read the authors name and remind her that their marked on her list. This was just a 5-minute task for me; all the others are just as unique. And the more I accomplish the better equipped I am to help the next person.

At the university where I attended, it was suggested that LIS students complete a practicum or special project within their degree, but it is not required, except for a library media specialist degree. **In my opinion, it should be mandatory, as well as other kinds of participation, or at least observation in the field where library science is applied.** If some of this experience, even just observation, were done early in a program, individuals who do not like or appreciate the work could focus elsewhere. Providing library services requires understanding how individuals learn. **It seems to me that a teaching requirement for anyone (not just library media specialist aspirants) studying for the MLS is vital.** I use my vast experience as an educator and my practicum experience to bolster my reference interviewing. Without that, I think I might often be clueless (as I occasionally am for a few seconds!) as to how to best provide the information needed.

Many librarians are in pivotal positions to connect individuals directly with information or at least sources of information. And this direct access really is exactly what all individuals from toddlers to senior want. Individuals thrive on learning and now technology can provide answers to what they want to know. It seems so simple to think of it until the task is begun and the information is too little or too voluminous and confusing and hard to get a handle on. Librarians have many of the answers; they just need to quickly understand the questions and give the answers that will answer the needs presented in a reference interview. And these answers should include info about the authority of info that they provide, helping the user to understand the importance of info authority.

The education aspect of the reference interview also needs to continually be addressed. And since users often just want to quickly get the information or resources, they might not focus on or remember the brief instruction provided. So librarians must find ways to continue, to reinforce or to provide this instruction again succinctly and encouragingly. It's an art to apply the library science knowledge when and how it is needed. **Practicing the art of providing reference might best be practiced initially in school.**

But the offering of this effective kind of services mentioned requires funding. **I think coursework focusing totally on libraries as institutions and advocating for their continued existence and strengthening is vital.** Libraries have long been taken for granted; even regular users hardly realize what goes on 'behind the scenes' and the costs involved. A tremendous amount of work needs to be done in this area to reestablish the value of libraries to average citizens and community leaders, both bricks and mortar and digital.

There is no doubt in my mind that **librarians must stay current in their field. 60 hours of workshops per year could hardly cover the new topics that arise in the course of 6 months nowadays.** But where does the time come from? Again funding.... Countless librarians and other library staff do not continue their education or even know all the resources and services their own library offers since there is usually no budgetary provision for providing the time for this.

Finally, I notice that **the deskilling which continues in libraries definitely affects the services provided.** I don't know more than the para-professional staff in my library; my expertise just has a different although overlapping focus. But library users don't usually consider the training

behind the employee with whom they come in contact nor do they even often remember with what they were provided. They do remember, however, how they were treated and consider that when thinking of returning. Right now libraries are mostly being judged by their service. And those providing that are working harder for less. Again, funding and advocacy and education are vital tools needed for strengthening libraries. **What better place to begin finding, considering, and using these tools than in librarian training schools?**

---

**Email from Kimberly B. Kelley, Associate Provost for Libraries and Dean,  
School of Library and Information Science, The Catholic University of America**

May 12, 2009

I read the ALA report from the task force with concern, as I'm sure many others have expressed their concern to your organization(s). While the need for interplay between practicing professionals and academics within programs is essential, and I fully support their participation and their governance role, the outcome of their deliberations has a the tone of a polemic rather than a set of recommendations that received careful consideration and demonstrates the respect for, and balance of, differing viewpoints. I am particularly dismayed by the condescending and condemning tone of the document which appears to discount the complementary, but differing roles of the programs for providing an education, and the professional development needs of new and continuing professionals once they complete their educational foundation in the master's degree program.

As an individual working in both spheres, both within the education of future professionals and serving the field directly, I know that the expectations for the programs are already extremely high and continuing to tweak the standards in a misguided effort to make them more rigorous, for example by adding additional imperatives, is unlikely to achieve much and more likely to continue a downward spiral of specificity that does not improve the educational outcomes and does affect the perception of the field through its constant denigration of its own educational programs. I have not a clue why ALA thinks that being in opposition to its own programs, is useful to the future of the profession or the continued health of the programs it requires to meet its future professional needs. Further, this tactic only demonstrates that it is easier to blame than to take responsibility for sincere, respectful change that would be helpful to both sides through a respectful dialogue, which doesn't seem to take place.

I also know that accreditation standards are a tricky business and that becoming overly prescriptive usually indicates that the individuals prescribing them are unaware of the diversity of programs, faculty, students, mission and roles of the schools for which they prescribe. The ALA standards follow the best of the accreditation agencies, such as the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) that seeks to require high standards but casts a wide, purposely vague set of standards, to accommodate the variety of organizations it accredits that demonstrate compliance in a myriad of unique ways that are consistent with their mission and the requirements of MSCHE. I would like to recommend that the task force reconsider whether tweaks to the standards are what's required here or alternatively, if they would like to

have some demonstration that the programs are achieving the standards they are accountable for. The manner that I have experienced that is successful in this regard relies on outcomes data, not on narrower and narrower standards that achieve little and confuse more.

The competencies require a diverse faculty that can address the competencies successfully. We all know that part-time faculty are not the problem and their existence is not a threat to the full-time faculty. Again, the recommendations demonstrate a frustration on the part of the group but a lack of a thoughtful approach to the problem. Instead of attacking the practice of part-time faculty, as though it is an indicator of trouble or de-professionalization of the faculty, ask for outcomes that demonstrate whether the part-time faculty are providing an equivalent education to those who are full-time and allow the programs to demonstrate their ability to properly and professionally engage part-time and full-time faculty successfully to provide a quality education. No one person or type of faculty dictate a quality education. A program that evaluates its outcomes and engages its faculty will have a quality program, part-time or not. These recommendations harken back to another time and are not cognizant of the competitive nature of higher education and the need for an entrepreneurial approach for staffing that is in line with the realities facing higher education. Using part-time faculty can be done well or badly, outcomes are the key to differentiating the two.

One of the recommendations:

3. That the standards be revised to be written using imperatives and in the active voice – stressing that adherence to them is required for accreditation.

Is particularly dismaying. After all, it is a “given” for every program that adherence to the standards is required for accreditation, every Dean knows this and is aware of his/her responsibility to demonstrate adherence. It is insulting to have a document that is so dismissive of the efforts and respect that the programs have for the standards and their efforts to achieve them.

Further, I’m not thrilled that ALA is adopting the core competencies as a requirement of the standards. While I utilize competencies myself, and think they’re a good idea, we took a set of them, from several professional associations, and made our own that draw on all of them and match the mission/culture of our institution and are better for us. If they’re mandated, we have to go back and change or withdraw all of our work because the standards are now the ALA competencies, which are fine but are not in all cases entirely compatible with the competencies we chose, although it’s not a significant departure.

This item:

7. That ALA’s accreditation standards prescribe that a majority of the permanent full-time faculty teaching in the program are grounded in librarianship by virtue of their educational background, professional experience and/or record of research and publication.

Is definitely problematic in that it limits the future, prescribes too narrowly how we should achieve our adherence to the standards and goes beyond ALA’s governance role to micro

management. Good governance sets the standards and the direction and allows each individual program to find their approach. Poor governance narrowly dictates how to approach accreditation and begins to meddle in the day-to-day decision making processes, which chips away at the autonomy of the programs without achieving a positive outcome.

I would respectfully request that the task force refrain from dictating and instead, hold us accountable for demonstrating with various data that we are achieving the standards through our outcomes and continuing planning efforts. These tweaks are not very meaningful and smack of a set of individuals who are upset about what is but are not quite sure how to “fix” the problem. Accreditation is an iterative process, it is the process, not messing with the standards, that make for better, more responsive programs. We might find ourselves with a process very similar to the NCATE process, one of the most laborious in all of accreditation-dom. And, I would add, not particularly helpful in improving the programs it accredits.

---

**Email from Lorna Peterson, Associate Professor, Dept. of Library and Information Studies, Univ. at Buffalo, SUNY**

May 8, 2009

The UB [University at Buffalo] DLIS [Department of Library and Information Studies] faculty did discuss the Task Force recommendations regarding the ALA accreditation standards. We find the recommendations to be especially damaging and problematic for small programs. We see the 1992 and 2008 Standards as supporting the diversity of LIS programs and being helpful for those MLS programs with fewer resources, no doctoral program, and a small faculty and staff. The TF recommendations are restrictive and limiting. The faculty also read the ASIST concerns and agree with their statement (although point out that ACRL is part of ALA and not a stand alone organization as their letter suggests.)

---

**Letter from ASIST (American Society for Information Science and Technology):**

April 13, 2009

Office of Accreditation  
American Library Association  
50 E. Huron St.  
Chicago, Illinois 60611

This letter is meant to express our concern, and the concern of the members of our Society, with the January report of the ALA Library Education Task Force. The setting of educational standards and accreditation policies based upon them is crucially important to all professions and we value the work of ALA and its COA in insuring that information professionals in a variety of

settings obtain the highest quality education possible. The changes in standards presented in this set of recommendations are problematic on several fronts.

First, these changes represent a significant narrowing of the LIS field, at a time when the need for information professionals is burgeoning in all areas of human enterprise. At present, almost 30% of LIS graduates do not enter library jobs and the proposed prescriptive emphasis on specific competencies will displace content that addresses non-library-related knowledge and skills. This narrowing is fundamentally opposed to the long-standing commitment to diversity and liberal thinking that ALA so gallantly champions. Excising important growth areas for our field with reactionary restrictions on educational programs will likely lead to a schism in the information professions rather than a united dedication to the values all our organizations share.

Second, the requirements for faculty educated in LIS and library-centric curricula strongly restrict the diversity and interdisciplinarity of LIS programs. This restriction is clearly in opposition to the trends toward more interdisciplinary activities in higher education and commerce.

Librarians as well as other information professionals meet broad ranges of information needs that cut across all disciplines and students who experience interdisciplinary courses, projects, and faculty will be prepared to excel and lead in their professional lives.

Third, the changes are prescriptive. History has shown that clear guidelines that inspire programs to carefully define their goals and then use criterion-based assessments to measure progress will lead to more innovative schools, faculty, and graduates than nationally mandated standards.

Fourth, many other groups are stakeholders in the LIS programs that ALA accredits. Organizations such as MLA, SLA, ACRL, ALISE, as well as ASIST have strong interests in insuring that their future members receive excellent educations. ALA has assumed leadership for accreditation and the changes proposed do not take into account the perspectives of allied organizations.

In conclusion we object to some of the specifics of the report as well as to its general tenor, which violates the values of ALA itself as well as the values and trends of higher education. We believe it has neglected the concerns and goals of a larger community, including the membership of ASIS&T, and encourage ALA to avoid prescription and restriction but rather to continue to lead the information professions with openness and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Donald O. Case  
2009 President, American Society for Information Science and Technology