

# **Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies**

**Adopted by the Council of the American Library Association (the Council), February 2, 2015  
Revision of standard element V.3 adopted by the Council, January 28, 2019  
by request of the Committee on Accreditation**

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## **Introduction**

### **Purpose of Accreditation**

Accreditation in higher education is defined as a collegial process based on self- and peer assessment for public accountability and improvement of academic quality.<sup>1</sup>

Accreditation serves to ensure educational quality, judged in terms of demonstrated results in supporting the educational development of students. Judgments are made by carefully vetted, unbiased practitioners and faculty professionals at the expert level.

These experts judge how well:

- Accreditation standards are met (and can continue to be met) by the institution or program;
- Elements such as curriculum, evaluation methods, faculty, resources and admission requirements are suited to the overall mission and level of program offerings and objectives;
- Students can be expected to fulfill the knowledge and skills requirements for completion of their programs.<sup>2</sup>

### **Authority and Responsibilities of the ALA Committee on Accreditation**

The Council of the American Library Association (ALA) has designated the Committee on Accreditation "to be responsible for the execution of the accreditation program of the ALA and to develop and formulate standards of education..."<sup>3</sup> for graduate programs of library and information studies leading to a master's degree. The American Library Association Committee on Accreditation is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation as the accrediting agency for these programs.<sup>4</sup>

The Committee on Accreditation protects the public interest and provides guidance for educators. Prospective students, employers recruiting professional staff, and the general public concerned about the quality of library and information services have the right to know whether a given program of education is of good standing. By identifying those programs meeting recognized standards, the Committee offers a means of quality control in the professional staffing of library and information services.

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<sup>1</sup> CHEA Recognition of Accrediting Organizations, Policy and Procedures (1998, revised June 28, 2010); Appendix A: Accreditation Defined. Retrieved March 28, 2014, [http://chea.org/pdf/Recognition\\_Policy-June\\_28\\_2010-FINAL.pdf](http://chea.org/pdf/Recognition_Policy-June_28_2010-FINAL.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) (2013). "Quick Reference: Standards, Outcomes and Quality." Retrieved March 24, 2014, [http://www.aspa-usa.org/system/files/inserts/ASPA\\_Standards\\_Jun12.pdf](http://www.aspa-usa.org/system/files/inserts/ASPA_Standards_Jun12.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> American Library Association Handbook of Organization. (Chicago, IL: ALA 2013).

<sup>4</sup> The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is a national recognizing agency of higher education accrediting bodies that emerged from the dissolution of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA). ALA discontinued U.S. Department of Education recognition review when the 1992 Higher Education Act limited the scope of recognition to only those agencies whose accreditation plays a "gatekeeping role" to establish eligibility for federal funding.

The Committee on Accreditation examines the evidence presented for each of the Standards; however, its final judgment is concerned with the totality of the accomplishment and the environment for learning. The decision regarding accreditation is approached from an evaluation of this totality rather than from a consideration of isolated particulars. Thus, failure to meet any particular component of a standard may not result in failure to meet that standard. Similarly, failure to meet a single standard may not result in failure to achieve accredited status for a program.

Evaluators of a program for accreditation purposes are vetted for bias, formally oriented, experienced, and capable.

### **Scope of Standards**

These Standards are limited in their application to the assessment of graduate programs of library and information studies that lead to a master's degree. As a prerequisite to accreditation, the institution in which a program resides must be accredited by its appropriate accrediting agency.

The phrase "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, regardless of a degree's name.

A unit's mission is relevant to master's program review; when the unit offers other educational programs, the contribution of those programs is also relevant. A unit may seek accreditation for more than one graduate program of education in library and information studies leading to a master's degree; when that is done, the goals, objectives, and learning outcomes of each program and their interrelationships are to be presented.

### **Terminology within the Standards**

The academic unit that provides graduate education in library and information studies may be organized as an autonomous college within its university, as a department in a college, or otherwise, as appropriate within the institution. Within the Standards, the term "program" refers to an organization of people and educational experiences that comprise the degree.

The term "research" as used in the Standards is understood to be (1) broad in its inclusiveness of scholarly activities of a wide variety; and (2) inclusive of communication of results through appropriate means.

When the term "faculty" is used, the Standard applies to the faculty as a whole, including both full-time faculty members (tenured/tenure-track and non-tenure-track) and part-time faculty members. Reference to a subset of the faculty is designated by referring specifically to "full-time" or "part-time" faculty members, or to "each" or "individual" faculty members.

Systematic planning is an ongoing, active, broad-based approach to (a) continuous review and revision of a program's vision, mission, goals, objectives, and learning outcomes; (b) assessment of attainment of goals, objectives, and learning outcomes; (c) realignment and redesign of core activities in response to the results of assessment; and (d) communication of planning policies and processes, assessment activities, and results of assessment to program constituents. Effective broad-based, systematic planning requires engagement of the program's constituents and thorough and open documentation of those activities that constitute planning.

A glossary of accreditation terminology is available at the ALA-Office for Accreditation website, <http://www.ala.org/accreditedprograms/standards/glossary>.

## **Nature of the Standards**

These Standards identify the indispensable components of library and information studies programs while recognizing programs' rights and obligations regarding initiative, experimentation, innovation, and individual programmatic differences. The Standards are indicative, not prescriptive, with the intent to foster excellence through a program's development of criteria for evaluating effectiveness, developing and applying qualitative and quantitative measures of these criteria, analyzing data from measurements, and applying analysis to program improvement.

The Standards stress innovation, and encourage programs to take an active role in and concern for future developments and growth in the field.

The nature of a demonstrably diverse society is referenced throughout the Standards because of the desire to recognize diversity, defined in the broadest terms, when framing goals and objectives, designing curricula, and selecting and retaining faculty and students.

The requirements of these Standards apply regardless of forms or locations of delivery of a program.

This 2019 edition reflects an adjustment to the first sentence of ALA standard element V.3 to respond to Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) requirements that accreditors confine standards to what is necessary for student learning and achievement, "refer to resources only to the extent required for students to emerge from institutions or programs appropriately prepared" (CHEA 2010 standard 12A5/ 2018 standard 10D).

## **Philosophy of Program Review**

The Committee on Accreditation determines the eligibility of a program for accredited status on the basis of evidence presented by a program and by the report of a visiting external review panel. The evidence supplied by the program in support of the Standards is evaluated against the statement of the program's mission and its program goals and objectives. A program's evidence is evaluated by trained, experienced, and capable evaluators.

Program goals and objectives are fundamental to all aspects of master's degree programs and form the basis on which educational programs are to be developed and upon which they are evaluated. Program goals and objectives are required to reflect and support student learning outcomes and the achievement of these outcomes.

The *Accreditation Process, Policies and Procedures (AP3)* document guides the accreditation process. Both the *Standards* and *AP3* are available online from the Office for Accreditation website, <http://www.ala.org/offices/accreditation>. Assistance in obtaining materials used by the Committee on Accreditation (COA) is provided by the Office for Accreditation. These materials consist of documents used in the accreditation process, as well as educational policy statements developed by relevant professional organizations that can be used to inform the design and evaluation of a master's degree program.

## **Standard I: Systematic Planning**

I.1 The program's mission and goals, both administrative and educational, are pursued, and its program objectives achieved, through implementation of an ongoing, broad-based, systematic planning process that involves the constituencies that the program seeks to serve. Elements of systematic planning include:

I.1.1 Continuous review and revision of the program's vision, mission, goals, objectives, and student learning outcomes;

I.1.2 Assessment of attainment of program goals, program objectives, and student learning outcomes;

I.1.3 Improvements to the program based on analysis of assessment data;

I.1.4 Communication of planning policies and processes to program constituents. The program has a written mission statement and a written strategic or long-range plan that provides vision and direction for its future, identifies needs and resources for its mission and goals, and is supported by university administration. The program's goals and objectives are consistent with the values of the parent institution and the culture and mission of the program and foster quality education.

I.2 Clearly defined student learning outcomes are a critical part of the program's goals. These outcomes describe what students are expected to know and be able to do by the time of graduation. They enable a faculty to arrive at a common understanding of the expectations for student learning and to achieve consistency across the curriculum. Student learning outcomes reflect the entirety of the learning experience to which students have been exposed. Student learning outcomes address:

I.2.1 The essential character of the field of library and information studies;

I.2.2 The philosophy, principles, and ethics of the field;

I.2.3 Appropriate principles of specialization identified in applicable policy statements and documents of relevant professional organizations;

I.2.4 The importance of research to the advancement of the field's knowledge base;

I.2.5 The symbiotic relationship of library and information studies with other fields;

I.2.6 The role of library and information services in a diverse global society, including the role of serving the needs of underserved groups;

I.2.7 The role of library and information services in a rapidly changing technological society;

I.2.8 The needs of the constituencies that the program seeks to serve.

I.3 Program goals and objectives incorporate the value of teaching and service to the field.

I.4 Within the context of these Standards each program is judged on the extent to which it attains its objectives. In accord with the mission of the program, clearly defined, publicly stated, and regularly reviewed program goals and objectives form the essential frame of reference for meaningful external and internal evaluation.

I.4.1 The evaluation of program goals and objectives involves those served: students, faculty, employers, alumni, and other constituents.

I.5 The program has explicit, documented evidence of its ongoing decision-making processes and the data to substantiate the evaluation of the program's success in achieving its mission, goals and objectives.

1.6 The program demonstrates how the results of the evaluation are systematically used to improve the program and to plan for the future.

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## **Standard II: Curriculum**

II.1 The curriculum is based on goals and objectives, and evolves in response to an ongoing systematic planning process involving representation from all constituencies. Within this general framework, the curriculum provides, through a variety of educational experiences, for the study of theory, principles, practice, and legal and ethical issues and values necessary for the provision of service in libraries and information agencies and in other contexts. The curriculum is revised regularly to keep it current.

II.2 The curriculum is concerned with information resources and the services and technologies to facilitate their management and use. Within this overarching concept, the curriculum of library and information studies encompasses information and knowledge creation, communication, identification, selection, acquisition, organization and description, storage and retrieval, preservation and curation, analysis, interpretation, evaluation, synthesis, dissemination, use and users, and management of human and information resources.

The curriculum

II.2.1 Fosters development of library and information professionals who will assume a leadership role in providing services and collections appropriate for the communities that are served;

II.2.2 Emphasizes an evolving body of knowledge that reflects the findings of basic and applied research from relevant fields;

II.2.3 Integrates technology and the theories that underpin its design, application, and use;

II.2.4 Responds to the needs of a diverse and global society, including the needs of underserved groups;

II.2.5 Provides direction for future development of a rapidly changing field;

II.2.6 Promotes commitment to continuous professional development and lifelong learning, including the skills and competencies that are needed for the practitioner of the future.

II.3 The curriculum provides the opportunity for students to construct coherent programs of study that allow individual needs, goals, and aspirations to be met within the context of program requirements established by the school and that will foster the attainment of student learning outcomes. The curriculum includes as appropriate cooperative degree programs, interdisciplinary coursework and research, experiential opportunities, and other similar activities. Course content and sequence relationships within the curriculum are evident.

II.4 Design of general and specialized curricula takes into account the statements of knowledge and competencies developed by relevant professional organizations.

II.5 Procedures for the continual evaluation of the curriculum are established with input not only from faculty but also representatives from those served. The curriculum is continually evaluated with input not only from faculty, but also representatives from those served including students, employers, alumni, and other

constituents. Curricular evaluation is used for ongoing appraisal and to make improvements. Evaluation of the curriculum includes assessment of students' achievements.

II.6 The program has explicit, documented evidence of its ongoing decision-making processes and the data to substantiate the evaluation of the curriculum.

II.7 The program demonstrates how the results of the evaluation of the curriculum are systematically used to improve the program and to plan for the future.

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### **Standard III: Faculty**

III.1 The program has a faculty capable of accomplishing program objectives. Full-time faculty members (tenured/tenure-track and non-tenure-track) are qualified for appointment to the graduate faculty within the parent institution. The full-time faculty are sufficient in number and in diversity of specialties to carry out the major share of the teaching, research, and service activities required for the program, wherever and however delivered. Part-time faculty, when appointed, balance and complement the competencies of the full-time tenured/tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty and are integral to the program. Particularly in the teaching of specialties that are not represented in the expertise of the full-time faculty, part-time faculty enrich the quality and diversity of the program.

III.2 The program demonstrates the high priority it attaches to teaching, research, and service by its appointments and promotions; by encouragement of excellence in teaching, research, and service; and through provision of a stimulating learning and research environment.

III.3 The program has policies to recruit and retain faculty from diverse backgrounds. Explicit and equitable faculty personnel policies and procedures are published, accessible, and implemented.

III.4 The qualifications of each faculty member include competence in designated teaching areas, technological skills and knowledge as appropriate, effectiveness in teaching, and active participation in relevant organizations.

III.5 For each full-time faculty member, the qualifications include a sustained record of accomplishment in research or other appropriate scholarship (such as creative and professional activities) that contribute to the knowledge base of the field and to their professional development.

III.6 The faculty hold advanced degrees from a variety of academic institutions. The faculty evidence diversity of backgrounds, ability to conduct research in the field, and specialized knowledge covering program content. In addition, they demonstrate skill in academic planning and assessment, have a substantial and pertinent body of relevant experience, interact with faculty of other disciplines, and maintain close and continuing liaison with the field. The faculty nurture an intellectual environment that enhances the accomplishment of program objectives.

III.7 Faculty assignments relate to the needs of the program and to the competencies of individual faculty members. These assignments assure that the quality of instruction is maintained throughout the year and take into account the time needed by the faculty for teaching, student counseling, research, professional development, and institutional and professional service.

III.8 Procedures are established for systematic evaluation of all faculty; evaluation considers accomplishment and innovation in the areas of teaching, research, and service. Within applicable institutional policies, faculty, students, and others are involved in the evaluation process.

III.9 The program has explicit, documented evidence of its ongoing decision-making processes and the data to substantiate the evaluation of the faculty.

III.10 The program demonstrates how the results of the evaluation of faculty are systematically used to improve the program and to plan for the future.

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## Standard IV: Students

IV.1 The program formulates recruitment, admission, retention, financial aid, career services, and other academic and administrative policies for students that are consistent with the program's mission and program goals and objectives. These policies include the needs and values of the constituencies served by the program. The program has policies to recruit and retain students who reflect the diversity of North America's communities. The composition of the student body is such that it fosters a learning environment consistent with the program's mission and program goals and objectives.

IV.2 Current, accurate, and easily accessible information about the program is available to students and the general public. This information includes documentation of progress toward achievement of program goals and objectives, descriptions of curricula, information on faculty, admission requirements, availability of financial aid, criteria for evaluating student performance, assistance with placement, and other policies and procedures. The program demonstrates that it has procedures to support these policies.

IV.3 Standards for admission are applied consistently. Students admitted to the program have earned a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution; the policies and procedures for waiving any admission standard or academic prerequisite are stated clearly and applied consistently. Assessment of an application is based on a combined evaluation of academic, intellectual, and other qualifications as they relate to the constituencies served by the program, the program's goals and objectives, and the career objectives of the individual. Within the framework of institutional policy and programs, the admission policy for the program ensures that applicants possess sufficient interest, aptitude, and qualifications to enable successful completion of the program and subsequent contribution to the field.

IV.4 Students construct a coherent plan of study that allows individual needs, goals, and aspirations to be met within the context of requirements established by the program. Students receive systematic, multifaceted evaluation of their achievements. Students have access to continuing opportunities for guidance, counseling, and placement assistance.

IV.5 The program provides an environment that fosters student participation in the definition and determination of the total learning experience. Students are provided with opportunities to:

IV.5.1 Participate in the formulation, modification, and implementation of policies affecting academic and student affairs;

IV.5.2 Participate in research;

IV.5.3 Receive academic and career advisement and consultation;

IV.5.4 Receive support services as needed;

IV.5.5 Form student organizations;

IV.5.6 Participate in professional organizations.

IV.6 The program applies the results of evaluation of student achievement to program development. Procedures are established for systematic evaluation of the extent to which the program's academic and administrative policies and activities regarding students are accomplishing its objectives. Within applicable institutional policies, faculty, students, staff, and others are involved in the evaluation process.

IV.7 The program has explicit, documented evidence of its ongoing decision-making processes and the data to substantiate the evaluation of student learning outcomes, using appropriate direct and indirect measures as well as individual student learning, using appropriate direct and indirect measures.

IV.8 The program demonstrates how the results of the evaluation of student learning outcomes and individual student learning are systematically used to improve the program and to plan for the future.

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## **Standard V: Administration, Finances, and Resources**

V.1 The program is an integral yet distinctive academic unit within the institution. As such, it has the administrative infrastructure, financial support, and resources to ensure that its goals and objectives can be accomplished. Its autonomy is sufficient to assure that the intellectual content of its program, the selection and promotion of its faculty, and the selection of its students are determined by the program within the general guidelines of the institution. The parent institution provides both administrative support and the resources needed for the attainment of program objectives.

V.2 The program's faculty, staff, and students have the same opportunities for representation on the institution's advisory or policy-making bodies as do those of comparable units throughout the institution. Administrative relationships with other academic units enhance the intellectual environment and support interdisciplinary interaction; further, these administrative relationships encourage participation in the life of the parent institution. Decisions regarding funding and resource allocation for the program are made on the same basis as for comparable academic units within the institution.

V.3 The administrative head of the program has authority to ensure that students are supported in their academic program of study. In addition to academic qualifications comparable to those required of the faculty, the administrative head has leadership skills, administrative ability, experience, and understanding of developments in the field and in the academic environment needed to fulfill the responsibilities of the position.

V.4 The program's administrative head nurtures an environment that enhances the pursuit of the mission and program goals and the accomplishment of its program objectives; that environment also encourages faculty and student interaction with other academic units and promotes the socialization of students into the field.

V.5 The program's administrative and other staff support the administrative head and faculty in the performance of their responsibilities. The staff contributes to the fulfillment of the program's mission, goals, and objectives. Within its institutional framework decision-making processes are determined mutually by the administrative head and the faculty, who regularly evaluate these processes and use the results.



V.6 The parent institution provides continuing financial support for development, maintenance, and enhancement of library and information studies education in accordance with the general principles set forth in these Standards. The level of support provides a reasonable expectation of financial viability and is related to the number of faculty, administrative and support staff, instructional resources, and facilities needed to carry out the program's teaching, research, and service.

V.7 Compensation for the program's faculty and other staff is equitably established according to their education, experience, responsibilities, and accomplishments and is sufficient to attract, support, and retain personnel needed to attain program goals and objectives.

V.8 Institutional funds for research projects, professional development, travel, and leaves with pay are available on the same basis as in comparable units of the institution. Student financial aid from the parent institution is available on the same basis as in comparable units of the institution.

V.9 The program has access to physical and technological resources that allow it to accomplish its objectives in the areas of teaching, research and service. The program provides support services for teaching and learning regardless of instructional delivery modality.

V.10 Physical facilities provide a functional learning environment for students and faculty; enhance the opportunities for research, teaching, service, consultation, and communication; and promote efficient and effective administration of the program.

V.11 Instructional and research facilities and services for meeting the needs of students and faculty include access to information resources and services, computer and other information technologies, accommodations for independent study, and media production facilities.

V.12 The staff and the services provided for the program by libraries, media centers, and information technology units, as well as all other support facilities, are appropriate for the level of use required and specialized to the extent needed. These services are delivered by knowledgeable staff, convenient, accessible to people with disabilities, and are available when needed.

V.13 The program's systematic planning and evaluation process includes review of its administrative policies, its fiscal and support policies, and its resource requirements. The program regularly reviews the adequacy of access to physical resources and facilities for the delivery of face-to-face instruction and access to the technologies and support services for the delivery of online education. Within applicable institutional policies, faculty, staff, students, and others are involved in the evaluation process.

V. 14 The program has explicit, documented evidence of its ongoing decision-making processes and the data to substantiate the evaluation of administration, finances, and resources.

V. 15 The program demonstrates how the results of the evaluation of administration, finances, and resources are systematically used to improve the program and to plan for the future.

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*(End of Standards)*