

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

**Adopted by the Council of the American Library Association (the Council), November 30,
2023, by request of the Committee on Accreditation**

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Accreditation

Accreditation in higher education is defined as “a process of external quality review created and used by higher education to scrutinize institutions and programs for quality assurance and quality improvement.”¹

Accreditation serves to ensure educational quality, judged in terms of demonstrated results in supporting the educational development of students.

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 ALA, and to develop and formulate standards of education for library and information studies for the approval of council.”² The American Library Association Committee on Accreditation has been recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) as the accrediting agency for “master’s programs in library and information studies offered under the degree-granting authority of institutions in the United States, its territories, possessions, and protectorates; in Canada by agreement with the Canadian Federation of Library Associations/Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques (CFLA-FCAB); and in the United Kingdom (2019).”³

The Committee on Accreditation endeavors through standards to protect 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.

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. Any standard on which a program has follow-up reporting (following a comprehensive

review or interim reporting review) is made public by the Office for Accreditation in the Directory of ALA-Accredited Programs.

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 information resources 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 and curation, analysis, interpretation, evaluation, synthesis, dissemination, use and users, and management of human and information resources. Given the growing and changing complexity of our global society, library and information studies also is concerned with equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice with regards to information and its use. This definition incorporates a field of professional practice and associated areas of study and research, regardless of a degree's name.

The mission of a unit in which a program resides 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.

Program goals are broad statements of what the program intends to achieve or accomplish. A program's objectives specify how the program will achieve its goals within a specified timeframe.

Program-level learning outcomes specify what students know and are able to do by the time of graduation.

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 (1) continuous review and revision of a program’s vision, mission, goals, objectives, and learning outcomes; (2) assessment of attainment of goals, objectives, and learning outcomes; (3) realignment and redesign of core activities in response to the results of assessment; and (4) 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.

Definitions of equity, diversity, inclusion and social justice are included in the Office for Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach Services (ODLOS) Glossary of Terms
<https://www.ala.org/aboutala/odlos-glossary-terms>.

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 values of equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice are referenced throughout the Standards because of their importance when framing goals and objectives, designing curricula, selecting and retaining faculty and students, and allocating resources.

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

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 unit’s mission and the program’s 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 program-level learning outcomes and the achievement of these outcomes.

The *Accreditation Process, Policies and Procedures (AP3)* document guides the accreditation process. Section II "Guidelines for the Self-Study and comprehensive review" includes Section II.7.4 "Examples of evidence that might be used to indicate compliance with the Standards for Accreditation." 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 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.

Endnotes

1. *CHEA Recognition of Accrediting Organizations, Policy and Procedures* (1998, revised September 24, 2018); Background, p. 2. Retrieved October 24, 2023, <https://www.chea.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Recognition-Polic-FINAL-Dec-2018.pdf>
2. Committee on Accreditation. Retrieved October 24, 2023, <https://www.ala.org/aboutala/committees/ala/ala-coa>
3. Council for Higher Education Accreditation. American Library Association, Committee on Accreditation. Retrieved October 24, 2023, <https://www.chea.org/american-library-association-committee-accreditation>

Scope Statements for Top-level Standards

Standard I – Systematic Planning

The program implements an ongoing, broad-based, systematic planning process that involves the constituencies the program seeks to serve, includes members of traditionally underrepresented and historically underserved groups, and results in improvements to and innovations in the program.

Standard II – Program-Level Learning Outcomes and Curriculum

Program-level learning outcomes describe what students are expected to know and be able to do by the time of graduation. The curriculum provides descriptions of different courses of study, specializations, or other variations of study. The evaluation includes attainment of outcomes across the program.

Standard III - Faculty

The faculty are diverse in representation and have the necessary qualifications, achievements, and resources to support the program. Faculty performance is regularly evaluated by criteria relevant to the program.

Standard IV – Students

The program has processes and systems to recruit, retain, and support students and prospective students, including the evaluation and continuous improvement of those processes and systems.

Standard V - Infrastructure

Programs have the administrative, financial, physical, and technological resources and services to support student learning and enable program-level learning outcomes to be achieved.

Programs evaluate these resources and services for continuous improvement.

Each Standard begins with a statement of scope. In each of the remaining numbered sections, the Self-Study will provide evidence demonstrating achievement of that standard.

ALA Standards for Accreditation of Master’s Programs in Library and Information Studies

Standard I – Systematic Planning

The program’s implementation of an ongoing, broad-based, systematic planning process involves the constituencies that the program seeks to serve, including members of traditionally underrepresented and historically underserved groups, and results in improvements to and innovations in the program.

I.1 Mission and Goals. The mission and goals of the unit and the educational program foster quality education and incorporate values of equity, diversity, and inclusion. The program’s goals and objectives align with the needs of the LIS profession, demonstrate continuous improvement over time, and are informed by the mission of the parent institution.

I.2 Process. The program employs an on-going systematic planning process that involves the constituents the program seeks to serve, including traditionally underrepresented and historically underserved groups. Those constituents include, but are not limited to, the parent institution, employers, alumni, and students. Elements of systematic planning include:

I.2.1 Continuous review of the program’s vision, mission, goals and objectives;

I.2.2 Assessment of attainment of program goals and objectives;

I.2.3 Improvements to the program based on analysis of assessment data from all relevant constituents.

I.3 Plan. The program’s systematic plan includes a written strategic or long-range plan that includes vision, mission, and direction for the future; this plan is publicly available and regularly reviewed. The plan also identifies needs and resources for achieving its mission and goals to ensure sustainability of the program.

Standard II – Program-Level Learning Outcomes and Curriculum

Program-level learning outcomes describe what students are expected to know and be able to do by the time of graduation. The curriculum provides descriptions of different courses of study, specializations, or other variations of study. The evaluation includes attainment of outcomes collectively across the program.

II.1 Ethics and Values. Program-level learning outcomes and curriculum are designed to incorporate the philosophy, principles, and ethics of the field, including the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and relevant professional codes of ethics.

II.2 Program-Level Learning Outcomes. Program-level learning outcomes describe what students are expected to know and be able to do by the time of graduation. The outcomes are informed by the most recent statement of **ALA Core Competences, ALA Core Values** and include a focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion. For areas of specialization, outcomes are informed by knowledge and competency statements developed by relevant professional organizations. Programs regularly evaluate the attainment of program-level learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are consistent regardless of mode of delivery.

II.3 Curriculum. The program provides a curriculum that enables students to achieve the identified program-level learning outcomes. The curriculum addresses information users, resources, services, and technologies to facilitate information management and use, across diverse contexts and communities. Beyond the required curriculum, programs shall offer additional courses to provide both greater depth and breadth of material. Programs have the option of grouping courses together to create areas of specialization. The curriculum is revised regularly to keep it current.

II.4 Program Completion. Program course offerings and support systems allow students to construct coherent and timely plans of study that address their career goals. Course offerings, scheduling, and delivery methods are consistent with public information and are matched to student needs.

II.5 Evaluation. The curriculum is continually evaluated with input not only from faculty, but also stakeholders: students, employers, alumni, and other constituents, including members of traditionally underrepresented and historically underserved groups. The program's design, delivery, and continuous improvement are based on data provided by systematic evaluation of students' achievement of program-level learning outcomes within the context of the overall mission and goals of the unit offering the program and distinct needs and goals for separate specializations.

Standard III - Faculty

The faculty are diverse in representation and have the necessary qualifications, achievements, and resources to support the program. Faculty performance is regularly evaluated by criteria relevant to the program.

III.1 Faculty Diversity. The recruitment, retention, development, and advancement of all faculty, especially underrepresented faculty, reflect the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

III.2 Program Faculty. There are sufficient full-time program faculty (tenured/tenure-track and non-tenure-track) to carry out the major share of the teaching, research, and service activities required for the program, wherever or however delivered. The teaching, research, and service responsibilities are equitably distributed among the full-time faculty. Teaching involves curriculum development and innovation, instruction, direction of student research, and academic advising. Full-time program faculty collectively provide a range of specialties that support the goals and objectives of the program. Part-time faculty, when appointed, balance, enrich, and complement the competencies of the full-time program faculty.

III.3 Faculty Qualifications. All faculty possess appropriate academic and subject-matter qualifications to teach in their area of instruction at the graduate level and contribute meaningfully to program design and evaluation. Full-time faculty demonstrate skill in academic planning and assessment, have a sustained research and scholarly agenda that contributes to the knowledge base of the field and is disseminated regularly. Faculty regularly update and enhance their knowledge and skills, including skills in equity and social justice; interact with faculty of other disciplines; and maintain close and continuing liaison to relevant areas of professional practice.

III.4 Faculty Workload. Faculty assignments relate to the needs of the program and specializations, and to the competencies of the individual faculty members. Faculty workload assignments are equitable, support the quality of instruction throughout all academic sessions and all modes of delivery, and take into account time needed for teaching, academic advising, research, professional development, and institutional and professional service.

III.5 Faculty Support. Compensation for program faculty is equitable and is sufficient to attract, support, and retain personnel needed to attain unit, program, and LIS professional goals and objectives. Institutional funds for research projects, professional development, travel, and leaves are available on the same basis as in comparable units of the institution. Faculty have access to resources and accommodations for disabilities. Faculty from underrepresented groups have access to support and resources specific to documented challenges and oppression in academic settings.

III.6. Faculty Evaluation and Development. The unit provides policies and resources that support and enhance the retention and professional development of full- and part-time faculty. All faculty have the opportunity for professional development activities. Systematic evaluation of faculty considers accomplishments and innovation in the areas of teaching, research, and service, and that evaluation provides data for continuous improvement of instruction and other program goals and objectives. Documented mechanisms for addressing the unique challenges of faculty from underrepresented groups in development and evaluation exist. Within applicable institutional policies, faculty, students, and others are involved in the evaluation process.

Standard IV – Students

The program has processes and systems to recruit, retain, and support students and prospective students, as well as the evaluation and continuous improvement of those processes and systems.

IV.1 Student Diversity. Student recruitment, retention, and support systems address student needs in a global and diverse society, explicitly advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion.

IV.2 Public Information. Current, accurate, and easily accessible information about the program is available for prospective and current students and other program constituents. This includes statements of program-level learning outcomes, program requirements, data on retention, time to degree completion, graduation rates, percentage of graduates holding program-relevant positions after graduation, and other relevant metrics. Public information is available on curricula, faculty, admission requirements, costs and availability of financial aid, and criteria for evaluating student performance.

IV.3 Student Qualifications. The program formulates recruitment and admission policies for students that are consistent with the unit's mission and the program's goals and objectives. These policies include the needs and values of the constituencies served by the program. Standards for admission are applied consistently and equitably. 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. 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.

IV.4 Student Advising, Services, and Support. The program provides students with the support and services that promote health and safety, learning, timely completion of their program of study, and socialization into the field. The program provides students with competent academic advising, progress appraisal, and career guidance. Students have access to university services, including personal counseling resources, and accommodations for disabilities. The program supports students by providing them with financial aid opportunities.

IV.5 Student Engagement. The program fosters student participation in the determination of the total learning experience. Students are provided with opportunities to: participate in the formulation, modification, and implementation of policies affecting academic and student affairs; participate in research; form student organizations; and participate in professional organizations. Students have multiple avenues for input, including opportunities to express concerns and have them addressed.

IV.6 Evaluation. Processes and systems supporting students are systematically evaluated and the results applied to continuous improvement in the context of the unit's mission and the program's goals and objectives.

Standard V - Infrastructure

Programs have the administrative, financial, physical, and technological resources and services to support student learning and enable program-level learning outcomes to be achieved. Programs evaluate these resources and services for continuous improvement.

V.1 Values Underlying Infrastructure. Programs show documented efforts to use resources and services in ways that reflect equity, diversity, and inclusion. Resources and services are distributed, implemented, and used by the program equitably and with aims toward diversity and inclusion.

V.2 Autonomy and Administrative Infrastructure. The program is integral yet distinctive within the institution. Its autonomy is sufficient, within the general guidelines of the institution, to determine the intellectual content of its program, the selection and promotion of its faculty, the selection and support of its students, and the support of the academic program. It has the administrative infrastructure, financial support, and resources to ensure that its goals and objectives can be accomplished. The parent institution provides both administrative support and the resources needed for the attainment of mission and goals. The administrative head(s) of the program has authority to ensure that students are supported in their plan of study, has leadership skills and experience relevant to the program, and understanding of developments in LIS. The administrative head(s) demonstrates ongoing development of administrative abilities and skills in equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice.

V.3 Participation. 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.

V.4 Administrative Support. Program or unit support staff are sufficient in number and expertise to support faculty and students. Staff have appropriate resources and support, compensation, professional development, and systematic evaluation that provides for accomplishment of program and unit goals. Program or unit staff are selected, employed, and offered development opportunities in accordance with LIS professional values, including equity, diversity, and inclusion.

V.5 Physical, Technological, and Information Resources. The program and the unit have access to resources that allow them to accomplish their goals of teaching, research, and service. Physical facilities, online services, and associated technologies provide a functional and accessible working, learning, and teaching environment for students, faculty, and staff. These resources enhance the opportunities for research, teaching, service, and communication. Library resources and university services support the program's curriculum and faculty and student research. These resources promote efficient, effective, and equitable administration of the program.

V.6 Evaluation. Resources and services are sufficient and appropriate to meet the needs of the program. Resources, services, and their use, including efforts to improve equity, diversity, and inclusion, are systematically evaluated and the results applied to continuous improvement in the context of the unit's mission and the program's goals and objectives.

End of Standards