

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Introduction

The University of Kentucky School of Library and Information Science has enjoyed a number of successes as it has evolved during the past decade. We have responded in creative ways to the challenges of a changing field and shifting academic environment. As we confront new challenges, we will continue to seek innovative ways to develop a clear vision of the path ahead in order to continue to be a leader in library and information studies education, research, and service.

Curriculum and the Students

Central to achieving our goals will be to work on a curriculum that is responsive to the changing market place for information professionals. The school is committed to training leaders in the profession – men and women who are active in the profession in a number of ways, and who not only contribute to their respective institutions but also bring fresh ideas and excellent leadership abilities to the field. Our curriculum, therefore, should offer students a solid foundation in both theory and practice.

Clearly, most of our students will work in a library environment following graduation. We have excelled at preparing students for such work. However, there is an increasing number of students who have aspirations to work as information professionals in a variety of contexts. Moreover, there are students who will advance their careers by moving from a library to other areas in the profession, such as government agencies or the business sector.

Given these dynamics, we anticipate a process of continual curriculum refinement that, as its primary goal, offers a foundation in information studies that is necessary and useful to all information professionals. This should be reflected in our core curriculum. We envision the core classes taken by each master's student as setting a firm foundation in understanding information creation, dissemination, organization, and use. While the library is a typical and relevant venue in which to study these issues, other contexts are necessary to offer a broader perspective on the field. Moreover, information technology as an essential competency is vital to the quality of our core. While a basic IT course has been required for a number of years, we recognize the need for each student to acquire far greater mastery of IT for use in the profession. Thus, we have recently approved the requirement of an additional, advanced IT course in each student's course of study. Moreover, within the other core courses it is virtually impossible not to integrate technology. For instance, these courses must address such issues related to the information society; how IT may impede/promote information use by special populations; and the technical considerations of system design, use, and evaluation in a variety of contexts.

A second major issue in our vision of an effective curriculum relates to a student having flexibility in his or her program of study. A challenge in library and information studies education has always been to train individuals, in a field that they may have no experience in, through a limited number of required credit hours. Beyond the core, then, students should be able to carefully, and with appropriate faculty advising, select additional courses to meet their needs. Many of our current elective courses focus on particular library contexts: e.g. academic, public, school, and health sciences. In addition, we have offered an IT-oriented track, which has included courses that let students build a number of basic skills and knowledge

in IT from the perspective of an information professional. The vision of the school is to offer greater depth by offering elective courses that appeal to a number of students; that is, rather than an increase in elective courses that are focused only on some particular topic. As one example, a course in information seeking would be of use to a variety of students with differing professional goals, as would a course in knowledge management.

The future of our curriculum, then, will be to achieve breadth and depth in a manner that most efficiently uses faculty knowledge and effort, and that appeals to the greatest number of our students while not excluding those with more particular interests.

A curriculum that is inaccessible, however, has little value for students. The school has been a leader at the University of Kentucky in facilitating the distance learning needs of students. Through our outreach to metropolitan areas, such as Louisville and Cincinnati, we have provided excellent training to those who otherwise might have been denied access to an ALA-accredited program. We have continued this service by employing Web technologies to offer a number of our classes online. With each course offered, and through collaboration with instructional design experts at the university's distance-learning center, our faculty continue to develop innovative responses to the inherent challenges of online learning. Our goal is to offer the complete program online by 2005, and we have made great strides toward achieving this.

In addition, our vision includes a continued emphasis on exploring innovative delivery modes to meet the diverse access and learning needs of our students. The faculty has been discussing different models to accomplish this; for instance, an "executive program" that would be a cohort-type, intensive version of the master's program for those professional students with very limited time to attend traditional classes.

Faculty

A strength of the school has always been its high-quality faculty. These individuals have made contributions to all aspects of library and information science, from the local to the international level. As is the case in many library and information studies programs, there will be a number of senior faculty retirements in the coming years. Such losses could affect not only the quality of the program but also our connection with other parts of the college and university.

Thus, hiring new faculty requires more than merely filling faculty lines; the school must think more strategically. In seeking the most talented in the field, both at senior and junior levels, our goal is to attract diverse and creative candidates who will support our vision of the school's future. The best new faculty will offer not only expertise in a particular area but also capabilities translatable throughout the core.

In today's academic environment, interdisciplinarity is a challenge. New faculty members are encouraged to engage themselves with researchers from other disciplines within the college and across campus. As we seek new faculty, a key requirement will be some demonstrated interest in working with other scholars, to bring a variety of perspectives, knowledge, and tools to solve complex, multidisciplinary problems. Our college and school have a strong recent record of such collaborations, with regard to health-related information and communication problems, in school media training and research, and with distance learning (e.g. a multi-institutional archives management program).

In envisioning what the faculty will look like in the coming years, we agree that a more diverse faculty is one that may better serve the students and the commonwealth. In particular, African Americans have been under-represented on our faculty, and different approaches for attracting such candidates are continually explored.

A major challenge to our vision of a dynamic and quality faculty has been retention of junior faculty. Clearly, there are unavoidable factors that result in the loss of talented faculty; for instance, personal issues requiring relocation. However, some junior faculty have left for more prestigious institutions or for a higher salary. As noted in previous sections of the *Program Presentation*, our goal is to address this problem, in part, by increasing compensation of junior faculty. Other, non-economic solutions are also part of our goals. For instance, closer mentoring, with particular emphasis on involving junior faculty in research grants that relate to their interests and will aid in establishing a research agenda early on. The vision, overall, is to ensure that the school is a place of growth and opportunity for new faculty.

Facilities

The changing nature of research and instruction in library and information studies requires new facilities that will further research, education, and service, as well as attract a more diverse student body and faculty. In these times of economic hardship in academia, it is difficult to conceive of requesting building funds for new facilities. However, the importance of the school to the missions of the college and university is reflected in the importance assigned completion of our new space, and this has been a strategic aim in the college for several years.

New, more aggressive approaches are being considered to complete the move into the new facilities. These include close collaboration with college and university development offices. Also, a proposal is being put forth to the new UK Vice President for Research to set aside monies to support phase two of construction, which comprises the new Center for Applied Information Technology, Metadata Research Center, and McConnell Center for the Study of Children's Literature. Already, our current space has supported a variety of research projects, ranging from metadata research and practice, to the development of an innovative information-retrieval application (e.g., Dr. Jeng's IMLS grant), to housing research assistants on other grants (e.g., Dr. Andrews' primary care informatics project). The new facilities, we contend, will further enable research that, ultimately, can lead to larger, federally funded grants and research. Given the small amount of teaching and research space per grant dollars generated in the college, we feel that this should be a priority in the university.

Conclusion

Predicting the future of the library and information studies discipline is certainly an exercise in guessing; however, with a clear sense of purpose and vision, the school will help determine its own destiny. By recognizing the significant challenges to growth and innovation, we will continue to respond to changes with reflection. By keeping the interests of our students as the focal point, our curriculum, research, and service to the professional and academic library and information studies community will continue to "*extend and enhance the quality of information services in a culturally diverse, technological and global society.*"