

Preparing Students for the Workplace: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum for master's level education in library and information science is an historically popular subject of discussion in the disciplinary literature. Specific topic areas are interrogated (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2022), opinions are solicited about courses or topics which ought to be required of all students (Saunders, 2019) or required of students in particular sub-areas of the profession (Davis & Saunders, 2020; Saunders, 2020; Williams & Saunders, 2020), changes over time are analyzed (EunKyung Chung, Schalk, & JungWon Yoon, 2022), and external standards are developed to articulate the breadth and depth of curricula which "should" be included (ALA, 2023). Similarly, the literature promotes a range of pedagogical approaches (Ely, 2023), and conference programs (such as the ALISE conference) and webinar series (such as those sponsored by ALISE, including the "LIS Pedagogy Chat" series) also address pedagogy.

One aspect of professional practice that has received less consideration is the way students are prepared to hold realistic expectations for the workplace. Those expectations may relate to organizational cultures, practices, and challenges, all of which may be minimally addressed during students' pre-professional education or ignored completely.

The panel highlights specific aspects of workplace experience as revealed through research projects delving into the lived experiences of library workers. These research findings will be considered in terms of the ways in which they may inform the curricula of master's programs in the field. The panel will open with a very short introduction by the moderator, Dr. Heidi Julien. Then each panelist will have 15 minutes to summarize results of their recent studies, and individually will suggest their implications for preparing master's students for the realities of professional practice. The remaining 40 minutes will be devoted to audience discussion about possible ways students may be exposed to these realities. Prompting questions for the audience include:

- Are there other workplace realities not addressed by the panel that would be relevant to students?
- Who is best positioned to discuss these realities with students – e.g., practitioners? Adjunct instructors? Regular faculty members? Alumni?
- Are there existing opportunities in master's curricula to include these discussions, or would extra-curricular opportunities be more effective?

Ideas generated by the panelists and the audience will be captured and shared with attendees orally at the close of the session.

Panelists:

Dr. Amy VanScoy is an Associate Professor and award-winning teacher at the University at Buffalo. She will share findings about librarians' experience of professional expertise through an intersectional lens. Funded by the University at Buffalo Gender Institute, this interview study explored the perceptions of 29 librarians about identity, expertise, and power in the library workplace. Participants represented multiple identities, positions, and types of libraries. Participants shared that their expertise is interpreted by colleagues and users through the filter of their multiple identities. These identities included not only gender and race, but also age, size, and regional culture, and these identities compounded to further affect their perceived expertise. In addition to workplace discrimination that a graduate might face, their knowledge and skills, in essence, the very value of their degree, may differ depending on how they present. While library organizations and individual librarians must recognize these biases and work to eliminate them, LIS programs, too, must face this reality. How can LIS programs prepare students for the challenges they or their colleagues may face? Is there a role for LIS programs in conveying the expertise of all of their graduates, regardless of identity?

Drs. Melissa Gross and Don Latham are both Professors at Florida State University. Brittany Baum and Lauren Crabtree are doctoral candidates at Florida State University. They will present findings synthesized from three separate studies (one funded by IMLS) that explore public library administrators' and librarians' thoughts about how they might be better prepared for the realities of working with the public and the centrality of the public library to the provision of social services in many communities. Data have been collected from library administrators, adult services librarians, and youth services librarians using surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. Findings suggest that both administrators and librarians feel unprepared by their LIS education for working with the public and especially with people in crisis. It seems that whatever skills they have gained in this area have been learned through prior education and experiences not related to library school, professional development, and on-the-job experience. Topics will include preservice preparation, continuing education, and the profession of librarianship. The emphasis will be on how we can best prepare our students to provide social services in public libraries.

Dr. Mónica Colón-Aguirre is an Assistant Professor at the University of South Carolina. She will present preliminary research findings based on the qualitative component of a larger, IMLS funded, study on BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) librarian retention in the LIS profession. These findings are based on 20 interviews conducted with BIPOC librarians who are

currently employed in or have left the LIS field. Early analysis of the study's data indicates work issues faced by participants include hostile work environments, ineffective management, and microaggressions, among others, which drive LIS professionals away from jobs and sometimes even their profession. These issues will be discussed and connected to areas of LIS curriculum which can potentially help improve the ways in which our programs prepare future LIS professionals to deal with the situations they are likely to face in the work environment. This section will place special emphasis on how the LIS work environment is perceived by BIPOC professionals.

This panel proposal directly addresses the statement in the ALISE CFP for panels: "This conference welcomes contributions that address the ways that LIS educators and professionals are exploring the linkage between professional and educational practices and are identifying the synergy and gaps between professional competencies and LIS pedagogy and curricula, so that we can build a dialogue between practitioners and LIS educators, and provide a platform for creating timely, relevant, and valuable education for our students."

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ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Curriculum; Pedagogy; Students.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Professional preparation; Workplace experience; Professionals and educators dialogue.

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