

LIS and Social Work: From Current Issues to a Collaborative Future

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ABSTRACT

As Melanie Huggins, past President of the U.S. Public Library Association, stated, “I cannot think of a profession more aligned with public librarianship than social work” (Blassingame, 2021, n.p.), a sentiment reflected in many recent professional and scholarly publications. Given the similarities and shared values of Social Work (SW) and LIS, there is much support to “the rationale for adopting theoretical, practical, and pedagogical approaches” from SW in LIS (Dali, 2018, p. 84), and for professional blending more generally. Benefits associated with this alignment make LIS professionals better equipped to engage communities in an impactful way; conversely, they prepare social workers for understanding the roles of libraries in community life, information literacy, and the ethical use of technology.

To facilitate this professional cross-pollination, a concerted effort needs to continue in both higher education and professional practice. The proposed panel discussion and accompanying interactive engagements will build on interdisciplinary narratives from practitioners, researchers, and educators in both fields: social work and LIS. The panel will delve into several current salient issues and propose a way into a collaborative future. The panelists will share their experience working, researching, and teaching at the intersection of SW and LIS while also engaging the audience through a series of interactive activities in small groups. These will be concluded with a general discussion. Panelists will take the lead reflecting on different aspects of the SW/LIS collaboration, as follows:

1. *Training models and professional boundaries*: Lydia Ogden will discuss a model that includes training for library workers and onsite social workers, including an exploration of such issues as role definition; gray areas between the practice of librarians trained in

crisis intervention and that of social workers; and the politics of negotiating interprofessional boundaries.

2. *Synergies and struggles*: Charles Senteio will present examples of successful partnerships and opportunities to improve collaboration between social workers and librarians. He will share synergies in his work (e.g., placing social work students in public libraries) and discuss the areas that require further development (e.g., managing disparate priorities, cultural chasms, sustainability of collaborations, and seeking grants collaboratively).
3. *Librarians as essential workers*: Rachel Williams will speak about the critical need to support librarians as essential service providers; the logistics of partnering with SW; and the issues of scarce funding, limited-term partnerships, and resulting disservice to both staff and patrons. She will examine a path to a sustainable collaborative future for this kind of work if one is viewed as essential for public libraries.
4. *Practical and philosophical aspects of collaboration*: Noah Lenstra will share his current work with the SW Program at the University of North Carolina Greensboro to coordinate the placement of SW students at local libraries and his research on the expansion of SW-library partnerships, in collaboration with the South Carolina Center for Rural and Primary Healthcare.
5. *Beyond public libraries*: Until now, the focus of SW/LIS collaboration has been on public libraries, partnerships, and populations in crisis. Switching gears, Keren Dali will speak about the potential contribution of SW to the education and professional practice of academic librarians, including advocacy efforts on campus, DEIA engagements, wellness and the “whole person” philosophy, organizational efficiency, and teaching information literacy.

Panel structure:

- Panelists’ introductions; brief overviews of the chosen topics: 30 min
- Small group interactive engagements: 40 min
- General discussion on charting a collaborative future: 20 min

All panelists have worked on the intersection of LIS and SW and bring unique perspectives and insight into the topic.

Keren Dali is a faculty member at the RMIS, U of Denver (DU). She holds BASW, MIST, and Ph.D. in Information Science, as well as Certificates in Diversity & Inclusion and Project Management. Keren served as the inaugural editor-in-chief of *IJIDI* and is a co-founder of the ALISE “Disabilities in LIS” SIG. Her research focuses on disabilities and workplace equity, the intersection of LIS and SW, humanistic pedagogies, DEIA, and reading practices in immigrant communities.

Noah Lenstra is an associate professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, with a Ph.D. in LIS from the University of Illinois. His research focuses on how and why public librarians work collaboratively with community partners to support public health. This work includes a collaboration with the South Carolina Center for Rural and Primary Healthcare that investigate the efficacy of health liaisons, including social workers, in public libraries.

Lydia Ogden is an associate professor at Simmons University School of Social Work and a licensed clinical social worker. She received her MSW and Ph.D. from Columbia University. Her scholarship is informed by social work practice with persons with serious mental illnesses and substance use disorders. Her recent collaboration with Dr. Rachel Williams focuses on

training library workers to leverage social work skills to better serve library patrons in crisis and manage their professional and personal wellbeing.

Charles Senteio, Ph.D., MSW, MBA is an associate professor at the Rutgers School of Communication and Information. His community-engaged research describes how health information is accessed and used by vulnerable populations and health care institutions, specifically healthcare practitioners. He helped establish the East Brunswick (NJ) Public Library as a field site for the Rutgers School of Social Work. He is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) who is currently licensed in Texas and New Jersey.

Rachel D. Williams, Ph.D. is an assistant professor in the Simmons University School of Library and Information Science. Williams's research focuses on the ways in which public library workers support patrons and communities in crisis. Her recent collaborative work with Dr. Lydia Ogden centers on the training for library workers that leverages social work skills and supports the development of healthy boundaries, resilience, and wellbeing.

References

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ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

academic libraries; community engagement; community-led services; public libraries; social justice.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

collaborative programs; interdisciplinarity; social work; trauma-informed librarianship; whole person librarianship.