

High Tech, High Touch, High Quality: Building the World's Largest MLIS Program at San Jose

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Know the Context

The San Jose State University's School of Library and Information Science has offered a Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree in some form for more than fifty years. It is the only program accredited by the American Library Association (ALA) in the California State University (CSU) system. It is one of the largest graduate programs in any discipline in the state and is, indeed, the world's largest accredited LIS program with more than 2,200 graduate students.

The School is a recognized leader in making effective use of leading edge technologies for distance learning. In 2007 *U.S. News and World Report* named it the #1 e-learning service provider in its discipline; by 2008 it was the largest e-learning program in the country in any discipline other than Business and Education. In 2008 the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) awarded its Faculty Innovation Award to San Jose, pointing to a sustained record of adept, responsive, and pervasive adoption of new and innovative technologies that enhance student learning and support the needs of students throughout the entire lifespan of their relationship with the School. At the same time, the School was nationally ranked by *U.S. News and World Report* for the first time in 2006 and received full and unconditional re-accreditation from ALA in 2007.

How did this happen? How does a smaller, less known program develop itself as a leader in its field with a strategic orientation, technological prowess and thousands of students from around the world? Several innovative approaches were introduced by faculty, laying the groundwork for sustained growth and development. These constitute a set of best practices for any program, in any discipline, in the 21st century.

Develop a Strategic Orientation

In 2005, the faculty recognized three major needs for the immediate future: a new director due to a retirement, a strategic plan, and a plan for re-accreditation of the MLIS program. Consequently, a director with expertise in planning and assessment, and the use of quality controls, was engaged. An external consultant worked with faculty, staff, students and alumni to develop a profile of the School, including perceived strengths and weaknesses. A facilitated two day process then led to a foundational plan; these short-term objectives resulted:

1. Engage in Strategic Planning

- Establish clear goals and objectives;
- Focus on the future by revisiting the School's vision and mission;
- Focus on innovation, especially in program development and delivery;
- Focus on the School's profile and visibility;
- Develop more effective and strategic communications.

2. Define Roles

- Determine minimum expectations for all full-time faculty and particularly off-site faculty (the School has tenured faculty living in other states);
- Determine standards for research and scholarly productivity;
- Revise standards for retention, tenure and promotion;
- Coordinate core required courses and program areas with lead faculty and part-time faculty;
- Develop priorities for faculty renewal;
- Implement a model of shared governance with broadly-based and representative committees with clear responsibilities and accountability.

3. Enhance Program Quality

- Review admissions standards and procedures;
- Review student assessment procedures and outcomes;
- Institute outcomes-based assessment; ensure core competencies for graduates;
- Expand in related fields where there are natural intersections of programmatic strengths and priorities and a workable business plan;
- Investigate a collaborative doctoral program.

3. Develop Partnerships

- Build stronger relationships programmatically (joint programs with other units), academically (service to the University), professionally (leadership in associations; internships);
- Work more strategically and effectively with professional associations and alumni on recruitment.

4. Invest Revenue for Return

- Address the disconnect between perceived quality and relatively low cost;
- Develop improved and sustained development support from alumni and others;
- Consider alternate forms of revenue through entrepreneurship;
- Develop the role of faculty and others in planned fund raising;
- Develop a strategy for increasing scholarships and awards.

5. Ensure Assessment

- Establish fewer, clearer goals and objectives – known by all;
- Align available resources with strategic goals and objectives;
- Monitor and adjust the strategic plan on a continual and annual basis;
- Demonstrate the impact and value of the graduate, the program and the School;
- Focus on outcomes;
- Review the School's "culminating experience."

Essential pieces in this review included maintaining a culture of innovation, focusing on re-accreditation and its attendant issues, overall fund development, mentoring new faculty, integrating part-time faculty and improving research productivity.

The result was a systematic, comprehensive, inclusive, and strategic planning process with a new vision, mission, and stated values.

Make Planning a Process

1. Engage in Strategic Planning

The School developed its plan over the Fall of 2005. These guiding principles were defined:

Our Vision for 2010. The School of Library and Information Science will be recognized as a leader in graduate education in Library and Information Science, delivering innovative, high quality programs across the state, the continent and beyond.

Our Shared Values (articulated with examples on the SLIS Website). Learning; Student and Faculty/Staff Success; Excellence; Integrity; Diversity; Community. SLIS is committed to the professions and disciplines it serves. In spite of distributed learning, centers and faculty, we are one team, one School.

Our Mission. The School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) educates professionals and develops leaders who organize, manage and enable the effective use of information and ideas in order to contribute to the well-being of our communities. (Note: The School is unique in its discipline in focusing on impact on community development.)

The resulting strategic plan had four specific strategic directions with measurable goals and objectives for each. These ranged from program development to operational reviews. Most importantly, the objectives were “smart” – specific, measurable, active, relevant and timed – with responsibility assigned to the director’s office or a representative committee. By having the deliverable tied to a completion date, the faculty agenda was driven by strategic deliberations.

Significantly, to grow student numbers, the School moved aggressively to establish a graduate program available fully on-line. This program, at 42 credits, became fully available in 2006.

2. Define Roles

Clear role descriptions were developed for the director and associate director, graduate advisor, newly-appointed course coordinators for required courses and content cluster coordinators. Three new assistant directors were engaged for priority areas: distance learning; research and professional practice; marketing and communications.

A new model of shared governance was introduced, with four broadly-based committees with representation of full-time and part-time faculty, staff, students and alumnae; the chairs of these committees sit on Director's School Leadership Team with presidents of alumnae and student associations.

Four new strategic directions were set with measurable objectives and assigned to the director and committees. Monthly faculty meetings were replaced in 2006 by quarterly two day faculty retreats focusing on planning, quality controls and assessment; administrative and operational issues were addressed through the Director's blog and electronic discussion lists. Items come before the faculty through a deliberative committee process; a "consent agenda" is used to ensure that time is focused on issues requiring discussion and debate.

Clear and high expectations were set for faculty; all faculty attend the quarterly retreats. Standards for retention, tenure and promotion were revised with greater attention to research and scholarly productivity. Standards and guidelines for peer review of faculty by specialization and in distance environments were developed and approved. Priorities for faculty renewal were defined and several new full-time lecturers as well as tenure-track faculty were added. The School offers a lower teaching load (3+3) than the University standard (4+4) due to the nature of the graduate program and research requirements. Faculty workload was further reviewed and restructured in 2006 to assure equity and research productivity. Each faculty member is provided with a graduate student assistant. Full and part-time faculty also complete a required twenty-hour faculty technology course before teaching on-line and attend a biennial faculty two-day institute (65 attending in 2007). No part-time faculty are retained if student opinions of teaching effectiveness fall below a minimum standard over three terms. Awards and recognition for faculty were introduced in 2006.

3. Enhance Program Quality

With structures in place for improved decision-making and strategic directions the School had to ensure that its growth could not be construed as a reflection of lower standards. Admissions standards were raised beyond those of the University and procedures streamlined, eliminating steps that had no evidentiary base for program success.

Preference in hiring part-time faculty moved from "adjuncts" to true part-time faculty, selected, appointed and evaluated by the same criteria as full-time faculty; the successful candidates were more often individuals holding the doctorate and an academic appointment at another university. Many of these

candidates indicated an interest in teaching for San Jose by distance due to an aggressive marketing program for specific areas and due to the newly introduced required faculty technology workshop, introducing the range of options and opportunities for improved teaching and learning on-line.

Specifically, the School moved to create an e-learning community, with a Learning Management System (Blackboard, now migrating to Angel) for class management, course materials, links to Web sites, discussion fora, and library resources; Web Conferencing (Elluminate) for real time conversation, synchronous meetings, asynchronous recording, and break out rooms for student small group work; and Content Management (Plone) for gathering content for a culminating e-portfolio. In addition, the School makes extensive use of blogs and wikis for disseminating information and consultation. In 2007 a virtual campus was built in Second Life and courses and classes offered in this immersive environment. In 2008 a new social networking program (SLISLife) will be introduced allowing students to connect by areas of interest and geography, as well as throughout their post-MLIS career. In order to enhance program success, a one credit required course was added to the curriculum (making the degree 43 credits), to be completed before starting the regular program, focusing on information technology tools and techniques including ability to access and use effectively the learning tools provided.

In 2007 the School joined WISE (Web-based Information Science Education), a consortium on distance education with high standards and rigorous review.

Course coordinators were assigned with release time, for each required course. Research methods was added as a required course but with several options from a survey course, to historical research, to market research, to evaluation of programs and services, with common learning objectives. Content cluster coordinators and program specialization advisors were named and assigned to a regular cycle of review for curriculum and programs.

Standards for grades (A, B, C...) were articulated and described in each syllabus. Student grade distribution is regularly collected and reported by course and instructor, and discussed by faculty.

The MLIS program objectives are now grounded in core competencies reflecting the theory, research, practice, values and ethics of the discipline and the profession. The program is 43 credits, among the longer programs in the country, with planned flexibility in course selection and four different delivery methods (on-site; distance; hybrid/blended; cohort). Three foundational courses (disciplinary foundations, management, information retrieval) are required at the beginning of the program, following the new

required one-credit technology course, with an e-portfolio as the culminating experience to demonstrate program competencies; research methods was required beginning in 2007. Student can build specializations in several areas from family literacy to advanced technologies; program advisory committees of leading employers and professionals advise on specializations. Delivery methods are selected by course, not by program, i.e., a student in San Jose may take classes on-site or by distance, a student in Canada may likewise take classes by distance or hybrid (and each does). Integrative learning is emphasized through extensive internships, planned and supervised, directed by a new assistant director for research and professional practice.

Regular student, recent graduate and alumni surveys inform annual review, revision and development. The world's first (and still only) Executive MLIS program with international cohorts of senior managers not holding the MLIS degree, continues to grow, with the fourth cohort beginning in 2008.

From the student perspective it is important that class size is limited to 25, that there is a systematic and well-defined advising program (outlined in detail on the School's Website), and that four active student associations provide presentations, tours, networking events and special lectures, physically and virtually. Awards to outstanding graduating students were instituted in 2006. A director's forum is held synchronously and recorded for asynchronous access each term for consultation, dissemination of new information and response to questions.

Weekly colloquia were introduced in 2007. Attendance averages 25 on-site with more than 120 viewings of the Webcast on average.

Priorities were set for expansion into allied areas with program strength; an extensive market research study was conducted in 2006 and a new Master of Archives and Records Administration will be introduced in 2008, the first in the nation to be delivered fully on-line.

A unique partnership with Queensland University of Technology will enable San Jose to offer a custom-designed Ph.D. program in Library and Information Science beginning in 2008, with specializations in archives and records administration, education for LIS, enterprise systems, information retrieval, information systems and technologies, information use (information literacy; human information behaviors), intelligent infrastructure, management and leadership, smart tools and services, and youth services. San Jose faculty will serve as associate supervisors and instructors. Students will complete all work in San Jose and by distance learning. Final examinations and assessment of dissertations will be completed by Queensland with an international independent panel of experts.

At the same time the School has developed a proposal for a formal Center for Research, Innovation and Education in LIS with a director and full-time grant development officer. The doctoral program will be integrated with the Center.

4. Develop Partnerships

In addition to the partnerships noted earlier, the School has provided support and mentoring to other graduate programs at San Jose launching Web-based delivery. Faculty have moved onto important University committees. Faculty have also been elected to positions of national prominence in academic and professional associations.

Greater attention and resources have been assigned to productive and supervised internships, through partnerships with potential employers, with a database of more than 250 possible placements in any one term. Students can search by preferred environment, location and remuneration.

Program advisory committees of employers have been established for each of fifteen program specializations.

A unique partnership with SJSU Career Center has led to employment advice, distance workshops on resume writing and interviews, placement counseling, and access to hundreds of available positions.

In order to enhance student involvement in professional associations and to develop a bridge to the field, memberships are provided to all entering students in the American Library Association and the California Library Association (or their state association if outside California).

An international advisory council of leaders from government, industry and the profession, meets annual to review the School's progress, hear about new possibilities and advise on priorities and approaches.

5. Invest Revenue for Return

The University supports innovation by enabling units to build on institutional strengths through "special session" programming and funding. Regular session students live in the local area, enroll in the program, pay tuition fees and come with state support. Special session students, on the other hand, live outside the defined catchment area and pay fees that ensure sustainability and coverage of university overhead charges for a self-supporting program. Normally special session programs are new and unique.

The School, however, has leveraged an extension of its program to reach the world through the special session structure. Each is benefitted by the other.

Regular session could not be as large without infrastructure support of special session monies while special session could not be sustained without tenured faculty and program quality provided by institutional expectations and frameworks. This unique blend of funding to enhance regular session program and extend the reach through special session has supported remarkable growth.

Similarly, regular session provides support for campus facilities; in 2006 the School moved to new quarters with new offices and state of the art labs; special session funds provide for learning and collaboration in virtual classrooms, with high impact and expensive software for synchronous audio advising and collaboration and social networking software. Both have access to high quality library and database resources.

A high quality program with state-of-the-art infrastructure requires resources for development, implementation and maintenance. The School sought a significant student fee increase in 2006 and was successful in having it approved by a campus fee advisory committee, including students, and the senior administration; a second fee increase was approved in 2008.

Better connections with students and alumni were developed by establishing one student association for consultation and deliberation and by supporting financially the alumni association. Annual receptions were introduced at state and national conferences. The student and alumni association presidents also sit on the School Leadership Team.

A professional firm was engaged to develop a preliminary marketing plan and communication tools; brochures and bookmarks were designed; advertisements were placed in professional journals across the continent. In 2006 SLIS redesigned its Website changing the focus from current students, to identified target markets and prospective students, and "top of mind" for search engines. Daily traffic averaged 15,000 hits a day from 2001 to mid-2006 when it jumped to 25,000 and now exceeds 30,000. The School was awarded the Public Relations Excellence Award by the California Library Association in 2006.

Priority target populations and locations for recruitment were identified. Aggressive print and electronic advertising was reinforced by information sessions given by the director across the United States and Canada and now moving into Australia. The response to these presentations has far exceeded expectations with, for example, more than 250 prospective students

attending sessions in one week in Canada. The effect of these presentations has been easily measured through increased student enrolments from targeted areas.

New revenue streams were established through continuing education programs with several programs offered each week through a partnership with the Professional Education Network and through textbook sales with an on-line vendor.

More than 120 students each year receive tuition reimbursement from the State Library through federal funds. In addition, the School's first five endowments were secured as a foundation for future scholarships and awards.

6. Ensure Assessment

The School has taken a strategic but hard-line approach to matching resources with stated objectives. Financial resources are flowing to support more research productivity and less professional service.

The strategic plan is reviewed and revised annually, first by the governance committees, then with recommendations to the School Leadership Team and subsequently to the full faculty and advisory council.

In order to assure the abilities of graduates, the School's "culminating experience", required by the University, was changed to an e-portfolio addressing the fourteen areas of competence identified as program goals.

In order to demonstrate impact and value, the School has developed a "balanced scorecard", addressing stakeholder perspectives, student progress, internal operations, organizational readiness for change and improvement, and financial oversight. Data is collected, analyzed, reported and debated for possible changes and improvements. Benchmark programs have been identified for the School.

In order to ensure decisions based on evidence, the School instituted several approaches to outcomes-based assessment. First, core competencies were defined through a synthesis and consideration of competencies promulgated by several professional associations; students must demonstrate competence in each of areas, regardless of their area of specialization. Further, a research librarian was engaged to support faculty decision-making by investigating areas of interest to the faculty as a whole and providing critical information before a faculty decision.

The School is also reviewed and accredited regularly through the program planning review process for the University, through the regional accrediting body, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, for our degree programs through our primary disciplinary association, the American Library Association Committee on Accreditation and also the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education for the school credential program.

The Results

Planning: New directions and goals are set annually for the future two years, with regular planning and review by governance committees and at quarterly faculty retreats. The School was specifically cited for its strategic planning process in the external review of the program in 2007.

Enrollment: Student numbers have increased dramatically, almost doubling to 2,200 students in four years, currently representing 40 states and eight countries. Optimum student numbers have been reached to sustain infrastructure needs in terms of additional faculty, staff and technology; increased student growth will ensure moving more California students into the tuition-bearing regular stream; limitations tend to be the low class size to which the School is committed and thus the need to recruit more qualified faculty. Currently, more than 20% of the student body represent visible minorities and the School attracts more ALA Spectrum Scholars (to support minority students) than any other School on the continent. Contrary to perception reports, the smallest single preferred environment for San Jose students is school libraries; the largest are public and academic libraries. Stanford University, for example, employs more than 40 San Jose graduates.

Curriculum: More than 200 course sections are offered each year; more than 100 faculty are formally reviewed each year. Over 250 planned and supervised internships are undertaken each academic year.

Placement Services: As a result of the partnership with the Career Center, in the past six months alone, over 500 SLIS students have registered, more than 100 have posted résumés; more than 300 jobs have been posted by employers recruiting SLIS students. There is a high success rate in placement of students in school, public and university libraries as well as the for-profit (e.g., high tech companies in Silicon Valley) and not-for-profit (e.g., Department of Homeland Security) corporate sectors.

Faculty and Staff:

Positions	Funded Through Regular Session	Funded Through Special Session	Total
<i>Faculty</i>			
Tenure Track Faculty (Full-time)	16.0	00.0	16.0
Lecturers (Full-time)	00.0	07.0	07.0
Part-time Faculty (Full-time Equivalent)	05.2	10.3	15.5
Total	21.2	17.3	38.5
<i>Administrative and Technical Staff</i> (Full-time Equivalent)			
Total	01.5	23.0	24.5
Total	22.7	40.3	63.0

In Summary:

San Jose offers the only ALA-accredited program in Library and Information Science in the CSU system of 23 universities; it is the largest program in the world with unique programs such as the Executive MLIS, a new Master of Archives and Records Administration and a collaborative international Ph.D. program.

The program has achieved exceptional growth and recognition due to

- a deep understanding of its local context and opportunities,
- a governance structure to develop and sustain a strategic orientation, clearly defined roles and responsibilities,
- strategic planning as a process, not an event, with accountability, resources and consequences,
- a focus on continual improvement through data collection and analysis and quality controls,
- a process for curriculum review, development and implementation,
- leveraged and formal partnerships taking advantage of mutual goals,
- identification of key target markets with aggressive and professional marketing,
- identifying and pursuing alternate revenue streams, and
- vigorous assessment of outcomes.

Through systematic and careful planning, the School blends revenue sources from regular session (tuition) and special session (fees) to build faculty and infrastructure for program quality overall. It attracted its first five endowments in and established alternate revenue streams in 2006.

An aggressive strategic plan focusing on high expectations, quality controls, innovation in programs and their delivery has been achieved through broadly based governance committees involving faculty, students, and alumnae. It is reviewed and renewed annually.

The School sets high standards for both entry (GPA) and exit (the e-portfolio). It takes a unique approach to part-time faculty with an international pool of recognized scholars as well as professional leaders, coordinated through full-time tenure-track faculty, trained in the use of technology and attending a biennial faculty institute on pedagogy in higher education. Class size is small and intensive training is provided for teaching on-line.

The School is on-track to achieve its vision for 2010: *to be recognized as a leader in graduate education in Library and Information Science, delivering innovative, high quality programs across the state, the continent and beyond.*

As the largest program in the world now, aggressively moving into new geographic and disciplinary markets, with students and faculty located around the world, the School has a special responsibility to demonstrate continued quality, leadership and impact in teaching, research and service.

Haycock, K. (2008). High Tech, High Touch, High Quality: Building the World's Largest MLIS Program at San Jose. In D. Bogart (Ed.), *The Bowker annual: Library and book trade almanac* (pp. xxx-xxx). 53rd edition. New York: R. R. Bowker.