

Education for Library and Information Studies in Canada:
A cross-cultural comparison

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Abstract

Purpose: to highlight the unique characteristics and homogeneity of the Canadian accredited programs in Library and Information Studies compared to those programs in the U.S.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Each year the Association for Library and Information Science (ALISE) collects statistics from accredited graduate programs. By disaggregating the American and Canadian information and limiting the data to the accredited degree program only, comparisons could be drawn between the two data sets. The generalizations and themes were then validated by comparison with the recent history of development of Canadian schools.

Findings: The history of development of Canadian graduate programs and the national context has resulted in programs that are more homogenous than diverse. The programs are housed in public research institutions, with competition for spaces. The students are full-time, studying a curriculum with more required courses. Faculty have more time for research. Access is an issue. The profession is satisfied but points to inadequacies in education for management and favors more internships.

Research Limitations/Implications: While commenting on developments and trends the report relies primarily on three secondary sources, thus creating a snapshot.

Practical Implications: The separation of Canadian and American models allows for greater attention to national approaches providing a beginning point for discussion, analysis and suggestions for further study.

Originality/Value of Paper: This paper is based on a presentation to the ALA President's Forum on International Library Education in June, 2006. Both American and Canadian participants demonstrated limited knowledge

of the subject and urged publication. No such explication has appeared previously.

Introduction

There are 56 graduate programs of Library and Information Studies (LIS) education in the United States and Canada offering a Master of Library and Information Studies (or equivalent) accredited by the American Library Association (ALA); of these, seven are located in Canada. All Canadian master's degrees are accredited by the ALA. Readers familiar with postings for North American positions will know that professional librarian positions require "an ALA-accredited degree." The programs are accredited according to standards developed by the ALA Committee on Accreditation (1992), approved by the Council of the ALA and administered by its Office of Accreditation.

ALA accreditation is thus the standard for Canada; this is endorsed by the Canadian Library Association and the Canadian Council for Information Studies, a national association of deans and directors of the programs and one faculty member from each program; by informal agreement, a Canadian sits on the ALA Committee on Accreditation (COA) and a Canadian Library Association observer serves on each COA external review panel to advise on Canadian context and issues (for example, Canadians honor their respect for diversity, tolerance and understanding by generally not collecting data on student backgrounds and ethnicity (although this is beginning to change) whereas in the U.S. this data is carefully collected and tracked.) Programs are accredited for seven years if they receive a full term. Graduates would be severely impaired in finding professional positions in academic and public libraries in particular if a program was not accredited.

In 1947 the newly established Canadian Library Association voted to continue the ALA system of accreditation of Canadian programs begun ten years earlier (McNally, 2004); at the time there were only two schools but even today the number of schools (seven) is too small to sustain a full and objective accreditation process; further, a larger pool of faculty for external reviews and a broader perspective on standards is useful for program quality. Some academic administrators also suggest that the

Canadian schools and associations endorse and participate in American (and thus foreign) accreditation of their programs to ensure easier cross-border migration of professional librarians and information professionals. Regardless, Canadian faculty participate in, and hold leadership positions in, the ALA Committee on Accreditation and the Association for Library and Information Studies Education (ALISE), the North American learned society for LIS educators. This "integration" of programs is taken as a point of reference in the Canadian academic and professional communities.

With so few schools, the historical development of education at each Canadian institution and across institutions has been well-documented in ALISE statistical reports (see Daniel and Saye for an example of an annual report) and the work of the Ex Libris Association, a national Canadian association of people who have spent an important part of their work life in libraries, archives, publishing houses, and adjunct fields, and who are now attracted to historical and current issues (see, for example, Land, 2004).

While there is great diversity among the North American accredited programs, it has not been generally been acknowledged that this diversity is most apparent among the U.S. schools.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the unique characteristics and homogeneity of the Canadian accredited programs compared to those programs in the United States.

Each year the Association for Library and Information Science Education in consultation with the American Library Association Office for Accreditation collects detailed statistics from the accredited graduate programs in Canada and the United States. These statistics cover many areas of faculty, students, curriculum, income and expenditure and continuing education. By disaggregating the American and Canadian information and limiting the data to the accredited degree program only (not the entire offerings of a school, department or faculty), comparisons could be drawn between the Canadian data set and the American data set. The resulting generalizations and themes were then validated by comparison with the recent history of development of the Canadian schools.

National Context

Canada is the second largest country in the world geographically with a population of 32 million (this is less than the population of California). Most of the population base is located within 200 miles of the American border.

The seven graduate schools in Library and Information Studies (six English; one French) are located from coast to coast in the major population centers (Halifax, Montreal (2), London (Ontario), Toronto, Edmonton, Vancouver). Each school is housed in a major research university. In Canada, almost all universities are public institutions and almost all universities have significant research requirements of faculty.

Library and Information Studies education began in Canada in universities more than 100 years ago. It did not grow out of library-based training programs as in the U.S. The Bachelor of Library Science (or Service) was offered as a fifth year post-baccalaureate degree until the 1970s; a sixth year master's degree (typically, Master of Library Science) was offered after one year of study following the Bachelor of Library Science (BLS) degree. This contrasts with the American schools which developed a fifth year master's program in the late 1940s. As early as the 1950s then, different national patterns emerged, a fifth year master's degree in the U.S. and a fifth year bachelor's degree in Canada, each fully accredited by the ALA.

With the subsequent establishment of the Canadian master's degree as the first degree, premised on one year of required courses and one year of electives for specialization, the program became almost uniformly two years in length, following a bachelor's degree.

Programs for "library technicians" offered through two-year community colleges began in the 1960s and are also common across the country; these are post-secondary programs offered both on site and by distance; these programs too are located from coast to coast (Weihs & Davidson-Arnott, 2004). The position of library technician is well-established in all types of libraries in Canada at the paraprofessional level.

Generalizations

While broad national tendencies are apparent there are of course always exceptions. The generalizations made here do represent, however, the situation in at least five of the seven graduate schools in the country, if not all. Data is taken from *Library and information science education 2004 statistical report* (Daniel and Saye, 2005), which contains information self-reported by the schools.

Academic Home: Each Canadian program is located in a large public research university. There are no programs located in private universities or “teaching universities” as one would find in the U.S. The range of academic home for programs in Library and Information Studies in the United States is large, from small private institute to first tier research university.

Funding: Funding for graduate education in these universities tends to be based on full-time equivalent faculty (FTE/F) and the number of students this faculty complement can accommodate, not on full-time equivalent student numbers (FTE/S). Thus, in Canada, e.g., a faculty of eight will determine the number of students they can accommodate in a teaching and research context and admit that number (e.g., 75); not all qualified applicants may be admitted as more students does not ipso facto mean more resources in Canadian higher education. In most institutions, there is no necessarily greater allocation of resources if the program experiences greater demand or if the program admits a higher number of students than previously. In the U.S., on the other hand, student demand is more likely to lead to increased resources, including faculty positions.

Faculty: There are approximately 80 full-time faculty in ALA-accredited Library and Information Studies programs; this is approximately ten percent of the total in North America, commensurate with population. Faculty are appointed to twelve month positions, teach two courses per term, with an attendant paid research term each year. In the U.S., faculty are appointed to academic year terms (nine to ten months), typically teach three course in one term and two in another and may add teaching responsibilities in the summer. Salaries are comparable between the two countries. Although there is a national dialogue underway about changing

mandatory retirement laws in Canada, currently university faculty must retire at age 65 (exceptions are developing, e.g., the University of Toronto recently eliminated mandatory retirement for university faculty). In the U.S., however, 10% of deans and directors and 5% of faculty are over the age of 65.

Research: As mentioned above, faculty have a lower teaching load than in the U.S. and an annual paid research term, without equal in the U.S. Sabbatical leaves are typically granted for a full year at full salary, once every seven years. In the U.S., it is more common for sabbaticals to be granted for a semester only, a benefit that Canadian faculty enjoy each year. However, as Canadian programs are located uniformly in research institutions demand for research productivity, whether measured by research grants and contracts or dissemination through refereed channels, is high.

Curriculum: Graduate programs are concerned with research and the advancement of knowledge and thus distinguish education and training, with theory, principles, ethics and values forming the core of graduate professional education; stakeholders for Canadian schools are thus seen more as accrediting agencies and university research and curricular standards than employers of their graduates. The Canadian schools see themselves as graduate schools with an academically rigorous curriculum reflecting the standards of their research institutions. To some extent it might be argued that the presence of trained library technicians has elevated graduate education for Library and Information Studies. First, the position has been well-accepted for more than thirty years such that trained paraprofessional staff have completed courses similar in name to those offered in the graduate schools. Second, as competition for graduate programs is higher in Canada than in the U.S. (more students do not mean more resources in Canada), those not successful in securing a place may undertake and complete a diploma as a library technician. As a consequence, almost 50% of library technicians with a post-secondary diploma (two years after high school) also have a university degree. Thus, where Master of Library and Information Studies graduates hold a bachelor's degree and have completed a two year course of study, similarly almost 50% of library technician graduates also hold a bachelor's degree and have completed a two year course of study. The programs of study must be substantially and substantively different. (A

post-baccalaureate master's program of study may have the same course names, e.g., reference, cataloguing, children's services, as a post-secondary diploma program of study, but the substance must enhance the role, responsibilities and remuneration of the graduate, and mirror the academic home of the program.) The Canadian programs are thus decidedly based in research and theory, principles, ethics and values. Canadian graduate schools taken together require more common courses than do U.S. counterparts, which demonstrate a much wider range of required credits. Courses are typically required in the core competency areas, by whatever name, of professional foundations, cataloguing, reference, management, information technologies and research methods. Internships (practica) are not offered or are required but not for credit. One school goes so far as to state that "field work is not applicable" to the degree it offers. In the U.S. field work carries three to six credits of the 32 to 48 required for the degree.

Length of Program: The programs in Canada require 48 credits for the degree, with one at 45 and one stretching to 56 credits. By comparison, U.S. schools range from 32-48 credits, with most at 36 credits, at the lower end. The degree can be completed in 12 months at many American schools whereas, with but one exception, Canadian schools require 16 months or two years. Interestingly, the unique "Canadian model" of the 48 credit, two year (sixth year) master's program has been adopted by a number of U.S. programs similarly based in research institutions.

Full-time/Part-time Students: Canadian programs typically have a required residency, usually of at least one term; most students are full-time. In the U.S., most students are part-time. Indeed, of the top ten schools (of 56) with more than 60% of students full-time, five are Canadian.

International Students: One quarter of all international students in Canadian programs are from the U.S. Approximately 4% of all international students in the U.S. programs are from Canada.

Tuition: Tuition is relatively low (range: \$3-13,000 for Canadians for the full degree; U.S. range: \$4-31,000 for in-state students). With only one exception, differentiated out of province fees are not charged, that is, the fee for in-province fees are the same as for students from outside the province. U.S. schools typically charge students coming from out of the

local state a higher tuition fee (typically double, on average). Even differential fees for international students are recent in Canada with some Canadian schools having international student fees that are less than many U.S. out-of-state fees (for detail, see Daniel & Saye, 2005).

Doctoral Programs in Library and Information Studies: Fewer than half of the U.S. schools offer a doctoral program whereas each Canadian program offers a doctoral program as a stand-alone or through special arrangements with its university; Canadian students are typically full-time. Of the five doctoral programs in Library and Information Studies in North America requiring that *all* doctoral students be full-time, three are Canadian.

Teacher-librarians: Unlike the U.S., Canadian school librarians (called teacher-librarians) are not educated in the graduate schools of library and information studies but rather receive their post-teacher education credential through faculties of education; these faculties of education may have tenured faculty in teacher-librarianship; however, rarely do these faculty hold a joint appointment in the graduate program in Library and Information Studies. Generally, a certificate or diploma in teacher-librarianship is provided following 30 post-baccalaureate but not graduate level credits.

The reasons for this practice are complex and historical but suffice to say that in most areas of the country a school librarian must be a qualified teacher and teachers wishing to become a school librarian may not be accepted to graduate school with competition for spaces, whether in Library and Information Studies or in Education. Further, the master's programs in Library and Information Studies require a full-time residency meaning that an employed teacher would need to leave his or her position. As a result, the faculties of education offer post-baccalaureate certificates and diplomas, through part-time study, which may be ladderred into master's degree programs. As a result there are Master of Education degrees in Teacher-librarianship in some provinces. This situation is not unique to librarianship but applies to many specialized areas in teaching such as counseling, English-as-a-second-language instruction, physical education, etc. There are many variations on this theme across the country (see, e.g., Amey, 1992).

Access: In spite of geographic size, distance education is in its infancy in graduate education in Canada (but readily available in library technician programs); a national initiative in Library and Information Studies is being discussed by the Canadian Council for Information Studies, which is affiliated with ALISE. Conversely, several accredited programs are available fully on-line in the U.S. Access is an issue while programs remain primarily full-time with required residencies and little distance education. (Distance education opportunities are, however, readily available in programs for teacher-librarians and for library technicians. See, e.g., Oberg, 1996.)

The Profession's Perspective

Early this century a major research project was undertaken to determine the human resource needs of libraries in Canada (8Rs Research Team, 2005). The resulting report documented the status of recruitment, retirement, retention, remunerating, repatriation, rejuvenation, re-accreditation and restructuring across the country, in a wide variety of library environments. The study team also collected perceptions of graduates and employers about the accredited master's degree programs.

They found that more job functions were being undertaken by library technicians and more employers were thus placing profession librarians in management positions. Perhaps not surprisingly, the most common suggestions for improvement of graduate education from employers and graduates was more emphasis on management, leadership and business skills and more internships to encourage dialogue with employers and practical application. Many schools are moving to more opportunities for the study of management (more courses, e.g., in human resources management, financial marketing, marketing, project management, evaluation of programs and services) but none see a required for-credit practicum as necessary, at least given the lack of recent curriculum change in this area.

Both the schools and the profession recognized a growing fissure between education programs and employers.

Employers are generally satisfied (8Rs Research Team, 2005) with the competencies of new graduates (75%) except urban public libraries (56%). Perhaps peculiarly, there is a disconnect between employers and recent graduates on program satisfaction as directors of research libraries were most satisfied with the graduate programs in Library and Information Studies while their new librarians were the least satisfied, with the reverse true in urban public libraries (recent graduates satisfied and their employers not). Clearly any perception studies of client satisfaction with the LIS programs require involvement of both senior managers and recent graduates.

No comparable studies on a national scale have been completed recently in the U.S.

Summary

Canadian graduate programs of Library and Information Studies are accredited by the American Library Association. However, the history of development of these programs and the national context has resulted in programs that are more homogenous than diverse.

Compared to their American counterparts, the programs are more typically housed in public research institutions, two years in length, with competition for spaces. More students do not bring more resources. The students are more likely full-time, studying a curriculum with more required courses. Tuition is relatively low.

Faculty are provided with greater time for research. Doctoral programs are common, again with full-time students. Programs for teacher-librarians tend to be housed in faculties or schools of education.

Access is an issue as distance education is paradoxically in its infancy in a geographically dispersed but technologically advanced population.

The profession is generally satisfied with the programs but points to inadequacies in education for management, leadership and business skills. The profession also favors more internships and connections with the field.

Conclusions

Education for Library and Information Studies in Canada has developed from a different model than the U.S. Programs are more homogeneous, the graduation education positioned as a high level, research intensive endeavor, supported and challenged by highly developed programs for paraprofessionals with university degrees.

Current studies provide much data for review and contemplation. This research base and market pressure should result in improved alignment with the needs of employers and professional practitioners, particularly greater emphasis on management and leadership and improved access through distance learning.

Academic program administrators have voiced these concerns in the past (Curry, 2000) yet noted that students do not often see the relevance of education for entrepreneurship and management until after they are in the workforce, and consequently do not enroll in sufficient numbers in elective courses related to business acumen. Similarly, the development of distance education, while important for access and to prevent a possible siphoning of students by U.S. accredited programs available through distance learning, is impaired by a traditional notion of graduate education and university infrastructure and reward systems.

Between Canada and the United States lies the world's longest undefended international border, which Canadian Margaret Atwood calls the world's longest one-way mirror. Americans look at the self-reflecting side. Canadians believe that they are nearly invisible to the U.S. but consequently benefit from the comparative lessons offered by two side-by-side national experiments. This examination of graduate education in Library and Information Studies suggests that once again, two very different traditions have resulted in outwardly similar effects but inherently different outcomes.

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