

Monday, April 13, 2009

Office of Accreditation
American Library Association
50 E. Huron St.
Chicago, Illinois 60611

This letter is meant to express our concern, and the concern of the members of our Society, with the January report of the ALA Library Education Task Force. The setting of educational standards and accreditation policies based upon them is crucially important to all professions and we value the work of ALA and its COA in insuring that information professionals in a variety of settings obtain the highest quality education possible. The changes in standards presented in this set of recommendations are problematic on several fronts.

First, these changes represent a significant narrowing of the LIS field, at a time when the need for information professionals is burgeoning in all areas of human enterprise. At present, almost 30% of LIS graduates do not enter library jobs and the proposed prescriptive emphasis on specific competencies will displace content that addresses non-library-related knowledge and skills. This narrowing is fundamentally opposed to the long-standing commitment to diversity and liberal thinking that ALA so gallantly champions. Excising important growth areas for our field with reactionary restrictions on educational programs will likely lead to a schism in the information professions rather than a united dedication to the values all our organizations share.

Second, the requirements for faculty educated in LIS and library-centric curricula strongly restrict the diversity and interdisciplinarity of LIS programs. This restriction is clearly in opposition to the trends toward more interdisciplinary activities in higher education and commerce. Librarians as well as other information professionals meet broad ranges of information needs that cut across all disciplines and students who experience interdisciplinary courses, projects, and faculty will be prepared to excel and lead in their professional lives.

Third, the changes are prescriptive. History has shown that clear guidelines that inspire programs to carefully define their goals and then use criterion-based assessments to measure progress will lead to more innovative schools, faculty, and graduates than nationally mandated standards.

Fourth, many other groups are stakeholders in the LIS programs that ALA accredits. Organizations such as MLA, SLA, ACRL, ALISE, as well as ASIST have strong interests in insuring that their future members receive excellent educations. ALA has assumed leadership for accreditation and the changes proposed do not take into account the perspectives of allied organizations.

In conclusion we object to some of the specifics of the report as well as to its general tenor, which violates the values of ALA itself as well as the values and trends of higher education. We believe it has neglected the concerns and goals of a larger community, including the membership of ASIS&T, and encourage ALA to avoid prescription and restriction but rather to continue to lead the information professions with openness and cooperation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donald O. Gase".

~~Donald O. Gase~~
2009 President, American Society for Information Science and Technology

Cc: Richard E. Rubin (Chair)
ALISE, ARL , ACRL, SLA