

Observations by the Dean, Associate Dean, SIS Council Chair, and Program Chairs (BSIS, GIST, TeleNet, LIS)

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Faculty members who teach in the LIS program participate actively in the School and University culture of assessment through: 1.) annual self-assessment of performance in teaching, research and service submitted to the Dean, 2.) participation in the Peer Review of Teaching process and the Provost's Assessment of Student Learning to demonstrate what students have learned. Faculty members are also assessed by their students for each course they teach in each term, and they use these assessments to make modifications in course content and methodology as needed. In addition, the faculty participated in the assessment of the on-line program that took place during the last academic year.

Changes (C) in the Library and Information Science Program 2005-2011 driven by or related to assessments:

For the LIS program, the five years between 2005 and 2010 began with the development of the Program Presentation for the re-accreditation of the MLIS program by the American Library Association. This process focused the faculty on assessing each aspect of the MLIS program in depth: mission, goals and objectives; curriculum; faculty; students; administration and financial support; and physical resources and facilities. An objective External Review Panel (ERP) evaluated the Program Presentation and made a comprehensive site visit to determine whether the faculty's assessment measured up to the American Library Association's *Standards for Accreditation of Master's Program in Library & Information Studies*. The ERP and the Committee on Accreditation each made a very positive affirmation of the quality of the MLIS program, and this affirmation allowed the LIS faculty to move forward confidently with new initiatives. We are now preparing for the next program presentation for ALA reaccreditation.

In the years since the re-accreditation process in 2006, several faculty members retired and resigned, and this change provided the opportunity for the LIS program to hire six new faculty members, each of whom is able to collaborate across the research areas of the School and to bring new teaching expertise to the MLIS and PhD curricula.

- C1. **Integrating the on-campus and FastTrack MLIS programs through the blended delivery of the entire MLIS curriculum** to accommodate both on-campus and on-line students and to accommodate the size and needs of the faculty (2008-2009). As a result of the external assessment by NCHEMS, this has been rolled back. "Blended" delivery (as we

¹ Text from last year's "observations" document is in blue text. Additions and updates to last year's observations are in black text. Also, this has *not* been vetted by the LIS faculty so it represents my personal reflections only.

have come to define it) has been discontinued as an expectation. In general, faculty now either teach an on-line or an on-campus course.

- C2. Focusing on defining and developing a limited number of **carefully-articulated specializations within both the MLIS and PhD curricula** and developing new courses to support these specializations (2009).
- C3. Funding **PhD students as Teaching Assistants and Teaching Fellows to participate in the delivery of MLIS courses** and to attract the best full-time students to the PhD program and **expanding the Pitt Partners Program** as the single method of funding MLIS students (2007-2008).
- C4. Developing a **shared governance** model to distribute the responsibilities for administering a large and complex LIS program (2009-2010). The shared governance model that had been approved by faculty vote in January 2009 expired in the summer of 2011.
- C5. **Aligning student outcomes** for each course in the MLIS curriculum to the Assessment of Student Learning process (2010).

Exogenous trends that have had an impact or influence on the changes that have been made:

- ET1. The current recession is causing a **downturn in the job market** that is requiring MLIS graduates to expend greater effort to secure a professional position while at the same time the recession is causing **an increase in enrollment in the MLIS program** among recent college graduates who are unable to secure positions based on their degrees. Total enrollment in MLIS programs (combined online and on campus) are down year-over-year. The downturn appears to be a conspiracy of several factors with no single factor standing out (*viz.*, graduation rates at the high end of the typical range, matriculation rates at the low end of the typical range, etc.). Nonetheless, we are not projecting a turnaround in enrollments in the near future given the poor employment prospects of MLIS students and significant tuition increases.
- ET2. The **demographics of both the MLIS and PhD student** bodies are changing: students are younger, more are more attending full-time, many have little or no experience in the profession or any work experience, and more have special needs including counseling and accommodations for coursework.
- ET3. Although there is growing diversity within the general population, there is **less diversity within the professions and within the student body**. There is a gender imbalance of females that has grown over the past few years because more women than men are now undergraduates. As a result, the number of women is increasing in the graduate student pool.

Dominant challenges (CH) and risks to the LIS program informed or driven by current assessment:

- CH1.** Providing **sufficient funding to support financial aid** for the best applicants to the MLIS and PhD programs.
- CH2.** **Securing the sophisticated technology infrastructure and facilities** needed to support teaching and learning for the MLIS and PhD programs. Dean Larsen made a significant investment in equipment for the purpose of establishing a “private cloud” for LIS student learning. This environment is still being tested and should be on-line for the Spring semester.
- CH3.** Providing **positive and “real world” learning experiences in blended courses** of on-campus and on-line students and **dealing with student expectations**. There has been an ongoing discussion about hiring permanent “professors of practice” who are expert in the application of theory to practice, but this has not been resolved yet.
- CH4.** Assuring that **graduates are well prepared to compete for professional positions** in a very competitive job market with graduates of other successful programs. The MLIS graduates must be prepared to function effectively in an environment that is becoming increasingly digital while remaining true to the service traditions of the profession.
- CH5.** Dealing with the **increasingly competitive environment of similar MLIS and PhD programs at other colleges and universities** around the world that have greater resources for financial aid and marketing/recruitment and that offer successful online programs. Again, there have been ongoing, if informal, discussions about how we can use the strengths of the school to differentiate ourselves from other iSchools (and other similar programs) without abandoning our common cause with our colleagues.
- CH6.** Coping with the rapidly **changing nature of the professions** and of professional associations, especially as these institutions struggle in a **poor economic climate** with stagnant or lower salaries and fewer professional positions at the entry level, especially in archives. Libraries and archives of all types now place greater emphasis on digital resources and information technology to deliver service.
- CH 7.** Fewer new LIS faculty members have **professional experience** that students expect but do have more expertise in disciplines and technology.

Notable opportunities (O) that have become apparent as a result of current assessments:

- O1.** **Extend the Mellon iSchools Inclusion Institutes (i3)** as a model for encouraging diversity in LIS student bodies and faculties across the country.

- O2.** Expand experiential and authentic learning experiences for students to build competencies in information technology and “real world” field experiences that they will need to succeed in their careers. Take advantage of these technologies to provide continuing education of professionals throughout their careers.
- O3.** Capitalize on the “graying” of faculty across the accredited programs and iSchools and the shortages of faculty in specializations to **focus the PhD program on educating teacher/scholars for the needed specializations.**
- O4.** The faculty searches that are anticipated for this year present an incredible opportunity for SIS and the LIS program. The leadership transition presents the opportunity for a leader to step in to make the necessary adjustments to position the LIS program for the future.

Potential scenarios (PS) that suggest alternative futures for the LIS Program that offer insight into the program’s 5-year prognosis and contribute to its vision:

The LIS faculty acknowledges the challenges and opportunities facing the LIS program and envisions a combination of these four scenarios, which are not mutually exclusive, to sustain the program in the coming five years:

- PS1. “Niche” scenario:** We are developing niche areas of specialization within the MLIS and PhD programs and encouraging research collaboration in these niches with faculty across the School, in other units of the University and at other institutions that build on the iSchool model. **(CH 5, CH 7)**
- PS 2. “Real World” scenario:** Create for students “IT Labs”-based learning experiences in every MLIS course and build internships across the specializations with institutions and professional associations to increase the marketability of students when they graduate. **(CH 2, CH 3, CH 6)**
- PS3. “Professional Career Ladder Education Model” scenario:** Using the new Health Certificate of Advanced Study as a model, develop a continuum of educational opportunities using the “real world” scenario from pre-service education through continuing professional development for professionals throughout their careers with a special focus on career ladders from master’s level to continued professional development and on the PhD level for those interested in careers as academics and researchers. **(O 1, O 3)**
- PS4. “Global Collaboration” scenario:** Building on the model used for collaboration with the University of the Virgin Islands, expand the use of emerging technologies to collaborate with universities around the world to offer professional education. We can begin with collaborations with Wuhan University and the Beijing Institute of Technology. **(CH 1, CH 2, CH 3, O 1)**
- PS5. “Librarians and Archivists of the Future” scenario:** This scenario involves transforming all aspects of the program to explicitly educate students to be leaders in the increasingly

digital future. This scenario would require reforming admissions criteria as well as the educational program to prepare a new generation of information professionals that are prepared to embrace the challenges that the future holds.

How does SIS assess itself with respect to the iSchool vision and SIS mission?

SIS Faculty members work in a changing environment in which collaboration with other faculty members on cross-disciplinary research is highly valued by every stakeholder—individual faculty members, programs, the Dean and the University administration. The LIS program as a whole and individual faculty members support this collaborative environment, and each project that moves the LIS program and the School forward solidifies SIS as an iSchool in keeping with the vision of the iCaucus. It was the LIS faculty who moved the adoption of the one-school concept and has steadfastly supported it.

Each year the faculty assesses its progress toward meeting the mission of SIS through its actions. These actions have become clearer each year that SIS has functioned as School with strong individual programs in harmony with its mission rather than as separate departments.

SIS stands at a fertile point in its history where transformation is possible. It is up to the faculty and leadership to grasp the moment and position SIS for a new, if uncertain future.

What steps can SIS and the BOV take to advance its effectiveness and stature as an iSchool?

Focus on resources: Raise funds in collaboration with the BOV, Institutional Advancement and alumni to marshal resources needed to:

- Secure the best students for each program through competitive financial aid incentives
- Provide sophisticated information infrastructure and facilities to help students gain a competitive edge in the job market and to help faculty the technology to teach effectively and to conduct research.
- Strengthen the signature specialization niches in each academic program, in research and in service.

Focus on vision, strategy and its implementation. People are the largest and most significant resource that SIS has. Approximately 15% of the faculty positions in SIS will have new incumbents (if the recruitments are all successful). With this number, choosing wisely means choosing in such a way that SIS is best positioned for the future. This demands a shared vision and a practical strategy for getting there.