

LIS Program Report, 2007-08
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Over the past several years, the LIS program has been committed to supporting the School by building its enrollment and generating tuition revenue as other programs in the School have suffered declining enrollments. This is being accomplished by expanding the Fast Track program (making nearly every course blended and offering new specializations) and experimenting with new ways of offering financial aid (primarily by expanding the Partners program). However, the growing number of students, additional burdens of teaching online, and loss of regular faculty has conspired to create a variety of serious problems in the LIS program.

In May 2008 the LIS faculty had a retreat to consider the relevance of the MLIS core courses and ways to coordinate the content taught in these courses, determine how to experiment with the LIS 2000 course, evaluate the need for a research methods in the MLIS program, and assess the infrastructure for the Fast Track program. Building from that retreat, we expanded a password protected website for LIS governance and communication, commenced a survey by both regular and adjunct LIS faculty of course content compared to ALA Committee on Accreditation standards, participated in a Human Resources assessment of the Fast Track program staffing, and worked on an evaluation of research methods courses in MLIS programs.

At the first LIS faculty meeting, the LIS Chair presented a detailed review of various issues challenging the program as well as data reflecting the program's status. He provided a profile of the Fall 2008 student enrollment, demographic data on the new students, the use of financial aid, LIS Faculty issues, and the needs for strengthening the LIS Doctoral program. The Chair emphasized that with the stabilization of enrollment in the other programs that the LIS faculty need to address other concerns, such as achieving a better balance between service, teaching, and research and a more effective management of large-class sizes, advising loads, and the under-supported online program?

The LIS faculty has started a process of evaluating where it wants to go in the next 3 to 5 years. It is discussing how it can enhance the acquisition of research grants and participates in collaborative research across SIS, in the RIGS, and with students. The faculty is considering what should be reasonable course enrollments, how to improve research productivity (funding and publication), achieving a balance between teaching, research, and service (both individually and as program), and strengthening the doctoral program so that it supports both MLIS program and faculty research. The LIS faculty also will be considering issues presented by the Provost in his reply about the School's strategic plan, namely identifying benchmarks, evaluating metrics, and considering outcomes assessments.

We also will be considering how the LIS program needs to reinvent itself in order to have a better chance of achieving any realistic goals it sets for itself. The LIS Program Chair has recommended that the LIS faculty consider a number of options for managing the MLIS and LIS doctoral programs, including setting Higher admissions standards for the MLIS program, creating MLIS Enrollment target and caps, fund-raising for tuition scholarships, setting research productivity goals, making strategic use of consultants to assist the faculty reconsider its various programs, and revisiting and expanding existing faculty metrics used in annual reviews. Of course, achieving such goals will be significantly affected, in a positive way, by the filling of the Boyce Chair and Mellon-supported “cyberscholarship” faculty positions (as well as the filling of any other vacant faculty positions that it has permission to search for and hire).

This process of planning is just underway. At the October LIS faculty meeting, the faculty will be considering proposals by the LIS Program Chair to establish one or more working groups in considering metrics and benchmarks (including research goals), enrollment caps and related issues, admissions standards and procedures, outcomes assessments, and the PhD program. Later this fall, when it becomes available, we will review and take action on the HR review of Fast Track Program staffing needs. Since this is a very ambitious agenda, it is uncertain as to what the LIS faculty will focus on as priorities for reaching long-term objectives, but it will be an interesting academic year no matter what.