

The MLIS at the IPT: a Comparison with American Masters' Programmes; with some Recommendations for the Future

Eloise S. Pettus*

Abstract: *A study is made of the curriculum of American library schools. The Masters' in Library and Information Science (MLIS) Programme at the University of Malaya generally compares favourably with American library school requirements, but some changes are suggested. Other comments regarding the Programme are also made.*

Abstrak: *Suatu kajian dibuat mengenai kurikulum di pusat-pusat pengajian sains perpustakaan di Amerika Syarikat. Kursus sarjana sains perpustakaan dan maklumat yang dijalankan di Universiti Malaya pada umumnya dapat menyaingi keperluan pusat-pusat pengajian di Amerika, tetapi beberapa perubahan dicadangkan. Ulasan-ulasan lain mengenai program ini juga diberikan.*

There are 53 masters' degree programs in library and information science which are accredited by the American Library Association. Information regarding these 53 programs was solicited, and replies received from 40 (75%) of them.

Of the 40 programs responding, 28 (70%) include a requirement for an introductory course. It may be entitled Foundations of Library and Information Science, The Library in Society, or similar titles. This requirement corresponds to the University of Malaya requirement of HP 501, Development of Libraries. The same number, 28 (70%), require a course in Management and/or Library Administration (under these or similar names). These compare with HP 502, Management & The Administration of Libraries.

Thirty-eight (95%) require a course in Cataloguing and Classification, Organization of Library Materials, or other variant title for a similar course, which compares with the cataloguing and classification component of HP 503, Organisation & Use of Information. Nineteen (47.5%) require Collection Development/Management, which is taught as the other major subject in HP 503. Thirty-six (90%) require Reference and Bibliography (or a variant title referring to the same content), which compares with HP 504, Bibliographic Control and Access to Information.

HP 505, Malaysian Bibliography, has no counterpart in American library schools, as international bibliography is covered in Reference classes, and Introduction to Bibliography is based on production of bibliographies, and is an elective. Nor does HP 506, Philosophy of Research, have a counterpart in American library schools.

Only two (5%) of the American programs include a requirement for Statistics, which compares with HP 507, Basic Statistics. Eighteen (45%) require Research as part of their core courses, which compares with HP 508, Research Methodology in Library Studies. Twenty-two (55%) require Introduction to Information Science, Computer Applications to Libraries, or some other title relating to technology in libraries. These courses compare with HP 509, Computer Applications of Library Activity.

In addition, many American library schools require at least one or more other courses, depending on the main thrust of their program. The most common other requirement is a literature course. Usually one course is chosen from Humanities Literature, Science Literature, or Social Science Literature. The next most common requirement is Searching Automated Databases. These are followed by Audio-visual Materials in Libraries, a Research Project or

*Dr. Pettus, an American Library Association Library/Book Fellow, was Visiting Lecturer to the Institute of Advanced Studies, and Coordinator of Studies, MLIS Programme, September 1987 – May 1988.

Seminar, or Systems Analysis. Still others require one other course from a variety of offerings. None of these are included in the University of Malaya MLIS programme.

Electives vary widely in American library schools, and the eight courses offered this year at the University of Malaya are appropriate and a good variety.

Most American library schools limit the number of courses graduate students can take to four courses per semester, which means that course-work requires three semesters or more. Most also permit students to enroll in either semester, and offer some core courses in all semesters to accommodate new students. Most also permit students to participate in a masters' program on a part-time basis if they are working full-time, although full-time participation is encouraged.

American library schools generally require students to purchase textbooks, in addition to providing lists of additional readings. These textbooks form the nucleus of a personal professional library, which is useful long after graduation from library school.

American library schools permit students who have graduated to return and take electives in which they are interested, or later need information about in order to enhance their careers, but which they were not able to work into their schedule while in the masters' programme. These audit courses usually require only a minimal fee of about US\$5.00–20.00.

Fieldwork is generally available at American library schools, and may be either one or both, of two categories: an internship, and a practicum. An internship usually consists of specified activities and requires supervision of these activities by an on-site librarian, as well as visits by a faculty advisor, and includes a detailed report by the student of the activities undertaken. A practicum usually consists of a project chosen and proposed by the student, with subsequent reports on his/her progress, and is supervised by a faculty advisor. However, these definitions are blur, as some define these terms opposite from the definitions given above. Although offered in their curricula, practically no accredited library school requires either an internship or a practicum for the masters' degree in library science, although one or the other may have been required in the past.

Most American library schools require from 36 to 41 total semester hours credit (or equivalent quarter hours), which is usually 12–14 courses, or approximately the same as the 12 units required at the University of Malaya.

American library schools have a regular full-time teaching staff, augmented by Adjunct Professors who are usually persons working in libraries or related fields, and who teach part-time.

Recommendations

Although a comparison has been made with American library schools, there are special needs in Malaysia which need to be addressed. It is obvious that HP 501, HP 502, both components of HP 503, HP 504, HP 508, and HP 509 compare favourably with the requirements in American library schools, and should remain as the bulwark of the programme at the University of Malaya. However, I recommend dividing HP 503 into two one unit parts: Organisation of Library Materials, and Collection Development, if the four semester proposal (mentioned later), is implemented. HP 505 is very important to this country, and should remain as part of the core. I recommend that Southeast Asian Bibliography be a part of HP 505, as it would be impossible to run a library in Malaysia without including material from all parts of this region. Perhaps the course could be renamed Malaysian and Southeast Asian Bibliography. HP 506 is a part of the Master of Philosophy Programme, and belongs there. I prefer that HP 506 be dropped as a requirement for the Master of Library and Information Science Programme, and that students be permitted to take an additional library or information science elective course. However, since the MLIS Programme is part of a research oriented unit, the Institute of Advanced Studies, it is appropriate that HP 507 remain as part of the requirements.

As to the electives, I recommend the addition of Academic Libraries, and the addition of a separate course on Indexing and Abstracting (rather than it being included in HP 503). For those who are planning to go into School Librarianship, courses on Children's Literature and/or Young Adult Literature need to be added as electives.

I recommend that the Programme be expanded to four semesters — three semesters of coursework, consisting of four courses each semester, and the fourth semester devoted to the practicum. A scholarly programme such as this needs to provide time for students to carry out projects and assignments.

Students should be permitted to enroll in any semester, and courses should be repeated often enough for students to get their required work completed within the three semesters. Students tend to learn from their peers, and students from a previous semester could be of great help to new students. I also recommend that students be permitted to participate in the Programme on a part-time basis, taking a lesser course load, so that persons who are working will have an opportunity to participate at their own pace, and their job-performance could be improved even though they could not take time out to pursue the Programme full-time. This also entails a recommendation to have some (or at least one) of the re-

quired courses available in the late afternoon or evening each semester to accommodate these part-time students.

Students should be required to purchase textbooks. Students who have already graduated should be encouraged to come back and take courses which they have missed as continuing education, and audit fees should be reduced to encourage this.

The 12-unit requirement should stand. I recom-

mend that two regular faculty members be hired, and that each be required to teach two courses each semester, depending on their interests and expertise. There should be three required courses taught, and at least three electives taught each semester, thus providing at least nine electives available during the recommended three semesters of coursework from which students can choose. This will also make it possible for part-time teaching staff to teach only every third semester.

† Editorial note: Regulations relating to the MLIS state:

Part II, comprising a period of attachment to a library, information centre or other appropriate location for research work leading to the submission of a practicum report for examination. (Act LV11, Regulations LV111 (2)(a)).