MLS CURRICULUM WORKSHOP QUESTIONS
MAY 16, 2020
Participant (students & alumni) Feedback

1. During your time as a student in the program, what was your biggest challenge in terms of the courses you took?

   Many of the classes required programs to be completed in conjunction with the library. This is not an issue except that some of these same courses also release information and assignments in a sequential manner, rather than all at once. Public libraries plan events in advance. My library plans programming with a minimum of three months advance notice. If I hadn't been working in the library for some of my courses, the assignments would not have been completed at all due to the lack of notice. In fact, one assignment had to be moved repeatedly due to scheduling and administration. I understand that some professors feel that assignments should be released gradually so that the material builds upon itself, but that takes away the autonomy of the student and the ability of a distance learner to create a timeline that works with their own schedules, particularly with the larger projects. Assignments and information should be released all at once to prevent situations like this that wreak havoc on students and their participating libraries.

2. How do you feel your course work in the program compares to the work you need to do/have been doing? What would have made you more prepared for the field of librarianship?

   The program is exceptional at providing information about the technical aspect of librarianship. The program is also well designed when advocating for libraries and the materials, whether it be for financial support, removal of censorship, etc. What the program lacks is a hard focus on the customer service aspect of librarianship. There is a strong focus on patrons that are of sound temperament with no mental, physical, or emotional handicaps whatsoever that are more often than not asking small questions that have quick answers. This is what much of our information seeking behavior is focused on in classes. Despite all of these good points, this program does not entirely prepare students for patrons that are struggling with mental illness, handicaps, homelessness, or that ask questions regarding hard topics with no clear answers, such as birth control, financial questions, etc. I realized this early on in my job through a difficult experience, and this was further solidified in an elective class focusing on special populations.

3. What types of assignments/projects were most helpful impactful?

   Creating a strategic plan (6031 – Library Administration and Management) was one of the harder assignments that I had to do, but ended up being the most rewarding. Throughout my librarianship, I've spent a lot of time justifying ordering and spending, and this taught me how to do that to the people who made those decisions (as well as who they were in the first place!). It also forced me to become privy to the issues that my library is currently facing in a way that I wasn't before, because I wasn't yet employed there at the time that I had made it.

4. What have been the most useful courses you've taken (or you took) in the program?

   The most useful course I took was 6026 – Organization of Information in Libraries. I have found myself relying on MARC information more times than I expected to during school and in the actual library.

   I also found a lot of use in the courses regarding children and young adults, since I am in the Children's department in my library (6135 and 6137). I do wish I'd taken early childhood as well.

5. Which have been the least useful courses?

   As I said, every course has provided some form of usefulness to both my schoolwork and my job. The course that I've found to be least useful thus far is 6142 (Instructional Foundations of the School Library Media Program), but this is due to my switching out of the school library pathway. Had I stayed in that direction, I do not believe this would be the case.

6. What topics/courses do you think need the most updating?

   I felt that the courses contained up-to-date information.

7. What were your thoughts on the order of courses? Were there some courses you wish you had taken earlier in the program? Later in the program?

   I wish 6048 had been taught earlier within the program, in Tier 2. Looking at an updated catalog, I see that it has moved into "core classes" instead of the Tier system, and I believe this approach is much more suitable.

8. Do you feel that the core courses (6010, 6014, 6016, 6019, 6026, 6031, 6048) prepared you for later courses in the program?

   I feel that every course had something to offer. I felt that 6014 (Introduction to Reference) didn't prepare me so much for the later courses, but it definitely prepared me for working within the library. It did give me more research options, should I have needed them.

9. If you could have had other courses on specific topics, what would you add?

   The course I took most recently, 6853 (Library Services to Diverse and Special Populations), should be a core course. There is a lot of information within this course that I felt that all librarians should be made aware of. Whether a librarian goes into academic, public, or school libraries, there will be issues within the scope of diverse and special populations that need addressing. This course will significantly impact my library work in the future.

10. What professional development have you experienced that could be possibly covered through coursework?

There's a lot of information on graphic novels that I think gets wholly unnoticed except in 6135 (Materials for Children). Graphic novels make up a significant percentage of the library in children's, YA, and adult areas, and they need to be given more attention in coursework. This is particularly true in 6048 (Collection Development). This is a very thorough class, but graphic novels very little mention in the coursework or the textbook, but they should have more of a focus here due to the potential size, cost, and difficulty of maintenance of a graphic novel collection. A full manga series can be 50-100 issues on the small end, and wear out very quickly due to typically being paperback. Shorter series, like those found in the adult section, are also frequently paperback and wear out quickly as well as carrying a high cost to replace a full series.

11. What suggestions do you have for promoting "community" among students in an online course?

When utilizing distance education, there is a strong lack of community in the beginning. Even when utilizing discussion boards and group projects, it can be difficult to obtain the "group" feeling. The most useful thing for me was finding students that were local to discuss classes and forge friendships, as well as communicating with students outside of the classroom via social media. It allowed us to be less formal and created a sort of togetherness that can't be manufactured. What the university or professors could do is suggest and encourage that students reach out to each other to form social media groups for their enrollment year to discuss assignments and information, as well as joke, share sad news, vent, and discuss current events. Social media is a powerful tool, and no one knows that better than us, who have made a career of information seeking behaviors. Taking away the constraints of interacting within an academic circle or in front of professors made us into friends, instead of distant colleagues.

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1. During your time as a student in the program, what was your biggest challenge in terms of the courses you took? *It's been awhile, but maybe balancing work, school and family?*
2. How do you feel your course work in the program compares to the work you need to do/have been doing? What would have made you more prepared for the field of librarianship? *I feel like the workload and assignments really prepared me to be the professional I am today. Being totally online made me develop those skills needed to be a digital leader in the school/public library. What could improve? Maybe coursework on grant-writing, budgeting and leadership.*

3. What types of assignments/projects were most helpful impactful? *Collection development plans.*

4. What have been the most useful courses you've taken (or you took) in the program? *children's lit and YA (but maybe because those are my favorite topics)*

5. Which have been the least useful courses? *Cataloging and reference - as far as using atlas, anthologies, encyclopedias, etc. When I took the course we didn't really use digital references. Not obsolete, but probably the least used of my courses.*

6. What topics/courses do you think need the most updating? *Reference, collection development.*

7. What were your thoughts on the order of courses? Were there some courses you wish you had taken earlier in the program? Later in the program? *I don't really recall the order. And I don't really recall having any problem with the order of things in which I took them.*

8. Do you feel that the core courses (6010, 6014, 6016, 6019, 6026, 6031, 6048) prepared you for later courses in the program? *Absolutely!*

9. If you could have had other courses on specific topics, what would you add? *Grant writing, advocacy.*

10. What professional development have you experienced that could be possibly covered through coursework? *NCLive, NCWiseOwl, Library of Congress and Primary Sources.*

11. What suggestions do you have for promoting "community" among students in an online course? *social media.*

1.During your time as a student in the program, what was your biggest challenge in terms of the courses you took?

   a. *I struggled with the internship, not because the requirements were difficult, but because finding a setting was a challenge. I know that some people already working in libraries complain that they don't need the internship because they have all the practical knowledge, but for students outside of libraries working full time jobs, locating library settings willing to host an intern is a bit of a struggle.*
      i. *This also holds true for assignments in other classes that require actual library settings to complete. The assignments are valuable, but I don't work in a library and so every time it meant building new relationships with people in libraries and working with them (sometimes more of a struggle than others) to accomplish these assignments.*
   b. *As far as coursework is concerned, the biggest challenge was probably the two research classes I took. They tended to have a lot of higher-level reading and the concepts (stats, etc.) were unfamiliar. Not a bad challenge, but a challenge nonetheless.*

2. How do you feel your course work in the program compares to the work you need to do/have been doing? What would have made you more prepared for the field of librarianship?

    a. *Honestly, I'm not sure yet. I feel that I've had a well-rounded education and I assume that will translate into a satisfactory preparation, but I have yet to be employed in a library, so I'm not sure I can answer this yet. I will say I have wondered if it wouldn't be more helpful to allow people to sort of specialize in an area (reference / metadata / research) that they're interested in rather than a concentration, but I understand this is stretching the limits of the paradigm.*

3. What types of assignments/projects were most helpful impactful?

    a. *Why is impactful a word?*
    a. *The flipside to the assignments that require real world access to libraries (mentioned as a challenge above) is that when they work, they really work. It's hard to simulate this sort of experience but a nice balance is important. If multiple assignments for a class require "real world" experience it would be more manageable for some to be simulated (i.e. "Here's a range of resources in the catalog with some notes about edition and condition. Evaluate for deselection and/or replacement") giving students a similar assignment and instructors a better control set to grade against.*

4. What have been the most useful courses you've taken (or you took) in the program?

    a. *Strictly within the core academic classes, Organization of Information in Libraries and Information Literacy and Library Instruction stand out.*
    b. *Honestly, because there is so little duplication in the core classes, I find it hard to identify any that were less useful than others.*

5. Which have been the least useful courses?

    a. *This is subjective (of course). I'd say that I didn't feel a compelling need to take administration and management, but that's only because I have lots of experience in this area from another field. On the other hand, it would be a useful class for someone without this experience.*

6. What topics/courses do you think need the most updating?

    a. *Intro to Reference and Technology for Library Sciences are going to need constant updating. It seems like traditional reference librarian jobs are evolving into hybrid information literacy and instruction positions and the curriculum will need to reflect this.*

7. What were your thoughts on the order of courses? Were there some courses you wish you had taken earlier in the program? Later in the program?

     a. *I feel like I took things in just about the right order. I did my internship early and felt like that was advantageous overall. I liked ending the program in coursework rather than internship.*

8. Do you feel that the core courses (6010, 6014, 6016, 6019, 6026, 6031, 6048) prepared you for later courses in the program?
     a. *Yes, absolutely.*

9. If you could have had other courses on specific topics, what would you add?
     a. *I would have added another course on metadata / cataloging with room for more philosophical work on the topic. I feel like I understand the mechanics of this area but would have been interested to do a deeper dive.*

10. What professional development have you experienced that could be possibly covered through coursework?
     a. *No answer*

11. What suggestions do you have for promoting "community" among students in an online course?
     a. *This is a tough one. Online forums are helpful but unwieldy. If there were a way to so smaller zoom cohorts (4-6 max) in each class I think that would be helpful. This is not necessarily for group work but could be used in this way. Dr. Bright has done smaller discussion groups and it was really nice to see other students, but I developed no real connection to them.*