

IFLA Efforts to provide Standards for International Library and Information Studies Education: The Role of the IFLA Section of Education and Training – A Case Study

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Abstract:

As education for library and information science (LIS) professionals has become more international in scope and as graduates of LIS education programs have expanded their interests in job opportunities beyond the boundaries of their home country or region, the question of appropriate measures for assessing and comparing the quality of LIS professional educational programs in this era of digital information and education delivered electronically on the internet, the question of whether it is possible to develop measures to assess the quality of such programs that would permit an international system of assessment that would provide reciprocal recognition of the quality of professional degrees in LIS becomes ever more pressing. Some countries or regions have their own quality assessment programs, such as the accreditation of LIS programs in the USA and Canada and the certification of courses of study by CILIP in the U.K.

This paper reviews the history of IFLA's involvement in the quality assessment of LIS Professional educational programs and examines as a case study the involvement of IFLA's Section on Education and Training in the development of Standards for Education Programs for Library and Information Professionals. The challenges involved in this process are analyzed.

Keywords: Quality Assessment, Library and Information Science Education, Standards for LIS Education, Professional Education.

Introduction: History and Background

In 1887, Melvil Dewey established the School of Library Economy at Columbia University in New York City. This program of Professional Education for Librarians eventually proved to became a model for the more than 50 accredited programs in the U.S. and Canada today. This model undoubtedly also provides a pattern for the education of professional librarians internationally through the connection between the American Library Association and the Library Association in the U.K. Initially, summer schools were one of the primary means of delivery of professional library education in the U.K. The summer schools, held between 1893

and 1897 in a variety of institutions, proved to be extremely popular, attracting approximately forty-five students from all parts of the United Kingdom. This may not seem like a large number, but in the context of the fact that the first Library Association examinations only attracted three students it is an impressive number. In 1902, the first library science course in an institution of university status was introduced at the London School of Economics. This was an initially successful but not particularly long-lived venture, lasting only until 1914 with the outbreak of the First World War. (Thomas, 1999, p. 14) Thomas notes that “The difficulty proved to be that, although the school attracted a large number of students who were interested in gaining the prestige of enrolling in courses at an institution such as the London School of Economics, there was a struggle between the school, which felt that it should be able to control what was taught and set its own syllabus, and the Library Association, which felt that in its capacity as examining body it ought to have the privilege of determining what was taught.” (Thomas, 1999, p. 15)

Beyond the U.K., a program of education of library professionals was established in 1915 at the University of Barcelona. Today it is the oldest continuing program for professional librarians. (*Education for Librarianship*, 2016)

The Role of IFLA in Library Education Standards

The involvement of IFLA in programs for the education of library professionals began soon after the founding of IFLA in 1927. In 1930, just three years after the founding of IFLA, a suggestion for an international summer school open to library workers in all countries, was proposed. The proposal from 1930 seems to have been abandoned in 1932, (Rovelstad, 1977). It is interesting that in 2004, the IFLA Secretary General, Ramachandran Rasu, asked Education and Training Section to draft a curriculum plan for an intensive two week period of onsite study followed by distance learning activities for middle managers in libraries in the developing world. A proposal to develop such a program was submitted in October of 2004 to the IFLA Secretary General, which was received with thanks. But there was no follow up on the 2004 proposal, seemly having met the same fate as the 1930 proposal. (Weech, 2004).

1976 IFLA Standards for Library Schools

After nearly 50 years of existence, in 1976 IFLA published the first standards for library schools which were developed by the IFLA Section on Library Schools. (“Standards for Library Schools”, 1976)

The original 1976 “Standards” included education for documentarists and information scientists, as well as for librarians. In the introduction it was noted that the premise in the development of the standards was that the greatest benefit of the IFLA standards would be for education programs in countries that did not have national standards. It was noted that very few national standards existed at the time. It was also noted that the primary standard was that the educational program should function at the university level and suggested that there should be one “highly qualified” teacher for every twelve students. (“Standards for Library Schools”, p. 211) In 1976, the remaining standards focused more on qualitative criteria such as evidence of accepted goals and objectives for the program and documentation of all activities of the school. The 1976 Standards did include a section on the “Possibilities for Implementation,” which acknowledge that implicit in any standards is the assumption that if the standards are to be effective, they need to find a way of determining if a program of study meets the standards. (*Ibid.*, p. 211) It was suggested that one method of implementation would be to have the international standards officially adopted by a region or country, perhaps

through a professional association or agency that would carry out the evaluation. But a second method of implementation was suggested, namely one that had IFLA seek to implement the standards in countries which did not have a suitable structure for national or regional implementation. (*Ibid*, p. 212). It was noted in 1976 that such a plan that involved IFLA “....would be immensely difficult and time-consuming...” but might lead to the establishment of internationally “...acceptable qualifications for the practice of librarianship.” (*Ibid.*, p. 212)

2000 and 2012 IFLA Guidelines for Professional Library/Information Educational Programs

The revision of the Standards in 2000 adopted a revised title of “Guidelines for Professional Library/Information Educational Programs” and was approved by the IFLA Section on Education and Training in August of 2000. In 2000, the “Guidelines” use both the phrase “Library/Information Educational Programs” and the acronym “LIS” to refer to educational programs under discussion. There is no list of definition of terms as appeared in the 1976 standards. Reference to “Possibilities for Implementation” were also eliminated in the 2000 revision. (IFLA. Section on Education and Training, 2000)

The 2012 revision, when compared to the 2000 revision, while retaining the same title as the 2000 revision, focuses on the impact of the internet and electronic information sources on the information services provided by library and information professionals. (IFLA, Section on Education and Training. 2012). Another focus in the 2012 revision that was not found in the earlier versions was the linking to education programs in archives, museums and records management. Awareness of indigenous knowledge paradigms also was included for the first time in 2012. But perhaps the most interesting addition to the 2012 Guidelines was the statement in Section G3: Curriculum under “Regular review of curriculum.”

Regular review of curriculum. *A process of formal curriculum review should take place on a regular basis and the next review should take place on or before 2017. This review should be informed by input from employers, practitioners and professional associations, as well as students and faculty and will be overseen by the IFLA Standards Committee.*

The reference to the IFLA Standards Committee overseeing the review of Library/Information Education program curriculum on a regular basis in the above section from the 2012 *Guidelines* could not be found in any other section of the 2012 revision nor in any other IFLA source. It seems to be a return to the process of implementation process that was referenced in the original 1976 *Standards*.

In analyzing the IFLA standards for LIS education it is clear that the need for some form of review of the successful implementation of the guidelines for determining the quality of library/information educational programs is recognized as essential to the successful determination of the quality of such educational programs. But after three revisions, the challenge remains to find an acceptable solution to the implementation of what was identified as an immensely difficult and time-consuming task in the 1976 standards. In 2016, the task identified in 1976 seems even more challenging.

IFLA Section of Education and Training and Library Education Standards as a Case Study

In reviewing the IFLA role in Library/Information Professional Education quality assessment, as a case study, the efforts starting in the 1930s to provide some form of curriculum for

professional education programs internationally might be interpreted as an underlying commitment on the part of IFLA's Section on Education and Training and its predecessor (the Section of Library Schools), to find ways to deliver quality education programs internationally. Furthermore, the various editions of the standards and guidelines have noted the need for a method of implementing a way for individual programs of study to demonstrate that they meet the standards. Despite efforts in 1930 and again in 2004 for IFLA to explore delivering educational programs itself, most of the effort has focused on ways to coordinate and encourage individual schools to seek quality assessment of their programs. To this date, such assessment has been left to individual regions or countries. But with the increase in internationalization of library and information professions in the beginning of the 21st century as more and more resources became available on the internet and information access depended more on digital resources, more focus was placed on international access and concerns about equivalency of training and skills learned in the great variety of LIS education programs that had evolved world-wide in the 20th century. Also during this period many former library schools have dropped the term "library" from the school name and sometimes from the degree and focus now on the broad concept of information rather than on libraries.

It seems to this author that the role of IFLA's efforts to provide standards and guidelines for International Library and Information Studies Education has been a complex and frustrating one. Specifically the role of the IFLA Section of Education and Training has been to walk a fine line between what is feasible in terms of the limited resources available through IFLA to develop enforcement protocol that would permit some form of international quality assessment of Library and Information Professional Education programs to be implemented in such a way that confidence in the assessment could be maintained internationally. As a case study, the Education and Training section has demonstrated considerable persistence and dedication over the years in attempting to put forth proposals to accomplish the goal of International Quality Assessment of Library /Information Professional education programs. The barriers the section has encountered have been both political and financial. Political in terms of the great variety of approaches to Library/Information Professional education found worldwide. Financial in terms of the costs that make effective Quality Assessment evaluations prohibitive to many programs in both developed and developing countries. But as the Library and Information professions become ever more international in their functions as a result of the transition to electronic information resources on the internet and in the "internet cloud," the more important an international measure of quality assessment of education programs for information professions becomes.

The iSchool movement and the impact on Quality Assessment of Professional Library/Information education programs

Reflecting this change was the growth of the iSchools during the early 21st century to the point that by 2016 there are more than 50 institutions adopting the term iSchool to identify their programs of study. Many of the iSchools focus on computer technology and have little in common with traditional library schools. The IFLA Section on Education and Training has reflected an awareness of these changes in the revisions they have made over the past 40 years to their Standards for Library/Information Programs. But the goal of establishing a means of quality assessment of such programs has remained elusive despite the dedication of IFLA members to the goal of such assessment. In some ways, the growth of the iSchool movement has further widened the gap between those programs that have the resources to meet quality standards and those which may not have the resources. As IFLA struggles to meet the needs of libraries and library users internationally, the task adopted by the Section of Education and Training to find a way to develop standards for the education of library and information

professionals that can be implemented for the wide diversity of education programs that exist worldwide become ever more important.

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