

Responses to the LIS Forward Position Paper *Ensuring a Vibrant Future for LIS in iSchools*



THE FRIDAY HARBOR PAPERS, VOLUME 2



Abstract

At the end of 2023 the LIS Forward initiative released the position paper, *Ensuring a Vibrant Future for LIS in iSchools*, Friday Harbor Papers, Volume 1, proclaiming that “the contemporary multidisciplinary iSchool is both the greatest strength and the greatest risk for library and information science (LIS) and librarianship.”

The paper was aimed at stimulating discussion and debate on how LIS can thrive and grow in research intensive iSchools. This second volume of the Friday Harbor Papers compiles responses to the position paper, representing over forty voices from researchers, educators, professionals, and thought leaders. Collectively, the authors provide informative, insightful, and provocative perspectives that enrich and advance the conversation and offer new propositions for strengthening LIS.

Keywords

Information Schools, iSchools, Library and information Science, Libraries, Librarianship

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Introduction

LIS Forward asks the urgent question: **As LIS evolves within the context of iSchools, how do we best position our research and education programs to lead the field and the future of libraries?** The initiative was born out of recognition that the evolution of iSchools presents opportunities and challenges for LIS, and the hope that schools could work together to chart future directions that take full advantage of the multidisciplinary scope and mission of iSchools. Starting as an informal working group of faculty from seven schools, [LIS Forward](#) was envisioned as a way to foster conversation, support emerging LIS leaders in iSchools, and make progress toward collective action.

To stimulate dialogue within the academic and professional community, the LIS Forward group collaborated on a position paper, [Ensuring a Vibrant Future for LIS in iSchools, Friday Harbor Papers, Volume 1](#). The scope was intentionally constrained, focusing on iSchools in research-intensive universities and deferring consideration of accreditation and core curriculum. Released at the 2023 ASIS&T annual meeting, in a session designed to build awareness and foster deliberation, the position paper proclaimed an urgent need for action to strengthen LIS in iSchools. It also welcomed further input and responses from researchers, educators, professionals, and thought leaders on a set of proposed priorities for iSchools: invest in pathways for outstanding faculty, develop centers of excellence in LIS research, improve cross-disciplinary governance, and promote LIS values to unify disciplinary traditions in iSchools and address the urgent information problems of our time. With support from IMLS, LIS Forward also implemented an active outreach program to conduct forums with library professionals and thought leaders, while continuing to gather written submissions to expand and deepen conversations across the iSchool community.

This document, *Responses to the LIS Forward Position Paper*, Friday Harbor Papers, Volume 2, is a compendium of 16 submissions and forum summaries completed in 2024. The compilation represents over forty voices, including tenure track and teaching faculty, and academic and public librarians, representing individuals, groups, schools, and professional organizations. The submissions vary in length, tone, and format, ranging from an informal email exchange among a group of faculty to a lengthy fifty-page treatise by a library thought leader. Collectively, the authors provide informative, insightful, and provocative perspectives that enrich and advance issues raised in Volume 1 and offer new propositions for strengthening LIS.

We invite interested parties to submit additional responses to further the conversation. All responses in this volume, and new contributions spurred by Volume 2 will be posted in a forthcoming section of the [LIS Forward website](#), along with news on actions that result from the ongoing conversations, in keeping with LIS Forward objectives and vision.

Responses from Faculty Groups



University of Maryland College of Information



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In the following response, members of the University of Maryland College of Information, first, articulate two core tensions we found inherent in the Friday Harbor Papers (FHP) report, then propose an epistemological core and topical foci that might begin to define LIS research beyond the confines of particular institutions or work in practice. We conclude with our recommendations for future-looking work at Maryland and beyond.

Tension 1: Roots and Branches

Each semester we ask incoming master's students to define LIS and explain why we—librarians, data scientists, designers, developers, information managers, and so on—share one college. And every year, they struggle with the answer. Many rattle off a “standard” definition—iSchools work at the intersection of people, information and technology to study the organization, storage, management and discovery of information. But push a bit further and many students (like many of us) have difficulty explaining the relationships and differences between library science, information science, archives, informatics, and all the other variations of our programs. They often have a vague understanding of librarianship as the historical source of our ethics and values (perhaps?), but beyond that, struggle to articulate connections among professions that vary so greatly in day-to-day operations, workplace culture, and pay. The definition and scope of LIS and iSchools described in the original Friday Harbor Papers (FHP) report reflects a similar tension (best articulated in the “iSchool Leadership Perspectives chapter”). It framed LIS as a field defined by its distinctive historical roots in libraries, and a (perhaps dubious) claim to a unique focus on societal good, rather than articulating a current set of unique epistemological, theoretical, and methodological contributions. The report argued for the inherent value of LIS research while arguing that the future of LIS must be determined by faculties at R1 universities, which excludes many programs and scholars who focus primarily on librarianship. It positions innovation as inextricably tied to advances in computing and technology, arguing that our “social and humanistic values” are what distinguish us from computer science and business schools (LIS Forward, 2023, p. 19).

This tactic—making our field appear more appealing to provosts and students through appeal to a shared sense of technological determinism—is an understandable response to ongoing financial scarcity and threats on campuses. Students want jobs, and universities want to promote new, “cutting edge” (or top of hype cycle) research. But the political and socioeconomic battles of the last decade have clearly demonstrated the ongoing relevance of systems and institutions that support and improve public information literacy, information and data access and organization, independent of their capacity to produce new technologies. Battles over school and public libraries across the United States have underscored their importance in framing the scope of public knowledge and conversation around public health, medicine, education, cultures, politics, research, publishing, and everyday life. iSchool faculty, with their focus on information access, seeking, and systems also strengthen research

across universities, acting as connectors and research collaboration hubs, and supporting and engaging in multi- and interdisciplinary research with campus partners. It would seem, given the ubiquity and importance of data and information, that LIS has a strong case for its value as a field.

While the authors of this response debated over the usefulness of the report's definition of LIS, our group agreed that the "L" is (and should remain) deeply embedded within LIS; we agreed that asserting the importance of librarianship alone will not change that ongoing problem of differentiating ourselves from computer science and business programs.

What is needed is a coherent, cohesive articulation of our epistemological core beyond an emphasis on specific institutions and beyond a general sense of "goodness." We need a more robust definition that explains how exactly LIS, as an academic field of study, creates social value and useful, rigorous research now.

To be clear, this is not a fig leaf for diminishing or abandoning librarianship in favor of more lucrative technical studies. It is a call to examine our current LIS research as having its own process of self-discovery and articulation to undergo. Is it, at its core, a call to move beyond definitions limited to the study of any and all things having to do with a specific set of institutions (libraries, museums, and archives), housed largely in physical spaces, and funded mostly by governments? Why limit the research focus on the resources, skills, and tools to access, organize, and evaluate all information and data, particularly just those used in specific organizational contexts? The definition and scope of LIS research must evolve as the practices of facilitating public access to collections of information, and supporting new types of data and information literacies, change over time.

Tension 2: Innovation in professional practice and research are not the same thing

LIS has a tense relationship between its role as an interdisciplinary domain of research and education and the support it provides for professional practice in libraries, archives, museums, and repositories. That relationship has prevented LIS scholars from uniting around their more general contributions to universities and social and technical research.

For example, as a result of that framing, Libraries (capital "L") are at the center throughout the FHP report, and some claims about the "L" in LIS seem uniquely aligned only with libraries as distinctive institutions (despite the report's aim to encompass a wider range of subfields, including archival science and museology). While the distinct professional traditions of various fields are important, framing LIS around particular institutions and practices may create unnecessary divisions between them as research fields.

For many researchers, there also exists a deep contradiction in rooting our work on information and communities primarily in government-funded or colonial institutions which have not served (or which have actively harmed) many communities. While libraries are now one of the few remaining institutional "third spaces" in US social life that support public access to information, community building and provision of social services, many libraries, museums, and archives have not been safe spaces for traditionally marginalized communities. Moreover, existing professionalization within LIS reflects a disciplinary dedication to improvement and high-quality services, recent battles over defunding libraries and disempowering librarians have demonstrated the critical role they play in a country that has systematically defunded social welfare and public education. Tying our identity to these systems presents a conflict in itself.

Furthermore, divisions between “basic” and applied research that are common in other fields are actually difficult to make in LIS. Because of LIS’s connection to professional practice in GLAMs, work broadly situated within these institutions has been treated as “applied” and research not immediately applicable to professional practice within these institutions has been treated as “basic.” This has resulted in an underdeveloped disciplinary foundation for research, especially in comparison to disciplines like sociology or anthropology that are defined through use of particular epistemologies, research methods, and literatures produced with those methods (rather than specific institutional contexts). The FHP report is correct that librarianship has played a key role in creating the current field of LIS, but decades of early “applied” LIS research have not comprised the expansive institutional and research contexts touched by current LIS research.

As the FHP report discusses, because library practice, and teaching library practice, were central to the formation of information studies colleges and departments, that shaped what research problems were considered interesting and what it looks like to do “library science” in a way that centers around practice in GLAM institutions. Growing LIS requires protecting tenure and promotion for LIS faculty and researchers within the university. Tensions over increasing research impact (“publish in high impact venues”), especially how those are evaluated differently across disciplinary norms with fields like CS relying on very high citation counts, and the quality and rigor of research, is often defined in opposition to the deep value of community and practitioner research and knowledge. Universities are broadly acknowledging the value of community-engaged research, even as they hold faculty to stricter and stricter standards for hiring and promotion.

The question for LIS researchers, then, is how do we stabilize LIS as a field and simultaneously advance theoretical and methodological contributions (more in line with basic research) that can make cross-disciplinary impact? Developing a clear program for basic research, and its epistemic foundations, in LIS—one that unites each of its strands, rather than emphasizing one—will secure LIS’ place as a field that speaks to multiple disciplines.

Tension 3: Defining a coherent epistemological core and topical foci

To move towards that goal, we suggest a research core for LIS that could help us develop a program for future research and education, better cohere our field, and increase its support for community information needs.

First, we must clarify what defines research innovation in LIS. Research reflects current practices, interests, and research problems in a field, and innovation defines a positive direction for that research. Like the “grand challenges” that the FHP report promotes, central problems take years, if not decades of research to address, but they also change as the field changes. What then is LIS as a research domain now, and how is it related to librarianship? Answering this question involves taking a hard look at the current research programs of LIS faculty and students, and how that research intersects with interested stakeholders. Librarianship is a part of that, not just because of LIS’s historical origins in librarian practice, but because library faculty conduct research on particular topics of interest to their profession, academia, and society more broadly.

A robust formulation of the role of librarianship in LIS would account for the following:

- 1) Aside from the aforementioned institutional contexts, what core functions, values, and goals can we distill from GLAM studies? What does librarianship hope to accomplish, and what methods does it use? What research furthers those goals?
- 2) What questions and methods will continue to engage future students, other disciplines, and society more broadly?
- 3) Should our future research continue to innovate primarily within LIS and its attendant institutions? Should future research focus on epistemological, theoretical, and methodological contributions to or influences on other disciplines and fields? Perhaps a balance of each?
- 4) Should the field continue to focus on innovations in practice within LIS institutions and knowledge repositories?
- 5) Should the instrumental “use” of library spaces, resources, audiences, and skills (“teaching science, engineering, computer science, etc. in libraries”) count as library innovation?

We should better define the problems we want to solve, how they connect to local or institutional (field-based) contexts, and how global or societal or pan-human they are. This requires deliberate work: weaving stronger theoretical connections among our proliferation of disparate disciplinary strands. Without these connections, LIS research will stagnate and be overtaken by other, more well-defined fields of research.

As we understand it, typically, the “IS” field has been defined around the intersection of:

- 1) Information/data: The nature and processes of information being created, communicated, stored, and/or transformed; including knowledge organization, knowledge representation, information representation, and related standards and constructs.
- 2) People: The people who interact with the content, including the creators of information, recipients of information, or intermediaries in the communication process; including community stakeholders, and community, societal and cultural ecosystems, at a variety of scales and units of measurement.
- 3) Technology: The technology used to support the creation, communication, storage, or transformation of the content, from analog to AI technologies.

As a partial answer to the questions about the LIS core above, we suggest the following set of topics as a distinctive epistemological core, with the combined elements of people, information, data, knowledge, and technology woven throughout. In some cases, these are distinctive areas of work, but they are also lenses that LIS researchers take on to study a range of other subject domains (in no particular order):

- 1) Assessing and understanding information needs (community/individual assessment)
- 2) Understanding and building knowledge infrastructures
- 3) Facilitating information seeking, use, and access
- 4) Knowledge organization
- 5) Knowledge representation
- 6) Information systems, infrastructures, and environments
- 7) Information ethics and values
- 8) Information in communities and societies
- 9) Public access to data and information
- 10) Information practices and behaviors
- 11) Information quality
- 12) Information and data literacies
- 13) Information sovereignty
- 14) Information preservation and stewardship

The FHP report urges us to make our contributions more visible, but then dwells on LIS's historical contributions and the roots of the field. We suggest amplifying not only LIS's historical roots, including foundational contributions to computing and information, but also our continuous, equal, and inverse emphasis on people, communities, and values-driven research. LIS has often started with particular information practices or technologies to consider how they affect people or can be used in particular communities. So much of librarianship is about facilitating information access and seeking within the public. When we look beyond library spaces, however, we can see these information needs in communities can be met without people necessarily coming to physical libraries—various kinds of civic data access and use are possible online, over the phone, and within other spaces and can be understood as constituting a type of library-inflected practice. We see a diversifying ecosystem of information provision and access, and an increasing range of organizational and community contexts in which we must advance the core goals and values of LIS.

Instead of focusing primarily on the development of technologies (as many programs now do), we suggest that LIS should recenter its epistemological and pedagogical focus on people and communities, developing and improving the information, data, systems, and technologies that will meet their needs:

From: Information, data, and technology → People and communities
To: People and communities → Information, data, and technology

This more complex “re-turn” to the user would leverage the historical strengths of LIS while offering a more nuanced, forward-looking perspective that puts critical context and communities at the fore. It is inclusive of a wider range of IS research projects and better reflects changing definitions of librarianship, which includes digital access to information and a wider scope of possibilities for how that access is provided (i.e., not necessarily through libraries alone, but also platforms, databases, other information institutions).

Tension 4: Future directions for Maryland (and perhaps beyond)

We agree with the initial recommendations of the FHP papers for ensuring the continued success of LIS as a field, although we think that improvements that reflect the epistemological core, that we defined above, are required. At our institution, these are our plans and attempts to implement the FHP suggestions. Much work remains to be done.

A primed pipeline

The FHP authors suggest that LIS needs to build richer pools of applicants and increase retention for doctoral programs and tenure-track faculty careers. Although we are not universally convinced that the pipeline (supply side) is the core problem, we envision the following at Maryland and have begun taking the following steps at different levels:

- 1) Reevaluating the structure of our masters' and doctoral programs, surveying faculty and students in order to design more effective culminating experiences and pre-dissertation assessments that serve students and faculty across disciplines equitably without sacrificing rigor.
- 2) Strategically expanding connections to students in HBCU/MSI institutions through research collaborations.

Research reciprocity

The FHP authors suggest centering LIS within interdisciplinary research centers or other research enterprises within iSchools. At Maryland we are trying to ensure:

- 1) Involving LIS faculty in most of the school's research centers and groups, including the [Maryland Initiative for Digital Accessibility \(MIDA\)](#), the [Community, Equity, Data, and Information Lab \(CEDI\)](#), the [Center for Archival Futures \(CAFe\)](#), and the [Social Data Science Center \(SoDa\)](#), as founders and continuing collaborators.
- 2) Using internal seed funding mechanisms and other research support services to promote interdisciplinary collaboration, and prime the pump for larger grant applications beyond the university.
- 3) Providing resources and support for LIS faculty to pursue funding from a greater diversity of funders and programs across disciplines, including through interdisciplinary collaboration.
- 4) Developing and reinforcing mutually beneficial connections and collaborations among faculty regardless of track, including both faculty across the iSchool and in Libraries (e.g. through our LIS Pedagogy Google group and other LIS faculty convenings).

An evolved body politic

The FHP authors suggest establishing governance approaches that support navigation of the differing disciplinary expectations and ensure balance among tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty. At Maryland we are:

- 1) Hiring both TTK (tenure-track) and PTK (professional track) in LIS disciplines.
- 2) Improving promotion pathways for PTK faculty to promote equity.
- 3) Defining workload requirements for faculty, paying particular attention to unequal (and inequitable), invisible, and non-promotable service work that faculty across domains undertake, including community- and practitioner-engaged service work.

LIS values for all

The FHP authors believe that LIS' disciplinary values (e.g., "access to information, information integrity, information ethics") should connect disciplines, and the field should embed those values, despite political opposition, as part of our core practices—how we mentor, do governance, evaluate, etc.). At Maryland we are:

- 1) Enacting all of the practices above as demonstrations of LIS values.
- 2) Working to build a faculty and student culture of respect and material expression of value across programs and subfields.

LIS core in our primary educational programs

As we discussed above, LIS is such a vibrant community because LIS values and practices reach across so many different disciplines. We believe that our definition of an epistemic core for LIS that includes those disciplines suggests further actions that LIS faculty can take to build our field.

First, we want to make LIS epistemological and methodological perspectives more visible at more levels of education, as a buttress to and vector of impact for our research in the following ways:

- 1) **MLIS and LIS:** As an interdisciplinary research area, LIS should think beyond its commitment to our flagship professional master's program and consider how LIS foundational intellectual contributions and research areas can speak more strongly to undergraduate and doctoral education. This will require acknowledging the shifting landscape of employment for MLIS-degreed library workers as requirements for ALA Accredited MLIS degrees decline. At Maryland we are simultaneously seeking to grow research-oriented field study, capstone, internship, and assistantship opportunities for MLIS students, in partnership with a wide range of knowledge organizations, to graduate a growing number of MLIS students with research experience and skill. At the same time, we offer LIS-focused research fellowships and assistantships that invite participation from students across master's and undergraduate programs at the college, helping to diffuse LIS core concerns into research experiences for a wider population of students.
- 2) **Undergraduate education:** It is our goal to infuse LIS deeper into the core of undergraduate education here at Maryland to promote its visibility and impact as a research area. The curriculum already reflects some LIS core areas and values, but there are unrealized opportunities to make the intellectual foundations of LIS more central, bringing it into deeper conversation with the more dominant disciplinary modes, e.g., data science, HCI/UX, and information management, in the undergraduate curriculum at UMD. More inclusion of LIS in the undergraduate curriculum will promote it as an area of research and education that is broadly impactful across sectors, including in the eyes of university administrators, students, parents, employers, and a much broader swath of iSchool alumni. Increasing undergraduate engagement in research is a priority for the university, so that is also a way of drawing additional research attention and new, more diverse researchers into LIS concerns.
- 3) **Doctoral education:** When surveyed, very few current doctoral students at UMD listed LIS as their core area of interest but several listed areas that might be considered subfields or adjacent to LIS (LIS=6/81; Information justice, Human Rights, and Technology Ethics=21; Digital humanities=12; Youth experience=4; Digital archives=2; Information Literacy=2). This is probably a reflection of the doctoral curriculum and recruitment. This raises the question of how to amplify methods that are LIS "flavored" and inject LIS theory and concepts into the core doctoral curriculum. We are improving doctoral methods courses and seminars to do so, but

we still need to prepare instructors from diverse disciplinary backgrounds to take part in that project—creating shared core concepts and envisioning LIS as a collective project that doctoral students are building together.

Conclusion

We explored many metaphors as we formulated a response to the FHP: cores, threads, foundations, foci, lenses, and the process of marbling paper. Marbling takes many patterns and forms, often beginning with a central drop of ink on water and the addition of other colors into the center looking like a gobstopper candy or a cross-section of a planet. A thin instrument like a toothpick or metal rod then pulls the ink layers gently through each other, forming multicolored, swirling patterns. The original colors remain but take on new shapes and complexity—the original core and arrangement of layers is hard or impossible to discern in the new pattern. Perhaps iSchools are like this—we pull ourselves, our work, our students, our ethics, values, research questions, methods, collaborators, and audiences—into complex swirls of color and pattern unlike anything a single drop of color can produce on its own.

University of Washington Information School



The Center for Advances in Libraries, Museums, and Archives (CALMA) at the University of Washington (UW) Information School facilitated two discussion sessions, on April 19 and May 17, 2024, with a group of five UW iSchool faculty, which included both research and teaching faculty at various stages of their careers from assistant to tenured professor. Below is a summary of perspectives and insights shared during these discussions in response to the LIS Forward position paper, *Ensuring a Vibrant Future for LIS in iSchools*.

Centering LIS Values & the Identity Challenge of LIS in iSchools

The session began with a robust discussion of the LIS Forward position paper's central proposition:

“ The iSchool's choices regarding its investments across disciplines and academic programs, will have serious consequences for the field of LIS and the library profession. Grounding our school in LIS values can unite different disciplinary traditions and fortify a vibrant, cross-disciplinary environment to address society's most pressing information challenges. (LIS Forward, 2023)

In discussing LIS values, it was noted how the position paper uses the terms “libraries” and “librarianship” in a holistic sense to encompass libraries, museums, archives, and repositories. However, one faculty member pointed out that libraries, museums, and archives often hold distinct values, and that these values often shift according to different cultural understandings regarding information. For instance, the American Library Association's (ALA) core value of access can be problematic from an Indigenous perspective where certain information is restricted according to cultural protocols. This illustrates how defining and understanding LIS values in a coherent manner poses its own challenges on top of the identity challenge of LIS within iSchools. At the same time, another faculty member noted how many in the LAM (libraries, museums, archives) sphere do share a common set of values and ethics that stems from a human-centered perspective oriented toward social justice. These common values help distinguish LIS from other STEM-oriented disciplines such as computer science and engineering. They also noted how PhD students and faculty who come to iSchools from those disciplines can lack grounding in these values and, in some cases, be woefully behind in conversations around diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion. This same faculty member echoed the fear highlighted in the report that as iSchools become increasingly dominated by STEM disciplines they are losing their grounding in LIS values and run the risk of adopting less progressive academic standards as a result.

Another faculty member agreed that grounding iSchools in a common set of values is important, but was wary of the approach advocated for in the LIS Forward position paper. This faculty member took issue with the pervasive sense that the entire report allied most strongly with the “L” of LIS. Rather than pursue a top-down approach where LIS values are imposed on iSchools, this faculty member advocated for creating a set of collectively held values. They felt it was important to recognize that

most iSchool faculty and researchers, even those from STEM disciplines, choose to work in an iSchool over other academic departments and units because they already hold values centered on supporting the social good, caring for users, and making a positive impact—similar to those espoused by ALA’s list of core values for librarianship. This faculty member noted how this identity crisis with LIS and iSchools has been a constant throughout their nearly three decades in the field, perpetuated by the unresolved tension between the desire to change and an unwillingness to let go. Rather than figure out something new, “we retreat back to our foundations in the ‘L’ of libraries,” which becomes “the chain that binds us and stops us from becoming something truly new and different.” Instead, this faculty member advocated for “creating and identifying a shared set of values together as an iSchool rather than strapping them to librarianship from the start.”

At the same time, this faculty member acknowledged the importance of the historical roots of iSchools in LIS, but that this fact should not prevent LIS within iSchools from embracing change. They noted how iSchools tend to attract misfits or those who didn’t quite fit into the boxes imposed by their initial disciplines of study, such as human-computer interaction (HCI) scholars originally from computer science and engineering programs. They described this misfit label as a strength of iSchools, where faculty can offer fresh, unbounded perspectives that can lead to innovative solutions to information problems. With this in mind, they iterated their call for the iSchool to “establish our own identity collectively, which will look a little different from data science or HCI or LIS... You cannot be interdisciplinary and remain what you were before.”

In response, another faculty member mused whether new faculty and researchers from non-LIS disciplines come to an iSchool environment with a strong sense of LIS values rather than having to learn them along the way. Others remarked how they appreciate the interdisciplinary nature of iSchools, and how, “I want there to be many voices in the room, but when there’s so few of us that have training in information sciences, we’re vastly outnumbered or put in the role of educating our colleagues about the discipline we’re all supposed to work in.” This burden on LIS faculty of having to educate non-LIS faculty about what they do, is often doubled or tripled for faculty with marginalized identities, especially faculty of color. One faculty member believed this additional labor leaves LIS faculty with less time and space to devote to research in comparison to non-LIS faculty in disciplines such as HCI. Given these interdisciplinary tensions, the faculty group affirmed that as the field grows and adds more subfields and diversity, it will be important to continually find commonalities and foster mutual understanding and respect among the range of disciplinary traditions and professional backgrounds within iSchools. At the same time, the group believed that librarianship will be strengthened by this growing diversity and interdisciplinarity.

Given the importance and difficulty in defining LIS values, one faculty member felt that it was more important to focus on cultivating LIS skills rather than splitting hairs over a discussion of values. Another faculty member shared a similar idea, stating:

“Of course I agree that LIS values are integral to the iSchool—and that they genuinely do differentiate us from departments like Computer Science—but I worry that an excessive focus on abstract values will only further diminish the equally integral intellectual core of LIS. For example, during my own time at the UW iSchool and in the UW MLIS program, I have realized that expertise in areas like classification, metadata, curation, preservation, and appraisal is urgently important (and worryingly lacking) in many technical, data-related fields. I think it would be smart to identify a range of LIS-specific intellectual contributions and foundations that we could point to and list out when we are advocating for its significance.

LIS Foundations & Priming the Pipeline

The group strongly affirmed not only the need to preserve LIS foundations but integrate them more holistically within iSchools, especially at the PhD level. The assembled faculty noted how the erasure of LIS foundations and epistemic dismissal of LIS described in the Early Career Faculty Perspectives chapter of the report is happening at the UW as well. For new PhD students with an LIS focus at the UW, they encounter HCI as the dominant culture in the program and either shift in that direction or become increasingly isolated. The group reflected that, as described in the report, the alienation and devaluing of LIS at the doctoral level negatively impacts the faculty pathway at UW iSchool. In particular, they observed a real lack of understanding of the roots and historical foundations of LIS in the PhD program. They noted how significant figures in the LIS field aren't being taught as the faculty often teaching these core courses usually don't hold an LIS background. One faculty member raised the possibility that if significant figures of LIS aren't properly taught and valued, this foundational knowledge could disappear over time. Another faculty member highlighted how faculty teaching at the PhD level need to understand the importance of valuing LIS and to correct instances in the classroom when students from non-LIS backgrounds may dismiss LIS research and its validity. To this point, the group discussed that a longer onboarding process for new faculty would be beneficial. This onboarding process should introduce and reinforce LIS foundations and emphasize to new faculty that all areas of research within the iSchool, even those that may look quite different from their own, are equally valued and worthy of investment and attention.

Regarding the position paper's first directive of "a primed pipeline," one faculty member described how the term pipeline doesn't sit well from an Indigenous perspective. The term pipeline raises associations with oil pipeline projects such as the Dakota Access Pipeline that infringe upon the sovereign rights of Indigenous nations and tribes. It also conjures the concept of school-to-prison pipeline. The term pipeline elicits an image of rigidity and singularity that someone must conform to. They offered pathways as a better word choice, as it reflects plurality, openness, and offers a stronger sense of agency to the person charting their path through academia. The group agreed with this suggestion and that the term pipeline is perhaps reflective of the more harmful aspects of academia that make pursuing an LIS-focused PhD less attractive.

In considering how to strengthen some these PhD and faculty pathways for UW MLIS students, one early career faculty member offered the following ideas:

- More explicit support for directed research with faculty, whether by integrating it into MLIS coursework or by providing dedicated funding (for faculty and/or students) to do so.
- Incorporate more research-focused courses into the MLIS curriculum.
- Start mentorship programs with current iSchool PhD students.
- Offer LIS postdocs.

Beyond the PhD program, the group also noted how LIS is largely absent from the UW's Informatics undergraduate program, which is a missed opportunity given both the program's growth and popularity, and its position in students' potential pathways toward LIS research and graduate programs. The group noted how the undergraduate program would benefit from an introduction to cultural heritage and digital humanities to better balance the technology-focused curriculum. They noted the importance of LIS faculty teaching foundational undergraduate courses in order to help introduce LIS intellectual contributions and foundations, which stands in contrast to the perspective shared by the authors of the Early Career Faculty Perspectives chapter.

Looking at academia at large, the group also noted how current PhD students see the burnout, personal sacrifices, and overwork that current faculty experience, which discourages them from pursuing faculty positions. It was noted how getting hired at an R1 Institution requires higher benchmarks every passing year, especially in comparison to one or two decades ago. The group strongly agreed that current evaluation metrics within iSchools need to better support the differing norms, expectations, and criteria that pervade different disciplines, especially LIS—a perspective shared by the position paper. Ultimately, a number of the faculty see academia heading in an unhealthy direction, which will require significant structural and systemic change to address.

Research Reciprocity & Evolving the iSchool Body Politic

In line with the position paper, the group affirmed how the interdisciplinarity of iSchools creates challenges for LIS researchers, as the different disciplines within iSchools hold different criteria, norms, and expectations, especially among STEM, social sciences, and humanities. One faculty member observed that “being in a less-defined environment like an iSchool exacerbates those challenges (say than in a more defined discipline like chemistry).” They noted how in an iSchool, these criteria and expectations are often unclear—especially for early career faculty—and based on the priorities and disciplinary backgrounds of those in leadership positions. This same faculty member also noted how “A frustration is that all of us who come from LIS understand how research works in other disciplines encompassed within the iSchool, but that understanding isn’t reciprocated—making LIS work feel undervalued.” This issue is reflected on the hiring side, where not only are LIS faculty more likely to be hired to teach than conduct research, but that non-LIS folks on the hiring committee are also less likely to see the value in hiring LIS research faculty. In many ways, the discussion around the position and understanding of LIS research in iSchools and the field at large came down to a need for mutual respect among different disciplines and greater understanding of different forms of research.

At the same time, the group affirmed the need for LIS research to cut across multiple disciplines as outlined in the report. One faculty member emphasized the importance of LIS researchers venturing out and participating in new and different conferences beyond LIS to help encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration. In a similar vein, the group noted that within LIS research, the relationship between researchers and practitioners needs to move beyond a transactional relationship to a more meaningful and collaborative relationship, with practitioners and LAMs being seen as valuable and active research partners.

However, it was also recognized that LIS research must be rigorous within an understanding of the validity of qualitative and community-based research practices. One faculty member who has published in a variety of HCI and LIS journals over the years noted a difference in the quality of reviews from LIS journals in comparison to HCI conferences. They noted how HCI conferences seem to have a more diverse, dynamic and higher-quality review process than LIS journals, which further marginalizes LIS and how it’s perceived by other fields. This faculty member called for more intellectual rigor with reviews for LIS journals and raised the question, how can iSchools mentor LIS PhDs to become more rigorous reviewers? At the same time, the group discussed the limited grant funding opportunities for LIS research, which exacerbates this issue of rigor. Supporting LIS faculty with larger start-up packages and more internal funding opportunities were offered as potential solutions alongside a more robust research services department that could work with faculty to help secure new funding sources. Overall, the group agreed that the iSchool’s ability to meaningfully incentivize, resource, and support LIS research would be a key method for demonstrating and reinforcing the value of LIS at the iSchool.

In wrapping up the discussion and considering the position of LIS in iSchools, one faculty member noted:

“...the LIS Forward argument was most compelling when it was made clear that “libraries” and “librarianship” were being used as holistic terms to describe “libraries, museums, archives, and repositories—the institutions and professions dedicated to information collection, access, and stewardship of knowledge.” It’s further notable that this point was foregrounded by the early-career faculty, who represent the future of the field. I think LIS Forward will generate the most power and traction when this fuller range of institutions and professions is consistently named and included. And I might even add “cultural heritage” to the mix. I feel like there’s a concern that libraries, specifically, will get lost within this broader mix, but I personally think there’s greater strength—and less possibility of denying the significance of the area—when terms are framed more broadly.

Ultimately, the faculty group affirmed that the identity of the iSchool—and what excites them most about being in an iSchool—is interdisciplinarity. The ability for iSchools to truly foster an interdisciplinary environment underscores the need for the iSchool to cultivate a culture of genuine curiosity and connection among and across disciplines, and to dismantle frameworks of governance that create silos and fragmentation. Within the UW iSchool, certain faculty noted how certain governance structures around merit review, affinity groups, and evaluation unintentionally encourage siloing, which weakens a sense of a broad and inclusive community. The faculty group identified that deans in particular have a critical role to play in helping correct the devaluing and marginalization of LIS, but pointed out how deans and those in other high-level positions in iSchools often lack an LIS background. The group also affirmed the importance of knowing what other iSchools are doing, what’s working and not working, especially in terms of governance. They noted that holding structured exchanges among iSchools for different groups including students, faculty and deans would be highly beneficial to help share strategies, ideas, and insights. From the discussions, it was clear that LIS in iSchools would benefit from a variety of investments aimed to cultivate a deeper sense of relationality and mutual respect among disciplines.

University of Toronto

Faculty of Information



Siobhan Stevenson, Jenna Hartel, Patrick Keilty, Silvia Vong

The following document contains the responses of four professors at the University of Toronto's iSchool to the LIS Forward position paper. These include Associate Professors Jenna Hartel, Patrick Keilty, and Siobhan Stevenson, and Assistant Professor Silvia Vong. Each of us read the document, and have considered the discussion prompts. Due to time constraints, we engaged with the materials independent of each other, except for a brief exchange over email. Below are our individual responses.

Siobhan Stevenson

Unpacking this thing called "library and information science"

My overriding concern is the untroubled deployment of the concept of library and information science as if its meaning as a field of research and professional practice is transparent and obvious, rather than contested and, in 2024, somewhat ambiguous if not misleading. My comments are a product of my experiences as a professor and researcher in LIS, specializing in public librarianship.

Every fall, I am faced with 140 first year LIS students who, when asked why LIS, invariably respond with some combination of: happy childhood memories, a love of books and reading, and the MI (Master of Information) will afford them an immediate salary increase and upgrade their status from clerk to librarian. Certainly, all of them are enthusiastic about the importance of public service. The assumptions underlying their visions of work seem to center on direct daily contact with patrons to fulfill their information needs or active engagement in original cataloguing that will correct for the cultural, social, and racial biases of the LCSH.

Having crossed Canada three times over the past 20 years to conduct empirical research into the changing nature of work in public libraries (who does what, when, where, and how), I can say with confidence that these students' imaginings, while not wrong, are out of step with the reality. Today, paraprofessionals (many with college diplomas and/or undergraduate and graduate degrees) are hired to do much of the work formerly reserved for the professional librarian. Indeed, the students in my courses who do work in libraries are already providing reference and reader's advisory services. Yes, Google did forever change reference, and copy cataloguing depopulated technical service departments, meanwhile paraprofessionals freed by automated circulation systems represent a rich pool of surplus labour.

When we talk about the "library" within the context of "library and information science," what exactly are we referring to? Further in what ways does library and information science inform the professional occupation practiced within the academic or public library space? Job descriptions and titles have evolved to fit with contemporary conditions, but how essential is this job class or the need for an ALA accredited master's degree?

Librarianship emerged in response to the material scarcity of an analog world, from ancient tablets and scrolls to medieval manuscripts, through to reference books, 16 mm film, LPs, cassettes, videos, DVDs and CDs, etc. During this period, personal ownership of these materials was beyond the range of what most people could afford, let alone house. In that analog world and the early days of automation, librarians were an essential link in making accessible the contents contained within physical artifacts. Two years of graduate study in library science was the minimum time required to master the esoteric and specialized knowledges necessary for: (a) conducting reference interviews that assisted people in extracting the information they needed from a wall of indexes, compendiums, atlases, almanacs, encyclopedias, dictionaries, etc., (b) selecting (title by title) materials to create a balanced and representative collection for their communities, and (c) cataloguing those same materials to ensure multiple access points to content, and to manage a dynamic inventory.

Today, we live in a digital world of media saturation and ubiquity where a scarcity of content no longer holds, thus calling into question the specialized knowledge and practices once associated with reference, collections development, and cataloguing. Further, most of our best library systems are opening food kitchens, providing access to showers and meals, distributing winter clothing and toiletries, and even wedding dresses, as per a piece in the *New Yorker* (May 20, 2024) entitled “Say yes to the dress” with the byline, “A New Jersey librarian named Adele Puccio matches brides with pre-owned wedding gowns, from her office near Current Nonfiction.” In the past fifteen years, library leaders have been hiring social workers and public health nurses to support an influx of vulnerable, oppressed, and often homeless patrons. This is all great stuff, but what is it about the work of the modern library that demands a professionally trained librarian? What unique jurisdictional knowledge does a professional librarian bring to the contemporary context; skills that do not exist anywhere else? Where are we drawing our professional boundaries today?

On a related theme around jurisdictional knowledge, consider the following. UoT (University of Toronto) houses one of the largest academic libraries in North America. For the last fifteen years, our iSchool and the University of Toronto Libraries (UTL) have partnered to create an academic library internship (TALint) where the top students admitted to the program are offered the opportunity to apply for one of 20 internships. These are highly coveted positions: two years in duration plus mentoring, professional development opportunities, and a competitive salary. For a number of students this is their entry into full-time academic library work. Students can come from any of our eight concentrations, of which LIS is one. Following a competitive process, most students who receive an internship are students in concentrations other than LIS. The most popular concentrations are User Experience & Design (UXD), Information Systems Design, and Archives and Records Management. What can we learn about the labour needs of today’s library when LIS students are not the go-to cohort for academic library internships?

Where to go from here?

There are threads of continuity between students currently enrolled in our LIS specializations and the world of public information infrastructures of which the traditional library was once a central part. I suggest shifting the focus of today’s library students from libraries to the world of public information policy (broadly defined). Here, they can leverage, to great effect, their innate senses of social justice, commitment to public service, and love of information onto an area of work desperate for professionals with the political, technical, and social knowledge necessary to engage meaningfully in a world where the information commons has never been more threatened.

But what about our libraries

Sure, the world needs librarians to counteract misinformation, false information, promote intellectual freedom, protect privacy, build systems, etc., but the institutions that once would do this work have been shedding librarians for years or fast-tracking them into management positions. I can only speak to public libraries, but a college diploma in library techniques or an undergraduate in LIS would surely be sufficient within today's physical library. Meanwhile, municipalities and higher levels of government will need public information policy professionals (formerly known as librarians) to help grow our smart cities in ways that benefit all citizens, now and into the future.

* I do feel that LIS as a history, intellectual tradition, and democratizing enterprise (and concomitant values) is vitally important today, I just wonder if it would be more valuable as the thread of continuity through all iSchool concentrations rather than its own thing...in this way the valuable traditions of LIS would remain foundational but also be reanimated through the range of other studies. Plus, students who want to work in libraries would then also have the technical chops and insights required to do some great things.

Jenna Hartel

LIS Forward asks "...How [do we] best position our research and education programs to lead the field and the future of libraries?"

I propose leveraging the LIS tradition of *information behaviour*, that is, "how people seek and use information." Information behaviour is one of our most sustained and original contributions to scholarship. It is an area with multiple large textbooks, theoretical and methodological traditions, articulate visionaries, and dedicated conferences. Information behaviour is *essential to all other iSchool specialties* and has both pure and applied aspects. Put metaphorically, information behaviour is like the hub of an Information Age wheel. My own Faculty has elevated information behaviour to a required LIS course, which attracts large enrollments (e.g. 140 students), and 40% of these are non-LIS students! In short, I believe *information behaviour* is a valuable resource for sustaining LIS going forward.

LIS Forward asks, "How do we attract more PhD applicants who are committed to a research intensive academic career in LIS?"

I propose adding more research experience at the master's level of our programs, thereby piquing curiosity and engendering research-oriented thinking at an early stage. While many students initially demand to learn only front-line library skills, they can be redirected. For the past ten years I have placed substantial original research projects at the center of all my LIS courses. More than a thousand recent LIS students have conducted information behaviour studies on populations and topics of their choice. Enthusiasm has been very high; many student papers have been published; and most students begin to self-identify as "researchers." These small-scale research projects have seeded master's thesis and doctoral aspirants, too.

Overall

The LIS Forward report did not specify the massive identity problem Library and Information Science has outside the iSchool domain. (Rather, emphasis was placed on the challenges to LIS *within* iSchools, which is a valid and more immediate pain-point.) Yet, the larger backdrops of higher education and the public at large are woefully short of appreciation for and understanding of LIS. This almost complete lack of recognition colors and amplifies the problems outlined so skillfully in the LIS Forward study. (The

Dean who joked about teaching LIS to elementary students was on the right track!) Personally, I have taken-up this issue with my educational YouTube channel [INFIDEOS](#), that aims to share the ideas of LIS with the world in playful, accessible video formats. We should call upon our professional organizations, such as ALISE and ASIS&T to develop better public-facing communications initiatives.

Patrick Keilty

I largely support this report and feel many aspects of it resonate with my experience as Faculty of Information (FOI). Here are some ways in which my experience as FOI slightly differs from the report:

PhD Admissions

Unlike other schools, FOI has enough PhD spots for applicants who do L-focused research. Our problem is that we get so few competitive applicants who want to do L-focused research, even compared to archives and museums. Some of the L-focused applications are simply poor quality. In addition, two years in a row, we've accepted two applicants to do L-research who decided against pursuing a PhD after being accepted and committing to the program. I will work to promote L-focused research as a central area of our PhD program this year when we plan our recruitment. I am already brainstorming ways to promote our PhD program to our LIS students. However, promotional efforts are not a silver-bullet solution. This will only partially address the problem.

Diversity

While we can always do better, among the five core LIS faculty in FOI, two are women of color and another is openly gay. And lots of our LIS students take courses from a diverse range of faculty at FOI. Every recent hiring cluster has hired a majority of people of color, including this past year's hiring cluster. We're more diverse than a lot of other iSchools and LIS faculty. Nevertheless, we will continue to prioritize diversity in our hiring. I agree *entirely* that we need to increase diversity among our LIS students. We have scholarships for EDI, but we need to think of better ways to diversify the profession. You all know how hard I have pushed for this over the years. Let's redouble our efforts.

Curriculum

The challenge with this suggestion is that a general LIS course at the PhD program level won't fill many seats. This is true even if someone were doing L-related research because they often come in with advanced library knowledge already and have done a lot of L-courses in their Master's. The most popular courses at the PhD level cut across research areas and attract a range of students. That said, I want more GLAM courses generally in the PhD curriculum, including an L-focused class. The bigger problem I face is that few faculty members follow through on their desire to create such courses. I have found this very frustrating. If someone wants to offer an L-focused course, there is no impediment to making it happen other than their own inertia.

Faculty research opportunities with libraries

Most of Siobhan Stevenson and Nadia Caidi's (Professor, FOI) work does this already. Some of my work does, too. The GLAM Incubator is another opportunity FOI provides for faculty to engage with libraries and conduct L-focused research. I don't know of any other iSchool with a similar initiative to the GLAM Incubator. It is one of a kind. It could be a model for other iSchools. Its profile is growing, too. One thing that helped raise the GLAM Incubator's profile this year is that Emily Drabinski, the ALA President, tweeted about it after giving a talk here. The GLAM Incubator has had a lot of applications this year already—and the deadline isn't until August.

Silvia Vong

Talent pipeline

UTFA's recent negotiation gives UTL librarians access to full tuition coverage for PhDs. There's a potential here to encourage professionals (some who already do research) to obtain a PhD. From my experience working with ACRL, it's encouraged that professionals pursue a PhD.

Empower MLIS students to pursue PhDs

The encouragement of pursuing PhDs as a practising professional is more feasible. Folks are ready to enter the field and while in the field, they develop specializations and interests which can be further developed during a PhD. I do a lot of mentoring and I often advise my mentees to consider a PhD in their mid-career if their university covers the costs and gives release time.

Culture of PhD admissions

The social sciences are also a big area of potential. Nearby institutions such as YorkU and TMU have strong social justice-related programs that connect well with LIS. Another consideration is that a lot of LIS practitioners obtain PhDs in Education (I'm one of them!). You may be able to increase admissions if there is a collaborative specialization (see [OISE](#)).

About the contributors

Jenna Hartel, PhD, Associate Professor

Jenna is a theorist, methodologist, historian, and educator of Information Science at the University of Toronto's iSchool. Her lifelong motivating question has been: What is the nature of information in the pleasures of life? To that end, Jenna has championed information research into "higher things in life," especially information-rich domains of serious leisure, like hobbies. An enthusiast of multimodality and creative expression, she has introduced visual, photographic, and arts-informed methods into Information Science. Jenna's latest adventure, the YouTube channel INFIDEOS, features 100+ original, outrageously playful, educational videos about Information Science. She is the recipient of SIG-USE's Innovation Award (2013) and Outstanding Information Behaviour Research Award (2022); ALISE's Excellence in Teaching Award (2016) and Pratt-Severn Faculty Innovation Award (2022); and the ASIS&T Outstanding Information Science Teacher Award (2023).

Patrick Keilty, PhD, Associate Professor

Patrick works across two knowledge domains; his primary residence is at the iSchool but he is also associated with the Cinema Studies Institute at the University of Toronto. Prior to academia, he worked in libraries and archives in the U.S. and U.K., including the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library at UCLA, the Library of Congress, the American Library Association's Washington Office, and the Westminster Archives Centre in London, U.K. From 2018–2023, he was Archives Director of the University of Toronto's Sexual Representation Collection. His research interests focus on the politics of digital infrastructures in the sex industries and the materiality of sexual media.

Siobhan Stevenson, PhD, Associate Professor

Siobhan has been at the iSchool since 2005. That same year, she earned her PhD in LIS from the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at Western University (London, Ontario). Prior to doing her PhD, she worked as a library professional (MLIS) for over twenty years in the public library sector. In her final professional position, she contributed to the development of province-wide strategic plans on behalf of Ontario Canada's 260 public library boards. Her research interests include labor conditions in public libraries, educating for public librarianship, and the health and safety of frontline library workers. Most recently she conducted a Canada-wide study of public library social work and is currently completing an integrated literature review of the topic from a critical policy perspective. This project has generated several serious questions regarding the relevance of public librarianship as a bona fide professional occupation using a sociology of professions framework. Prior to her professional work, she worked her way up in the public library sector, from page, to clerk, to clerk caretaker.

Silvia Vong, ABD (expected Dec. 2024), Assistant Professor

Silvia Vong is an assistant professor at the iSchool at the University of Toronto. She was a professional librarian for 15 years in various roles at different Canadian universities ranging from liaison librarian to head of public services to associate dean of scholarly, research, and creative activities. Her experience in teaching, collections, scholarly communications, and management contributed to her research as a professional in critical management studies in librarianship. Silvia's doctoral research in the higher education program at the University of Toronto examines new public management accountability practices and its impact on EDI in Canadian universities. Her study draws on the experiences of faculty and librarians in EDI leadership roles via interviews and document analysis.

Rutgers University Library & Information Science Department



1. Background

The Rutgers University Library and Information Science (LIS) Department and iSchool contributes this Response to the LIS Forward report by invitation of the drafters. The report advocates for establishment of a deliberately considered interdisciplinary balance among iSchools leadership decision-making and strategic development that maintains and preserves LIS librarianship-focused research and educational priorities in the midst of STEM and computing sub-disciplinary areas' growth in iSchools. The report refers to HCI, data science, and AI as areas that garner significant federal funding priorities and substantial support from universities in decision-making around hiring approvals and curriculum development. The report asserts:



Schools of library and information science led the establishment of the iSchool movement 20 years ago. . . As iSchools balance investments across a growing range of disciplines and academic programs, their choices have serious consequences for the field of LIS and the library profession. Library-centric research and education can be diluted or diminished, or it can be reinforced and enriched. LIS Forward is our investment in shifting the tides toward the latter (Friday Harbor Papers, p. 5).

Here in the Rutgers LIS department, we ongoingly consciously engage with these developments as a faculty, in all aspects of our work. Interestingly, for the last 15 years, our department has largely been led by senior scholars of librarianship in the Chair role. While we have maintained our LIS research areas, in tandem, we have expanded our computing research faculty; Data Science, HCI, and AI areas have been central to our hiring priorities and department's growth and development. Meanwhile, as we experience new retirements and address our staffing and curricular needs, we have also centered librarianship, archives, and preservation in our most recent searches. Further, at the individual level, several of our existing faculty also keenly bridge sub-fields like librarianship, critical informatics, digital humanities, computational, socio-technical, social, and humanistic domains in their interdisciplinary research and field site contexts of work.

We embrace the spirit of interdisciplinary boundary discourse that invites a momentous, deliberate centering of what the report describes as "LIS Research." We recognize the need for this conscious deliberation to continue. We also recognize we all still have more work to do, as we set an advantageous balance that meets many diverse potentials across areas. Similar to other iSchools, our faculty composition changes with new entering and departing faculty cohorts, creating evolving cultural department dynamics. The collective drafting of this document involving several current LIS research faculty has created the opportunity for us to reflect more deeply, and consider still-existing gaps and needed improvements.

Overall, we support the report's main tenets. Our response document aims to articulate facets of our department's LIS Research identity, our ongoing deep commitment to LIS research and educational excellence, and some of our strengths in these areas, and link to report pillars to showcase areas of alignment with many elements of our scholarly activities. We assert unequivocally that LIS research remains a core strategic priority for the Department among the full diversity of areas in the foreseeable future. As we further self-audit our efforts in the coming school year (2024/2025) and ongoing, we intend to explicitly address the report's goals and frameworks as benchmarks, while continuing to develop and implement important holistic department strategic directions as an iSchool.

1.1. Identity, 1: A Long History of LIS Research and Educational Excellence

The Department of Library and Information Science (LIS) at Rutgers University is one of three departments in the School of Communication and Information (SC&I) that also includes Communication, and Journalism and Media Studies, reflecting a convergence of disciplines driven by shared core values. The School has approximately 74 full-time faculty and 150 part-time faculty and includes 16 interdisciplinary collaborative research groups¹ creating a robust environment for research and learning within a Research 1 (R1) Big Ten university, where the ALA Core Values are fundamentally central to the school's mission. SC&I faculty study socio-technical systems, communication, information, and media processes as they affect individuals, institutions, organizations, and societies, and the complex relationships among them.

The LIS department's research and teaching are foundational to SC&I's efforts. We are an active founding member of the iSchools organization. The history of LIS education and research at Rutgers University is well established, beginning in 1927 as an undergraduate program in librarianship at the Rutgers New Jersey College for Women, now Douglass Residential College, with accreditation by the American Library Association for the undergraduate degree granted in 1929. In July 1953, the Graduate School of Library Service (GSL) was established at the University under the deanship of Professor Lowell Martin and admitted its first class of master's students. The school's first full graduate accreditation was granted by the American Library Association in 1956. The PhD program in Library Service was established in 1959. Rutgers University merged the Graduate School of Library and Information Studies with existing undergraduate departments of Communication and of Journalism into one entity in 1982.

1.2. Identity, 2: Progressive LIS and Socio-Technical Systems Research and Education

We are committed to the highest quality educational experience for aspiring library and information professionals and research scholars, driven by a research evidence base of expertise situated in the rich depth of knowledge among our faculty and the discipline at large.

1 **Centers:** Center for the International Study of School Librarianship [CISSL]; Center for Communication and Health Issues; Health, Humanities, Communications, and Informatics.

Clusters: SC&I Youth Cluster; Social Media and Society Cluster; Health and Wellness Cluster.

Labs: Behavioral Informatics Lab; Community Design for Health and Wellness; Community Health Action Lab; Computational Social Science Lab; HCI Lab for Health and Sustainability.

Working Groups: Digital Ethnography Working Group; Power and Inequality in Technology and Media.

- **VISION:** Enhancing human experience and quality of life in a dynamic information world, our goal is to pursue pre-eminence and leadership through boundary-breaking research and innovative professional and academic programs.
- **MISSION:** As scholars and educators in the Department of Library and Information Science, we believe that information makes a profound difference in the lives of people, communities and organizations. We undertake boundary-breaking research that seeks to understand and enhance people’s lives by enabling and supporting their interactions with information in whatever contexts and forms that may happen. We educate future-ready professionals in diverse information service and technology contexts. They are prepared to design, manage and evaluate systems and services that support people and communities’ interactions with information, and they play a leading role in enabling people to create, use, and preserve knowledge. They are people-centered in their work, critical and reflective thinkers, creative problem solvers, and effective communicators.

1.2.1. LIS Curricular Programs: Ph.D.

The Interdisciplinary Ph.D. doctoral program in Communication, Information, and Media (CIM) offers three areas of specialization for each of the three departments, serving three new doctoral cohorts each year. LIS is the founding and most long-standing doctoral area. The Ph.D. faculty in the Library and Information Science (LIS) area have categorized our key scholarly expertise into the following themes². We identify the bolded themes as fitting the bounds of “LIS research” per the report.

- Health Information and Technology
- **Human Information Behavior**
- Human-Computer Interaction
- **Information Institutions, Artifacts and Documents**
- **Information, Learning, and Technology**
- Information Retrieval and Language Analysis
- Social Computing and Data Science

One of the stated report goals is “Changing the culture of Ph.D. admissions.” Our admissions process among the faculty is democratic, and involves all faculty in a rigorous review and specifies egalitarian approaches to ensure representation of admits across all the themes above. In recent years we have taken specific measures to recruit and admit students from under-represented and minoritized groups, with support of special fellowship funds from the School and University. We’ve also welcomed LIS MI graduates now working in NJ/NY/PA tri-state area cultural institutions who focus on LIS research domains in their doctoral work. We accepted two such candidates with full funding into our doctoral cohort in 2024. We also strongly support the efforts of the i3 Inclusion Institute, which supports development of new researchers from underrepresented populations across all iSchools areas. In addition, we have admitted several practicing academic librarians in the LIS area in recent years, including several from Rutgers who bring experience with scholarly publication and strong promise of success, helping “prime the LIS pipeline.” In our upcoming years’ admissions cycles, we intend to strengthen our doctoral recruiting efforts through deliberate, conscious discussion and attendance to the report’s principles.

² All of these areas are described at the following link, with affiliated faculty identified:
<https://cominfo.rutgers.edu/graduate-programs/phd-program/areas-concentration/phd-lis-concentration>.

1.2.2. MI program

As the provider of the only accredited ALA graduate program in New Jersey, we educate information professionals for a diverse and changing field. We have sustained high rankings for our Master's program over the last 20 years, recognized again in the 2022 rankings by US News and World Report. Our MI program is ranked in the nation's Top 10; is #2 in the nation for School Library Media; #6 for Library and Information Studies; #6 for Digital Librarianship; #3 for Services for Children and Youth; and #10 for Information Systems. The current MI program has 6 areas of concentration: 1) Library & Information Science; 2) Archives & Preservation; 3) Data Science; 4) Technology, Information & Management; 5) Informatics & Design; and 6) Health and Wellness.

1.2.3. ITI undergraduate program

The LIS department has offered an undergraduate Information Technology and Informatics (IT&I) degree program since 2001, which has now grown to 900+ majors, the 5th largest major at Rutgers University. We also feature a 4+1 program for IT&I students who graduate with the addition of an MI degree, in ~5 years. Our IT&I curriculum offers socio-technical systems, social and critical informatics-based classes integrated strategically into our curriculum pathway to augment technical classes in areas such as data science, networking and IT, cybersecurity and HCI.

2. Alignment of LIS Research Focal Areas with Report Priorities

The Ph.D. program description above includes several themes in bold that reside in the report's conception of "LIS" as a disciplinary area. Our hiring priorities in recent years have spanned these areas including a recent focus on LIS scholars, with more to come. We have also engaged a variety of inclusivity, diversity, equity, and access approaches in our processes, across all categories. Here we further elaborate on our departmental expertise in these main thematic LIS Research areas, linking them to the report goals and priorities such as:

- Supporting community- and practitioner-focused research.
- Respecting diverse and variable funding avenues.
- Recognizing the labor of LIS teaching and student mentorship.
- Building peer support for LIS faculty.

These intersecting dimensions are integrated in the thematic narratives that follow. Indeed, recognizing the labor of LIS teaching and student mentorship is evident in Professor Radford's Spring 2024 award of the Rutgers University-wide, prestigious and competitive "Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Mentoring." It is also evident in the contributions of Professor Dalbello's doctoral advisees who are now shaping the field of LIS research, as leaders themselves, along with the advisees of several other faculty. Further, we note that most of the post-tenure faculty in LIS in our school are still at mid-level. Thus, the report's recommendation of "building peer support" among the faculty is and has been key. We aim to continue developing these priorities in our ongoing LIS faculty mentoring and support.

2.1. Human Information Behavior

Human Information Behavior examines how and why people seek out and use information in context and is often concerned with the development of models and theories of these interactions. This theme offers students the opportunity to study the interactions between people and information and emphasizes the human aspects of information and library services. These interactions are studied in a wide variety of contexts, such as the design and use of web search engines, collaborating with others in knowledge work, sharing in social networks, information seeking in everyday life, organizing personal or work information, relevance judgements, and evaluating information technologies to support people's information behaviors. Multiple LIS faculty members undertake research in information behavior, encompassing people's interactions with information at personal, social, institutional and cultural levels; including, but not limited to information seeking and retrieval; information use, sharing, and disclosure; information relevance and credibility judgements; and information marginalization and access.

Integral to our scholarly leadership in this area is Associate Professor Kaitlin Costello, who studies health information behavior and practices. Their research focuses on how patients seek out, use, and disclose health information with other patients in online communities, on social media, and in clinical settings. They also investigate social relevance assessments, including the structural, cognitive, and relational relevance appraisals people make when they seek out and share health information in online support groups, at both the community (macro) and individual (micro) levels (Costello, 2017; Costello, Martin, & Edwards, 2017). Findings from this line of work demonstrate that patients have an array of complex, thoughtful strategies that they use when they are verifying the credibility of something they have learned from other patients, and that they teach one another these skills (e.g., Costello & Veinot, 2020). Dr. Costello advises numerous master's and doctoral students, and is a known expert in the constructivist grounded theory methodology. Their recent work advances novel metatheoretical and methodological approaches to conducting information behavior research (Costello & Floegel, 2021; Floegel & Costello, 2022).

New to the Rutgers SC&I faculty as of fall of 2024, Professor Denise Agosto has been an LIS educator and scholar for more than two decades. Her research combines two Rutgers LIS focal areas: Human Information Behavior, and Libraries and Information Agencies. As information behavior scholar, Dr. Agosto studies the various ways in which young people interact with information and information technologies, and how to apply user-centered research to the design of public library services for young people. Her earliest work examined how young people evaluated content on the then-nascent web. She has since built on this work with a series of studies of youth information behavior, developing scholarly analyses, professional articles, and educational tools designed to teach librarians, teachers, and parents how to support young people's healthy development within dynamic—and often unpredictable—information ecosystems. Her research has been funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE), OCLC, and the Fulbright Scholar Program. Dr. Agosto teaches courses in Human Information Behavior at both the masters and doctoral levels at Rutgers. Her student-centered approach to LIS curriculum design and content delivery have been recognized with several major LIS teaching awards, including both the ALISE Award for Teaching Excellence in the Field of Library and Information Science Education and the ASIS&T Thomson Reuters Outstanding Information Science Teacher of the Year Award. In addition, Dr. Agosto has a long history of service to the LIS professional community. She currently serves as the Secretary Treasurer of ALISE. In that position she is working to bring many of the ideas presented in this report to the ALISE Board as it works on strategic planning.

2.2. Information Institutions, Artifacts and Documents

The Information Institutions, Artifacts and Documents research theme involves the study of socio-technical and socio-material dimensions of information systems, infrastructures, and institutions in an emergent and evolving political, legal, economic, social, and cultural framework that draws on sociological, historical, and technological approaches. Faculty recognize that these phenomena are complex and constructed through processes that require critical positions and reliance on a wide range of qualitative and quantitative methodologies to study their life cycles in the micro, medium, and macro-levels of society. Multiple LIS faculty members undertake research in related areas, including, but not limited to:

- Forms and document and media ecologies (artifacts) including the studies of institutions, knowledge production, transmission, and knowledge domains.
- History and cultures of the book, reading experience, and reading communities, material texts.
- Preservation and circulation of information.
- Theory of knowledge and social epistemology.
- Libraries and information agencies and their collections, and associated services.
- Intellectual property and information rights.
- Integrity, authority, and authenticity.

2.2.1. Libraries and Information Agencies

The focus on information agencies engages the societal, institutional, organizational, professional, historical, and foundational perspectives in the work of multiple faculty. We study the transformative aspects of librarianship. We emphasize social justice and ethical perspectives in our work. This concentration in our MI program has long reflected the largest enrollment.

Assistant Professor Emil Lawrence's work epitomizes the scholarly area of LIS Forward. His work is central to this departmental thematic area of expertise and offers transformative curricular innovations in the MI and IT&I programs. Dr. Lawrence's research centers on normative issues arising at the intersection of library & information ethics, readers and reading, and aesthetics. His work intervenes in interpretive disputes about the core values underpinning librarianship and what these values entail, particularly with respect to Readers' Advisory service (e.g., Lawrence, 2022, Lawrence, 2021; Lawrence, 2020). His current research asks how we ought to secure the freedom and autonomy of everyday readers in a non-ideal world (e.g., Lawrence, in press; Lawrence 2024). In an ongoing book project under contract with Cambridge University Press's *Publishing & Book Culture* series, Dr. Lawrence critiques the individualism of librarianship's going model of readerly autonomy, which he takes to be insufficiently attentive to the enabling and oppressive features of reading's complex social infrastructure. He argues that a feminist relational theory of autonomy can effectively address these objections. This research has informed a major restructuring of Dr. Lawrence's course on adult reading interests to foreground the structural inequities that constrain our freedom to read. Our department (and his faculty peers and students in the classroom) deeply value and recognize his pivotal role in innovating culturally responsive, sensitive and caring teaching, research, and service.

Associate Professor Charles Senteio focuses his health informatics research on describing drivers of inequity, at individual and structural levels, and his work seeks to inform the development and enhancement of innovative, scalable approaches to care delivery, with a particular emphasis on community-based participatory (CBPR) research strategies. For example, his work includes contemporary issues like AI bias and algorithmic fairness (Quion et al., 2023) along with persistent

structural issues regarding equitable representation and access to resources in health and wellness contexts (Osakwe et al., 2023; Adam et al., 2022). Dr. Senteio uses mixed methods to investigate how information can be collected and used to support both healthcare practitioners and patients to improve various chronic disease outcomes, such as chronic kidney disease, diabetes and dementia, specifically for patients at-risk of racially disparate health outcomes (Senteio & Murdock, 2022; Osakwe et al., 2021; Senteio & Ackerman, 2021; Senteio et al., 2021; Senteio & Akincigil, 2020; Senteio & Yoon, 2020). He has published work specifically describing racial inequity in clinical care (Hotez et al., 2021) and equity specific to LIS (Senteio et al., 2021; Senteio et al., 2021). He also has a master's in social work (MSW) and is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), and his work includes the expanding work of social work and librarianship. In addition to helping to spearhead Rutgers School of Social Work placement of undergraduate, masters, and PhD students in area public libraries and serving as their Field Instructor, he is a clinical therapist.

Professor Marie L. Radford has mentored scores of masters students, doctoral students, post-docs and faculty in LIS areas, is award-winning in her mentorship, and recognized field-wide for her thought leadership in librarianship. Her research focuses on interpersonal communication within library contexts, virtual and traditional reference service (VRS), and postmodern approaches to media stereotypes of librarians/libraries. A major part of her research agenda involves a longitudinal investigation of academic library reference services, especially live chat VRS. She is an expert in qualitative methods and has co-authored two editions of a highly rated scholarly LIS methods text (Connaway & Radford, 2021). With several doctoral students, she explores the impact of COVID closures on academic libraries (e.g., Costello, Radford, & Montague, 2022; Radford, Costello, & Montague, 2022). Dr. Radford is co-PI of the "Seeking Synchronicity" and "Cyber Synergy" grant projects funded by IMLS, Rutgers, and OCLC, which studied interpersonal communication in VRS (e.g., see Kitzie, Connaway, & Radford, 2021). With MI Program Director Lilia Pavlovsky and Croatian counterparts, Professors Drahomira Cupar and Sanjica Faletar of the University of Zadar and the University of Osijek, she is a Co-Director of the international LIDA (Libraries in the Digital Age) biennial conference established in 2000, next held in 2025 in Dubrovnik, Croatia. With his Croatian counterpart Dr. Tatjana Aparac-Jelušić, the conference was initiated by Professor Tefko Saracevic and established with help by Dr. Marija Dalbello.

Professor Marija Dalbello, whose work is mainly highlighted below, contributed to the LIS area with her research of digital library development on which she has published extensively, and historical studies of libraries and librarianship (e.g., Richards, Wiegand, & Dalbello, 2015). Her current historical studies focus on library services to immigrants, and literacy and citizenship during the Progressive era (Dalbello 2022; Dalbello 2017; Dalbello 2016).

Teaching Professor Nancy Kranich, a past-president of the American Library Association (ALA), addresses democracy (Kranich 2020; Kranich 2020; Kranich 2017; Kranich 2013), community and civic engagement (Kranich 2012; Kranich 2010), intellectual freedom, information equity and information policy (Kranich 2019). She recently edited a special issue of *Library Quarterly* on "Reimagining the Civic Role of Libraries" (Kranich, 2024; Kranich, 2024). For fifteen years, Kranich held a joint appointment with the Rutgers University Libraries, building a strong bridge with the LIS program and publishing research about academic library engagement (Kranich, Lotts, Nielsen and Ward 2020; Kranich 2017; Kranich 2010). Her sustained involvement with the ALA has addressed the profession's core values, its public policy advocacy, and its First Amendment stance. Her instrumental early scholarly work with Nobel prize winner Elinor Ostrom conceptualized an understanding of the Commons as it relates to libraries and information policy (Kranich & Schement, 2008). She founded the ALA Center for Civic Life and co-developed the IMLS-funded ALA/Harwood Institute for Public Innovation's Libraries Transforming Communities initiative and subsequent Models for Change program. Through the Kettering Foundation, she has engaged and led dialogue between Russian and U.S. citizens in a

formalized program of learning exchange that involved collaboration with public libraries near Rutgers (Kranich 2021). She applies her active involvement in the profession to teaching and mentoring future library leaders in the MI program and beyond.

2.2.2. Archives and Preservation

Interdisciplinary archival studies research occurring at Rutgers epitomizes the new frontiers for the information field in which digital curation and digital preservation are tied to humanistic approaches and cultural heritage informatics. Our graduates are shaping the field of cultural and scientific knowledge amid changing perspectives, and in diverse social and cultural contexts. They explore the tensions around privacy, access, and memorial contestation and the role of records, documents, and archival institutions in human rights and social justice contexts. They learn the skills needed to perform preservation for stewardship across media forms, including digital objects and digitized materials, applying critical archival theory. The ethical dimension and policy grounding are the core of our archival curriculum. From spring 2017, the Archives and Preservation concentration has grown to the second largest in the MI program.

Professor Marija Dalbello has developed and leads this concentration. She has also mentored scores of master's students, doctoral students, and faculty in LIS areas. She studies the archives of immigrant experience and sensoria, judicial records and transnational print culture of radical labor during the Progressive era, and femina archives. Her approaches are best exemplified in her recent co-edited books, *Reading Home Cultures Through Books* (2022), *Global Voices from the Women's Library at the World's Columbian Exposition-Feminisms, Transnationalism and the Archive* (2023), *T-Bone Slim and the Transnational Poetics of the Migrant Left in North America* (forthcoming 2024) and a thematic issue of LIS journal *Archaeology and Information Research* (2019). Her research and teaching draw on book studies, literacy/orality, theories of text, artistic practices that engage silences in the archives, decolonial heritage and media analysis, and material culture. The empirical approaches and methodologies that she brings to the classroom range from archaeological materialism, affect and material studies, and exemplify 'close' reading of textual forms and sites of memory, and 'distant' (aggregative) reading, exploring how corpora, archives, and heritage are related. Recent Ph.D. graduates advised by Professor Dalbello hold tenure track positions in the archives field (e.g., James Hodges, and Zachariah Lischer-Katz). Doctoral students currently advised by Dr. Dalbello are developing dissertations at the intersection of cultural heritage, material studies, memory, ethical collection practices, and spectatorship; others are working in the fields of the history of the book, electronic textuality, and digital humanities.

2.2.3. Knowledge Organization, Metadata, Data Curation

"Knowledge Organization" (KO) as a sub-domain in LIS comprises scholarship addressing the description, organization, and representation of concepts, objects, and documents. To support these tasks, semantic tools like the Knowledge Organization Systems (KOS) are developed, such as term lists (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries), metadata-like models (e.g., authority files, metadata standards, gazetteers), classifications (e.g., taxonomies, subject headings, classification schemes), and relationship models (e.g., thesauri, ontologies). This area is integral to master's level education in LIS, in that it equips students with necessary skill sets to become information professionals (e.g., taxonomists, ontologists, catalogers, metadata and data librarians).

Assistant Professor Jessica Yi-Yun Cheng leads the department in this area. Her work centers on how knowledge systems affect the way data is represented. Dr. Cheng investigates how inherent

assumptions in KOS impact data integration, provenance, and reproducibility. In her work, she resolves interoperability problems in KOS by employing conceptual modeling, qualitative reasoning, and taxonomy alignment methods. Her work has been published in leading LIS journals such as the *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* (JASIS&T) (Cheng, 2023a) and the *Journal of Documentation* (JDoc) (Cheng, 2023b). She has also recently co-authored a book, *Documenting the Future: Navigating Provenance Metadata Standards in the Synthesis Lectures on Information Concepts, Retrieval, and Services* series by Springer Nature (Bettavia, Cheng & Gryk, 2022). Further, with the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Large Language Models (LLMs), our future trajectory in this arena involves developing domain-specific knowledge bases and knowledge graphs in the context of KOS to contribute to domain-specific training in AI. Dr. Cheng is a co-PI of a large, U.S. Department of Transportation collaborative grant³, in which she is constructing domain-specific KOSs on bridge technologies and experimenting ways to leverage AI and LLMs to help build a bridge-related cyberinfrastructure. Her work reflects a key area of growth and innovation in LIS research that bridges the technical sub-domains, exemplifying multidisciplinary while maintaining deep historic roots in LIS domain expertise as well as support from diverse funding sources.

2.2.4. Critical Informatics Perspectives on Information Institutions and Sociotechnical Futures

Assistant Professor Britt Paris' work focuses on ethical, political, and social analyses of different types of information institutions and infrastructures from libraries to protocols and how we might collectively imagine better, more just sociotechnical futures. She mentors, advises and co-advises a large number of current doctoral students, develops transformative curriculum, and teaches at all three levels of the curriculum; her students strongly recognize her tireless support for their scholarly growth and development. Her critical informatics (CI) work draws from Science and Technology Studies (STS) and related fields that assume the constitutive nature of technology, and society, data, and research ethics around sociotechnical change. Her work highlights how sociotechnical arrangements materially benefit some actors over others, and radically reimagine information infrastructures (Paris, Cath, & Myers, 2023).

In the realm of librarianship, Dr. Paris specifically explores how public librarians understand and engage in practices to combat misinformation (Paris et al, 2022a). This is part of broader work she does to explore the *power dynamics of altered information and systems/platforms* (Paris & Donovan, 2019; Dan et al., 2021; Paris, 2021a; Paris, Reynolds, & McGowan, 2022; Reynolds et al., 2022). Her work on networking protocols, and routing and transmission of data packets across the Internet further demonstrates such power dynamics of inequality (Paris, 2018, 2021b, 2021c), highlighting the need for *collaborative and cooperative infrastructure* (Paris, Cath, & Myers, 2023) and bridging with technical sub-domains. Relatedly she is working on a book on this topic with University of California Press (under contract), and a future book on *epistemic burden* building on Pierre et al (2021), Paris et al. (2022), Paris & Paschetto (2024), Paris (2024). Dr. Paris's research and expertise on imprecise official data, misinformation, and AI ethics has been cited in numerous prestigious press publications, such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wired Magazine*, the *MIT Technology Review*, *USA Today* and the *Boston Globe*.

3 USDOT ABTC grant [Grant Number: pending (FY2023ABTCNOFO)]. <https://cee.rutgers.edu/rutgers-team-wins-usdot-competition-develop-and-implement-advanced-bridge-technology-clearinghouse>

2.3. Information, Learning, and Technology

Human inquiry processes and practices are closely interrelated with human knowledge building and learning. Those researching and teaching in the Information, Learning, and Technology domain aim to foster a deeper understanding of the cognitive, affective, and social processes that facilitate inquiry, learning, and knowledge co-construction, often through learners' uses of e-learning and information technologies. Our work advances theories of learning, inquiry, and information seeking, as well as design of learning systems, environments, and instructional models. Sub-themes include:

- Youth information-seeking (in alignment also with Human Information Behavior above).
- School librarianship scholarship, pedagogy and praxis.
- The science of learning with information and technologies across the lifespan by the full diversity of youth, adults, elders and specialized populations.
- Design and use of information, communication, and technology (ICT) systems for learning.
- ICT design for computer supported collaborative learning.
- Digital divide, information/digital/data literacies, access, and learning systems.

2.3.1. School Librarianship Research, Youth Information Seeking & Learning Across the Lifespan

The highly ranked area of School Librarianship in the MI program offers a specialized certification pathway for graduating master's degree students, many of whom go on to work in K-12 education. Our strategic agenda includes the following goals and activities, and in alignment with LIS Forward Response invitation, here we especially highlight recent research activities and publications of affiliated faculty in key strategic areas aligned directly with the report.

1. Prime the pipeline. In addition to her many ongoing department curricular and field-wide library leadership activities, Associate Teaching Professor Valenza is conducting research investigating recruitment strategies and issues in school librarianship preparation programs with colleagues from AASL's Educators of School Librarians Section (ESLS) from University of Pittsburgh, University of South Carolina, and University of North Texas. They presented their preliminary findings at ALA 2024.

Our LIS Department is fortunate to have dedicated funding for master's degree student research. [The Beverly E. Schoen Research Fellowship](#) sponsors graduate student research in school librarianship to ensure professional leaders value and engage in practitioner research. The research program designed by Dr. Valenza and Ross Todd was further developed into a course by Lecturer Dr. Brenda Boyer.

Our support of student research focuses on engaging our community in practitioner-centered action research, while building a potential cohort of future doctoral-level researchers. Our Schoen scholars regularly present at state conferences. Their work is shared on the Schoen Fellowship section of the CiSSL LibGuide (Valenza & Boyer 2024). Dr. Valenza also shares her focus on practitioner research, evidence-based practice, and professional leadership in her Partnering for Human-Centered Change and Innovation (2024).

2. Incentivize research reciprocity (collaboration). Dr. Valenza and Dr. Boyer have engaged cross-cultural and international perspectives in school librarianship and youth services in the relaunch of the Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CiSSL) including a podcast series featuring leading school library researchers.

Towards the report goal of “Regional and global coordination,” Associate Teaching Professor Marc Aronson focuses on international youth literature and introduces students to international authors and artists expanding DEI to include global languages and cultures; leads international travel learning experiences for MI students, e.g., the Bologna Children’s Bookfair, and recently served as a guest co-editor of the peer-reviewed academic journal of international youth literature *Bookbird* for a forthcoming special issue on nonfiction.

3. *Evolve the iSchool body politic with interdisciplinary governance.* For instance, Dr. Valenza has served as co-PI on a four-year IMLS-Funded project with the University of Florida and OCLC partners—*Researching Students’ Information Choices: Determining Identity and Judging Credibility in Digital Spaces* (Cataldo, 2023; Connaway, Valenza, Cyr & Cataldo, 2019; Connaway & Valenza, 2021).

Dr. Valenza and Dr. Boyer were awarded the American Association of School Librarians Research Award and the NJLA CUS/ACRL-NJ Research Award for their work in the First Years Meet the Frames Project. Engaging academic and school librarians across the state, the First Years project investigates the value of certified school librarians in providing resources and instruction to bridge situations of inequity, information poverty, and identify gaps relating to academic preparedness among first-year students in New Jersey colleges. (Valenza, et al, 2022) The project LibGuide (Valenza, 2024) features multiple papers and presentations. Based on the research data and findings, Dr. Boyer’s collaboration with alumnus Ewa Dziedzic-Elliott, “What I had, what I needed: First-year students reflect on how their high school experience prepared them for college research,” was selected as a Top 20 Article for 2023 by ALA’s LIRT (Boyer & Dziedzic-Elliott, 2023).

4. *Promote LIS values reflecting information access and literacy and encourage genuine collaboration and research partnerships with the library profession.* Our faculty actively promote ALA’s Core Values of Librarianship and several have served on numerous ALA Leadership committees. Our research and professional partnerships focus on access and equity, intellectual freedom, promoting the public good, and continual professional learning (e.g., CITEs).

We also highlight that NJ is the first state to require K-12 information and media literacy curriculum, and we will be instrumental in supporting the writing and implementation. Dr. Valenza serves as an academic consultant on one of the project’s evaluative subcommittees and a member of its IMLS-supported National Advisory Board.

2.3.2. Design and use of learning systems, ICTs, Digital & Information Literacies, Digital Divide

Research addressing the multiple literacies (information, media, digital literacies, etc.) continues to evolve as quickly as the information and socio-technical landscape, today bringing in issues of mis- and dis-information and the challenges being posed by AI, as well as new prioritization of data literacy, to teaching and learning at all levels. Historically, inquiry-based learning, inquiry design, and information and digital literacies have been key elements of LIS research and education, as shown in Rutgers emerita faculty member Professor Carol Kuhlthau’s integral work on the ISP and meaning-making (Kuhlthau, 1991; Kuhlthau, 2004), guided inquiry (Kuhlthau, 2010), and guided inquiry design (Kuhlthau, Maniotes & Caspari, 2012), and in our valued colleague Associate Professor Ross Todd’s research on information literacy (e.g., Todd, 1995, 2010, 2017) who in sadness we lost in 2022.

Currently these domains are demonstrated in Associate Professor and Department Chair Rebecca Reynolds' research agenda, which investigates intentional and incidental human inquiry and learning in formal educational settings of K-12, higher education, continuing education, as well as informal online participatory digital environments where learning occurs. She applies inquiry-based learning, learning sciences, design-based research, socio-technical systems/social informatics research, and critical informatics theories and methods in her work. Exemplary works on the digital divide, and digital and information literacy development among young people (past, present, and future) include Reynolds (2016a, 2016b, & Reynolds & Chiu, 2016), and Paris, Reynolds, & Marcello (2022). Exemplary socio-technical systems, and critical education technology studies, and education informatics research conducted collaboratively with Professor Britt Paris and several LIS doctoral students addresses data injustices and digital inequalities central to the erosion of public education, and corporate educational technology platform and learning management system proliferation (Paris, Reynolds & McGowan, 2024; Reynolds, McGowan, Aromi, & Paris, 2022; and Paris, Reynolds, & McGowan, 2021). Her work also addresses social-ecological and culturally sensitive perspectives on resilience in the context of LIS higher education graduate student teaching and learning (e.g., Reynolds, 2023).

Dr. Reynolds is also the co-founder and editor-in-chief of the journal, *Information and Learning Sciences* published by Emerald UK (Reynolds & Chu, 2020; Reynolds, Chu, Ahn, et al, 2019). The journal's mission aligns with report goals, inviting work that strengthens scholarly understanding of human inquiry and learning phenomena, especially as they relate to design and uses of information-and technology-based learning environments, systems, and curricular innovations. The journal's leadership comprises an eminent team of associate editors and editorial advisory board members; it aims to strengthen and broaden rigor and impact in the literature across these two closely intersecting disciplines, mutually and reciprocally. As editor she ongoingly mentors early career scholar authors closely through their article review and revision, and attributes the journal's success to the tailored, close matching and high quality of reviews provided to authors at all levels. The journal has seen significant growth in Scopus Citescore impact metrics: from 3.9 in 2021, to 6.8 in 2022, to 9.5 in 2023. The journal is also indexed in the Clarivate Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI).

3. Conclusion

As the field evolves and adapts to a changing information landscape, we adapt with it. In alignment with the report goal of "Expanding partnerships with libraries and the tech ecosystem," some recent department strategic innovations in the LIS research area are demonstrated by our 2024 Symposium, [Rethinking the Future: People-Centered Information and Communication Practices](#) designed and led by four faculty on our LIS Research Development Committee (Paris, Senteio, Lawrence, and Garimella). The symposium featured speakers from local NJ, NYC, and Philadelphia organizations such as the [Library Freedom Project](#), [DataSourceNJ](#), [People's Tech Project](#), and [Surveillance Resistance Lab](#). The Keynote address was given by noted activist and bestselling author Mariame Kaba who directs [For the People: Leftist Library Project](#). The Symposium addressed the ways transformative, people-centered research agendas can help foster and promote social change, and rethink how LIS research can be most impactful through engaged participation among diverse constituents in local communities. The innovative guest speakers, projects and organizations showcased how inclusivity, diversity, equity, and access goals and priorities are at the forefront of progressive librarianship. The Symposium is facilitating development of collaborative interdisciplinary projects with these LIS-forward community organizations that will contribute to our re-envisioning and building of new and localized information and communication institutions, infrastructures, and learning opportunities.

Meanwhile, as the report recommends, *this work involves everyone, across all iSchool research and faculty areas*. While the LIS Forward Report offers many valuable and strongly needed strategic development touchstones for our disciplines, communication must be reciprocal across all scholarly domains, both within departments and professionally field-wide. It is important, for instance, that leaders in the LIS research organizations (e.g., ALISE, ASIS&T) closely review and consider applying some of the ground-breaking advances occurring in the socio-technical systems research domain, around recent consensus-driven professional association ethical norms, standards, policies and publication practices (e.g., [ACM-SIGCHI Ethics and Conduct procedures](#); CSCW conference [code of conduct](#) and [proceedings publication policy](#)). The report does not recognize such procedural innovations in socio-technical domains for their potential benefit to LIS research organizations, whose policies and membership stand to gain through reciprocal interchange of ethics and IDEA innovations across areas.

We are all, hopefully, working to improve the grounds to be more inclusive, ethical, and equitable. While this response highlights LIS research, we seek to unify and strengthen our efforts across areas, not divide. We are excited to pursue these directions further as a department, as we “prime the pipeline, incentivize reciprocal collaboration, evolve the iSchool body politic, and promote LIS values” across subdomains and field-wide. Indeed we are fortunate at Rutgers that many report values are largely reflected among all our faculty members’ work across areas. We are a collegial unit and team who share knowledge amply and collaboratively. Becoming more conscious, deliberate, and systematic in our LIS futures-Forward alignment will help drive our department’s ongoing equity actions, sustainability, growth and expansion in positive ways.

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University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Information Sciences



In response to a call to discuss the LIS forward position paper, several members of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) faculty of the School of Information Sciences gathered for an informal conversation at ensuring the future of LIS in the school. This included Emily Knox and Maria Bonn, participants in the LIS Forward initiative; one teaching assistant professor, soon to direct the undergraduate degree program; three assistant professors; an associate professor (apart from Maria and Emily); one long-time adjunct; and a full professor, Allen Renear, who will also be providing a formal response to the position paper. Maria and Emily gave a brief overview of the position paper, drawing upon slides from the 2023 ASIS&T session.

Allen began the discussion with the assertion that he will also make in his formal response. He believes iSchools are as much at risk as LIS programs and that the most concerning threat is to Information Science as a discipline. He is primarily concerned with the wellbeing of iSchools. Within that he indicated that he is “deadly serious that LIS is in trouble.” He added that “while LIS works to remain relevant it doesn’t do a good job of sustaining improvements.” He also stressed his belief that having a healthy LIS program is essential for a healthy iSchool.

The group raised the difficulty of defining information science; and representing it as a coherent discipline that both arises from and contains LIS. Information Science is a coalescence of several communities that have a lot in common, but it is sometimes difficult to articulate those commonalities.

A significant portion of the conversation addressed the issue of the “pipeline problem” and the threat of a research-barren discipline. The junior faculty held strong opinions that the problem isn’t that we aren’t producing enough LIS PhDs, it’s that we’re not hiring them. If iSchools would value LIS research and commit to hiring in that area, iSchool PhDs would not feel driven away from an LIS focus by market exigencies. Instead of committing to LIS research faculty, iSchools hire adjunct rather than full-time faculty to address LIS needs. They also increasingly hire teaching professors with LIS interest and expertise, but don’t provide them with the structural support to do research.

It may be useful to note that the junior faculty attendees commented on the position paper as “depressing” and “discouraging.”

We discussed that this is a potentially excellent moment to seize upon working on library questions, because private funders are interested in addressing the current crises of freedom to read and intellectual freedom.

The majority of the conversation focused on undergraduate education as an opportunity for demonstrating LIS relevance and incorporating its perspective and values. One member of the group had been in discussion with a funding agency interested in ensuring that undergraduate information programs aligned with LIS. That alignment could lead to an increased service orientation

in undergraduates and shifting of focus from technology solutions to human needs. While we acknowledge that our view of ourselves as a professional school is critical, we did not necessarily see that this is at odds with undergraduate education and tasked ourselves with exploring accelerated paths to a professional degree for undergraduate majors. At the same time, we noted this could exacerbate the problem of a sufficient number of expert instructors on LIS topics.

In brief, we concluded that one way we can position ourselves for that future is through attention to undergraduate education in information science. The iSchool is at a critical juncture to ensure that the Bachelors program realizes the potential of its LIS foundations. We also explored pathways from our MS LIS program to our PhD, noting more seminars that included students from both degrees could help identify and nurture promising PhD students with an LIS interest.

Responses from iSchool Leadership



Holding the Center with Intentionality



*Michelle M. Kazmer, Dean, College of Communication & Information,
and Professor, School of Information, Florida State University*

I write as a former corporate and academic librarian; I am an LIS researcher and hold a PhD in LIS along with an MLS. Since 2002 I have been a member of the faculty at Florida State University in Tallahassee—in the School of Information Studies, then College of Information. In 2009 that unit became part of a merged College of Communication and Information; and it is of that college that I have been dean since 2023. I am pleased to offer a leadership perspective. I also wish to acknowledge the contributions of Charles C. Hinnant, PhD, Associate Professor and Director of the School of Information at Florida State University, for his invaluable reflections on this response.

iSchools have historically, currently, and intentionally worked to “hold the center” of scholarship, teaching, and practice in information. One way of doing so has been to welcome scholars, in particular as faculty, from many related disciplines into our iSchools. This inclusive approach has the potential to create the best of synergetic metadisciplines, wherein truly novel questions are asked about previously unimagined phenomena and answered using the most appropriate mixed and emergent methods at all scales. In ideal circumstances, this works beautifully. Under stress, whether economic, intellectual, or political, there is a tendency, of those who have been welcomed in, understandably, to re-align, however subtly, with their originating disciplines. The funding may be more certain there, the publication outlets more reliably measured as impactful, or the disciplinary reputation more publicly clear. Regardless of cause, this leads to fragmentation, tension, and entropy, even if unintentional. And in fact it is this intentionality that is so important: to hold the center of LIS means to focus explicitly, consistently, and insistentlly, on what brings us together. In academia, where so much of our thinking is dedicated to what makes us unique—from the nascent “how does my dissertation make a novel contribution” to the ongoing “what is my article, book, or research project proposal contributing that no one else has done”—a relentless focus on what unites us can feel both unfamiliar and unnecessary. But necessary it is.

I do want to discuss my own institution. Florida State University, a founding member of the iCaucus, maintains membership at the level of the College of Communication and Information. Our college includes three schools: Communication; Communication Science & Disorders; and Information. All three of these units engage in scholarship related to information in some way, but the School of Information is naturally where it is concentrated, and the school houses the historical LIS program, accredited by the ALA since 1951. The school also offers doctoral and specialist degrees in Information, as well as a master’s and bachelor’s in Information Technology. While the degree name “Information Technology” now sounds vaguely retro, in a state such as ours, where the state legislature and the Board of Governors of the State University System take their detailed oversight responsibilities of every aspect of our public universities very seriously, we are obligated by law to follow their direction quite closely. As a result, the Information Technology name will remain for the near future. This does not preclude us from innovating within the program through courses, majors, minors, and certificates, and we have done so.

"Information Technology" raises another good example, as noted in the position paper about library science and librarianship, of a field where there is the potential for a tenurability struggle. The skills and knowledge maintenance required to teach IT courses at a high level are difficult to find unified in a singular faculty member with the ability to sustain a publishable research agenda in an area that awkwardly straddles computer science, information science, and applied technology. As with library science or librarianship, it is not a lack of theoretically and empirically rigorous and interesting topics for research in IT that causes the problem; it is the difficulty in balancing the research, teaching, and hands-on disciplinary engagement to the exceptional levels required for tenure.

I also want to emphasize a key point raised in Volume 1 about ultimate credentials among our faculty. I noted, in my initial review of the document, a focus on having the research doctorate specifically in LIS. At our university, we have engaged in a long-term discussion with those responsible for institutional (not disciplinary) accreditation because our university's external accreditor is only interested in what it considers the ultimate credential—generally "highest degree in field." First, as a proudly interdisciplinary unit, we engaged in the tough conversations about what "in field" constitutes for us. Expressing "highest degree" was easier, and we included several doctoral-level degrees. Our argument about asking the university to track and consider the useful combination of accredited master's degree plus doctorate, however, was the lengthiest. Since the outside accreditor does not care about anything other than "highest degree in field," why track or evaluate it? But we have observed through long experience that a master's degree in LIS combined with a doctorate in a related discipline— independent of the order in which they were earned—can reflect a scholar who is just as centrally LIS as someone whose doctoral degree is in LIS. That said, however, I strongly endorse the recommendations from the early career faculty about providing viable LIS-specific paths at all phases from undergraduate through postdoctoral. This will be vital to the future of LIS scholarship.

Looking at Florida State University over the past two decades, the institutional thrust has, rather than "STEM," been largely cast—in perception if not in intention—as a focus specifically in "Health." While STEM in general still has an aura of desirability, there is perceived to be a gentle push in our context to health research only. This has left units in the arts, humanities, and social sciences—all historical strengths at our institution which, until the increased need for male college placements burgeoned post-WWII, was the Florida State College for Women—feeling as if health is going to become "the eggplant that ate" everything in its wake (reference to Michael Gorman's 1990 American Libraries excoriation of the term "LIS" quite intentional). On one hand, yes, of course: LIS in general and libraries in particular contribute to "wellness," and therefore health, in the broadest possible sense and across the lifespan, as well as being a key part of people's personal health information ecosystems. This is in fact true of our entire higher educational endeavor—that it contributes to wellness. On the other hand, a single-minded focus on health, STEM, or any other subset of the breadth of human inquiry damages our capacity for robust knowledge creation and practice.

In all of this inter-/multi-/transdisciplinary work—which from a societal and species perspective is I believe imperative for our future—we also must keep a firm focus on our responsibilities to our discipline and to LIS. LIS research must be central rather than auxiliary to substantial portions of this work, else we risk being a service-providing add-on.

I agree that one imperative is outreach in the K-12 education environment. It is a long-held truism that our discipline suffers a "general awareness" problem. "People" may or may not know precisely what a physicist does, but they know physicists are smart and that physics is important. The same is true of many disciplines and professions, but (for many reasons covered in depth elsewhere) it is not universally true of ours. Awareness is a start; belief in our value is the true goal. Meaningful, immersive, engaged

outreach with students, faculty, administrators, and families in the K-12 systems needs to be consistent across contexts and persistent across time. We can help one another with that.

Reading about difficulties associated with particular research agendas in any LIS area, librarianship included, always reminds me of the late 1980s and early 1990s, during that specific wave of library school closings, which also saw the “death” of research in library cataloging. It was conventional wisdom at the time that cataloging as the topic for a career-long research agenda was moribund; cataloguing faculty were often not replaced; and those of us entering doctoral programs were encouraged to think in other ways. Of course, what happened was that brilliant folks started doing “metadata” research, using the same intellectual turn of mind to generate what has turned into a sustainable, valuable, and intrinsic area of LIS research. In tandem, conceptual approaches to bibliographic control have, defying predictions, been the topics of robust scholarly work throughout the same 40-year span. I look to a similar rejuvenation of scholarship in the area of librarianship—and our colleagues who ARE maintaining robust research agendas in librarianship will rightly cast an indignant eye on the word rejuvenation. Fair enough; perhaps we are just waiting for the opinion leaders to catch up.

To return to a notion I glanced at in an earlier paragraph, the connection of LIS to the discipline of communication, not just at my institution, will benefit from additional attention. There are a number of historical schools of communication that have added “information” as an outgrowth, or through a merger with an information unit within their university that was based in historical CS programs rather than LIS, and I am not speaking primarily of them here. I do think we should closely observe how they construe the field of information from their perspective over the next several decades. But seven universities currently—Florida State University, Kent State University, Rutgers University, University of Alabama, University of Kentucky, University of South Carolina, and University of Tennessee—have merged colleges of communication and information where one of the originating units developed from, and still includes, a vibrant LIS program. The LIS Forward declaration includes communication (“communications”) as another of the “information centric metasciences” and correctly so. I have heard a surprised “you study that also?” from both LIS and communication researchers upon encountering one another’s work often enough to rue the undiscovered public knowledge that surely lurks in the under-examined overlaps (thank you, Don Swanson).

Volume 1 invokes two specific areas that the field of communication, through its publications, projects, teaching, and professional associations, identifies as squarely within its own remit: misinformation and disinformation. These related concepts emerged as an area of grand challenge posed by the LIS deans. We need to consider their long-term existence in communication and journalism. How we proceed with this grand challenge in iSchools, I think, again requires substantial intentionality to affirm the centrality of LIS in both understanding and remediating disinformation and misinformation, while acknowledging and building on—and with—the work done in the field of communication.

Other additional disciplines, beyond communication, are ripe for ongoing transdiscipline-level work with LIS. The fields of social work, public policy, and public administration are such disciplines. These disciplines share strengths and historically-shaped structural challenges. By “ongoing transdiscipline-level work” I mean epistemological shifts in how we approach our knowledge about humanity and its use of information in contexts, and particularly in library contexts, and not merely a series of research or instructional collaborations, however fruitful.

We are at one of the moments in history when libraries as institutions, and the apparatus of the profession of librarianship as a whole, face increasing legislative scrutiny and limitations as well as uncertain societal assessments of libraries’ value, utility, and potential for help rather than harm.

This is true in Florida, but it is not exclusive to Florida. Of the many impacts of this scrutiny and uncertainty, one may be a future in which we operate in a context where we have either collectively and affirmatively created paths different from historical accreditation models, or have had to do so reactively. It is important that we keep thinking proactively and creatively about how to maintain high and coherent professional standards in librarianship. To do so, we must work together to understand and demonstrate how libraries of all types comprise a key piece of the social, economic, and technical infrastructure in which humans create and maintain knowledge.

Information Science Forward – Can LIS help?



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Ensuring a Vibrant Future for LIS in iSchools is astute and compelling. The organizers and contributors deserve high praise. For me, however, its significance lies in an inversion of perspective: these challenges are not only issues for LIS, but for information science (IS) generally. If the underlying dynamics that create and sustain these threats are not addressed, then yes, LIS will suffer, but information schools will be devastated. The central question is whether information science can maintain a coherent identity and realize that identity in an appropriate academic community. To succeed at this, IS needs help from LIS.

The iSchools movement

At one time, the perennial question of IS identity was largely conceptual and the discussions relaxed and academic. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, the conversation became fraught. Our education and research were not having the influence one would expect at the putative dawn of the information society. Moreover, the well-documented fragmented and porous nature of the discipline was worsening, which made it difficult to explain our field to university leadership. Being an LIS school at a research university became perilous: in 1980, there were around twenty-five independent LIS schools at R1 universities; by 2000, there were twelve, and by 2020, there would be seven. Some of the best schools were closed completely, others were subordinated or merged, forever limiting their autonomy, scope, and impact.

The independent LIS schools remaining in 2000 were alarmed but remained convinced of their unique importance. They responded by generalizing how they represented their education and research and set about, as “iSchools,” growing rapidly in scale and scope. This was enormously successful in developing financial security, new programs, and new research directions. In some cases, iSchools even assumed leadership roles in university data science initiatives, bringing a needed broader perspective to those initiatives. But far from moderating the underlying trends that threatened the information science community, this success has accelerated those trends.

Fragmented, fragmenting, dissolving

We have long recruited many of our faculty from other disciplines, an exogamy critical to our success and identity. Coordinating disparate cultures is always difficult, but rapid growth adds punishing combinatorics. Not only are new faculty more likely to interact with other new faculty than with existing faculty, making maintaining a common local culture difficult, but, more importantly, rapid growth undermines socialization into the field: new faculty disproportionately meet faculty who are also new to IS.

These effects do not just accumulate, they compound. And they are nearly impossible to halt or reverse. The issue goes beyond combinatorics. In the past, faculty members arriving from other disciplines knew they were joining an information science school—even if with dual citizenship. Is this still the case? Are new faculty making a conscious decision to join an information school? Do they realize they are joining not an academic department but a professional school that is collaboratively preparing information professionals and conducting related “use-inspired” research? Do they believe that disciplinary characteristics of IS make it the best location for their teaching and research? Will they identify as members of the IS community and publish their research in the field’s principal publication venues? Although some academic departments can take identity for granted and for others it is unimportant, a multidisciplinary professional school will fail, absent the ongoing construction of a coherent identity. Long characterized as a fragmented discipline, information science is now a fragmenting discipline. In the past fragmentation seemed an artifact of multidisciplinaryity. Today it is driven by centrifugal forces that increase the narrow coherence of local research groups while eroding the fragile connections between them. These forces are also transferring leadership in traditional areas of research and teaching to other disciplinary communities, most with only a notional commitment to public benefit and none with the unique perspective of information science. The bibliometric evidence for these trends is decisive: we were once a fragmented discipline, later a fragmenting discipline, and now a dissolving discipline.

It may be that the forces in play are so large and entrenched that they are beyond intentional shaping. Should we adopt *el sentimiento trágico de la vida*? No. Because this is not about us. It is about the people we serve: being a coherent discipline appropriately realized in academic and professional institutions is necessary for fully securing the social benefits of information science research, teaching, and engagement.

IS identity

Disciplinary identity requires both substance and differentiation. It cannot be found in a laundry list of important things, regardless of how important those things are, because important things, being important, will be on the menu everywhere. Nor can it be found in things that are essential—if they are essential to other disciplines as well. And it cannot be found in a paratactic Venn diagram, even at the intersection.

What is unique about IS? We are multidisciplinary, but so are many disciplines. We are “human-centered,” as are many other fields. We are committed to social benefit and social justice, but hardly exceptional in that (and let us hope we become less exceptional). We are a “meta-discipline,” but not the only one. We have institutions and personas of particular interest, but other fields have interests in the same institutions and personas. None of these things, nor any combination, will provide a differentiating identity.

On its website, ASIS&T presents three well-known, convergent definitions of information science, spanning forty years of identity discussions:



...the body of knowledge relating to the origination, collection, organization, storage, retrieval, interpretation, transmission, and utilization of information.

— Borko, H. (1968).

Information science: What is it? *American Documentation*, 19, 3.



[information] ...its generation, organization, representation, processing, distribution, communication and use.

— Williams, M. E. (1987/1988).

Defining information science and the role of ASIS. *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science*, 14(2), 17-19.



...the transmission of the universe of human knowledge in recorded form, centering on manipulation (representation, organization, and retrieval) of information rather than knowing information.

— Saracevic, T. (2009).

Information science. In M. J. Bates (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of library and information sciences* (3rd ed.) (pp. 2570-2585). New York: Taylor and Francis.

Accounts such as these provide a substantive and differentiating characterization—and the content of 100 years of research and curriculum confirms that this is indeed who we are. Of course these familiar definitions are only the foundation for a continually evolving identity, and certainly a more contemporary register is needed. But we do not start from scratch. We start here. Our problem is less who we are then it is how to realize our identity strategically, culturally, and institutionally.

LIS

This is where LIS comes in. For the last fifty years, IS has repeatedly claimed that LIS is our “foundation,” our “heart.” Such phrases need to be more than vague aspirational soundbites that seem less and less credible with every passing year.

That LIS provides intellectual foundations for IS is revealed by careful reflection on even the most traditional enumerations of LIS core areas: cataloging, classification, indexing, abstracting, bibliography, authority control, bibliographic control, collection development, reference, administration, user services, and so on. Traditional core concepts such as aboutness, relevance, information needs, document, work, pre/post coordination, and literary warrant are also instructive. Recent stylings of LIS areas make the connection even more evident: [information] ...organization, ... behavior, ...systems, ...management, ...policy, ...history, ...ethics, and ...law. Specific areas that have had a particular role in exemplifying LIS/IS identity are also important to note, such as bibliometrics, information retrieval, and information seeking traditionally, and scientific communication, data curation, and information history more recently.

LIS provides another critical component: the preparation of information professionals. This is central to how we actualize our social benefit mission in the design and conduct of a curriculum, and the pursuit of the research that that curriculum is based on. Equally important, it creates a collaborating unified faculty and contributes to the intellectual basis for strategic decisions about evolving the field.

Will it be enough?

What else is required for information science to survive as a discipline? Of course, our research accomplishments must be influential and distinctive, and our professional education impressive in depth and relevance—it was often the perceived weakness in research quality and curricular depth, as much as anything else, that led to the closing, merging, or subordination of R1 IS/LIS Schools. We also need wise, timely, and resolute strategic maneuvering from our leadership; there is no substitute for

that. There are many specific challenges that must also be navigated as well, from accreditation to the accommodation of undergraduate programs. Proceeding with a firm sense of identity will help us with all these things.

Unfortunately, the forces that underlie the fragmenting and dissolving trends are powerful and entrenched. Failure is more likely than success. If we do succeed, it will probably require an additional overarching strategy beyond what has been discussed above. The nature of that overarching strategy remains to be seen, but it will not be one of resistance or isolation. It will involve pursuing fundamental IS research and education in partnership with the adjacent disciplinary communities often viewed as threats—and it will be creative as well as emphatic in affirming our foundational identity.

In Conclusion

The iSchools movement, which was initiated by LIS schools, was essential to the survival and evolution of the discipline. At the same time, it created grave vulnerabilities not only for LIS, but for information science itself. We must now embark on a new and very challenging phase of that movement. The irony, I suppose, is obvious. IS created problems for LIS and is now asking LIS for help. Apologies, but there is much at stake.

Avoiding the iSchool Identity Trap



Sanda Erdelez, Dean & Professor, and Laura Saunders, Associate Dean & Professor, Simmons University School of Library and Information Science

The LIS Forward position paper *Ensuring a Vibrant Future for LIS in iSchools* identifies several opportunities and challenges for the foundational core of library and information science programs within the larger and more disciplinarily diverse iSchool ecosystem. While the paper focuses on the iSchool environment and, even more narrowly, on a subset of R1 universities within that environment, in reading the report, the authors of this chapter were struck by the idea that, to some extent, the challenges and opportunities are shaped by forces external to iSchools and perhaps even external to higher education more generally. Those external forces are then translated down to the more operational levels of the university administration, the iSchool department, and even the individual faculty within the iSchools. Each of these levels has its own concerns that impact their perspectives and approaches and, ultimately, the place of LIS in the iSchool. As such, the authors will look at those external forces and the various levels of impact as part of this response. Given the authors' perspective as faculty members and administrators in an iSchool that is not located within an R1 institution, the authors will also consider how the ecosystem of their institution aligns with and diverges from the experiences and perspectives of the R1 institutions as described in the position paper. Finally, the paper will offer more specific responses to several points that surfaced in the position paper.

External Forces

Many external forces are causing challenges within the broad field of higher education that, in turn, impact iSchools. Several of these factors are alluded to in the LIS Forward paper but are not fully explored. Among these are declining enrollment rates in colleges and universities, a trend likely fueled in part by a general lack of trust in higher education and concerns about the value of a college education (Blake, 2024; Brenan, 2023). As a field that ostensibly requires a master's degree, LIS faces some additional barriers to entry, including the program's cost both financially and the investment of time required. Unfortunately, salaries often are not commensurate with the advanced degree, while "vocational awe" and emotional labor exact additional tolls on librarians (Ettarh, 2018). While libraries are one of the few civic institutions that seem to be retaining public trust (EveryLibrary Institute, 2023), increased opposition and threats to libraries in the form of materials challenges and legislation that could potentially criminalize libraries and librarians for offering certain collections and services could also be an additional deterrent for some to enter the field. Even as Americans generally say they trust and value libraries, there seems to be a lack of general awareness and understanding of the services, resources, and benefits libraries provide to their communities (Pew Research Center, 2013), which in some ways mirrors the lack of recognition or understanding of how the research done in the field of LIS can contribute to other fields. While the LIS Forward paper notes that "MLIS enrollments are strong and continue to grow," it also acknowledges that "enrollments in other iSchool master's programs show even stronger growth" and that bachelor of information science programs are experiencing "demand that exceeds capacity." As such, library school students are no longer the "dominant cohort" in most of these programs. In combination, the various external and environmental challenges outlined here could contribute to budgetary and enrollment issues as well as impact retention within

LIS programs and in the field (Ewens, 2022; Hinds, 2023). If iSchools, and the library programs within them, hope to sustain and potentially grow the field, they will need to keep a close eye on these trends.

Naturally, academic administrators are generally focused on budget issues, including revenue generation, and some of their decision-making is likely to be guided by these concerns. The LIS Forward paper stresses the need for substantial recalibration of things like criteria for promotion and tenure that would place more emphasis on applied research and recognize the scarcity of funding opportunities for library-focused research. Further, in Chapter 3, the early career professionals discuss the often inequitable distribution of labor in iSchools, in which library-focused faculty tend to have heavier courseloads with fewer opportunities for grant-funded course releases and potentially heavy service loads. The authors of that chapter advocate for LIS programs to find ways to acknowledge and account for that labor. However, such recalibrations depend at least to some extent on the support of administrators, and those administrators might not see the incentive for such changes if the budget impacts are unclear. The authors of this chapter note that the dynamic might be different in non-R1 institutions like Simmons University, where the library and information science program is a major revenue generator and is considered a “signature program.”

Internal Challenges

While external and administrative forces certainly impact the shape and direction of iSchools, the most intriguing challenge that surfaced from the LIS Forward paper is the idea of the iSchool identity trap. Indeed, what emerged are two distinct but interrelated issues. First, most, if not all, of the iSchools in the original profile offer two or more separate degree programs, of which LIS is one. The separation of programs has several implications, including the fact that students across different programs may or may not share courses and/or foundational theories and concepts; that resources, including budget and faculty lines, might be allocated based on factors such as program enrollment and larger proportions of grant funding; and, as such, some programs might end up with an actual or perceived lower status. A second issue relates to the purported interdisciplinarity of the profiled iSchools. The report emphasizes the interdisciplinarity of the field of LIS and touts the interdisciplinarity of the profiled iSchools. However, the descriptions and discussions of these seven iSchools put major emphasis on the STEM disciplines, in some cases to the complete exclusion of the humanities or more humanistic fields. While the report touches on areas such as children’s literature and indigenous knowledge, much more of the discussion focuses on areas related to data science, human-computer interaction, health informatics, etc. This STEM emphasis is likewise reflected in the leadership of those iSchools described in the paper. The argument here is not that those fields are not important in many different ways, including their relation to some of the grand challenge areas like climate change or mis/disinformation and their scope for generating grants and other revenue. However, this somewhat narrowly defined interdisciplinarity may underlie or even drive some of the challenges of what is valued and rewarded, including criteria for tenure and promotion, in these departments. To wit, the R1 institutions profiled in the position paper surely have departments of literature, languages, art, history, etc., that, like the LIS area of iSchools, are not typically engaged in the sort of sustained research projects or eligible for the high six and seven figure NSF grants of the STEM disciplines. Yet, surely, faculty in those departments are achieving tenure and promotion.

Along these same lines, the argument that the professional focus of LIS leads to tension between the basic research of the more pure STEM fields and the applied/practical research of LIS seems potentially distorted as well. Fields like nursing, social work, education, and even law and medicine both prepare students for professions and engage in research. Again, faculty in these departments are

achieving tenure and promotion. iSchools might look to those fields to see how they have balanced the professional/research tension.

Of course, there is a notable difference between the fields referenced above and LIS in that LIS is the only one that does not generally require licensure. While many information institutions still seek an ALA-accredited MLIS for professional positions, there is an increasing trend to substitute other advanced degrees and, in some cases, to forgo an advanced degree or even an undergraduate degree altogether (Seale & Mizra, 2019; Wilder, 2017). Increasing scrutiny of higher education in general, and the LIS degree in particular through initiatives like ALA Connect's Librarian Education Reform discussion group, as well as arguments that the MLIS poses a discriminatory barrier of entry to the profession all surface questions about the potential de-professionalization of the field. On the one hand, basic research is often considered the gold standard, and LIS Forward acknowledges the premium that the academy places on this type of research. However, the authors of this chapter wonder whether basic research, which might not have immediately apparent applications to those in the field—or to students studying for entry into the field—will help insulate the field from this existential threat or whether practical, applied research might make more inroads. In other words, if faculty in iSchools are producing research that people in the field find meaningful and that directly impacts and perhaps improves their work, might that help raise the perceived value of LIS programs to practitioners who, in turn, recruit others to the field? Further, a review of funded projects suggests that applied research seems more attractive to IMLS, one of the main outlets of grant funding for library-focused research. Yet, if LIS faculty are discouraged from doing applied research, then their funding opportunities might be further decreased.

With all of this in mind, encompassing a more truly interdisciplinary perspective that embraces fields beyond STEM might better enable iSchools to find a way to recalibrate their expectations for tenure and promotion and what “counts” as research by acknowledging and embracing the research and methodological traditions of the humanistic and more “professional” fields. It is important to ensure that this recalibration is seen *not as a difference in value but in kind*. In other words, changes in expectations or recalibrations of promotion and tenure criteria must not be framed as “giving a break” to some faculty for doing “lesser” research, but are simply a recognition of different traditions across different disciplines and the importance and potential impact of these different approaches. As such, various works from scholarly monographs, policy reviews, amicus briefs, and textbooks might need to be considered for their role in a faculty member's overall scholarly production. To that end, individuals within a department should not be evaluated against each other. They should be evaluated holistically, considering their disciplinary traditions and the scope and impact of their other work (acknowledging that LIS faculty often have heavier teaching loads, for example).

Reexamining grant expectations might be particularly important. The position paper notes that funding sources and amounts are not as plentiful for LIS-focused faculty and research. Some early career faculty note they have been counseled to apply for STEM-oriented grants such as NSF. Not only do such suggestions further devalue the kind of work LIS-focused faculty do, redirecting their research to fit STEM-oriented grant criteria might also mean reorienting their focus and asking different kinds of research questions, which would seem to undercut the argument that we need to value LIS-focused research. We need to understand and recognize the value of this research beyond grant money—perhaps through other measures of impact (e.g., community impact).

The more systemic challenges described above have impacts on and implications for individual faculty members in iSchools, particularly those focused on librarianship. The chapter by early career professionals underscores the pervasive feeling that their work is undervalued across the board, from their research, which is often framed as somehow less important, to their teaching and service, where

they often take on more and often invisible labor. The recalibration of expectations outlined in LIS Forward and discussed in this chapter could give early career LIS-focused faculty more of a sense of predictability in their careers and provide them with some measure of security so that they would feel confident in pursuing the kind of LIS-focused research that LIS Forward suggests we should value. Indeed, this was the case for one of the authors of this chapter. Although their work on information literacy and LIS education and pedagogy is entirely applied, and some of their more recent scholarship has focused on textbooks, they understood that work to be valued within their institutional and departmental structure, to the extent that they felt supported to apply for promotion only three years after attaining tenure. iSchools need to provide some scaffolding for early career LIS-focused faculty who, as the early professional chapter notes, often do not enter the professoriate with the same publishing and grant background as their STEM colleagues. Often, they need an entry point, and iSchool administrators might work to be sure they are included in interdisciplinary teams and grants in their capacity as LIS faculty and for their expertise in LIS areas.

Additional Observations

The LIS Forward paper argues, as do the authors of this response, that LIS-focused research, including practical and applied research, needs to be recognized and appreciated. This point is made most forcefully in the early career chapter, where the devaluation of this research is most clear. Nevertheless, and seemingly with no irony, even as they argue for valuing this research, the paper authors seem to dismiss the research emanating from non-R1 institutions like that which employs the authors of this chapter (which they refer to as 'second tier' schools). Certainly, R1 institutions have an infrastructure that supports large, ongoing research projects that might be lacking in non-R1 institutions. Still, many of those "second-tier" institutions are engaged in important research that often fits criteria identified by LIS Forward as important: much of it is interdisciplinary, community-based, and addressing areas of "grand challenge" like mis/disinformation. Why, then, is it the case that the research and scholarship needed to drive the field "must be done in R1 universities" (p.5)? The authors of this response suggest that the different ecosystems of non-R1 universities might offer advantages and opportunities not present in the R1 systems.

To begin with, while introducing new disciplinary areas might have fueled growth and even been necessary for survival for some iSchools, it might also have led to some unintended consequences for the LIS focus of those schools. In particular, developing multiple, separate master's programs within the overarching home of an iSchool might be leading to siloing and fragmentation that may be, in part, fueling the kind of tensions and challenges described in the report, as the programs compete for resources and students and establish implicit or explicit hierarchies of programs based on size, revenue, and even criteria such as what kind of research is valued. Despite claims of interdisciplinarity this fragmentation and competition might be the source of the purported "identity crisis" as each program stakes out its own area. In their initial report, the LIS Forward team did not address core curriculum and accreditation, but those areas seem pertinent here. If separate degree programs do not share a core curriculum and only the MS LIS program is accredited by ALA, it raises the question of to what extent the programs share common values and foundational concepts and theories. Even if they share them in words, how does that translate to deed or to the curriculum that enculturates the students into the field(s)? In remaining closer to their LIS roots, some of the non-R1 institutions, such as that of this chapter's authors, have managed to engage in interdisciplinary work but suffered less of an identity crisis. Students in the school share a set of core courses, regardless of their area of concentration or ultimate career goals, and, as such, develop a shared set of values and understandings about the field. The faculties in different areas have remained cohesive and, in matters of tenure and promotion, have learned how to value each other's work in whatever tradition it is rooted. Further, at least in the

authors' institution, this valuation of the school and the work emanating from it has escalated to the administration, who regularly describe the iSchool as a "signature program" of the university and are willing to direct resources to support it.

The authors of this response were struck by the LIS Forward notes on terminology and, in particular, the choice to use "libraries," "librarians," and so on as inclusive terms. Of course, this makes sense for a project that wants to center LIS. On the other hand, we wonder if collapsing the nuances of the "traditional" LIS areas of libraries, archives, and other cultural heritage institutions might be counterproductive. This question surfaced again when we looked at the figure illustrating iSchool research areas on p.13, where certain areas that might be considered "core" or "central" to LIS, such as information behavior and information literacy (including related literacies such as health, news, and so on, as well mis/disinformation), were not represented at all. Perhaps these areas are included in broader categories (for instance, maybe HCI includes information behavior). If that is the case, it might show how the collapsing of terms obscures some of the important areas of focus. Perhaps we would do well to differentiate some of these areas, not to create more silos and competition, but to underscore the contributions that each makes to the whole.

While we recognize this is not unique to iSchools, LIS, or even STEM, we think it's important to explore whether the basic/applied research dichotomy is a false one. Applied research is often framed by or based on theory and can also raise questions and bring in data that can inform theoretical research. Furthermore, applied research can have important and far-reaching impacts that should be "counted" as a measurement. Many universities make community-building and give-back a part of their mission, and practical, applied research, especially if it is locally based, can contribute to that mission. Again, we recognize that this dichotomy is long-standing and not a product of LIS tradition. Nevertheless, we believe that part of the forward-thinking work of this project could be to draw on the interdisciplinarity of the field to explore how other fields, especially other professional fields, have handled this dichotomy in terms of evaluating research and, further, to take a leadership role in demonstrating how the contributions and symbiotic relationships of both research strands can be acknowledged and valued.

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Another Iteration on Library and Information Professionals in an AI-Augmented World



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In the fall of 2023 amidst the burgeoning generative AI hype, I wrote a short estimation on what roles librarians and other information professionals should play in an AI-augmented world. This was placed on [Medium](#), and a refined version appeared as an opinion piece in JASIST (2024). I argued that “information and Library Science (ILS) professionals have skills, perspectives, and practices that are essential to human interests in the AI-augmented world. We are especially crucial because of our human-centered approach to information and technology impact. For ILS professionals, human interest is not an add-on or afterthought but rather the reason we do the work at all—it is fundamentally baked into information generation, management, and use. We are clearly positioned to approach an AI-augmented world from a human-centered perspective.”

The characteristics of ILS professionals that make us essential to an AI-augmented world include:

- Concern with information integrity and trust so that humanity can advance with confidence, justice, and equality.
- Traditions and expertise in managing large-scaled information streams and repositories.
- Active participation in pioneering information retrieval research and evaluation since the post-WWII era that gave rise to search engines, LLMs, and recommender systems.
- Fundamentally human-centric approaches to the needs of patrons, clients, and the public.
- Active partnerships with science and industry in advancing human-centered design and evaluation research and practice.
- Practiced responsibility for managing institutions and services devoted to preserving the products of human memory and activity, and defending these institutions and services as public goods.
- Commitment to a culture of sharing and equitable access—librarians, archivists, and curators operate cooperative sharing partnerships (e.g., interlibrary loan) and distributed digital libraries.

Using this perspective, I identified six types of roles and responsibilities categorized into inputs, use, outputs, evaluation, education, and reflection. As the attention, investments, and hyperbole of AI continues to consume our intellectual and physical resources, it is even more clear to me that librarians and other information specialists are essential to our future progress in a complex, connected, and highly stressed world. Rather than spelling apocalyptic doom and gloom for our profession, we are positioned to expand our roles to curate vetted, documented, and highly provenanced information—perhaps a new golden age for our trusted and honored profession. To do so, we must be prepared to address trends and issues that continue to develop. Here is a small set of particular importance for us to consider.

Hallucinations in mission critical processes

It is becoming increasingly clear that Large Language Models (LLMs) have limitations (e.g., see the ongoing critiques of Gary Marcus and others) and at the very least, information professionals must be documenting critical cases so that humanity can learn and adjust to decisions and events that result from poor probabilistic estimates.

Intellectual property misuse

Generative AI training models gobble up everything accessible electronically, and much of this is copyrighted or publicly available under acknowledgement requirements (e.g., creative commons with attribution). The legal quagmires are only beginning as publishers, news services, and artists push back on indiscriminate use of their intellectual products. Information professionals are well-positioned to advise and document provenance and attribution policies and practices.

Navigating the Internet wasteland

If you have been using the Internet for two or more decades, you have seen significant changes in volume, variety, quality, and convenience. Not only is there more variety but also more misleading or dangerous content. More generally, the trend toward ad driven content via search services or general browsing illustrates Zuboff's argument that the Internet is the epitome of surveillance capitalism. AI-augmented search is still in early days, however, the enormous investments that have been made in training models and enticing investors surely will lead to even more automatically generated content (text, images, media, code), more misleading content, and higher rankings and display prominence for commercially driven content. Information specialists are humanity's best hope to help people navigate an increasingly random or hostile information exposome. Highly curated and documented information services are increasingly paywalled or highly restricted and it is information professions who will continue to bridge the free-or-fee chasm. There will be a growing need for libraries of vetted content—recognizing the contextual limits of “truth” but revealing that context via provenance and citation.

Environmental effects

Part of our education and reflective roles and responsibilities are to help the public understand the underlying costs and tradeoffs of information services. Enormous investments around the world are being made in building data centers that support the Internet and new AI augmentations. It is becoming more evident that energy use (ranging from 2% to 5% and more of all energy used globally), water use (ranging from 300,000 to one million gallons of water per day per data center), land use (tens of thousands of square meters of land per data center), and toxic waste disposal (constant upgrades and replacements of electronic equipment) represent real costs to individuals, the environment, and our collective capital.

Work and wellness

Human life and work continue to evolve and information professionals not only should be attuned to how AI will affect their professional training and practice, but also to help the public understand trends and conditions that will allow them to work and live fruitfully as economies and societies are disrupted and reshaped.

There will surely be other trends that require our attention and action. We are prepared and responsible for ensuring that humanity progresses with dignity and equanimity.

Some Directions to Consider to Ensure a Brighter LIS Future



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With pervasive adoption and use of information technologies, the valley separating the public and the critical information services they depend on continues to widen. Ironies abound. Living in an age, eponymous with information, people of modest means increasingly face insurmountable challenges to access information that is essential to support their livelihood. When important information is made available by governments or social service organizations it is often difficult to find, infrequently updated, or is served using systems that are hard to use. It is in this milieu, the stance of governments and public institutions toward libraries, ranging from ambivalence to actions eliminating vital library services, is particularly hard to accept. Perhaps partly reflecting the ambiguity of the funders of library services, academic programs have shifted their priorities regarding areas they focus on to train the next generation of information professionals.

It is, of course, important that the new information professionals acquire a strong foundation in information technologies. But the latter emphasis should not lead to a de-emphasis, or worse, elimination, of training that focus on skills and knowledge critical to library development, management, and services. In fact, the changes we are experiencing in relation to the broad and growing number of information technology applications for information provisioning should be an exciting opportunity to re-envision library services and inject into the LIS field new vigor and momentum to expand the field. Alas, examples of academic professional programs that are invested in serious and creative ways to grow the LIS field are becoming rarer, and efforts to revise LIS curricula and training methods lag significantly in relation to what the LIS service organizations are currently required to do and what the broader profession demands.

The ailments outlined above are well-known but are worth repeating and emphasizing. The challenge ahead of us, especially for the leadership in both academic and professional organizations (i.e., memory institutions and associated societies), is to identify some potential solutions and invest in initiatives that may address the problems.

Here, I offer two broad, potentially useful directions. The first proposal is a straight-forward and perhaps even a mundane one. Both LIS academic programs and professional organizations should consider developing a meta-level, federated organization with representations from current academic and professional institutions—modeling it after organizations such as the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE). The federated organization should actively invest in and nurture members of academic institutions (teachers and students) as well as professionals in powerful and concrete ways. For example, both the ACM and the IEEE have forums that are directly aimed at professionals. There are numerous other activities and projects that such a LIS federated organization can take on that leverage the resources and energy of both sides of the field and serve both sides in a more effective way. The second proposal is a rather

radical one and may involve more thought and effort to execute. The LIS profession and academic programs should create new alliances with the media and entertainment industries. As information technology becomes more AI-centric and AI-driven, the premium on human-produced creative content that our societies place will continue to degrade and the demand for human-generated creative artifacts and performances will face greater challenges. In targeting a “common enemy” so to speak, the LIS field and the artistic and the creative fields may find a large number of common issues to focus on and develop new strategies to tackle together. To make progress toward the latter goal, the LIS professional societies could take the lead. Sub-organizations, particularly in the larger academic LIS programs, that focus on advancement, communications, and public relations may also contribute to establish and nurture relationships with the creative industries.

Responses from Library Leadership



LIS Education and the Black Information Future



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“What you know good?”

– African American colloquial expression

“The man she worked for had a library—a whole big room full of books.

‘He let you read them?’ I asked.

‘He didn’t let me near them.’ Travis gave me a humorless smile.

‘I read them anyway.’”

– Octavia Butler

“In the future, as in the present, as in the past, Black people will build many new worlds.”

– N.K. Jemisin

In 2018, a billboard declaring “There are Black People in the Future,” designed by artist Alisha B. Wormsley and erected in a gentrifying Pittsburgh neighborhood, ignited so much public controversy that it was ultimately taken down mere weeks after its appearance. As inspiration for the text, Wormsley cited the “absence of non-white faces in science fiction films and TV” (Sharp, 2024). Though many in the community expressed support for the billboard, they were vastly outnumbered by those demanding its removal. Jon Rubin, founder and curator of The Last Billboard project, who had originally commissioned Wormsley’s contribution lamented, “I find it tragically ironic...that a text by an African American artist affirming a place in the future for Black people is seen as unacceptable in the present.” In a public statement agreeing with Rubin, the Pittsburgh Office of Public Art stated, “Alisha’s text, a recurring message in her rich body of work, is a positive affirmation that there is a place for Black people in our community, past, present, and, yes, in the future. This message is particularly poignant in the context of ongoing cultural and societal erasure and denial that communities of color experience on a daily basis” (Sharp, 2024).

This affirmation (and resulting contestation) of the inclusion and well-being of Black people in the future, as well as the concerns about that prospect that implicitly inform Wormsley’s declaration, is also of consequence for the Library and Information Science (LIS) sector, which like the racialized milieu of science fiction that spurred Wormsley’s response has largely been constructed for consumption by white people and has historically excluded (by law, practice, or organizational culture) Black and other people of color or relegated them to secondary status (Hall, 2012; Hathcock, 2015). Yet, as

contemporary studies repeatedly show—the country’s shifting demographics: with more than 40% of Americans identifying as Asian, Black, Indigenous, or Latino (Frey, 2020)—pose an ethical as well as existential challenge to the persistent centering of whiteness in libraries (Santamaria, 2020).

Moreover, library usage surveys continue to indicate that Black (52%) and lower income (49%) users tend to ask for help from a librarian compared with general library users (42%); and though their white counterparts are more likely to focus on print materials, nearly 40% of Black library users, and a third of Latino and lower-income users seek out computers, the internet, or broadband access during library visits (Horrigan, 2015). These user behaviors demonstrate the degree to which effective service to Black and other users of color hinges on the cultural competency of librarians and the organizational capacity of libraries (Joint ALA/ARL Building Cultural Proficiencies for Racial Equity Framework Task Force, 2022) to not only provide resonant information technologies and digital learning opportunities, but to expand, perhaps, the library’s formal role as education provider (Spoor & Thornton, 2011).

A 2020 study of the early economic impact of COVID-19 by Deutsche Bank cogently assessed the huge socioeconomic divide a predominantly digital economy would cause, noting “The exponential growth of the digital economy is going to leave large chunks of minorities with little or no access to jobs...76% of Blacks and 62% of Hispanics could get shut out or be under-prepared for 86% of jobs in the US by 2045. If this digital racial gap is not addressed, in one generation alone, digitization could render the country’s minorities into an unemployment abyss” (Walia & Ravindran, 2020). Black workers were particularly vulnerable during the pandemic becoming the first racial group to reach double-digit unemployment during the public health crisis. RAND Corporation findings published shortly after the Deutsche Bank study revealed that by April 2020, Black workers’ unemployment rate had reached 16.7% compared to 14.2% for white workers. The racial divide persisted even as pandemic conditions stabilized, and businesses transitioned to digital deployment. RAND reported that “a higher percentage of Black workers reported being permanently laid off than did white workers” (Williams, 2020). Longitudinal research conducted between 1972 and 2019 by the Center for American Progress confirms that “the Black unemployment rate has consistently been twice the white unemployment rate” (Olugbenga, 2020). There is unambiguous evidence that the post-pandemic digital divide—in terms of digital access and literacy—has exacerbated that already alarming disparity. A 2023 Pew Research study revealed that 9% of Black people report not using the internet at all, a percentage of non-users more than double that reported by any other racial or ethnic demographic polled (Sidoti, et al., 2024). A 2019 McKinsey study estimated that digital automation and artificial intelligence would—due to their overrepresentation in service jobs—disrupt 4.5 million jobs performed by Black Americans by 2030 (Cook, et al., 2019). Indeed, before his death (notably also in 2020) civil rights icon and US States Representative John Lewis, presciently observed, “Access to the Internet ... is the civil rights issue of the 21st century” (Broadband for America Now, n.d.).

Compounding low levels of digital access and literacy for Black people is the continued prevalence of disparate investment in public K-12 educational institutions in the US where the aggregate student body has become majority Black and Latino even as the demographics of the teacher workforce have begun to mirror that for librarians: 80% and 83% white, respectively (Schaeffer, 2024; Kendrick, 2023). Coinciding with the mounting underrepresentation of Black teachers and overrepresentation of white teachers has been the normalization of the Black/White “achievement gap,” which has positioned low reading and math scores as an organic reflection on student aptitude rather than educational equity and effectiveness, and even more disturbingly, the concretization of a school-to-prison pipeline that has contributed greatly to the over-incarceration of Black and other people of color.

Adding to the expanded encumbrance on educational and economic mobility that Black people have historically faced, and even more intensively since the pandemic, as the aforementioned studies have

attested, are escalating attacks on Black history and literature, that along with LGBTQIA-authored and themed materials have become the predominant focus of contemporary book censorship in the US (Chavez, 2022). The suppression of the First Amendment-protected right to read for already marginalized communities recalls the policy of compulsory illiteracy mandated by slave code laws during the antebellum period (Span, 2005), and the policing of reading and library access that circumscribed Black sociopolitical agency through the civil rights era of the late 1940s to 1950s (Hall, 2012).

According to a 2023 American Library Association report on book-banning activity, 58% of censorship efforts have targeted materials in school libraries or classrooms while 41% have been aimed at public libraries. This recent surge in book banning initially caught many library professionals largely unprepared for a coordinated counterattack given that few, if any, library school programs currently mandate (let alone consistently offer) standalone courses on intellectual freedom, and there is even less availability of post-MLIS professional training (Oltmann, 2017). In 2024, the Freedom to Read Foundation (FTRF), the more than half-century-old anti-censorship advocacy non-profit established by the American Library Association announced that it would collaborate with Longwood University to offer an intellectual freedom course for school media specialists noting that “It is the first time the Freedom to Read Foundation and an accredited LIS program have collaborated on an intellectual freedom course specifically for school library media specialists” (Freedom to Read Foundation, 2024). Indeed, remedial action to reinforce the tenets of intellectual freedom across the LIS workforce has been recurrent. Responding to the limited availability of intellectual freedom education more than nine years earlier, FTRF announced that it would link with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign School of Information Sciences to offer an online two-credit, graduate-level course on intellectual freedom to LIS students across the country (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2015).

Just as LIS education in the US generally, and ALA as the accrediting body for the field specifically, have had to periodically remediate the teaching of intellectual freedom as an existential measure, so too are they obligated to ensure that the LIS workforce has the foundational knowledge and ability to effectively respond to the information needs of Black people, especially given the concrete link between equitable information access, digital literacy, socio-economic mobility, and civic agency. What may have hobbled progress on this front to date is the altruistic (and often, patronizing) lens through which the LIS sector tends to view racial equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice (Leung, 2022) rather than seeing the framework as critical to the future relevance, credibility, and reach of libraries. Adding to the view of equitable information access as a charitable measure—which keeps the LIS sector stuck in a *modus operandi* that defaults toward a white, middle-class usership (whether that user group sees libraries as their only or primary resource for information retrieval or not)—is the intentional construction and evolution of librarianship in the US as a “pink-collar” profession, and library and information science as a field that focuses on increasingly anachronistic technical skills rather than theoretical or scientific knowledge. This historical notion of library work as charity and “women’s work” renders it perennially vulnerable to eclipse by adjacent, male-dominated fields like information management, informatics, data science, and data analytics. All of this serves to keep librarianship and libraries particularly vulnerable to defunding and deprofessionalization and subject to romanticization rather than prioritization in the public imaginary, forced into a kind of institutional amorphousness, and importantly for the sake of the question of the Black information future, under the radar when it comes to the social reproduction of race and class bias.

The question of real and measured accountability regarding equity of access should hold greater weight in the LIS sector than it currently does. After more than thirty years of directly identifying the lack of racial diversity as a hindrance to its future viability and the subsequent creation of national and regional diversity pipeline programs, the ranks of professional librarianship are not only persistently white, but

the number of Black librarians has dipped to 7%, down from the most recent 10-year average of 7.4% (Delandro, 2024). The drop in Black librarians by nearly half a percentage point over a decade should be a *grit* call given the critical information-seeking needs and information technology gaps widely observed in both research and practice. Per the range of information disciplines they contain and combine, iSchools should be among the first responders.

In their chapter on early career faculty perspectives in *Ensuring a Vibrant Future for LIS in iSchools*, Amelia Acker, Ana Ndumu, Beth Patin, and Andrea Thomer observe that the “erasure of foundational library and information science principles in iSchools is leading to epistemic injustices,” which they describe as “the harm that people experience in their process of knowing” (LIS Forward, 2023). They further note, “the conceptualization and analytic application of epistemicide has been established in a number of social science fields while information scientists have only recently acknowledged epistemicide in relation to the field’s responsibilities as stewards of knowledge.” By identifying LIS programs, in general, and iSchools in particular, as agents of systems that either propagate or disrupt information inequity, Acker, et.al also allow us to imagine what might occur as a result of an intentional reengineering of these programs to achieve the latter. The document’s concluding chapter goes on to identify four baseline conditions vital to the future, universal health of iSchools as a subset of LIS education:

- **A primed faculty pipeline** evidenced by an increase in the number of LIS Ph.D. graduates prepared to contribute to generative research, effective pedagogy, and a “virtuous cycle of high-achieving faculty” who can effectively serve as “advisors for new Ph.D. students, mentors to early career faculty, and research leaders in the field.”
- **Research reciprocity** that allows iSchools to harness and leverage cross-disciplinary strengths and to develop “collaborative initiatives within and across schools such as research centers” that can further raise the visibility of LIS study and practice and support “integrative research with LIS, but importantly also to attract more funding to LIS and library-centric research.”
- **An evolved body politic** that benefits from complementarity between its teaching and tenure track faculty and that establishes “principled, inclusive governance that values the many kinds of contributions needed for excellence in basic and applied LIS research and state-of-the-art educational programs.”
- **LIS values for all** evidenced by respect for libraries and the existential threats they currently and historically face, respect for library-based research and library and information science, and efforts between LIS and non-LIS researchers to “work collaboratively to seamlessly embrace LIS values to tackle the grand challenges of democratic society.”

Just as the LIS Forward initiative seeks to establish baselines for a general LIS future, so too should we be compelled to imagine a parallel set of conditions necessary to envision and achieve the well-being of Black people in the information future which I suggest might include the following:

- **Reparative action within LIS practice and education** based on the recognition that current information practices, technologies, and policies mirror and reproduce racial bias and stratification and that growing reliance on search-engine curation, data-enabled psychographic profiling, and artificial intelligence has served to accelerate and compound information disparity.
- **Commitment to the development of cultural competencies** among LIS faculty and students necessary to the development and dissemination of the analog and digital information skills and survival strategies that Black (and other historically marginalized) people will need to thrive in, and despite information ecosystems that are designed for or ignore their containment, subjectivity, or exclusion.

- **Accelerated pathways to the MLIS and LIS PhD for Black people** that acknowledge and confront the factors and conditions within the LIS sector that have and are leading to the current downward trend in the number of Black librarians and that employ measures to expand access to practice and pedagogy for Black people as a means of countering information disparity and epistemicide.
- **Coordinated national redesign of LIS curricula and accreditation standards** to ensure that the next generation of librarians and library leaders have the educational and practical training necessary to effectively respond to the sociocultural information contexts, information needs, and information retrieval behaviors of Black people (and other people of color) and confront and mitigate the information barriers they may face.

To move LIS forward it is necessary that we reimagine LIS education and the leadership role that iSchools should, and by virtue of their syncretic disciplinary potential, can uniquely play. It is also necessary that we intentionally reimagine and reconfigure LIS practice and pedagogy as sites that actively affirm and contribute to the vitality of the Black information future, not as an act of altruism, but as a necessary element of our collective survival.

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What Kinds of Partnerships Would You Like to See Between the Profession and iSchools?



John Wilkin, CEO, Lyrasis

What kinds of partnerships would I like to see between the profession and iSchools? I'm almost embarrassed to write this because the point is so obvious: I'd love to see libraries actively making themselves available as laboratories for advancing LIS research, and librarians partnering with LIS researchers; similarly, I'd love to see LIS faculty deploy a significant part of their research capacity to better understand the challenges facing libraries, using those living laboratories and collaborating with practitioners to advance solutions that benefit users of libraries.

I won't pretend that my observation is one that I've arrived at through systematic analysis, but I think we've all seen the problem. Librarians who do research do so without collaborating with LIS researchers and focus primarily on empiricism, drawing on practice and practice-based data to further practice. Conversely, LIS researchers tend to examine research questions without regard to the practical implications of their investigation, rarely collaborating with practicing librarians, and rarely using the libraries at hand.

Oh, you're probably complaining that my characterization of librarian-led and LIS researcher-led research is simplistic. Of course it is! It's also true, however, that if we look at the premier venues where each party publishes, nearly all LIS publications are the product of LIS faculty and nearly all library research publications are exclusively the product of librarians. Crossovers and collaboration are nearly non-existent. For two high profile examples of librarian and LIS publication venues, look at [C&RL](#) and [asis&t](#).

While neither of these approaches is inherently wrong, each has shortcomings. Empiricism alone yields conservative conclusions. Much of library research driven by an empirical approach is information sharing or documenting best practices and outcomes of practice. The results serve to reinforce and refine practice, rather than pushing boundaries. The age-old characterization of library research publications as "how we done it good here" is a reflection of this empiricism. Promulgating publications with this sort of approach reinforces the use of practices documented in the research. Similarly, research without a meaningful practical context or goal produces ideas divorced from practice. Those of us in the field are used to encountering LIS research with impractical solutions (e.g., digital library information retrieval models that draw on datasets of insignificant size) or conclusions that fail to ground the "problem" they document in potential solutions (e.g., shortcomings in measurements in various forms of impact factors divorced from approaches to measuring impact factors).

So what kinds of things could we expect through collaboration? Oh, there are so many opportunities that it's hard to know where to start. Here are a few things that appeal to me.

- Users are right when they say that we lose important analog ways of discovering information in a digital-only collection. HCI research, in collaboration with librarians managing real digital collections, could help shape models of serendipitous discovery, introducing models that simulate (or provide the benefits of) browsing the stacks. Edward Tufte is right when he says we haven't begun to get information retrieval right.
- Research libraries manage vast collections of unused and underused print materials that are duplicated across institutions, and the librarians responsible for those collections have their heads in the sand when it comes to the cost and value of that enterprise. And of course those librarians are up against the sentiments of an army of conservative and even reactionary scholars. A credible system of shared and distributed storage (optimized through research) with delivery mechanisms (optimized by research) to be responsive could assuage concerns about loss of access from the scholars who use those collections, could save money that now goes into buildings and curation, and produce a clearer sense of the published record.
- Bibliometric analysis is even more important today with the rise of Open Access publications and systems of measurement that are locked behind paywalls. Collaboration between researchers, librarians, and open systems developers could return value to scholars and scholarship in a way that is driven by the scholarly enterprise for the benefit of the scholarly enterprise.
- Librarians are stewards of vast amounts of digital information, either directly (e.g., HathiTrust) or indirectly (e.g., through agreements with publishers). Open, well-understood AI and trustworthy algorithms would make a world of difference in providing access to that content.

Granted, libraries are not the only focus of LIS research, and focusing solely on pressing current problems ignores future possibilities. And, certainly, not all librarian-led research leads to derivative results. Nonetheless, the failure to make meaningful connections between theory and practice strikes me as an oddly missed opportunity. The active use of the library and library practitioners as a laboratory for LIS research would create powerful alliances that benefit librarians and their users, as well as producing valuable long-term research.

Embracing LIS Values in Digital Equity Initiatives



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Introduction

The Friday Harbor Papers, Volume 1 report offers an essential roadmap to ensure a healthy and vibrant future for LIS programs in iSchools moving forward. As LIS practitioners with advanced degrees from two top U.S. iSchools, we respond in this essay to the following question posed by the report's authors under the directive, "LIS values for all": *Using an L + IS approach, how can non-LIS and LIS researchers work collaboratively to seamlessly embrace LIS values to tackle the grand challenges of democratic society?* (LIS Forward, 2023a, p. 37). In this brief response, we highlight three digital equity initiatives led by LIS scholars in iSchools across the U.S. and then draw from our own experience leading the Digital Equity Research Center at the Metropolitan New York Library Council to highlight impactful applications of LIS values both within and outside of iSchools. By doing so, we hope to show how LIS programs can remain central to iSchools, the communities they serve, and our society into the future. We close by suggesting one area we believe iSchools should further embrace that reflects LIS values: integrating the knowledge and expertise of communities we serve into research and practice at LIS institutions through community-based and participatory research initiatives.

Embracing LIS Values: Three Examples from Digital Equity Initiatives in iSchools

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the digital divide as a significant global issue. In the U.S., many individuals and families without access to broadband at home were either forced outside to access the internet in school and public library parking lots (Kang, 2020) or they were left without the internet completely. In response, President Biden signed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021 into law, which set aside \$65 billion to advance universal broadband access and promote digital equity among "covered populations," part of the government's "Internet for All" initiative (NTIA, 2024a). The Digital Equity Act in the IIJA defined covered populations in the following: older adults; incarcerated individuals; veterans; persons with disabilities; members of a racial or ethnic minority group; rural residents; individuals with a language barrier, including those who are English learners or have low literacy levels; and individuals living in households with incomes not exceeding 150% of the poverty level (NTIA, 2024b). The IIJA tasked the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) with overseeing \$2.75 billion of the total funding to establish three digital equity grant programs, which are currently underway. Public libraries and LIS programs have historically played a key role in advancing digital equity for and with covered populations over decades. Therefore, many LIS faculty, students, and staff in iSchools have been busy in recent years preparing for federal funding and promoting digital equity through their own state-funded initiatives.

Three projects, in particular, are worth highlighting to show how iSchool research initiatives are tackling digital inequity as a grand challenge of democratic society.

- Marylanders Online is a collaboration between the University of Maryland Extension and the College of Information to empower Marylanders through digital equity and accessibility (University of Maryland Extension, 2024). This multidisciplinary team has been working to support the “approximately 290,000 households that don’t have access to a desktop, laptop, or tablet device” (Slivka, 2024).
- In Washington State, researchers in the University of Washington Information School’s Technology and Social Change Group led a project to investigate the ConnectWA statewide Digital Navigators Program, funded with support from the Washington State Broadband Office. Through their study and collaboration with the Equity in Education Coalition, the iSchool researchers found that the “CWC digital navigators have assisted their communities using digital technologies, they have also assisted with accessing and using essential services such as housing, employment, and healthcare” (Wedlake et al, 2022).
- And, in Illinois, faculty, students, and staff in the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign worked to build the digital equity capacity of individuals and communities in East Central Illinois. Funded by a grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the iSchool team represented the East Central region, “one of 10 state zones for which \$50,000 in ‘pilot’ Broadband READY funds for regional research initiatives” (Illinois Office of Broadband, 2024) was provided. Through this collaboration between the iSchool and six regional organizations, the team worked closely with community members to expand Internet and technology access for low income families in East and Central Illinois (Community Data Clinic, 2022).

These three examples from iSchools show the significant impacts that are possible when LIS values are embedded in research initiatives to address digital equity as a grand challenge. More concretely, the projects show how LIS principles of “access,” “equity,” and “social justice” can be embodied in digital equity projects. For example, ALA described equity as a core value of librarianship in the following description,

“ Library workers play a crucial role in fostering equity by actively working to dismantle barriers and create spaces that are accessible, welcoming, and beneficial for all. This is accomplished by recognizing and addressing systemic barriers, biases, and inequalities to create inclusive library environments where everyone can benefit from the library’s offerings and services (American Library Association, 2024).

By embracing this LIS value of equity in digital equity projects, iSchools are uniquely positioned to ensure that digital equity projects center people rather than technology in local, state, and federally funded initiatives. The examples, which demonstrate some of the suggested actions outlined by Chance Hunt in an essay in LIS Forward’s (2023b) *Essays on Selected LIS Priorities*, also show how LIS researchers in iSchools can lead regional collaborations with community partner organizations and individuals most impacted by digital inequity. Each project offers a unique model to show how non-LIS and LIS researchers can work collaboratively in partnership with communities to solve key societal challenges. Lastly, these examples demonstrate how LIS values center vulnerable populations and favor community-centered approaches, grounded in social science and humanistic perspectives, to balance the techno-centric strategies that have exploded in recent years due to advances in computing, machine learning, and artificial intelligence.

Co-designing for Change: An Example from LIS Practitioners

In this last part of our essay, we turn to highlight an example from our own work at the Digital Equity Research Center at the Metropolitan New York Library Council. The purpose is to offer additional evidence to show how LIS values, specifically *equity* and *social justice*, are critical to embed in LIS research particularly at this moment of unprecedented federal funding to advance digital equity nationwide. The Digital Equity Research Center is an applied research center that assumes digital equity research must include analyses of economic injustice, systemic racism, and other structural inequalities in order to understand and address the root causes of the digital divide. Our research uses critical theoretical insights along with participatory research methods to ensure those most impacted by the digital divide are included, whenever possible, in interventions to advance digital equity and social, economic, and racial justice (Digital Equity Research Center, 2024). By de-emphasizing technology and centering people in community technology initiatives, we join other LIS practitioners who value the knowledge and expertise not just of other LIS professionals, but of those most impacted by digital and social injustice in society.

In one recent project, we co-designed a participatory action research (PAR) project with staff at Tech Goes Home, a nonprofit organization that “connects families and community members across Massachusetts with technology, connectivity, and digital skills to help them thrive” (Tech Goes Home, 2024). The purpose was to engage the knowledge and expertise not only of staff at Tech Goes Home, but those with whom they work. We used PAR to develop a theory of change and an evaluation framework to benefit Tech Goes Home’s work, the individuals and families with whom they support, and the larger digital equity field. A total of 43 people participated in our PAR project. Participants included representatives of the following populations: (1) learners in Tech Goes Home programs; (2) instructors who teach Tech Goes Home courses at community-partner organizations; (3) Tech Goes Home staff, managers, and directors; and (4) a small group of representatives from peer digital inclusion and digital equity organizations from across the U.S. who shared their experiences and insights.

Our research team co-authored a white paper that presented findings from the analysis of qualitative data from the project (Rhinesmith et al., 2023a). In the paper, we described the benefits for TGH learners as short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes that translated well into the TGH logic model that was co-designed through this project. We also learned that TGH programs have ancillary benefits for community partners, such as the curricular support TGH provides to partner organizations and their instructors through their programs. Our interviews with national organizations yielded several additional insights that we used to share our recommendations with several key stakeholder groups: Tech Goes Home, other digital equity organizations, and state and federal policymakers. Most importantly, we argued in a separate article written for and published by the Benton Institute for Broadband & Society that if the current unprecedented federal funding is truly to make an impact to advance digital equity nationwide, then those most impacted by digital inequities must be included as partners in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of these programs (Rhinesmith et al., 2023b). We believe this project reflects what’s possible when LIS values for all are embedded in community-based and participatory research projects.

Conclusion

In this brief response essay, we chose to highlight three significant examples of LIS research initiatives in iSchools that we believe have been successful because of their embrace of LIS values. All three projects led by researchers at the Maryland, Washington, and Illinois iSchools show how integrating LIS principles of *access*, *equity*, and *social justice* provided opportunities to embrace the knowledge and expertise of individuals and families most impacted by digital inequities and of the community partner organizations that work closely to support these individuals. We concluded by highlighting an additional example from our own efforts at the Digital Equity Research Center to describe how community-based and participatory research supports the directives found in the Friday Harbor Papers, Volume 1 report. Taken together, we argue that if iSchools are to truly remain relevant into the future, then they must embrace the principles that LIS faculty, students, and staff bring to iSchools. However, the task ahead is to ensure that adequate space is set aside inside iSchools for faculty, curricula, and research funding to support these engaged scholarship approaches.

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Research Library Leaders Forum



LIS Forward Forums are a series of discussions with library leadership in response to the position paper, [Ensuring a Vibrant Future for LIS in iSchools: Friday Harbor Papers, Volume 1](#).

The Research Library Leaders forum, coordinated through the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), was held on August 20, 2024 with four participants:

- Paul Bracke, Dean of the School of Information Sciences and University Libraries at Wayne State University
- Maria R. Estorino, Vice Provost for University Libraries and University Librarian at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Andrew K. Pace, Executive Director, ARL
- Judy Ruttenberg, Senior Director, Scholarship, Policy, and Engagement Strategy, ARL

The 1-hour session was facilitated by Carole Palmer, Professor at the University of Washington Information School and co-chair of LIS Forward. A set of potential discussion topics was circulated in advance, to help guide discussion of the position paper assertions in relation to the context of academic research libraries.

The discussion surfaced the need for more intentional and strategic partnerships between academic libraries and iSchools to advance research collaborations, address workforce development concerns, and ensure the ongoing relevance of LIS in the evolving landscape of information professions. Adhering to the LIS Forward goal of identifying areas for collective action, we translated the ideas and concerns raised in the forum into a working list of priorities for action. The list, presented below, is followed by a narrative description tracing the contours of the entire forum conversation. The full text was reviewed and revised by the participants.

Not surprisingly, there is considerable variability and overlap among the nine items identified, in terms of level of abstraction, complexity, and cost. The priorities raise many questions on how to operationalize and make progress on problems that are deeply embedded in professional, disciplinary, and organizational cultures. LIS Forward aims to gather additional input in future academic library forums.

Working list of priorities

Convene iSchool deans and academic library directors to identify opportunities to build meaningful partnerships.

- Identify “points of excellence” where libraries can excel in partnership with iSchools.
- Develop a common research agenda between iSchools and academic libraries.
- Create research labs that bridge iSchools and academic libraries to help forge intentional collaboration.

- Evolve a community-engagement model of research partnership between academic libraries and iSchools to address both the practical needs of the profession and the research interests of iSchools.
- Formally recognize and value diverse librarian roles and contributions as research partners and collaborators, especially for those in non-faculty positions.
- Expand the base of funding for LIS research with strategies that open avenues through collaboration and increased awareness and advocacy with policymakers.
- Analyze degrees and areas of expertise most needed in the current and future academic library workforce.
- Analyze tenure-track positions in libraries affiliated with iSchools to understand the landscape of research expectations and opportunities.

Discussion Summary*

After an introduction from Palmer on the LIS Forward initiative and role of the forums, the participants voiced their appreciation for the perspectives and issues raised by the position paper and the group moved through a round of initial observations and responses.

Paul Bracke stated that the report resonated strongly with him, noting his unique perspective as both dean of libraries and the iSchool at Wayne State University. Bracke identified his main challenge as finding ways to foster collaboration across organizational boundaries. Notably, Bracke discussed how he faces an inverse of the disciplinary dynamics outlined in the position paper, with his school centered on LIS, while the newer fields, such as data science and human computer interaction (HCI), have yet to establish a strong identity.

Maria Estorino affirmed the challenges of the LIS PhD pipeline, identified in the position paper as a primary concern of iSchool deans. She noted the non-linear pathway to the PhD, with MLIS graduates tending to pursue doctoral study mid-career after holding professional positions. Estorino emphasized an opportunity to create more formalized partnerships between libraries and iSchools, especially given the significant number of students employed in the libraries, noting a concentration of students working in special collections at UNC. She stated, “I firmly believe that the reputation of the [archives and records management] program is as much the school as it is the opportunity to work in our special collections library.” Teaching is another critical area of contributions and interdependency. Several UNC librarians teach iSchool classes as adjuncts. Estorino promoted the creation of new research labs that bridge the schools and libraries and demonstrate to iSchools how libraries can serve as a vital space for research, experimentation, and collaboration. Estorino also strongly supported efforts to convene academic library directors and deans of iSchools to address these issues of partnership and collaboration.

Judy Ruttenberg voiced appreciation for the position paper’s emphasis on LIS research, underscoring the need for a common research agenda between iSchools and libraries. She cited potential research areas covered in the report—such as individual and collective resilience to mis- and disinformation—that aligned with challenges faced by ARL members and directors. She pointed out that LIS Forward’s aim to keep LIS strong in iSchools is mirrored by the need to keep librarianship strong in libraries and for LIS research to directly benefit and impact research libraries. She also supported investments in collaboration as with the labs described by Estorino. Ruttenberg elaborated on the need for true two-way collaboration, that moves beyond a focus on “preparedness to work in our organizations” to progress on “where the research takes our organizations.” She acknowledged the limited funding sources for LIS research and advocated for identifying new funding avenues and shared advocacy strategies to elevate the visibility of LIS research among policymakers.

Andrew Pace shared his first-hand awareness of the lack of intentional partnerships between iSchools and academic libraries and voiced keen interest in an ARL affinity group for library directors at universities with iSchools to offer a platform for ongoing conversation and collaboration. Noting the trend in hiring that de-emphasizes the need for an MLIS degree, Pace proposed collecting data from ARL member libraries to analyze actual hiring patterns, preferences, and priorities. With the conversation turned to workforce preparation, Estorino further emphasized the ongoing disconnect and need for better alignment between iSchool research and the practical skill and career preparation needed by libraries.

Following this lively round of observations related to the position paper, the group moved into more conversational exchange. Estorino emphasized the cultural work involved in improving engagement and collaboration between libraries and iSchools, including the need for recognition of librarians' expertise and contributions to research, of particular relevance in the hierarchical context of R1 universities where many librarians may not have faculty status. Acknowledging the current trend in community-based LIS research, she advocated for academic libraries to be understood within this framework, as one of the key communities for research partnership.

Bracke returned to the issue of career preparation through the MLIS degree, highlighting the many changes in librarianship over the last 30 years and what LIS research has missed including how academic libraries need to be more involved on their campuses and in their broader communities. Research has yet to substantially address "how" librarians need to work going forward, with a focus on the relational aspect of the work and the ability to serve a wide variety of different stakeholders and community groups. Bracke pointed to the [Data Curation Profiles](#) project from his time at Purdue University as an example of iSchool-based research that was impactful for practice and became a tool of cultural transformation in the library.

Ruttenberg highlighted declining numbers of staff in academic libraries and the challenges librarians face finding time for research due to heavy workloads and, in many cases, lack of faculty status. Estorino proposed the need for a new strategy in considering the tradeoffs libraries face. While the focus is often on how to cut existing services to do new things, she suggested identifying areas where libraries can excel and create "points of excellence" in partnership with iSchools. Estorino posed, "Are there things that academic libraries want to accomplish and excel at that iSchools can also create research agendas around to create convergence?" This approach would allow academic libraries to make strategic investments and prioritize areas that align with their institutional goals and the research expertise within iSchools.

As the discussion came to a close, Pace reiterated the possibility of creating a new ARL affinity group which could gather feedback from academic library directors on campuses with iSchools and explore research agenda possibilities in collaboration with ARL's Scholars and Scholarship Committee. Pace also proposed collecting data on tenure-track positions in libraries affiliated with iSchools to understand the landscape of research expectations and opportunities. Bracke encouraged the LIS Forward team to also look at academic libraries at non-R1 institutions, where strong institutional relationships with iSchools may already exist, as these collaborations could enrich the project and provide valuable insights.

**The discussion summary was drawn from a transcript of the forum. The LIS Forward team used Google Notebook LM to generate an initial summary based on the full transcript, which they then revised and refined. The final document was further reviewed and approved by the forum participants.*

Public Library Leaders Forum



LIS Forward Forums are a series of discussions with library leadership in response to the position paper, [Ensuring a Vibrant Future for LIS in iSchools: Friday Harbor Papers, Volume 1](#).

The Public Library Leaders forum, coordinated through the Public Library Association (PLA), was held on December 16, 2024, with five participants:

- Sonia Alcántara-Antoine, CEO of the Baltimore County Public Library, past president of PLA
- Paula Brehm-Heeger, Eva Jane Romaine Coombe Director of the Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library
- Michael Lambert, City Librarian of the San Francisco Public Library, current president of PLA
- David Leonard, President of Boston Public Library
- Maria McCauley, Director of Libraries for the City of Cambridge, past president of PLA

The 90-minute session was facilitated by Chris Coward, Senior Principal Research Scientist at the University of Washington Information School and co-chair of LIS Forward. A brief project overview, link to the report, and a set of discussion prompts were circulated in advance.

Key Takeaways

- There is a strong disconnect between the research produced by iSchools and the practical needs of public libraries.
- Public library leaders value research that is concise, easily digestible, and immediately applicable to their work.
- There is a desire for research that addresses the evolving role of public libraries, particularly in areas such as community engagement, cultural competency, data fluency, and the impact of technology and social issues on library services.
- iSchools need to engage in more meaningful dialogue and collaboration with public library leaders to ensure that research priorities and curriculum development align with the needs of the profession.

Discussion Summary*

The discussion began with participants questioning the relevance of iSchool research given the practical needs and daily challenges facing public libraries. Participants stated that they were unaware of significant research or innovations from iSchools that had directly benefited their organizations or the broader field, surfacing a strong disconnect between iSchool research and the practical needs of public libraries. Several participants noted that they find valuable research insights, reports, and best practices in briefings produced by organizations such as the Urban Library Council (ULC), Public Library Association (PLA), and will draw from management and leadership research publications such as Harvard Business Review or Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR) rather than LIS research.

The participants identified several reasons for this disconnect. First, one participant emphasized that library directors do not have time to read and digest lengthy dissertations and reports, and prefer quick summaries with clearly applicable findings. How LIS research is being communicated to practitioners was raised as a critical part of the equation. LIS researchers and faculty like Noah Lenstra and Colin Rhinesmith who use social media to help track what's happening on the ground in libraries were mentioned as being useful among practitioners. One participant mentioned David Lankes' research as being relevant to their practice, specifically his concept of libraries' role in facilitating knowledge creation holding profound implications for practice, but that his research would benefit from being broken into smaller, more digestible chunks.

“ The urgency with which we have to serve our community means that we gravitate toward sources of information that are quick, easily digestible, accessible, and relevant in that moment versus scholarly literature that comes out of our library schools.

This led to two key problems being identified: the translation problem, which refers to the difficulty in making research findings accessible and digestible for practitioners, and the topic problem, which refers to how iSchools are not researching the topics that are most relevant to public libraries.

“ Maybe this is a two-way failure that we shouldn't be just dumping on the schools. But rather we haven't asked for the right research that would support our work and grow the profession also.

As part of this discussion, many participants also questioned the continued relevance of the MLIS degree for staffing libraries. They observed the failure of MLIS programs to adequately prepare students to meet the real-world challenges that public libraries face in the twenty-first century. Traditional library services such as cataloging and reference services are less important.

“ Within the public library world, particularly those of us that are in leadership, the majority of us have MLIS degrees. We would not have gotten to where we are without first doing library school and getting that credential. But for many of us, we just kind of see it as a credential. The thing that allows us to get the jobs that we have, but in terms of usefulness and in terms of value to MLIS graduates that are coming out of library schools right now, it's just not there. So, if I need a solution, I'm not going to turn to my local library school and say hey, can you help me figure out such and such? Because within the world of public libraries, there's not a whole lot of respect to be quite honest [for MLIS programs].

Participants offered a number of practical suggestions for enhancing the MLIS curriculum. They emphasized the need for teaching MLIS students strong customer service and budgeting skills, management and strategic planning, and the realities of working with limited resources as well as the importance of programming and community outreach, cultural competency, DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), and data fluency as essential skills. With these needs in mind, research on the current effectiveness of LIS curricula in preparing MLIS graduates in becoming practitioners was suggested and in connection with this, the role of ALA accreditation in shaping MLIS programs.



And I would also say, data fluency is another thing that I think more MLIS students and graduates would benefit from learning about, because more and more we're using data to not only make better and more efficient decisions, but we're also using it to tell our story and to advocate for the library, and all of it ties back to the data, how people are using the library, how people are not using the library, who's in our community, what those demographics are, what the data tells us, and then how we shape our services.

Research Priorities

The discussion then shifted to identifying research topics that would be valuable to public libraries. In making these suggestions, participants also thought that many of these issues should be woven into the curriculum as well, which often intersected and overlapped with topics participants found important.

- **Understanding the Evolving Role of Public Libraries:** Participants highlighted the need for research that addresses the shift from print to digital borrowing and its implications for libraries as knowledge repositories, given the reliance on licensing rather than ownership of digital materials; and, the shift from collection-focused libraries to people-centered community-based organizations.
- **Legal Foundations and Budgetary Impacts:** One participant advocated for research and stronger curricula on legal foundations for libraries, including the rights of individuals and public employees, as well as the impact of budgetary decisions on library outcomes and services, especially in relation to equity and the long-term effects of staffing cuts. Regarding research on library budgets and impacts, applying mathematical statistical analysis was emphasized as a multidisciplinary opportunity that could hold meaningful implications for practitioners.
- **Labor & Management Dynamics in Libraries:** Significant interest was expressed in research on labor, management, and organizational dynamics in libraries, and the impact of these dynamics on library institutions as well relevant best practices from other industries. Participants noted the vocational, civically minded, and values-based nature of librarianship as having a unique impact on these dynamics. Research on information policy, both nationally and state by state, and its effects on equity issues, was also raised as an area that would benefit from long-term study.
- **Exploring the Role of Space:** The importance of space as an increasingly critical resource provided by public libraries was highlighted, complementing the broader discourse on the role of third spaces in civil society. A multidisciplinary approach to this topic in terms of community redevelopment was also raised, with one participant advocating for potential collaboration with land development organizations like the Urban Land Institute in analyzing the impact of libraries on their surrounding communities.
- **Understanding the Impact of AI:** AI was also identified as a crucial area for research, emphasizing the need for understanding its implications for digital literacy, automation, and the role of libraries in preparing patrons for this technological shift.
- **Examining the History of Libraries:** The importance of critically examining the history of libraries, especially the impact of exclusionary practices on marginalized communities and the failure of libraries to welcome all members of the community, was raised as a way to combat the continued whitewashing of librarianship in LIS programs.

Exploring Partnerships & Collaboration

The conversation then turned to potential partnerships and collaborations between iSchools and public libraries to address the identified research and curricular needs. Participants offered concrete suggestions for partnerships, including:

- **Advisory Councils:** Participants emphasized the need for stronger dialogue and collaboration, with one participant expressing disappointment at the lack of engagement from iSchools in seeking input from library leaders on desired skills and qualifications for LIS graduates. To remedy this, forming advisory councils was suggested.

“ Why isn't there a standing advisory council for every iSchool or LIS program that is drawing from public [libraries]—and I include school libraries in the public—and academic libraries together? Not separately, together...So I really think the choice of what to study and what to research as well as what to prepare people for, should be in dialogue with the entities that will benefit from the research or hire the people.

Multiple participants discussed instances where the MLIS requirement had been eliminated in library positions, with one participant sharing their decision to remove the MLIS requirement for branch managers in their library system stating, *“The reality is that library school doesn't teach the skills that I'm looking for in my next generation of workers and leaders.”*

- **Incorporating Practitioner Perspectives into Curriculum:** Inviting practitioners to teach courses, offer guest lectures, or serve as mentors to students. The Managerial Leadership in Library and Information Science doctorate program at Simmons University, which was funded by IMLS and no longer exists, was highlighted as an example of a highly beneficial program due to its well-balanced combination of faculty and professors of practice that helped produce many of the current leaders in the library field.
- **Create a Separate Public Library Track for MLIS Degrees:** Developing a specialized track within iSchool programs that focuses on the specific needs and challenges of public libraries.
- **Dual Degrees and Minors:** Restructuring LIS programs to encourage dual degrees or minors in fields like social work, public administration, or management theory to enhance the skills and knowledge students gain in ways that are more relevant to public libraries.
- **Engaging Undergraduate Students:** Participants affirmed the introduction of LIS concepts and career pathways to undergraduate students, as raised in the LIS Forward report, as an important means to increase awareness of the field and build a future pipeline of professionals and researchers. At the same time, the steep cost of undergraduate and graduate programs and high rates of student debts was noted—especially when placed in the context of the low starting salaries for librarians—as an area of ethical concern.
- **Exploring Funding Opportunities:** Investigating funding opportunities for research that addresses the needs of public libraries, potentially through partnerships with organizations and entities with a vested interest in community development and social services.

**The discussion summary was drawn from a transcript of the forum. The LIS Forward team used Google Notebook LM to generate an initial summary based on the full transcript, which they then revised and refined. The final document was further reviewed and approved by the forum participants.*

Library Studies, the Informational Disciplines, and the iSchool: Some Remarks Prompted by LIS Forward



*Lorcan Dempsey, Distinguished Practitioner in Residence,
University of Washington Information School*

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iSchools have created a space where many disciplinary backgrounds come together in potentially exciting ways. My focus here is on the position of Library Studies within this mix. I don't mean to ignore the bigger questions about iSchools and their future, or about Library Studies in other disciplinary configurations; they are just not within my scope. A strong Library Studies component has much to gain from this mixed disciplinary hinterland.

This response reflects its origins as a personal commentary on the LIS Forward report, and as such manifests some informality, in both presentation and preparation. It covers several areas that could be treated much more extensively or completely in a different kind of consideration.

Given the original emphases of the report, I focus on libraries and library studies, LIS, and IS, and assume an R1 setting.

I am very aware of my partial and particular perspectives. I make a note of my experience in a coda. It should be clear that my aim most of the time is to be suggestive rather than comprehensive. I use IS (Information Science), LIS (Library and Information Science/Studies) and LS (Library Studies) throughout.

1. Introduction

Introductory

The LIS Forward report is motivated by “a sense of urgency concerning the future of LIS in information schools.” It is a welcome and interesting contribution.

The report looks at the current position of LIS (Library and Information Science/Studies)¹ in the iSchool. It echoes recurrent discussions about the prestige or position of LIS/Library Studies within the academy, the unsettled relationship between various informational disciplines, circular debates about the nature of those informational disciplines, and the challenges to a practice-based discipline in a research environment.

I share the authors’ sense of urgency. However, this sense of urgency is not driven primarily by questions of disciplinary definition or boundary. It is driven by a sense that this is an important moment for libraries and for librarianship.

It is an exciting time, as the library has been transforming from a transactional, collection-centered one to a relational, community-centered one. It is also a challenging time as both library value and library values are being questioned.

It is very much a field in motion, and occasional commotion.

For these reasons it is a time when it is more important than ever to have strong learning, research and advocacy partners which can strengthen the field and provide leadership in these areas:

- Research: enrich the library’s knowledge base about its community and environment.
- Career preparation: understood broadly as provision of skills and outlooks to understand and act in changing social, political, technical, and service environments.
- Engagement: connect libraries to frameworks, evidence and arguments, which influence practice and inform policy.

Library or Information Studies is one important place this leadership can come from, although as I note below, there are others. The current iteration of the report focuses on research, although I make comments on all three areas.

Accordingly, the urgency that I see is in the connection between, on one hand, the library of today and tomorrow and, on the other, the university educational capacity that prepares much of the library workforce, and the university research capacity that can potentially advance the field.

Is iSchool education and research helping libraries succeed? I am not sure to what extent it is. I would be interested to see more of an outside-in view of the questions raised in the report in future iterations. What do libraries and related organizations need in terms of iSchool (or other) research, education and innovation partners?

I mostly use the term ‘Library Studies’ (LS)—or librarianship—in my response.² This is certainly because libraries and librarianship are my primary focus; however, I also want to avoid some of the definitional

¹ LIS can be expanded as Library and Information Science, which is how it seems to be used in the report. Less often, perhaps, it is expanded as Library and Information Studies.

² Of course, not all iSchools include Library Studies in their portfolio.

blurriness around the use of 'LIS' that the report acknowledges. I believe that this blurriness can be politically and personally convenient while also being more generally unhelpful.

It is clearly significant that LIS Forward was initiated by a group of iSchools within R1 institutions, given the reputational hierarchies and research focus at play in those institutions. Library Studies may have low prestige or 'symbolic capital' in these environments. This comes across very clearly in the contribution in Chapter 3 of the Early Career Faculty. It is also evident in some comments in the deans' interviews.

Indeed, in support of this view, one need not look beyond the disciplinary backgrounds of the deans of the involved iSchools, and the relative absence among them of a disciplinary or practitioner background in Library Studies. The low proportion of LS hires in 2022 (as opposed to LIS hires) noted by the report authors also seems telling.

At the same time, the perception of libraries themselves, particularly within university structures of influence and opinion, may be static and out of date. They may not be seen as complex management environments embedded in demanding political situations, or as sites of evolving technology or strategic choices, or as public investments in wellness, education and research.

At a high level, this leads to a two-fold challenge for Library Studies within the iSchool, especially within the R1 environment. First is the lack of academic prestige and hence emphasis; second is a potential lack of belief that libraries can motivate theoretical frameworks or professional preparation that is sufficiently worthy of academic attention.

These and other challenges have led to what I call here a story of progressive subsumption, as Library Studies is subsumed into various broader informational constructs. Schools of Library Studies diversified into LIS to reflect the changing technology environment, and the variety of informational careers students were following. LIS was subsumed into broader schools of information, as information processing and management became more common. The iSchool range is wide, with emphases as various as, say, vocationally oriented information systems work, or as social and philosophical aspects of an informational society, or as values-driven social justice and equity explorations. In some cases, informatics or related undergraduate degrees were added. The report makes clear that Library Studies feels squeezed or undervalued, despite reporting continued demand for the MLIS. There are also questions about the balance between teaching-oriented faculty and research faculty, as this educational demand continues.

This pattern of subsumption also relates to scale, the LS research and education capacity available in any iSchool or in aggregate across iSchools and other institutions. Is this a community that is stable or in decline? Of course, an advantage of the bigger school unit is the ability to work in concert with others.

There is a third challenge, one of agency and change. Local evolution will be driven by individual university configurations, influences and needs. Any change process is diffuse and slow, and is subject to the collective action problem across schools. It may also be resisted, although the report does not emphasise this, as may happen if some reallocation of resources, influence and vested interests is suggested.

Together, these challenges lead to a major question the report needs to address. Given the depressingly recurrent nature of the discussions about the position of Librarianship/LIS in R1 institutions, what needs to be done differently now to secure and elevate that position?

This is why I emphasise four factors throughout this response:

- 1) The benefits of increasing the awareness, scale and impact of research and policy work through a more concerted collaborative approach.
- 2) The benefits of reconnecting more strongly with libraries and related organizations, and the organizations that channel their interests, which includes discussion of more flexible and tailored learning and certification reflecting evolving skills and workplace demands.
- 3) The possible benefits of refocusing this particular discussion of Library Studies around the institutional and service dynamics of LAM and connecting that with a variety of disciplinary hinterlands (public administration, social studies, and so on) and moving away from the familiar and maybe superseded discussions about IS, LIS and so on.
- 4) The benefits of developing an agenda of Key Areas which connect with current library needs, and which can provide some rationale or motivation for recruitment, research activity, granters, collaborative activity, and so on. If iSchool education and research respond more actively to evolving library issues, the people with appropriate skills and interests need to be in place.

Of course, there is a prior question about whether Library Studies has a place in the iSchool at all, but for now I assume it does. In fact, one is aware of opportunity. R1 institutions contain the space, resources and ambition to potentially remake Library Studies in ways that address the challenges of the times. If Library Studies is to benefit from strong collaborations within the range of specialisms an iSchool offers then Library Studies itself must be strongly represented in the structures of the school, be connected with the practitioner community, and have a strong research profile. The report recognizes this, notably in recommendation 3.

It seems unlikely that Library Studies has the prestige, track record or scale to exist in the R1 environment outside of a bigger grouping such as the iSchool. Given the history of library schools within this environment, a favorable position with an iSchool or other school seems like a win. (And again, Library Studies exists outside of this environment also.)

I comment on iSchools here given that that is the focus of the report, acknowledging that other disciplinary-departmental configurations exist and may offer other advantages. A key issue here is the scale required to have a range of educational offerings and some research capacity.

Finally, as the report notes, iSchools are quite different from each other and given the fluidity of disciplinary definition, origin stories, and departmental organization, it is clear that practices are highly contingent—on institutional histories and configurations, on deans' preferences and outlooks, on hiring decisions, on institutional political and economic drivers, and on existing faculty interests. This comes across quite strongly in some places in the report, and I thought that it would be interesting for the authors to lean a little more into some of these questions at some stage.

For this reason, when I talk about iSchools I tend to have a somewhat idealized version in mind, assuming a broad scope that entails a sociotechnical exploration of technology, people and organizations within a multidisciplinary setting. Thinking about the position and future of the iSchool within the university is outside my scope here, and, indeed, outside my competence. Library Studies certainly have a place within such an environment. Of course, actually existing iSchools variably embody that idealized version.

Summary note

My response is in seven sections. This introduction is followed by five relatively self-standing pieces which could be considered independently, each looking at a different aspect of Library Studies and the iSchool. For this reason, there may be a little redundancy between them. Finally, there is a section which responds to the report's invitation to provide some candidate recommendations.

Five opening remarks:

- 1) The initiative should have ambition which is proportional to the urgency they describe, and to the benefits of having a strong research and education partner for a challenged and changing library community. This needs some thinking about agency in respect of collaborative activity, and I suggest the group seeks funding to coordinate and seek additional support.
- 2) Given the recurrent nature of the discussion about the position of Library Studies/LIS within the university, and given the prestige dynamics of an R1 institution, a (the?) major question before the initiative is how to secure and elevate that position. This involves steps to elevate the interest in, the awareness of, and the impact of the research and education questions Library Studies addresses, to sharpen focus on the distinctiveness of LS, and to reconnect with evolving library challenges and interests.
- 3) The report notes an identity challenge within an identity challenge (LIS within the iSchool). One could extend the identity challenge concertina and add Informatics, Library Studies, Information Science and Information Sciences to the mix. At the same time, as the deans note, outside perceptions can be confused about labels, be unaware of intellectual traditions, or be confused about the nature of the scholarly enquiry or education involved. After many years of discussion, the LS/LIS/IS discourse does not cumulate to consensus about a unified field, about the main emphases in such a field, or about the terms used to describe it. Seen against the challenge I describe above, this disciplinary discussion seems like a played-out topic, of declining interest; however, it still commands attention and I explore it further below. At the same time, the library is not just a set of information management techniques. Nor is the future of the library more Python or data science, important as those are for some who work in libraries. The library is a service organization that needs to be designed and sustained, a social and cultural institution with a long history and a vital educational and civic role. Library education and research have other potential partners in the disciplinary ecosystem, which is one reason that the potentially broader social and cultural range of the iSchool is of interest. If the focus of the initiative is on libraries, I think that it makes sense to talk about Library Studies (rather than LIS), noting, as the report does, the evolution of and interaction between informational disciplines.
- 4) I question above whether switching from LIS to LAM as a focus would clarify and sharpen the goals. This would move it away from definitional discussion within the informational fields, although it could still benefit from their focus. Of course, libraries, archives and museums have quite different traditions and emphases, but they do share that they are practitioner-focused, and represent institutional responses to social, cultural and scholarly needs. Establishing a new focus, within the rich multi-disciplinary hinterland of the iSchool, connects to the future rather than to a past struggling to establish its place. A Library/Archive/Museum focus also potentially presents a more understandable and relatable focus to other parties.³
- 5) A key factor here is economics. I do not have the data or the knowledge to comment on this. However, it is important to understand local economic drivers, market demand and willingness

³ While Archival Studies is present in many iSchools, Museum Studies is less so, which can complicate use of the LAM label. I am not suggesting that the designation 'LAM' is readily understood, but libraries, museums and archives are. I understand various objections to this, not least the perception that LAMs are about the past.

to pay, and so on. This plays into the interesting discussion about certificates, stackable qualifications, and other flexible learning pathways in evolving practitioner-oriented disciplines.

Here is a brief description of what is to follow.

- 1) **Information – an elusive and changing concept.** I sketch a brief historical schematic, just to provide some context for subsequent discussion of libraries and the informational disciplines. I note the move from the long age of literacy and print, to the proliferation of recorded information and knowledge resources after World War II, to the current 'informationalized' environment where information is an integral part of social organization. I note how the library, Information Science, and the iSchool emerged, respectively, in these successive phases. And I also discuss the current broad philosophical, technical, cultural and social interest in informational issues across disciplines. This interest is also turned to the past, which may be reinterpreted in informational terms. In parallel with this rise, information critique becomes more important.
- 2) **Libraries – organizational responses to learning and creative needs.** My main focus is to reaffirm that libraries are complex and changing social organizations, which are deeply collaborative and networked, and which are often working in challenging political and social contexts. They are shifting from being transactional and collections-centered to being relational and community-centered. This means that they manifest interesting educational and research issues, from the technical, to the management, to the social and political. For example, libraries are relevant if you are interested in the public sphere, the nature and support of public goods, equity of opportunity, childhood learning, building sustainable scholarly infrastructure, the balance between creators and consumers, the nature of memory and forgetting. Information management skills remain important but there is a range of community, management, organization, advocacy and other skills that are also very important. This underlines how the library can generate interesting education and research agendas, and a principal theme here is how to elevate awareness of this and interest in it among peers from other disciplines. I suggest that the initiative convene with central library organizations and funders to develop a motivating list of Key Areas that will be important for libraries, and might provide some signals for recruitment, research, and course development.
- 3) **The informational disciplines.** I review some of the literature about LIS, Information Science (IS) and the emergence of the iSchool. I note the binary nature of LIS (L + IS) and the subsequent ambiguity in its use as well as occasional tension between the two wings. The relative L or IS emphasis may vary by context of use or person. In its classic form, Information Science may only be fully appreciated by those familiar with its tradition. Others may understand it more generically as a more applied companion to computer science or as a general enquiry. We already see discussion of 'information sciences' or 'information science' which make no reference to the classical Information Science intellectual legacy or social community. Nevertheless, there are strong intellectual traditions and affiliations at play, and I conclude that it may be appropriate to think of LIS and of Information Science as ongoing social communities, supported by particular educational affiliations, journals, conferences, and associations rather than as self-standing disciplines. The iSchools themselves are an important part of the IS and LIS social architecture. However, this may mean that the specificity of the IS or LIS community may be diluted as the iSchool faculty continues to be diversified, as the broader iSchool informational agenda subsumptively addresses the core IS issues in a hybrid disciplinary setting, and as iSchool graduates have a variety of disciplinary outlooks. Library Studies can potentially benefit from being a strong focus within the multidisciplinary mix of the iSchool.

- 4) **Ideas – impact on policy and practice.** I briefly look at the general transmission of ideas and innovation in the library domain and wonder if the impact of Library Studies here is less than one might expect. The report is relatively silent about this area, but some disciplines (business and economics, for example) do aim to inform policy and influence practice. This seems like an important discussion point. I would be interested to see some follow-up work comparing Library Studies with other disciplines. Education, Health Sciences, Social Work, Industrial Relations and Hospitality Studies come to mind.
- 5) **Prestige and power in the university.** I talk about prestige and power, which are clearly very much at play in the dynamics of the iSchool and the influences on the report. I draw on Bourdieu's discussion of field, capital and power. The historical trajectory of Library Studies in the context of successively emerging informational disciplines (Information Science, LIS and the iSchool) lends itself extremely well to analysis using these categories. To what extent does the historical addition of 'Information Science' to library (as in LIS) or the positioning within a broader technology hinterland represent a desire to increase the symbolic capital of the discipline? Has the 'IS' subsequently crowded the 'L', as the report seems to suggest? How do Library Studies play within the prestige politics of an R1 institution? Library Studies undoubtedly benefit from the scale and diversity a broader iSchool brings and the report also notes the addition of interesting and relevant new domains of study, Indigenous knowledges, for example. However, Library Studies also struggles for attention or prestige and is pressed in some of the ways discussed emphatically by the early career faculty in the report. The Library Studies field typically has a professional focus, does not generate large collaborative grants, and its community engagement and contribution does not result in industry breakthroughs, major policy initiatives, newsworthy prizes, or other markers of distinction valued in this environment. Reception is also gendered, given the historically feminized nature of the profession. There is a comment in the Dean's section about having to continually make the case for librarianship: I would have been interested to have heard more from the iSchool deans about the realities of leading iSchools in an R1 institution, and indeed more generally about power, prestige, and politics in this environment. This section was written in dialogue with ChatGPT, which notes "The struggle for symbolic capital in LIS involves both defending the value of library-centric research and aligning with the broader, more interdisciplinary goals of the iSchool movement."
- 6) **Recommendations and candidate recommendations.** A concluding section takes up the invitation to offer some candidate recommendations. They mostly focus on how to elevate the status and recognition of Library Studies, in part through stronger collaboration across the iSchools. I also include some suggestions for additional studies that would amplify topics or questions raised in the report.

There are two Codas. In Coda 1 I include some NGram diagrams of vocabulary used in the report (LIS, Information Science, etc.). The curves are interesting, but I did not incorporate them here given uncertainty about NGram data and interpretation. Coda 2 is a note describing my experience, and acknowledging my partial perspective.

Some preliminary notes

Finally, here are some additional notes of areas that are important but not pursued here.

- Library Studies shares with some other practice-oriented disciplines (health professions, hospitality, social work, and others) a historic association with service and community engagement. These areas have been traditionally feminized and undervalued. How much is this dynamic in play in the relationship between Library Studies and the informational qualifications in part designed to make it appear more technological or scientific? This definitely bears further exploration by the initiative.

- The report notes that libraries can stand in for LAM generally in discussion. I think that 'LAM' should only be used when it is applicable to and inclusive of all three strands, not when the discussion is really library or LIS based. While acknowledging that there are variously converging interests, each practice also has a history, professional community(ies), and curatorial traditions that warrant individual discussion. Assimilating LAM to an LIS/LS discussion like this is unhelpful. That said, schools that are lucky to have all three strands benefit greatly.
- I am very conscious that the report does not consider student or potential employer interests. My own knowledge here is largely personal and subjective. Given that many students are looking for the MLIS credential as an entry point to a library or related career, this seems like an important gap which future work may address. The relevance of LS research, education and other work to libraries and related organizations is an important element of their claims to research and education status.
- The report is about iSchools. Of course, as noted above, Library Studies may achieve some scale and collaboration possibilities in other configurations—within cultural studies or communications schools, for example, or business or education. Given the organizational context of libraries, there is a variety of relevant disciplinary hinterlands, and it is increasingly the case that 'information' is only one possibility. Given the topic of the report, I do not discuss those, although I do suggest some further exploration.
- I use 'librarian' generally to refer to those who work in libraries and have a vocational interest in their evolution. Only occasionally do I explicitly limit it to those who have the MLIS credential.
- I include references. Given the historical nature of the discussion, some of these are to older materials.

2. Information: a brief schematic history

“ The word information has been used so much that it has come to dominate discourse (Day, 2001). [...] Vagueness and inconsistency are advantageous for slogans and using “chameleon words” that assume differing colors in different contexts allows flexibility for readers to perceive what they wish.

Buckland, M. (2012). What kind of science can information science be? *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*.

“ I should like to draw an analytical distinction between the notions of “information society” and “informational society,” with similar implications for information/informational economy. The term “information society” emphasizes the role of information in society. But I argue that information, in its broadest sense, e.g. as communication of knowledge, has been critical in all societies [...] In contrast, the term “informational” indicates the attribute of a specific form of social organization in which information generation, processing, and transmission become the fundamental sources of productivity and power because of new technological conditions emerging in this historical period. My terminology tries to establish a parallel with the distinction between industry and industrial. An industrial society (a usual notion in the sociological tradition) is not just a society where there is industry, but a society where the social and technological forms of industrial organization permeate all spheres of activity, starting with the dominant activities, located in the economic system and in military technology, and reaching the objects and habits of everyday life. My use of the terms “informational society” and “informational economy” attempts a more precise characterization of current transformations beyond the common-sense observation that information and knowledge are important to our societies.

Castells, M. (2009). *The Rise of the Network Society, With a New Preface: the Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture Volume I* (2nd ed).

I look very briefly at our senses of information itself as it is the context for the discussion about informational disciplines to follow. It is certainly a ‘chameleon’ word. It has become so widely used as to become drained of specificity unless explicitly qualified in particular circumstances.

Raymond Williams’ *Keywords* does not include an entry for ‘Information,’ which is telling. This influential work gave rise to multiple subsequent collections which aim to update it or adapt it to particular domains. I quote from the entries on ‘information’ in three of these here:

“ Information as keyword—digital or otherwise—did not exist before the twentieth century. [...] Then, unexpectedly, in the 1920s this formerly unmarked and unremarkable concept became a focal point of widespread scientific and mathematical investigation.

‘Information’ by Bernard Geoghegan in Peters, B. (Ed.). (2016). *Digital Keywords*.

“ Toward the end of the C20 “information” became a popular prefix to a range of concepts that claimed to identify essential features of an emerging new sort of society. The **information explosion, information age, information economy, information revolution**, and especially **information society** became commonplace descriptions (Castells, 1996-8; Webster, 2002). These covered, and tried to conceive, disparate phenomena, perhaps unwarrantedly. The concepts appeared superficially to capture similar phenomena, yet on closer inspection centered often on quite different things. For example, their concern ranged over a general increase in symbols and signs that accelerated from the 1960s (the information explosion); the development of information and communications technologies, especially the Internet (the **information superhighway**, reputedly coined by US vice-president Al Gore), the increased prominence of information in employment (**information scientists, information labor, information professions**); the growing significance of tradable information (information economy); and concerns for new forms of inequality (the **information divide, the information rich/poor**).

‘Information’ by Frank Webster in Bennett (2005) *New Keywords: a Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*.

“ As burgeoning use of information in preference to related terms encroaches on the word’s surrounding lexical field, questions arise as to how everything from the human genome to celebrity gossip can so readily be referred to as information.

‘Information’ in MacCabe, C., & Yanacek, H. (2018). *Keywords for today: a 21st century vocabulary: the keywords project*.

Geoghegan notes the relatively recent general use of the word, and is primarily interested in the information-theoretic work of Shannon and others in the mid-20th century, which was important for the development of telegraphy and in subsequent years of computing, cryptography, genetics, network theory, and other areas (although was ultimately not very influential in Library Studies or related fields, as Hjørland (2018) points out). The other two excerpts emphasize growing use of the word throughout the latter half of the 20th Century. Webster (a sociologist who has specialized in information-related topics and has written about public libraries) notes the way in which it became attached to various generally descriptive labels, notably of course in the ‘Information society’ and for our purposes ‘Information science.’

The quotes above underline the strong emergence of information-related issues as a topic of investigation, and as an explanatory framework in different contexts. Given this widespread use, any account of information is also going to be provisional and contextual.

As background here, I sketch a very schematic overview of information history, which departs from the W. Boyd Rayward (2014) account which influenced it.

This may seem a little hubristic, but I am prompted to insert it here by the common assertion in iSchool materials—accompanied by such phrases as the ‘knowledge economy’ or the ‘information age’—that the importance of information in our world elevates the work of the iSchool.

However, as Castells notes, this “common-sense observation that information and knowledge are important to our societies,” is not in itself very revealing.

Information has also gone beyond the bounds of any one subject. The chemist or the cultural geographer or the sociologist has an informational perspective. In this context, it seems to me, the promise of the iSchool is not that it has specialist or unique expertise, but that it can bring together a historical perspective and a multidisciplinary focus.

For reasons that should be clear, I do not attempt to define information here. See Bates (2010) for an exhaustive review of definitions, which, more than anything, suggests why a singular view is unlikely.

For convenience, I reference Michael Buckland’s (2017) pragmatic and functional account.

- *Information as thing*. Informational artifacts—books, passports, menus. Broadly synonymous with Buckland’s inclusive view of ‘document.’
- *Information as process*. Becoming informed.
- *Information as knowledge*. Intangible. Fixed in ‘things.’ Imparted in the informing process.

In their reflective overview of information definitions in IS, Dinneen and Bauner (2017) note that “Buckland was aware that the overall account was likely to disappoint the pickiest of theorists.” While a more conceptual characterization—such as Bateson’s “a difference that makes a difference” or Bates’ “the pattern of organization of matter and energy”—might offer additional nuance or insight, it is less well-suited to my purposes. Dinneen and Bauner (2017) favor the recently influential work of Floridi, which also, incidentally, is highlighted in the important information science textbook, Bawden and Robinson (2022).

I reference it mostly because its somewhat technocratic emphasis is convenient. Much of the emphasis of Library Studies or Information Science is indeed on the recorded information that can provide a part of the material base for some of the more abstract or general uses above. And also partly because Buckland is such an interesting and historically influential figure in this discussion (librarian, leading Information Science theorist and practitioner, central player in the iSchool movement at Berkeley (Buckland, 2024)).

I take the pivotal mid- to late mid-twentieth century as a starting point. As noted above, information was foregrounded in a variety of ways at this time, and terms such as ‘information science’ and ‘information society’ emerged. I refer to this as *the short age of documents*, a reference to the discourse around the challenge of managing recorded information.

Then, we have the long period before this, in which recorded information was manifest in print or manuscript forms. I refer to this as *the long age of literacy and print*.

And third, we have the short period after this, which we are now living through. While we can characterize this as a digital or network age, the more interesting point here is that an informational perspective becomes more common, extending to social and political contexts. Modern institutional constructs—markets or bureaucracies for example—can be seen in informational terms. I refer to this as *the informational age* (influenced by Castells’ characterization of the current period).

Furthermore, it is now common to reinterpret the past through an informational lens. Perhaps the most interesting recent example of this is Yuval Noah Harari’s ambitious *The Nexus*, which was published recently to mixed reception. He tends to see any ‘intersubjective reality’ as informational. He takes a long historical view, discussing developments as stages in the emergence of information networks. For example, he discusses the difference between democratic and totalitarian regimes as a difference

between self-correcting and closed information networks. He talks about civilizations as combinations of a managerial and operational bureaucracy and a legitimating or imposed mythology, each again very much an informational apparatus. He reinterprets the past in terms of an informational present; here he is, for example, talking about the impact of printing: “print allowed the rapid spread not only of scientific facts but also of religious fantasies, fake news, and conspiracy theories.”

In this period also there is a strong emphasis on information critique, and with the advent of AI, perhaps, as I will suggest, we are seeing the apotheosis of the document.

The long age of literacy and print

The emergence of the document marked an important early transition.

Writing allowed thought to be externalized, fixing information in a medium that could persist across space and time. In an oral culture, knowledge had to be remembered. Mnemonic techniques and repetition aided memory. It was retained through song, story and ritual.

As Walter Ong and others have argued, the external documentary accumulation of knowledge co-evolved with a profound shift in the structure of thought, knowledge and communication, evident in the development of more abstract and systematic forms of thinking, the emergence of formal learning and scholarship, the development of laws, the codification of expertise, and so on. This intensified after the invention of movable type.

From then until the Second World War, say, information exchange was dominated by the production and exchange of print. Infrastructures and institutions emerged which helped create, manage and preserve documents, including libraries, archives, scholarly societies and publishing, publishers, commercial distribution mechanisms, and so on.

Libraries are a strongly institutionalized response to the print distribution model, where information or cultural resources were expensive or available in limited ways. Efficient access required the physical proximity of collections to their potential readers, and libraries built local collections to make them conveniently available within their communities. In this way, collection size and transaction volumes became a signifier of quality. Those interested in technical, scholarly, cultural or other documents built their workflow around the library.

So, while at a material or mechanical level, we see the progressive intensification and amplification of the production and exchange of documents, a greater variety of ways of processing information, and the massive accumulation of recorded knowledge, the more interesting story involves the mutual interaction between this and social and cultural life.

The progressive connectedness and complexity of social contexts entails progressively more communication across time and space, and a corresponding expansion of the external shared documentary accumulation of expertise and knowledge. Libraries are a part of the apparatus for retaining and sharing that documentary record.

The short age of documents

In the mid-20th century, the production, circulation, and institutionalization of information expanded significantly, shaped by the ongoing interplay between social structures, technological developments, and organizational demands. The Second World War itself accelerated this, intensifying the need for systematic coordination across scientific, governmental, and industrial domains. There was growth in the scientific and technical literature, while governments and institutions expanded their administrative

records, accompanying new forms of bureaucratic surveillance and tracking. Businesses became increasingly reliant on structured data, for decision-making, to optimize workflows, to comply with regulatory frameworks, and so on.

In this way, the volume and variety of documents (again, broadly understood) continued to grow, as did the processes by which they were shared. It is in this period, as noted above, that Information Science emerged, as a response to the challenges of managing this abundance of information in various ways.

Through the sixties and later, there was a focus on the structural changes brought about by “knowledge-intensive production and a post-industrial array of goods and services” (Lash, 2002). This work was informed by the empirical work of Porat and Machlup and others and was given influential synthetic expression as the ‘information society’ or the ‘post-industrial society’ in the work of Daniel Bell. Peter Drucker also popularized the concepts of ‘knowledge work’ and ‘knowledge worker’ during this period.

In successive decades, digital information systems emerged—chemical information, health and legal systems, early knowledge management, and so on.

In this period also there was some modest social institutionalization of Information Science and related areas. The *American Documentation Institute* (ADI) was founded in 1937, becoming the *American Society for Information Science* (ASIS) in 1968. It acquired a final ‘t’ for technology in 2000, and finally became the *Association for Information Science and Technology* in 2013. The *Institute of Information Scientists* was formed in the UK in 1968, and merged with the *Library Association* in 2002 to form *CILIP*. *IFIP* (*International Federation for Information Processing*) was founded in 1960.

The evolving informational age



Then it looks at how the logic of information flows reterritorialize into new formations of the brand, the platform, the standard, intellectual property and the network. [...] The primary qualities of information are flow, disembeddedness, spatial compression, temporal compression, real-time relations. It is not exclusively, but mainly, in this sense that we live in an information age.

Lash, S. (2002). *Critique of information*.

In his highly influential three volume *The Information Age*, Castells talks of a network society and an informational society. I will use this to frame an introduction to the current period, dating from the late 20th century.

Contributory factors in this period are the accelerated evolution of communications and computational capacity which has provided the material base for a range of other developments. These include the restructuring and intensification of capitalism brought about by deregulation, privatization, global extension and geopolitical changes; the network flows of money, data and people which have changed how we think about the boundaries of organizations, nations and personal relations; and the ongoing transformation of the media, personal communications, and the means of shaping public opinion.

This environment rests on complex network systems, aggregations of data, and applications which communicate via protocols and APIs. This material base has co-evolved with social organization. For Castells (as for Lash and Harari), a key feature is the organizing power of networks, throughout all aspects of what we do.

For example, network effects have led to several dominant platforms that articulate much of our social,

cultural and business activities (the Amazoogole phenomenon). Retail, music and entertainment were transformed. The flow of materials is monitored by tracking systems, and is articulated in complex just-in-time supply chains; mobile communications and mapping services have changed our sense of mobility and delivery; distribution chains, the disposition of goods around retail floors, investment decisions, variable real-time pricing, and many other taken for granted aspects of what we do are driven by the collection, exchange and analysis of data.

From a functional point of view, varieties of 'Informationalization' are visible at all levels in everyday life: doors open automatically, material money is disappearing; advanced instrumentation for observation and analysis is common in the sciences. Increasingly, our activities yield up data which influences what products are offered to us, the news we see, and so on.

Something as apparently simple as the selfie has interacted with behaviors to affect mental wellness, the travel industry and communication.

It is this sense of qualitative change that prompts Manuel Castells to pose the distinction between the 'information society' and the 'informational society.' We are now seeing an intensification of some of the informational trends he observes as AI becomes more common.

Castells discusses how the network has facilitated broad coordination of interests, in social movements, popular uprisings, or organized crime, for example. It extends to a global scale, where a network of megacities channels power and innovation. He suggests that there is at once a global integration facilitated by the network, but, at the same time, a growing fragmentation between those connected to the network circuits of power and prosperity and those not connected.

More recently, we also see a counter force to global integration. Rather than frictionless global information flow, we are seeing regimes forming around power blocs, with different policy, control and regulatory regimes. Think of the US, EU, Russia and China. There has also been some argument that unequal participation in the 'knowledge economy' is a factor in emerging political polarization.

Given this general importance, there has also been an interesting and unsurprising informational development in modern theory. This has come into our field most clearly perhaps in Jurgen Habermas' concept of the public sphere, but think also, for example, of Anthony Giddens' concept of 'reflexive modernity' or Ulrich Beck's 'risk society.' Modernity in these views is characterized by the dynamic reassessment of available information and expert knowledge to navigate complexity.

A central aspect of Giddens's analysis is his consideration of 'reflexive modernity': "... the reflexive ordering and reordering of social relations in the light of continual inputs of knowledge affecting the actions of individuals and groups" so that "production of systematic knowledge about social life becomes integral to system reproduction." Modern life rests on expertise (in construction, engineering, medicine, technology, ...), which builds on the accumulated record of science and technology.

I have chosen to reference the social sciences here, as informationalization and social and cultural change are intricately linked. It is also notable how little reference there is to classical Information Science in this discussion.

The generative turn: the apotheosis of the document

“ Instead, these AI systems are what we might call cultural technologies, like writing, print, libraries, internet search engines or even language itself. They are new techniques for passing on information from one group of people to another. Asking whether GPT-3 or LaMDA is intelligent or knows about the world is like asking whether the University of California’s library is intelligent or whether a Google search “knows” the answer to your questions. But cultural technologies can be extremely powerful—for good or ill.

Alison Gopnik, 2022.

The current form of generative AI emerged as late as 2023. I find Alison Gopnik’s characterization of it as a cultural technology helpful. She places it in a historical context as the latest technique for passing information from one group of people to another, again considering information very broadly. I was interested to see her place libraries in this frame as well.

Effectively, large language models are statistical models derived from vast accumulations of documentary representations of knowledge. In the context of the narrative presented here, the volume and variety of documents is now so great that they are treated as a proxy for knowledge. Proponents of intelligent AI argue that the models, working with both the broad accumulated representation of knowledge in the training collections, and with massive compute, can find a way to not only summarize and generalize from the content of those documents, but also to replicate the minds that created them.

I tend to Gopnik’s skepticism on this question (see Yiu, E., Kosoy, E., & Gopnik, A. (2024) for an extended argument).

Nevertheless, the processing powers of the models make them very effective for some purposes, and the agentic and applications infrastructure being built on top of them promise to make them more so. We do not know yet whether and where developments will plateau, or how adoption varies by tolerance for hallucinations,⁴ or where the impact will be most felt.

However, given the key role of documents (information) in managing complex organizations and interactions, some see the reach of AI as extensive. In this way, the informational, reflexive, networked nature of social life is potentially further intensified.

This extensive informationalization is why Harari, for example, is concerned about the potential reach and impact of AI, as the systemic processability of the connective informational tissue of organizations and systems, he argues, renders them vulnerable to manipulation.

Of course, the ramifications of AI for libraries and for iSchools are accordingly significant. It intensifies some of the trends we have observed, and—as with other activities at scale—has both constructive and problematic elements (to use a phrase of Barrett and Orlikowski’s).

If we think of the informational disciplines having a special interest in recorded information, some immediate issues arise.

- Cultural synthesizers. Synthesized content and context add a new dimension and challenge.
- Iterative and chained interaction. We will interact differently with information objects or bodies of knowledge. Think of how larger publishers or aggregators will provide access to scholarly literature, for example.

⁴ It is a pity that ‘hallucination’ has become the term used here, as it gives a misleading sense of how LLMs work.

- Social confidence and trust. Our sense of authenticity, identity, authorship will all be redefined, creating issues of trust and verification.
- Policy, law and practice will all evolve unevenly in concert.

Information critique

Our simplest actions or interactions now entail complex informational networks and platforms. Think of what is involved in just texting, sending an email or writing in cloud-based Office 365, whatever about group document preparation, remote experiments, or mapping activity.

Day to day behaviors yield up data which is aggregated at scale and used in various ways to monitor, sell or advertise. Large companies have built vast consolidated infrastructure—we are used to thinking of information as immaterial, however, AI has also emphasized how the cloud has boots of concrete. These companies also wield great cultural and economic power—Spotify does our listening for us, Amazon holds sway over merchants on its site.

These social and cultural ramifications mean that undesirable effects are visible and urgent. Addressing these has become an ongoing research, education and advocacy role for the informational disciplines, among others. There is also greater historical sensitivity, an alertness to the ways in which experiences, memories and knowledges may have been suppressed, distorted or invisible (see Benedict Anderson’s classic discussion of museums, maps and other resources in the emergence of nationalism, for example).

Here is a non-exhaustive list of information issues.

- **Inequity.** Given the centrality of the network and digital resources, differential access creates inequities.
- **Surveillance.** There is an increase in direct surveillance and also increased collection of data which drives other aspects of our environment. We are generating data shadows which are operationalized in various ways to influence or inform.
- **Market concentration.** The winner takes all dynamic of network services has resulted in the dominance of several platforms who wield great economic power and influence.
- **Dominant or partial perspectives.** Perspectives which are historically dominant, or politically motivated, or which reflect imbalances of power and influence may be over-represented in any resource. The plurality of experiences, memories and knowledges is under-represented in the record.
- **Dis- and misinformation/‘degraded democratic publics’.** Our reliance on flows of information has led to concerted attempts to distort, mislead or defraud. Henry Farrell has argued that there is a more fundamental problem, which is “not that social media *misinforms individuals* about what is true or untrue but that it creates *publics with malformed collective understandings*” (Farrell, 2025).
- **Geopolitical fragmentation.** Rather than a global information flow, as noted above, we are seeing regimes forming around power blocs, with different policy, control and regulatory regimes. Think of the US, EU, Russia and China.

Information today – systems of information

Information, then, is at once fugitive and everywhere, chameleon-like.

I noted above how libraries, Information Science, and the iSchool emerged in different phases of the information evolution. And in some ways, they reflect elements of when they emerged.

The library is different from the other two, in that I talk about the library itself as an organization, rather than as a body of knowledge or techniques. Libraries emerged in the first phase described above. Historically, the collection was the core of library identity, as an organized response to accessible distribution in a print world, and to the preservation of knowledge. The library continues as an organized response by cities, universities and others to learning, research and equity of access to the means of creative production. In this way the scope has moved beyond the collection in various ways, as discussed further below. As an organization, the library benefits from education and research in information management topics, but also across a range of other topics (public policy, for example).

Information Science emerged, in the second phase, in the mid-20th century. In this narrative, its origin story splits from the library as information production grows, requiring new methods of organization and access, and it anticipates elements of today's information environment. As discussed further below, common to definitions of Information Science is a concern with documents (or recorded information, literatures, and similar).

Although, it doesn't make sense to lean on it too heavily, one might say that Information Science largely retains an information view of the world, concerned with access to and management of information as a thing (in Buckland's terms).

In the third phase, information is not only seen as something to be managed or discovered, but as an organizing element of social structure and interaction. It has become an object of study across many disciplines and in social and cultural analysis.

The iSchool has emerged in this third phase and it typically embraces a broad set of informational interests. In some ways it subsumes Information Science interests in a very broad view of information in the modern world.

A large part of the typical iSchool portfolio is information systems oriented, at undergraduate and graduate levels, meeting needs for workers with technology, business and social skills. It may be a more applied alternative to computer science. It may also encompass expertise in other informational fields (policy, philosophical/social/cultural, data science, HCI, digital humanities, and so on). The broad disciplinary spread also potentially encompasses social and philosophical perspectives as well as very often a strong information critique emphasis.

Borrowing a suggestive phrase from an article by Black and Schiller (2014), one could say that the iSchool is often interested in both information systems and systems of information, "systems that create information through social means."

Of course, the iSchool is not a discipline—it is an evolving academic structure, although, as I have noted, it may be associated with a broad view of Information Science (understood generically not in the classical sense) or Information Sciences. Informatics, a term which emerged in the 1960s (often associated with another term, as in health or social informatics) may also feature.

The focus and disciplinary spread varies across schools.

3. Libraries and library studies

“ We often hear it said that libraries (and librarians) select, organize, retrieve, and transmit information or knowledge. That is true. But those are the activities, not the mission, of the library. [...] the important question is: “To what purpose?” We do not do those things by and for themselves. We do them in order to address an important and continuing need of the society we seek to serve. In short, we do it to support learning.

Robert S. Martin (2003). *Reaching across Library Boundaries. In Emerging Visions for Access in the Twenty-first Century Library.*

“ As Robert Bellah observed in *The Good Society* (Knopf, 1991), “Institutions are socially organized ways of paying attention.” Hospitals pay attention to illness and health, police pay attention to crime prevention, and the courts pay attention to justice. Similarly, public libraries are society’s way of paying attention to learning and equity. In the United States we hold both in high esteem, so we fund public libraries with tax revenues.

Eleanor Jo Rodger (2002) *Value and Vision.*

“ [...] the similar shift within academic libraries from an existence based on an assumed and stable value that libraries contribute to the institutional mission to a negotiated comprehension of services and resources where social and intellectual capital provide apt and useful frameworks for conceiving of the exchanges that occur between libraries, librarians, users, communities, institutions and other stakeholders.

Tim Schlak in Schlak, T., Corral, S., & Bracke, P. (2022). *The social future of academic libraries: new perspectives on communities, networks, and engagement.*

The iSchools have the collective resource to situate the library of today in current technology, policy and organizational questions. And potentially to connect to research and education agendas across disciplines.

The report makes clear an immediate challenge—to emphasize and elevate the library research and education agenda within the university. Addressing this seems like a priority. This involves playing (in Bourdieu’s terms) the research university ‘game’, especially looking at what is valued in an R1 institution.⁵ At the same time, today’s libraries will benefit from better frameworks, evidence and arguments to guide them. There is a need for stronger connection to workplace issues and skills, and potentially greater focus on credentialing for ongoing development. Is there a tension between these two goals? Is there a way of aligning academic and practice incentives?

There are many scholars in iSchools who are making interesting connections with the library as organization, social actor and institution. Within a more technical iSchool context, there may be sometimes a tendency to see libraries as a collection of information management practices. However,

⁵ Blaise Cronin (1995) is caustic about librarianship’s inability to play the university game (he does not express the thought in these words), tying this directly to closure of library schools. He argues for the ‘decoupling’ of the L and the IS in LIS, and, in his discussion of a candidate future, foreshadows something of the multidisciplinary way in which the iSchool actually developed.

from an educational perspective it is important to see them in their full breadth as **institutionalized community and cultural actors**. From a research perspective, libraries are sites of major **social, organizational and cultural questions**.

Here are some of the ways in which libraries intersect with broader agendas.

- They are **social, learning and research infrastructure** connected in multiple ways to the communities they serve. They prompt questions about support and investment in social infrastructure, equity, the status of public goods, health and wellness, the construction and maintenance of research and learning infrastructure.
- They are **social creations** where one can explore long standing manifestations of the public sphere, of social capital, of network theory, of memory and forgetting.
- They support **learning** in both directed and emergent ways—early reading, social skills, study spaces, instruction, life-wide learning. This interacts with community agendas around reading, childhood development, equity, pedagogy, student retention, and wellness.
- They have curated **the scholarly and cultural record**, and so offer the opportunity to explore cultural patterns, including legacies of oppression or oversight.
- They are embedded in **evolving scholarly ecosystems** and help influence their direction. They are centrally involved in service and policy questions around open access, scholarly communication, and research infrastructure.
- They have created innovative organizational responses to the **network dynamics** of recent decades, developing network platforms and logistics systems before they were common more broadly. They have built multi-faceted consortia to help distribute collections, infrastructure and expertise. They were early movers to the cloud. They are deeply embedded in collaborative, vendor and other networks, raising strategic, investment and organizational development questions about platforms, network organization, and related topics. This poses interesting organizational development, management, negotiation and partnering strategies and skills.
- They are exploring what **organizational, skills development, and staffing patterns** will support their future as they continue to provide access to the means of creative production. They need a broad array of skills and attributes, some of which will be drawn from outside the MLIS pool.
- Libraries deploy and advise about technologies in a variety of settings—enterprise systems, discovery, content delivery, research workflow, and so on. They are great environments in which to explore the **sociotechnical** evolution of technologies in practice.

Here are some broad ways in which the library may be reconfiguring services, expertise, and positioning.

- 1) **Scope.** Libraries are co-creating their futures with deeply engaged communities. There is a transition from a library which was transactional and collections-based to one which is relational and community-based. Public libraries have a social role and align services with education and social services, with a range of nonprofits and charities. They serve the community's needs for equity, for educational attainment, for food security, for immigrant services. Academic libraries more deeply engage with campus partners across the research and learning spectrum. They are important partners in research effectiveness, scholarly communication, student retention, and life-wide learning. These trends all create the need for a variety of teachable skills.
- 2) **Institution.** The library is an institution, embedded in particular social relations, values and investments. As such, it has a history and evolving social and cultural meanings. Rodgers argues that public libraries are society's way of paying attention to equity and learning. What happens when elements of a society do not value learning and equity? Or where this is not understood

by the voter? We see this now in the challenges to the public library. What is the equivalent of 'learning and equity' for academic or other libraries? It is important for all libraries to explain their value and story in ways that the host understands, and libraries have been very focused on value, values and vision. For much of its existence these have been stable and accepted. However, the abundance of information resources on the web and the rise of economic liberalism has meant that this can no longer be taken for granted.

- 3) **Story.** The library story is being retold to be relational, community-focused and generative, but this story is not widely socialized or always understood by those that support or fund libraries. The value of the library cannot be taken as 'assumed or stable.' As Bob Martin suggests, an information-based story is not strong, especially as information activities and investigation are diffused through multiple services on the web, personal activities, and disciplinary homes. The library story is being renegotiated.
- 4) **Empathy and equity.** Recent experiences have underlined the need for the library to purposefully recognize the importance of equity and empathy. Libraries have recognized a need to move past mere statements of diversity and inclusion, to recognize harm or omission and to begin to repair damaging and exclusive practices. The pandemic has also underlined economic inequities, the digital divide, the importance of available social infrastructure, especially for those that critically rely on library spaces and extended services. We know that libraries support mental wellness, social cohesion, digital equity, and personal and community development. Libraries have been asked to step up to additional social roles and to reshape services. This in turn has highlighted staff stress and unpreparedness, and the need for self-care and boundaries.

This makes it an extraordinarily interesting time to prepare people to work in libraries or to investigate them. The library position and role are being re-negotiated and co-created within diverse user communities. This generates educational needs and a wide variety of research questions, which would benefit from a multidisciplinary approach.

Librarianship and the iSchool

“ With new challenges comes a demand for education and for training new skills. This necessity is the topic of this article. We seek the answer to the question of how research librarians can educate themselves to meet the challenges of the unknown 'new research library'? [...] No uniform standardized educational program can take into consideration all the possible paths that the modern research library may choose and therefore all the skills needed by a modern research librarian—and information specialist.

Wien, C. N., & Dorch, B. F. (2018). Applying Bourdieu's field theory to analyze the changing status of the research librarian.

“ It's very important for people who want to work in a library to learn communication skills, advocacy skills, because people with an MLIS are going to rise to leadership roles. It's not going to necessarily be the entry point anymore for working in a library—there are other entry points. When you're seeking that MLIS, it should be a management degree. It should be helping people to prepare for leading in some way.

Sari Feldman (2019) Sari Feldman Gets Ready to Transform (Again).



Of those 11 skills ranked as core, only four could be considered specific to the field of LIS: knowledge of professional ethics, evaluating and selecting information sources, search skills, and the reference interview. The remaining seven are not only more generic but could also be categorized as “soft skills” or personal attributes: interpersonal communication, writing, teamwork, customer service skills, cultural competence, interacting with diverse communities, and reflective practice grounded in diversity and inclusion.

Laura Saunders (2018). Core and more: examining foundational and specialized content in library and information science.

Learning and teaching

It was always a challenge encompassing the range of desired skills in the MLIS, given the variety of practice-oriented roles a librarian performs throughout their careers and the variety of working environments (youth services, special, academic, public, etc.). The knowledge and skills needed to run libraries effectively continue to evolve, to the extent that it is now common to recruit for other expertise (languages, social work, instructional design, disciplinary knowledge, marketing and communications, research expertise). The library of today requires the skills needed to manage complex changing organizations, engage and nurture diverse communities, negotiate and advocate.

In this context, Sari Feldman’s perspective that the MLIS should be a management degree is interesting when placed alongside the demand for increasingly diverse technical skills (data science, data curation, application development, content licensing, collection development, instructional design, and so on) and a broad range of other vocational and general skills (communications, project management, and so on).

The skills and competencies required by the library (and related organizations) have been the subject of ongoing research (e.g. Saunders). And different career stages may prompt very different responses, depending on role, administrative responsibilities, and so on.

Of course, programs may offer different pathways, there may be specialisms (legal, health, ...), and there are a variety of joint options possible in some settings (with an MBA for example, or history, or some other discipline).

Is the library education market large enough for eMBA or eMPA style MLISs for those in library management career paths? What about additional certificate-style credentials? These may be in technical areas (data science or AI, for example), in public administration or public policy, in intellectual freedom, in negotiation, in social work, in industrial relations, in copyright, and so on.

The University of Southern Denmark took an interesting approach. In the article above the authors argue that the prestige of the research librarian⁶ has declined and that it is not actually clear what skills they will need to do their jobs given the evolving nature of the research library. They introduced a masters program which allowed students to combine some LIS courses with courses from elsewhere in the University and beyond which they feel prepares them best.⁷

Has Library Studies kept up with the changing library landscape? Is it well-positioned to educate the library workforce or to guide its development? In its current iteration the report does not look at career

⁶ The authors use ‘research librarian’ in a specialist sense which seems somewhat similar to library faculty in the US.

⁷ This particular program is no longer offered but in a personal communication one of the authors informs me that it is possible to assemble a similar program at a more general level within the university.

preparation needs or the research and policy interests of the library community they serve. Anecdotally, one is aware of concerns that there is a gap here. Closing this gap is clearly a priority, although one has to understand it first. This is naturally a focus of individual schools and their positioning and emphases.

More collectively, it would be useful to do some research about career preparation needs and research and policy interests in the context of an exploration of Key Areas for education and research. A part of the ambition I spoke about in the introduction should surely involve some recalibration of the library education and research agenda, to ground and connect.

That said, again, the ability to refocus within the existing model in R1 institutions is limited in various important ways.

The report does not discuss curriculum, and the candidate range could be broad given the discussion above. Here are some high-level library emphases, which do not necessarily map onto potential courses, but which suggest some directions. It is of course just indicative and incomplete.

Nurturing and engaging community

As the library engages with a variety of community partners, a set of collaboration, communication and other skills is required. This might include supporting student success and retention, and research workflows in academic settings. In a public library setting, the library is welcoming the community to its space with a growing variety of creative activities and events. It is partnering with social and educational services, with local charities or cultural institutions, with schools and colleges. It is reaching previously overlooked or marginalized populations, it is developing special programs for particular language groups, it is providing services for immigrants. Skills around, for example, community engagement, instruction, event management, public health, and exhibitions are more important.

Values

The report emphasizes LIS values. The importance of equity and empathy has been underlined in recent years. Both within the structures of the library itself, and in relation to the role of the library within its community. Libraries are refocusing organizational cultures and values, the importance of reparative action in relation to collections, practices and attitudes, and are more actively working to understand and practice inclusion, plurality and diversity. They are working to embrace more justly the experiences, memories and knowledges of all the communities they serve.

Social and so-called soft skills

So-called soft skills, and the contributions of the (often female) library workers who demonstrate them, have often been undervalued or gone unobserved. However, the value and visibility of this work is increasingly recognized as critical (see for example Decker, Dempsey). This is especially so as the library is more relational and collaborative. These are learnable skills which include advocacy, negotiation or conflict resolution, for example, or empathy, communications and teamwork. So-called soft skills are actually very hard, especially in the stressful contexts that have become common in some public library settings.

Administrative and organizational

The skills required to manage complex connected organizations are various. It is common now to have a Management of People and Organizations course (or some such) which may end up being overloaded.

- Management of complex organizations, relationships and tasks.
- Greater project-based work.
- Negotiation – for content, services and collaborative work.
- Strategic planning and budgeting.
- People recruitment, retention and development.
- Creating diverse and inclusive environments for users and for staff.
- Working in consortial and collaborative environments.
- Organizational development.
- Industrial relations.
- Fund raising.
- Grant work.

Positioning, communication and advocacy

Traditionally, libraries may have distrusted ‘marketing’, however developing the library story has become more important given changing roles and current pressures around value and values.

- Communications and marketing – ensuring that the library story and position is well understood within its community, and elsewhere.
- Advocacy – representation of library interest to voters, host institutions, funders, user groups, and others.

Information policy and intellectual freedom

Balancing the rights of creators and consumers, pricing of licensed materials, open access discussions, information ethics, digital equity, attitudes to harvesting for AI or search—there is heightened attention to a range of information policy issues where libraries have to make decisions, advocate, and implement. Librarians also need to understand the legal framework of intellectual freedom, to be equipped with strategies and arguments in a contested political environment, and to have access to updated information.

Specialist skills

A growing number of staff will be drawn from outside the MLIS ranks. We already see this in roles like communication and marketing, technology, development, social work, subject specialties. Certificates or other approaches offered in partnership with others on campus may become more useful. Public Administration or instructional design come to mind, for example.

Information management

Of course, this is a historic core. The iSchool location is valuable in terms of the expanding information management skills of interest. Career preparation certainly benefits from options in data science, programming, research data management, instructional technology, metadata management, and so on.

LS forward

As noted throughout, the position of Library Studies within the university, its relationship to other informational disciplines, and its practice orientation have been much discussed. LIS Forward places this discussion in the current iSchool dynamic, a multidisciplinary school in an R1 institution.

As noted, it is in some ways a story of progressive subsumption. Schools of Library Studies diversified into LIS to reflect the changing technology environment, and the variety of informational careers students were following. LIS was subsumed into broader schools of information, as information processing and management became more common. The possible range is very wide, from quite vocationally oriented information systems, to social and philosophical aspects of an informational society, to values-driven social justice and equity emphases. In some cases, informatics or related undergraduate degrees were added. The report makes clear that Library Studies feels squeezed or undervalued, despite reporting continued demand for the MLIS. There are also questions about balance between teaching-oriented faculty and research faculty, as this educational demand continues, as well as increased use of guest faculty.

Given that this is a recurrent discussion, given the gap to practice, given the putative advantages of the multidisciplinary environment, and given the 'urgency' expressed in the report, one might expect that a strong response is required. To move the needle, after all, the needle must be moved.

I suggest some candidate areas for attention in the recommendations below. As noted in the introduction, I emphasize these four factors in relation to education and research for libraries throughout:

- 1) The benefits of increasing the awareness, scale and impact of research and policy work through a more concerted collaborative approach.
- 2) The benefits of reconnecting more strongly with libraries and related organizations, and the organizations that channel their interests, which includes discussion of more flexible and tailored learning and certification reflecting evolving skills and workplace demands.
- 3) The possible benefits of refocusing this particular discussion of Library Studies around the institutional and service dynamics of LAM and connecting that with a variety of disciplinary hinterlands (public administration, social studies, and so on) and moving away from the familiar and maybe superseded discussions about IS, LIS and so on.
- 4) The benefits of developing an agenda of Key Areas which connect with current library needs, and which can provide some rationale or motivation for recruitment, research activity, granters, collaborative activity and so on. If iSchool education and research respond more actively to evolving library issues, the people with appropriate skills and interests need to be in place.

4. Informational disciplines

This informational diffusion has given the iSchool great latitude and it can accommodate a great diversity of disciplinary lenses—from the very technical, to the social sciences and humanities, to design, to marketing and communication, to public policy, to critical theory, and so on. The deans' interviews suggest that this is at once a great strength and a potential weakness, as the iSchool does not have exclusive ownership of a foundational discipline, but rather a multidisciplinary focus on a hard to define phenomenon. Furthermore, this phenomenon has become an object of study in many other disciplines also.

In this section I discuss the informational disciplines (sic), LIS and Information Science, and conclude with some comments about Library Studies, LIS and the iSchool.

Library studies

First, here is a brief note on LS. Buckland (2005) traces the emergence of 'library science' to Martin Schrettinger in the early 19th century. The first American library school was opened by Melvil Dewey at Columbia in 1887. Unsurprisingly, a central focus of each of these figures is organization of the collection.

In general, the 'library school' has not been a story of optimism and growth. Some closed. Many changed their name to lose 'library.' Some were merged into other schools or departments, with various disciplinary emphases.

There is now some variety of provision across types of university and disciplinary configuration. It is common within iSchools who have a library focus to use the term LIS.

Information science(s)

What is Information Science or the Information Sciences? It seems to me that one can identify two very provisional emphases here to help scaffold a discussion. The first is in terms of the emergence of Information Science in the mid-20th century, with a set of shared concerns, intellectual and personal influences, and professional venues. I label this Information Science Classic in this section, and this is what I usually mean when talking about Information Science (IS). The second is more generic, as Information Science or Information Sciences (or Informatics) is used as a designation of convenience for an academic interest in a range of information-related topics, with or without any specific reference to or acknowledgement of Information Science Classic. We see this emphasis in various places, including in some of the iSchools with non-Library Studies backgrounds (see Cornell or Penn State for example). This may sometimes be used to designate an applied technology focus with more of a social or business dimension than you might typically find in Computer Science.

How many on campus outside the iSchool, I wonder, would have any sense of Information Science Classic? How often would Information Science simply be read in the more generic second way? If you read a page of iSchool faculty interests would anything identify information science distinctively? It would be interesting to explore this further.

Information science – classic

“As long as the “discipline” is the primary unit of differentiation in the social system of scholarship, it is only strategic for information science to claim its status as one.”

Petras, V. (2024). The identity of information science. *Journal of Documentation.*

“[Information science] is a somewhat battered and in some ways disoriented field.

Ian Cornelius (1996). *Meaning and Method in Information Studies.*

“Thus, our second major finding, already conveyed, is that information science lacks a strong central author, or group of authors, whose work orients the work of others across the board. The field consists of several specialties around a weak center.

White, H. D., & McCain, K. W. (1998). Visualizing a discipline: An author co-citation analysis of information science, 1972–1995.

“We may therefore conclude that information science is an unclear label (a floating signifier) and that there is a great need for clarification and for improved terminological hygiene.

Hjørland, B. (2018). *Library and Information Science (LIS), Part 1.*

“In this final chapter we give an overview of some ideas about the future of the discipline and profession of information science. This has been a source of debate almost since the beginnings of the discipline, and of its sibling, library science. Much of the debate has been negative, with a narrative around disciplines and professions permanently in crisis. And, indeed, if one worries about the structure of academic departments and the names of professional associations one might find cause for concern. If one takes a long view and thinks [...] about the power of recorded information and the continuing need for disciplines and professions to deal with it, the concerns come into better focus.

Bawden and Robinson (2022). *Introduction to Information Science.*

“We can see three different, though not incompatible, places for information science in the changing academic firmament. One is a closer alignment with the informatics and data science areas; this is essentially the route taken by the iSchools movement. Another is an alignment with media, communications, journalism, publishing and similar subjects. A third is an alignment with cultural studies and the digital humanities. Examples of all three can be seen, and all seem to be viable. It is important, however, not to choose one of these and declare that this is the future of the information sciences. They, and others which will emerge in the future, are simply aspects of multidisciplinary, emphasizing different perspectives on the central focus of documents and the human record.

Bawden and Robinson (2022). *Introduction to Information Science.*

We can identify IS Classic as an academic interest with practical applications which emerged in the mid-20th century as a response to the increasing volumes of scientific, technical and other information. A historical perspective locates this in the interests of special librarianship, of the documentalist movement in Europe (Otlet et al), and of various scientific and technical approaches to the management of growing information resources (Bush, Bradford, Garfield, and so on).

There is extensive literature seeking to define what is meant by Information Science. Much of this is summarized in Bawden and Robinson (2022), seen as a definitive, if belated, description of the field. Indeed, White and McCain (1998) noted the lack of a definitive textbook when they were writing at the turn of the century. See Furner (2015), Buckland (2012), Bates (2015), and, recently, Petras (2024), for example contributions.

Definitions often emphasize recorded information, or documents in Buckland's terms, rather than some of the broader social and cultural dimensions discussed above. Robinson and Bawden's textbook defines it as a 'field of study, with recorded information and documentation as its concern, focusing on the components of the information chain, studied through the perspective of domain analysis.' Bates discussed recorded information and the influential analysis of White and McCain talks about 'literature systems.' For Petras, Information Science is also about objects (manifested information) but adds an interesting temporal dimension: "Information Science is concerned with how information is manifested across space and time."

What is striking about this literature is how often it comes back to first principles, and also how the 'field' seems less a cumulating, coherent discipline than a set of topical emphases (for example, theoretical information retrieval, quantitative views of the literature, and information seeking behaviors). It can seem like a collection of variably related interests in pursuit of a discipline. Indeed, as the report mentions, White and McCain (1998) identified two main subdisciplines in their early analysis (information retrieval and citation analysis), and noted their relative independence of each other. Marcia Bates (2022) and others would add information seeking behavior as a third emphasis. Of course, looking across LIS one can identify a variety of additional emphases. Some of this work is summarized in Järvelin, K., & Vakkari, P. (2022).

As late as 2022, Bates, a major figure in the field, was proposing a theory of Information Science, and calling for the various emphases to be finally integrated "into a true *disciplinary*—not interdisciplinary—a true disciplinary paradigm for the field?" This was in an article where she notes that in the network era "our little field of information science was simply pushed aside by the behemoths of computer science and business."

This diffusion is seen in how it is described. I chose 'interest' above ... Bates describes it as a metadiscipline, or earlier, as a meta-field. In this it is like journalism or education. Each is different from what she calls 'content disciplines' in that it explores issues which crosscut those disciplines. In Information Science's case, the cross-cutting interest is the storage and retrieval of knowledge in recorded form. Bawden and Robinson describe Information Science as a 'field of study': it is focused on particular problems, but uses a variety of methods and theories.

Petras resists these definitions, preferring to see IS as having "an independent core and locus in the canonical scholarly universe: a discipline." But this seems like territorial optimism, as does this author's quote above. Does one have to claim one's place as a discipline? It is interesting to see this beside Bawden and Robinson's acknowledgement above that Information Science is likely to rest within a larger disciplinary home (they might have added Business). Indeed, it is revealing to see the acknowledgement in a (the?) leading textbook that Information Science has had an identity issue from the start.

That said there are strong intellectual traditions and affiliations at play here, around particular topics, academic centers of expertise, researchers/teachers and venues. Familiarity with key figures, central works, and the field's core concepts serves as a shibboleth, marking membership within an ongoing social and intellectual community. The community's activities are supported by dedicated journals, conferences, and professional associations, such as ASIS&T.

It is perhaps appropriate to think of Information Science Classic in this manifestation as an ongoing community, institutionalized in a small set of journals, events and associations. Given the changes within the iSchools which are a strong part of the architecture and identity of this community, one wonders if it will persist with quite the same identity.

LIS

“ In general, I feel that even authors who write a great deal about the structure of the field sometimes use the combo of “LIS” as a matter of habit, and even in the works of the most prominent thinkers, there is no consistency in usage.

Dali, Keren (2015) How we missed the boat: reading scholarship and the field of LIS. *New Library World*.

“ Two major structural shifts are revealed in the data: in 1960, LIS changed from a professional field focused on librarianship to an academic field focused on information and use; and in 1990, LIS began to receive a growing number of citations from outside the field, notably from Computer Science and Management, and saw a dramatic increase in the number of authors contributing to the literature of the field, notably from Computer Science and Management.

Larivière, V., Sugimoto, C. R., & Cronin, B. (2012). A bibliometric chronicling of library and information science's first hundred years. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*.

“ This analysis of cognitive structure shows a clear division of LIS into three distinct areas with well-defined objects of study and, to some degree, venues of publication. These three areas can be broadly defined as LS, IS, and scientometrics/bibliometrics.

Milojević, S., Sugimoto, C. R., Yan, E., & Ding, Y. (2011). The cognitive structure of Library and Information Science: Analysis of article title words. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*.

“ Many of these definitions allude to the Janus-faced nature of the field—a field that is at once both professional and academic [...] As a result, Miksa (1985, 1992) argues that the field has two distinct paradigms—librarianship, which is focused on libraries as institutions, and information science, which is focused on information and its communication. They are informed by different research traditions: librarianship from social science, and IS from mathematical communication theory. And while some researchers (Ingwersen, 1992; Vakkari) consider library science (LS) to be a subfield within a more general field of IS, others (e.g., Saracevic) still consider them to be two related, but separate fields.

Milojević, S., Sugimoto, C. R., Yan, E., & Ding, Y. (2011). The cognitive structure of Library and Information Science: Analysis of article title words. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology.*

“ For the perspective presented here, libraries are a specialized subject area in the wider field of information science. [...] The name library AND information science is redundant for this definition, but links to the historical roots of the fields and is now often used to represent a school’s particular focus on libraries in the disciplinary problem space.

Petras, V. (2024). The identity of information science. *Journal of Documentation.*

“ A field of research may institutionalize both cognitively and socially (Whitley, 1984). The former means a shared and coherent understanding of principal research problems and goals, ways of conceptualizing the research objects and methodologies to study them. The latter refers to, e.g. university departments, journals and conferences representing the field of research. It is questionable whether the 50 years have led to cognitive institutionalization in LIS as a whole. There hardly exists a shared understanding of principal research problems and goals. [...] Interdisciplinarity is fruitful in developing new knowledge, but isn’t there a risk for LIS being absorbed by the stronger partners—both cognitively and socially? Further study is needed to analyse these questions.

Järvelin, K., & Vakkari, P. (2022). LIS research across 50 years: content analysis of journal articles. *Journal of Documentation.*

The report’s focus is LIS. The report says it applies LIS in a “general sense of ‘LIS-oriented’—the range of research, academic programs, faculty, and students who contribute to the profession of librarianship, broadly construed.”

However, this is not always how it is used in practice, although as noted by many, including Dali above, LIS is a very elastic term.

Often ‘Library and Information Science,’ it can sometimes be ‘Library and Information Studies.’ Syntax does not help. It can be parsed in a left-branching way ((library and information) science) suggesting ‘library and information’ is a unit. Sometimes it is parsed in a more flat structure as if ((library science) and (information science)) are two parallel concepts brought together. My sense is that it is used in the former way when the discussion is more library related, but I cannot confirm that.

However, in his interesting historical overview of LIS, Hjørland (2018) notes that “In general, however, the tendency today is to use the terms Information Science and Library and Information Science as synonyms.” And, as if to underline the deep confusion around the term, he describes this guidance to prospective authors posted by the editor of a journal.



The editor of *Information Research* recommends the following use of the terms: “An additional point about LIS—this is much over-used and people are rarely writing about research directly related to libraries when they use it: if you are writing about research in libraries, use ‘library research,’ if you are writing about information research, use ‘information research’ or ‘information science research.’ If you really intend both, use ‘research in librarianship and information science’” (Wilson 2015).

In support of his view above, he also notes that in the *ASIS&T Thesaurus of Information Science, Technology, and Librarianship* (2005), LIS is considered synonymous with Information Science, whereas librarianship is considered a related term.

At the same time, Petras claims that Library Studies is a subset of Information Science, and hence argues that LIS as a term is formally redundant. And in another position again, Dali resists the IS encroachment on L.

So, there is some ambiguity in the term.

There is general agreement that LIS was formed by combining library and information science perspectives. From a library point of view, this made sense in the context of the growing digital environment and because the information management, policy or other topics that emerged were not exclusive to the library space. However, equally, there is a recurrent note, as in the report, that the two have not always sat beside each other comfortably. In fact, it has been suggested (Petras and elsewhere) that the ‘science’ in Information Science was chosen to differentiate the emerging discipline from the more practice-oriented Library Studies.

Referring to this dual nature, Milojević et al (2011) note the Janus-faced nature of the field. In their analysis of article words across a range of LIS journals they conclude that there is “a clear division of LIS into three distinct areas with well-defined objects of study and, to some degree, venues of publication.” The three areas “can be broadly defined as LS, IS, and scientometrics/bibliometrics.” They go on to more tentatively suggest that information seeking behavior may be establishing itself as another first order category. One striking feature of the analysis is the separated clustering they discovered of IS and LS journals.

In a later study, Järvelin & Vakkari (2022) carried out a content analysis of 30 LIS journals. They question “whether the 50 years have led to cognitive institutionalization in LIS as a whole” noting that there “hardly exists a shared understanding of principal research problems and goals.” They further observe that in some areas LIS researchers partner with other disciplines, and wonder whether there is a risk of LIS being absorbed by stronger partners both cognitively and socially (partners include computer science, communications, management).

Of course, LIS has indeed been organizationally subsumed into other departments/schools for some time (examples include education, business, computing, communications).

Another recurrent feature of discussion and debate is the low level of theory formation within the field. Not unexpectedly, given the nature of its interests there is a high level of borrowing from other fields.

A recent survey of theory formation and use in LIS (Roy & Mukhopadhyay, 2023) concludes rather dramatically by claiming that LIS is facing a “theory crisis.” I am not sure about this, but it is certainly a factor contributing to perceptions of the prestige of the field.

Finally, both Järvelin & Vakkari (2022) and Larivière et al (2012) note a decline in the proportion of publications on librarianship specifically, and a growth in informational and other topics. This is not too surprising, but one wonders how much of a factor the relative balance of L and IS faculty in LIS departments/schools was, acknowledging the absence of clear boundaries.

So, LIS is a confusing term for a diffuse field which has not cohered around a sense of itself as a single entity. The term may be used synonymously with Information Science, and it may be used in a library context to acknowledge a wider informational dimension or to sound more ‘rigorous.’ If it is being used in a specific way, it really needs to be qualified to make this clear.

Again, however, LIS may also have a strong social dimension, whatever about its disciplinary coherence. It references shared schools, conferences, journals, and influences. Although, that said, it is interesting to note the strong divide between IS and L in some of the analysis above.

Information sciences, informatics, iSchool



Some iSchools grew out of Library Science Schools, some out of Computer Science Schools, some have merged with Communication Departments, some have merged with Management—but the telling characteristic of each is that they are interdisciplinary and all share the same goal—to enable their graduates to become successful professionals based on their combined expertise in information, technology, and management.

Liddy, E. D. (2014). *iSchools & the iSchool at Syracuse University*.

As I noted in the introduction, my view of iSchools has been a little idealistic, given their variety, seeing them as multidisciplinary homes for a variety of informational interests. I suggested that a working characterization might be schools with a sociotechnical perspective that consider technology, people and organizations within a multidisciplinary setting.

Of course, actually existing iSchools are quite various, in terms of breadth of faculty expertise, configuration within the university, and so on. And their number has grown, if membership of the iSchools Organization is a measure. The designation has come to be applied less exclusively as membership has grown. At the time of writing, there are 130 members of this group.

Some offer undergraduate degrees. There are graduate degrees in information systems, data science, and other in-demand areas. There is a strong focus on general IT issues with a social and business dimension. They teach and research topics arising from the construction, deployment and management of information systems across industry, business, educational, or other domains. This means that some may have a wider bandwidth connection to industry, in terms of partnership and vocational preparation. There may be local drivers around income, employability and overseas students.

At the same time, many have broad research agendas, and they are hospitable to a range of informational perspectives in the terms above, looking at the ramifications of informational organization of social and cultural phenomena. (The Center for an Informed Public at UW is an example.)

It is interesting to note that the iSchools Organization 'about' page does not mention libraries or library studies, again as of this writing, although it does include what may be a stock photo of the (all male) busts from the Long Room of Trinity College Dublin, one of the most photographed libraries in the world, and a common media recourse when a library is required.

Not all of the iSchools have a library or LIS heritage, and various terms may be used in quite general ways hospitable to many dimensions of information education and research. These include Information Science (with or without a connection to what I call Classic Information Science), Information Sciences and Informatics.

Library studies, information science, LIS and the iSchool

The difference between a multidisciplinary and an interdisciplinary approach is one thread in discussions, with some favoring a multidisciplinary approach (e.g. Bates, 2022). The contrast is between an independent focus which cooperates in a peer-to-peer way versus a more integrated approach in which the characteristics of an individual approach may be subsumed.

A discussion of multidisciplinary or interdisciplinarity depends on some scale of activity. Library Studies has much to gain from a rich mix, in educational and research terms. This is both within the disciplinary mix of the iSchool, and potentially across campus. That depends on Library Studies itself thriving, in education and research terms as part of the mix. As discussed, this presents challenges in the R1 setting, which for scale, prestige and other reasons favors library studies sitting within a broader disciplinary setting. I discussed library studies in the previous section.

Is Information Science (Classic) in a different place? It brings a legacy of interesting work in specialisms which are not exclusive to it (information retrieval, information seeking behavior, domain analysis...) and a community who may share some traditions and social venues. However, as is evident from the literature, it doesn't bring a coherent body of work organized around a well-understood discipline. This is especially the case when one notes that the research interests of IS Classic are not exclusively the concern of IS Classic. Indeed, this becomes very apparent within the broader umbrella of the iSchool, which contains researchers and educators exploring similar issues and coming from different disciplinary traditions.

This broader iSchool informational agenda addresses core IS issues in a hybrid disciplinary setting. Information Science Classic still has some organizational momentum, embedded in schools and the social apparatus of a community (journals, ASIS&T...), but it seems doubtful that it has a strong future as a distinct discipline recognized within the university canon. Bawden and Robinson suggest that it might live in several possible disciplinary homes. However, as with LIS below, one wonders if the continued academic transformation and relocation of the informational disciplines might also weaken the social affiliations of Information Science Classic.

The discussion of LIS in the report is both interesting and ambivalent. It is not clear how you circumscribe LIS. And, although there is an emphasis on LIS faculty, it is not clear either how you circumscribe the LIS faculty population. The report leans to a strong LIS association with librarianship, although, as discussed above, this is not universally true of its usage.

Is it somebody who has a Ph.D. from a current 'LIS school'? If this is so, and if the trends outlined in the report continue, presumably some of those LIS graduates with a strong IS or technical formation may naturally gravitate to other options in the iSchool. What is an LIS concentration when the IS is increasingly intermingled in the broader disciplinary array of the iSchool?

Is it a particular disciplinary focus? Well, as discussed throughout, there is an informational dimension to many subjects, which means that the IS part of LIS is intellectually less distinctive over time (even if there remains a community distinction, as discussed). The L part of LIS is more distinctive, one might as well just say LS?

Is it a matter of values? The discussion of LIS values reinforces this library emphasis (are those values espoused by the tradition of theoretical IR researchers or by those who are traditionally active in information systems?)

Is it a shared history, tradition and way of thinking? Undoubtedly. And, in this context, many researchers and teachers readily self-identify in an LIS tradition. However, as discussed here, LIS may be used in different ways and this identity may gradually dilute given changes in the iSchools themselves which have been part of the social institutionalization of LIS.

Much of the time whether one uses LS or LIS does not matter much. However, it makes sense to be clear what you are talking about—especially when it matters, as, for example, given the concerns of the report, in a recruitment discussion in an iSchool context.

There are also a variety of ways in which you want to talk about the library, which are not about information processing or management.

Suggesting a preference for LS is not to be isolationist. Quite the contrary: LS will benefit from the multidisciplinary of the iSchool in both research and education terms.

Cross-LAMination

Several iSchools have expertise in libraries, archives and museums and offer degrees across the range. Archives and libraries may be a more common combination.

I have suggested it would be interesting to consider a horizontal LAM expansion to include archival studies (and potentially museum studies), in future iterations. It is important to recognize their distinct intellectual, social and vocational contexts, and traditions. In my recommendations I ask if a LAM Forward initiative would create a stronger story than an LIS Forward one.

A note on other disciplines

Historically, several other disciplines had an informational interest. These include, for example, Management Information Systems in a business setting, or Communications/Media studies, or Journalism.

While there might be some porosity of borders, each has a clear center of gravity. Interestingly, the first two of these at least might find a home in a current iSchool.

Of course, there are also significant examples of influential researchers in the Information Science Classic tradition who find a home in other disciplines, information retrieval in computer science, notably, but also in the social sciences, communications or elsewhere.

However, as more activities have become informationalized, many other disciplines have a strong, explicitly informational dimension. The sciences (e.g. bioinformatics), geography, the digital humanities, and so on. And the report notes the range of disciplines with a strong informational flavor.

iSchools may often promote their work by repeating what Castells above calls the common-sense view that information or knowledge is everywhere. This is a double-edged proposition, and goes to iSchool identity. While it may suggest that the study of information can anchor a school, it can also suggest a lack of distinction.

5. On the dissemination of ideas and innovation

The diffusion of ideas

“ As numerous critics beyond Kristof have observed, the professionalization of the academy prioritizes peer-reviewed publications over other forms of writing. Professors allocate the bulk of their efforts to researching, writing, and publishing in their field journals. The first task of any professor—particularly junior professors—is to publish in prestigious peer-reviewed outlets. Even scholars who have some facility with engaging a wider audience have warned that it takes time away from research. It is great when academics also express their ideas to a wider audience. Professional incentives dictate, however, that this will always be the hobby and not the job.

Daniel W. Drezner (2017) *The Ideas Industry*.

The university plays an important role in the generation and diffusion of ideas and innovation. The report does not focus on this area. However, informing practice and influencing policy is an important part of what the university does, especially in a practice-oriented discipline. As noted, in a period of change, libraries benefit from data-based frameworks, evidence, and arguments to support advocacy work, or to think about new service areas. In a related context, being interviewed on NPR when expertise is required or writing an op-ed in a leading newspaper are markers of esteem (see the discussion of symbolic capital in the next section).

Drezner's typology of sources

Dan Drezner writes about the dissemination of ideas in *The Ideas Industry*. Drezner is interested in how ideas are diffused and taken up in political and policy contexts, and how they lead to action or practical decisions. He discusses the evolving sources of ideas in the policy arena.

- **Academic.** The academy may have been the historically primary source of ideas, although Drezner argues that its influence has waned for various reasons. He notes the scholarly incentives of faculty, which promote peer-reviewed articles in leading journals as the peak achievement, and which in turn leads to disciplinary peers as the primary audience and community they seek. Disciplines will have different dynamics. For example, perhaps because of its normative base, Drezner suggests, economics has more influence than other social sciences.
- **Think tanks.** He charts the rise and changing role of think tanks such as the RAND Corporation or Brookings Institution. Unlike universities, these do have an explicit role in influencing policy, and over time some have become more partisan.
- **Industry and management consulting.** Various firms—McKinsey, Gartner, and others—have developed capacity for published research and thought pieces, often as a form of reputational promotion of their consulting or related services.
- **Individuals.** Drezner highlights, for example, the careers of Fareed Zakaria and Neil Ferguson.

How does this play out in the library field?

The incentives Drezner mentions are strongly at play in R1 schools and may not be aligned with broader

community engagement. This is evident in the comments of the Early Career Faculty in the report. Of course, taken collectively, iSchools do work which influences both practice and policy, and there are some notable connections (Sheffield and exploration of open access, for example). There are also some high-profile iSchool faculty members who make important and visible contributions to broader debate outside the library context.

While they are not think tanks as such, one can point to Ithaka S&R and OCLC Research divisions, respectively, of large not-for-profit service organizations, each of which is quite active in working with groups of libraries to develop applied R&D outputs⁸. They tend to focus on areas of topical interest, such as collections, collaboration, research infrastructure, and scholarly communication. Over the years, they have worked on a variety of topics (including, for example, metadata and protocols, research support, library collaboration, and user behavior in the case of OCLC Research). Ithaka S&R has an academic and cultural focus. OCLC Research works with academic and public libraries (notably through WebJunction, a learning platform for libraries). In each case, there is definitely an interest in providing knowledge, evidence and models that help influence practice or inform policy.

This interest is also evident in the output of professional associations and others which produce outputs on behalf of members. While different from Drezner's consultancy category, there are some parallels in terms of providing value to members. Here one might point to the Urban Libraries Council or to the Association for Research Libraries and the Coalition for Network Information, or to the divisions of ALA. ARSL is another example.

Advocacy and other groups also produce materials to inform and guide. Helping with evidence and arguments is important here. SPARC and EveryLibrary are examples.

An important element of what associations and membership groups do is to provide venues for networking and to support communities of practice. They aim to scale learning and innovation within their constituencies.

One can also see that vendors produce occasional reports, as a value-add to customers. Think of Sage or Clarivate for example. In some cases, these may not be seen as more than elevated marketing.

Finally, there is a variety of individual practitioner voices that are quite influential.

I have not given a lot of examples above, because without some analysis, it would be very subjective. However, some exploration of the diffusion of ideas and innovation in this space would be interesting, acknowledging that it is a smaller, more tight-knit community than some of the areas Drezner (who is a scholar and commentator of International Relations) discusses.

Public intellectuals and thought leaders

“Public intellectuals delight in taking issue with various parts of the conventional wisdom. By their very nature, however, they will be reluctant to proffer alternative ideas that appeal to any mass audience. Thought leaders will have no such difficulty promising that their ideas will disrupt or transform the status quo. And the shifts discussed in this chapter only increase the craving for clear, appealing answers.

Daniel W. Drezner (2017) *The Ideas Industry*.

⁸ Buschman (2020) talks about 'white papers' in the library space, and, focusing attention on the outputs of Ithaka S&R, describes them as 'empty calories'



This is an inherent tension between scholarship and communication, one that breeds resentment for academics trying to engage a wider audience as well as readers who have to wade through complex, cautious prose.

Daniel W. Drezner (2017) *The Ideas Industry*.

In Drezner's terms, thought leaders favor large explanatory ideas, and deliberately aim to influence policy and practice. They value clear communication, may view the world through a single frame, and evangelize their ideas actively. Thomas Friedman is an example in the book. Public intellectuals promote critical thought across different arenas, may not offer easy solutions or answers, and emphasize complexity and questioning. Francis Fukuyama and Noam Chomsky are cited examples here.

Drezner notes that the current climate favors thought leaders because their ideas are easier to consume: their big idea can be delivered in a Ted Talk. Perhaps the library community hit peak thought leadership in the heyday of the personal blog, where several influential librarians achieved large audiences.

Platform publications

Computing has *Communications of the ACM*. Engineering has *IEEE Spectrum*. Business readers turn to the *Harvard Business Review*. The HE technology community has *Educause Review*.

These are what I have called in the past 'platform' publications (Dempsey and Walter). They aggregate the attention of an audience within a particular domain, including leadership, practice and research. They provide a platform for their authors, who may be reasonably assured of a broad engaged audience.

The library community does not have such a publication, which could provide a venue for research and practice to co-exist in dialogue.

iSchools and influence on policy and practice

What is the role of the iSchool in influencing policy and informing practice? More specifically, how important is it for Library Studies to visibly do this?

The bilateral research practice connection is of course much discussed, and I wondered about the gap here above. Is the influence on policy at various levels perhaps less discussed?

This works in a variety of ways, not least through participation in professional venues—membership of associations, presentations where practitioners congregate to learn about direction, partnership with library organizations and libraries.

Again, without supporting evidence, my impression is that there may be a higher level of engagement with policy and practice in Archival Studies than in Library Studies when measured against overall research and education capacity.

I believe that markers of influence are important for elevating the overall profile of Library Studies, and that the initiative should look at this engagement in a further iteration of this work. A comparative perspective would be interesting, thinking firstly of the LAM strands, and then of other practice-oriented disciplines. How does Library Studies perform in terms of impact on policy/practice compared to other comparable disciplines?

This seems especially important now, given the importance of evidence and arguments in a time of contested value and values.

6 Symbolic capital

“ When considering the role of symbolic capital and educational degrees, one may want to look at the respect or significance given to the traditional LIS master’s degree (MLIS) in comparison to other information related degrees, such as master’s in information science (MIS). In recent history, there has been a growing friction between what are seen as traditional library programs and those that focus on the field of information.

Lisa Hussey (2010). *Social capital, symbolic violence, and fields of cultural production: Pierre Bourdieu and library and information science.*

“ More than ten years ago, a fellow encyclopedist observed that “although research in library science has come a long way, it still has not reached the maturity of other disciplines. . . [and struggles with] an academically imposed inferiority complex and linguistic dilemmas on the meaning of research for an applied and service field” and it is hard to disagree with his assertions.

Richardson, J. V. (2010). *History of American Library Science: Its Origins and Early Development.*

“ At present, some in the archival world have lost this sense of the archivist in society or the archival mission. Most archivists complain either that they are invisible to society or that society and its organizations hold images of archivists as low-level clerks. Some of this derives from misperceptions of records and recordkeeping as simply fodder for bureaucratic inertia or obstacles to be overcome. Records as important safeguards for accountability, vessels of essential evidence, and foundations for social and corporate memory have been lost because archivists sometimes seem to portray the notion that they are merely antiquarians concerned in preserving documentary debris for the use of a few scholars, genealogists, and local historians. Might this also be the result of how LIS schools have been traditionally seen by many, and why library science has been supplemented by information science and why iSchools have emerged with an even broader agenda and mission?

Cox, R. J., & Larsen, R. L. (2009). *iSchools and archival studies. Archival Science.*

iSchools are a relatively new creation. They also emerged in different ways, some based on prior library or Information Science departments, some not, and they are positioned differently in the university disciplinary setting. The role of ‘information’—something which is now pervasively used, and which, is, accordingly, very unspecific—in anchoring an academic or professional school may be puzzling or resisted. And so, it is not surprising that they may not be fully understood, or may not—in Bourdieu’s terms—have the cultural or symbolic capital of well-established or more foundational disciplines.

It is clearly significant that LIS Forward was initiated by a group of iSchools within R1 institutions, given the reputational hierarchies and research focus at play in those institutions. As discussed throughout, given the priorities of these universities and their projected image, Library Studies may have low prestige. Especially when considered alongside some other professional schools. This comes across very clearly in the contribution of the Early Career Faculty.

This is the context in which a framing within Bourdieu's theoretical context seems apt, although beyond my scope here. Bourdieu is of interest in the LIS case because he is explicitly concerned with power, prestige, reputation, allocation of resources and other elements of the political and social organization of disciplines and departments. Here I just want to touch on his discussion of capital.

Here is a brief introduction by Mendoza et al (2012) (who are looking at dynamics within Materials Science):

“ For Bourdieu, the social world is a multidimensional space of fields structured hierarchically by the distribution of powers or forms of capital. Thus, agents and institutions occupy dominant and subordinate standings based on the relative possession of resources. Bourdieu characterized these resources as four types of capital: economic (material possessions), cultural (information, knowledge, education, skills, mannerisms), social (social connections, group memberships, networks), and symbolic (honor, prestige, recognition). Agents and institutions in social fields are distributed according to three dimensions related to capital: volume or amount of capital, distribution of types of capital, and the trajectory in the social space in terms of the evolution over time of the volume and distribution of capital acquired.

As suggested by Cox and Larsen above, one might chart the historic attempt to increase symbolic capital of the discipline through what I have characterized as a progressive subsumption in broader disciplines which are seen as more technical, scientific, or research-oriented (or male?).

Librarianship adds 'Information Science.' Information science or Information Sciences on its own might be used (I noted earlier commentary that 'science' was deliberately chosen to distance Information Science from librarianship). The field is broadened in the iSchool to include a range of informational skills and research interests, with a multidisciplinary focus drawing on established disciplines (e.g. HCI, computing...). While this broader focus retains a strong vocational element, it may be more readily understandable within the university (preparing people to work in product, UX, data science, among other roles, in industry), connects to understandable research agendas, and can attract well-known funders and industry participation.

I note in the recommendations that it would be of interest to critically review some of the history of Library Studies, and this trajectory into the iSchool, in the context of politics, prestige, power, and personalities.

Given the recurrent discussion about the position of Library Studies in R1 institutions, in whatever disciplinary configuration, is the main task of this report not to ask what can be done differently if Library Studies is to remain a vibrant part of the iSchool mix? It is for this reason that some of my recommendations focus on ways of increasing symbolic capital.

The rest of this section is a summary generated by ChatGPT, of a 'discussion' with ChatGPT (ChatGPT 4o model) about the report and Bourdieu.⁹ I uploaded the report (it has a very open license) and asked questions about the report in the context of Bourdieu's framing.¹⁰ I should note that I did ask it to distinguish between LIS and Library Studies.

9 I was inspired to do this by the interesting and quite different Harnad (2024) which proceeds by way of a dialogue with ChatGPT.

10 Prompts are of course important. I can share a link to the discussion upon request.

Summary of Analysis: Bourdieu's Framework, the Position of Library Studies, and the Influence of R1 Institutions

Bourdieu's Framework in Academic Contexts

Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework offers a valuable lens to analyze the dynamics within academic fields, particularly the struggle for legitimacy, the distribution of symbolic capital, and the reproduction of power structures. In academia, disciplines and departments operate as fields where various actors—scholars, administrators, and institutions—compete for different forms of capital: economic (funding, salaries), cultural (knowledge, expertise), social (networks, connections), and symbolic (prestige, recognition). The position of a field or discipline within the broader academic hierarchy is influenced by the amount and type of capital it possesses and how that capital is valued by dominant actors within the field.

Distinguishing Between Library Studies and LIS

In the context of Bourdieu's framework, it is essential to distinguish between Library Studies and Library and Information Science (LIS), as these fields have different valences, particularly in discussions related to power, prestige, and symbolic capital.

- **Library Studies** is traditionally more associated with the practical, professional training of librarians. It is often viewed as vocational and applied, focusing on the functioning of libraries, cataloging, reference services, and library management. This field is closely tied to the professional practice of librarianship and has historically been seen as less prestigious within the academic hierarchy. In Bourdieu's terms, Library Studies possesses less symbolic capital because it is perceived as less theoretical and more practice-oriented.
- **Library and Information Science (LIS)**, by contrast, is a broader, more interdisciplinary field that includes not only Library Studies but also information science, data management, archival science, and digital curation. LIS aims to bridge the gap between practical librarianship and more theoretical concerns about information systems, user behavior, and the role of information in society. LIS, therefore, has a more complex position within the academic field, possessing more symbolic capital than Library Studies due to its interdisciplinary nature and closer alignment with information science, which is often viewed as more technical and theoretical.

The Position of Library Studies and LIS in iSchools

Within iSchools, the position of both Library Studies and LIS is contested, but they face different challenges in terms of power, legitimacy, and symbolic capital.

- **Library Studies** often finds itself marginalized within iSchools, overshadowed by the more technically oriented aspects of LIS and other fields like data science, AI, and human-computer interaction. The vocational nature of Library Studies means it struggles to gain the same level of recognition and prestige within the academic hierarchy. It is seen as necessary but not central to the research-intensive focus of R1 institutions. In Bourdieu's terms, Library Studies suffers from a deficit of symbolic capital, being perceived as less intellectually rigorous or relevant in the modern, technology-driven academic environment.
- **LIS** occupies a more ambiguous position. While it is broader and more interdisciplinary, giving it more symbolic capital than Library Studies, it is still often seen as less prestigious than the purely technical fields. Within iSchools, LIS is both a foundational field and one that must constantly assert its relevance against the encroachment of other disciplines that are perceived as more

cutting-edge or aligned with current technological trends. The struggle for symbolic capital in LIS involves both defending the value of library-centric research and aligning with the broader, more interdisciplinary goals of the iSchool movement.

Influence of R1 Institutions

The document is prepared by a group of schools within R1 institutions—universities classified as having very high research activity according to the Carnegie Classification. The R1 classification significantly shapes the analysis and priorities reflected in the document. R1 institutions emphasize research productivity, high-impact publications, and competitive research funding. These institutions operate within a framework where research output is a primary measure of symbolic capital, and the ability to attract prestigious grants is crucial for maintaining status within the university and the broader academic community.

For iSchools within R1 institutions, the pressure to align with these priorities is intense. The deans discuss the need to balance the expansion of technical disciplines with the preservation of LIS, but they also emphasize the importance of maintaining a strong research profile. In Bourdieu's terms, the iSchool is engaged in a struggle for symbolic capital within the university, where dominant actors—university administrators, funding bodies, and peer institutions—place a high value on technical and research-intensive fields.

This emphasis on research and symbolic capital shapes the strategies and concerns of iSchool deans. They are focused on developing interdisciplinary research initiatives, securing funding, and maintaining the intellectual prestige of their schools. However, this focus also places LIS—and particularly Library Studies—at a disadvantage, as these fields are often perceived as less competitive in terms of research output and funding opportunities. The deans' discussions reveal a recognition of this disadvantage, but their strategies are largely aimed at navigating the existing power structures rather than fundamentally challenging them.

Early Career Faculty: Struggles and Differences with Deans

The perspectives of early career faculty, as presented in Chapter 3, contrast sharply with those of the deans. Early career faculty are in a more precarious position within the academic field, particularly in R1 institutions where the pressure to produce high-quality research and secure funding is immense. These faculty members often face significant challenges in gaining recognition and legitimacy within the iSchool, particularly if their work is centered on Library Studies or traditional aspects of LIS.

The early career faculty describe the marginalization and even ostracization of Library Studies within iSchools. They highlight how foundational principles of library science are devalued or dismissed in favor of more technically oriented disciplines. This marginalization reflects a struggle for symbolic capital, where the knowledge associated with Library Studies and even traditional LIS is not granted the same recognition as that associated with more technical fields. The concept of "epistemic injustice," discussed by the early career faculty, underscores how certain forms of knowledge are systematically devalued within the academic field, leading to what they describe as "epistemicide"—the erasure of entire knowledge systems.

Unlike the deans, who have the institutional power to influence hiring, resource allocation, and strategic direction, early career faculty are more vulnerable and have less agency. Their power is contingent on navigating the existing power structures, which often favor more technically oriented research. This difference in agency and power shapes their perspectives: while the deans are concerned

with managing the challenges facing LIS within iSchools, the early career faculty are more focused on survival and gaining a foothold in a field where they feel marginalized.

The early career faculty also advocate for structural changes within iSchools, particularly in the context of Ph.D. admissions and faculty hiring. They argue for a more epistemologically just environment that recognizes the value of Library Studies and LIS and supports the development of future scholars in these fields. However, they recognize that these changes are largely out of their control and depend on the willingness of those in leadership positions to advocate for these fields.

Conclusion

Through Bourdieu's lens, the analysis reveals a complex landscape of power dynamics, struggles for symbolic capital, and differing levels of agency within R1 institutions. The position of Library Studies within iSchools is particularly precarious, as it must contend with being seen as vocational and less prestigious, resulting in a significant deficit of symbolic capital. LIS, while broader and more interdisciplinary, still faces challenges in asserting its relevance within a field increasingly dominated by technical disciplines.

For iSchools within R1 institutions, the emphasis on research and symbolic capital drives the strategic priorities of deans, who must navigate the competing demands of expanding technical disciplines while preserving the foundational values of LIS. In contrast, early career faculty face a more precarious position, where their work in Library Studies or traditional LIS is often marginalized, and their power to effect change is limited.

The differences between the perspectives of deans and early career faculty highlight the varied experiences of power within the academic field. Deans, with their institutional authority, have the ability to influence outcomes and navigate the power structures that govern iSchools. In contrast, early career faculty must find ways to navigate a system that often devalues their work, particularly in Library Studies. These dynamics underscore the ongoing challenges facing both Library Studies and LIS within iSchools and the broader academic landscape, particularly in research-intensive R1 institutions.

7. Recommendations and candidate recommendations

The report is rightly focused on a small number of recommended emphases.

I was struck by the fact that at the top level, they were internal to individual iSchools. Of course, this makes sense as individual iSchools are subject to various institutional contexts. And there are also complications involved in working across organizations.

That said, given the focus of my remarks about awareness, scale and impact, it does seem that some coordination across iSchools and with library organizations make sense. And, in fact, there is some discussion of collaborative topics with a values emphasis in the authors' fourth recommendation.

The report invites further recommendations, and, in that spirit, I offer some candidates here that focus on the areas I have discussed, and are pretty continuous with report themes. Again, I am very conscious of my own partial perspective here and I offer these for improvement by the group or to be avoided as impracticable.

As I note throughout, the position of Library Studies, its practice orientation, its research credentials are all recurrent features of discussion. One may not be able to move beyond this, but it does suggest that something more or different should be done. Hence my remarks on greater awareness, scale and collaboration, and on engagement with practice and policy.

Here are some preparatory comments.

- **Ambition.** The report talks about urgency. There is also some urgency in more general library discussions. I recommend that this initiative respond proportionately, leveraging the collective iSchool capacity to scale up the ambition and potential impact of actions. This is a strong group and seems well placed to approach funders to back an initiative to understand and advance research and education topics in support of libraries. Especially when framed in the context of the changes and challenges in library communities.
- **Agency and funding.** This ambition would require coordination. Perhaps a modest shared investment in CALMA (Center for Advances in Libraries, Museums, and Archives) at the UW, or a unit in one of the other iSchools, would provide some capacity to advance shared activities such as communication and grant-seeking. Resources are scarce and there is of course a cost in seeking and managing external funding.
- **Scale.** One of the issues mentioned with library research when compared to other disciplines is that of scale. Many Library Studies researchers are solo, or in small groups. It is appropriate to explore joint working and funding support in this context. This relates to the notion of key areas or grand challenges—it makes sense to tackle them jointly and from different directions.
- **Practice and library organizations.** Library Studies is ineluctably practice-oriented, and iSchools and individual faculty have various structured connections with practice. It would be appropriate to explore some shared co-design of future priorities given the discussion of urgency—where a group of iSchools works with library organizations. The creation of a Key Areas agenda is such a topic. When I mention library organizations below, I am meaning those organizations that pool library capacity and voices—for example, ALA, ARL, ULC, ARSL, Lyrasis, ATALM, BTAA, COSLA, Oberlin Group. In some cases, it may be appropriate to think of organizations whose members 'pay attention' to libraries: for example, AAU, BTAA, and the organizations where counties/municipalities/cities come together. Finally, there are some critical funders who would benefit from outreach: Mellon, IMLS, etc.
- **The LIS question.** Given my discussion about LIS, I use LS below.

- **ASIS&T and iSchools.** ASIS&T and the iSchools Organization have some shared interests around some of these questions. Acknowledging that they may also compete for attention, it would be nice also to see some collaboration around some shared interests.

Original report recommendations, slightly amended

- 1) **Prime the talent pipeline:** Increase the number of **LS** Ph.D. graduates prepared to thrive in research-intensive environments. This would help create future research leaders and strengthen the **LS** faculty pipeline. **Consider the Key Areas in recruitment.**
- 1) **Incentivize research reciprocity:** Foster collaborations between **LS** and other disciplines within iSchools, **and between LS and other disciplines on campus.** By attracting more funding and leveraging interdisciplinary projects, **LS** research can thrive and grow.
- 1) **Evolve the iSchool governance:** Establish governance structures that respect the differing norms of **LS** and other fields, allowing for balanced growth of research and teaching faculty. **Specifically, credit community engagement and impact in merit/tenure discussions.**
- 2) **Promote LIS values across disciplines:** Strengthen the integration of LIS's foundational principles, such as information access and literacy, within iSchools and ensure these values inform research and partnerships with the library profession.

LAMinate this initiative – from LIS to LAM

Mentions of LAMs notwithstanding, the report has an LIS/Library focus. It would make sense to consider the particularities of Archival Studies and perhaps Museum Studies in a subsequent iteration (LAM Forward).

I would go further. I would shift the focus of the initiative to LAMs and away from LIS, acknowledging that Museum Studies may not be as established in iSchools as Archival Studies.

This is not to suggest a blurring or merging between L, A and M. There may be some overlap of interests, but there are also very clearly different interests, traditions and orientations.

However, from a communication and story point of view this is more relatable. There is a common interest in institutional and organizational contexts, in public policy, in advocacy and in social contexts. There is an interest in facilitating mental wellness, creation, research and education. There is an interest in representing experiences, memories and evidence.

All of the LAM traditions potentially benefit from the multidisciplinary hinterland of the iSchool.

For the reasons above, I think this move is worth exploring. I also think that if one wants to focus on libraries and librarianship, it might make sense to be clear about this, and, as discussed above, LIS is ambivalent in its use.

Elevate the awareness of the LS work conducted within iSchools

Create a shared bridging/brokering communication capacity which shares stories about interesting research and activity in suitable formats. This activity takes the scholarly article as the beginning of a process not the end.

- Articles in *The Conversation*, *Inside Higher Ed*, *American Libraries*...
- Propose a collaboration with library organizations to create a Platform Publication as described above.
- Periodic shared research bulletin.
- Targeted communication with library organizations.
- The shift from LIS to LAM might help with this—creating a more relatable and novel set of communications.

Motivate collaboration and impact with a shared set of Key Areas

Confer with library organizations and funding agencies to create a menu of Key Areas of importance to evolving libraries. It would make sense to be broad-based, ambitious and maybe to do it by type of library or thematic area. The aim is motivational and gravitational: to create funding, recruitment, research and teaching interest around a forward-looking agenda. For example...

- **Public.** The public library and social capital—signals of success? What motivates citizens to vote positively for library funding? The library and childhood education.
- **Academic.** Library contribution to life-wide learning. The library in emerging learning and research infrastructure on campus. Future of the collective collection.

There are also more general questions. What barriers exist to greater diversity in the profession?

Encourage strategic Key Area Affinity Alliances across iSchools to scale funding and projects

Mobilize diverse capacity and partnerships collaboratively across iSchools to bring scale to projects which address Key Areas. This seems like an area where a partnership with a funder might jumpstart some activity.

Shared attention to learning

Education, curriculum and related matters are to be discussed in subsequent phases of the initiative. In the interim here are some candidate suggestions that fall out of the discussion above.

- Commission or collaboratively carry out an investigation into future employer needs—initially by type of library. Of course this would be indicative only.
- A collaborative market research project to assess the interest in an eMLIS degree focused on strategy, organizational development, negotiation, etc. The target audience may be too small?
- A review of certifications available in iSchools. Does this point to opportunity areas, public administration, say, for example.
- A review of current joint offerings between LS and other departments/schools (business, history, etc.).
- A collaborative project to develop a bank of structured case studies. Based on real issues in libraries of distinct types. To include assessment of their use. Promote as evidence of 'interesting' questions. HBR style structure. This becomes a manifestation of the collaboration with practitioners, and of engaging with real-life management issues.

Diversifying the workforce

- What can be done, individually and collectively, to support a diverse student population and to facilitate broad entry into the library workforce?
- What can be done, individually and collectively, to encourage diversity in the LS Ph.D. community, and in the so-called 'pipeline'?
- What can be done through visiting or adjunct arrangements, practitioner appointments, and other initiatives, to diversify perspectives in teaching and research?

Increasing the knowledge base: characterizing the iSchools

It would be good to inventory some of the similarities and differences between the iSchools to help advance a shared understanding. This could be advanced as a shared agenda of candidate research areas, which iSchool researchers, doctoral students and others could consider as they chose questions to explore. If a partner funding agency could be found, this would create some incentives to work in this area.

By the numbers

The quantitative data in the report is quite revealing—it was interesting for example to see the MLIS completion curve. It would be interesting to see more data in the context of understanding more fully the funding, research and disciplinary profile of iSchools. Do resources actually flow into stated priorities? What subsidizes what? For example:

- **Revenue profile** – what is the relative contribution to income of the MLIS and related degrees? What way do cross-subsidies work within the graduate degree portfolio?
- **Student numbers** – how many students have graduated with the MLIS and related degrees? What proportion of overall graduate degrees does this comprise?
- **Student population** – how do students break down by age, gender, race, ...?
- **Student nationality** – how does the student population break down across degrees by home country? And how does this play into revenue and other discussions?
- **Faculty** – how do faculty break down by disciplinary background? How many identify with librarianship in some form?
- **Teaching** – who teaches what courses? How do research faculty, teaching faculty, guests break down?
- **Research funding** – how does grant income break down by disciplinary background? How does it break down by funder? How much income is from IMLS?

Organizational contours

It would be interesting to learn more about, for example:

- **Identity** – how are departments, schools and disciplinary emphases named? (I was interested to see *Information Cultures* in Pittsburgh). Are there dominant patterns? Are some terms used with different senses?
- **University configuration** – how does the iSchool fit into university structures?
- **iSchool configurations** – is the iSchool departmentalized? Are there heads of subdisciplines? What disciplinary emphases are represented? What is librarianship clustered with?

Courses

- Create an inventory of joint programs with campus partners (e.g. social work, history, business, ...).
- What courses are offered across the iSchools, at graduate and undergraduate levels? How do they cluster by discipline?
- Who is teaching what you might call core librarianship courses? Research faculty/teaching faculty/adjunct/...?

History and values

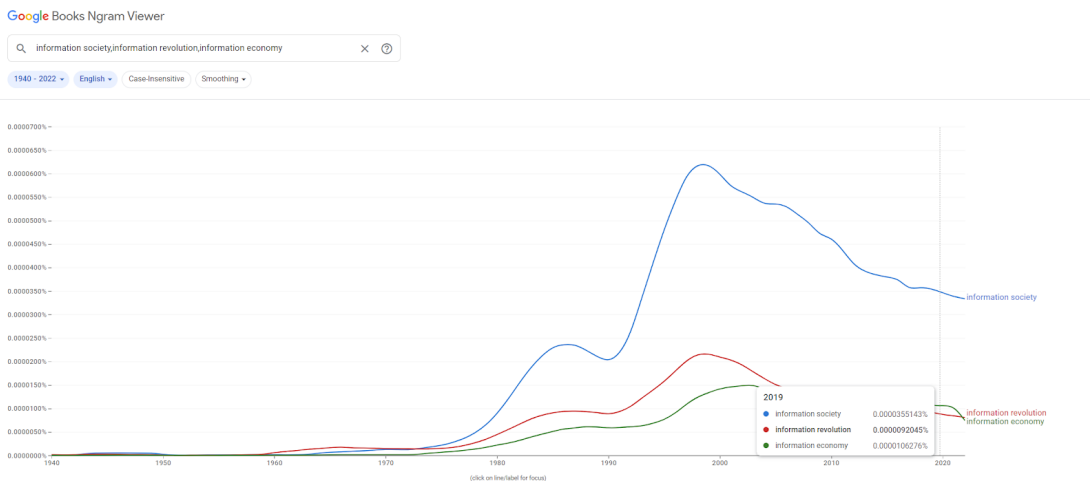
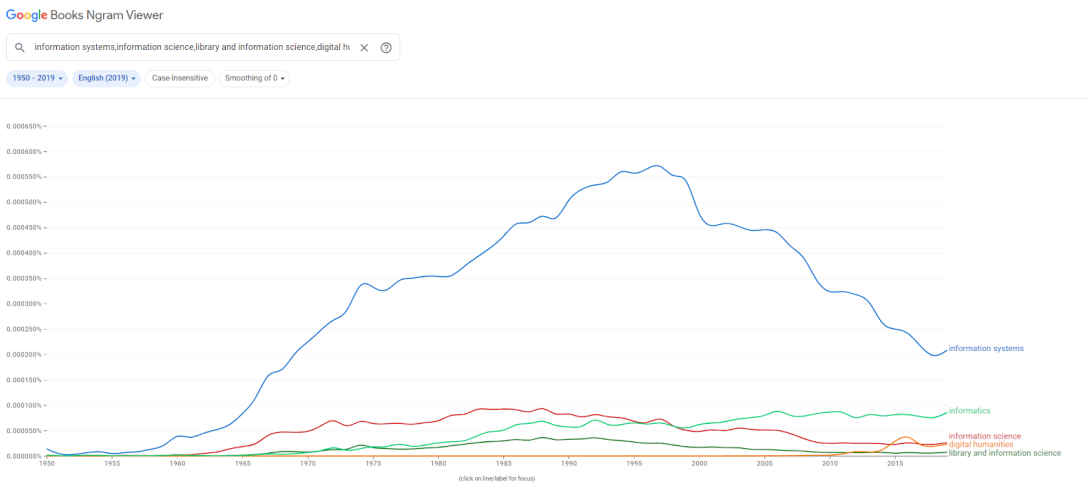
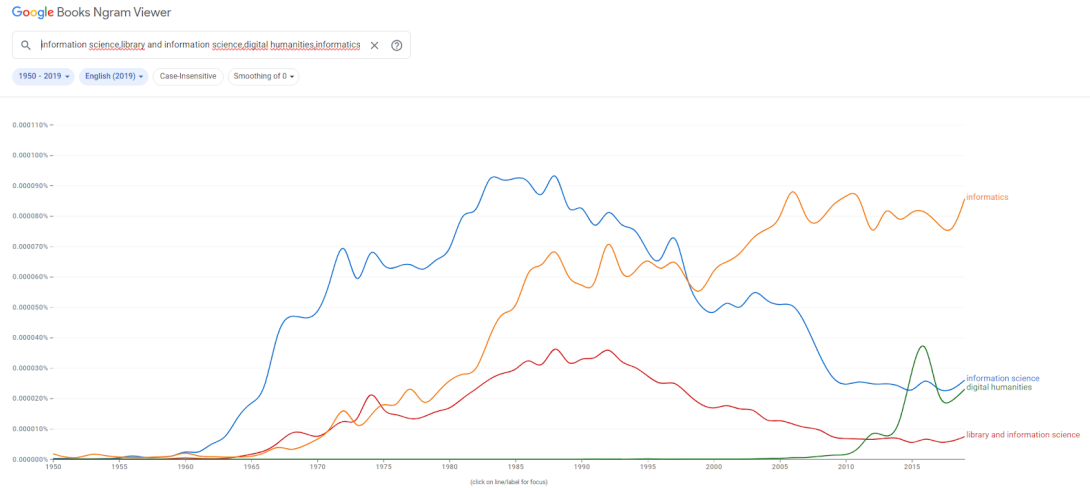
- A history of organizational evolution within iSchools that focuses on realpolitik of changes, leadership decisions, recruitment, dissent, etc. It may not be realistic to expect such a treatment, but it would be good to understand some of the dynamics at play.
- The importance of gender is noted and reserved for future treatment in the report. It would be useful to have a review of feminized professions and prestige in R1 institutions, and of any comparative work on librarianship in this context.

Exploring another dimension: practice and policy

I wrote about the creation and diffusion of ideas and innovation above. It would be useful to carry out or commission some work which explores the role of Library Studies in influencing practice and informing policy. A comparative approach (both with other LAM strands, and with other practice-oriented disciplines) would be helpful.

Coda 1: Google Ngram

These charts are presented without commentary. While interesting, they are not reliable enough in terms of transparency of content and understanding of cutoff to lean into heavily.



Coda 2: Personal position

Given the variety of perspectives at play, I note how my experience and interests influence my own perspective here.

- I consider myself a librarian and my career has been driven by a vocational investment in **libraries and librarianship**. By extension I am interested in the study of librarianship itself, in its history, organization, values and practices.
- I directed for many years two of the most influential **R&D units** devoted to libraries and related organizations, UKOLN, at the University of Bath (now closed), and OCLC Research. In these roles I have always had a threefold ambition: to **contribute to knowledge**, to **inform practice**, and to **influence policy**. I am interested in how **ideas** and **innovation** are diffused throughout the library community and in the role of iSchools in this context.
- I have worked in libraries, but have spent most of my career in library support organizations, providing infrastructure, research, data and other services to libraries. In that time, I have **recruited** and overseen many early-career librarians. I am interested in what the broad library field needs in terms of **career preparation**.
- I am currently a Professor of Practice at the iSchool at the University of Washington, a fixed term position. I received my library education at University College Dublin, when it was very much a 'library school'. I have also collaborated over the years with colleagues from iSchools. This means that my iSchool perspective is more a **visitor's** than a resident's. That said, from an experience, observational and conceptual position, I recognized much of what was said in the Assistant Professors' discussion, although I contextualize it a little above.
- I have worked in Ireland, the UK and the US. While in the UK, I worked closely with the then EU Libraries Programme, and with libraries and projects across Europe. While in the US, I worked with an international library membership organization and was for a time responsible for its membership apparatus. So, while I try to have an **international** perspective, I also recognize how difficult it is to really understand different national contexts from an external vantage point.

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