

EDITORIAL

A Purpose-Driven LIS Education

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For a long time, Library and Information Science (LIS) education has held on to the “tried and tested” preconceived systematic approach, which mirrors the foundations of LIS in information organization. From the time when Melvil Dewey established the world’s first library school in 1887 at Columbia College, the emphasis on library skills such as classifying and organizing information and knowledge has always been in the models for curricular and professional advancements in library education in various countries. These technical skills and their associated values have become an essential aspect of librarianship – from being a profession centered on being a “bookman” to becoming more “socially minded” (Butler, 1951, p. 236). The professional “self-consciousness” of librarians and their position in their social world next to the other professions and disciplines has created a significant impact on the education and training of librarians. This particular consciousness centered on the need to acquire and perform specific and “expected” knowledge and skills has equally shaped the collective and individual perceptions of the LIS teachers, learners, and practitioners about their work, responsibilities, potentials, and even limitations. While library schools continuously provide their students the “tried and tested” approaches, as well as their expanded or improved versions, a rather short and seemingly basic question of “why?” still needs to be constantly raised.

If we will continue to believe in the conventional purpose of education as a means to acquire knowledge through reading books and learning facts, then we, as Roosevelt (2008) points out, must have to think again and see how education can be better and purposefully designed and articulated for our students and society. It will not be enough to produce a pool of graduates trained to do specific tasks without making them realize the

underlying and more significant purpose of what they are learning and doing. Bass (1997) argues that without the necessary attention to the “long view of things” or “the big picture,” then we are “doomed to wander in circles or vacillate from this direction to that, negating one day what we accomplished the day before” (p. 128). As we look at the bigger picture and try to envision the future of LIS education and the discipline itself, we should remember that education is more than the established institutions and prescribed rules and procedures for teaching and learning, but it is the sum total of everything learned from the past, present, and up to the time we leave this mortal plane (Bass, 1997). Moreover, since it is a natural tendency to compare ourselves to others to benchmark or create several measures to standardize our competencies and capabilities as professionals, Lesch (2009) reminds the educators that this system, which also covers a sequential and restrictive way of pursuing a subject matter, usually falls upon the shoulders of the teachers. This method would sometimes subvert the natural progress of genuine learning and inherently stifle creativity and curiosity due to the restrictive nature of instruction and curricula. More than the standards and finite measures, a more balanced approach between the expected outcomes and types of learners and teachers is needed. Hence, in examining and reimagining LIS education, it should be noted that different disciplines have different criteria, as well as teaching and learning culture based on their history, values, and methodologies (Dow, 2011). The requirements set in the hard sciences are expectedly different or perhaps not appropriate to be applied across other disciplines and professions. While LIS has positioned itself as both a science and an art, the LIS curricular offerings and the competencies required are continuously being examined and improved based on the emergent trends and needs of a particular country or region. In Asia, concerns in the curricular offerings in higher education to meet the demands of information industries, program accreditations, evaluation methods

for courses and training programs, and collaboration among LIS educational programs for teaching and research have been emphasized in the last decade (Chaudhry, 2007; Kaur, 2015; Miwa, 2006).

In the Philippines, library schools adhere to the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order No. 24, series of 2015 (CMO 24 s. 2015), otherwise known as the “Revised Policies, Standards and Guidelines for the Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) Program.” It enumerates the program specifications and directions based on the Guidelines for Professional Library/Information Education Programs of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and curricular offerings of different library schools abroad. Aside from the specifications mentioned in the CMO, library schools in the country also hold on to the culture and roots of their respective schools and LIS programs. As mentioned earlier, education and learning are highly shaped by history, values, and methodologies. There may be standards and systematic approaches that guide the library schools, but it is essential to look at their origins, their evolution, and the people who have participated in the development of library education not just in their respective schools or universities, but in the Philippines as a whole. The efforts done by each education institution and the people behind it have a cumulative effect on the overall status and quality of LIS education in the country. It is also interesting to see how the programs and departments have grown through the years. For instance, most LIS programs started under a bigger program such as Liberal Arts or Education. Recently, a number of programs have begun to expand to more information-centric rather than institution/library-centric content. Whether the current LIS programs remain to be subsumed in other programs or continue to be expanding, this description of change may be an oversimplification for now as we try to provide answers to the basic question of “why?”—the main purpose of LIS education in and for a particular country, region or context – and the many ways we can reimagine it.

It is but natural to retain the status quo, to gatekeep, and to stick to the systematic approaches. However, the drastically changing landscapes and the current pandemic that challenges the notion of normalcy call for substantial adjustments in LIS education. This special issue of the PhJLIS celebrates the 60th Founding Anniversary of the UP School of Library and Information Studies (UP SLIS), and honors the efforts of the people and institutions behind the progress of LIS education in the Philippines. It is a testament to the commitment of various library schools to continuously reexamine and improve their programs. Different LIS professors from around the country have come together

to present the histories of their programs, as well as their missions and visions, paths of curriculum development, faculty complement, profiles of students and alumni, and their plans for the future.

This compendium of articles from 10 different library schools in the Philippines, from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, may not provide the complete picture or view of LIS education in the Philippines. But the PhJLIS hopes that this will be a beginning of more collaborations and vision setting for the future of LIS education in the country and in the region.

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