

Overcoming Challenges in Teaching and Mentorship in LIS Research Education in the Philippines

Elijah John F. Dar Juan
Associate and Issue Editor, PhJLIS

Iyra S. Buenrostro
Editor-in-Chief, PhJLIS

The ability to conduct research is one of the common competencies expected of library and information professionals. Research is considered the lifeblood of a discipline, allowing the field of study to move forward and adapt to the ever-changing needs of our society and communities. Library and information science (LIS) is certainly not exempt from such change as a dynamic and interdisciplinary field. Another vital motivation behind developing research skills in LIS is that research is fundamental to offering information services and managing information organizations. Librarians offer research assistance/consulting to their clients (research not in the fact-finding aspect but in the context of generating new knowledge by applying methods to gather and analyze data) (Katz, 2002; Tyckoson, 2020). Research enhances practice by evaluating processes and resources when offering information services (Moran & Morner, 2018).

Aside from published texts that enumerate the expected skills of information professionals, organizations such as associations of librarians and government regulatory bodies prescribe standards for librarians, either as a requirement or as a recommendation. ALA's Core Competences of Librarianship (2023) has item "7. Research and Evidence-Based Practice" (p. 8), while CILIP (2021) includes research in its Professional Knowledge and Skills Base (PKSB). Though not explicitly mentioned, research skills and competencies are blended within the National Competency-Based Standards for Filipino Librarians (NCBSFL; PRBFL Resolution No. 03, s. 2015).

To support the development of research competency among LIS professionals, LIS schools in the Philippines adhere to local standards in teaching research, among other areas of LIS. In

Philippine LIS higher education, the inclusion of research courses into the curricula is stipulated in the Commission on Higher Education Memorandum (CHED Memorandum Order No. 24, s. 2015) as a requirement for LIS students to have the ability to conduct research and participate in knowledge-building. As a requirement for graduation, among the LIS schools in the Philippines, most of the research courses mainly focus on research methods and are taken during the last or final years of the students in their degree programs. This requirement not only underscores the importance of research but also places significant pressure on faculty and students.

The UP School of Library and Information Studies has several research courses in its undergraduate and graduate programs. The BLIS program requires qualitative (LIS 191) and quantitative research (LIS 192) methods, each offered as three-unit courses. The student must also take LIS 199 Research in Library and Information Science to develop their research proposal for the LIS 200 Thesis course. In the 2021 revisions of graduate programs, LIS 299 Foundations of Information Research (earlier course title: Research Methodology) prepares MSLIS students for the LIS 300 Thesis course. To instill mastery, one research methods elective is required in the MSLIS program, either LIS 299.1 on quantitative methods or LIS 299.2 on qualitative methods.

As LIS educators, the main question that we usually ask ourselves is, “How do we teach research to our students?” We design and perform pedagogical approaches because we want our students to develop particular research competencies and experiences – and while it is already challenging to conduct research and teach research, in recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought even more challenges and issues that both the faculty and students need to confront.

One of the PhJLIS editors was able to have brief conversations with LIS faculty members in

different schools in the Philippines. According to some LIS faculty members, the most common problems they and the students encounter are the difficulty to finish their research on time and the faculty to advise all the students. There is also a lack of students’ exposure to methods, diversity of topics and theories, and resources, and also the faculty’s lack of actual research experience. In this situation, both the faculty and students are sometimes left with almost no choice – because, one, research is a requirement for graduation, and two – the faculty are required to teach and at the same time conduct their research. While these experiences are not conclusive, these are nevertheless sound reflections of what LIS schools are facing in the country regarding teaching and conducting research.

Aside from these, a common challenge in research teaching and mentoring includes the faculty’s knowledge of LIS as a field of study and the research areas that can be covered. Research teachers should have sufficient knowledge so that students may be guided well enough to address the intricacies and nuances required of research inquiry. As faculty teaching research, it is expected that we already have the research knowledge and skills, and there are times when those knowledge and skills are tested due to the topics submitted by students. We, research teachers, should embrace lifelong learning as this is critical in our ways to contribute to the growth and expansion of our field of study.

The challenges with teaching research in LIS were compounded by the inevitable switch to remote learning delivery during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The curriculum and syllabi were revised, learning outcomes were redefined, and new strategies were developed to ensure that students could continue their education despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic. These adjustments included creating study guides, course packs, and other materials that students could access asynchronously, catering primarily to those with unstable internet connections or limited

access to technologies. While we are now almost back to our pre-pandemic ways, these study guides and approaches that we developed during the pandemic are still being utilized for the benefit of our students.

It is also important to provide enough emotional support to our students. As teachers, we try to be more understanding of our students' situation and their concerns, especially in satisfying the research requirements and their worries about whether they will be able to conduct their research or even graduate on time. We tried to assure them by simplifying things, without sacrificing the quality of their outputs. Students have different skills and mental abilities; thus, we should be more forbearing in dealing with those needing more time and guidance.

LIS teachers should be mindful of their role in facilitating student learning. We should be present throughout the process, from when the students acquire knowledge of research methods and techniques to the actual research process (from conceptualizing the research problem to writing the research report). As much as possible, the students should not be simply left on their own. A considerable amount of guidance should be given to the students to keep them on track. Research guidance should strike a balance between giving the students the freedom to decide on their research direction and ensuring that they will not go astray and make unnecessary mistakes.

Protocols and procedures should be established for student research advising. The roles and responsibilities of students and advisers should be defined, expectations should be made apparent, and both parties should understand and exercise such roles effectively. Mechanisms should also be in place for future research utilization (e.g., submission to journals or conferences, co-authorship, etc.) and addressing disagreements between students and research advisers, if there would be any.

Faculty members get to be mentored, too. As stated earlier, faculty members teaching research and advising student research should continuously learn. We acknowledge that utilizing books and learning resources has its potency; more than that, faculty-to-faculty mentorship could also substantiate the experience. At UP SLIS, there were consultation sessions with visiting professors Diljit Singh, Michael Olsson, Maureen Henninger, and Michelle Caswell, to name a few, to flesh out research topics and agendas and develop strategies for academic publishing.

Peer-to-peer coaching and mentoring among faculty members can take in so many forms. At times, even informal conversations in the faculty room could lead to discussions about research problems and methods that eventually lead to collaboration for co-authorship. Structures can be set up to catalyze research activity, such as conducting research clinics, workshops, and similar sessions, organizing research interest groups and research laboratories, and reaching out to counterparts in other departments and universities to discuss and cooperate for research.

Indeed, there are many challenges in teaching and mentoring our students in conducting LIS research. As teachers, we should always find and innovate ways to improve ourselves as educators and researchers – and at the same time help our students appreciate not only the end benefits of research but also the experience of engaging in the research process itself.

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