

# UP School of Library and Information Studies (UP SLIS) on its 60th Year and Beyond: Challenging Traditions, Embracing Innovations

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## Abstract

*This paper presents the history and development of the University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Studies (UP SLIS). The UP SLIS operates within the core mandate and principles of UP, and is driven to carry out its responsibilities as an academic institution within the larger LIS community. The school recognizes and stays true to its role in nation-building by providing quality LIS education centered on honor, excellence, and service to the Filipino people.*

**Keywords:** Bachelor of Library and Information Science, Master of Library and Information Science, LIS curriculum, Library and information science education, Library education and training, Philippines

## ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FIRST LIBRARY SCHOOL

Education became the foremost influencing factor that Americans adopted to gain the trust of the native Filipinos after they took over the Philippines in 1898. Schools were established, and as such, libraries flourished to support the educational programs during the American regime in the country. However, unlike the different fields of learning, such as the sciences, humanities and arts, which have been taught even during the previous Spanish regime, no formal education or degree in library science was initially offered. Early librarians acquired their skills through hands-on or on-the-job trainings. Although this method sufficed for some time, it was not very long when Dr. James Alexander Robertson, then director of the Philippine Library (the forerunner of the National Library of the Philippines) realized the need for formally trained personnel to man the growing number of public libraries in the country. Thus, in 1910, he proposed to the University of the Philippines (UP), the establishment of a library school (Damaso, 1966). The request to establish a separate library school was not readily approved. It was in 1914, four years later, that a three-year program of study on librarianship under the College of Liberal Arts was

allowed to be offered. Nevertheless, this program paved the way for practicing librarians and would-be librarians to acquire formal training. In 1916, the program was expanded to four years upon the proposal of Mary Polk, librarian of the Bureau of Science, and one of the pioneering teachers of library science, who felt the need to provide more theoretical knowledge in the practice of the profession (Perez, 2004). With the offering of the practical courses and eventually the four-year program, UP became the first university in Asia to offer the degree prior to World War II (Miyahara, 2015).

The development of the program continued with the passing of Act No. 2746 or the Library Science Scholarship Act (also known as the Alonzo Act) on February 18, 1918. This law, which could be attributed largely to Mary Polk and Lois Osborn, paved the way for a number of government scholars to specialize in bibliography and library science from 1918 to 1923 prior to the repatriation of the American teachers back to the United States (Philippine Islands, 1918). This scholarship yielded seven graduates in the field, including Prof. Gabriel Bernardo, also known as the doyen of Philippine librarianship. Four of them became professional

librarians and part-time teachers at the Department of Library Science, which in 1922 was designated as the University Library of the UP Board of Regents (Damaso, 1966).

While several librarians were specializing further in the field, other universities started offering courses in library science or general librarianship. Among these include the Philippine Normal College (the present Philippine Normal University) which offered general elective courses on librarianship in 1919, and University of Santo Tomas in 1936 (Vallejo, 1990; David, 2015). By 1945, there were already 11 schools offering the program but were forced to close because of the Japanese colonization (David, 2015). After the war, all educational institutions reopened, including those 11 library schools and UP. In 1961, the UP Board of Regents approved the establishment of the Institute of Library Science (ILS) as a separate degree granting institution in UP (Vallejo, 1990, Faderon, 2011; Obille, 2017). With the establishment of ILS, it became the first and only library science school, independent of any other field of study, in the Philippines and in South East Asia that offer both degrees of Bachelor of Library Science and Master of Library Science before it was followed by Chulalongkorn University in 1965 (Miyahara, 2015).

#### **UP ILS: AN INSTITUTION OF EXCELLENCE AND PUBLIC SERVICE**

As one of the degree-granting units within the premier university in the country, the School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS; formerly ILS and the Institute of Library and Information Science [ILIS]) is driven to ensure the effective accomplishment of the purpose and functions of the University. This purpose and functions are enumerated in Republic Act No. 9500, also known as “The University of the Philippines Charter of 2008.” This law declares UP as the national university of the Philippines (Section 2) and as such, UP is the primary partner of the government in promoting, fostering, nurturing and protecting the right of all citizens to accessible quality education (Republic Act No. 9500, 2008). Among the purposes of UP as a national university are to: (1) Lead in setting academic standards and initiating innovations in teaching, research and faculty development in all fields of study and maintain centers of excellence in such disciplines and professions; (2) Serve as a graduate university by providing advanced studies and specialization for scholars, scientists, writers, artists and

professionals, especially those who serve on the faculty of state and private colleges and universities; (3) Serve as a research university in a various fields of expertise and specialization; and (4) Lead as a public service university by providing various forms of community, public, and volunteer service, as well as scholarly and technical assistance to the government, private sector, and civil society while maintaining its standards of excellence.

Likewise, it is also UP’s mandate to ensure that graduates from the University exemplifies the *Tatak UP* philosophy which is embodied in the UP Philosophy of Education and Graduate Attributes (2019) approved by the Board of Regents on November 28, 2019, which states that:

*A UP education seeks to produce graduates imbued with an abiding sense of responsibility to their people and nation, the skills and mindsets to improve human life, and a commitment to the freedom and welfare of all.*

*Aside from mastery of knowledge in their specific disciplines, UP graduates must possess breadth of mind, strength of character, and generosity of spirit, fostered by a firm grounding in both the arts and sciences, and such specialist courses as their programs may require.*

*They must be prepared to inclusively engage with society and the world at large, mindful of their people’s needs and capabilities, and keen to the challenges and opportunities of national development in this century of rapid global change.*

*UP aims to achieve this through its General Education program, one that develops mind, body and spirit, which familiarizes all its students with their culture and history and fosters a sense of shared sense of identity, while equipping them with critical thinking, discernment and technical skills they will need to excel in their chosen professions. (para. 1–4)*

Needless to say, the UP ILS then and UP SLIS now, like the rest of the constituents of UP, has been

mandated by this philosophy of excellence and public service and hence, required to be consistent and be in line with the state university's purposes. As such, it has to keep up with the high standards expected of UP. Thus, while other universities were content with offering courses in library science under another program of studies, e.g., education, arts, the then UP ILS continued to enjoy for several years, the stature of the only academic institution that offered the BLS degree independent of, and not subsumed under any field such as Education or Liberal Arts. Thus, it continued producing graduates who were highly trained in the LIS practices.

## UP ILIS: CHALLENGING TRADITIONS

### Expanding the Scope of LIS

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the era of computers ushered a significant development in the field of librarianship. Fundamental reforms on the content of the LIS curriculum had to be undertaken to accommodate the expanding scope of the LIS profession (Picache, 1983). These reforms required graduates of library science to recalibrate existing practices and learn new skills to adopt to the demands of the digital society. Consequently, these developments in the library science profession necessitate changes in the curriculum which led to the institution of information science courses within the library science program. In UP ILS, the first information science course, LS 260 Introduction to Documentation (which later became Introduction to Information Science) was offered as early as 1971 (Faderon, 2011). This course introduced students to the foundational knowledge on information management. It also introduced them to the basics of automation. The following years saw more information and communications technology (ICT) courses included to the curriculum.

Moreover, with the advent of computers, the archetypal roles of librarians such as acquisition of print information resources based on expressed and perceived needs of clients, processing and packaging of information contained in these resources in the most accurate and accessible manner, maintaining their availability for library clientele, and preserving cultural and heritage materials had to be brought to a new level to accommodate the use of automated tools. From the collection centered perspective, the "library's new role as information center requires a re-commitment to an expanded mission, and a marketing program that promises meeting of customer needs" (Aguirre, 2011, p. 48). This recommitment entails challenging

traditional practices and enrolling the client's participation in enhancing and establishing responsive library services.

For the pioneers of the library profession in the Philippines, this shift presented more challenges because of the required retooling to keep the librarians and the profession relevant. It was even foretold that librarians would be soon replaced by computers. Instead of getting threatened, UP ILS accepted the challenges that automation and the digital world presented. True to its mandate as a public service institution, UP ILS started offering extension programs to help librarians update their skills, techniques and knowledge. The first of its kind was the Summer Institute on Information Science conducted in 1975 (Faderon, 2011). Since then, it became a tradition of public service for UP ILS to offer yearly Summer Institute programs aimed at upskilling librarians with the latest trends and practices in the field of librarianship. The first Summer Institute was later followed by several internationally funded training programs on information management, web searching, computer-aided instructions, integrated library systems, and other ICT-related raining courses. Among these include the UNESCO Regional Training Courses in Computerized Documentation System/Integrated Set of Information (CDS/ISIS) which were co-sponsored by UNESCO and UP ILS in the '70s up to the '80s which later led to the assignment of UP ILS as the Philippine Distribution Center of the Micro CDS/ISIS software package, a library management system adopted by several libraries in the country during the '80s. Trainings on ICT application in the library continued as more and more development occurred in the field. Towards the end of the '80s, specializations in medical and law librarianship were also introduced in the graduate program curriculum of UP ILS. Several years later, courses on archives administration were also included to the graduate curriculum as a response to the growing need for training in archives administration (Faderon, 2011; Faderon et al., 2016).

In 2002, the UP ILS was renamed UP ILIS to reflect the expanding field of library and information science. After five years, the request to change the name of the UP ILIS to UP SLIS was again approved by the Board of Regents. These changes in the name of the institution over the years, were intended to manifest the transformation of the library profession and the expanding scope of education that is required of LIS graduates of today ("2017 UP SLIS Strategic Plan"). Although traditional library practice requires librarians to

provide personalized library services to their varied clientele, embracing these challenges to the profession made the profession more relevant to the current information era.

### **Cultivating the Culture of Research in LIS**

While the challenges of the expanding scope of the field kept LIS educators preoccupied with curriculum and organizational reforms, the faculty members of UP ILS also had to address the need for a medium to encourage and disseminate researches about Philippine materials and libraries. Thus, in 1968, the first issue of the *Journal of Philippine Librarianship (JPL)* was published by UP ILS. The JPL was a biannual journal publication which served as a venue for practitioners, faculty members and students in LIS and other related fields to disseminate significant research about Philippine materials, libraries, librarianship and its related fields (Obille, 2018). The first few issues of the JPL also feature articles written by professional outside of the LIS profession such as notable historians, literary writers and anthropologists (Obille, 2018). For the longest time, the issues of JPL were printed biannually until 2007 when UP SLIS decided to make the succeeding issues available electronically as open access.

### **UP SLIS: EMBRACING INNOVATIONS**

Graduates of UP SLIS are highly sought after by different organizations not only within the field of librarianship but also in the allied fields such as archives and records management, information systems, knowledge management, data management and other related areas. A significant number of its graduates have excelled in the profession and have been recognized as trailblazers in the field of LIS in the country. Likewise, some of its alumni who chose to practice the profession outside of the country have also coped and thrived well. This only proves that UP SLIS has continued to embrace the developments in the library and information science field in the country, and remains in its commitment to equip graduates of the programs with the relevant skills and knowledge to prepare them to embark in the world outside the university. Another attestation to the quality of education and mentorship that UP SLIS offers is its being a consistent top performing school in the Librarian Licensure Examination (LLE) since it was instituted in 1991, with a 98% to 100% passing percentage every year. It is also the only LIS school in the Philippines awarded with a certification as a Center of Excellence in LIS education by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED).

These achievements may be attributed not only to the robust faculty compliment of 14 full-time faculty members, and 14 part-time senior lecturers (as of 2021), but also to the expanding curricula of both the undergraduate and graduate programs which led to increased enrollment to the programs. As expected, this expansion led to offering of new courses and specialization to accommodate the demand for highly trained LIS practitioners not only in general librarianship but also in areas such as ICT, law librarianship, health librarianship, archives and records management. Moreover, in the past ten years, UP SLIS faculty members were encouraged to pursue doctoral studies consistent with the call of UP for all faculty members to do doctoral studies. This call has received a stronger push when the Philippine educational system transitioned to K to 12 arrangement. During the first two years of its implementation, universities expected a dwindling enrollment as high school students had to complete two more years of studies in the secondary level. This anticipated event opened a window of opportunity for tenured faculty do their doctoral studies. At present, one senior faculty has completed her doctorate studies, while five others are completing their doctoral degrees, consistent with the faculty development plan that the UP SLIS has laid down in 2017. The faculty compliment of UP SLIS is further enhanced by visiting professors from universities abroad who are experts in the field of LIS, archival studies and LIS research to team teach, conduct mentorship programs and workshops among the faculty members and students, and assist in curricular development of the school.

On a related note, the curriculum of the Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) program being offered by UP SLIS has been periodically reviewed and revised to accommodate changes to the content, terminologies, and technologies used for LIS education and practice. The most recent revision to the BLIS curriculum was done in 2018 to reflect the gradual progression of the BLIS program to an IT-intensive curriculum where IT is integrated in the various aspects of library and information studies including archives and records management (i.e., use of relational databases in cataloging, digital archiving, metadata, ontology etc.), which balances the traditional aspects of information organization as well as the preservation aspects of information management. Likewise, the shifting roles of library professionals as information experts and vanguards of truth requires that BLIS graduates be trained to become information professionals who are well-rounded in the different facets and issues related to

the prevailing information activities in this era and their impact to the whole of humanity. Thus, the latest curricular revisions considered the most recent standards set by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), and also mapped out with the National Competency-Based Standards for Filipino Librarians, as well as the BLIS Graduate Outcomes as specified in CHED Memorandum Order No. 24, series of 2015 (Commission on Higher Education, 2015). More so, it is also worthy to note that the last curricular revision also included the institution of a general education (GE) course, LIS 10 Information and Society. LIS 10 is the first GE course in LIS which students from other program of studies can take. Now on its third year of offering, it has become a well subscribed GE course in UP.

Similarly, the Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) program curriculum which was last revised in 2011, is currently being reviewed for revisions to include courses on critical librarianship, digital humanities, ethical considerations and practices, multiculturalism and other emerging issues that affect the LIS profession. Also, the current review is looking into the expansion of the Research Methodology courses to effectively equip the graduate students with the necessary fundamental knowledge and aptitude to conduct more in-depth and theoretically grounded research on LIS. Moreover, part of the strategic plan of UP SLIS that was laid down in 2017 includes the offering of new graduate programs. These include graduate degree programs in Archives and Records Management, Information Science and eventually, the much-awaited doctoral program in LIS in the immediate future.

With regards to the research and publication aspect of the School, as UP SLIS strives to keep up with the developments in the LIS field, it has also decided to push through with a long-conceived plan to rename the JPL to Philippine Journal of Librarianship and Information Studies (PhJLIS) to open the publication to contributors and contributions beyond the topic of Philippine librarianship (Obille, 2018). With the change of name came the establishment of an editorial board consisted of international experts in the field of LIS. To date, the PhJLIS publishes two issues per year but is gearing up to publishing four issues annually in the coming years. This is also part of the strategy to internationalize the Journal to encourage submissions from authors outside of the Philippines. As Buenrostro (2019) explained, “the change of name and scope of JPL to PhJLIS,.. is one

of the many steps that the UP SLIS is undertaking to strengthen its place as the premier library and information school in the region” (p.2).

Finally, the last 10 years also saw the move of UP SLIS to renew international linkages by becoming institutional members of different international associations such as the iSchools Consortium, the Asia-Pacific Library and Information Education and Practice (A-LIEP) and Southeast Asia-Pacific Audio-Visual Archives Association (SEAPAVAA). Faculty members have become more involved in presenting research papers in different conferences and seminars, thereby extending their networks by their involvement in the discussions of the latest trends and issues that affect the LIS profession.

### LOOKING BEYOND 60 YEARS

The success of UP SLIS as a library school, and the quality of LIS education that UP SLIS offers to its students did not come easily. It is a fruit of hard work of all pioneering librarians and practitioners in the field of LIS since 1914 up to present. It is also an outcome of persistent and bold faculty members who continuously strive to improve the pedagogy to keep it in tune with the demands of the profession. It is also an outcome of the strong support from the UP SLIS library, administrative staff and the whole UP SLIS community.

As UP SLIS envisions to be one of the leading libraries and information schools in the region, it also continues to strive to produce more graduates who are well equipped with the needed knowledge and skills to prepare them to face the challenges of the information era through further curricular developments, adoption of latest pedagogical approaches, and conduct of more research activities.

### Curricular Developments

Because of the rapidly developing technology-driven information landscape, the UP SLIS will continue to periodically evaluate its course offerings and institute new courses relevant to and based on the current and shifting demands of the LIS field. It will also aspire to institute new programs of studies, including the Master of Science in Information Science, which will include courses in data management, digital humanities and artificial intelligence as applicable to LIS, and the offering of a doctoral program in LIS. This plan follows the anticipated institution of the new Master of Archives and Records Management (MARM), which is being deliberated by the University curriculum

committees this year. Once approved, MARM will be the first formal program in this field in the country and in the ASEAN region.

### **Pedagogical Approaches**

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the resourcefulness and flexibility of UP SLIS faculty when the need to transition from face-to-face setup to remote teaching methodology had to be implemented without enough planning and preparation. Adjustments have to be made with regards to pedagogical strategies to meet the learning objectives and meet the needs of the students. This precarious event presented an opportunity for UP SLIS faculty members to maximize their familiarity with IT which helped them to navigate in synchronous and asynchronous teaching modality. More than ever, this event also proved the importance of having awareness on the different pedagogical strategies that can be adopted when there is a need to shift or adopt a different teaching approach. Thus, UP SLIS shall continue to aim for innovations to cultivate, resourcefulness, flexibility and commitment to the teach and mentor its students.

### **Robust Enrollment**

It cannot be denied that even with the stature as the pioneer independent LIS school in the country, and even in the region, there were academic years when enrollment dwindled. With the offering of ICT courses, perception of the students to LIS programs somehow improved and eventually led to more students taking the programs. In 2019, BLIS was included by CHED as one of the priority programs that a CHED scholar may choose to take. Thus, with more ICT courses added to the curriculum, it is expected that enrollment will continue to increase as the information landscape becomes highly dependent on emerging technologies. Moreover, with the anticipated approval of the institution of the MARM program, it is also expected that more students from neighboring countries will be coming over to UP SLIS to take the program.

### **Research Agenda**

The UP SLIS agenda for research will be regularly revisited and updated to include current trend in the practice and teaching of LIS. More research workshops will also be conducted to encourage the conduct of research among faculty and students.

### **Networks and Linkages**

In order to be updated with the current trends and development, both in the teaching and practice of the LIS, international and national collaborations will be

maintained, and more linkages will be established to facilitate collaborative research and teaching.

### **Outreach and Community Services**

Since the late '70s, the then-UP ILS has been organizing several trainings/workshops, with the objective of upskilling LIS practitioners, teachers and paraprofessionals working in libraries. It will also increase its offering of informal training which aims at retooling LIS teachers and LIS practitioners with the latest skills and knowledge that are critical to help them cope with the development in the practice of the profession. It will also continue to offer consultancy services for institutions, both public and private, in the establishment and organization of their digital libraries, as well as the management of their archives and records. These trainings and capacity building initiatives will form part of the community service and outreach activities that UP SLIS will continue to provide to the community.

### **Faculty and Personnel Compliment**

Aside from the support that UP and the School provide to its faculty members with regards to the completion of their doctorate studies and/or other advanced education, the UP SLIS also plans to build up its faculty compliment by inviting full-time and part-time faculty with specializations or who could teach courses which are currently not being offered by UP SLIS. Likewise, the library and administrative personnel are also encouraged to attend training courses that would contribute to their professional development.

### **State-of -the-Art Facilities**

And lastly, part of the immediate plan of the School is to move in to its very own home, the UP SLIS building. For several decades, UP SLIS has contented itself at the third floor of the Gonzalez Hall that the UP Main Library so generously shared. However, the growing student population and expanding programs of UP SLIS necessitates a bigger home to have a more conducive and appropriate venue for students to study and practice what they learned. Likewise, the growing faculty and staff complement also requires bigger working areas, research laboratories, and discussion rooms. For more than 20 years, the UP SLIS has waited for the approval of the request for its own building. This new building will have state-of-the-art facilities and laboratories that will support the laboratory requirements of the programs offered by UP SLIS. It will also showcase the UP SLIS Archives and Museum which will contain historical records

pertaining to the establishment and operation of UP SLIS through the years.

## CONCLUSION

Atty. Vyva Aguirre, former dean of UP SLIS, used to say, “the LIS programs are the programs of the future.” This statement may have been said years ago but remains relevant and true until now and even in the coming years. As the information landscape continuous to be highly dependent on the technologies that produce, gather, process, manage and disseminate information, the LIS programs will also continue to be very relevant—and evolving—particularly in the context where information is considered as power. Thus, with the new technologies that continue to emerge, more new concepts and knowledge will have to be learned by current and future LIS professionals. Moreover, with UP SLIS being a part of the UP System, the School is operating within the core mandate and principles of UP, and UP SLIS is driven to ensure the effective accomplishment of the purpose and functions of the University. Both the relevance of the LIS programs and the important role of UP SLIS in nation building will continue to move UP SLIS to strive harder to offer an LIS education centered on the values of honor, excellence and service to the Filipino people.

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