

***An adjunct professor's perspectives
on the skills LIS students need, and
how practitioners and educators
can collaborate to provide them***

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Overview

- Needed Competencies
- Desired Competencies
- Competencies LIS Teaches
- Competencies LIS Practitioners Offer
- The Intersection of the Competencies
- Competencies Leftover
- Collaboration Opportunities

For this presentation I will present from my perspective as an adjunct instructor the skills and competencies that LIS students need and how the LIS profession and practitioners could collaborate to fill in gaps not otherwise provided by the LIS curriculum. I will be speaking primarily from the perspective of the cataloging/subject analysis/metadata discipline; however, there is much that might be generalized or paralleled in other LIS disciplines and specialities.

I want to start by looking at the overall competencies and skills that all librarians need, and then look at the competencies cataloging instructors desire most. We will then look at the competencies typically taught in the LIS curriculum and compare that with the competencies that LIS practitioners can offer.

Once we've reviewed the list, we will look at where these needed competencies intersect with LIS curriculum and LIS practice, we will look at those competencies that are left-over, and see what building blocks there may be in an LIS student's pocket that can be re-assembled for any of those needed competencies that are left over.

To wrap up, we will explore potential collaborations between LIS educators and practitioners that may be useful for filling in the gaps.

Definitions

Competence (Competences)

- Oxford English Dictionary
- 4.a. Sufficiency of qualification; capacity to deal adequately with a subject.

Competency (Competencies)

- Merriam-Webster Online
 - Industry jargon
- An ability or skill

The terms competence and competency are sometimes confused, so briefly to define these in context, competence is when a person has the skills and abilities needed for certain work. Competency is the ability or skill. The OED makes little distinction between the two terms, however M-W does show a difference for the manner in which the term is used in jargon; (possibly limited to North America?)

ALA Core Competencies

1. Foundations of the Profession
2. Information Resources
3. Organization of Recorded Knowledge and Information
4. Technological Knowledge and Skills
5. Reference and User Services
6. Research
7. Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning
8. Administration and Management

<http://www.ala.org/educationcareers/careers/corecomp/corecompetences>

The American Library Association has a list of “Core Competencies of Librarianship.” It begins “A person graduating from an ALA-accredited master’s program in library and information science studies should know and, where appropriate, be able to employ” the competencies in this list. Cataloging is mentioned only once under number 3 as “the systems of cataloging, metadata, indexing, and classification standards and methods used to organize recorded knowledge and information.”

Most LIS programs address these core competencies in a sufficient manner for the LIS student to be informed and knowledgeable of the issues. However, the idea of employing a specific competency isn’t always true, particularly when cataloging and classification courses are not core.

There is also a list of knowledge and competencies statements from other ALA divisions and LIS related organizations. None of these statements are for the cataloging and metadata discipline except for MAGERT’s “Map, GIS, and Cataloging/Metadata Librarian Core Competencies” statement.

Necessary Competencies

- Administrative awareness
- Advocacy & Outreach
- Authority control
- Classification schemes
- Collaborative initiatives
- Communication skills
- Critical thinking
- Descriptive cataloging
- Holistic visioning
- Interpersonal skills
- Multilingual proficiencies
- Open-minded listening
- Organizational management
- Original vs. Copy Cataloging
- Patience
- Project Management
- Standards
- Subject analysis
- Technological applications

I assembled this list of Competencies that cataloger/metadata professionals need from Sylvia Hall-Ellis' 2008 CCQ article "Cataloger competencies ... what do employers require?", from the MAGERT competencies list previously mentioned, and from my "scientific" Facebook poll of LIS educators. I do not claim this to be comprehensive, and not everything here is given in terms of an ability or skill—some are representative of an ability or skill. I think we can agree that a person who has competence in these areas is competent for most cataloging/metadata positions.

Competencies We Wish They Had

- Critical thinking
- Curiosity
- Holistic visioning
- Open-minded listening
- Patience
- Time management

My quickie poll of LIS instructors on Facebook produced the following list that instructors wish their students had already when they come to class. Critical/analytical thinking was by far the most common wish.

Competencies We Teach

Typically Taught

- Authority control
- Descriptive cataloging
- Classification schemes
- Standards
- Subject analysis

Possibly Included by Some

- Original vs. Copy Cataloging
- Technological applications

Hall-Ellis lists a variety of typical competencies that employers require that LIS instructors teach. These include authority control, descriptive cataloging, classification and subject analysis, and standards.

While we can hope that copy vs. original cataloging is addressed, and it usually is, in our limited time to cover all the basics we may neglect that finer points of copy-cataloging, what a cataloger will want to look for, how to define quality and how to define acceptable in terms of record selection and review. Technological applications may be the most difficult competency to instruct. While we can make use of Connexion Browser and the save file, the vast majority of my students are Mac users and cannot install or use Connexion Client, which most practitioners use in the wild. The variety of ILSs out there also complicate this particular competency.

Skills LIS Practitioners Offer

- Administrative awareness
- Authority control
- Descriptive cataloging
- Classification schemes
- Collaborative initiatives
- Holistic visioning
- Organizational management
- Original vs. Copy Cataloging
- Standards
- Subject analysis
- Technological applications

Catalogers in the wild have to be competent in these areas in addition to the ones taught in library school.

The Intersection

Shared LIS Competencies

- Administrative awareness
- Authority control
- Classification schemes
- Collaborative initiatives
- Descriptive cataloging
- Holistic visioning
- Organizational management
- Subject analysis

Unclaimed Competencies

- Advocacy & Outreach
- Communication skills
- Critical thinking
- Curiosity
- Interpersonal skills
- Multilingual proficiencies
- Open-minded listening
- Project management

What is Left Over?

- Advocacy & Outreach
- Communication skills
- Critical thinking
- Curiosity
- Interpersonal skills
- Multilingual proficiencies
- Open-minded listening
- Project management
- Original vs. Copy Cataloging
- Technological applications
- Collaborative initiatives
- Holistic visioning

Some competencies are simply re-arrangements of other competencies. For example, everyone these days seems to want Project Management. This is not something we teach outright, but we do teach most of the essential skills needed for project management:

The Lego Effect

Project Management Skills

- Attention to detail
- Communication
- Leadership
- Negotiation
- Organization

- Recognizing and solving problems

LIS Equivalents

- Descriptive cataloging
- Papers, presentations, etc.
- Group projects
- [Deceased relatives?]
- Classification/Subject analysis

If you look at most books and Web sites that discuss project management in the general sense (rather than computer systems/software development context) you see many different skill sets listed that by and large can be distilled into the ones listed above.

If you compare this list to the competencies taught in LIS, including cataloging, students learn attention to detail and organization with descriptive cataloging, classification, and subject analysis. At some point these students must continue to develop their communication skills through papers, presentations, and so forth, and they must develop leadership skills if they have group projects (maybe not all, but certainly the motivated ones). In a tongue-in-check way I think most students try to sharpen their negotiation skills by trying to make deals about late work, missed classed. Tragically there are times when it really is true, but like many other instructors I seem to have at least one or more deceased elderly relatives each semester.

The point here is that we teach to some of the larger, discipline-specific competencies, and we might look at how we can break some aspects of this down to show students that “Lego effect” so they can use it to their advantage. It might also be an effective learning outcome to have students examine their skills and arrange and re-package them to meet or approach other competencies. In fact, this very exercise might be helpful for both critical thinking and holistic visioning.

Collaboration Options

- Mentoring
- Practicums
- Professional organizations

Mentoring and practicums are the first and most obvious collaboration options that come to mind. In site-specific locales these may become tedious and burdensome, particularly if you have dozens of library school students every semester knocking on your door to come do some cataloging.

However, the twist that I would proffer here is not the typical have the library school student search for copy or other menial, easy-to-train tasks. Instructors can create great learning activities that will suffice to give the student the basics skills to create an original record. What is more difficult for the instructor to offer in class is a working ILS, a viable project that shows planning, leadership, negotiation, etc., the actualities of copy cataloging, leadership opportunities, and holistic visioning.

What we need from practitioners is the demonstration of that reclassification project, that migration project, that backlog project, that gift resources project, etc. and laying that out for the student. Even presenting them with the problem and asking them to work it out in their head and comparing what the student thought of vs. what the library actually did. What the student learns from that, particularly as it relates to the library as a holistic and administrative organism would be invaluable to the student and not something easily incorporated into an already seam-busting syllabus.

What we need from professional organizations are student chapters with opportunities for leadership and communication. Such an opportunity might also be used to develop advocacy and outreach skills.

Sources

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