

Core Competencies of Library Schools in the United States

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the evolution and current state of Library schools in the United States, focusing on the role of the American Library Association (ALA) in shaping the field. As the primary accrediting body for LIS programs, the ALA has significantly influenced curricula development, professional standards, and competencies required for future librarians and information professionals. LIS education has evolved from focusing on traditional library skills to a more comprehensive inclusion of information technology, digital literacy, data management, and data curation. This research highlights the ALA's contribution to maintaining educational quality while addressing the challenges of keeping pace with technological advancements and diversifying the profession. The study also explores emerging trends such as the rise of digital libraries, continuous education, online education, and integrating interdisciplinary approaches into Library school curricula.

KEYWORDS

ALA, U.S., Core competencies, Accreditation, Education, Library Schools

Introduction

Library Schools in the United States have a long and dynamic history, deeply influenced by professional organizations that set standards for curriculum, accreditation, and professional competencies. Central to this development is the American Library Association (ALA), the primary accrediting body for LIS programs. Through its accreditation process, the ALA ensures that library schools across the country adhere to rigorous educational standards, fostering the development of well-rounded professionals equipped to meet the demands of the evolving information landscape. ALA-accredited programs are a benchmark for quality LIS education, providing graduates with credentials recognized in the library and information services sector.

The American Library Association (ALA) plays a central role in accrediting and shaping Library and Information Science (LIS) education in the United States. Alongside the ALA, several other professional organizations contribute significantly to the growth and development of LIS schools and university programs. These associations provide direction, establish standards, and promote specialization within the diverse field of information science, ensuring that LIS education adapts to the changing needs of the profession. The history of LIS in the United States showcases a transformation from traditional librarianship to a dynamic discipline

encompassing technology, knowledge management, and data science. This evolution began in the late 19th century, marked by the contributions of Melvil Dewey, who introduced the Dewey Decimal Classification system and established the first library school. The founding of the ALA in 1876 further institutionalised the profession by setting library education and advocacy standards. By the early to mid-20th century, universities across the U.S. began offering graduate degrees in library science, preparing professionals to manage growing collections with an academic and research-based approach. In the 1960s and 1970s, the advent of computing technology transformed the field, merging traditional library practices with information science to form the interdisciplinary LIS programs we recognise today. The rise of personal computers and the internet in the 1980s and 1990s further broadened the field, with LIS education incorporating digital literacy, database management, and digital libraries into its curriculum. Today, LIS in the U.S. has expanded to include specialities such as digital curation, information policy, and data analytics, reflecting the need for professionals who can navigate and manage information in an increasingly digital world. The profession's evolution underscores its adaptability, addressing the challenges of information access and equity in a networked society.

The American Library Association (ALA) has been a critical force in shaping library education in the United States, mainly through its efforts in establishing and accrediting library schools. Since its founding in 1876, the ALA has worked to set professional standards and support formal training for librarians. In 1887, Melvil Dewey launched the first library school at Columbia College (now Columbia University), focusing on cataloguing, classification, and library management, which laid the groundwork for the profession. As the field evolved, more universities introduced library programs, and by the early 20th century, these schools began to expand their focus to include research and theoretical concepts alongside practical skills.

In 1926, the University of Chicago launched a Graduate Library School emphasising research-based education, influencing library science to develop as a rigorous academic discipline. Over time, the ALA developed accreditation standards to ensure consistent quality across these programs, covering curriculum, faculty qualifications, and resources. Throughout the 20th century, the ALA continued to advocate for improvements in library education, leading to the merger of library science with information science in response to the digital age. Today, accredited LIS programs in the U.S. provide interdisciplinary training in digital libraries, information technology, data management, and user experience design. The ALA's impact remains significant, as its accreditation is still a hallmark of program quality and helps ensure that graduates are equipped to meet modern information challenges in diverse professional settings.

Associations for Library Professionals in the United States:

In the United States, various associations support library professionals by providing resources, advocacy, and networking opportunities. Key organizations include the American Library Association (ALA), which promotes library services and standards; the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), which focuses on school library advocacy; and the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE), dedicated to improving LIS education. These associations play a crucial role in advancing the profession, fostering collaboration, and ensuring that librarians are equipped to meet the needs of diverse communities.

American Association of School Librarians (AASL):

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a division of the American Library Association (ALA) founded in 1951, is dedicated to advancing the role of school librarians and promoting effective school library programs. AASL advocates for the vital contributions of school librarians in fostering literacy, information literacy, and a passion for reading among students. The organization focuses on raising awareness of the importance of vital school library programs through policy advocacy and professional development opportunities that help librarians enhance their skills and stay current with educational trends. Additionally,

AASL develops and promotes standards and guidelines for effective school library practices, enabling librarians to create supportive learning environments that positively impact student achievement. By fostering collaboration among school librarians and educators, AASL strengthens the influence of school libraries in education and offers a wealth of resources and publications that empower librarians in their roles as educators and information specialists.

Special Libraries Association (SLA):

The Special Libraries Association (SLA) was founded in 1909 during a meeting in New York City. The association was established to support the unique needs of special libraries, which serve expert information needs in various sectors, including corporate, legal, government, and non-profit groups. SLA provides resources, networking opportunities, and professional development for information professionals in these focused settings. The SLA focuses on developing specialized information services, often in non-traditional environments like corporate, law, and government libraries. It influences LIS education by promoting curricula emphasising research skills, knowledge management, and the ability to manage information within specific industries. SLA's work pushes LIS schools to include courses on specific librarianship, knowledge organization, and the handling of proprietary information, preparing graduates for roles beyond the public and academic library systems.

Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T):

The Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T) was founded in 1937 as the American Documentation Institute (ADI) and later adopted its current name in 1983. ASIS&T was established to address the growing need for effective information management and to advance the study and practice of information science and technology. With the increasing reliance on data management, digital archiving, and computational techniques in information services, ASIS&T encourages LIS schools to offer programs that combine traditional librarianship with advanced technology skills. This association fosters innovation in information retrieval, human-computer interaction, and digital preservation, ensuring graduates are well-versed in cutting-edge technologies and data-driven methodologies.

Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE):

The Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) was founded in 1935 during a meeting in Washington, D.C. established initially as the "American Association of Library Schools," ALISE was created to address the need for collaboration among library educators and to promote the advancement of library education. The organization has evolved over the years, reflecting changes in the library and information science field, and now focuses on enhancing the quality of education and research in LIS. ALISE is a vital forum for educators, researchers, and practitioners to share knowledge and foster innovation in library and information science education.

Medical Library Association (MLA):

The Medical Library Association (MLA) is a professional organization dedicated to supporting the advancement of health sciences librarianship and improving the quality of information services in healthcare. Founded in 1898, the MLA provides educational opportunities, professional development, and resources to its members, including medical librarians, health information professionals, and other healthcare and medical information stakeholders. The MLA contributes to developing LIS programs by promoting health sciences

librarianship. Given the unique demands of managing medical and health-related information, MLA helps shape curricula emphasising evidence-based practices, medical informatics, and specialized resources such as medical databases. Many LIS programs have adopted MLA guidelines to offer tracks or concentrations in health sciences librarianship, preparing students for roles in hospitals, academic health centres, and pharmaceutical companies.

Association of Research Libraries (ARL):

The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) has tackled key issues affecting libraries, research, higher education, and the scholarly community. It was founded in December 1932 during a meeting in Chicago, where the directors of 42 prominent university and research libraries came together, recognizing the need for coordinated efforts and a platform to address shared challenges. ARL is influential in developing LIS programs focusing on academic librarianship and research support services. By setting benchmarks for research libraries, ARL encourages universities to incorporate research-oriented courses that teach students about scholarly communication, research data management, and the provision of specialized support for faculty and students. ARL's initiatives have included data curation, digital scholarship, and open-access publishing in LIS curricula, fostering the next generation of academic librarians and information professionals.

Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR):

CLIR supports the development of LIS programs by focusing on the intersection of libraries, cultural heritage institutions, and information technology. By encouraging collaboration between libraries, archives, and museums, CLIR promotes interdisciplinary approaches to information management. Its influence has led to the inclusion of courses in digital humanities, data stewardship, and preservation of digital and physical collections, expanding the scope of traditional LIS education to include a broader array of cultural and information services.

ALA Accreditation

Established in 1876, the American Library Association (ALA) is the biggest and most significant professional association for librarians and information professionals in the US. Its goals are to promote and enhance library services and represent the profession's interests locally, state-wide, and nationally. Schools and universities in the US, Canada, and Puerto Rico offer master's programs that have earned ALA accreditation. These programs award degrees with various names, such as Master of Science, Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS), Master of Librarianship, Master of Arts, and Master of Library Science (MLS). The ALA focuses on several key areas, including advancing library and information services, ensuring access to information for all, and supporting the freedom to read and access diverse viewpoints. One of the ALA's critical roles is accrediting master's degree programs in library and information studies through its Committee on Accreditation (CoA). This process ensures that programs meet rigorous educational standards, preparing graduates to serve effectively in various library and information roles.

The ALA also provides resources for professional development, including conferences, publications, and continuing education opportunities, while promoting diversity and inclusion within the profession. Through advocacy efforts, the ALA strives to secure library funding, defend intellectual freedom, and address information access and literacy issues in the digital age. The ALA accredits master's programs in library and information studies across the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico. This accreditation is granted after an external panel of experts reviews the program to ensure it meets the Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies. Graduating from an ALA-accredited program provides greater career flexibility and access to diverse library roles. Many employers require an ALA-accredited degree for

professional positions, and some states mandate this qualification for individuals aiming to work as librarians in public or school libraries.

The ALA sets rigorous accreditation standards for Library Schools in the U.S., ensuring that graduates are prepared to meet the demands of the evolving information profession. These standards require programs to have a mission-driven focus, aligning educational goals with the needs of the LIS field. A strong curriculum is essential, covering foundational and specific areas like information groups, digital libraries, ethics, and faculty who bring diverse expertise and engage in ongoing research and professional development. Programs must also demonstrate a commitment to student support, from admissions and advising to hands-on learning experiences that prepare students for diverse career paths. Stable administration and financial backing are vital to maintaining program quality, along with resources like libraries, digital tools, and facilities supporting in-person and online learners. Additionally, programs must undergo systematic planning and assessment to continually adapt their curriculum and outcomes in response to field changes. ALA accreditation remains a mark of excellence, signifying a program's dedication to high-quality education and professional relevance.

The American Library Association's (ALA) thorough accreditation process is a significant factor in determining the features of library schools. To start this process, schools evaluate their compliance with ALA's set standards by completing a thorough self-study examining curriculum, faculty credentials, and student results. A group of peer reviewers visits the program's location and speaks with stakeholders to assess its compliance with these standards after the self-study. The American Library Association's purpose strongly emphasises upholding high education standards, encouraging diversity and inclusion in the field, and encouraging innovation to equip graduates for the quickly changing information landscape. By guaranteeing that recognised programs generate skilled and culturally sensitive workers, the ALA substantially contributes to the efficacy and pertinence of LIS education in fulfilling the varied demands of communities.

ALA Core Competencies for Librarianship

1. Information Resources
2. Gateway Knowledge
3. Social Justice
4. Management and Administration
5. Lifelong Learning and Continuing Education
6. Technological Knowledge and Skills
7. Research and Evidence-Based Practice
8. Reference and User Services
9. Organization of Recorded Knowledge and Information

The curriculum in library schools is designed to equip students and faculty with essential competencies critical for effective practice in library and information science. Key areas of focus include information literacy, which helps students learn to find, evaluate, and use information efficiently, and reference and information services, where they develop skills to assist users in finding relevant resources. Students gain knowledge in collection development and management, understanding how to select, use and evaluate materials based on user needs. Cataloguing and metadata skills are emphasised to ensure that resources are planned and accessible. Proficiency in current technologies is also essential, as it enhances library services. Leadership and management principles prepare students for administrative roles, while an emphasis on diversity and inclusion

ensures that services meet the needs of all communal members. Ethical considerations and professional standards, research methods, and community engagement are also integral to the curriculum. Continuing education engages them in life-long learning and helps them to update their skills in the technological era.

Students in library and information science (LIS) programs have the opportunity to work independently on core and elective courses under the guidance of a faculty member or gain hands-on experience through a practicum in a library, performing real-world tasks under the supervision of a professional librarian. They can also take part in paid or unpaid internships, which provide exposure to various activities in libraries, data agencies, and information centers. Additionally, students can volunteer at different information organizations to gain practical experience and understand their day-to-day operations.

Table 1. Universities with Master's Degrees Accredited by ALA

Sr. No.	Name of the University & Offered Program
1.	Alabama University Master of Library and Information Studies
2.	Albany University Master of Science in Information Science
3.	Alberta University Master of Library and Information Studies
4.	Arizona University Master of Arts in Library and Information Science
5.	British Columbia University Master of Library and Information Studies
6.	Buffalo University Master of Science in Information and Library Science
7.	California Los Angeles University Master of Science in Information Science
8.	Catholic University Master of Science in Library and Information Science
9.	Chicago State University Master of Science in Library and Information Science
10.	Dalhousie University Master of Information
11.	Denver University Master of Library and Information Science
12.	Dominican University Master of Library and Information Science
13.	Drexel University Master of Science
14.	East Carolina University Master of Library Science
15.	Emporia State University Master of Library Science

16.	Florida State University Master of Arts
17.	Hawaii University Master of Library and Information Science
18.	Illinois at Urbana-Champaign University Master of Science in Library and Information Science
19.	Indiana University, Bloomington University Master of Information Science
20.	Indiana, University Indianapolis(IUI) University Master of Library and Information Science
21.	Iowa University Master of Arts in Library and Information Science
22.	Kent State University Master of Library and Information Science
23.	Kentucky University Master of Science in Library Science
24.	Long Island University Master of Science in Library and Information Science
25.	Louisiana State University Master of Library and Information Science
26.	Maryland University Master of Library and Information Science
27.	McGill University Master of Information Studies
28.	Michigan University Master of Science in Information
29.	Missouri University Master of Library and Information Science
30.	Montreal, Universite DE University Maitrise en sciences de l'information
31.	North Carolina at Chapel Hill University Master of Science in Information Science, Master of Science in Library Science
32.	North Carolina, at Greensboro University Master of Library and Information Studies
33.	North Carolina Central University Master of Library Science
34.	North Texas University Master of Science
35.	Oklahoma University

	Master of Library and Information Studies
36.	Old Dominion University Master of Library and Information Studies
37.	Ottawa University Master of Information Studies
38.	Pennsylvania Western University- Clarion University Master of Science in Library Science
39.	Pittsburgh University Master of Library and Information Science
40.	Pratt Institute University Master of Science in Library and Information Science
41.	Puerto Rico University Master of Information Sciences
42.	Queens College University Master of Library Science
43.	Rhode Island University Master of Library and Information Studies
44.	Rutgers, The State University Master of Information
45.	San Jose State University Master of Library and Information Science
46.	Simmons University Master of Library and Information Science
47.	South Carolina University Master of Library and Information Science
48.	South Florida University Master of Arts in Library and Information Science
49.	Southern California University Master of Management in Library and Information Science
50.	Southern Connecticut State University Master of Library and Information Science
51.	Southern Mississippi University Master of Library and Information Science
52.	ST. Catherine University Master of Library and Information Science
53.	St. John's University Master of Science in Library and Information Science
54.	Syracuse University Master of Science in Library and Information Science

55.	Tennessee University Master of Science in Information Sciences
56.	Texas at Austin University Master of Science in Information Studies
57.	Texas Woman's University Master of Arts in Library Science
58.	Toronto University Master of Information
59.	University College University Master of Arts in Library and Information Studies
60.	Valdosta State University Master of Library and Information Science
61.	Washington University Master of Library and Information Science
62.	Wayne State University Master of Library and Information Science
63.	Western Ontario University Master of Library and Information Science
64.	Wisconsin-Madison University Master of Arts in Library and Information Studies
65.	Wisconsin-Milwaukee University Master of Library and Information Science

The table highlights 65 universities accredited by the American Library Association (ALA) that offer various advanced degrees in Library and Information Science (LIS). These programs differ in their degree titles, reflecting diverse areas of focus within the LIS field. While many institutions provide a Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS), others offer alternatives such as a Master of Science in Information Science or a Master of Arts in Library and Information Science. These variations demonstrate the profession's expanding scope, where traditional library science intersects with broader fields like information science and technology. Degrees such as the Master of Information (offered by Rutgers and Toronto) and the Master of Science in Information Studies (University of Texas at Austin) adopt an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating topics like information management, data science, and digital curation. Meanwhile, programs like the Master of Management in Library and Information Science at Southern California University emphasize leadership and administrative skills in information professions.

Universities from the U.S. and Canada are included, with prominent institutions such as the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Simmons University, all of which have longstanding reputations in the LIS field. This comprehensive list shows a strong presence of ALA-accredited programs across North America, each contributing to the professional development of librarians and information scientists prepared for diverse roles in libraries, archives, information and beyond. Initially, ALA-accredited schools, including early leaders like the University of Illinois and the University of Chicago, focused on developing foundational solid curricula. These programs emphasised practical skills in cataloguing, classification, reference services, and library administration, ensuring graduates were well-equipped to meet the profession's needs. Additionally, ALA accreditation requires schools to maintain rigorous

academic standards, qualified faculty, and adequate resources, setting a high benchmark for education quality. The accreditation process fostered uniformity in library education, creating a pathway for the profession and a reputable credential for graduates entering the field. This initial phase of ALA accreditation helped establish library science as a respected academic discipline and prepared the groundwork for the field's later expansion into information science.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper suggests that while the ALA plays a crucial role, future innovations in LIS education must account for rapid changes in the information landscape, ensuring that graduates are prepared for new roles in the digital period. The American Library Association (ALA) plays a pivotal role in shaping library schools in the United States through its accreditation process, ensuring that programs meet high standards of quality and relevance. ALA-accredited master's programs equip students with essential competencies: information literacy, reference services, continuous education, technology, and technological knowledge and skills proficiency. These core competencies are integral to preparing future librarians to effectively navigate the information landscape's complexities and meet their communities' diverse needs. By fostering collaboration among educators and professionals, the ALA and affiliated associations promote a vibrant and dynamic field that continually adapts to emerging challenges and opportunities in library services. As a result, graduates of ALA-accredited programs are well-prepared to contribute meaningfully to advancing library and information science, ensuring the profession remains vital and responsive in an ever-changing world.

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