Teaching the Teachers:  
What’s Missing in LIS Doctoral Teacher Education?  

Meghan Dowell¹, Vanessa Schlais¹, Xiaohan Yan¹, Brad Wiles¹  
¹University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Information Studies, United States  
mldowell@uwm.edu, vschlais@uwm.edu, xyan@uwm.edu, bjwiles@uwm.edu

ABSTRACT

This panel presentation will discuss the results of a study examining teacher education in United States-based Library and Information Studies (LIS) doctoral degree programs. The study integrates analysis of multiple data sources and perspectives to begin assessing whether current approaches in developing discipline-specific educators are adequate for the immediate professional needs of doctoral students and the long-term academic viability of LIS programs. The analysis focuses on a subset of ALA-accredited LIS programs that hold membership in ALISE and/or the iSchool Organization. It assumes that the majority of the LIS degreed faculty personnel are drawn from these programs and thus are part of an overall network of doctoral teacher education and training that is ostensibly informed by shared frameworks and standards. Yet, the notion of teaching doctoral students to be teachers is largely absent from professional discourse in LIS, where most discussions of education focus primarily on training librarians, archivists, and other information professionals in information literacy instruction. In other words, there is not now, nor does there appear to have ever been, a clear consensus approach to training the people who ultimately become responsible for teaching LIS.

Recent research and reporting demonstrate that across academe, PhD programs generally do not provide sufficient teacher training for doctoral students, often because academic faculty and department agendas are focused on research that attracts outside funding, facilitates industry partnerships, and adds notoriety and prestige for institutions in an increasingly competitive education marketplace. A 2018 study by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) found that the scant training offered by the ‘professional apprenticeship’ system, defined mostly by teaching assistantships, may actually stunt doctoral students’ progress toward degree completion. The report indicates that “while teaching a few courses can be a valuable learning experience, many teaching assistants instead operate as a source of cheap labor for the academy,” producing a harmful “casualization” of academic labor that undermines traditional faculty roles and the tenure system (Data Snapshot: Contingent Faculty in US Higher Ed). Further analysis by the AAUP shows that the proportion of teaching-intensive positions to research-intensive positions has risen sharply in recent years, representing a “seismic shift” with consequences for faculty and students due to the “lower levels of campus engagement across the board and a rising service burden for the shrinking core of tenurable faculty.”

Discipline-specific studies of doctoral student teacher training in a variety of academic fields reveal an ambivalence among students toward their teaching responsibilities and
opportunities, which often reflects a lack of confidence in and anxiety around their ability to teach effectively. This frequently leads to feelings of unpreparedness in approaching the few available faculty openings at any given time, which is especially problematic for doctoral students in programs that promote the ideal of success as obtaining tenure-track appointments in highly-ranked and research intensive academic institutions. The trend of shrinking university budgets and diminishing opportunities for new PhDs to take on research-focused work has been accompanied by new expectations for education delivery by students, administrators, accreditors, employers, and other stakeholders, factors which can contribute to the high attrition rate of doctoral students. Previous research shows that when combined with the firsthand experience gained through the apprentice systems, formal teacher training makes a positive difference in how new and aspiring faculty carry out their roles, manage their workloads, and build sustainable careers. Adequate teacher training also creates a ripple effect that benefits student learning outcomes and skills acquisition, which is especially important to LIS and other discipline areas built around a distinct but evolving set of practical professional pursuits.

Very little scholarly research on doctoral student teacher education and training has been conducted in the LIS field. The investigators (Meghan Dowell, Vanessa Schlais, Xiaohan Yan, and Brad Wiles) are currently students in a LIS doctoral program and formulated the idea for the study from our own experiences and observations. We utilized a multiple-method qualitative design to explore four main areas. First, we evaluated doctoral student handbooks and other publicly available program information from American LIS doctoral degree-granting programs (n=27) to determine how teacher education and training is integrated into curricular offerings and requirements. Second, we reviewed recent faculty job announcements and position descriptions from iSchools and LIS departments to collate information on requirements and recommendations for doctoral-level teacher education and teaching credentials or experience expected of applicants. Third, we distributed a survey to current LIS doctoral students and recent graduates to gather perceptions on their experiences with teacher education and training. Fourth, we interviewed select LIS faculty members from several institutions to gather insights from their perspectives about the role and nature of teacher education and training in doctoral programs.

Preliminary analysis of the data gathered so far indicates that formal (i.e. credit-bearing courses or units required for degree completion) doctoral student teacher education and training across American LIS programs is inconsistent, nonstandardized, and frequently inadequate. We intend to use the panel presentation to discuss our findings in more detail and in relation to our own experiences with doctoral teacher training and education. We suggest that instruction must include and extend beyond learning courseware, instructional design, educational theory, and ad hoc modelling of doctoral seminars to enable doctoral students to develop diverse and discipline specific instructional approaches to LIS. Based on our findings, we hope to propose recommendations and potential solutions for how teacher education and training might become more effective and firmly prioritized within LIS doctoral programs, both in preparing students for faculty positions and for alternative career paths. Furthermore, we invite participation and feedback from faculty, students, administrators, and others attending this panel session to inform our research by sharing their experiences with teacher education and training in their doctoral programs.
ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

education programs/schools; curriculum; pedagogy; students; teaching faculty

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

doctoral programs; ischools; standards; teacher education; teacher training