Assessing iSchool Effectiveness through Alumni Feedback: Preliminary Results from the Workforce Issues in Library and Information Science 2 (WILIS 2) Project

Workforce Issues in Library and Information Science 2 (WILIS 2) is an IMLS funded project designed to implement a career tracking model for Library and Information Science (LIS) graduates. This project was introduced to the iSchool community via a poster session at the 2009 iConference and recruited the participation of 8 iSchools and 36 other LIS programs in the US and Canada to test the career tracking model and program evaluation instrument. Each program was funded to survey up to 250 of its recent graduates. Data are currently being collected and the response rate so far is 45.4%. The aggregated preliminary results will be presented in this poster, and will showcase characteristics of recent graduates and evidence of iSchool program effectiveness. Career results will include such items as length of job search, current job settings and titles, job satisfaction, leadership responsibilities, professional contribution, and continuing education needs. Program evaluation results will include respondents’ overall satisfaction with their program, sense of preparedness for the workplace, and suggestions for LIS program improvement.

Project Background: LIS programs have generally lacked the time and resources to systematically survey their graduates; as a result, stakeholders lack an adequate understanding of what happens to their students after they graduate. Educators, in particular, do not have ongoing data about the extent to which their programs meet students’ expectations, prepare them for the workplace or meet continuing learning needs. Such an understanding will assist in educating and managing the LIS workforce more effectively.

WILIS 2 builds on WILIS 1, a comprehensive study of career patterns of graduates of LIS programs in North Carolina. Using a Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach, WILIS 2 refined the WILIS 1 career tracking model so that it would be suitable for use by any LIS program. The WILIS 2 implementation has provided an opportunity to experiment with the use of CBPR to create a national career tracking model that will have the best chance of being widely adopted and used by LIS programs. Evidence-based workforce and educational planning are both essential to supporting the successful recruitment, education and retention of the next generation of LIS professionals. The stakeholders who require the information necessary to do such planning include LIS educators, professional associations, LIS employers, practicing professionals, LIS students and the larger library and information community. Each of these groups has somewhat different information needs and interests in the process of workforce and educational planning. Recognizing the importance and perspective of these differences, the study team has utilized elements of CBPR to maximize consensus and buy-in. This process has resulted in the creation of a survey that will create an evidence base from which stakeholders can make important decisions related to the recruitment, education, reentry and retention of future LIS professionals.

CBPR is “a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community and has the aim of combining knowledge with action and achieving social change (Isrel, et. al., 1998).” While CBPR is largely used in public health research, it makes sense for WILIS 2 as a way to bridge the education and professional practice worlds of LIS in constructive and mutually beneficial ways. For WILIS 2, the study team has worked side by side
with the stakeholders to do all of the following: 1) craft the WILIS 2 survey; 2) finalize methodological tools; 3) implement the launch of the WILIS 2 model; 4) disseminate the findings; and 5) explore sustainability options. A likely side product of this work will be to increase the capacity of the stakeholder partnership created through the formation and experience of a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) to work together on other important research and practice issues in the field. This approach also holds promise for narrowing the gap between researchers, educators and practitioners.

The specific research goals of WILIS 2 are to:

1) **Refine a career tracking model that is suitable for all LIS programs to use with their recent graduates.** Using the CBPR approach and a PAC of 16 members including LIS program directors, library leaders and workforce experts, we have built consensus on the essential elements of a career tracking instrument for use in monitoring and planning both educational programs and LIS workforce needs.

2) **Recruit as many LIS programs as possible to participate in a phased national launch of the career tracking model.** The study team, in concert with the PAC, recruited LIS programs in the US and Canada to participate in an initial survey launch phase of 8 programs, a second phase of 20 programs, and a third phase of 16 programs.

3) **Conduct the surveys and provide access to results for the participating LIS programs.** Participating LIS programs will have access to their own datasets, automated reports, analytic tools and analytic benchmarking feedback from the study team.

4) **Explore options for sustaining the national career tracking model.** The PAC, in conjunction with the study team, will direct and conduct the exploration of avenues for sustainability beyond the grant period. This process will result in a final plan for sustainability generated by the PAC and the study team and systematically presented to other LIS stakeholders not involved in the creation of the plan.

5) **Disseminate findings and publicize the availability of the WILIS 2 model.** The study team members and the PAC will collaborate to explore avenues for dissemination of this research, such as conferences and a Webcast.

**Works Cited**