

Putting It Into Practice: Service Learning and LIS Curriculum

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Literature Review

“Experience is the adult learner’s textbook” ~Hall-Ellis & Grealy, 2012

Service learning has been widely discussed throughout the LIS literature, especially within the topic of curriculum development. While this scholarship sheds light on the value of SL, much of it fails to paint a holistic picture of what’s happening in LIS curriculum currently; studies usually elaborate on the successes and failures of *one* class or *one* LIS program (Roy, Jenson, & Meyers, 2009; Nazarova, 2007; Mehra, 2004). Furthermore, many pieces of literature call for an increase in the practicality of LIS programs, but fail to mention SL as an option for implementing it (Rentfrow).

Scholars acknowledge that defining SL, especially in the context of what’s best for LIS, is often complicated and complex. Some suggest that practica are considered SL while others hold that practica are too much about student development instead of both the student and organization (Hall-Ellis & Grealy, 2012; Overall, 2010; Mehra, 2004). It’s also unclear how much SL is an adequate amount for students to be able to gain practical experience and have meaningful reflection. Does helping an organization perform a user experience (UX) test count (Becker, 2000)? Is adding an entry to the Internet Public Library (IPL) enough?

SL increases students’ “teamwork skills, community involvement, citizenship, ability to address complex problems, and critical thinking skills,” all of which are important to being a successful librarian (Bishop, Bruce, & Jeong, 2009). Furthermore, 67% of employers deemed service critical to their hiring practices (Montague, Wolske, & Larke, 2009). Thus, the importance of SL in LIS training continues to grow.

Method & Limitations

Noting each ALA-Accredited Institutions’ mention of service learning specifically emphasizes

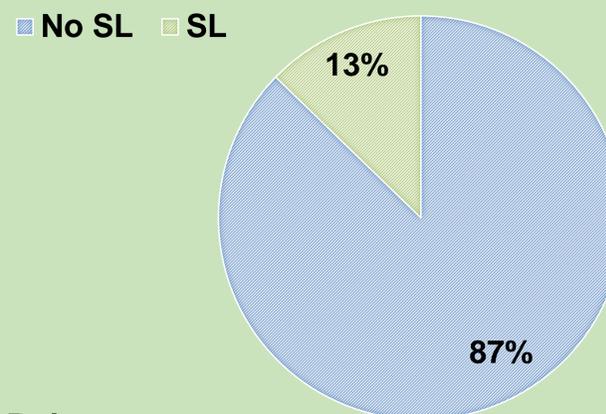
- their transparency to students choosing coursework
- their dedication to informing potential employers of graduates’ practical experience

Limitations:

- Not every SL opportunity will be in the institution’s catalog
- Difference between what “actually is and what is projected about those aspects on the internet” (Mehra, 2004)
- Some course catalog listings are more detailed than others
- Other sources confirm that this may be the case (Ball & Schilling, 2006; Nazarova, 2007)

Results

- Only **7** out of **48** ALA-Accredited Schools mentioned SL in their course catalog
- 4 schools didn’t have explicit course catalogs on their website; all programs pending accreditation were removed as their programs aren’t necessarily established



Programs

University of Iowa
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Simmons College
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
UCLA
University of Wisconsin-Madison
State University of New York (SUNY)- Albany

Data Points

- **Practica/ Internships:** **none** of the programs devoted practica or internships to only SL by including it in the course description
- **WISE (Web-Based Information Science Education):** **4 of the 7** SL schools collaborate in online education, though that doesn’t necessarily mean students can take SL from other institutions
- **Required to Graduate:** SL is not a requirement for graduation in **any** program
- **Geography:** the highest percentage of schools implementing SL came from the **Midwest**, according to the Census Bureau’s designated regions and divisions
- **Rank:** **two of the top three** LIS schools (according to US News & World Report) implement SL

Interpretation & Future Research

Not enough LIS programs are implementing service learning in their curriculum. If they are, they might not be transparent enough in their course catalogs. Service learning could be part of many programs’ curriculum but it might not be a large enough portion of the course to include information about it.

There are some definite correlations with SL and programs’ success. Two of the top three schools implement SL. Further, almost half of the institutions that collaborate in WISE have SL courses.

Future research:

- WISE implementation of SL courses for all students, even in an online format
- How Community Informatics is redefining SL
- Correlations between SL coursework and employment rates