

The Master's Degree: Basic Preparation for Professional Practice

JANE ROBBINS-CARTER
CHARLES A. SEAVEY

The Master's Degree

THE MASTER'S OF LIBRARY SCIENCE (MLS) degree did not spring, full blown, from the directors of the old "Type I" library schools of the 1930s nor from the head of Harriet E. Howe (then director of the Denver library school) in 1946. It is a variation of the master's degree (M.A.) which has been part of academe since the earliest beginnings of the university system. It seems logical to set the scene by briefly examining the roots and development of the master's before our discussion of the MLS.

At the earliest universities—e.g., Bologna and Paris—the original degree was the *Licentia docendi*, or license to teach. This evolved into the *Magister Artium*, or one qualified to teach the liberal arts, and the Doctor of Laws, a teacher of law. For most of the middle ages *Master* and *Doctor* were "absolutely synonymous."¹

As the early universities evolved on the continent the term M.A. was gradually abandoned in favor of the doctorate. In England the reverse was true, and the M.A. was the highest earned degree. In consequence, when higher education came to the English colonies in America, it was the M.A. that was recognized as the highest educational attainment, and the doctor's degree was largely unused (and honorary) until the latter part of the nineteenth century.²

Jane Robbins-Carter is Director and Professor, School of Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin—Madison; and Charles A. Seavey is Doctoral Candidate, School of Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin—Madison.

Harvard and the other early centers of higher education in America preserved, for a time, the notion that while the M.A. was awarded *in cursu* (as a matter of course) it came as the result of some recognizable achievement beyond the bachelor's degree: the "Scholar that giveth up in writing...and is ready to defend his *Thesis*...is fit to be dignified with his 2nd Degree" (*Laws of Harvard College*, 1642). By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the degree was referred to as "of course" and the requirements consisted of "keeping out of jail for three years and paying the five dollar fee."³ This almost automatic award of the M.A. continued for most of the nineteenth century. Even after the educational reforms discussed below, as late as the Wilson presidency at Princeton, a graduate could "earn" an M.A. with a thesis fifteen to twenty pages long.⁴

Starting as early as the 1850s higher education in America underwent a major transformation.⁵ The master's degree was reformed along with virtually every other aspect of university-level education. In the 1850s Michigan and North Carolina both attempted to institute M.A. degree requirements not dissimilar from those of today. Georgia adopted new requirements in the late 1860s, although the first degree was not awarded until 1871. By that time the great reform of American higher education was well underway.

The trend toward the *pro Meritis* (for merit, usually demonstrated by course work, exams, and a thesis) degree gained significant momentum when Charles W. Eliot assumed the presidency of Harvard in 1869. He immediately scrapped the *in cursu* degree and instituted a *pro Meritis* program. Other universities followed suit, and by the end of the century the modern M.A. requiring significant (with some variation in the definition of "significant," as noted above) work at the graduate level was the accepted model in higher education.⁶

The M.A. was joined by the Master of Science degree as early as 1858. Since then the master's degree has been "qualified" or fragmented by a variety of terms that define the area of expertise the degree represents. Most of the new terminology has been added in the twentieth century. By 1960 the U.S. Office of Education (USOE) could report that there were no less than 121 varieties of M.A.s and 272 kinds of M.S. degrees.⁷ Simply listing them (including our favorite, the M.A.C.E. or Master in Air Conditioning Engineering) requires twenty-two pages (248-70) in the USOE report.

The MLS, therefore, is part of the mainstream of the academic degree structure as it evolved in this country. It has not always been part of library education but has developed and changed over the course of

The Master's Degree

our 100 years. The broad outlines of the development of library education have been well documented elsewhere.⁸ We can, however, note the specific events which relate directly to the MLS. In general there are three periods of time in which different versions of the MLS have been awarded. The "Albany" period, from 1889-1926; the "sixth-year" period, from 1927-1960; and the current, "fifth-year" period.

The Albany Period, 1889-1926

Like so many other things in librarianship, the MLS was the idea of the late Mr. Dewey. Mr. Dewey's School of Library Economy was moved from Columbia to the New York State Library in Albany in 1889. Upon activation in Albany the school was authorized by the Regents of the University to award the degrees of BLS, MLS, and DLS. White notes that the honorary DLS was apparently never awarded.⁹

The MLS, however, was awarded to eleven individuals prior to 1926. As near as can be determined, Albany was the only school awarding the degree during those years. Receipt of the MLS was limited to those who possessed the BLS and, "not less than five years in professional library work and who submitted in print a satisfactory contribution to library service or library history...this work (must) show independent thought and research..."¹⁰

Although the degree had been authorized in 1889, and presumably could have been awarded as early as 1895, the MLS was first conferred upon James Ingersoll Wyer in 1905.¹¹ Ten more MLS degrees were awarded under the rules of the Albany School.¹²

The Sixth-Year MLS Degrees, 1927-1960

The "Carnegie Impulse" triggered a major restructuring of library education in the 1920s. C.C. Williamson's *Report*¹³ provided the catalyst. ALA created the Temporary Library Training Board, which begat the Board of Education for Librarianship (BEL), which wrote new standards for library education in 1925,¹⁴ and revised them in 1933.¹⁵ The standards allowed an "Advanced Graduate Library School" to award the "M.A. or M.S. for the satisfactory completion of one year of professional study strictly graduate in character."¹⁶ The MLS would therefore be awarded only after a year's study beyond the BLS which already required a year beyond the baccalaureate degree, hence the term sixth-year master's.

Initially five schools offered the sixth-year degree: Illinois, starting in 1927; California, starting in 1928; the reestablished school at Colum-

bia (1928); Michigan (1927); and Chicago (1932).¹⁷ Six more schools—Peabody, Toronto, Western Reserve, Drexel, Louisiana, and McGill—awarded the sixth-year degree at various times before the last one given in 1960. Drexel, Louisiana, and McGill awarded one degree each; Peabody awarded seventeen, Toronto sixteen, and Western Reserve, nine.¹⁸ Tables 1 and 2 present a statistical breakdown of the MLS degrees awarded during the Albany and sixth-year periods.

TABLE 1
MASTER'S DEGREES, 1905-1960, BY SCHOOL

<i>School</i>	1905-1926	1927-30	1931-40	1941-50 ¹	1951-60
California	0	10	47	24	9
Chicago	0	0	33	79	26
Columbia ²	11	46	171	136	72
Illinois	0	27	131	110	64
Michigan	0	13	156	195	102
Other (6)	0	1	10	2	32
Total:	11	97	548	546	305

N = 1507¹ Data for 1948, except for California, are missing.

² Includes the Albany MLS degrees.

Sources: C. Edward Carroll. *The Professionalization of Librarianship*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1970, pp. 196-97; and *New York State Library School Register, 1887-1926*. Albany: New York State Library School Association, 1959.

TABLE 2
MASTER'S DEGREES, TOTAL AND PERCENTAGE, BY SCHOOL, 1905-1960

<i>School</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
California	90	6.1
Chicago	138	9.2
Columbia	436	28.9
Illinois	332	22.0
Michigan	466	30.9
Other (6)	45	2.9
Total:	1507	100.0

Sources: C. Edward Carroll. *The Professionalization of Librarianship*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1970, pp. 196-97; and *New York State Library School Register, 1887-1926*. Albany: New York State Library School Association, 1959.

The Master's Degree

The Fifth-Year MLS, 1947-

The sixth-year MLS was awarded as late as 1960, although there was a sharp decline in the number of degrees awarded after the new standards of 1951, and only nine were awarded after 1956. The MLS, starting in 1947, underwent a transformation as fundamental as the restructuring of the 1920s. The old BLS degree, which had always been something of an anomaly, was sharply upgraded at most schools, and replaced with the current fifth-year MLS degree.

The 1940s was an era of some discontent with library education. Despite the war a number of critical studies were completed and published,¹⁹ and it was clear that an adjustment in the structure of library education was due. The faculty at Columbia were moving toward establishing a fifth-year MLS, although the actual catalyst was Harriet Howe, director at Denver.²⁰

The first post-war ALA meeting at Buffalo, New York in 1946 was the start of the move into the fifth-year degree. The Columbia faculty held a meeting with its alumni to discuss their still unfinished plans for the transition. The news spread rapidly as other schools showed an interest in the move. "No one went into the matter more thoughtfully than Harriet Howe, of Denver...."²¹ The following year, Howe announced that Denver would inaugurate a fifth-year program. The first two fifth-year degrees were awarded by Denver in 1947.²²

Denver's move proved to be the catalyst that precipitated a general shift toward the five-year MLS in library education. In 1945, 720 fifth-year MLS degrees were awarded, and 664 fifth-year BLS degrees; in 1951 the ratio was 985 to 435, and by 1956—the last year of the fifth-year BLS—only 52 were awarded, opposed to 1185 fifth-year MLSs.²³ As we have seen, the sixth-year MLS rapidly disappeared after 1956, the last being awarded in 1960. The change to a completely graduate education where the first professional degree is the MLS was complete. Having established the ancestry of the current MLS we can turn to a consideration of debates about the nature of the degree.

Debating Basic Questions

The basic questions the literature of library and information science education seems to be organized around are two:

1. Should master's-level education be more disciplinary than instrumental?
2. Should master's-level education be more theoretical than practical?

A further debate can be added here—i.e., are these really two questions or simply a single question?

Assuming for our purposes here that these are two profoundly different questions, let us further discuss the first—i.e., the disciplinary *v.* instrumental question. The debate here is over whether there is a distinct, identifiable, theoretical base called library science or information science (whichever is preferred; and this, too, is debatable); or whether there is instead an applied (or instrumental) theoretical base derived from established disciplinary fields such as sociology, psychology, linguistics, and philosophy. This debate can be embellished to include an argument about whether it would ever be possible for a discipline of information (or library) science to evolve; or whether applied fields *must* devolve their concepts and propositions from “true” disciplines. When a colleague says “theory” does he or she mean *instrumental* or *applied* theory—i.e., does the colleague mean a distinct or unique theoretical base or the “creative application of theory from other disciplines to the task of solving practical problems in some area of social life.”²⁴

Does it make any difference for the educational enterprise if colleagues do mean different things? Buckland points out that there seems to be an assumption that there “ought” to be a unique body of theory in library and/or information science, but states that being too concerned about the uniqueness of our theory appears “to be counterproductive for practical purposes of getting on with the development of the theory and the practice of library service.”²⁵ So, taking Buckland’s point to heart, the instrumental *v.* disciplinary theoretical debate may be put to rest.

The second question—i.e., the theory *v.* practice question—would be the debate over whether master’s-level education should include larger components of theory (whether disciplinary or instrumental) or larger components of practice. There seems to be little debate over whether there should be both. The essential debate is often generated by a confusion about just what the debaters mean by practice. When a colleague says “practice,” does he or she mean case-method instruction; laboratory work in conjunction with individual courses; field work as a curriculum component—either as an individual course or as components in these courses; master’s-degree study combined with relevant paid work, as post-master’s internships; or as some combination of these practice methods? The literature on field work within library education is quite extensive and will be dealt with in somewhat more detail elsewhere in this paper. Suffice it to say here that there is little argument

The Master's Degree

that professional education includes a significant component of skills education and that experiential education contributes to the learning of skills; however, the skills must be firmly rooted in a knowledge base which is internalized by the professional practitioner so that he or she can apply principles and concepts to solving problems or meeting situations encountered on the job.

So why do we debate? In part because we are not clear about the fundamental nature of the debatable questions; however, when the debate literature is read as a whole, it all appears rather tiresome and quite diversionary.

From what then are we diverting ourselves? Well, for one thing, the celebration of diversity in our curricula—i.e., diversity of courses, diversity of faculty, even diversity of goals for educational programs including the master's-degree program. The cross-currents generated by the far-reaching, extensive technological, societal, and bibliographical developments of the past twenty years have been embraced into curricular components in our schools, but there are so many developments and so much variation in information practice, that curricula vary widely.

Professional Identification of Librarianship

It would seem from the literature that librarians struggle excessively to create the outward signs of professional identification. Librarians spend more time debating about what a theoretical base ought to be composed of rather than in doing work which would contribute to the development of a theoretical base for the field. Pierce Butler stated in 1933: "Unlike his colleagues in other fields of social activity, the librarian is strangely uninterested in the theoretical aspects of his profession."²⁶ This is certainly no longer the case within the community of educators; many are obsessed with at least questions related to whether or not there is theory!

Professional(?) Education

One of the field's most relished debates stems from the question: Is librarianship a profession? The debaters consider the characteristics of professions²⁷ and examine them one by one measuring aspects of librarianship against the characteristics identified; or a single characteristic is selected from the list of characteristics and an array of work areas including librarianship is measured against it. One characteristic which is included in all efforts to delineate the criteria of professions is the educational requirement for entry at the first professional level—its

length, content, location in the educational hierarchy, and other aspects.

Kathleen Heim has investigated the educational requirement for librarianship compared with medicine, law, social work, teaching, and nursing and has found, "librarianship has exhibited an evolution that parallels, and at times even anticipates, the other professions."²⁸ Using a framework developed by McGlothlin, Heim compares these fields noting first the relative recency of the professional education model which is approximately only 100 years old.

Location and Length of Program

Most scholars of the sociology of professions agree that professional education is located principally at the graduate level. Librarianship was a leader field on the basis of this criteria. By 1951 education for librarianship at the professional level required a full four years of undergraduate preparation. Three years of college was not required for admission to law school until 1951; as recently as 1969, only 89 percent of students seeking admission to medical school had bachelor's degrees; it was not until 1973 that all states required the bachelor's degree in order to obtain a teaching license, and nursing still does not require the baccalaureate. Only social work predates librarianship on the measure of the location of the first professional degree program at the graduate level, as it has required the bachelor's degree for admission since 1939.²⁹

The critical criteria is not, however, locus of the program, but rather whether the perceived content of the program is indeed considered, by both scholars and the public, to be professional. The length of the educational period may be an accurate measure of professional content. Medicine has the longest period with three years beyond undergraduate work demanded, with much of the undergraduate work required to be closely related to graduate medical training. Law requires three years of work at the graduate level, social work two, and librarianship, for the most part, one. All three of these fields have relatively few, if any requirements regarding undergraduate preparation. Nursing and teaching have the first professional degree at the undergraduate level. On this criteria alone one can see a clear order of perceived professionalism among the fields with medicine and law being preeminent.

Content

The content of education, according to McGlothlin's schema has three aspects which are briefly examined below:

General v. Professional Content. Nursing and education control all of the content, general and professional, for training in their fields;

The Master's Degree

medicine controls most of the content, while law, social work, and librarianship leave the general content to the students and trust that their general preparation will be sufficient to support their professional training.

Knowledge v. Skills Content. Theoretical knowledge is the critical criteria here. Both medicine and law have close control of the knowledge base related to their professional practice. Nursing is so allied to medicine that it probably cannot develop its own theoretical base. Neither teachers, social workers, nor librarians are believed to have developed a significant theoretical knowledge base sufficient to have achieved professional status.

Specialization Content. All the fields being discussed allow for some specialization, but specialization is a rather limited indicator of professionalism. "It seems that specialization, insofar as it lengthens the period of professional training, is an indicator of professionalization, but that specialization in the basic training period is not."³⁰

Educational Gestalt

Truly professionalized education accounts for education of the entire field including its allied occupations. Medicine, on this criteria, again is clearly the ideal profession. A whole array of allied health professions which support physicians' work are controlled by the medical profession. Law is developing the ancillary field of paralegals and the occupation of legal secretary is considered a specialization within secretarial "sciences." Social work also provides for several levels of training. Neither nursing nor teaching has a clear continuum of practice levels that are supported by educational programs. While some will argue that librarianship has developed a well-articulated educational continuum through its policy document, "Library Education and Personnel Utilization,"³¹ in fact there is no educational structure in place to support a continuum. Librarianship officially ignores all educational programs (or lack thereof) with the exception of first professional-degree education. The thousands of untrained librarians practicing throughout the United States are invisible to the profession while highly visible to library users. It is of little wonder then that the populace is surprised to learn that one has to go to school to become a librarian when obviously that is not the case.

On the surface, librarianship has developed a professional education model that compares favorably with most other professions/semi-professions. It falls short of the professional ideal in two areas: the development of a well-articulated and practical occupational continu-

um and the development of a knowledge base. Larson, in her *The Rise of Professionalism*,³² states:

The structure of the professionalization process binds together two elements which can, and usually did, evolve independently of each other: a body of relatively abstract knowledge, susceptible of practical application, and a market—the structure of which is determined by economic and social development and also by the dominant ideological climate at a given time.

These criteria, the body of abstract knowledge and the market—i.e., in our words the occupational continuum—are the two key criteria in professionalization according to Larson and are the two criteria of professionalism in which we believe librarianship falls far short. A profession must control its market by monopolizing competence and demonstrating that its competence is superior to others. Librarianship has relatively little control over its market as it is not at all sure of what professional competence in librarianship is possessed; and further how best that unknown competence might be acquired. Margaret Myers, director of the American Library Association's Office for Library Personnel Resources, has recently written:³³

Probably no environmental factor has influenced staffing in the last twenty years as much as the legal and regulatory climate....Questions have arisen over whether certain requirements, including the M.L.S., are job related. Education and experience stated as exclusive entry requirements are sometimes difficult to justify as the only requirements necessary for successful job performance. If the knowledge, skills, abilities (KSA), and other personal attributes obtained in the acquisition of a degree, such as the M.L.S., are substantially correlated with the requirement of the job, there is little probability of being challenged. But, if the use of the M.L.S. as a hiring requirement results from tradition or expediency and not from a thorough analysis of the job requirements, validity may be questioned.

Aspects of the Master's Curriculum

Now that the information age is upon us, we are quite certain that there is an important market in our environment, but we fear that other fields such as computer science and management are more clearly defining the nature of competence for the information professions. The most encouraging aspect of education for librarianship today is the amount of experimentation taking place in the schools. Some schools have developed undergraduate curricula (Pittsburgh and Drexel), others are requiring prerequisites (UCLA), and still others are providing

The Master's Degree

more than one master's degree (Syracuse and Pittsburgh)—i.e., a master's in librarianship and a master's in another information-related field such as information resources management or information science. Such developments bring up the oft-debated question: "Is there a core?"

The Core

The concept of "core" educational components for the information professions is an excellent example of an "ideal" concept; it is difficult to be precise about the components and the components will differ in their manifestations from an educational program to the next, but all of the initiated in the field recognize the core or the lack thereof. The core is simply what each person identifies as the core and believes everyone else should or does agree to.

The American Library Association's Committee on Accreditation (COA) gives the following as the basic content areas that all master's programs must cover: (1) an understanding of the role of the library as an educational and informational agency; (2) an understanding of the theories of collecting, building, and organizing library materials for use; (3) a knowledge of information sources and an ability to assist the user of library materials in locating and interpreting desired items; and (4) knowledge of the principles of administration and organization to provide information services.³⁴ Translated into curriculum structure in master's programs, these four content areas constitute what has come to be known as the "core." Of fifty-one schools reporting for the *ALISE Statistical Report*,³⁵ no school reported fewer than eight hours of course work to be required of all students. One school reported twenty-four required hours. The most typical requirement is from twelve to fifteen hours (twenty-one schools).

Because curriculum revision—especially at the level of the core—is so characteristic of today's schools, it is difficult to describe a typical core curriculum. The required hours seem to be principally devoted to the traditional content area of librarianship that came into acceptance in the 1940s and 1950s—i.e., courses including a combination of reference, materials selection, cataloging and classification, and administration. The addition of courses or course components dealing with the library as a societal institution were introduced in the late 1960s and early 1970s and remain within the typical required course component. The limitations imposed by this largely library institution-focused curriculum have come under careful scrutiny. Integration and expansion of core content by adding course components related to information science appears to be the present direction, even though there is no national

agreement as to the basis for an *integrated* core in librarianship; still, a significant number of schools are creating and implementing such curricular structures.

The first attempt at offering an integrated core curriculum was undertaken in the 1960s under the leadership of Jesse Shera at Case Western Reserve University. Since then, many schools have introduced and revised variations of an integrated core. Some include a required course in foundations of librarianship coupled with a small number of separate, largely skill-based courses. Another approach is a totally integrated core, usually consisting of nine to twelve credit hours that may be taken either in a block or in a sequence of a primary six hours followed by three to six additional hours. These integrated core curricula subsume substantial parts of the traditional core of reference, cataloging, materials selection, and administration and add significant components dealing with foundations, communications, the research process, media, and, most notably, information science. The emphasis of the integrated core is on the view that there are elements common to all types of library and other *information* services that include both theoretical and philosophical, as well as skill fundamentals. The central institutional focus remains the library, but other institutional and independent work roles are included.

In those schools with the longest experience with integrated core curricula, notably Drexel University and the universities of North and South Carolina, the integrated core approach has had influence on the entire curriculum, especially in reducing redundancy and providing individual faculty with a shared knowledge base of those students who have completed the core.

An abbreviated, generalized outline for a hypothetical integrated core curriculum is as follows:

- I. Libraries and Society
 - A. Communications
 - Information—its meaning, interpretation, dissemination
 - B. Library role in the communication process
 - User needs; comparison with other information agencies;
 - library and information science as a profession
 - C. Social role of information institutions
 - Meeting the needs of clients
 - D. Political and economic context of information institutions
 - Library in its institutional setting, its administrative structure,
 - means of support, legal base
 - E. Freedom of information, intellectual freedom, and copyright

The Master's Degree

- F. Forms of communication media
 - Film, audio tape, telecommunications, maps, other media
- II. Library Services and Materials
 - A. Information institutions as service systems
 - B. Mechanization of library services
 - Computer usage; computer languages and programming
 - C. Types of materials; types of collections; types of libraries and users; technique and principles of selection; selection tools; collection maintenance
 - D. Collection access
 - Bibliographic descriptions; subject analysis and description; physical access
 - E. Information seeking
 - Reference services; materials and automated services; reference interview
- III. Research (as a means of studying concerns in library and information science)
 - A. Problem identification, research techniques, design, data collection, and treatment
 - B. Communication of research results
- IV. Management
 - A. Planning, organizing, staffing, directing, controlling
 - B. Systems analysis
 - C. Effectiveness measurement
 - D. Interlibrary cooperation and organization

Returning to the traditional core of reference, cataloging and classification, administration, and selection, it can easily be seen that the integrated core does indeed subsume these elements, but important elements emphasizing conceptual and methodological concerns are added. Especially noteworthy are: (1) the comparison of libraries and librarians with other institutions, professions, and occupations that provide information services; (2) identification of information user needs and behaviors and the roles of information professionals in identifying and responding to them; (3) introduction of technology and information science to all who will become professional librarians; (4) recognition of knowledge of the content and process of research as essential to all library professionals; and (5) acknowledgment of the increasing responsibility of all professional librarians in the management of library operations.

The emphasis on the core curriculum in library education, especially the inclusion in the core of the concerns of, and contributions

from, information science and other disciplines is an indication of the strong desire of library educators to maintain the traditional generalist curriculum and to head off a possible breakup of first professional degree education into specializations; however, holding together education for the information professions may well be beyond the capacity of most programs of library education as they are presently structured in relatively autonomous graduate schools. It may be true that mergers of related departments as has been accomplished at Rutgers University in its School of Communications, Information and Library Studies will be necessary to integrate education for the information professions. The 1984 ALISE/ALA initiative to bring together professions interested in accreditation of information-related education programs may provide an indication of whether it will be possible to integrate education for the information professions or whether education for librarianship will remain principally education for those preparing to work in libraries.

The curriculum of librarianship, which through the 1960s had been focused almost exclusively toward the library, in most cases continues to emphasize specialization in the profession by the type of library institution in which the professional might expect to work—i.e., in school, public, academic, or special libraries. There are indications from curricular changes that this emphasis is declining and that specialization in the field could better focus upon type of client served (e.g., student, researcher, recreational user) or information function pursued (e.g., indexer/abstracter, collection developer, information interpreter, information manager), disregarding the institutional setting of the professional. The development of integrated core curricula is one of the key indicators of this shift.

Specialist Areas

So long as the vast majority of master's-degree holders continue to find employment in library institutions, and so long as these institutions require only that their beginning professionals possess the degree without much regard to the courses taken to obtain that degree, true educational specialization will be concentrated in on-the-job experience and post-master's programs. (School/media librarianship is in most schools the only type of clearly developed library specialization offered.) Regardless of the many reasons given for continued reliance on the generalist curriculum, a growing number of library educators and practitioners concur that specialist preparation is needed. They agree that the thirty-six hour master's curriculum is insufficient for the educa-

The Master's Degree

tion of "real" specialists. However, should a school elect to educate only one or two "types" of information professional with all courses, after the core curriculum, focused upon selected institutional, subject, or functional areas, then specialization may be possible. Even then thirty-six hours may be too limited. Some library educators and employers believe that more library education programs should choose to declare a specialty or perhaps small groups of specialty curricula. For example, a school might state that its single purpose is the education of public librarians including perhaps tracks for urban and rural public librarians. For this specialization, a school might offer a core and the following course distribution:

Required of all students (credit hours)

Political Environment of the Public Library (3)

Economics of Public Service (3)

Systems of Libraries (3)

Administration of Public Libraries (3)

Rural Track

Rural Sociology (3)

Regional Planning (3)

Rural Libraries (3)

Rural Economics (3)

Resources for Small

Public Libraries (3)

Rural Library Research (3)

Urban Track

The City (3)

Urban Planning (3)

Metropolitan and

Suburban Libraries (3)

Resources for Large

Public Libraries (3)

Urban Library Research (3)

This type of specialist program offered totally within the library school could also be developed for academic librarianship including tracks for university, college, and community college librarians.

Another type of single-purpose curriculum that could be developed within the offerings of a single-purpose school might be the reference specialist. As in the past, many generalist librarians still decide to concentrate in reference service without regard to type of library in which they might find employment. These students take courses in reference totaling at least fifteen semester hours. The fifteen minimum hours would probably include:

Introduction to Reference Service (3)

Resources for the Humanities (3)

Resources for the Social Sciences (3)

Resources for Science and Technology (3)

Government Publications (3)

In today's complex information environment, a single-purpose curriculum of some depth for a reference specialist might well include:

- Introduction to Reference (3)
- Resources for the Humanities (3)
- Resources for the Behavioral Sciences (3)
- Resources for the Social Sciences (3)
- Resources for the Sciences (3)
- Resources for Technology (3)
- U.S. Government Publications (3)
- Government Publications (Exclusive of U.S.) (3)
- Serial Publication (3)
- Nonprint Media (3)
- Online Bibliographic Resources and Services (3)
- Information User Studies (3)
- Administration of Reference Services (3)

This hypothetical curriculum represents a total of thirty-nine semester hours of which only three, Introduction to Reference, might be concentrated in the core. Additional single-subject resource courses could well be included, boosting the number of credits to well over forty. In fact, a school that chooses to be a reference specialist school could reasonably develop tracks for social science specialists, humanities specialists, and others.

Another route to specialist preparation is through cooperation with other academic departments. While the specialization program by type of library could be pursued in this manner, for example, having those pursuing academic librarianship taking courses in schools of education and public administration, this path to specialization is especially appropriate for subject specialists. Prospective art librarians might profitably take a variety of courses in art history and fine arts as well as special courses in the library school. While many students might choose a dual master's-degree program, it would be possible to gain appropriate preparation for a specialty with fewer hours than those needed for a dual degree, provided of course that the specialist program is well designed.

The principal reason specializations are not pursued by many students is that library education programs continue to draw their students mainly from their local area. The largest number of students demand education that is generalist in nature so that they can apply for a wide variety of beginning library positions. There is no national recruiting program for the field and no developed consensus on what a

The Master's Degree

specialization consists of; therefore, there is no clear demand for specialization except that created by state school library/media certification regulation.

While programs of specialization are available in library schools, they are chosen by only a few students and they vary greatly in their structures. In reporting to ALISE, twenty-six schools indicated they offered a total of sixty-four or more specialization programs. Specializations included twelve with history and seven with law or business. Many of these schools reported the availability of multiple specializations.

One area of specialization in the master's curriculum that has been called for especially by library practitioners is a management specialization. It is unclear whether practitioners are calling for an actual specialization or for an extension of the curriculum for *all* librarians in the area of management. There is considerable evidence—based on research studies, continuing education needs assessments, and programs held at professional meetings—that professional librarians are increasingly being used in management and various supervisory positions. Traditionally, library schools have offered only the core course in general library administration and then planned for additional administrative knowledge to be gained through students' taking type-of-library courses. A number of library schools, responding to the need to provide additional administrative knowledge, have introduced advanced general administration courses. Many schools offer courses in such analytical skills as systems analysis. Courses in the administration of specific library functions such as technical services and public services are also offered at some schools and many courses dealing with library networking or cooperative systems emphasize administrative aspects. The most prevalent means for providing concentration in administrative aspects of librarianship is through cooperation with other academic departments. Master's students may be encouraged to take courses such as personnel management or organizational behavior in schools of business or public administration.

Only the largest schools in number of faculty can hope to provide more than one or two programs of specialization to their students, although many schools are able to offer single specialized courses such as law, map, music, or archival librarianship. The individual specialized course does not amount to specialization in most concerned people's opinions. These courses are typical in most traditional library education curricula because they are offered based on the expertise available from a particular full-time or adjunct faculty member.

The future development of specialization programs within the thirty-six hour master's degree is problematic. Because the COA has

approved the concept of single-purpose programs, there seems to be little compelling argument that it would not be appropriate provided that there was a market for such specialists. Except for some as yet not clearly defined indications from the community of academic librarians, there does not appear to be a market for specialization at the first professional degree level. It is especially difficult for publicly supported library schools to abandon the generalist library education program, as they are expected to educate and train librarians for all types of libraries within their states. Further, the development of specialized library education programs would best be accomplished through a national plan for library education. Although a number of writers have called for such a national plan, none is on the horizon.

It appears that the most likely changes to occur in the education of librarians are that (1) curriculum content will continue to be expanded to emphasize development of competence in the technologically oriented aspects of the information environment; (2) the number of credit hours required for the first professional degree will increase slightly; and (3) undergraduate education for information professionals—including education for library support staff—will be further developed and more closely articulated with first professional degree programs.

Library education curricula are in a period of scrutiny and change, and curricular change will continue to be the most characteristic element of library education through 1989. The inclusion of flexible course structures—such as *Issues in Librarianship* or *Resources in Special Literatures*—which will allow library educators to respond rapidly to changes in library and information science, will become essential elements in the curriculum.

Conclusion

The MLS has been part of library education for 81 of our 100 years. It has evolved from the almost total obscurity of very infrequent awards, to the point where it is today *the* credential for entry into the ranks of professional library practice. As such, it becomes the focal point of the various debates on the nature of librarianship (theory and practice; profession or not?), and library education expends considerable energy on determining the content and form of the various curricula leading to its award.

Given the changing nature of libraries, information, and society it seems inevitable that the MLS will continue to change. Certainly the

The Master's Degree

curricula change and we are starting to see variations on the degree itself. The restructuring of 1926/27 was abrupt. The next transitional period—in the 1940s and 1950s—was more protracted. It is possible that we are entering an era of “continuous revision” as library education comes to grips with the new “information age” and that in our future no single degree will dominate as has the MLS in our past.

References

1. Rashdall, Hastings. *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1895, vol. 1, p. 21.
2. Eells, Walter Crosby. *Degrees in Higher Education*. New York: Center for Applied Research in Education, 1963, p. 72.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.
4. Veysey, Laurence R. *The Emergence of the American University*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965, p. 359.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Eells, *Degrees in Higher Education*, pp. 76-78.
7. *Academic Degrees: Earned and Honorary Degrees Conferred by Institutions of Higher Education in the United States* (USOE Bulletin No. 28). Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1960, p. 26.
8. Among the major works are: Vann, Sarah K. *Training for Librarianship Before 1923*. Chicago: ALA, 1961; White Carl M. *A Historical Introduction to Library Education: Problems and Progress to 1951*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1976; and Carroll, C. Edward. *The Professionalization of Education for Librarianship: 1940-60*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1970.
9. White, *A Historical Introduction to Library Education*, p. 65.
10. *New York State Library School Register, 1887-1926*. New York: New York State Library School Assoc., 1959 (hereafter cited as *Register*).
11. *Register*, p. 31; Carroll, *The Professionalization of Education*; and Pierce, Helen F. *Graduate Study in Librarianship in the United States*. Chicago: ALA, 1941. (Both note the first MLS degrees as going to Katharine Lucinda Sharp and William R. Eastman in 1907.)
12. According to the *Register*, the “Albany Eleven” are: Wyer (1905), Sharp (1907), Eastman (1907), Joseph L. Harrison (1912), Frank K. Walter (1913), John B. Kaiser (1917), Asa Wynkoop (1919), Joseph L. Wheeler (1925), Harriet C. Long (1925), Anne T. Eaton (1926), and Lucy Fay (1926).
13. Williamson, Charles C. *Training for Library Service: A Report Prepared for the Carnegie Corporation of New York*. New York: Carnegie Corp., 1923.
14. ALA. *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 19(July 1925):235-46.
15. ————. *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 27(15 Dec. 1933):610-13.
16. ————. *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 19(July 1925):246.
17. Carroll, *The Professionalization of Education*, pp. 195-98.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 196-97.
19. Carroll was moved to term the 1940s the “Decade of Conferences and Surveys.” Among the major surveys were: Munn, Ralph. *Conditions and Trends in Education for Librarianship*. New York: Carnegie Corp., 1936; Metcalf, Keyes D., et al. *The Program of Instruction in Library Schools*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1943; Wheeler, Joseph L. *Progress and Problems in Education for Librarianship*. New York: Carnegie

Corp., 1946; and Danton, J. Periam. *Education for Librarianship: Criticisms, Dilemmas, and Proposals*. New York: Columbia University, School of Library Service, 1946.

20. White, *A Historical Introduction to Library Education*, pp. 246-53.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 252.

22. Carroll, *The Professionalization of Education*, p. 63.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Derr, Richard L. "The Integration of Theory and Practice in Professional Programs." *Journal of Education for Librarianship* 23(Winter 1983):198.

25. Buckland, Michael K. *Library Services in Theory and Context*. New York: Pergamon, 1983, p. 39.

26. Butler, Pierce. *An Introduction to Library Science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933, p. xi.

27. The literature on the characteristics of professions is extensive; within that literature the subgroup on educational criteria is rather substantial. A select group of major works is as follows: Etzioni, Amitai, ed. *The Semi-professions and Their Organization: Teachers, Nurses, Social Workers*. New York: Free Press, 1969; Flexner, Abraham. *Medical Education in the United States and Canada: A Report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*. Boston: 1910 (reprinted New York: Arno Press, 1972); McGlothlin, William J. *The Professional Schools*. New York: Center for Applied Research in Education, 1964; Pavalko, Ronald M. *Sociology of Occupations and Professions*. Itasca, Ill.: F.E. Peacock, 1971; and Wilensky, Harold L. "The Professionalization of Everyone?" *American Journal of Sociology* 70(Sept. 1964):137-58.

28. Heim, Kathleen M. "Professional Education: Some Comparisons." In *As Much to Learn as to Teach: Essays in Honor of Lester Asheim*, edited by Joel M. Lee and Beth A. Hamilton, p. 131. Hamden, Conn.: Linnet, 1979. (Heim's article [on pp. 128-76] is recommended to all who desire a brief overview of the history of the development of education for these six work areas. Further, as her work pulls together widely scattered literature that forms the basis for a comprehensive comparative analysis of professional education in these fields, it is recommended to a scholar who would engage in such analysis.)

29. *Ibid.*, p. 161. (The presentation of the material that follows is all taken from the Heim article.)

30. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

31. American Library Association. "Library Education and Personnel Utilization" (adopted 1970, rev. 1976). Chicago: ALA, 1976.

32. Larson, Magali Sarfatti. *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1977, p. 41.

33. Myers, Margaret. "Human Resources Management in Libraries." *Library Management Bulletin* 8(Winter 1985):16-21.

34. American Library Association. Committee on Accreditation. "Standards for Accreditation." Chicago: ALA, 1972, pp. 5-6.

35. Association for Library and Information Science Education. *Library and Information Science Education Statistical Report, 1984*. State College, Pa.: ALISE, 1984.