

# Role of the Association for Library and Information Science Education in Library and Information Science Education

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## Historical Perspectives

ON BALANCE, EVEN A glance at the history of the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) makes clear that the organization consistently has sought to be a force in education for librarianship and more recently for information science. Such a review also makes clear that ALISE has not been consistent in pursuing its goals nor has it been clear on what these goals were. Donald Davis has documented the history of the organization from its founding in 1915 until 1968.<sup>1</sup> That history shows that ALISE has pursued several themes that have not been consistent with one another and that inconsistencies and contradictions in message have resulted in a certain cognitive dissonance in ALISE's statements over the years. These themes have been the following: (1) meeting place for persons engaged in library and information science education, (2) seeking involvement in accreditation, (3) association of schools *v.* association of members, (4) dealing with nonaccredited library schools, and (5) relating library science and information science.

### *Meeting Place for Library and Information Science Educators*

From its beginnings ALISE has sought to provide a place where persons engaged in library and information science education could come together to share ideas and viewpoints, and it largely has addressed itself to the everyday concerns of the classroom teacher. Many of the

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articles in the ALISE journal concern methods and procedures for teaching various classes in library schools. Much of its conference program has been devoted to providing opportunities for teachers to share experiences and ideas about content and methods for teaching. This classroom focus has caused many to see ALISE as somewhat of a "marching and chowder society" that devoted greater attention to social and self-congratulatory kinds of concerns than to matters of national policy or substance. For much of its history the organization operated without a fixed secretariat and issued only a newsletter. In 1959 it established its journal, the *Journal of Education for Librarianship*.

Throughout its history ALISE has sought to differentiate itself from the larger and more generally purposed American Library Association, and at the same time ALISE has recognized that it needs some degree of association with the larger organization. ALISE usually has held its meetings just prior to ALA to reduce travel costs for ALISE members and to assure a good attendance. Persons active in ALISE also are active in ALA, and many people have held leadership positions in both organizations. This dual existence has been most clear with regard to ALA's interests in library education that are made manifest in its Committee on Accreditation and its Standing Committee on Library Education (SCOLE, formerly the Library Education Division). Because ALA and its member units include many people who are not directly involved in library education—e.g., library staff members, directors, and trustees—some ALISE members have felt that ALA affiliation would dilute education issues and would make it difficult to focus on the particular problems and concerns of the library schools. Over the years ALISE has flirted with closer affiliation with ALA, even to the point of considering direct affiliation. At best ALISE has had a love-hate relationship with the larger organization.

#### *Seeking Involvement in Accreditation*

The ambivalence of ALISE toward ALA is probably most evident in the subject of accreditation of library schools than in any other arena. For much of its history, accreditation by ALA was the principal criterion for ALISE membership, and ALA accreditation was a matter of importance to all ALISE members. Davis indicates that in an earlier period ALA appeared to be urging ALISE to assume responsibility for setting standards for library education programs, but by 1925 ALA had moved forward with its own program of accreditation.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of its inability or unwillingness to act, ALISE did not abandon its interest in accreditation and over the years there have been calls for the association to play a greater role or to assume complete responsibility for accredita-

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tion. These calls apparently have ignored the fact that ALISE does not have the financial resources to sustain an accreditation program. ALA currently spends in excess of \$100,000 to staff its accreditation effort at what can only be considered a minimum level when compared to other fields. The current total income for all ALISE activities is approximately \$70,000. To derive the entire cost of accreditation from the existing schools would require each school to pay approximately \$2000 annually in addition to its ALISE dues. We may assume that a similar cost and revenue differential existed in earlier years.

Economics notwithstanding, ALISE long has felt that accreditation is a central point in determining the quality of library schools and that as the association representing the library schools it should have a louder voice in the process. ALISE's concerns tended to be raised in response to the concerns of individual members or officers who raised the question. For example, in the mid-1950s, as president of ALISE, Harold Lancour proposed that the organization take over the accreditation responsibilities due to what he saw as the downgrading of the Board of Education for Librarianship to the present Committee on Accreditation.<sup>3</sup> No action was taken on Lancour's proposal beyond authorization to appoint a committee that apparently was never activated.<sup>4</sup>

ALISE has used opportunities afforded it by ALA to make recommendations for the revision of the accreditation standards and it did so in the 1951 and 1972 revisions. Members of ALISE were active in the various committees that produced the standards.

While it could set its own membership rules, ALISE has never set any criteria for membership other than ALA accreditation of programs, which are, by definition, a minimum level of quality. ALISE, for example, could have sought to admit only the "stronger" schools and thereby could have established a hierarchy, or, perhaps more accurately, it could have legitimized the hierarchy that always has been assumed to exist. Over the years there have been numerous calls for ALISE to limit membership despite the fact that it would have made ALISE a much smaller but perhaps more effective organization. ALISE could have constituted itself as an organization composed of "quality" library schools and set standards beyond ALA's to define that quality. ALISE has chosen the alternative that produces the larger organization and recently it has abandoned even the ALA-accreditation standard for full membership. It is interesting to speculate what the effect might have been had ALISE chosen the more elitist route to define its membership. Obviously it would have become possible to make meaningful statements about some of the differences in the accredited schools. Also some

of the concerns recently articulated by Herbert White and others about the adequacy of the size of library school faculties could have been addressed in a more hospitable forum. Nevertheless, for library education the development of an organization of elite library schools represents the road not taken.

*Association of Schools v. Association of Members*

For much of its history ALISE chose to define itself as an association of schools as contrasted with an association of members. This distinction was of significance in its early history and dictated to a great extent the roles it could play in library education. One immediate consequence was to exaggerate the importance of the spokesperson for the school—usually the dean—in the organization.

For the first thirty-two years of its history (1915-1947) ALISE was solely an organization of schools. After 1947 personal members were admitted and could vote, but only the school representatives could vote to change the constitution. Now the association functions principally as an association of personal members. It is clear that the organization's program and its influence have increased markedly since individuals as opposed to institutions were given the major voice in its direction and policy. Had ALISE functioned from the beginning as a membership association it might have reached the place it now holds at a time when it could have had a major impact upon the structure and direction of library education in the country.

*Dealing with the Nonaccredited Library Schools*

Throughout its history ALISE has demonstrated a certain ambivalence toward the programs of library education that did not have ALA accreditation. For most of the association's history these schools were not eligible for membership and played no role in the association's affairs. In the 1970s they were afforded membership as associate members along with their faculties, and in 1984 all membership classes were dropped and persons from nonaccredited schools could be full members of the organization. It probably is safe to observe that the nonaccredited schools that have affiliated with ALISE are those that have some interest in accreditation and eventually hope to achieve it. Those programs that have no interest in ALA accreditation—principally school media programs and more recently some programs in information science—have not sought affiliation with ALISE nor do they appear to be interested in it as an organization. ALA has long been hospitable to these programs and has actively sought and encouraged their participation in its library education programs and units. Now

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that ALISE has provided for full membership for nonaccredited programs it remains to be seen if it will change its programs and concerns to make membership attractive to these schools.

### *Relating Library Science and Information Science*

A more recent concern of ALISE and of the schools that belong to it has been the relationship between library science and information science. There have been long and extensive arguments about whether these are two disciplines or one and how education for information science could be integrated into library schools and whether it should. At the same time there have been a few schools of information science that saw themselves and their graduates as having little or nothing to do with libraries and that have neither sought nor wanted affiliation with a library organization. In some cases the library and information science programs have been within the same school. There is no point in repeating the arguments here except to note that it has been a major issue in ALISE and within library education, one that appears unresolved, and one to which the association continues to devote considerable time and attention.

### **Recent Initiatives**

In recent years the association has undertaken three initiatives that are indicative of its desire to increase its impact on library education and to reflect the directions which the field is taking. Each of these initiatives has some portent for the future of ALISE and its effort to influence the field.

#### *Change in the Organization's Name*

In 1983, by vote of the membership, the name was changed from the Association of American Library Schools (AALS) to the Association for Library and Information Science Education. Subsequently the name of its official journal was changed from the *Journal of Education for Librarianship* to the *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*. The discussions of the name change and the reasons put forward for it reflect a great deal about the present direction and concerns of the organization. First, it was argued that the designation "American" was inaccurate in that the association had, and wished to have, international memberships from non-American schools. Second, the designation as an association of "schools" was inaccurate because the association had for some time been an association of individual members. Third, more than half of the schools that were members and

in which the members were employed were named schools of library and information science or something similar. Fourth, the association was principally concerned with education in these disciplines and this fact should be reflected in its name. Apparently the membership was in agreement with these arguments because the name change was endorsed overwhelmingly. The change was too recent to permit an assessment of whether it will also be reflected in the programs ALISE mounts and in the membership it attracts. One of the hopes of the Board of Directors in changing the name was that ALISE might become an attractive home for those educators who saw themselves as information scientists but not as librarians and that it might attract institutional memberships from programs of information science.

#### *Change in Membership Requirements*

Shortly after its name change ALISE also submitted to its membership a constitutional change that created one and only one category of membership for personal members. The change reflected a need for the association to reach out to many individuals who were not in accredited library schools but who might be or could become interested in the association. It was also recognized that library schools might have programs that were not accredited by ALA and in which it was unlikely that the graduates would work in libraries—e.g., programs in information management. As in the name change, it remains to be seen if the membership will change. If ALISE begins to conduct programs designed to appeal to wider and less library-oriented audiences and to provide professional services to these members it may become a more broadly oriented organization that will address professional and education issues from an enlarged perspective.

#### **Future Developments**

There are a number of probable future directions for ALISE that have the potential of drastically changing the organization and its impact upon education for library and information science education. How these developments take place can increase the strength and stature of the organization, or if poorly handled they can erode the progress made in the last twelve to fifteen years.

#### *A Change in Secretariat*

Since about 1968 ALISE has maintained a permanent secretariat. A single person has functioned as both executive secretary of the organization and assistant editor of the journal with principal responsibility for

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production, printing, and distribution of the publication. The association has been very fortunate in having such a position because it has significantly increased the visibility and the effectiveness of the organization. The history of ALISE is filled with reports of decisions made but never implemented, of committees authorized but never appointed. With the creation of a permanent secretariat, albeit part-time, the association has gained some consistency in its actions and a permanent mailing address. This assistance has been provided on terms that were favorable to both the association and the person filling the position.

In the present secretariat, the emphasis probably has been on the secretarial rather than on the executive. Some ALISE officers and board members have thought that this was appropriate. Others have felt that the association needed more executive leadership than could be provided by elected officers who have full-time positions elsewhere and that the association really needed an executive director who could represent the group in national conclaves, address and raise issues for the board, and be an effective spokesperson in Washington and Chicago. At the same time, the current financial structure of ALISE probably precludes it from seeking a full-time person at any level and certainly it precludes seeking one with executive abilities. ALISE also has a great deal of secretarial work that must be done. It is doubtful that an arrangement as advantageous to the association as the present one can be found. How ALISE handles the future of its secretariat is a crucial question for the association to resolve.

### *New Directions for JELIS*

The association's journal has developed a reputation as a scholarly publication, principally through the selection of a series of able editors. The journal attracts enough paid subscriptions to operate at a near break-even position with relatively little subsidy from the association. It is indexed in a number of major indexing services and is well received by the membership and by the field.

It would seem likely that as the association becomes more broadly purposed there would be similar expectations for its journal. There has always been some tension between the journal's balance as a scholarly publication and as a house organ. The journal has also tended to reflect the association's teaching orientation. Thus one finds many articles about teaching methods, student recruitment and retention, and concerns of library school faculty. The journal faces the difficult problem of addressing the newer and broader concerns of the association while at the same time retaining the loyalty and interest of its present readers and contributors.

### *International Efforts*

ALISE has long been interested in increasing its international affiliations and memberships. To further this goal it created the membership category of "International Affiliate Institutional Member" and has sought affiliations from foreign library schools and library school instructors. International visitors are always welcomed and recognized at ALISE meetings, and the association publishes a list of faculty members qualified to teach in foreign languages. By fall 1984 the association had attracted five foreign associate member institutions—three from the United Kingdom and one each from Nigeria and Pakistan.

If ALISE continues to attract foreign institutional and individual members it certainly will increase its visibility and its influence. ALISE could attract grants to support international projects and to facilitate exchanges of American and international library and information science educators. Such ventures would provide opportunities for the association to increase its impact upon library education.

### **Relationships with Other Organizations**

Even though ALISE's principal external organizational relationships have been with ALA, ALISE has maintained useful relationships with a variety of organizations and these relationships have increased in recent years. ALISE was an early member of the Council of National Library Associations and for a brief time an associate member of the American Council of Learned Societies.

More recently, in keeping with its international interests, ALISE has been a member of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) and has sponsored a representative to the Library Schools Section and had a representative on the U.S. committee for the IFLA conference in Chicago in 1985. In the international arena, ALISE has a representative to the Organization of American States (OAS) and to the International Relations Committee of the American Library Association. For several years ALISE maintained membership in the Council of Communication Societies but dues increases and limited gains for ALISE caused it to drop the membership.

ALISE had for many years and has now resumed a membership in the American National Standards Institute/National Information Standards Organization committee on library and information industry standards. Within the American Library Association, ALISE has a representative on the Standing Committee On Library Education (SCOLE) who regularly reports to the ALISE board and seeks advice on ALISE's

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position on various matters. ALISE also has a standing committee on liaison with the Society of American Archivists that has not been very active but that might become important as library schools increase their course offerings in archives. In recent years ALISE has devoted attention to its affiliation with the American Society for Information Science (ASIS), particularly to the ASIS committee and interest groups on education for information science. Many ALISE members also belong to ASIS and several ALISE members have served as ASIS president.

It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of these various liaisons, representatives, and memberships. Some would appear to be of more symbolic than actual importance but even symbolism can have significance. The IFLA association is one to which ALISE attaches great importance as measured by its willingness to contribute increasing sums to maintain the relationship. The relationship with SCOPE also appears important, based on the time the ALISE Board of Directors devotes to hearing and discussing its representative's reports. Other relationships that are less actively pursued are dependent upon the interest and enthusiasm of the ALISE representative and frequently upon the availability of external support to provide whatever travel and communication costs may be involved in maintaining the relationship.

For the past five years or so ALISE has served as a convener for heads of other information organizations who have met to discuss their common concerns. One product of these discussions has been the development of "Guidelines for Practices and Principles in the Design, Operation and Evaluation of Student Field Experiences in Library and Information Science" that were developed through discussion within this group, approved by the parent organizations, and published by ALISE. Plans for the accreditation conference were also discussed within the group. It is doubtful that these discussions will take on formal structure and the group has decided to keep them on an as-needed basis, but they have the potential to address problems and concerns of several of these agencies.

In 1984—with the support of a grant from the H.W. Wilson Foundation—ALISE convened a conference on accreditation that included representatives of seventeen organizations and concerned the structure, scope, and finance of accreditation in library and information science. The conference focused on whether a new structure could be evolved that would represent the interests of all of the relevant groups, provide a mechanism for governing accreditation, and produce a financial structure to support it. The conference met for three days and its proceedings have been published.<sup>5</sup> At its close it was announced that the ALA Committee on Accreditation also had received a grant from the

U.S. Department of Education to consider ways of implementing the concerns identified in the conference. Since the ALA/COA project is still underway and involves a multiplicity of organizations in the field it remains to be seen whether the ideas germinated at the ALISE conference will bear fruit. Certainly the accreditation conference is one of ALISE's major efforts in working with other organizations in many years. It also represents the ongoing interest of ALISE and other organizations in having an increased voice in accrediting programs in library and information science education. As a relatively small organization with limited financial resources, ALISE may well find the cost of maintaining liaison with other associations beyond its means and it may be forced to become much more selective in those relationships it maintains.

### Summary

One must conclude, as did Davis, that ALISE has had an impact upon library and information science education although that impact was less significant than it might have been because of a lack of organizational identity and leadership.<sup>6</sup> The major contribution for much of ALISE's history has been providing a forum for dialogue about education among leaders and instructors in accredited programs and in associated programs. ALISE has contributed to improvements in teaching by maintaining its interest groups and publications which have allowed teachers to share ideas on an ongoing basis.

In the 1970s and 1980s ALISE appears to have heeded Davis's advice, to have broadened its activities, and to have increased its impact on the field as a whole. Indicators of this new more activist stance may be seen in policy statements on member concerns and an increased publications program.

### *Policy Statements on Member Concerns*

Policy statements have been issued on: "The Accreditation Process," "Standards for the Development of Sixth Year Programs," "Position Statement on the Role of Graduate Programs in Library and Information Science and Higher Education," and "Elements of a Federal Legislative Program for Library Education." These policy statements have been widely distributed and the statement on the role of graduate programs was adopted in large part by ALA. These policies have extended ALISE's influence and recognition beyond its members and have been a healthy exercise for the association members who served on the task forces.

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### *Increased Publications Program*

In addition to its journal, ALISE has increased its publications program. In addition to publishing the policy statements its most significant publication has been an annual compilation of statistics on library education that has been issued since 1980. These statistics are the only ones available since ALA/COA ceased a similar publication in the 1970s. The ALISE statistical compilation has been valuable to the schools for comparative purposes and has been cited frequently in publications describing library education programs. The organization has also prepared a task force report on the implications of the White House Conference on Library and Information Services for library education and another on the accreditation process. The heightened publications activity has increased the organization's visibility and extended its influence beyond the membership.

Overall it can be concluded that ALISE has recognized that continuing to function as a small closed society, regardless of the interest and devotion of its members, would inevitably cause it to have limited impact and influence. As a result the organization now seeks to achieve influence through contacts developed and maintained with other professional associations and through the development, adoption, and promulgation of policies and publications on issues falling within its broader scope of concern. At the same time the organization has sought to broaden its membership by liberalizing its membership policies to attract new domestic audiences and international members. If these strategies continue to be pursued, and the secretariat is strengthened, it would be reasonable to predict that early in the 1990s ALISE would be a stronger and more effective organization than at any time in its history.

## **References**

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