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# Special Library Education and Continuing Education in Canada

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## ABSTRACT

THE BUSINESS OF PROVIDING and managing information in today's changing economy is in a state of constant flux. This is as true for special librarians in Canada as it is for those in the United States. This article will take a comprehensive look at special library education and continuing education within the accredited library school programs in Canada. The state of special library education in light of changes in the profession and in the marketplace will be assessed. What does an employer expect from a newly graduated special librarian? How should special librarians continue to expand their capabilities and skills to include the broad education and training needs required in most information systems and services today? Finally, the article will conclude with some speculation on educational preparation for careers in special libraries for the future.

## INTRODUCTION

To discuss education for special librarianship in Canada is no easy task, since there is no standard throughout the nation, and, like many things in this country, it varies from province to province, city to city, school to school, association to association. As in the United States, special libraries have been an important aspect of the field of librarianship for about a hundred years, and courses have been geared to the special librarian for nearly as long, whether by the library associations or by the schools of librarianship.

For many years, courses called "Special Libraries" were part and parcel of the curricula of the two original library schools (McGill University and University of Toronto) and, when new schools were formed, they followed suit. These were usually elective courses, often taught by practitioners who worked as special librarians themselves. Students were usually required to choose one or more "type of library" course: public, college, university, children's, special, or a variant of these.

There was, of course, no guarantee that if a student took the course in special librarianship he or she would actually work in a special library. Then, as now, most organizations employing special librarians are looking simply for someone with a library or information science degree, if in fact they know enough to employ a librarian with professional education at all. A course in "special libraries" may be the perfect preparation for work in a special library, but the graduate may well find himself or herself in another type of library while the person working in the special library may never have taken such a course. Nonetheless, education for special librarianship is still available in one way or another in all the schools in Canada.

There are at present seven accredited schools of librarianship and a number of institutions which give training for library technicians. We shall deal here only with the former, since the latter rarely cover special librarianship in any specific way. The seven accredited schools are: School of Library and Information Studies at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia; Graduate School of Library and Information Studies, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec; École de bibliothéconomie et des sciences de l'information, Université de Montreal, Montreal, Quebec; Faculty of Library and Information Science, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario; School of Library and Information Science, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario; School of Library and Information Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta; and School of Library, Archival and Information Studies, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia (see Appendix A for information about these school and Appendix B for course content of the Canadian special library courses). Each of these schools has different emphases, different strengths, and a different approach to education for librarianship.

With the exception of the University of Western Ontario, which has a three-semester program, all the Canadian schools have two-year programs. This means that students spend the first year learning basics of librarianship, and there is usually a required core which probably includes cataloging, classification, bibliography, reference,

library automation in its various aspects, collection development, management, or some variation of these. The content of a course in special librarianship would depend on how much the students would already know in any one area and where emphasis would be needed. In one school, for example, time is spent discussing appropriate databases and how to evaluate and choose them. In another, such a topic is not touched upon.

## COURSES

Of the seven schools of library and information studies/science in Canada, six have specific courses in special librarianship, and the seventh, Dalhousie, provides a variety of options for students who wish to explore this type of library. Several schools report discussions about abandoning such a course along with other "type of library" courses, but, on the other hand, the Université de Montréal, which did abandon it in a revision of the curriculum some years ago, has recently reinstated it. The courses are taught either by sessional faculty who work in special libraries or faculty members with special library experience. There is a range of titles for these courses from a bald "Special Libraries" to "Management of Corporate and other Special Information Centres."

The methods of teaching are fairly standard and vary little from school to school. All emphasize reading and discussion, site visits, and interviews with special librarians. Most invite special librarians to speak to their classes. In most schools, the students have some form of project or paper. One school, Toronto, has a well-established practicum; students are assigned to a special library where they work on a special project as well as taking part in the activities of the library and reporting on them. At McGill and the Université de Montréal, students take part in a six-week simulation of the establishment of a new special library in a pharmacological firm. At Western Ontario, students use a seminar method using specific problems to prepare, solve, and discuss at each class.

Content of the courses is also relatively standard. All dwell on the philosophy of tailored service in the special library and the differences between special and other libraries. They all describe the importance of networking within the special library community, and the importance of associations and continuing education.

All courses stress the importance of a knowledge of management in the special library and the ability to fit into the organization of which the library is a part. They cover aspects of management such as staff: job descriptions, salaries, hiring, interviewing, performance appraisal; finance: budgeting, records, funding methods, chargeback; planning and evaluation: the why and how. Most examine

the environment in which the special library exists, studying the place of the library in the organization, the people to be served, analysis of needs, resources available within organizations, and internal networking. All deal in some way with services offered and how to market them. Some cover the automation of the library in some detail, and discuss hardware, software, databases available, and how to choose them. Some concentrate on collection development. A number discuss special services provided by some libraries: translation, archives, records management, publications, and so on. Some cover planning and selecting space, furniture, and equipment. Some discuss alternatives to special librarianship such as free-lancing, entrepreneurship, and so on.

The course descriptions, though detailed, do not, of course, show all the detail of the courses. Much is covered through observation of the work of the special libraries visited, through lectures by special librarians, and by the opportunity to ask them questions. Much more is learned in projects, papers, and activities such as case studies or games. What is special about special libraries is more an attitude than a collection of techniques, and this is what students need to learn from a course in special librarianship.

### OTHER APPROACHES

Dalhousie's School of Library and Information Studies has no course in special librarianship as such. Mary Dykstra, the director, describes the many ways in which a student can concentrate on special librarianship in his or her program at Dalhousie. They may choose a special library for their projects in such courses as "Collections Management," "Systems Analysis," "Database Management Systems," "Library Automation and Networking," "Library Promotion and Public Relations," and so on. They may specialize in a reading course on a topic such as prison libraries, bibliotherapy, or map librarianship. They may take one or two specialized courses on law libraries or health science libraries. They may take a combined MLIS/LLB—a combined degree of the library school and the law faculty. They may take up to four graduate courses in other departments thus fitting themselves for specialized library service in such fields as education, business administration, or environmental studies. They may take a course in management information systems in the School of Business Administration. They also have an opportunity to use the "Work Experience Programme" of 100 hours, a requirement for the degree, in a special library.

The earlier mentioned approaches are not, of course, confined to Dalhousie. Many other schools offer some or all of the mentioned opportunities in addition to their specific course in special

librarianship. These are all valid and valuable educational experiences for students who are interested in special librarianship.

In many aspects, the education of special librarians north of the forty-ninth parallel is no different from that of our neighbors to the south. In a general sense, it is true that the two-year master's program common in Canada is more supportive of developing many of the competencies that we have come to view as essential than a one-year program. The essence of the issue, however, whether one is north or south of that forty-ninth parallel, still remains the identification and encouragement of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to do the job in a special library.

This has not been a neglected area of library literature. Over the years, many highly qualified and well-respected practitioners and educators have addressed the issue of developments in special library education. In terms of what special librarians expect from and are looking for in recent graduates, however, there are some landmark works that deserve particular attention. Any discussion of library education must also take into account the impact of the recently revised American Library Association *Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies* (American Library Association, 1992). In the special library field, we should also look at the Special Libraries Association's input into the process of developing the accreditation standards and the status of the final product. Finally, new initiatives such as SLA's *Report from the Presidential Study Commission on Professional Recruitment, Ethics and Professional Standards* (Special Libraries Association, 1992) will help point the way toward the future.

In 1986, Miriam Tees surveyed over 400 special librarians in order to determine and identify what these librarians required new graduates to know. The results of the study were not particularly surprising. Over 98 percent of respondents felt that the "ability to communicate orally" was an essential skill. Communication skills and reference skills ranked very high on the scale of the new graduate's needs, lending further credence to the current preoccupation with marketing skills. Management skills were also considered very important by respondents, along with knowledge of computer capabilities, research skills, professional ethics, and an "attitude of service." Certainly these are attributes that will always remain essential. However, it is also interesting to note that financial management—identifying costs, developing a budget, controlling expenditures, accounting—was judged only moderately important as were human resource management skills. Perhaps the intervening years and new economic realities have conspired to shift some focus toward how we manage people and money. Other concerns enunciated in Tees's study remain

current. Many people were interested in the area of recruitment into the profession and, indeed, felt that the type of person is more important than the skills and knowledge that individuals learn in school. Another issue was the desirability of an internship/practicum as an essential part of the education of the special librarian, either as a requirement or as an option for those with no working experience in information work.

Further to the Tees survey, SLA published another study dealing with competencies unique to the information professional within a special library (Special Libraries Association, 1991a). In contrast to the previous work, this publication compared the competencies that may be needed in special libraries of different sizes. While it is evident that a professional in a one-person library will probably need different skills from the manager of a large facility, it is remarkable to note that there were more similarities in the librarian competencies reported here than differences. Four different-sized types of libraries were examined: the one-person/one-professional library, the mid-sized special library, large corporate information centers, and branch libraries. The attributes or characteristics held in common by all to be desirable were the oft-mentioned "attitude of service," enthusiasm, learning the techniques that lead to excellence, the ability to set and maintain high standards, marketing and "salesmanship" skills, and, of course, high-level communication skills. Interestingly enough, it is in this study that the concept of information professionals requiring the ability to analyze, assess, and package an information product is stated in more than one instance. Financial management and human resource skills are judged to be of more importance than in the earlier Tees survey. Each of the four authors within the study appears to assume that, since the task of the special librarian is to provide information, the competencies required are focused on this activity. Information or knowledge skills at a very high level are therefore an absolute necessity and an accepted base upon which all other competencies and skills will be built. Many library managers in larger settings do very little "information" work and find themselves spending all their time in management and marketing functions. However, in one-professional and mid-sized libraries, managers also participate in the actual access and provision of information to the clients as well as interpreting the information function to the organization. Librarians, therefore, must have three "areas" of competencies:

1. "Information"-related and technological skills:

These skills include the so-called "traditional" abilities of selecting, acquiring, controlling, and disseminating, as well as the ability

to carry out a reference interview, to develop search strategies, and to do online searching. The librarian must also have knowledge of information sources and either in-depth subject expertise or the willingness to acquire subject specialization. The knowledge and use of new technologies in acquiring, organizing, and providing information is essential, as is the ability to develop new and appropriate information systems within a given organization;

2. Management skills:

The librarian must be able to manage in circumstances that may vary due to size of the parent organization, number of information professionals employed, economic strictures and realities, or any other environmental change. Included within the management functions are the abilities to plan, organize, supervise, budget, and market or sell not only the information function, but the abilities of librarians to control that function. For if others outside the information center control its management, there probably will be little corporate support for its continuance;

3. "Attitude" skills:

It is in this area that we find the competencies most often referred to in surveys and studies. A professional attitude, commitment to service, enthusiasm, the ability to communicate, idealism, vision, flexibility, dedication, motivation—these characteristics or attributes have variously been identified as leading to success in librarianship. As Guy St. Clair, a former president of the Special Libraries Association, has suggested, there are "those characteristics—excellence in the service we provide, efficiency in the management of our operations, and enthusiasm in our organization and delivery of information—which will define us in the future (1991, p. 2).

All of these competencies, characteristics, and skills must be obtained and demonstrated at the highest possible level. Service to users should be the first and only consideration for a special library. Consequently, it still holds true that perfect answers to questions will always be the best marketing tool.

There is, therefore, a certain amount of unanimity within the profession in North America as to what competencies a special librarian should possess. How should this consensus of opinion be translated into reality? Apart from what is being taught in the present, what must be taught in the future? The recent revision of ALA's *Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies* (American Library Association, 1992) is a necessary starting point for any consideration of graduate programs of education. The four-year (1988-1992) revision process gave ample

opportunity for interested and involved individuals and associations to provide input into particular areas of concern. The Special Libraries Association submitted responses to both the first and final drafts of the revised standards. The standards themselves apply to the evaluation of graduate programs of library and information studies that lead to a master's degree and are organized around six topics: (1) mission, goals, and objectives; (2) curriculum; (3) faculty; (4) students; (5) administration and financial support; and (6) physical resources and facilities. SLA's concerns centered around the first three areas of the standards and reflect many special librarian's educational interests. In general, the SLA responses to ALA indicated that the standards should try to ensure that the basic skills and competencies of the information professionals as they emerge from the graduate program will enable them to approach the job market with enthusiasm and confidence. In particular, SLA was pleased to see that the standards recognize as essential the educational policy statements of relevant associations. In fact, SLA's *Graduate Education Position Statement* (Special Libraries Association, 1992) clearly outlines areas of study that should be included in each library school's curriculum. The revised standards also recognize the principles of specialization and a greater awareness of the importance of other disciplines. The addition of an emphasis on the analysis, interpretation, evaluation, and synthesis of information (within Standard II) also represents an important change. The inclusion of assertiveness in the delivery of service is another change to Standard II (curriculum) that is welcome to special librarians. However, SLA's response included the comment that "we recommend that this be expanded to address assertiveness in anticipating and evaluating services as well. It is in anticipating the needs of users, and delivering appropriate services and value added data that the library can make the greatest impression on users and parent organizations" (Special Libraries Association, 1991c, p. 1).

The standards, therefore, suggest and encourage library schools in both Canada and the United States to make use of statements of knowledge and competencies developed by relevant professional organizations in the study of services and activities in specialized fields. Clearly, those schools offering courses in special librarianship should be consulting SLA's *Graduate Education Position Statement* that was developed in 1988 and revised in 1992. SLA has also, however, begun a much more comprehensive analysis of the relationship among recruitment, ethics, standards, and professional education. This Presidential Study Commission (PREPS Commission), begun by Guy St. Clair in his presidential year (1991-92), encourages SLA to become much more proactive in its connections with library schools. The

PREPS Commission report includes nine recommendations specifically addressed to educational concerns and includes efforts aimed at schools that currently do not offer courses in special librarianship. The impression given by the PREPS report is that, if SLA cooperates more fully with ALA in the field of accreditation, it will be able to capitalize on its position as an active participant in the education of information professionals. SLA would also like to be able to provide more visible support to those programs that do offer exemplary "special libraries" courses. In these days of library school closures, perhaps being able to demonstrate the value of a worthwhile program will be of use to library schools. Of course, SLA has a natural interest in attracting and, more importantly, retaining students as members in the association, as well as having more substantial input into the education process of all potential librarians. As noted in a previous study (Tees, 1986), special librarians have been concerned with recruitment into the profession for some time. Indeed, some employers have gone as far as to say that the type of person recruited into the profession is as important as the skills and competencies they acquire along the way. The PREPS Commission also views the area of attracting what is referred to as "the best and the brightest" into special librarianship as a high priority. It is hoped that, apart from the expanded visibility among a variety of employers, career and guidance counselors, teachers and academics, regarding what a special library is and what special librarians do, active recruitment policies will encourage students entering library school with an established awareness of special librarianship to demand courses geared specifically to this subject. Schools which already offer such courses will be encouraged to expand them, while schools which do not offer them will face the choice of instituting such courses or losing potential students.

#### LIFELONG LEARNING

Continuous education, both within the confines of the library schools and without, is another increasingly important area of concern for information professionals. Special librarians in particular have a need for professional development opportunities in librarianship as well as in management, technology, and other subject-specific areas of interest. Philosophically, it is apparent that the shift to a global economy will require a well-educated, technically literate workforce. In order to gear ourselves to this new "intellect-intensive" economy, education and training—especially continuous education and retraining—have to be included in our "shopping list" of educational requirements for future information professionals. This process of continuous improvement is perhaps even more critical, if possible,

in times of economic hardship. Effecting change in education and attitudes to education is not a short-term or "good times" project. Learning must be accepted as a lifelong process. Effective continuous education should be the norm rather than the exception. Should we as a society be fortunate enough to succeed in making education and training an ongoing activity, we will be helping to create a culture that accepts change as the norm—a culture that will be able to move quickly to meet the challenges of the 1990s and beyond.

In a more practical vein, how should special librarians contribute to the creation of a workforce ready and able to deal with future (and imminent) economic realities? Do special librarians appreciate the need for never-ending professional growth and development? Do special librarians want to participate in continuous education programs and courses? The answer to this last question is that, according to SLA membership participation rates as well as formal responses to needs assessment surveys and evaluations, special librarians do indeed recognize the crucial need for up-to-date effective educational services. The results of the Special Libraries Association "Super Surveys" of 1986 and 1991 (Special Libraries Association, 1991b) indicate that the top priority of the membership is continuing education, both at the annual conference and through ongoing professional development. Generally speaking, approximately 25 percent of SLA's over 14,000 members participates in a professional development offering in any given year, and the awareness factor of continuing education courses, again as measured by the 1991 "Super Survey," is over 80 percent of the entire membership. It is evident that SLA's membership both participates in and requires a vital and innovative professional development program. The growth of our profession will result from efforts to constantly improve ourselves. We must continue to foster the gains we have made in the area of professional development and to nurture our considerable investment in the education and continuous improvement of the profession. The PREPS Commission also focuses on continuous education as an area for further effort and expansion, and it is interesting to note that cooperation with library schools is also a suggested avenue for future growth. Certainly in Canada, there is no unanimity regarding library school participation in ongoing professional development. Some schools carry on extensive continuous education programs and others do not offer anything. This perhaps is an area that potential special librarians could pay attention to when looking for an appropriate graduate program. The very fact that many special librarians find themselves in a one-person/one-professional situation makes it imperative for them to have access to other educational opportunities.

## THE FUTURE

Education for special librarians in Canada and the United States is very similar. Perhaps the two-year master's program lends itself to more in-depth and extensive "type-of-library" courses, but this is not a certainty. It is, however, a certainty that education for special librarians must continue to keep pace with advances in technology and management. We need information professionals who are assertive and forward-looking. The educational process must be more responsive to changing issues in higher education, as well as the constantly shifting realities of the marketplace. A recent report from the ALA Special Committee on Library School Closings (American Library Association, 1991, p. 2) echoes these concerns. The report identifies the "perception that librarianship has not established a niche in the information marketplace amidst the rapidly growing numbers and kinds of information agencies" (p. 2). The profession must begin to address the problem by ensuring that our basic skills and competencies are not merely adequate but are excellent and, indeed, superior. Accredited library schools must be contemporary forward-looking institutions with an awareness of changing employment markets that will consequently be translated into the creation of courses of study that will prepare graduates for new roles, as well as existing ones. A market-driven orientation within the library schools could create a competitive advantage for future information professionals. Effective ties should also be made with related key disciplines such as management and computer science. These relationships with other areas of academic institutions will not only lead to a more proactive monitoring of changes in the information environment, they will also enable library schools to maintain more central roles within their institutions and will possibly help them avoid some of the pitfalls that potentially lead to closure. The educational process in both Canada and the United States must begin to respond to the evolving needs of those institutions and organizations that will hopefully employ future graduates. This is especially valid for special librarians and the future of special libraries.

## APPENDIX A

### THE SCHOOLS AND COURSES

Dalhousie University. School of Library and Information Studies.

Mary Dykstra, Director

No course in Special Librarianship

McGill University. Graduate School of Library and Information Studies.

J. A. Large, Director

Miriam Tees, Instructor. Lorna Rees-Potter to teach it in 1993/94

Course: Special Libraries

Université de Montréal. École de bibliothéconomie et des sciences de l'information.

Marcel Lajeunesse, directeur

Céline Armette, responsable

Course: Création, organisation et évaluation de bibliothèques spécialisées

University of Toronto. Faculty of Library and Information Science

Adele Fasick, Dean

Joanne G. Marshall, Instructor

Course: Management of Corporate and Other Special Information Centres.

University of Western Ontario. School of Library and Information Science.

Catherine Ross, Acting Dean

Instructor: n/a

Course: Management of Special Libraries and Information Services

University of Alberta. School of Library and Information Studies.

Sheila Bertram, Director

Robin Minion, Instructor

Course: Special Libraries and Information Centres.

University of British Columbia. School of Library, Archival and Information Studies.

Peter Simmons, Acting Director

Diana Broome, Instructor

Course: Special Libraries and Information Centres.

## APPENDIX B

## CONTENT OF COURSES IN SPECIAL LIBRARIANSHIP

	McGill	Montréal	Toronto	Western Ontario	Alberta	British Columbia
<i>Special Librarianship</i>						
Philosophy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Diversity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Networking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Associations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Publications	✓			✓		
Freelance	✓	✓			✓	✓
History					✓	
Canadian status			✓			
<i>Organization served</i>						
Needs assessment	✓	✓		✓		✓
Resources available	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Place of library	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Internal networks			✓			✓
<i>Services</i>						
Assessment of need	✓	✓				✓
Priorities	✓	✓				✓
Reference/ Searching			✓	✓		✓
<i>Collections</i>						
Needs assessment	✓	✓		✓		✓
Organization			✓	✓	✓	✓
Proprietary material	✓			✓		✓
Storage, weeding						✓
<i>Computerized aspects</i>						
Type needed	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Future			✓			
Online databases			✓			✓
<i>Management</i>						
Duties of managers			✓	✓		
Status of librarian Staff:	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Types and levels	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Job descriptions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Salaries	✓	✓		✓		✓
Hiring/Firing	✓	✓	✓	✓		

	McGill	Montréal	Toronto	Western Ontario	Alberta	British Columbia
Interviewing	✓	✓	✓			
Relation to org.	✓	✓		✓		
<b>Finance:</b>						
Funding methods	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Budget	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Records	✓	✓				
Cost of information					✓	✓
Chargeback	✓	✓	✓	✓		
<b>Evaluation:</b>						
Why evaluate			✓	✓		
Reports	✓	✓	✓			
How to evaluate	✓	✓	✓			
<i>Marketing</i>						
Why	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tools and techniques	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Space management</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Special services</i>						
Archives				✓	✓	✓
Records management			✓	✓		✓
Translation						✓
Publications			✓			✓
Training support						

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