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Fifty years of library and information science education in Iceland

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Abstract

Instruction in library and information science (LIS) at the University of Iceland began in 1956 making the year 2006 the 50th anniversary. A new chapter in the history of the LIS Department began when a formal Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) program was launched in 2004 under the leadership of Prof. Anne Clyde. Dr Clyde came to the department 15 years ago. She brought with her from Australia new disciplines and a new outlook regarding the utility of the Internet as 'a library without walls'. She was instrumental in designing the master's program.

Methods in LIS have changed drastically in conjunction with rapid developments in information technology. These changes are reflected in the courses being offered. More emphasis is now placed on ties with the outside world, the profession and with industry. The objective is to meet demands for knowledge and skills in industry without reducing academic requirements.

By the end of 2005 a total of 448 students had graduated in LIS from the University of Iceland with a BA degree. Two students have so far finished their MLIS degree.

Introduction

The beginning of instruction in library and information sciences (LIS) at the University of Iceland dates back to 1956 and LIS instruction has therefore continued without interruption for half a century. A major step forward was taken in 2004 with the formalization of the Master of Library and Information Sciences program (MLIS) in the Department of Library and Information Sciences in the Faculty of Social Sciences. The beginning of this article briefly traces the history and development of the course of study from its inception at the University of Iceland until the present. Following this introduction the article discusses the quality assessment that was carried out, improvements and future outlook, increased emphasis on research, and the relation of the course to the wider world. The article continues with an account of the changed emphases in the course and the work of librarians, and presents the policy and main objective of the Department of Library and Information Sciences. The concluding section covers the course of study as it is today, especially the MLIS program, and new course directions in the Department of Library and Information Sciences.

The first steps in the Faculty of Philosophy

Instruction in library science began in 1956 in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Iceland. The university librarian at the time, Bjorn Sigfusson, was the first to direct instruction. The students who first studied library science were especially those who had studied Icelandic or history. In the beginning the main emphasis was on teaching subject classification and cataloguing of works, bibliography and reading manuscripts. Emphasis was also placed on in-service training and practice, and the course was intended as supplementary to a university degree in another field of study.

In 1957 the first two students completed the first stage in library science at the University of Iceland, or the equivalent of one academic year (two semesters) in the subject. In subsequent years a few more students attended and when instruction for the BA degree in library science began in 1963-1964 a total of 13 students had completed one to two stages of the study. In 1964 the first student was granted a BA in library science, thus leading to the recognition of the course as an independent field of study at the University of Iceland (Olgeirsson, 2004) which is usually completed in three academic years.

To begin with, the study of library science existed under difficult conditions and all courses were taught only by part time instructors. The field had no permanently appointed staff until Sigrun K. Hannesdottir was appointed assistant professor in 1975.

What especially influenced development and improvement of the discipline was the establishment of Association of Professional Librarians in 1973. One of the association's goals was to strengthen education in the subject. The association urged the requirement that the course in library science at the University of Iceland be reviewed. As a result, two foreign specialists, Dr G. Edward Evans from Denver, Colorado, and Douglas J. Foskett from Great Britain, were invited to produce proposals for the future organization of the course of study in 1974. The Association of Professional Librarians also appointed a committee to present proposals concerning the organization of the course. Although the proposals from these various parties differed in many respects, they were in agreement on the need for a tenured instructor in library science (Hannesdottir, 1996).

Library Science remained within the Faculty of Philosophy until the Faculty of Social Sciences was established at the University of Iceland at the beginning of the last quarter of the twentieth century. At that point the course of study was transferred to the new faculty, where it has grown and flourished, taking into account the myriad changes that have taken place in the field's working environment.

Transfer to the Faculty of Social Sciences

The Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Iceland was established in September, 1976. The new faculty was comprised of sociology, political science, anthropology, library science, psychology and child development and education (Sigfusdottir, 1997).

Within the Faculty of Social Sciences the Library Science flourished and in 1977 a second lecturer was hired. For most of the time, continuing until the present, three permanent instructors have taught at the department at the same time. In addition to permanent staff a considerable number of part time instructors have taught LIS over the years. In recent years three permanent staff members have taught in the department: Dr L. Anne Clyde, professor; Agusta Palsdottir, assistant professor, appointed in 1997; and Jóhanna Gunnlaugsdóttir, assistant professor, appointed in 1999. After the untimely death of Dr Clyde on the 18th of September, 2005, the department now has only two assistant professors, in addition to Kristin Osk Hlynisdottir, who was appointed adjunct (permanent part time teacher) to take over the courses that Dr Clyde had taught. At the same time ten people are registered as part time teachers in the department. The department has been fortunate in having been able to enjoy the assistance of foreign guest lecturers from Australia, the US and Great Britain.

Dr L. Anne Clyde worked as a guest lecturer in the Department of Library and Information Sciences during the academic year of 1990 - 1991. On the 1st of January, 1993, she became associate professor in the department, and on the 1st of April, 1996, she was appointed professor. Dr Clyde's contribution to the department and therefore to the field of LIS in Iceland was considerable, and her contribution covered the teaching, research and management aspects of the field. Dr Clyde was a trailblazer in the development of teaching in the department during the last decade, especially regarding instruction on the use of the Internet and searching through databases. In this respect she introduced a new academic area into the course work and her expertise ensured that the courses met international criteria for excellence. Dr Clyde's courses were popular and attended not only by students in LIS but also those in other subjects, both Icelanders and foreign students.

Furthermore, Dr Clyde carried out important research in her field. She wrote books and authored a large number of scientific papers that were published in international journals. She played a large part in the field of LIS internationally and was the representative of the University of Iceland at the Nordic Research School in Library and Information Science, NORSLIS.

During her last years Dr Clyde was especially active in the development and creation of new course directions in the Department of Library and Information Sciences, not least her unselfish work to organize the new master's level program leading to the MLIS degree. Ten years before Dr Clyde had, however, pushed for an assessment of the instruction in the Department of Library and Information Sciences with the objective of better organizing the course of study.

Quality assessment and improvements

In June 1995 a report by the external review team was made public. The report was part of a European project that presented the results of a quality assessment of the teaching in library science in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Iceland. The results of the report were in many respects positive for the field of library science. The assessment found that the department had good teachers, that the teaching facilities were good, that the students were pleased with the teaching and that

their job prospects after graduating were good. Relations with other countries were considered the department's main strength. The teaching staff had all been educated abroad and had maintained connections with those universities and countries where they had received their education. In addition, it was considered that the ties with foreign professional associations and organizations were rather strong.

The conclusions of the report presented several aspects that could be improved. The report pointed out that there was a shortage of office personnel and other assistants to support the operation of the department. This shortage meant that the time invested by the teaching staff was not sufficiently well utilized for research and that as regards research studies the department was rather weak. Further collaboration with the National and University Library of Iceland was recommended. Furthermore, it was felt that the department's policy formulation should be more clearly stated (Library and Information Science Programme at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Iceland: Report of the external review team, 1995).

Unfortunately financing has not been available for the department to appoint more permanent teaching staff. Efforts continue unabated within the department to obtain more financing in order to hire more teachers and to increase course offerings. There is considerable optimism concerning financing as the MLIS program has been formally approved and the outlook is that a considerable number of students will be graduated in coming semesters. The agreement between the Ministry of Education and the University of Iceland on research specifies that the division of funds between the department and the faculties shall, among other things, take into account the number of graduating master's and doctoral candidates. The department in question will therefore be granted a considerable sum of money for each student who completes a master's or doctorate in the discipline (Agreement between the Ministry of Education and the University of Iceland on research..., 2003).

It is important to strengthen research activity within the Department of Library and Information Sciences where the permanent instructors devote a considerable number of hours on research in the various fields of information science. Examples of the topics of research conducted include:

- the use of information from the Internet and other electronic media;
- Icelanders' everyday life information behaviour in regard to health and lifestyle;
- the implementation and use of electronic records management systems in Icelandic organizations;
- knowledge management (KM) systems;
- tracking information in Icelandic companies that have received accreditation according to ISO 9000 quality standards; and
- school libraries.

Students in the department's new MLIS program carry out research, in the fields of information literacy, KM, RIM and in libraries, to give a few examples.

The department's instructors have also participated in conferences in the social sciences that are generally held annually at the University of Iceland. Furthermore, they present the results of their research at Icelandic, multinational and international

conferences, write papers published in accredited journals or books in the field of LIS, RIM, total quality management (TQM) and KM.

The Research Centre in Library and Information Sciences was established in 1986 and was an active research base for more than a decade. Unfortunately the centre was discontinued due to the shortage of funds. The main role of the centre was to strengthen theoretical and practical research in the area of LIS and to support the publication of works such as manuals and bibliographies (Hannesdottir, 1997). Should the department's financial prospects brighten it would be a worthwhile project to re-establish the operation of the centre with the intent of increasing research activities, both in the department and in the discipline.

The report of the external team urged more collaboration with the National and University Library of Iceland and much has been done accordingly to strengthen relations and increase co-operation with the library. In August 2004 a contract of co-operation was signed by the University of Iceland and the National and University Library of Iceland which specifies four main objectives. One of the objectives is 'to strengthen the library with a research institute in the area of bibliography and LIS, among other things, in collaboration with the Department of Library and Information Sciences in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Iceland'. The contract specifies a Committee of Collaboration to carry out the terms of the contract, with one of the committee's main roles being 'to see to executing the terms of the contract and related subcontracts and setting plans for carrying out the terms specified' (Contract of collaboration between the University of Iceland and the National and University Library..., 2004).

Collaboration has been established with other libraries and information centres: The National Archives of Iceland, The Reykjavik Municipal Archives, and the archives of various institutions and companies, including the archives of the Government Offices (the ministries). Furthermore, liaisons have been established with several companies, chiefly software firms. Collaboration with these entities must be further strengthened, and the department also needs to establish collaboration with other types of libraries. It is necessary to strengthen relations with foreign university faculties that offer courses in the discipline and with schools of LIS. The objective of such ties is to become acquainted with their courses and directions of development and the teaching and research that comparable universities teach and carry out. There is also interest in strengthening ties and increasing collaboration with domestic, foreign and international professional societies and associations in the fields of LIS, RIM and KM.

In response to the suggestions made by the authors of the 1995 report, work on stating the policy and objectives of the Department of Library and Information Sciences has been carried out and it is necessary that this work will be continued. Such work should of course be constantly reviewed. At the same time it is necessary to constantly keep up with changes in the field and, on this basis, to assess the quality and teaching of the courses offered.

Changed emphases in the course of study and the profession

Projects and methods in the field of LIS have undergone rapid changes in conjunction with the development of information technology (IT). In 1986 the name of the course of study was changed from library science to library and information sciences (LIS) to better reflect teaching in the field.

The course of study in LIS has undergone large changes in recent years. Emphasis has been placed on the relations with the national economy and adapting the field to the objectives and needs of the economy, while not reducing the academic requirements of the discipline. In response to the constant increase in the volume of information in electronic form, added weight has been applied to teaching about organizing and searching for information in databases and on the Internet. In recent decades there has been a steadily increasing need for systematic RIM in organizations because of the constantly increasing volume of information in various forms. The Department of Library and Information Sciences at the University of Iceland teaches a course in RIM, as is widely done in similar departments in universities in other countries. The department also offers courses in KM and TQM. These management methods are closely related to RIM and stress the importance of efficient record keeping, tracking and the correct use of information.

Nowadays LIS specialists in Iceland hold different types of jobs. They work as LIS specialists and directors of a large variety of types of libraries and collections and as record managers, web managers, quality managers and knowledge managers in companies and institutions, to name a few examples. Graduates in LIS have also established counselling firms and counselled companies and other organizations regarding the handling of information.

There has been good attendance at the courses of study offered by the Department of Library and Information Sciences, with 40 to 50 new students enrolling every year. At the end of 2005 there were 132 students enrolled in the department, of which 36 were registered for the MLIS program, according to information in December 2005 from the Student Registry of the University of Iceland.

The policy of the Department of Library and Information Sciences is to provide individuals with skills to enable them to perform effectively in their work careers and in the fields of research and teaching. In order to implement this policy the department offers courses that include all the necessary aspects of the discipline and related fields. Effort is made to continually reassess the course of study as a whole, course directions and specific courses within the department. Teaching in the Department of Library and Information Sciences is based on five main objectives:

- to graduate students who have the necessary knowledge and skills to work effectively in their field, both for public authorities and companies as well as private organizations;
- to encourage students to keep abreast of the rapid changes that are continually taking place in the field, and to keep up with the changes by participating in continuing education at the end of their university studies;

- to support students so that they are able to make use of their knowledge, after graduating, e.g., by giving courses and lectures at their workplace or other venues;
- to encourage students to carry out research and to realize that LIS and related disciplines constitute a relatively unploughed field as far as research is concerned; and
- to encourage students to enrol in further education and to give them a good background and understanding so that they are prepared to continue their studies.

In order to achieve the above objectives it is necessary always to offer a wide enough selection of courses and course directions. However, being able to do so is of course dependent in each case on financing and the availability of instructors capable able to implement the objectives (Gunnlaugsdóttir, 2005).

Course directions

In 1979 training to become a school librarian was first offered. In the same year teaching began in records management (RM) and in 1994 training as a specialist in RM was offered (University of Iceland, 1979; Kristinsson, 1994). By the end of 2005 a total of 448 students had graduated as LIS specialists from the University of Iceland (Association of Professional Librarians, 1998; University of Iceland, 2005), as can be seen in figure 1.

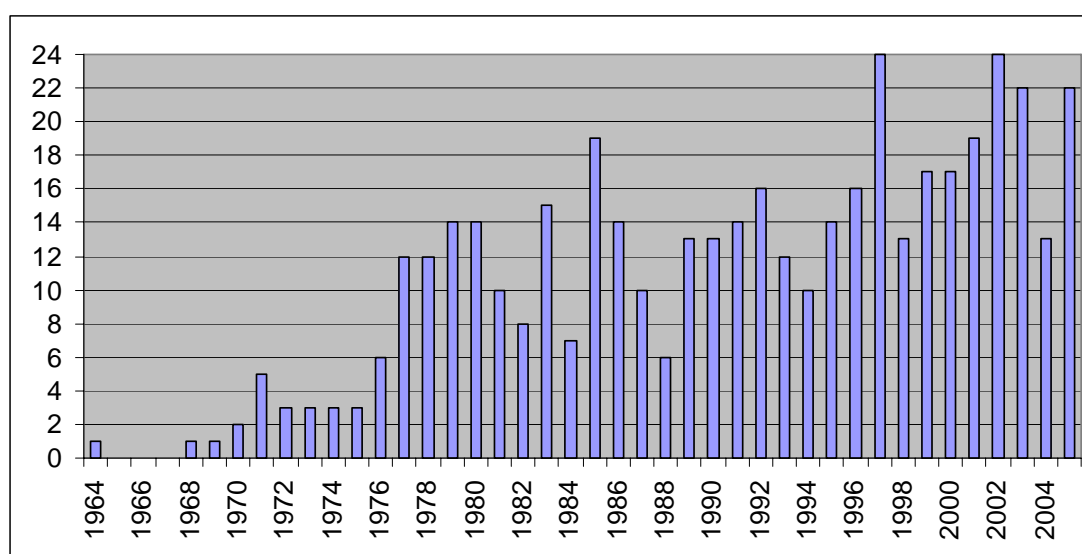


Figure 1 – Graduates in library and information sciences, University of Iceland, 1964-2005; total 448.

With enactment of the Law on the Profession of Librarians no. 97/1984 it was clear that those who had graduated in another field but had taken at least 60 credits in library science, the equivalent of two years of study, could call themselves specialists in library science. At that time a course of study was established to convey the right to work in the field of library science intended for those who had graduated in another field. In 2005 about 50 students had graduated with the right to work in this field

(Association of Professional Librarians, 1998; Faculty of Social Sciences, 2001; University of Iceland, 2005).

In 1996 the first student to have completed the MA degree in the course at the University of Iceland graduated, and by now a total of three have graduated. In the autumn semester of 2004 instruction began in the MLIS program in the department and two students have completed this degree.

Students in the field can now go abroad to foreign universities for part of their studies and Icelandic students have enrolled in courses in universities under the aegis of NORDPLUS and ERASMUS. In addition, foreign students have studied LIS at the University of Iceland.

Students may also enrol in foreign universities with which the University of Iceland has signed an agreement. In this connection, the University of Iceland is a participant in NORSLIS (Nordic Research School in Library and Information Science). The organization was established in 2004 in order to strengthen research study in LIS, especially at the doctoral level, in the Nordic and Baltic countries. NORSLIS took over from NordIS-NET (Nordic Information Studies Research Education NETwork), which was established in 1996 and was a co-operating network performing a role similar to that of NORSLIS.

More on course directions

In the basic course selection in LIS it is possible to choose between several different tracks. These lead to the BA degree and it is also possible to choose a specialty in two areas, school librarian and RIM.

As mentioned above a course has also been offered in LIS to lead to the right to work in the LIS field for those students who have completed the requirements for a university degree in another field. The new MLIS program will in the future replace this instruction for the right to work as LIS specialists.

In the Department of Library and Information Sciences it is possible to take an individualized, research-oriented MA degree which is intended for students who have completed the requirements for a BA in the field. Students must organize their course of study in consultation with their instructor and a special examination committee (Kristinsson, 2005).

It has still not become possible to establish a formal MA program for people with a BA in LIS. Hopefully it will be possible in the future to offer such graduates formalized advanced study, e.g., specialization in a defined field of information theory and related subjects. On the other hand, it should be realized that there are various possibilities for advanced study for this group, such as the MPA (Master of Public Administration) program in the Department of Political Science at the University of Iceland and the MBA (Master of Business Administration) program which is offered by the Faculty of Business Administration and Economics at the University of Iceland and at other universities. In addition, several universities offer courses leading to a diploma and LIS specialists have taken this type of course in management and company administration and in computer science, to name a few examples. In

conclusion it should be recognized that increasingly people with a BA degree in LIS have sought advanced study in other countries. In addition, students have specialized in other fields and at the same time have become acquainted with LIS coursework and teaching abroad in regular classes or via distance learning.

A great many consider it a good option for LIS specialists to concentrate on the subject knowledge of at least one area outside of the field of LIS, which in turn makes their work more meaningful and creates job opportunities for them (Gunnlaugsdóttir, 2004; Hjørland, 2002). It would therefore be sensible for LIS specialists with a BA degree in the field to acquire advanced study in another field and to make use of the increased possibilities that are now available in advanced study courses. By the same token, it is of considerable value for people who have graduated from university with a degree in another field to enrol in advanced study in LIS.

MLIS program

The academic year of 2004-2005 began with the teaching of a new graduate course in LIS, the MLIS program (Master of Library and Information Sciences). The MLIS program is intended for those who have completed their university training in a field other than LIS, for instance, students who have a BA in one of the various humanities or social sciences, a BEd degree in education or a BS degree in a natural science. The MLIS program will provide those who have specialized in another subject increased possibilities for interesting work, allowing them among other things, to work as LIS specialists, or as records managers, quality managers, knowledge managers and web editors. Completion of the MLIS program can thus give an initial university degree a considerably increased value (New and exciting course directions, 2004).

As explained, the MLIS program is intended to take the place of the BA level course leading to the right to work as a librarian, which has been offered in the Department of Library and Information Sciences for some years. Students who have completed this course, therefore, already have at least 150 credits in the basic course. It is disadvantageous for these students, in respect of appointment to a position and the possible salary, to have only a BA degree in comparison with those who have a university degree in a field other than LIS from the University of Iceland and who then go for an MLIS degree elsewhere, for example to the US or to Britain.

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of students with a degree in another subject who have enrolled in LIS. The program appropriately meets, on the one hand, the requirements of these university graduates and on the other the requirements of the university community and of the economy where work-related master's degrees are increasingly offered.

The MLIS program at the university of Iceland has been developed, taking into account international associations in the area of LIS and based on the *Standards for Library Schools Update: Report 1999* of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, the *Standards for Accreditation of Masters Programs in Library and Information Studies 1992* of the American Library Association, and the *Competencies for Special Librarians of the 21st Century* of the Special Libraries Association. Furthermore, the MLIS program is based on graduate study in other departments in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Iceland, including

the MPA (Master of Public Administration) program in the Department of Political Sciences and the MSW (Master of Social Work) program in the Department of Social Counselling (Clyde, 2004).

A proposal for the construction of the MLIS program was put together in the autumn of 2003 subsequent to a detailed discussion of the permanent staff of the department. A great deal of work was put into processing and shaping the proposal and this work was for the most part in the hands of Dr L. Anne Clyde who was the department chair for that semester. The proposal was agreed by the Research Committee of the Faculty of Social Sciences and by the Faculty Council in December 2003 and at the meeting of the Faculty of Social Sciences in January 2004 (Clyde, 2004). The proposal was agreed without changes and unanimously at all levels. In the autumn semester of 2004 students were admitted to the MLIS program for the first time.

The MLIS program has now been instituted at the University of Iceland. Effort was made to set up the project as best possible, but it is clear that many things could be done better. In order to utilize in the best way possible the appropriation that the department has been granted for the MLIS, some courses have been combined in part with teaching at the BA level. This method is, in fact, used widely in teaching other subjects at the University of Iceland, but the policy is to keep all teaching at different levels completely separated in the future. The program will, of course, be constantly assessed, both as to the structure of the teaching and the courses offered. An important way to further develop the program in an effective way is to turn to professionals in the field and within the field's professional associations. Departmental strategy must include collaborating with professionals with the intent of increasing the quality and the effectiveness of the program.

Course of study

The course of study in LIS is varied and covers differing areas, including:

- management and operation of various types of libraries
- organization of information in whatever form, such as classification, indexing, and cataloguing of library holdings and sources
- information sources
- information services and assessment of information
- information search and dissemination
- the Internet and computer use, web solutions and metadata
- databases, design and construction of databases
- RIM
- TQM
- KM
- shaping and dissemination of newer knowledge in library and information sciences and related subjects
- research in library and information sciences and related fields
- practical training in the various types of libraries.

In addition, courses are taught in methodology and procedures in the social sciences in other departments in the Faculty of Social Sciences which the students in the Department of Library and Information Sciences are expected to take. Instruction in

the courses is given in the form of lectures, individual and group projects where the students present their projects to other students and to teachers, practice in the computer centre, visit libraries, archives and records collections, and undertake field work under the guidance of LIS specialists.

Various faculties and departments at the University of Iceland offer courses that fit well with study in Department of Library and Information Sciences and students in the basic course have had courses taken in other faculties accredited for their studies in LIS. Furthermore, graduate courses in other subjects are very suitable for graduate students in the department. Such courses include service assessment in the Department of Child Development and Education, courses on management of cultural institutions in the Department of Political Science, courses on KM and management of human resources (HRM) in the Faculty of Business Administration and Economics, courses on TQM in the Faculty of Engineering, courses on copyrights, protection of personal rights and information technology in the Faculty of Law, as well as courses in research methods and methodology.

From this it can be seen that it is possible to choose among different paths in order to increase the variety of courses offered students in LIS. The field of LIS has also interesting courses and solutions to offer those in other fields. The fact is that a multidisciplinary approach to professional fields has greatly increased in recent years. Dr Irwin Feller, specialist in the assessment of university operations, considers, for example, that the walls between university faculties in international research universities are rapidly breaking down. Scientists in very different faculties are increasingly working together and are thus achieving new and unexpected results. Feller holds that 'future development consists, among other things, of having university faculties mix their disciplines' and that 'they need to combine their solutions in order to see the whole picture' (Role priorities of the University, 2004). In this connection the students at the University of Iceland should be in a strong position because of the variety of courses offered.

Conclusion

This article has given an account of the Department of Library and Information Sciences at the University of Iceland, the development of the course of study, its present standing, policy and objectives, and future plans. It is clear that much has been accomplished and that the discipline has developed in keeping with local requirements and the external environment. But more can be done. The course of study must be competitive in our modern competitive society. The report on the quality assessment of the status of the department produced ten years ago listed one of the most critical needs as hiring an additional fully qualified staff member. This is still a necessity, the more so after the untimely death of Dr L. Anne Clyde. If the objectives and the future of the department are to be realized the most burning issue is to hire more permanent instructors. This must be accomplished in the near future.

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