



# Continuing Education

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## Do We Need a New Paradigm?

Everywhere in both professional and popular literature we are reading about paradigm shifts—including that wonderful bumper sticker that cries, “Shift Happens!” Some of us believe strongly in the concept of paradigms; others wish that the word could be permanently excised from the language. This editor falls in the former camp, and this column explores whether library and information science (LIS) education needs to take seriously the notion of a paradigm shift in the information industry and consequently reflected in our curricula. Further, if we believe that fundamental change is upon us, should we not take another close—and hard—look at the overall structure of how we do business?

In the 1950s, LIS education underwent a paradigm shift when the model of the professional degree moved from the fifth year of undergraduate education to the master’s degree level. There were good and sufficient reasons to make this change, and the wisdom of the day built this master’s degree upon an assumption of a liberal arts undergraduate education. It was a time when libraries as institutions were a natural employer of LIS graduates, and the profession could breathe easy within this model.

Now, nearly a half century later, the LIS world has spun on its axis so many times—and with increasing speed—that those of us in LIS education are

quite dizzy. Perhaps it is time to be quiet and reflect on whether the model predicated on the master’s degree remains totally viable. For purposes of discussion, and in light of the extraordinary expansion of the information industry, I suggest the following fundamental change in the structure of LIS education.

### **Stage One: The Undergraduate Degree**

There are many aspects of the information industry for which a baccalaureate degree can be a reasonable level of education. Examples include:

- Directors of small public libraries (under 6,000 population served)
- Instructional media center staff in some public and private schools
- Some records-management personnel
- Some corporate positions working with information for which a BA/BS is required
- Support staff positions
- Information-and-referral centers in not-for-profit agencies

This is not an inclusive list, nor does it purport to say that a master’s degree would not be preferred in some cases. But it does indicate that there are jobs in the information industry that do not necessarily require master’s-level preparation. Types of coursework to be

found in an information studies *major* could include:

- A foundation-type of course/introduction to the field
- What has been traditionally taught as “skills” courses: reference, cataloging, collection development
- Sufficient courses in computer science to demonstrate competence
- Courses concerning human development, personality preferences, etc.

It is assumed that relevant technologies would be built into every course. Further, in order to ensure that the student majoring in information studies has sufficient subject background, there could also be a requirement for a *second major* in liberal arts.

### Stage Two: The Master's Degree

In this model, the master's degree is upgraded and represents true mastery of a given aspect of library and information studies. In order to be admitted to this course of study, certain coursework at the undergraduate level must be completed (see Stage One). Students entering a master's degree program would have the opportunity to focus on achieving depth in one or more areas of choice, such as:

- Services to a specific client group
- Information storage and retrieval
- Information systems
- Information-seeking behavior
- Collection development and management
- Library administration, etc.

Because the master's degree would be built upon a foundation established at the undergraduate level (or deficiencies removed before admission), the degree itself would not necessarily contain fewer course requirements. Rather, the requirements would be dif-

ferent and allow the student to specialize. In this model, what has been called the “specialist certificate” or “sixth year degree” would no longer be necessary.

The types of positions that would be best served by the master's degree include (but are not limited to):

- Library directors
- Librarians in larger public, school, academic, and special libraries
- Department heads

### Stage Three: The Ph.D.

The Ph.D would remain basically unchanged, as it is a research approach to a specific question or problem.

### Stage Four: Continuing Professional Education

The model is also built on an assumption that any LIS academic degree (whether at the baccalaureate or master's level) has an anticipated shelf life of three to five years. Therefore, as proposed in an earlier column, academic institutions have a responsibility to support their graduates throughout their work lives. Consequently, every LIS school needs an organized and relevant continuing education program to serve these graduates. Stage Four is the keystone to overall effectiveness and ties the other stages together.

In this proposed model, the undergraduate degree would become the professional entry (and therefore, *LIS programs offering such majors would also be accredited by COA*) and the master's degree would provide in-depth knowledge. Such a model allows for the increasing diversity of opportunities available to graduates of LIS programs. In addition, it would allow LIS schools to participate actively in the full range

of degrees offered by their parent institutions.

Do you agree with this approach? Do you want to defend the current model? Do you want to comment on or argue with any of the ideas presented here? Send your comments to the column editor.

Comments, suggestions, and potential column manuscripts may be sent to Darlene E. Weingand, School of Library and Information Studies, 4253 Helen White Hall, University of Wisconsin, 600 N. Park St., Madison, WI 53706.