

# UP SLIS UPHOLDING THE TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE IN LIS EDUCATION

Kathleen Lourdes B. Obille  
School of Library and Information Studies  
University of the Philippines

## Abstract

The UP SLIS, for over 50 years, continues to be the leading LIS School in the Philippines. The curriculum is seen as among its best practices with its design, development and continuous improvement. Having factors such as the demands of the practice, existing standards and feedback from alumni and LIS stakeholders, and its membership to iSchools, UP SLIS strives to offer more to its students and its various stakeholders.

The University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Studies (UP SLIS) recently celebrated its 55<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary in July 1, 2016. But as a program offering within the UP, it is already on its 102<sup>nd</sup> year, thereby being the oldest in Southeast Asia. While being the oldest, it hasn't ceased to be the best among the LIS schools in the Philippines. For one, it recently was awarded Center for Excellence in LIS Education by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) of the Philippines. Then it subjected itself to another scrutiny by the iSchools and was considered as an associate member. Feeling the honor and at the same time the responsibility, UP SLIS continuously endeavors to uphold excellence in LIS education.

As a best practice, I would like to present the curriculum – its design, its development and its continuous improvement. Aside from the faculty force, we can say that this is the reason why SLIS has come a long way. Knowing full well that a strong and sound curriculum relates to excellent graduates, SLIS has always focused on determining ways how best to improve it.

### *Design of the Curriculum*

The current curriculum of the undergraduate program includes 45 units of general education (GE) subjects; 42 units of LIS core courses; 15 units of LIS electives with choices from IT, Archives, Health Librarianship, Law Librarianship and General Librarianship track or specialization; 12 units of required non-GE subjects; 12 units of Foreign Language; 6 units of free elective and 8 units of PE.

As it is, the curriculum already assures a holistic individual trained in librarianship. The 45 unit GE, centers on liberal education and is the core of UP education – developing the students from the arts and humanities, the math and sciences, and social sciences and philosophy.

The LIS core courses cover all the skills needed for a librarian whether situated in any type of library or information center. As the Philippines has a law (RA9246) mandating librarians to pass a licensure exam before they can practice librarianship, the core courses ensure that the students not only pass the board exams but be among the top passers while warranting them as well to be good in what they do. One unique feature of the current curriculum is that the Introduction to Archives is already required, unlike in the previous curricula where this is just among the subjects they elect to take.

The LIS electives serve as specialization for the students. They are required to take 15 units of electives from among the fields: general librarianship, archives and records management, IT, law librarianship and health librarianship. Currently, the number of electives per track is not sufficient to fulfill a full specialization as such, the students have a combination of these and consequently have either IT-Archives, IT-Law, and more. But there is an active and on-going development of electives to fulfill the 15 unit demand.

The graduate program on the other hand is designed to accommodate those without BLIS and those with BLIS thus labeled as Plan A and Plan B accordingly. Plan A is so designed to enable the students to take the board examinations after – thus having the core courses necessary to be trained as librarians with sufficient number of LIS electives as additional learning or specialization. Plan B on the other hand provides more specialization to graduates of BLIS. A central feature is the cognates, which are courses taken outside the college to further enrich them either in their work or in their chosen field of study/thesis. Thus a school librarian may take cognates from the College of Education from among the following specializations: reading, teaching in the early grades, educational technology or guidance and counselling.

The graduate program of the SLIS is among the few in the Philippines that accommodates non-LIS graduates. Recognizing the fact that it is counterproductive to make those interested to take librarianship later on in their careers go back to an undergraduate program. It has addressed to a certain extent the lack of qualified librarians in the Philippines by allowing those who have been posted/assigned in libraries to go for further education in the graduate level.

### *Development*

From its beginnings, mainly taking from Dewey's curriculum up to the current, the UP SLIS curriculum has changed dramatically especially in the undergraduate program. It still has the foreign language curriculum and the specific practical/technical courses. For quite some time, the curriculum included a number of literature courses with the objective of enabling the students to be familiar with literary materials so they can serve their clients better. Specific courses for the management of academic and school librarianship were also present. However with the need to accommodate IT courses some of these were replaced.

### *Continuous Improvement*

The curriculum is continuously evaluated to factor in the established standards, demands of the practice, and feedback from alumni and other stakeholders. SLIS has a yearly evaluation of the curriculum which may either be on just one course or courses/electives involving particular tracks or the overall curriculum. This yearly evaluation that considers the abovementioned factors is consistently improving the curriculum.

The most recent revision was that of the cataloging and classification courses. In the past, there were two cataloging and classification courses where Cataloging I covers the following major topics: descriptive cataloging of print resources, subject cataloging using Sears List of Subject Headings, and classification using the DDC. Cataloging II on the other hand covers descriptive cataloging of non-print materials, subject cataloging using the Library of Congress Subject Headings, and classification using the LCC. When RDA came about, it was deemed necessary that this be taught, the question thus: Is it necessary to institute a new course and label it as Cataloging III or should it be integrated in the cataloging courses? While this is the new AACR, not all libraries in the Philippines are ready and able to accept this new standard just because of the environment it has to operate in – online.

Before anything could be instituted, there had to be careful planning for the design of the course. SLIS has a Special Topics course which is primarily a course to accommodate non-regular topics as electives but has become essentially a test bed for courses to be instituted. The course was developed and implemented with specific requirements for the students. After its implementation, necessary evaluation was made taking on from the feedback of the students and the observations of the teacher. As such, it was determined that a third course in cataloging was not necessary but there needs revision in terms of outline and approach of the two cataloging courses.

In this instance, changes in the curriculum were made to fulfill the demands of the practice. As deemed necessary, SLIS graduates should be ready to design and implement cataloging systems that are RDA compliant. As RDA requires knowledge of database systems, part of the design was to determine what IT courses should be taken prior to this.

The CHED through its Technical Committee on LIS Education has revised the BLIS curriculum consequently mandating all LIS schools to make the necessary revisions. This curriculum now requires 6 IT courses aside from the core courses in place. As an enhancement, this has also allowed for the inclusion of 7 special topics to include Principles and Methods of Teaching, Preservation, management of the 4 types of libraries, educational technology, indigenous knowledge and foreign language. The UP is an autonomous university meaning it does not have to necessarily follow the curriculum set by CHED. For SLIS however, there is a plan to at least harmonize the two. The CHED Curriculum will be reflected in the licensure examination thus the need to adopt to a certain extent.

With these evaluation, planning, and revision processes, it can be said that UP SLIS continues to uphold the tradition of excellence in LIS Education. With a continuously developing curriculum, UP SLIS promises to produce more capable professional librarians both in the Philippines and elsewhere. Knowing full well that there is a need to improve the curriculum due to the demands of the practice, keeping up to date with standards and accommodating the feedback of alumni and LIS stakeholders, the yearly evaluation of the curriculum by the faculty members is ensured. With our membership to the iSchools, learning and getting inspiration from our fellow member schools, we envision other course offerings and the possibility of new program offerings as well.