

Title. LIS Forward Forum: Shaping Future Directions for LIS to Thrive and Grow in iSchools

Type. Panel with structured audience input and plenary dialogue

Organizers

Carole L. Palmer, Information School, University of Washington

Chris Coward, Information School, University of Washington

Amelia Acker, School of Information, University of Texas at Austin

Cindy Aden, Information School, University of Washington

Maria Bonn, School of Information Sciences, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Emily Knox, School of Information Sciences, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

R. David Lankes, School of Information, University of Texas at Austin

Michelle Martin, Information School, University of Washington

Marijela Melo, School of Information and Library Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Ana Ndumu, College of Information Studies, University of Maryland

Brian Strum, School of Information and Library Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Mega Subramaniam, College of Information Studies, University of Maryland

Abstract

Schools of Library and Information Science (LIS) were foundational in launching the iSchool movement. Over the past 20 years, the movement and many individual schools have grown to become increasingly multidisciplinary, as concepts, problems, and opportunities related to information, people, and technology have prevailed across disciplines. LIS is now one of many fields represented by iSchool faculty and programs, and LIS itself has become more interdisciplinary in its orientation to research and education. Against this backdrop of evolution and change, a group of U.S. iSchools is initiating a national conversation to inform future positioning and priorities for LIS research and education within the broader mission of iSchools. This interactive event will provide background on the group's activities and engage participants in collective reflection on evolution in the field and in their schools. The session will generate broad perspectives and surface priorities to inform planning of an LIS Summit slated for 2022.

Description

Purpose and Audience:

The LIS Forward Forum will engage the iSchool community in a conversation on advancing LIS research and education in iSchools. The session will be designed to benefit from the breadth and depth of LIS expertise and experience among iConference attendees.

Schools of Library and Information Science were foundational in launching the iSchool movement. Over the past 20 years, the movement and many of the schools have grown to become increasingly multidisciplinary, as concepts, problems, and opportunities related to information, people, and technology have prevailed across disciplines. LIS is now one of many fields represented by iSchool faculty and programs, and LIS itself has become more interdisciplinary in its orientation to research and

education. Critically, the core values of the profession of librarianship--access, privacy, democracy, diversity, education and lifelong learning, intellectual freedom, preservation, the public good, professionalism, service, social responsibility, and sustainability¹--have more resonance than ever. At the same time, the information issues and problems that propel research directions and demand for professional expertise are growing in scope and complexity.²

The organizers of this interactive event represent a set of U.S. iSchools that have experienced this trajectory of change over the past two decades. We are working together to convene conversations on future positioning and priorities for LIS research and education within the broader mission of iSchools. The proposed session aims to facilitate dialogue on the future of LIS to seed learning, exchange, and collaboration among the iSchool community. The outcomes will inform plans for an LIS Summit we are planning for a broad range of U.S. iSchools and key stakeholder groups, slated for mid-to-late 2022. While the summit will be focused on the U.S. context, this iConference session has international relevance and participation is encouraged for all conference attendees with interests in advancing LIS within multidisciplinary iSchools.

The initiative was prompted by recognition of the varied and significant transformations across iSchools and the opportunities afforded by learning about our respective experiences. For the University of Washington, additional motivation stems from the ten-year Gates Foundation legacy grant received by the Technology and Social Change (TASCHA) group, with a mandate to support the “transformation of public libraries as critical centers of learning, creativity, and community development in a rapidly changing environment.” Extending the scope of the TASCHA purview, the group is concerned with the future of academic and research libraries and archives, in addition to public libraries, with a focus on harnessing the broad spectrum of iSchool expertise. For example, LIS scholarship is expanding in many schools through collaboration with researchers from within and outside of iSchools, from fields including, computer science, learning sciences, communications, family sciences, education, journalism, public health, political science, and other disciplines. In turn, these scholarly activities often enrich MLIS programs, bringing theoretical frameworks and methodological traditions of value to the next

¹ American Library Association (2019). Core Values of Librarianship. Retrieved from <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/corevalues>.

² See, for example, Altman, M., & Bourg, C. (2018). A Grand Challenges-Based Research Agenda for Scholarly Communication and Information Science. *MIT Grand Challenge PubPub Participation Platform*. Retrieved from <https://grandchallenges.pubpub.org/pub/final/release/3>; Amy K. Garmer (2014). Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries, a Report of the Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries, October. 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/rising-challenge-re-envisioning-public-libraries/>; Kennedy, M. L. (2020). Research Libraries as Catalytic Leaders in a Society in Constant Flux: A Report on the ARL-CNI Fall Forum. Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries and Coalition for Networked Information, January 2020. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.29242/report.fallforum2019>; Lankes, R. D. (2019). Why Do We Need a New Librarianship? *Journal of New Librarianship*, 4. Retrieved from <https://newlibs.org/index.php/jonl/article/view/757>; Raine, L. (2016). The Puzzles Librarians Need to Solve. VALA, Melbourne, February 9, 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2016/02/05/the-puzzles-librarians-need-to-solve-vala-2016/>

generation of librarians and archivists. The initiative aims to build on this trend to further cultivate strategic synergies in support of LIS research and education.

The work of the group has been framed by an initial set of questions related to the position of LIS in our growing and evolving iSchools, including:

- How can iSchools leverage their broad spectrum of expertise to address critical information challenges of our time while also advancing the profession of librarianship?
- How can we attract and incentivize faculty from within and outside of iSchools to engage in library-related research?
- How can we articulate the strengths and contributions of LIS research and teaching conducted in iSchools to potential funders and stakeholders, to expand our funding portfolio beyond agencies, such as IMLS and the Mellon Foundation, that typically fund library and archive related research?

In short, what does it mean for LIS to thrive and grow in an iSchool, and how can iSchools continue to lead the advancement of libraries and the field of LIS? These questions are vital to how our schools can successfully respond to the imperatives associated with research universities, the pervasiveness of critical information problems in society, and the accelerated need for information expertise across disciplines, professions, sectors, and communities.

Format:

The 90-minute session will begin with a short introduction and panel presentation by the organizers (20 minutes), followed by facilitated breakout groups (40 minutes). It will close with a plenary summary of the breakout discussions, highlighting key areas of consensus, opportunities and innovations, and challenges (30 minutes).

Engagement:

The breakout segment will be devoted to eliciting and documenting input from the participants on a range of themes related to the questions outlined above. Members of the organizing group will facilitate using prompts to encourage what we are calling “affirmative brainstorming” that focuses on goals, strategies, and impact. The specific breakout themes and prompts will be developed in the coming months through the ongoing work of the organizing group, with the aim of fostering constructive and productive exchange. We expect the slate of themes will be formulated in a set of “how can we” questions. For example, how can we best make advances in: robust collaborative research; justice focused programs; faculty recruiting, etc.? Participants will self-select into a question group, and facilitators will guide each group in articulating high level goals for the field, proven or promising strategies for making progress, and the value and impact of success for iSchools, the field, and society. We will provide specific prompts for each of these groups and use participatory design methods, such as layered elaboration and mixing ideas, to allow integration and coalescence of ideas among breakout groups.³

³ IDEO. (2015). _Design Thinking for Libraries: A Toolkit for Patron-Centered Design (Web-version). Retrieved from <http://designthinkingforlibraries.com/>

Each breakout group will generate a shared working document on their question. While participants will need to participate in one breakout group, all documents will be made available to all participants during the session and remain accessible for adding content and comments over a number of weeks following the conference. Importantly, a separate document will be established to solicit additional questions and themes to be considered or integrated into the LIS Summit agenda. The approach will allow all participants to contribute their ideas within their group and have the opportunity to add to and comment on the ideas generated by other groups over a period of time.

The closing plenary segment will provide a summary of the real-time breakout activities, with continued focus on strategies and impact. Facilitators will steer the creation of a “Big Ideas” board that highlights areas of consensus, opportunities and innovations, potential paths forward, and apparent obstacles to progress. The last 15 minutes will be open to the audience to offer constructive observations and advice to the organizing group for their continued work planning the LIS Summit. We will also gather the contact information from participants who wish to stay informed or have interest in further related activities.

Goals and Outcomes:

The documents and exchange produced through the LIS Forward Forum will capture a broad range of perspectives from numerous schools. The process will seed exchange among iSchools and guide framing and priorities for the forthcoming LIS summit. The content will be fully deidentified and integrated into a white paper on advancing LIS in iSchools, a projected outcome of the 2022 LIS Summit event. The white paper will be archived in an open access repository available to the iSchool community and the broader public.

Relevance:

As LIS and iSchools have evolved over the past 20 years there has been limited attention to how changes in the field are shaping our schools, individually and collectively, or how our schools can proactively collaborate to advance and potentially strengthen LIS. The iConference is the signature platform for the iSchool community to convene around this important topic and engage a diverse group of faculty and students in charting the future of LIS. Junior faculty and student perspectives will be particularly important in ensuring the LIS Summit and related conversations represent and feature the forward-looking priorities of the broad and diverse iSchool community.

Duration. Standard 90-minute session.

Special Requirements. None