

# MAIN CURRICULUM TRENDS IN BRITISH LIBRARY SCHOOLS A BRIEF REVIEW

*George W. Whitbeck*

This article is based upon a visit to British library schools in late November and December of 1981. In the space of two weeks, eight British library schools were visited, problems of library education were discussed with directors, faculty members and students, and officials at the Library Association and the Council for National Academic Awards were interviewed. Schools visited were the City University Centre for Information Science, University College - London, Polytechnic of North London, Ealing College of Higher Education, Loughborough University of Technology, the University of Sheffield, Leeds Polytechnic, and the Newcastle-Upon-Tyne Polytechnic.

Generally speaking, schools of library and information studies are in a period of contraction in the United Kingdom, as is the case in the USA and Canada. Enrollments are either stable, or dropping, and faculty size is the same, that is, declining or holding its own. Beyond this generalization, however, one must note that it applies in differing degrees to different schools and different programs. While some schools have suffered declines in student enrollment and lost faculty positions, not all have. This article will give an overview of curriculum development, with some particular attention to work experience as a part of the educational program of English schools of library and information science.

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*George W. Whitbeck is Associate Dean of the School of Library and Information Science at Indiana University, Bloomington.*

### Trends in British Schools

There appear to be two main general trends and a number of lesser trends that have developed in recent years in British education for librarianship. The first of these is a movement toward integrating traditional "library science" into an informational context. Thus, the adaptation of education for librarianship is from training for specific jobs in libraries to emphasis upon the accumulation, organization, and delivery of information. This approach to the field is somewhat along the lines of that taken at American library schools such as Syracuse and Drexel, where information is the overall umbrella perspective under which the curriculum develops.

A second trend relates to the study of the library or information center as a part of the communications network of society at large. Possibly because of the success of the Citizens' Advice Bureaus, public libraries have taken a great interest in information services for their patrons with consequent resulting interest on the part of the library schools. While the Citizens' Advice Bureaus are not part of the library system, they are very typical of the type of government position that the library schools are seeking as an interest for their students. The CAB's are staffed by, for the most part, trained amateurs whose educational background would be less than that of a professional librarian. This type of position, however, illustrates both curricular trends cited above, the emphasis on information handling as opposed to type of position in library training, and the role of the library in society. Portrayal of the library, or information center as a part of the communications process, whether in an industrial firm, a government agency, an academic institution, or a public library in its community, is very much a part of the British educational scene.

A third area of concentration in training for librarianship and information services in the UK is that of emphasis on management. The British have come to the conclusion, as have many American library educators, that most librarians will during their careers be exercising supervisory roles of some sort and should therefore be well-grounded in management skills. This is reflected in all the curricula examined, where a substantial "track," or segment of time in the general program, is devoted to management studies.

Perhaps the best way of providing a more concrete view of the curriculum of British library schools would be to look at two examples which would illustrate different approaches. A distinction can be made in the British programs, between the segmented ones where library and information science is studied separately (at least in terms of structure) from other subjects, and where different subjects within the field are studied more or less independently in much the same manner that we do and in those programs where the totality of the student's experience is integrated.

### Polytechnic of North London

Perhaps the best example of the latter would be at the bachelor's and diploma programs of the School of Librarianship at the Polytechnic of North London. At this school, the bulk of the student's work is concentrated in two main segments of curriculum, which are team taught. "Core Stream A," one of the main tracks of the program, deals with the nature and development of systems created to deal with the problems of access to information, retrieval of information, and the management of libraries. Within this context, major bibliographic systems are studied, as well as types of classification of information, and networking or systems of libraries. This sounds like familiar material, and it is, but the arrangement and delivery of the subject matter is in general considerably different from ours although not perhaps so different from the introductory "bloc" programs at American library schools such as Drexel, North Carolina and South Carolina.

North London's "Core Stream B" is called Community Studies, and emphasizes people and their information requirements. Here the student chooses four communities from two substreams, "communities by environment," such as social services, or higher education, and "communities by subject," such as history, or computer science. The practical skills and techniques of the librarian are taught in this second stream of team taught lectures, seminars, and tutorials. Reference work and information retrieval come out in the subject "communities," while the services of libraries and library management are emphasized in the sub-stream relating to communities by environment. Service to people is most strongly emphasized in this whole large segment of the program relating to community studies.

In addition to these two main segments of the three year bachelor's course, a third stream requires students to take two "tool skill" courses, the first being an introduction to computers taken in the first term of study, and the second a basic statistics course. A second part of "Stream C" is what are called "optional studies," optional in the sense that the student chooses two courses from a list of subjects which includes children's literature, local history, psychology of reading, reprography, and several others.

This is the bachelor's program of North London; the diploma course is much the same, but it must be compacted into one chronological year, whereas the Bachelor of Arts covers three years of study.

Perhaps the easiest contrast to this general type of program with librarianship being integrated into a lot of other sociological and economic subject matter would be the bachelor's programs offered at the Loughborough University of Technology. Here a variety of options are available and the library science courses or programs, are arranged more in the way ours are, in modules. In the basic program, BA or bachelor of science (Honors) in library studies, students in their first two years will take four basic core courses, "indexing and data processing," "sources of bibliographical information," "libraries and civilization," and "library administration," and an "associated subject" taken from a broad selection of options ranging from "Asian Studies" to "Computer Studies" to "Transport Technology." Students are also required to study a foreign language. In their final year students choose four courses from a long list of options including such topics as serial publications, medical literature and libraries, children's literature, non-book media. An important task of this final year, however, is the preparation of a major project and report which is to be in the range of seven to ten thousand words.

Another option at the bachelor's level at Loughborough is to work for a joint qualification in librarianship and another subject. Students may choose among seven other subjects including creative design, English, history, and physical education and sports science. The latter reflects the fact that Loughborough is prominently a physical education school. This course may be three or four years. The bachelor of arts (Honors) in education and library studies is a variant of this, with a substantial part of the third year of the required four years being devoted to practice teaching. This degree qualifies for both library and teaching positions.

There is yet another bachelor's degree offered at Loughborough, the bachelor of science in information science, which consists of courses in information storage and retrieval and information systems; mathematics, including statistics, and the history of science in society. The other bachelor's programs tend to fall somewhere in between these schools on the spectrum. Ealing College of Higher Education and the polytechnics at Leeds and Newcastle all have integrated, overall programs that are closer to the curricular arrangement at North London, but are not as integrated.

## Diploma Qualifications

What about the arrangement of the other qualifications, including the diploma? The diploma covers the same ground as the bachelor's programs, but in a much more concentrated way since, although it is a first professional qualification, it is compressed into one year. The masters' degrees vary in their emphases and arrangement, and are sometimes considered to be a continuing education degree; that is, a second professional qualification. These qualifications require coverage of a core of library and information science areas and some degree of specialization. Some sort of practice work or experience is somehow attached, if not built into this level of study.

Some idea of the diversity of masters' programs may be gathered from the following: Loughborough, in addition to its MLS, which is the equivalent of a diploma, gives a Master of Arts in Archive/Library/Information Studies and Education, which is primarily intended for those planning to teach librarianship in developing countries. They also give a Master of Science degree for those intending to pursue careers in special libraries, primarily scientific or technical, in government, industry or academia. This is similar to the master of science program at the City University and that of the University of Sheffield.

The University of Sheffield has three regular masters programs plus an option for independent masters level study for mature practitioners. The first, and largest, is the Master of Arts in Librarianship, a general course catering largely to humanities majors who will be employed in public and academic libraries. The program is what might be described as "advanced - general," with study in the fields of information sources, information storage and retrieval, computers and information, and management and systems. Students specialize by type of library and start in their second semester to relate their work toward the community they will serve, whether academia, the general public, or some special clientele. Students are required to take two optional courses in addition to core areas, choosing from among such subjects as public relations and promotion and advanced computer programming. They also must take a combined statistics - research methods course. In addition, visits to libraries and a study tour to London or Edinburgh are mandatory. This is a three semester chronological year master's program.



The Master of Arts in Information Studies (Social Sciences) is very similar except that students are required to have a good honors degree in a social science or law for entry. The Master of Science in Information Studies requires students to have a good honors degree in science, engineering, or technology for entry. As one might expect, this program emphasizes the subjects we include in the category of information science after introducing students to the "core." As is the case with the City University Master of Science degree, it is anticipated that the graduates will find placement in special libraries in government, industry, or higher education.

In summarizing the masters degree programs at Sheffield, one must note that they are first qualifications, and thus are similar to our programs. There is, however, at Sheffield a special emphasis on research. Students are expected to carry out research projects and studies in their regular course work and not just passively absorb lectures or piece together term papers from library materials. However, no master's essay is required, and the school is in the process of phasing out comprehensive examinations, feeling that with the high quality of student insisted upon, course work can be evaluated instead, thus avoiding loss of time.

### Keeping Abreast in Library ED

What are the British schools doing to develop curricula and keep up in the field of information science, including data processing equipment? If one may generalize from the eight schools visited, one can say that they are at the same current level as the School of Library and Information Science at Indiana University, a school probably a little ahead of the average library school in the United States. All of the British schools have a micro-computer, and all have terminals connecting to some central computing facility. None of the schools however, have portable terminals. All students, whatever the program bachelor's, diploma, or masters are apparently required to obtain some familiarity with computers, computing, data bases, and their applications in library and information center work. The degree of homogenization of library education enforced by the Council on National Academic Awards is high. It seeks to keep the curriculum of the polytechnics up to university level; one might venture to guess that most students obtain more information studies than ours do. In any case, a strong push is on in British library schools to ensure that graduates will have a good background in information science, including familiarity with technology.

No attempt at summarizing the picture of curriculum at British library schools would be complete without some word concerning work experience in libraries.<sup>1</sup> First, experience in libraries is almost universally posed as an admission requirement for the graduate qualification programs. It seems to be almost universally agreed that practice work as a part of the curriculum is highly desirable and that the only justifiable exception to a requirement of this sort would be that of a very compact, tightly scheduled program where time does not permit work experience. This, obviously, would be most likely to occur in the post-graduate diploma courses or masters courses that are confined to one year. However, even here one finds some stress upon obtaining first hand library or information service work. The City University Master of Science program, which prepares students for information service work in government and industry, after two semesters of intensive academic study, assigns its students to work experience for much of the last three or four months of the program. The University College of London assigns their diploma and masters students to a two week work experience in December of each year, even though the diploma course runs only an academic year, while the master of arts a chronological year with the last four months of this year being devoted to writing a substantial essay. Leeds requires a week of practice work of its diploma candidates and the projects required of students in this program have a pronounced practical bent which forces the students to become involved with libraries and information centers.

Other schools, such as the Ealing College of Higher Education, make heavy use of field trips to libraries as a device to introduce students to practice. Field trips are apparently taken almost weekly. The Director of this school expressed himself as being dissatisfied with this arrangement, and hoped to be able to institute work practice even for the diploma level students.

In the bachelor's programs, Loughborough requires two summer placements in their three year program. Newcastle-Upon-Tyne Polytechnic places their first level bachelor's students in a four week practice work situation in that city or region. They require their second year students to undergo a one week observation period in a primary school library and to participate in a one week study tour to libraries and information centers in London. In their third and final year, the students work for three weeks in a library of the type in which they are interested in seeking employment. This placement may be anywhere in Britain. Thus, work experience tends to be almost universally required as part of a program. For postgraduate qualifications, it is a prerequisite to entry. This situation may be contrasted to that in the United States, where practice work, or internships, tend to be, if not actually discouraged as taking time away from presumably more valuable class time, of an optional

Achieving satisfactory assignments for student practice work is becoming a problem, according to the staff at all schools visited here. Exceptions to this generalization would be some Canadian schools which require a summer placement between the two academic years of their programs, and the teacher-librarian programs which require practice work or student teaching of some sort.

### Program Administration

A word should be said covering the administration of these programs. Since the procurement of practice work assignments is such a large task, involving in some cases hundreds of students per year, an administrative officer or faculty member is sometimes assigned this as his/her principal duty. For example, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne Polytechnic has a full time placement officer who finds positions for students for their three levels of experience. She also arranges and supervises the one week study tour to libraries in London for second year bachelor's candidates. She makes at least one visit to each practice work site, whether it is within the Tyne region or elsewhere. Some concern was expressed that with funding contractions, travel for this purpose may be cut, and that possibly the study tour to London may be dropped. Leeds Polytechnic actually did drop their London study tour for economic reasons. The placement officer at Newcastle has some assistance from faculty members in their tutorial capacity, but by and large it is the best example of a centralized system for handling this part of the curriculum.

At the opposite extreme, the Polytechnic of North London is an example of decentralization of practice work assignments where faculty tutors are primarily responsible for finding placements for their ten or so advisees. Some central administration support is given, however. Leeds and Loughborough fall somewhere in the middle, with both having someone administratively responsible for assignments but with faculty very much involved with student placements.

Evaluation of practice work experience is handled in very much the same way that it is in American library schools. That is, the supervising librarian will send back at least one report on the student. The student is not graded on the work experience, but if her/his work is unsatisfactory, this is noted and reflected in references for employment. In effect, the student is graded "satisfactory-unsatisfactory."

The student also evaluates the experience situation, writing a report concerning the value of the work assigned. This report is seen by placement officers and tutors, who, as indicated, seek to provide suitable assignments that will give the students the board experience the schools want them to have.



cause libraries, both academic and public, are faced with staff cut-backs, and supervision of student workers is usually not one of their top priorities. Also, the period of placement is often for a relatively short time, and the library will receive little return for providing varied training.

Nevertheless, the schools are persevering in their endeavor to provide work experience for students, an endeavor which is supported by the Library Association. LA takes a great interest in assuring that school education is related to current practice and is not unduly theoretical.

### Independent Studies

One last characteristic of the British curriculum is the stress placed upon independent study and projects under the direction of tutors. This is true even for undergraduate students, where an independent project is often required during their third year. Field research and independent projects are in place at the following bachelor's programs: Ealing College of Higher Education, Leeds Polytechnic, Loughborough University, and Newcastle-Upon-Tyne (honors bachelor's only). The graduate programs at the diploma level at Ealing College of Higher Education and Leeds Polytechnic require a research project, usually dealing with a practical, on-site project in a library. Newcastle has made theirs optional at this level. While it might seem strange that a graduate qualification is less likely to require a research project than the bachelor's level, one must keep in mind that the diploma, and Loughborough's Master of Library Studies, is the equivalent of our MLS, and most American library schools dropped the masters essay requirement many years ago because of the concentrated nature of the program and the feeling that additional classroom study was more desirable than a special study on a narrow topic.

The masters programs at City University (London), the University College - London, the University of Sheffield, Leeds Polytechnic, and the masters programs at Loughborough other than the MLS (the diploma equivalent) require an essay, or extensive research project. Of course, the Master of Philosophy and Ph.D. courses are entirely research.

In addition to the formal degree requirements, there is a strong tendency to get students involved in the examination of the real world of librarianship through papers and projects.

As a generalization, one may conclude that British library school students are rather heavily involved in independent study as compared with their American counterparts. Students at all levels work closely on their projects or essays with their tutors or advisors, who apparently take this work as a serious and major part of their responsibility.

In summary, there are many similarities between the curricula of schools of library and information science in the United Kingdom and those in North America despite the different degree structures. There is the increased emphasis on the centrality of information science in the British schools along with emphasis on the role of the library in society as a concept for study. These themes are not strange to North American educators. Some of the less central trends that have been discussed, that of an emphasis on training for management responsibilities and on the constant striving to keep up-to-date in matters relating to information science and library automation, would appear to be equally strong in both North America and Britain. Others, such as emphasis on independent study and the necessity of practical work experience, areas of growing concern in North America, appear to be more heavily emphasized in the British schools.

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<sup>1</sup> The subject of work experience in libraries as a part of the curriculum of schools of library and information science has been a topic of growing interest to the profession in recent years, and this brief survey can serve only as a relatively current up-date of practice in one country. For a more extended treatment of the subject, see the thorough background discussion by Margaret E. Monroe, entitled "Issues in Field Experience as an Element in the Library School Curriculum," (*Journal of Education for Librarianship*, 22, Summer/Fall, 1981) and the excellent survey of current practice by Witucke, "The Place of Library Experience in Library Education: Trends and Current Status," (*Journal of Education for Librarianship*, 22, 57-73, and 74-88.) See also the insightful and thoughtful article by R. J. Prytherch entitled "Towards an Understanding and Evaluation of Student Fieldwork in Libraries," (*Journal of Education for Librarianship*, 22, 173-186).