

Cultivating Library Research among MLIS Students: Theses and Other Original Investigations

Thomas D. Walker, Associate Professor
School of Information Studies,
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee

Abstract

Library and Information Science (LIS) is a practice-driven profession that is an integral part of knowledge generation/distribution cycles, yet librarians lean more toward routine practice than toward research that contributes to such cycles. Likewise, students confront evolving and ever-denser curricula in graduate programs that attempt to equip future professionals with appropriate skills for practice, yet they often have no time left in their studies to learn how to carry out primary research. One aspect of LIS education that continues to evolve is that of research preparation for librarians and other knowledge workers, which is intended to inform planning, decisions, policies, and other aspects of professional life.

This paper will analyze current opportunities for students to acquire primary research experience within MLIS programs. It is based on a study of all the programs accredited by the American Library Association using data from program websites, other publications, and interviews with program representatives.

Formal exposure to primary research experience can be gained through research methods coursework, theses, and other capstone projects; less formal involvement can include research assistantships, participation with faculty research projects, and presentations of posters and papers in research conferences. The paper summarizes the various requirements for research involvement among students and explains the expressed and implied reasons for such opportunities to exist.