Alliance for Information:
Michigan Librarians and Library
Faculty Join Forces for the Future

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*Editor's note: This article, submitted at my request, discusses a novel program at
the University of Michigan that teams librarians and library school educators. The
program's objectives are (1) to enhance the information literacy of all students, and
(2) to expose institutional barriers to the information created by and of concern to
minority groups. The five coauthors have contributed in various ways to the
program's development. —B.W.*

As our society shifts from a manufacturing base to a knowledge base, our
lives are increasingly information intensive. Information retrieval, evalua-
tion, analysis, organization, and management are becoming the basic skills
necessary for an information-literate society. Higher education must now
provide students with the skills and expertise requisite for independent
life-long learning in the knowledge-based environment of the 21st century.
Students should know how to manipulate the plethora of information tech-
nologies; they should understand the philosophy, policies, and economics of
information access; and they should become familiar with the broad informa-
tion environment and how to particularize it to a specific area or discipline.
    Librarians and library educators must be actively engaged in teaching
users how to exploit information fully and influence its development. They

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must also use and expand their research expertise to explore the increasingly complex areas of information creation, dissemination, and management. This responsibility includes contributing to the clarification of information policies as well as the expansion of technological applications—all within the context of user needs.

Along with growing information intensity, another major change is shaping American life—an increasing sensitivity towards societal diversity. On college campuses in particular, heightened awareness of ethnic and cultural differences and the growing importance of minorities to the national economy have led to new institutional initiatives. As an integral part of the university, the academic library has responded to these issues, both in concert with other institutional units and independently. Librarians must use the unique expertise available within their profession to fulfill their responsibility to these efforts.

Society's historic lack of sensitivity in dealing with minority populations is reflected in the scholarly record, which frequently overlooks their history and contributions. This attitude has been extended into the information policies and processes being adopted for electronic formats. In many ways, barriers to information created by and of concern to non-mainstream populations have been compounded by electronic technologies, which are used primarily by the relatively affluent. If not addressed and resolved during the current development phase, inaccessibility and further entrenchment of discriminatory practices and policies may result.

A NEW PROGRAM

The University of Michigan Library has a unique interdisciplinary niche on campus. The perspective this niche affords led to the recognition that both of the issues—information literacy and sensitivity to diversity—could be addressed with one program. As Dean of the School of Information and Library Studies (SILS) and Interim Library Director of the University of Michigan, Robert M. Warner identified the potential for SILS and the University Library (UL) to combine their expertise to make a major contribution to resolving these issues on our campus. He appointed a Joint Task Force to explore options for new programs or expansion of existing cooperation between the two units. After examining the University-wide initiatives developed in response to recent criticism concerning diversity on campus, and exploring societal and campus information needs, the Task Force defined a program that works toward attaining these goals using the special skills of the information profession.

A Dual Effort

The program addresses both the new information age and the role of information in a diverse society with two education components and an enhanced research segment. Taken together, the program builds upon the intellectual foundations of librarianship that stress evaluation of content in an ethical and conceptual framework, and knowledge of the tools for organiza-

tion and access. It advances the relationship between the library and the university by integrating the educational and research activities of SILS and the University Library. Not only is the area of information itself explored in this program, but information is considered in the context of how it relates, supports, hinders, or otherwise affects the development of a diverse and intellectually sensitive community.

As in most higher education institutions, the Library at U of M embraces a heterogeneous scholarly community more broadly than any other single unit on campus. Almost all persons engaged in the institution's educational and research enterprises use the UL. As a pivotal campus facility, it has the potential to touch every individual and can help each use information as a critical tool for success. It is this potential that is emphasized in the program.

A Three-Pronged Approach

The Michigan program has a three-pronged approach to accomplishing its mission: (1) two broad-based information courses are being developed for SILS, one covering general information issues and technologies, the other dealing with societal barriers to information access; (2) additional discipline-specific service courses—developed and offered with the cooperation of specific departments or schools—are being made available at the upper-level undergraduate and graduate level; and (3) an explicit plan has been put in place for expanding and strengthening the existing relationship between the University Library and the School of Information and Library Studies in support of the University's mission of education, research, and service. Particular emphasis is placed on cooperative research on information use, policy, and economics in a diverse society.

PROGRAM-RELATED COURSES
Information Resources

A general, three-credit course entitled "Information Resources in the Knowledge-Based Society" is intended to prepare students to function effectively in the information age. In an increasingly interdisciplinary world, the next best thing to mastery of all disciplines is a clear understanding of how to find information in any discipline. Important sources of information exist in many institutional environments, accessible through a variety of intellectual and technological means. Research strategies and information access and management skills are presented within the larger context of information theory. The course educates the student in the complexities of new and sophisticated information tools. The potential power of emerging information technologies and services depends as much on the skill of the user as on the quality of the provider.

Specifically, the course intends to provide students with an understanding of the structure and intricacies of the knowledge-based society, including such issues as information economics, privacy, and intellectual property rights. An introduction is provided to the hierarchies of information sources for broad disciplinary categories (the humanities, social sciences, natural

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sciences, engineering sciences, physical sciences, and selected professions, including law, medicine, and business administration). Students are expected to

- understand the design, limits, problems, and uses of specific databases for discipline-based and interdisciplinary inquiry;
- study the identification, retrieval, use, and management of information;
- acquire the ability to analyze and critically evaluate sources and content; and
- be prepared to adopt new technological applications in an increasingly automated information environment.

Diversity in the U.S.

Higher education, as a reflection of the society in which it exists, has not been successful in dealing with issues of race, gender, and ethnic equality. The University of Michigan has delineated multiple initiatives to address this situation. In keeping with the spirit of these efforts, the UL and SILS offer a second general course concerned with sources and methods for the study of American diversity. This course details the institutional barriers to information in our society, namely, the exclusion and marginalization of information created by or of particular interest to various population groups. The diversity course covers two related issues: (1) how cultural differences influence the manner in which information is shared within an ethnic or cultural group and among individuals belonging to different groups, and (2) how society's dominant culture has influenced the intellectual and practical accessibility of information. These practices have erected significant barriers to the identification and retrieval of certain types of information

The existence of minority groups in the academic environment is not new, but the importance of their sources and scholarship is only now being recognized by the dominant culture. This course enables students, regardless of cultural background, to be aware of the issues and challenges related to obtaining this information, and of the institutional barriers that make it so difficult to identify and retrieve. Students acquire the research and evaluative skills necessary to overcome these barriers, gaining in the process an appreciation of this research potential and the richness of resources available. They have the opportunity to apply newly acquired skills and knowledge by preparing a research product in an area covered by the course.

The faculty for the course are drawn from SILS and University Library staff who have specific expertise in and a commitment to these issues.

Discipline-Specific Courses

In addition to two general courses for the university community as a whole, the program offers discipline-specific information courses at the upper level. Aside from teaching research resources, these courses cover scholarly literature, standard field-specific reference sources, and modes of scholarly communication within the discipline. Each course is developed with the department or school, with specialists from the UL and SILS staff and subject area faculty working together.

Requests from departments, interdisciplinary programs, and area studies programs at Michigan have demonstrated particular interest and need for this type of service course. Responding to these requests, SILS and the UL have offered such courses for programs in American Culture, Communication, History of Art, and the School of Music. The new program provides a framework that explicitly states SILS and the Library's willingness to respond to any department's needs and to identify resources to develop the courses.

UL/SILS RELATIONSHIP

The linchpin of this program is the relationship between the University Library and the School of Information and Library Studies. The new program will enhance and strengthen the ties between them and provide a mechanism for faculty and librarians to jointly address instructional, research, and service issues.

The connection between the two is an unusual one to find in a university environment: SILS is one of the few professional schools at Michigan with a laboratory—that is, a practice site whose mission is central to the support of the university's academic mission. While this tie has been minimally exploited in the past, it is basic to the cooperative program described here. Both librarians and SILS faculty participate in the University Library Associates Program, which provides selected Master's students specializing in academic or research librarianship the opportunity to work part-time in the UL system while completing an extended academic program. University Library units are also frequent sites for field experience placements, providing students with short-term work experience.

An expanded teaching role for University librarians is also a focus of this program. University librarians already serve as adjunct lecturers, teaching specialized courses in the School of Information and Library Studies. In addition to providing liberal arts information services, professional library staff (supported by the UL's physical collections and laboratories) offer expertise in all aspects of academic and research librarianship including preservation and conservation, area programs, rare books and special collections, and science librarianship. They regularly provide library-based instruction in these areas and will now expand into the classroom.

A greater research role for librarians is another major focus of the program. Cooperative research projects bring the research skills and experience of the SILS faculty to the rich source of professional experience and potential research topics found in the library. SILS is a small academic unit within a large university. By developing the research expertise of University librarians, the critical mass of information researchers in the institution is greatly increased.

SILS's concentration in archival administration provides a model for one type of expanded cooperative program: the Bentley Library (archives and historical collections) and SILS share one full-time employee who is responsible for teaching the graduate courses in archival methods and administration while maintaining responsibilities as a University archivist.

MANAGEMENT ISSUES

As the program components develop, several issues must be clarified and resolved. These include the changed role of librarians, the added service responsibilities of faculty, and the governance of the professional education program.

Restructuring

Because this program expands and formalizes the teaching and research responsibilities of University librarians, job descriptions must be examined and rewritten to clearly reflect these changes. Under existing standards, librarians are first and foremost service providers, and the current evaluation and reward processes provide little compensation for teaching and research activities. These, along with rank and title, must be restructured to reflect changed responsibilities. This problem, frequently raised when faculty status for librarians is debated, has no easy solution. Even with redefined roles, there is still a major operational unit that must be maintained. Also, not all librarians are trained to be university-level instructors. Closer cooperation between the Library and SILS may include more education for librarians to strengthen their instructional and research skills.

Incentives

A potential model for broadening the educational role for front-line librarians can be found in medical education, which stresses the involvement of clinicians in education and training. This, however, has not developed the research role as envisioned in this program. An extensive investigation of possible means of compensation for research activities must be undertaken.

Conversely, there must be faculty incentives for increased service activities. Academic institutions such as the University of Michigan have an acknowledged emphasis on research and offer little inducement for tenure-track faculty to increase service activities. Possible solutions to this dilemma may emerge from the enhanced research opportunities available to faculty resulting from the cooperative nature of this program.

Academic Governance

One sensitive area concerns the governance of the professional educa-
tion program. The role of librarians as teachers must be clearly defined. If
librarians are carrying a substantial part of the teaching responsibilities of this
program, it is not equitable to exclude them from participation in the formal
program governance. How this participation can be incorporated into govern-
ance of the Master's degree program has yet to be resolved. Academic
governance has traditionally been a privilege enjoyed by teaching faculty;
mechanisms for extending this, as appropriate, to the new, nontraditional
educators who participate in the program must be established.

A number of management issues are being worked through by the
program's Advisory Committee, which comprises University Library staff
and SILS faculty and reflects the interests of everyone involved. Among these
is funding. Start-up financing came from the Council of Library Resources
and the two cooperating units. But added resources must be found for the
program's full implementation. A program director with a dual appointment
in the Library and SILS has been engaged to coordinate and implement
program activities. Both SILS and the University Library have a strong com-
mitment to the ideals and actions this joint proposal represents. They are not
satisfied to rest on tradition to define the needs of their users and dictate their
roles in seeking solutions. As other parts of society begin to acknowledge the
growing role of information transfer in the global economy, succeeding
generations must be consciously prepared to evaluate the quality of its con-
tent and products. Everyone, including librarians, must be prepared for a
perpetually changing information environment, requiring constant re-
training.

Librarians at the University of Michigan, whether on the SILS faculty or
in the University Library, have established an ambitious agenda that they
hope will help their clientele stay at the forefront of their chosen fields of
inquiry. Together, they are creating a foundation of instruction and research
designed to enrich both the academic environment and the library profession-
als who serve it. Regardless of the uncertainty of the future, it is clear that the
role of information will continue to grow in importance for all segments of
society.

The program still has significant and complex administrative problems
that must be addressed. Those working on the program, however, feel that it
is well worth the effort. They believe that the program can help meet a real
need for intelligent, informed graduates in all disciplines. It broadens the role
of the Library and the Library School in the central education and research
mission of the University, bringing these units into a closer working relation-
ship. This will lead to the enhancement of the position and status of librarians
and information providers on the University of Michigan campus.   ■