

External Review Panel Report

Final Draft for COA Presentation

on

University of Alberta's Program

of

Master of Library and Information Studies

Conducted on behalf of the

American Library Association Committee on Accreditation

April 8, 2013

Introduction

The Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) at the School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS), University of Alberta has been accredited since 1976. The last accreditation visit was in 2006.

The External Review Panel (ERP) found that the Program's preparation for the accreditation review was very thorough. With the help of their Accreditation Administrator, Brianna Erban, the Program gathered considerable information and created a *Program Presentation* that was a good reflection of the Program's situation. Preparation for the visit was facilitated by the Administrator, who was very efficient and pleasant at responding to questions, arranging interviews and smoothing the way for the panel.

The panel arrived in Edmonton Saturday, March 2 and finished its visit on Tuesday evening, March 5, 2013. The primary location of the review was the Rutherford South Building, the location of the faculty and administrative offices and most classes; it is contiguous with the Rutherford Library. The administrative interviews took place in close-by buildings. The Program provided a conveniently-located workroom with relevant documents, computers, and other supplies.

On the Saturday, the Chair took the opportunity for an initial meeting with the Director and, with another panel member, was given an introductory tour of the campus. Sunday morning the remaining panelists were toured through the facilities. This was followed by separate group meetings with alumni, employers, and adjunct/sessional instructors. Over Monday and Tuesday panelists met with administrators, faculty, students and representatives of various services and faculties who interact with the Program. Panelists were able to observe four "live" classes, and two online courses. A list of the various individuals and groups interviewed follows this Introduction.

Throughout the visit, the administration, faculty, staff, and students were helpful and welcoming. Even very last-minute on-site requests were handled cheerfully and efficiently. All available requested documentation was on site. These included Exit Surveys, samples of student work, Student Ratings of Instruction, the SLIS Employer Survey and meeting minutes of committees and councils as well as many other items. Where possible, electronic copies were provided.

External Review Panel Members:

Christine Jacobs (Chair)

Clément Arsenault

Clara M. Chu

Judy Dunn

Rick B. Forsman

Cabot Yu

Canadian Library Association Observer:

Pam Ryan

Individuals and Groups Interviewed On-site

Administration

- Dr. Martin Ferguson-Pell, Acting Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
- Dr. Fern Snart, Dean, Faculty of Education:
- Ernie Ingles: Vice-Provost and Director, School of Library and Information Studies

- Dr. Mazi Shirvani, Vice-Provost and Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
- Dr. Murray Gray, Vice-Provost (Academic) and Associate Vice-President (Research) [Exit interview]
- Kathryn Arbuckle, Interim Chief Librarian
- Dr. Christine Brown, SLIS Liaison Librarian
- Freda Cardinal, Aboriginal Student Recruitment Coordinator
- Janet Welch, Assistant Dean, Information Technology and Computing

- Brianna Erban, SLIS Accreditation Administrator / Research Associate
- Aman Powar-Grewal, SLIS Senior Administrator
- Sophia Sherman, SLIS Office Administrator
- Lauren Romaniuk, SLIS Graduate Student Services Administrator (Admissions Committee / Scholarships and Awards Committee)

SLIS Faculty

1. Informal group meeting
2. Individual meetings (if met more than once because of committee interviews, committee is indicated):
 - Dr. Jennifer Branch-Mueller (Admissions Committee / Online Program Coordinator)
 - Dr. Margaret Mackey (Graduate Coordinator / Admissions Committee / Scholarships and Awards Committee)
 - Dr. Michael McNally (Scholarships and Awards Committee)
 - Dr. Tami Oliphant
 - Dr. Dinesh Rathi
 - Dr. Toni Samek (Admissions Committee)
 - Dr. Ali Shiri (Curriculum Committee Chair)
 - Mary-Jo Romaniuk, Adjunct

Group meetings

- SLIS Alumni and Library and Information Studies Alumni Association (LISAA) executive (lunch: informal group interviews)
- Employers (Focus group discussion)
- Sessional lecturers and Adjunct faculty (Focus group discussion)
- Students (lunch: informal group interviews)
- Library and Information Studies Student Association (LISSA) executive (Focus group discussion)
- Faculty of Education representatives: Larry Prochner, Chair of Elementary Education & Dr. Jacqueline Leighton, Chair of Educational Psychology
- Joint Program Heads and Interdisciplinary PhD Co-Supervisors: Dr. Scott Smallwood (HuCo), Dr. Jill McClay (Interdisciplinary PhD), Dr. Joan White (MBA/MLIS), Dr. Geoffrey Rockwell (HuCo)

Standard I. Mission, Goals, and Objectives

SLIS embraces the four cornerstones of the University's Mission (*PP* p. 20), and is informed by the *Faculty of Education Academic Plan* (May 31, 2006), which was developed for the years 2006-11 and states its academic priorities. SLIS engages in an ongoing, broad-based planning process through the work of two governing bodies. The SLIS Academic Council (formerly the SLIS Faculty Council), composed of all full-time SLIS faculty and the SLIS Senior Administrator, works on planning during its annual retreat held in August and, as appropriate, at its monthly meetings throughout the year. The SLIS School Council, which consists of SLIS faculty, the SLIS Senior Administrator and representatives of stakeholder groups, advises on the processes by which the mission, goals and objectives of the School are determined, and reviews and approves course and program changes.

In the last four years, in response to internal change, and in preparation for ALA COA review, SLIS has engaged in additional planning activities. These include additional planning meetings, generation of additional planning documents, the temporary hiring of Brianna Erban in the role of SLIS Accreditation Administrator/Research Associate to facilitate planning activities and the gathering of planning data, and the hiring of consultants to assist with the development of its current vision, mission, values, goals and student learning outcomes, and to conduct focus groups with its constituents.

SLIS is operating under re-stated vision, mission and values statements, which were reviewed by SLIS students, SLIS alumni, LIS practitioners and employers, and then approved at the October 5, 2012 meeting of the SLIS School Council (*PP* p. 21). They constitute part of the *SLIS Strategic Administrative Objectives* document (*PP* Appendix I.F) along with the "Student Learning Outcomes and Objectives." This document resembles a strategic plan, but diverges from one because the list of "SLIS Categories of Administrative Objectives – 2011-2015" do not align directly with the "School Goals, 2011-15;" the School Goals are designed to align with the "Program Level Learning Outcomes" (*PP* p. 22-24). It has been determined that these Administrative Objectives, which are reflective of the operations of the School, tacitly meet the substance of the School Goals, which are student oriented.

SLIS has developed "Student Learning Outcomes and Objectives" that reflect all aspects of the library and information studies profession as described in Standard I.2. Each of the ten student learning outcomes (SLOs) are re-stated as student learning objectives, which are fully aligned with each other with the exception of SLO1/Objective 1 and SLO2/Objective2, which partially correspond to each other. The level of learning expressed in the outcomes is relatively high following Bloom's taxonomy. LIS 600

(or the E-Portfolio Capping Project) is a capping exercise designed to bring together the evidence to assess student learning.

This, and other direct and indirect measures (focus groups, student achievements, etc.) that serve to demonstrate the extent to which students have achieved the program SLOs are described in the *Program Presentation*. However, as this spring sees the first cohort graduating under the revised E-Portfolio Capping Project, the assessment tool/rubric to measure the extent to which the SLOs are achieved by all MLIS students was not yet available for the ERP to assess. The School is currently working on this, as well as other holistic/analytic rubrics, and a comprehensive assessment plan, to measure the extents of student achievement (Interview with Director, March 4-5; *Draft Report* p. 5). The data gathered from the application of this assessment tool is needed to inform the Program of how well it is preparing all students, and to allow the Program to make any programmatic adjustments necessary for students to achieve learning outcomes.

Ongoing evaluation of the Program by students is conducted through the annual SLIS Exit Survey and SLIS Placement Survey. In Fall 2012 SLIS conducted focus groups with SLIS students, SLIS alumni, LIS practitioners, employers, and Practicum hosts to supplement the annual student surveys. SLIS Director Ingles indicates that the input from the focus groups will be fed back into the planning process, and ongoing input from these diverse constituents will be systematically collected in the future in order to evaluate Program goals and objectives. Furthermore, *2011-2015 Administrative Objective 5.4* indicates that metrics will be developed "...from standards for accreditation and quality service assessment tools to create baseline data and annual reviews; establish priorities for collecting data systematically from institutional sources and School sources; e.g., develop a consistent and congruent plan for tracking graduates." (*PP Appendix I.F*). As noted under Standard V, the School is in the process of rewriting one support position to focus on the development and administration of assessment measures and tools.

Ongoing, broad-based planning at the School is evident, as well as progress in making planning more systematic. Efforts will be strengthened with: ongoing, regularly scheduled assessment by all constituents; assessment data to inform the planning process, accompanied by adjustments if targets are not met or conditions change; regular review of the goals with incorporation of the objectives that directly measure their achievement; and an assessment tool that measures program-level student learning outcomes. A permanent Director would be in the position to provide oversight of the planning process and leadership in the School's structure and governance, financial arrangements, faculty

expectations and support, student support, administrative and technical support, and core School issues. See Standard V for discussion of this transition.

Standard II: Curriculum

The SLIS curriculum is consciously library-focused while allowing opportunity for broader study. The goals and learning outcomes are detailed on p. 22-24 and are correlated to the specific courses on p. 39-41 of the *Program Presentation*. All program objectives are integrated into one or more of the 5 core courses (*PP* p. 39-41; course outlines), and the combination of five core courses, two required IT-based courses and electives address the *ALA Core Competences*.

The review and planning processes since 2006 have involved all stakeholders through Academic Council, the Curriculum Committee and the School Council (*PP* p. 41-42, 60, 62-64). The *Curriculum Review Project, 2008-2009* was a comprehensive analysis from which developed a change-implementation plan (*PP* p. 60, Appendix II.H). Feedback from the previous accreditation process was folded into the process and curriculum concerns have been addressed through modification of existing courses and the introduction of new courses, particularly in the areas of new technologies and management/leadership (*PP* p. 42-43, 47, 60-61; course outlines).

Change within the curriculum appears to evolve naturally through the process of consultation, the determination of program and course objectives and outcomes, and the integration of feedback mechanisms. The Curriculum Committee works in conjunction with the School Council to ensure that concerns expressed by the various constituents are addressed, that course content is current and that the curriculum is coherent (Interview with Curriculum Committee Chair, March 4).

The range of courses encompasses the gamut of curriculum areas specified in the standard (*PP* p. 43). Thirty-five courses are offered, most of which focus on library and information studies. Approximately 13 electives are offered every semester, most repeating within a two-year cycle (*PP* p. 33; Appendix II.Q).

Of particular interest is the use of single credit-courses to introduce new/evolving concepts and concerns, as well as to address the continuing education needs of the local library community. Interviews with students, faculty and alumni indicate that:

- students and faculty feel that these provide up-to-date knowledge, and also provide opportunity for students to work beside future colleagues and to really understand the meaning of professional development;
- they are an effective testing ground for the content of full-length courses; as deemed appropriate to content, student interests and curriculum needs, 1-credit courses are upgraded to 3-credit courses;
- the initiative has been so successful that the process has been adopted elsewhere in the Faculty of Education.

There are a range of management/leadership-oriented courses (one core course), and students are given opportunity to interact with and to be mentored by leaders in the profession through courses, guest speakers and colloquia. In 2012 eleven students earned a Green and Gold Student Leadership and Professional Development Grant to participate in a one-credit course at the Alberta Library Conference (*PP* p. 51-52). This experience was deemed so successful that it is being repeated in 2013. The e-Portfolio capping exercise requires students to include “evidence of leadership and innovation” (*PP* p. 51; Appendix I.B). Students indicate that they feel well-prepared, especially if they take the relevant electives (Student interviews, March 3) and practicum supervisors and employers indicate that they are generally pleased with student/graduate leadership abilities and initiative (Interviews with alumni, supervisors and employers, March 3-4).

The curriculum reflects the integration of basic and applied research. In addition students are exposed to speakers and such events as Speaker’s Corner, Research Colloquium, and the Forum for Information Professionals (course outlines; *PP* p. 51-52; interviews with faculty and adjuncts, March 3-5)

Students must take a minimum of two technology-based courses. There are also a variety of IT-focussed single-credit courses, and many electives integrate technologies variously as content and as pedagogical tools (*PP* p. 48-49; course outlines). Computer labs, SMART classrooms, a videoconferencing centre and a smart board and computers in student areas contribute to the integration of technologies (*PP* p. 49, 169, 174; on-site tour).

The Foundations course directly addresses the “needs of a diverse society” (Standard II.3.4). In addition, there are electives and course modules focused on specific populations, including First Nation communities, and a number of courses addressing children’s services and literacy issues/knowledge (*PP* p. 49-50; course outlines); students may also take courses outside the School in the Faculty of

Education and other faculties that correspond to their interests in specific populations. The MLIS online program starting Fall 2013 will concentrate on Community-Focused Public Librarianship, and is being designed to address the needs of the rural and remote populations in the Prairie Provinces particularly, and across Canada more generally, but also on an international level. All students will have access to these courses.

Issues of rapid change are addressed throughout the curriculum, and there are courses in emerging technologies (e.g.: Emerging and Evolving Technologies; Multimedia Literacies; Digital Libraries; Publishing). International and national practicum placements are popular, with students travelling to other provinces, the US, Britain and as far as Finland (*PP* Appendix II.M). There are also courses on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility, and Copyright (Course outlines; *PP* p. 46, 50). A specialized online MLIS program, focussed on Digital Curation, has passed through the approval stage, and is expected to be offered within the next five years (*PP* p. 65).

The curriculum is forward-looking in terms of leadership, technology, and the theories and tools of information management (*PP* p. 50; course outlines). Interviews with students, alumni, faculty and adjunct faculty indicate a strong feeling that current students are well-prepared in this regard. Employer surveys and practicum evaluations support this.

There is ample evidence that the “curriculum promotes commitment to continuous professional growth” (Standard II.3.7) through core courses and electives as well as site visits, the Forum for Information Professionals, the e-Portfolio Capping requirements, volunteer work, and complimentary student association memberships (*PP* p. 51-52, course outlines).

The choice of electives is broad and the electives are rotated with reasonable frequency (*PP* Appendix II.Q). Experiential opportunities are encouraged through practicum placements and directed research. Content and sequence relationships are clear (*PP* Appendix II.O).

Students have the option of choosing a thesis path that includes a required 3-credit pre-requisite plus the 9-credit thesis. There have been 12 theses submitted since 2006 (website), indicating that only a few students choose this option. Directed studies may also have original research components, but are not required to meet thesis standards. (Interview with Chair of Curriculum Committee, March 4). According to students, faculty encourage research and the consideration of thesis and directed studies options (Interviews, March 4).

Interdisciplinary studies are encouraged, and students may take courses in other faculties, as well as at other institutions covered by the *Western Deans' Agreement*. Students may take courses through the Faculty of Education's Teacher-Librarianship by Distance Learning online program, as well as other Faculty of Education courses. A combined degree with Humanities Computing is possible, and a combined MLIS/MBA in conjunction with the Alberta School of Business has been approved and will launch in Fall 2014 (*PP* p. 52-59; *Draft Report* p. 9)).

Course pre- and co-requisites appear appropriate and it is clear that learning experiences are built upon a general foundation of library and information studies. Course outlines indicate that specialized statements of knowledge and competencies are taken into account (*PP* p. 58; course outlines).

As evidenced by course outlines, and observation of four classroom and two online classes, the curriculum conforms to the requirements of the *Standards* "regardless of forms or locations of delivery" (Standard II.6). The online program which starts Fall 2013 will "adhere to the same standards of quality Courses will be taken in an order that optimizes the learning process, and will comply with the School's vision, mission, values, School goals, and MLIS outcomes, as well as the ALA *Standards for Accreditation*" (*PP* p. 59). The content of the course outlines for courses offered in the two modes are the same (Interview with Online Program Coordinator, March 5).

There is evidence that all constituents have been consulted on an on-going basis since the previous accreditation via membership in School Council and the Curriculum Committee, formal surveys and consultations, and informal feedback mechanisms such as discussion with alumni and employers at association events (many graduates are employed in various capacities in the Edmonton area, and the links with SLIS are strong). An evaluative review was undertaken in 2008-2009 from which flowed a number of additions and changes to the curriculum. The course content is responsive to the consultation processes and curriculum design is receptive to innovation in terms of content and pedagogy. There is some evidence that assessment of student performance is taken into account. The new e-Portfolio Capping Project, which will be assessed for the first time this spring, should provide firmer evidence of student achievement of learning outcomes, and therefore allow a more reliable feedback mechanism (*PP* p. 25-26; interview with Chair of Curriculum Committee, March 4).

Standard III: Faculty

SLIS at the University of Alberta is a small-sized school comprised of eight fully-appointed faculty members. The current School Director has the status of Executive Professor. He was brought in to provide leadership on an interim basis, and was not expected to fulfill major research roles. (Interview with Director, March 2). Of the seven remaining faculty members, two are at the assistant level, one assistant professor will be newly tenured at the associate level as of June 2013, two are at the associate level (tenured) and two are full professors. In addition, since last year, the School has one cross-appointed (50%) associate professor given solely administrative duties. This person is mainly in charge of the distance education program that was recently initiated at the School. In the past seven years two senior faculty retired (one in 2007 and one in 2009), in 2010 the School Director left, and then in 2011 two full professors left, which caused difficulties within the School for a short while (Interviews with Dean of Education, Director, Faculty, students, alumni, March 2-5). The School was quick to respond to this situation by appointing an interim Director in 2010 and hiring two new faculty members in 2012. The School thus remains at 8.0 FTE which is the level it was at since the last accreditation, with the addition of 0.5 FTE from the cross-appointed faculty member (*PP* p. 68; interview with Director, March 4).

This small permanent faculty is supplemented by a large number of adjuncts and sessional lecturers (34 over the past seven years), many of whom have a Ph.D. These are mostly library practitioners with relevant expertise in a specific area. As such, the School's faculty is globally diverse, deliberately library-oriented, with appropriate knowledge and skills to deliver the courses enumerated in the curriculum. For regular faculty the normal teaching load is two courses per term, or four courses per year, comparable to most large size research-oriented institutions. The School's teaching policy ensures that required courses are usually taught by regular faculty members, which assures consistency of learning outcomes in core knowledge areas; this is believed to be a good practice to ensure that program objectives are met (*PP* p. 73).

Each member of the regular faculty was individually interviewed by two members of the External Review Panel, except for Professor Zhao who was away on sabbatical leave. All expressed great satisfaction regarding physical facilities (office and classroom), and administrative, pedagogical and research support. Except for the two faculty members hired in 2012, all have solid research records, strong enough to lead them successfully through the path of regular appointments and promotion (see further discussion of research accomplishments on p. 13). Each faculty member receives a full-year sabbatical when they are first eligible to do so (after receiving tenure and subsequently, every seven years).

The two recently-hired faculty members expressed that they are very happy with their new appointments and were already quite active building their courses and writing research grant proposals. They were satisfied with the mentoring support they had informally received from their colleagues and of the services they had been offered at the University level. Both received a one-course release during their first year, a computer upgrading fund and a small internal research start-up grant.

Each regular faculty member is allotted a Graduate Assistant for an average of 6 hours per week. The School does not provide teaching assistants, neither to regular faculty nor to adjunct faculty, which does not seem to cause major problems considering the fact that the average class size is fairly small (rarely over 35, although core courses often exceed 40 students). SLIS faculty as a whole is recognized by the Dean of Education as providing a higher than expected level of service for its size at the University and Faculty levels (Interview, March 4).

Adjunct faculty were interviewed as a group by all six members of the ERP. Most were happy to report that the level of guidance and mentoring they received had improved over the past 18 months. All praised the administrative staff for their help and support and they applauded the major technological improvements made in the past years both in the classrooms and through the online instruction delivery platform.

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* prevents Canadian institutions from compiling personal information about race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability. As a result, statistics about the diversity of the School's students, staff, and faculty could not be reported. However, according to the *Program Presentation*, "the School's faculty complement consists of four men and five women; visible minorities are represented. The ethnic/cultural backgrounds and linguistic capabilities of SLIS faculty members are also diverse." (p. 87) Of the full-time faculty, two are Canadian-born out-of-province, one born in India, one in Australia, one in Iran and one in China. The remainder were born in Alberta, but finished their terminal degrees in another province (PP p. 86-87).

At the University of Alberta each individual faculty, department, and unit is responsible for its own recruitment processes. At SLIS the selection process for new faculty members appears to be highly consultative and emanates from a strategic planning process. The *Program Presentation* reports that "each time a position is to be filled, required areas of teaching and research expertise are determined by the faculty as a group. The process begins with an evaluation of the needs of the MLIS program and the School, and the advertisement for the position is written on the basis of that evaluation ... All advertisements for tenure-track positions indicate the following requirements, in addition to the area

of specialized expertise: a Ph.D. completed or near completion, evidence of research potential, and a commitment to teaching” (p. 80).

In the recent 2011–2012 faculty search the posting (one posting for the two positions available) listed a very wide variety of specialized expertise: “Candidates may have expertise and/or research interest in, but not limited to, one or more of the following areas: knowledge management, bibliometrics/citation analysis, and information visualization; information retrieval, information organization, information behavior, and user services (including services to children and youth); or information policy” (PP Appendix III.H). According to the Director, the choice was made to make as wide a search as possible, in the hopes that SLIS would be able to interview team-compatible candidates with the flexibility to work with the existing faculty, and with the potential to develop their teaching and research interests within a team environment. The underlying assumption was that recent Ph.D. graduates are at the beginning of their careers and may change their research interests as they become established, so the School was looking for potential research ability, but did not want to rule out possibly excellent candidates by specifying specific research interests or expertise. It was deemed extremely important to focus on team-building in the aftermath of the departure of three faculty members and the retirement of two others. The Director indicated that SLIS was very satisfied with this process and its results (Interview with Director, March 4).

SLIS faculty members have clearly delineated research expertise and courses are assigned to them based on their specializations. Professional work experience prior to recruitment at SLIS is strongly preferred (as advertised in the job postings).

Classroom technology and online teaching platforms seem to be highly integrated in most faculty teaching practices. Two SLIS classrooms have been recently upgraded with SMART classroom technologies and class observation show that the technologies are used appropriately. Several faculty members have served on the Faculty of Education’s Technology Advisory Board, which advises the Dean on priorities for the deployment and integration of technology into teaching and learning. The Faculty of Education’s Educational Technology Services unit also provides services to help faculty, staff, and instructors. Many regular and adjunct faculty reported making good use of the services offered by this unit (Interviews with Faculty and with Assistant Dean of Information Technology and Computing).

Teaching effectiveness is an aspect of faculty evaluation and is measured in part through the questionnaire distributed to student for class evaluation. The University of Alberta mandates written, anonymous student evaluations of every course offered each time it is taught. This measures teaching effectiveness, which is used as a major aspect of faculty evaluation. Results indicate generally high levels

of satisfaction for most courses. The course evaluations are made available to the SLIS Director and demonstrated teaching competence is an element considered in tenure and promotion (*PP* p. 89-90).

Faculty teaching expertise has been recognized within and outside the University. Dr. Toni Samek received the first annual *Library Journal Teaching Award* in 2007 and the *3M National Teaching Fellowship* in 2012. Dr. Margaret Mackey was awarded the Faculty of Education *Graduate Teaching Award* in 2007 and the *Killam Annual Professorship* in 2009-2010. Dr. Branch-Mueller received the *Faculty of Education Award for Excellence and Innovation in the Use of Technology for Teaching and Learning* (with Dr. Joanne de Groot) in 2011. (*PP* p. 82)

Most of the School's faculty members participate and provide leadership in a wide variety of organizations ranging from more professional-oriented to more research-oriented associations. During group interviews, employers and alumni reported the involvement of faculty members in professional organizations.

The University of Alberta is a research-intensive institution and as such, SLIS faculty members are expected to develop a strong research agenda and to conduct research actively. The Faculty of Education has a number of awards and grants to support research and several faculty members have been recipients of grants and/or awards. There is both a University Research Services Office and a Faculty Research Facilitation Office to provide support for faculty members' research activities. The School has clearly-identifiable research strengths delineated by the faculty areas of expertise, and strongly values interdisciplinary, intercultural and collaborative research. There is clear evidence from the CVs of SLIS faculty members that they disseminate their work regularly to scholarly and professional audiences, at local, national, and international levels (*PP* p. 70-72, 82-84). The Dean of Education confirms that they have matched or exceeded the research output of other faculty units on campus (Interview, March 4).

In the past seven years SLIS faculty have been successful in obtaining substantial amounts of research funding (a total of \$6,943,293 since 2006) which was used in part to stimulate student learning and understanding of the research process (*PP* p. 83). Most SLIS faculty members are also actively engaged in service roles related to research.

The MLIS curriculum is organized around eight broad thematic areas intended to develop diverse competencies addressed by faculty competencies, appropriately matched to the needs of the Program. It is customary practice for the Director and faculty members to discuss teaching assignments in order to reach mutual agreement, with the final decision made by the Director. As a result, teaching assignments closely correspond to the competencies and interests of the individual faculty members

and evidence of this can be found in the teaching calendar. Additionally, the School's adjunct professors and sessional lecturers teach in their areas of professional expertise.

Course releases are given to compensate for some administrative duties and to accommodate sabbatical or other forms of leave. This permits sufficient time for faculty to attend to student advising, research and service commitments. Regular full-time faculty members typically teach in the regular academic year, leaving summer to attend to other duties, primarily research.

The University of Alberta's Faculty Agreement mandates that all faculty members shall be scholars, active in teaching (40%), in research (40%), and in service (20%). SLIS faculty must submit an annual report to the Faculty of Education for their evaluation. This report is the basis for discussion with the Director as part of the annual performance review which in turn is also an opportunity to discuss the faculty member's service responsibilities, teaching assignments, and research plans for the next few years. For tenure or promotion, additional evaluation methods are used such as peer observation of classroom teaching, summative evaluation of student course evaluation data, and assessment from senior academics in the field.

Standard IV: Students

Most of the work associated with recruitment and admissions for the MLIS Program is done by the Graduate Coordinator (a faculty member) and the Graduate Student Services Administrator.

Efforts in recruitment are basic but have recently intensified with the hiring of a Graduate Student Services Administrator with prior recruitment experience, and the development of a new visual identity. Mass mail-outs of the recruitment materials has been undertaken, and the Graduate Student Services Administrator has been attending graduate recruitment fairs and library conferences in Alberta, BC, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and further afield (e.g., the Ontario Library Association Super Conference). Plans for 2013 include 12 conferences and 5 graduate fairs (*PP* p. 115-17; Interview with Admissions Committee, March 4).

The majority of students come from the Prairie Provinces of Canada, but the School indicates that it is committed to diversity and there are a small number of students each year from provinces other than Alberta and countries outside Canada. Students in the current cohort speak more than 14 languages other than English (*PP* p. 119). It is hoped that the online program will attract those in remote and rural, including Aboriginal, communities (Interview with Director, March 4). There is concern that more creative recruitment methods may be necessary to improve outreach to underserved communities,

such as immigrant communities, and to obtain applicants from further afield (Interviews with Director and Provost, March 4-5).

The School is also committed to the University of Alberta's goal to attract and retain First Nations students and has recruited 9 such students to the Program since 2006. The Aboriginal Student Recruitment Coordinator is interested in working with indigenous recruitment, particularly for the online program. She suggested that the School tweak its marketing materials to appeal to the Aboriginal market. She also suggested that there may be recruitment opportunities with the University of Alberta's Honours Native Studies program. Scholarships would be an important incentive for Aboriginal recruitment (Interview with Aboriginal Student Recruitment Coordinator, March 4).

Applications to, and enrolment in, the Program have been fairly steady in the past seven years, although there was a noticeably lower number of applicants and a higher number of admits in 2012. The ratio of admits to applicants rose to 52% in 2012 from an average of 35% in the previous 6 years (*PP* p. 119). The Admissions Committee feels that the ups and downs in application numbers is related to the province's "up and down" economy, and is not concerned about these fluctuations. The applicants have been very strong in recent years, thus the higher ratio of admits to applicants; the average GPA at admission for the 2012 cohort was 3.53 (Interview with Admissions Committee, March 4; *PP* p. 119).

Financial aid is administered by a Scholarships and Awards Sub-Committee (a sub-committee of the Admissions Committee). The decision-making is done by two faculty members (one has traditionally been the Graduate Coordinator, but this is not a requirement), and administrative support is provided by the Graduate Student Services Administrator. The Committee meets in June to make decisions on scholarships for the following academic year. The Committee also runs workshops for external award applications (such as SSHRCs and QEII awards) and selects the winners of graduation prizes. Information on sources of financial assistance is readily available on the MLIS Program website. Over the past four years, the percentage of students receiving funding has varied from 17% to 37%, with an average of 20%. The total amount available for internal awards for 2013/2014 is \$21,150, and most of this goes to second-year rather than incoming students. The Committee acknowledges that it is important for the School to increase the scholarship "pot" so that funding can become a recruitment tool. As noted above, this is an important issue in Aboriginal recruitment. (*PP* p. 120-21; interview with Scholarships and Awards Committee, March 5).

Career and placement support is provided by the following:

- a Listserv of job ads (Jerome-L) has been operating since 1997 and is popular with both students and alumni (Student and alumni interviews, March 3-4)
- the SLIS Facebook page includes a section for non-traditional job ads
- Partner's Week, providing job shadowing opportunities, is held twice a year
- The Forum for Information Professionals is a one-day conference held annually
- A Career Fair has been hosted by SLIS three times in the past seven years
- the Practicum course (LIS 590) is extremely popular; participation averages 30 per year, a significant percentage of the School's enrolment; international practicum placements began in 2010, thus providing increased flexibility; some students suggest that the practicum should be a requirement of graduation, and some would like the opportunity to do two placements (*PP* Appendix II.M; Student and alumni interviews, March 3-4)
- Internships for recent graduates are provided by the Edmonton Public Library and the University of Alberta

There are career development resources such as CV-writing workshops available to all students on a University-wide basis (*PP* p.123) However, some employers and students mentioned the need for workshops on resume writing and interview skills (Interviews, March 3-4). The Director has noted that SLIS may need to accelerate its efforts to ensure that students are all aware of these resources (Draft Report, p. 16)

The SLIS website provides up-to-date and complete information on the Program; one example is that full course outlines are openly available – login is not required. Faculty members maintain their own sites that are linked to the SLIS site. The Graduate Student Services Administrator has recently revised the application/admission information.

The SLIS website is about to be overhauled using the new University-wide content management system, but the tools, template, and guidelines are not yet available.

The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) sets the minimum standards for admission to all graduate programs at the University of Alberta. Standards for admission to SLIS as outlined in the Program Presentation and the Appendices meet or exceed those required by FGSR. For example, the MLIS requirement for English-language proficiency is higher than the FGSR standard (*PP* p. 118). This is typical of MLIS programs at other Canadian institutions and laudable because of the importance of oral and written communication skills in the LIS field.

The Admissions Committee is composed of the Graduate Coordinator, the Graduate Student Services Administrator and two faculty members. The Committee meets shortly after the application deadline date to read the files together and make recommendations for admission. This collaborative process ensures transparency and equal treatment of the applications. Until this year, FGSR has made the final decision on admissions, including requests for exceptional admission. These tasks are to be transferred to the Department/School level for Fall 2014 admissions, with FGSR taking on an auditing role (Interview with Dean of FGSR, March 5).

Academic support is provided by a system of Program Advisors (upon entering the Program, each student is assigned a faculty member). Although there was a lack of stability with these advisors in 2011/12, due to faculty turnover, a brief medical leave and two faculty members returning from sabbatical, the issue has been addressed and current students are very happy with the system now in place (*PP* p. 127-28; Student interviews, March 4).

Most of the individual course outlines on the website outline the methods of evaluation for that course. A Brown Bag lunch, which is podcasted and available online to all students, is held each semester to provide course information, including explanations of the grading system used for all SLIS courses (*PP* p. 56, 128, 129-130).

There are many opportunities for student involvement in organizations both within the Faculty (e.g., SLIS Student Council (LISSA), SLIS Curriculum Committee, Director's Committee, School Council, Future Librarians for Intellectual Freedom) and externally (e.g., Graduate Academic Affairs Council, Graduate Students' Association, Education Faculty Council). Two 2005 graduating students established an annual award to recognize a first year student's contributions to extracurricular life at SLIS. The current student leaders appear very enthusiastic about their roles and appreciative of the opportunities to develop their leadership skills (Interviews with student leadership, LISSA, March 4).

A long-established "Get Acquainted" party hosted each September by the University of Alberta Libraries brings together SLIS students and the local and provincial professional community.

Elements of the program and course review process include:

- exit surveys to determine level of Program satisfaction
- placement surveys to determine employment trends and success finding work

- Course evaluations (formal University of Alberta written evaluations- USRI) and mid-term informal feedback solicited in each course
- annual faculty retreat
- regular review of student and Program needs by the Curriculum Committee
- external measures such as student/alumni publications, conference presentations, leadership roles

As noted under Standards I and II above, the revised e-Portfolio Capping Project is being assessed for the first time this spring so as yet it is not possible to evaluate its effectiveness as a feedback/planning mechanism for the Program as a whole.

Standard V: Administration and Financial Support

As called for by Standard V.1, SLIS is “...an integral yet distinctive academic unit...” with significant autonomy and adequate resources to accomplish its program objectives. Since 1991 SLIS has functioned successfully as a department within the Faculty of Education (*PP* p. 139) with its Director and faculty engaged in Faculty of Education and University of Alberta committees and other working bodies. Various campus administrators and faculty colleagues laud the generosity of SLIS faculty in the extent to which they are actively engaged in committee work, noting the high level of participation from a relatively small school (Interviews, March 3-4). SLIS retains control of student admissions and curricular changes. The School operates like all other units in conforming to University-wide policies and procedures for hiring, salary levels, administrative compensation, performance appraisal, and other personnel and fiscal structures (*PP* Appendices V.A-H). Students and support staff likewise actively serve on committees at various levels within the School and University (Student and staff interviews, March 3-4; *PP* p. 146-47).

Prior to the visit and while on-site, the ERP reviewed recruitment and hiring of the School’s current and future Directors. Ernie Ingles was hired to re-establish harmony, strengthen planning efforts, and provide nurturing leadership after a period of internal conflict and personnel loss (Interviews with Dean of Education and Acting Provost, March 4). He has worked tirelessly and successfully to restore a productive workplace, confidence across all of the School’s constituents, and a highly collaborative atmosphere. With his interim appointment coming to a close, the search for a new Director began over the winter. As required by University practice, the search commenced as an internal posting only but did not result in identification of a successful candidate. Consequently, the search will be re-launched in the fall as a broad external search. The Dean has already considered possible options for sustaining the

School should the current interim leader depart prior to the arrival of the new Director. Academic rank and compensation for the Director and faculty are determined by broad University agreements; the current interim Director holds a unique title within the Faculty and as the Director of an accredited School, he holds greater administrative discretion than other department chairs within the Faculty of Education (*PP* p. 147; Interviews with Faculty of Education Department Chairs, March 5).

The School has spent two years refilling faculty and support staff vacancies and is now at a full complement at both levels. Faculty, students and others on campus attest to the helpfulness and effectiveness of the support staff (Student interviews, March 4; Focus group results, *PP* Appendix 1.E, p.3). Support staff proved knowledgeable and readily responsive in answering ERP questions on-site, and staff described professional development opportunities they have taken through University funding (Staff interviews, March 3-4). Faculty members report receiving adequate clerical and research assistance support in their work (Faculty interviews, March 3-4).

The *SLIS Program Presentation* (p. 160) describes its financial support as “...adequate to generous,” and the ERP agrees after reviewing a variety of financial data in the *PP* and on-site, including annual operating budgets. The School has reasonable flexibility in use of carry-forward funds and other revenues along with a solid base of institutional funding, and the financial model for the online degree includes detailed projections of anticipated expenditures and revenues through 2017/18 (Interviews with Director and support staff, March 3-4; Online degree internal financial plan). University officials express the common concern over possible changes in future funding, but they believe SLIS to be well respected and closely aligned with University and Provincial priorities for providing education and services to Alberta’s citizens (Interviews with Dean of Education and Acting Provost, March 4).

SLIS offers a variety of 1-credit courses/workshops that are available throughout the year and are open to both students and practitioners. Professionals in the field may also audit SLIS courses. The 2011 Professional Development survey has been taken into account in the development of these courses/workshops, and will also be used in the development of continuing education opportunities for delivery over the RISE Network (Draft Report p.20; *PP* p. 175). Some alumni and employers expressed a need for more continuing education opportunities (Interviews with Director, alumni and employers, March 3-4); SLIS hopes that this expansion of continuing education opportunities will meet their needs.

Standard V.8 calls for a “...systematic planning and evaluation process...” which SLIS has focused on over the last three years. As discussed earlier in this report, SLIS has engaged in numerous planning sessions, gathered assessment data, produced multiple planning documents, and has worked to implement those plans. The cyclical schedule consists of 1) yearly SLIS retreats that focus on the

mission, goals, objectives and related planning documents; 2) yearly surveys: SLIS Exit Survey and SLIS Placement Survey; 3) curriculum reviews every five years and; 4) the Universal Student Ratings of Instruction questionnaire. There are various consultation and feedback mechanisms in place, such as SLIS Academic Council, the Curriculum Committee and the School Council. In addition there are surveys and focus groups as required, such as the Employer Survey and the Professional Development Survey and planning strategies linked to specific initiatives such as the online MLIS program. In conjunction with Standard V and the importance of an overall effective planning and evaluation process, the ERP was able to verify the work done to date, but did not find evidence that all of the assessment instruments the Program has deemed desirable have been developed, nor that there is a comprehensive framework of systematic planning characterized by tight integration of a regular cycle of planning, assessment, and refinement. As noted by the Director (March 3-5), the School would benefit from strengthening its iterative planning and assessment. The School has recently taken the step of rewriting one support position to concentrate on the development and administration of incomplete assessment tools and related work, which will facilitate further progress in this area and speaks to the School's understanding of the importance of measuring outcomes (Interview with Director, March 4).

Standard VI: Physical Resources and Facilities

SLIS is located in the Rutherford South Building, sharing the building with the University of Alberta Libraries. The School occupies sections of the first and second floors and the entire third floor. The building includes classrooms, computing labs, lounge areas, graduate assistant work space, dedicated study space, and washroom facilities (*PP* p. 163-64). Since the last review, the School's facilities have been refurbished and upgraded to accommodate newer technologies (*PP* p. 171; On-site tour).

Faculty and students have expressed satisfaction with the quality of the space available, particularly with the recent technological upgrades and replacement of dated furnishings. Offices and workrooms are spacious and well-lit (Student interviews, March 4; On-site tour). The majority of administrative and faculty facilities are located on the third floor, including faculty offices, the administration offices, Faculty and Staff Lounge, and a visiting faculty and guest room (*PP* p. 168).

The School's five classrooms of various sizes and configurations are located on all three levels of the building. Each class is equipped with appropriate instructional technology, with several having been upgraded to include SMART Classroom technologies. One room has seen the addition of a videoconferencing centre as well as the SMART technologies and will be a key facility in support of the

online MLIS program. However, there is a noticeable lack of electrical outlets to support devices such as laptops, not an unusual problem in retrofitted buildings. At the moment this does not appear to cause problems, but might in the future (On-site tour).

Students have access to the SLIS Student Computer Lab located on the first level and also have access to additional computer workstations elsewhere in the Rutherford building. Other student space includes the SLIS Student Lounge (lunchroom and an informal meeting place) as well as Henderson Hall, a large multi-use room for individual study or group work needs that provides access to two classrooms and the computer lab (*PP* p. 169-70). Student groups have access to the classrooms and multi-purpose spaces for events and activities (example: Forum for Information Professionals, Bagel Day for SLIS Students, etc.).

The School is co-located in the Rutherford complex with the University Library's Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) Library, including the core library and information science collection and course reserves. Students and faculty have access to digital (including remote access) and to print collections. Both groups have expressed satisfaction with the breadth and depth of the collections (Interviews, March 3-5). The HSS Library also provides students with access to additional computer workstations and study space (individual and group).

Students have access to additional resources available at the School in Henderson Hall (course-specific titles), in the SLIS Computer Lab (IT guides and manuals), and directly from faculty.

SLIS is under the wing of the Faculty of Education's EdTech Services. It provides application management and instruction-related technology support and training/consulting services. It refers SLIS to the following services when needed:

- infrastructure and hardware support from the Academic Information & Communications Technologies (AICT) unit;
- Learning Management System (Moodle) and ePortfolio support from the Centre for Teaching and Learning.

Although the separation of IT functions (application management from infrastructure) is quite recent, SLIS is perceived by service providers as being a long-standing early adopter of new practices and is sought after as a partner on initiatives (Interview with Assistant Dean of Information Technology and Computing).

Physical resources and facilities are addressed as part of the planning and evaluation processes at several levels within the University including:

- SLIS Academic Council;
- SLIS Ad Hoc Facilities Committee in 2008;
- Faculty of Education's Technology Advisory Board,
- Faculty-Based Information and Communication Technology Committee;
- Committee on the Learning Environment;
- Information Technology Committee;
- Teaching, Learning, and Technology Advisory Council

SLIS is represented on each of the committees by either a faculty member or the Director. Student representatives meet regularly with the SLIS Director where issues relating to the School's physical resources and facilities are addressed as necessary (*PP* p. 180-81).

Summary

This is an active program, well-aligned with the values of the University and of the Faculty of Education. Indications are that it is meeting the needs of the University's broader community, as well as the immediate community of libraries and allied organizations in Edmonton. The introduction of the online program in Community-Focused Public Librarianship should allow it to meet its mandate of serving the library community throughout Alberta more effectively. Both the Acting Provost and the Dean of Education expressed clear support for the School and its programs. The School is clearly well respected within the University, and faculty members are involved with committees at all levels.

Constituents of the Program indicate that they are involved with planning and decision-making. However, while there is evidence of some systematic planning, it was difficult to determine the regularity and the scope of the School's formal planning.

The curriculum reflects the ALA requirements and, in general, students feel that they can build effective program paths that reflect their own interests and needs. There is sufficient flexibility, effective advising, and a willingness among faculty to coach and support. Students are encouraged to perform research as well as to gain experiential knowledge through practica and other opportunities.

Faculty members teach the curriculum, conduct research, and are active in professional associations. They have the education and experience to teach their courses and advise students. New faculty members feel well-mentored and supported.

The administrative staff is well regarded by constituents and appears to be sufficient for program support. They are active within the School and have good relationships with faculty, students and the Director. The Program has pleasant, adequate space with close proximity to library resources. Technology-related needs appear to be met for both students and faculty.

The External Review Panel makes note of the following:

1. The relationships among and between administration, faculty and staff is very collegial and student-focused. Current leadership has been effective and innovative in guiding the School through a difficult time of transition in the wake of faculty and support staff retirements and departures. The administration is to be congratulated on the appointment of an Interim Director with the abilities to create a healing and strengthening environment. The new hires are integrating well with the support of their colleagues and are committed to the Program. There is now a solid culture of consensus-building and mutual support.
2. There is strong support for the Program in the Edmonton/Alberta library community, and there is a dynamic relationship between the Program and its alumni/employers. Graduates are respected and employers and practicum supervisors indicate a high level of satisfaction with their abilities.
3. SLIS's progress in developing online delivery of its existing MLIS courses as well as the online Community-Focused Public Librarianship program responds to a serious need among the rural and remote regions of the Prairies. Its willingness to work with other faculties to develop such programs as the soon-to-be MBA/MLIS and its flexibility in facilitating 1-credit courses indicates an openness to listening to its constituents' needs and interests.

The External Review Panel has the following concerns:

1. The Interim Director is expected to retire in the near future, and a search for his successor has been initiated. Conversations with the various constituents indicate a desire that in addition to the necessary academic qualifications (Ph.D.), the incoming Director be a leader and consensus builder with a strong vision, comfortable with innovation and with the issues surrounding the

delivery of courses in several modalities. They also express concern that the new Director be forward-thinking and engaged with the community, able to network with all constituents, and able to continue the momentum.

2. There is good evidence of a long-term view in the development of the School's capabilities and offerings, and of careful financial planning. The panel notes the work SLIS has done to date, but also notes that tools for assessment of student learning outcomes are in the process of development and that the various planning activities lack a formal comprehensive framework/schedule. Taking into consideration the work and plans already in process, it can be expected that the School will continue to strengthen its iterative planning and assessment.
3. The School is well on its way to integrating student learning outcomes into the curriculum, and is, in fact, ahead of the curve in terms of the approach within the greater University, and within the LIS community in Canada. However, the transition to teaching to learning outcomes is currently at the program and core course level. The next steps are to extend the determination of learning outcomes to all courses, to increase the rigour of outcome definitions at program and course level and to organize pedagogical development for faculty in teaching to, and assessing, learning outcomes. This is an empowering transition, but not always an easy one. As part of the Faculty of Education, the School is well-placed to take advantage of the knowledge within the Faculty.
4. Recruitment strategies are at a very basic level. More resources could be given to this activity to facilitate improved outreach to such underserved communities as Aboriginal, immigrant and remote communities.
5. Scholarship monies are limited, which has an impact on the Program's ability to recruit. An increase in scholarship funds was particularly noted as a factor that may contribute to boosting the recruitment of Aboriginal students.