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Investigating LIS Curriculum in both Structure and Content: the PILISSE Model

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Introduction

This theoretical paper aims to develop a new model for the assessment of LIS education courses, to prepare students with the fundamentals of librarianship so they are useful in their jobs locally and internationally.

Arguing for a study of the intersection of philosophy of information (PI), social epistemology (SE), and library and information science (LIS), will yield a set of guidelines to better inform those engaged in selecting common core courses for LIS professionals internationally.

This is work in progress. It's in the interest of the author that this discussion continues in LIS forums to allow further expanding the views herewith presented.

Intro…

LIS education faces issues about what Blaise Cronin (2002) called the 'increasing difficulty in maintaining coherence of identity, image, and purpose. Questions such as:

- What is librarianship, or information studies?

- What skills and attitudes make for successful LIS practice?

have been asked in various forums in recent years, and continue to be pondered.

Then we encounter the notion put forth by Haynes, McMullen arguing that each library reflects merely a philosophy of the community it serves – a reflection of stagnated growth.

State of LIS Curriculum Practices

- What percentage of the curriculum is considered core?
- The term "Core" is at time a confusing and ambiguous term.
- The challenges of traditional core and the student's career track
- Core courses vs. Career track

On the Flip Side

What if?????

- Instead of having the notion of a common curriculum or core courses - rather we could think about the idea of a set of common courses to be taught;

- How about the notion of a LIS curriculum made strong in the traditional areas of librarianship, especially in terms of service to users?

- Not forgetting that technology continues to have a strong bearing and relevance on LIS curriculum

Theoretical View of PI

Philosophical field concerned with the critical investigation of the conceptual nature and basic principles of information, including its dynamics, utilization and sciences, and the application of information-theoretic and computational methodologies to philosophical problems (Floridi, 2002).

It concerns

- information environments, including their systemic properties, forms of interactions, internal developments, and information life cycles

- series of various stages in form and functional activity through which information can pass, from its initial occurrence to its final utilization and possible disappearance

Theoretical View of PI

It concerns   Continues

- Information life cycle includes "discovering, designing, authoring, collecting, validating, modifying, organizing, indexing, classifying

- basic concepts related to library and information sciences by studying the essence, nature, and value of discourses in librarianship

- privileges 'information' over 'computation' as the pivotal topic of the new field

- the physical aspects of library operations focusing primarily on library tools; and metaphysical nature stressing the meaning of communicated ideas

Theoretical View of Social Epistemology

Social Epistemology (SE) is the study of those processes by which society as a whole seeks to achieve a perceptive or understanding relation to the total environment–physical, psychological, and intellectual (Shera, 1965: 27).

It concerns

- Connecting the intellectual life of the individual to that of the society, nation, or culture

- Subjects that relate the individual to the society in which they live

- The study by which society as a whole seeks a perceptive relation to its total environment, i.e. the production, flow, integration, and consumption of all forms of communicated thought throughout the entire social pattern

Theoretical View of Social Epistemology

It concerns Continues

- the production, flow, integration, and consumption of all forms of communicated thought throughout the entire social pattern

- SE thus is all about the interaction between knowledge and social activity

Theoretical View of LIS

Widely studied and continuously defined, the wide range of elements that constitute LIS continue to challenge LIS researchers.

It concerns

- LIS is concerned with documents, their life cycles and the procedures, techniques and devices by which these are implemented, managed and regulated (Floridi, 2002);

- LIS is more about resources, their contents, and the institutions that handles them;

- LIS is the study of the library as an "information channel" or a "documentation or information center" that is mainly characterized by the production and use of methods to effectively access the information sources;

Theoretical View of LIS

It concerns

- LIS is about library users and sees them as being of central importance in the solving of library problems and in the fruitful exchange of ideas on LIS;

- Regardless of time or place LIS constitute three functions: functions with a view to library collections, to accessibility, and the library users.

Intersection of LIS, PI and SE

- LIS applies the fundamental principles and general techniques of PI to solve definite, practical problems and deal with specific, concrete phenomena. It conducts empirical research for practical service-oriented purposes e.g. education, research, communication and cooperation that are so critical to LIS internationally and the LIS education curriculum;

Intersection of LIS, PI and SE

- Taking into consideration that LIS leans more towards epistemology of knowledge, Floridi (2002) suggested that:

  - the library is a place where educational and communication needs and values are implemented, defended and fostered;

  - where contents are assessed and selected for the public, and where practices like cataloguing, for example, are far from being neutral, evaluation-free activities.

  - In the epistemology sense, librarianship is understood as:

    - *the management of knowledge,*

    - *the way in which knowledge is disseminated through society,*

    - *the way in which knowledge influences group behavior, and*

    - *the management of human knowledge.*

- Both LIS and SE are interested in the social dynamics of their objects, have a wide scope and have an empirical orientation.

PILISSE Model

The new model, it is presumed will define the role of library in society; validate librarianship as a discipline; add meaning to library practice; clarify knowledge of purpose, thus adding precision to actions: and provide distinctions within librarianship between the varying functions and duties performed by different types of libraries. The major purpose of the international curriculum will be:-

- to serve as a comprehensive and specialized tool for LIS instruction,

- to express LIS's obligations for societal needs, and

- to provide a base for research and scholarship.

PILISSE Model

Things to consider in deriving the curriculum using the PILISSE model:

- The discipline should be focused on subject matter based on an organized unity, and in harmony with library practice (Dimock, 1939, as cited in Nitecki, 1993: 243);

- Subjects that research and expand into library's 'backgrounds' of history, bibliography, and relations to society, based on validated data and reasonable conclusions (McMullen, 1957, as cited in Nitecki, 1993: 243);

- Subjects that considers the communication system in general (Bergen, 1967, Orr, 1977); and specifically, as an interpersonal communication and knowledge system (McGarry, 1975);

- to provide a meaning for library work by identifying it with a professional;

- to formulate policies reflecting social conditions and needs

PILISSE Model Application

Things to consider in deriving the curriculum using the PILISSE model:

- the emphasis should not only be on form but also on substance (Orman, 1935, 1940), by contributing to the development of professional consciousness and appreciation of education;

- The curriculum should address the code of ethics and professional conduct for librarians. The belief in the need for human beings to share information and ideas implies the recognition of information rights as expressed in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Article 19 which sets out the right to freedom of opinion, expression and access to information for all and the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas in any media, regardless of frontiers

- The curriculum should address the right of existence of library science – history of libraries. Whether library science has the right of existence has, until the present time, remained a controversial issue. Library science, which has been practiced in the Anglo-American world for approximately a century, is still not recognized and accepted as an autonomous field of study on the Continent;

PILISSE Model Application

Things to consider in deriving the curriculum using the PILISSE model:

- The curriculum should address the material and the formal objectives of library and information science;

- LIS definition indicates the fundamental unity of the various library functions and tasks, as well as the objective of "making possible cultural progress" through the library. In view of this unity, it is recommended that LIS curriculum should address cultural studies as part of the LIS international curriculum.

Conclusion

In the opinion of this paper, the most important thing is to try to build a foundation for LIS education assessment that will ensure the equivalency of specific core and common curricula in a more satisfactory way. Most existing concepts such as philosophy of information (PI), social epistemology (SE), and library and information science (LIS) can make valuable contributions towards formulating new approaches to assessing LIS education with the goal of identifying specific core and common courses that address the core issues identified by the intersection of PI and SE with LIS. This is the goal of the PILISSE model.

Discussion

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