What counts as a science and discipline in library and information science?

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Abstract

Purpose – The convergence of librarianship and information science to form library and information science (LIS) is seen as a recent phenomenon, with the term "information science" originally focused on the application of computers to library operations and services. LIS as a science and multidisciplinary field applies the practice and perspective of information with the aim of answering important questions related to the activities of a target group. As a science, LIS is more than a collection of facts to be memorised or techniques to be mastered but is instead an inquiry carried out by people who raise questions for which answers are unknown and who have gained confidence in their ability to reach conclusions, albeit tentative ones, through research, experiment and careful thought sharpened by the open criticism of others. What is described here is a dynamic and changing field of study called LIS which differs from Cronin's (2004) conclusion that library science or LIS is neither a science nor a discipline. Like any other science, LIS continues to emerge, evolve, transform and dissipate in the ongoing conversation of disciplines.

Design/methodology/approach – To understand LIS, this paper thoroughly reviewed the literature by paying attention to the genesis of the terms "information", "documentation", "science" and "librarianship", and then the interdisciplinary nature of library science and information science.

Findings – The differences between librarianship and information science are an indication that there are two different fields in a strong interdisciplinary relation, rather than one being a special case of the other. LIS has grown to be a scientific discipline, knowledge and a process that allows abandoning or modifying previously accepted conclusions when confronted with more complete or reliable experimental or observational evidence. Therefore, like any other science, LIS is a science and discipline in its own right that continues to emerge, evolve, transform and dissipate in the ongoing conversation of disciplines.

Originality/value – What is described here is a dynamic and changing field of study and a science called LIS that differs from Cronin's (2004) assessment that library science or LIS is neither a science nor a discipline. The originality of the paper is rooted in a growing discussion to understand the relevance and appreciate the continued existence of LIS as a science and a field of study.

Keywords Documentation, Science, Librarianship, Information science, Disciplines

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

The concept of library and information science (LIS) became predominant in the mid-twentieth century as a move to rename library schools into schools of LIS and to reflect curriculum changes, the needs of the profession, continuous technological changes, the needs of the instructors and instructional methods and materials. For example, the Graduate Library School at Illinois changed its name to the Graduate

LIS has grown to be a scientific discipline, knowledge and a process that allows abandoning or modifying previously accepted conclusions when confronted with more complete or reliable experimental or observational evidence. Therefore, like any other science, LIS is a science and a discipline in its own right that continues to emerge, evolve, transform and dissipate in the ongoing conversation of disciplines. As suggested by Hjørland (in Bawden and Robinson, 2012, p. xxii), there is a need to develop a general perspective that keeps the field together to help information professionals get a clear identity in relation to other fields in the multidisciplinary field, as well as to develop a body of specific information science knowledge related to all major branches of knowledge.

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