

THE UP SLIS ALUMNI: QUO VADIS?

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Abstract

This paper examined the career paths chosen by the graduates of the UP School of Library and Information Studies. Using an online survey form, 185 graduates from the UP SLIS indicated their current employment information. It was revealed in the survey that the traditional path of librarianship is still the most common type of employment for SLIS graduates. Most of the respondents indicated that they are from academic libraries and special libraries while some of the graduates also mentioned being employed in the archives and records management sector. The multidisciplinary aspect of the degree also manifested through some of the responses which indicated that graduates who decided to pursue a career other than librarianship end up in a variety of industries, such as IT, business, education, law.

Keywords: tracer study, University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Studies, employment of LIS graduates

Introduction

Since its establishment in 1961, the UP School of Library and Information Studies (UP SLIS, formerly known as the UP Institute of Library Science and UP Institute of Library and Information Science) has produced approximately 1700 graduates from the Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) and Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) programs. The UP SLIS, as the oldest library school in the region and the premier educational institution in the country, continuously advances its academic and training programs to develop more quality LIS professionals.

While the students become highly equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the demands of the LIS field and other related disciplines and industries, it is also the priority of the UP SLIS to secure the “future” of its graduates. With this, in 2015, the UP SLIS decided conduct a tracer of its graduates. Thus, this paper is the first attempt on identifying career paths chosen by UP SLIS

graduates, with the end goal of producing an alumni database and an updated alumni directory. This initiative also aims to see whether the career choices of UP SLIS graduates are aligned with their education background. This tracer also wishes to see which path UP SLIS graduates take, considering that there are now both the traditional and non-traditional options. It must likewise be noted that the output of this paper is not yet final since there are only less than 200 alumni who responded in the preliminary survey done between September to October 2015.

Pursuing a degree in library and information science means to many as the first step into becoming a professional librarian. In the Philippines, the basic requirement in order for one to practice librarianship is to pass the licensure examination, which is annually administered by the Philippine Board for Librarians. According to the Republic Act No. 9246 or The Philippine Librarianship Act of 2003, only the graduates of library and information science degrees (BLIS or MLIS) are the only qualified takers of the licensure examination.

However, being that the world is changing and is becoming a more complex, information society, the traditional roles of LIS professionals are also shifting. Non-traditional employment has become a choice for LIS graduates, and venturing into other career paths has become a trend. Varalakshmi (2006) outlined the competencies required of modern LIS professionals and emphasized the need for library and information professionals to be trained in information technology, aside from the tradition LIS curriculum. This, according to Varalakshmi, would make librarians more ready for the inevitable “technological revolution” happening in our society.

Information technology is one of the major areas being incorporated in LIS today, both in education and practice. Furthermore, other fields are seen to be at a parallel with LIS. Fraser-Arnott (2015) expressed that librarians and information professionals land in positions outside LIS because they have the necessary skills required in some other fields, which they also learned in their pursuit of their LIS degree. Management, entrepreneurial roles, and resource development are just some of the popular choices for LIS professionals who took the non-traditional path. In South Africa, for instance, the number of other information-related jobs outside libraries is also increasing. Positions in NGOs, the book trade, and government offices now welcome LIS graduates. Ocholla and Shongwe (2015) however, noted that despite the availability of non-traditional employment in South Africa, the primary place of employment for LIS graduates is still in libraries.

Data Collection

In order to determine the career path UP SLIS alumni have ventured into, an online survey form was distributed amongst the graduates, through e-mail within a one-month period. A total of 184 graduates accomplished the said form. A previously compiled directory of UP SLIS alumni was used as basis for the mailing list.

Findings

The responses were clustered according to the types of information agency or industry. Traditional places of employment for LIS graduates were clustered as one, while responses falling under non-LIS industries were entered under “Other”. Also, we can see in the table below the corresponding number of graduates who landed jobs in each industry:

Table 1

Current Place of Employment

Current Place of Employment	Responses
Libraries, Archives or Records Centers	120
Other	56
Unemployed or Part-time	7

As seen from the table above, the most common area where UP SLIS graduates hold job positions is in the library setting. However, it is also interesting to note that the graduates are also employable in non-LIS work settings, which is represented in Table 1 under “Other”. Such other industries include banks, broadcasting industries, bookstores, software developing companies, and LIS schools. A small number of alumni also mentioned either being in-between jobs or holding part-time employment at the time of responding to the survey.

The employment of LIS graduates in non-LIS environments can be seen as a positive indicator of the employability potential of the graduates. This may be attributed to how the LIS program traverses with the other disciplines and industries, giving its graduates more opportunities to work outside the LIS field. The employability and flexibility of LIS may also help convince more people into pursuing a degree in LIS. This result is also a reflection of the similarities noted by research done in other countries, concerning the career choices of LIS graduates, as cited by Pradhan (2015) and Fraser-Arnott (2015).

Table 2

Type of Library

Type of Library	Responses
Academic	57
Special	36
School	14
Public	4

Next, since there are four main types of libraries, the researcher wanted to find out exactly under which type our graduates end up in. So, after looking into each of the 107 responses which indicated that they worked in academic libraries, it was seen that 57 of them landed jobs in academic libraries. This might be because academic libraries require more library staff compared with other types of libraries. Madalogdog (2002) discusses some of the motivational factors which influence the satisfaction of academic librarians. Satisfaction in terms of compensation is one of the major reasons why LIS graduates pursue employment and stay in the academic library setting.

The next type of library in the list, special libraries garnered a total of 36 responses. The UP SLIS offers tracks or specializations on law librarianship, medical librarianship, archives and records management, and information technology. Students who took any of the said tracks are more inclined to enter special libraries focusing on them. There is also an assumption amongst LIS students that special libraries tend to pay more than other types of libraries. Locally, Roque (2004) mentions salary satisfaction as a motivational factor why LIS graduates choose to work in special libraries. Hines and Baker (2008) also points out that in general, special librarians have higher job satisfaction compared with their academic librarian counterparts.

As for school libraries, 14 respondents mentioned they were employed in such type, with almost all of them holding posts in private schools in the metro, and only one was employed in a public school. This might be explained because private schools offer better compensation than public schools, and the existence of employee items is a problem not just for public schools, but for government agencies in general.

Public libraries got the lowest number of responses, only four said they were in the public library setting. These graduates hold library positions in city libraries all within Metro Manila. This might be attributed to the sheer number of public libraries in the Philippines. According to a report from the Public Library Division of the National Library of the Philippines, in 2010, there were only around 1000 public libraries all over the Philippines and only 40% of these libraries were functional. The number of employment items, as mentioned above may also be a reason for the low number of graduates working in public libraries.

Markgren and Allen (2013) have identified fields which are considered “alternative paths” for LIS graduates. These fields include the following: project management, IT, writing, and customer service, among others. Looking into the results of our survey, we see similarities with the alternative paths that some of our graduates have taken.

Table 3

Chosen Industries Outside LIS

Name of Industries outside LIS	Responses
IT	23
Legal	5
Business	11
Administrative	6
Forensics	1
Civil Designer	1
Medical	3
Education	6
Media	1

A majority of UP SLIS graduates who were employed outside LIS chose the field of information technology (IT) as their workplace. IT has been recognized as a key player in the field of LIS, with it being incorporated in library operations. The current LIS curriculum in UP SLIS has two mandatory courses in information technology, and four optional IT electives. This might be the reason why a fraction of the graduates pursued careers in IT. These graduates have landed jobs as Application Developers, Software Engineers; Research and Development Engineers; IT administrators; Web developers; and programmers. Pradhan (2015) has confirmed the same trend occurring in India, with the job market booming especially with in the IT industry, the curriculum in LIS schools are being restructured so that they can produced graduates possessing good IT skills, making them more employable in the current job market.

A number of the graduates also indicated that they have landed jobs in the legal field, some as lawyers and some as legal researchers. In recent years we have seen that law school is a popular choice for graduates, with some of them going straight to law school after obtaining their LIS degree. In the business field, several UP SLIS graduates also found their respective niches. Some graduates have entered jobs in banks either as tellers or loan officers; bookstores, and sales officers for publishing companies. A number of the respondents also said they have chosen to educate aspiring librarians, hence working as LIS educators.

Some outliers were also identified, one indicated being currently employed as a forensic Anthropologist; one who is currently a television production assistant, and one who became a civil designer. These people graduated with a degree in LIS but pursued further studies in other unrelated fields. From the data above, we can also see that 3 ended up in the medical field, as doctors.

Conclusion

The traditional library setting is still the top choice of employment for UP SLIS graduates. Despite the existence of alternative career paths for the graduates in industries related to LIS, and in some other industries which are totally unrelated, graduates choose workplaces aligned to their educational training. Some might have deviated from what LIS really focuses on, but their training in their current specialization, especially for those who pursued the medical and legal track, are still related to their background in LIS.

As this tracer is still an ongoing endeavor for the UP SLIS, the results are just preliminary and are not yet final. A more in-depth identification of the UP SLIS alumni career paths will be further studied and presented in succeeding papers. The link between a student's chosen track and his current employment is another important area that should be examined. Also, the motivating factors behind a student's career choice, as well as their decision to either stay or transfer to a new employment should also be explored.

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