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Julie Todaro

I'm not a stranger to the world of library education. In fact, I think I can safely say I know a little about being in the field and am moderately knowledgeable about current issues in the field. I would *never* state, however, that I “know what's good for library education today,” just as I don't want educators to tell me “how to manage my library” or “how a community college library system works”—but wait, isn't that the problem here? No one wants to say to someone—who isn't in his own academy, so to speak—that he knows best. In fact now, no one seems to want to even *recommend* anything.

How widespread are our differences? Who has a good relationship for study and emulation? Why is there such a lack of respect . . . on both sides? So where does all of the discord, lack of information, and discussion end? How do other disciplines establish and maintain relationships? Are the differences found in the library and information profession a normal divergence of opinion? How do other professional schools develop relationships with their “practice” and how do those in practice relate to their professional schools as alumni or as professionals in the critical world of educational partnerships?

I can't answer these questions but I can talk about the questions themselves and then suggest some challenges we all encounter.

How Widespread Are Our Differences?

If one were to review the number of discussions, commentary, debates, and summits, it would appear these issues are widespread. How great is the crisis in education in our field? I really don't know. I am personally familiar with or aware of three library schools, and each couldn't be more different. What I am very familiar with is their product. I have reviewed—in recent years—literally hundreds of applications, some for adjunct or hourly positions, some for entry-level reference and some for management positions. Are there differences among the graduating students that can be traced to specific institutions? Not yet and not



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from my perspective (although there is related information below) because I think this issue is SO important I would never make generalities with a—clearly—more scientific approach to assessing “product.”

Who Has a Good Relationship for Study and Emulation?

Now this is a good question. Who out there does have a good relationship with alumni and with the practitioners and scholars within the area? Which programs or faculty members assess the balance of core and supplemental, the balance of scholarship versus practice? This is a project worth funding, that is, which LIS programs establish benchmark relationships with their communities? Which programs have active research into the field to determine the perfect curriculum? Of course, this is an increasingly more difficult assessment due to the local, regional, and global world or market of educational programs.

Why Is There Such a Lack of Respect . . . on Both Sides?

While this may be too strong a statement for many educators and practitioners, there are many who might agree. What everyone might agree more with is the lack of understanding of both education and practice and the great possibility of that lack of understanding leading to miscommunication.

So where does all of the discord, lack of information, and discussion end?

I really don't know where things will end. The real answer here is that no discussion between education and practice *should* end. The best professional education maintains active communication with the field; however, the problem becomes trying to decide how to approach a solution. Should we talk it out until one group concedes? The reality is that groups should not even attempt to identify problems and address them one by one. Instead, the field should be striving to integrate student and learning outcomes, identify whose outcomes are being met with the most success, and choose and publicize models of success based on outcomes information.

How Do Other Disciplines Establish and Maintain Relationships in Professional Education?

Good question. There must be benchmarks and models from other professional schools that might be studied and emulated. Exclusive of health sciences and other related workforce areas (which have extensive integrated outcomes established by accreditation standards), management and public policy have an interesting and relatively recent history of market assessment and design and redesign of curriculum and programs.

How do other professional schools develop relationships with those in practice and how do those in practice relate to their professional schools as alumni or as professionals in the critical world of educational partnerships?

If there are environments with exemplary relationships with their field of practitioners either through graduate, doctoral, or continuing education alumni; or significant partnerships for internships, mentor arrangements, or practicums, who are they? What are the elements we can learn from?

Challenges

If one reviews the products from forums, teleconferences, ALISE discussions, articles, research, focus groups, strategic planning sessions and the myriad other venues of content, one can create a very long list of challenges facing our profession in regards to the issues of education versus practice.

Assessing Educational Content Exclusive of Delivery

With the exponential rise of technology as support for face-to-face classroom delivery, hybrid classes with some face-to-face delivery and some technology delivery, and all delivery through technology, the expectation is that classes delivered in a variety of modes have identical content. How are LIS programs tracking curriculum among delivery methods? How have they tracked curriculum among full-time faculty and adjuncts?

Determining Equal Outcomes for LIS Students

The expectation is that teaching and learning goals and outcomes remain constant throughout LIS curriculum. All educational environments should be measuring and studying data variances between and among modes and methods of delivery to ensure that all curriculum outcomes are appropriate, to ensure that levels of success in student learning are constant throughout delivery methods, and to determine retention and matriculation rates.

Determining the Needs of the Field

I've heard of a variety of ways that LIS programs assess the field, including advisory boards, focus groups, alumni surveys, employer surveys, faculty research and sabbatical projects, geo-demographic surveys, and strategic planning processes to name but a few methods. What else is done? Who's having the most success? Is every program assessing the field? If some programs aren't, what are they doing? Are schools that aren't assessing doing something? Are schools that aren't doing assessments proving their students are "measuring up" to other students from other programs?

Matching the Needs of the Field to the Core Educational Elements of the Profession

Is library education taking data gathered from the field to assist in design of curriculum? How are they using the data to decide which concentrations to offer, what to offer as core education, and required coursework for areas of study?

How Are Practitioners and Educators Keeping Current?

Are practitioners seeking updated content for consultancy, research and continuing education from library educators? Are educators seeking updated content from the field? While this article seems to be one-sided—that is, what is library education doing?—the reverse is just as important. The questions should also include:

- What are practitioners doing to support library schools?
- Are alumni approaching library schools to offer advice, serve on boards, fund projects, partner in grants, offer practicum environments, and provide mentor opportunities?
- Are practitioners inviting educators to observe and participate in institutional activities?
- Are practitioners seeking educators as partners in research needed for organizations?
- Are practitioners bringing educators into grant opportunities?
- How are state agencies working with library educators?
- Are associations working with library educators?

While I'm sure that many library schools, practitioners, state agencies and associations are working together on ongoing and ad hoc bases, the focus is on what the field is *not* doing to create a new future. It's time that best practices and benchmarks are identified to forge a new approach to solving old problems.