# FID NEWS BULLETIN

# LIBRARY EDUCATION IN MEXICO

BY ELSA BARBERENA BLÁSQUEZ
UNAM, Mexico

*Elsa Barerena Blásquez read History of Art at the Universidad de las Américas in Mexico, followed by an MA in Library Science from the University of California, Berkeley and a PhD in History from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). She has 36 years of teaching and library experience and is the author of over 60 publications and the recipient of 9 academic awards. Her research field is access to information on Latin American contemporary art and she has created the following databases: Mexicoarte, Latinoarte, Index to "Artes de Mexico", and Pepenar (Latin American art and architecture periodicals - Publicaciones Periódicas sobre Arte latinoamericano).*

## INTRODUCTION

This article briefly reviews : a) the emergence of an information society and the analysis of the consequences of new technological infrastructures; b) profession definitions; c) the elements of information; d) the importance of library education; e) UNAM master's program in library education including an analysis of history, program, professors, students; f) conclusions.

During the period 1970-90 many databases were developed and on line information services multiplied. Later on the growth and exponential use of Internet, the multimedia resources and the electronic networks necessitated the modification of information management models of the superhighways. Now, legal, economic, and ethical concepts of the production and circulation of information need to be studied in depth. At the same time everybody is keen to participate in this information revolution which may be compared to the printing revolution.

More than ever, a global information management infrastructure is necessary. Universal access for citizens, groups, commercial enterprises, business firms is becoming more democratic. There is an enlargement in the professional intervention field. The information and documentation sectors are developing progressively around the documents and their management, their exploitation and circulation; their content and integration to the work and decision processes.

The book catalogs have been transformed into electronic ones or to on line databases or to compact discs. The digitalization and the electronic administration of documents brings about a documentation engineering which allows for a better treatment and exploitation of documents.

Besides, the need to be informed has always been a vital need for governments, administrations, commercial enterprises, humanists and scientists. The networks and the Internet facilitate electronic information transfer worldwide and permit fruitful interaction between individuals

Nevertheless, where large numbers of the population have yet to attain an acceptable level of literacy, as in the case of Mexico, the so-called traditional library service is still needed. But alongside this will be the sophisticated service which eventually will cause the conventional service to be reduced.

It is vital that schools of library and information science, as well as the professionals and researchers, retain a sense of their own identity: a notion of what they do which differentiates them from everyone else. This is not to say that the schools should not forge meaningful teaching and researching links with other units; nor that the professionals and researchers should not get involved in interdisciplinary projects. The above is essential in a multi-disciplinary field. However, it is necessary to point out the risks of doing this in the absence of a well identified focus.

## PROFESSION DEFINITIONS

The difference between an occupation and a skilled, learned occupation called a profession is in the individual. He or she is the important element, not the structure in which he moves. To exercise an occupation is to master a "know how" and leads to the recognition of an identity. There is a need for the articulation of the individual, the "know how", and the identity.

Traditionally a profession is the cumulation of theoretical and practical competence. A profession results in a social identity because it masters the following points: coherence of practical and theoretical knowledge on which it is sustained, efficiency in professional regulations, and coherent representation of notion of the public service.

Members of a group or society interact with the human environment. This interaction provides them with an identity because the others make them understand who they are. A professional identity is at the same time personal and given by others. The identity construction continues throughout life. In order to attain an identity a human being articulates three aspects: to feel in accordance with his status, his function, and the opinion of others. We need to recognize the vital link between career development, high standards of service and professional status.

Several definitions of a librarian are currently accepted: a traditional librarian, an information specialist, a cyberlibrarian, an information manager, and an information engineer.

Blaise Cronin identifies three work levels for the professionals:

♦ the traditional work in the library as librarian;
♦ work with the world of information in virtual libraries;
♦ work as an information marketing specialist, as a database coordinator, or as an information manager;
♦ work with technology such as a software or hardware engineer, or as a telecommunications manager.

In conclusion Cronin states that professionals ought to be able to compete in the emergent information market.

The profession will gain complexity: economic intelligence, internal and technical documentation of enterprises, navigation of electronic networks, multimedia products, biblio metrics. At the same time, the profession is confronted with a multiform change: social, economic, technological, organizational and cultural. Its future depends on its capacity to adapt and innovate.

Librarians need more than their ordinary bibliographical skills and basic training in information retrieval techniques. Professionals have to guide the user in the efficient use of numerous information networks.

An MLS background is necessary together with the following personality traits: enthusiasm for the work, a good memory, a love of deciphering obscure citations and tracking down elusive documents - combined with an aptitude for making quick decisions, and an interdisciplinary and flexible attitude.

Professionals ought to be able to communicate effectively verbally or in writing and their interpersonal skills are more important than being an expert in a particular area. Professionals ought to act as a filter to interpret and evaluate the information to the user.

## INFORMATION

Information makes sense for society; it is very much related to its development, and the professional intervention gives it human and social values. Society needs access to information. New technologies and the wider recognition of the value of information should increase the demand for people with both information management and information technology skills.

A new type of global information management is needed for the benefit of individuals and the society in order to:
♦ to realize efficient, but creative and selective navigation in cyberspace;
♦ develop and exploit useful information;
♦ evaluate the information produced by organizations which has been dormant for a long time.

This global information management will bring a rich diversity of products and services and of professional practices beyond the databases on line, and on compact discs.

In addition to the bibliographic information and the scientific and technical documentation there will be medical and geographical information, graphics and sound, statistical data, informal, unstructured information, legal, and ethical and linguistic aspects of all these products and services.

Technology, which facilitates information services, is complicated. In order to achieve success in the profession of librarianship, besides having specialized knowledge, the librarian should have practical skills of the World Wide Web, the main navigation tools for the internet, and of associated browsers such as Mosaic, Netscape and Air mosaic. Librarianship involves intellectual work as well as skills.

The existence of information exploitation beyond the library and the librarian's limits - where it becomes a common good administered directly by the user from his home or workplace, assumes a complete change in library education.

## LIBRARY EDUCATION

Educating the future professional presupposes:

♦ Intensifying a dialogue beyond geographical and disciplinary boundaries.
♦ Moving from a service orientation attitude to a more business-like approach related to the market economy.
♦ Internal alliances with other university departments and employers in order to attain the interdisciplinary element.
♦ Looking for flexibility and greater diversity in the curriculum.
♦ Addressing the following issues concerning library education:
  a) the definition of a librarian related to its place in the new world of information;
  b) which courses to be offered in the program suiting the new technology environment in library education;
  c) how many hours of the program will do for theory and how many for practical work if any;
  d) the need to prepare teachers and how does the program reflect this need;
  e) how the program will cater for professionals as well as researchers;
  f) how continuing education can enrich the competencies in relation to the specializations needed;

g) to determine the scope of other professions such as communication, information science, informatics, to avoid the risks of fragile employment situations;
h) the analysis of the job market to ascertain what employers want.

There has been an attempt to define the librarian or information professional. It is felt that the pattern of LIS education in Mexico should be able to address the issues formulated above and meet the challenges of the economic, scientific, technological, social and educational needs of the country.

In the context of the current and likely future developments in library and information services, more emphasis on information technology including library automation in the curriculum with the necessary hardware and software facilities is required, keeping in mind the fact that Mexico cannot completely do away with traditional libraries and go for the latest technologies adopted by the advanced countries of the world.

## UNAM MASTER'S PROGRAM IN LIBRARY EDUCATION

### HISTORY

Library education was first offered in 1956 at UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) which has, since 1551, been recognized as a center for professional education in Mexico.

The UNAM, located in Mexico City, is the largest university of the country, and the only one providing, on a continuous basis, a library education program at a "licenciatura" and masters level. The school library is administratively located within the "Facultad de Filosofía y Letras".

The program allows the student to study for fours years at the undergraduate level and two years more at the graduate level. This length of time at a university level is similar to the program at the Royal School of Librarianship in Denmark. This article will discuss the graduate program.

Unlike many library schools which have dropped the term "librarianship" in favor of such terms as "Information Studies", "Information Science", "Communication Studies" and "Information

Management", the Library School at UNAM in an attempt to stabilize the curriculum has maintained the term "Librarianship".

The purpose of the school is to provide education and conduct research and development work in the library and information field. In 1972 it became clear that the Library School program had to redesign its courses to prepare students for opportunities in academic and special libraries. In the light of the increasing opportunities in information-related careers in non- library fields as well as in libraries, a new curriculum in library science was implemented in 1982.

Later on, the number of career opportunities available to library professionals outside conventional library settings grew. The school began to evaluate and upgrade those curricular elements oriented towards new technology and employment in non-traditional areas.

The program discussed below is a new program called Master in Library Science and Information Studies.

## PROGRAM

Library education at UNAM has not developed at the same pace as the labor market. Teaching makes efforts to be prospective, but the complex administration of the university makes it difficult to update the program. It takes too much time to add or cancel a course, in contrast with the accelerated pace of the information and technology world.

The study program for the Master in Library Science and Information Studies has the following objectives:

a) to provide formation in the application of the library research methods;

b) to develop a highly innovative, technical and methodological capacity in the professional;

c) to prepare high level personnel.

Specific objectives:

a) to form human resources for research in library and information systems;

b) to relate theory with practice considering the different group of users and their information needs;

c) to encourage work among librarians and professionals from other humanistic and scientific fields, with the purpose of teaming up to develop research projects and elaborate information products.

Criteria for admission to this program are a "licenciatura" degree in library science or in the humanities or scientific fields, library experience, being competent in a second language, an average of 8, and computer knowledge.

Inherent in the philosophy of the library and information studies program are such key features as:

♦ Flexibility and freedom of choice.
♦ Emphasis placed on theoretical aspects and methodological elements and instrumentalities.
♦ Independent study efforts.
♦ Evaluation and assessment built into all courses.

Courses in library education have been offered at UNAM for over 40 years. Through the years, the program has been periodically revised in response to philosophical and technical changes in the field of library science. Professors' and students' course evaluation data, which included both numeric ratings and written comments, were reviewed.

The methods used to evaluate the program included matching program elements against lists of criteria of competencies, eliciting graduates' perception of the program, and measuring the performance of graduates. Surveying graduates to determine their satisfaction with the program has been another evaluation method used. This was done through personal interviews.

Criterion-based methods involve measuring program elements against recommendations of two professional associations AMBAC ("Asociación Mexicana de Bibliotecarios") and "Colegio Nacional de Bibliotecarios". In a way the recommendations were based on standards defined by expert groups such as IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions).

The performance of graduate methods for program evaluation included an analysis of the jobs and institutions where they work, to find out if they were at the executive levels as teachers,

researchers or librarians.

The size and complexity of UNAM indicate that the task of maintaining academic standards require intensive and collaborative effort by various agencies: the university administration, library and information professionals, teachers and students.

The Master's Library and Information Studies can be taken through 80 credit hours which includes the thesis elaboration.

The first semester, where the courses are compulsory, is labeled "Basic Courses", encompassing the fundamentals and more instrumental aspects of library science as well as the importance of culture and information in society.

During the second and third semesters emphasis is placed on any of the five areas forming the program:

1) Historical and sociological aspects
2) Information systems
3) Information technology
4) Information use
5) Information communication

The fourth semester is reserved for research towards the presentation of a written thesis and/or an oral examination.

The program offers courses and seminars in the following areas: indexing theory, classification theory, database and interface design, problems related to retrieval, literature searching, interaction between the searcher's specific question and formulation of the information need, information technologies, online searching, multimedia, networking, metric studies, information management and information economics and marketing, representation, relevant assessment and quality and use of information, research methodologies.

Finally, a Ph.D. program will be launched in 1997; the program will be available to holders of the Master's Library and Information Studies degree in a range of humanities and scientific disciplines.

There is also a continuing library education program at UNAM, but this does not form part of the graduate program.

## PROFESSORS AND STUDENTS

Professors at UNAM are also researchers and have masters and Ph.D. degrees from Mexican, American and British universities. Their backgrounds are in history, art history, literature, library science, computer engineering. In comparison with other Latin American countries practically no visiting professors have been invited. The teaching methods used by the professors are: lectures, seminars, group discussion, case studies, projects and tutorial work.

The enrollment in 1956 was 7 students. Between 1959 and 1996 the number increased to 163. The number of students decreased from 1980 to 1984. This was due to the fact that the official program was not updated, and since the academia was not preparing students with technological knowledge in the discipline, there was a drawback in the professional practice.

During 1982 the program was updated, but it was not until 1985 that the recovery was reflected by a considerable number of students enrolling in the program. From 1956 to 1996 the enrollment of students rose, but not the number of graduates. One of the reasons for this is that once finished with the courses, it is not a requirement to obtain the degree in order to receive a good salary. On the other hand the number of dropouts has decreased from 63 in the 70's to 3 in the period 1995-1996.

The number of graduates working on their thesis has increased from 6 at the beginning of the 90's to 18 in 1995-1996. It is expected, based on the two existing programs named: a) Stimuli to the Universities Academic Staff and, b) National System of Researchers, that more students will write their thesis and start new research projects.

Generally the students with potential have no difficulty in obtaining appropriate positions after they have completed their library education program.

The distribution of some graduates by work place is as follows: 15 researchers, 18 faculty members, 27 executives, 7 professional staff.
Their background is 60% library science, 35% humanities and 5% science.

The ratio of students to a professor is from 10 to 15. IFLA recommends 12 students per professor.

Many students completed their library education on a part-time basis, often over two or three years.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article has reviewed the trends of library education in the world with the objective of presenting the graduate program of the National University of Mexico, UNAM.

Although norms have been followed, comparable to the guidelines for graduate study programs in library and information science adopted by the Council of the American Library Association, it is necessary to establish academic planning evaluation and implementation boards to continually improve academic standards.

Careers are going to be more varied as we approach the millennium; these changes are predominantly positive and presuppose a changing role for the professional.

Curriculum development has followed the inevitable lines dictated by technology. Educators are faced with the task of selecting a range of courses which together offer an exclusiveness sufficient to satisfy current and future professionals.

Knowledge, and by extension information is becoming central to the emerging social and economic order.

Since librarians deal with knowledge in manual writing, printing, computerized forms and sustained in parchment, paper, magnetic or optical media, it is imperative that UNAM's LIS program continues.
Only then the graduate students will administrate, develop and activate the document collections and the dormant information for the benefit of the entire population.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Basu, Asok. and Sarkhel, J.K. (1995). UGC - CDC Recommendations on Curriculum Development in Library and Information Science 1993 - a review". *Annals of library science and documentation*. 42(2): 67-78.

Calenge, B. (1995). A Quoi Former les Bibliothècaires et Comment? *Bulletin des Bibliothèques de France*. 40(6) : 39-48.

Cronin, B. (1983). Post-industry Society: Some Manpower Issues for the Library/Information Profession. *Journal of Information Science*. 7(1): 13-14.

Derryan, P. (1995).Training 2000? Local and Family History in Libraries. *Librarian Career Development* 3 (4) : 4-9.

Eyre, J. (1995). Some Views on the Development of Professional Library Education in Brazil. *Ciencia da Informaçao*. Brasilia 24(1): 21-25 (Jan-April).

Kajberg, L. and Pors, L.O. (1995). The Royal School of Librarianship, Denmark: Present Educational Programmes and Envisaged Curricula. *Librarian Career Development* 3(4): 19-25).

Oberg, D. and Easton, E. (1995). Focus Group Interviews: a Tool for Program Evaluation in School Library Education. *Education for Information* 13:117-129.

Riondet, O. (1995). Un Regard Exterieur sur l'Identité Professionelle des Bibliothècaires. *Bulletin des Bibliothèques de France* 40(6): 56-63.

da Soledade Vieria, A. (1995). Na janela do Tempo com o IBBD e Drummond: Passanges, Transformaçôes e Novos Desafios un Educaçâo. *Ciencia da Informaçao*. Brasilia 24(1): 26-30 (Jan-April).