Perceptions of Education and Continuing Education in Technical Services Librarianship

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Research questions

• RQ1: How adequate is LIS education, both theoretically and practically, for work in technical services?
• RQ2: To what extent do librarians working in technical services feel the need for continuing education?

Technical services librarians are professional librarians working in acquisitions, cataloging, digital collections, metadata, serials, or any position that identifies itself as technical services librarianship.

Survey responses will serve as the basis for exploring the research questions in this presentation.
Agenda

• Review of the literature
• Methodology
• Results
• Discussion
• Further study
Literature Review

Education in Technical Services (TS)
• LIS education will not address all education and training needs of librarians (Hill, 2007)
• Need to address competency gaps for present and future librarians (Fessler, 2007)
• Increasing amount of knowledge to be gained by practicing TS librarians to enhance skill set (Hill, 2007)
• TS librarians need to be self-motivated, flexible and willing to learn (Han & Hswe, 2010)

In Organization of Information in particular:
• Need for catalogers is felt even more today as catalogers’ skills are used to develop digital repositories (Cerbo, 2011)
Literature Review, Cont.

Continuing Education in Technical Services

• Paucity of literature in this area in TS
• Increasingly important “as changing technology and emerging metadata standards keep adding required skills and responsibilities in managing the ever-increasing volume of digital resources” (Park, Tosaka, Maszaros, & Lu, 2010)

The role of workshops, conferences, webinars, etc. in acquiring new professional knowledge

• F2F means (workshops and conferences) are the most popular for continuing education and training opportunities (Park, et al., 2010)
  – shrinking budgets and/or lack support from employer also make online options popular (Park, et al., 2010)
• Need for more specific, hands-on training for practical implementations of metadata project management and quality control (Park, et al., 2010)
Current Study: Methodology

• 28 survey questions for Technical Services (TS) librarians
  – In Qualtrics survey software
  – Questions included:
    • Information on respondent demographics (age, years in libraries, job title, etc.)
    • Open-ended and multiple choice questions about education and continuing education
  – Survey open July 14-31, 2011
  – Link to survey posted to 18 library-related email lists
  – All survey responses received anonymously.
Survey Findings

Demographics
Age group and gender of respondents

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<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Gender (n=700)</th>
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<td>21-30</td>
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<td>31-40</td>
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<td>91</td>
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<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>Male 15%</td>
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<td>596</td>
<td>Female 85%</td>
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Tenure as a Technical Services librarian

- Less than one year: 35
- 1-2 years: 47
- 3-5 years: 106
- 6-10 years: 137
- 11-15 years: 104
- 16-20 years: 71
- Over 20 years: 182
Current role(s) in Technical Services librarianship

- Acquisitions Librarian: 241
- Cataloging Librarian: 457
- Collection Development: 201
- Digital Services Librarian: 150
- Metadata Librarian: 129
- Other: 212
Kind of library, information center, cultural heritage institution, where employed (multiple responses permitted)
Survey Findings

Perceptions of Respondents: Education
Skills to succeed when starting out?

_Open ended question:_ When you began working in a professional-level position in a library, did you have adequate technical skills (computer skills, technical library skills like facility with metadata, skills with software, etc.) to succeed?

N.B. 16 respondents did not provide usable data.
Skills to succeed when starting out?

Open ended question: When you began working in a professional-level position in a library, did you have adequate technical skills (computer skills, technical library skills like facility with metadata, skills with software, etc.) to succeed?

83% (n=581) of respondents say they had the skills to succeed

13% (n=89) responded in the negative

N.B. 16 respondents did not provide usable data.
Skills to succeed when starting out?

*Open ended question:* When you began working in a professional-level position in a library, did you have adequate technical skills (computer skills, technical library skills like facility with metadata, skills with software, etc.) to succeed?

21% of respondents attribute acquisition of these skills to something other than LIS coursework.
Perceptions of skills

• **LIS Ed: Yes or qualified yes (n=436; 62.3%)**
  – yes, although I did have to learn some details along the way. I feel that I learned the basics well enough so that I could look things up and find answers when I need to.
  – Yes, although much of the specifics of acquisitions work was learned on the job.
  – Yes, but barely.
  – I had adequate skills to take advantage of on the job training. No amount of course work will replace this, and no graduate without hands-on real-world experience will ever be attractive to employers.

• **No or negative approach to responding (n=89; 12.7%)**
  – Of course not
  – Zero. I started with absolutely no preparation in cataloging or archival description. My MIS is totally useless. We did have a cursory reading of AACR2.
  – I had some skills, but the basic skills needed to Technical Services on my own, no.

• **Neutral, “yes and no”, somewhat (n=14; 2.0%)**
  – Yes and no - I wish I had more time in library school to take more of the courses that were offered.
  – yes to the computer skills, but no to the library skills
Positive perceptions of skills, primarily citing reasons outside LIS education

- **Yes: Paraprofessional-level work (n=100, 14.3%)**
  - Yes but I was lucky enough to get a lot of practical/hands on experience while working FT at a library in this area while I was going to Library School PT. Without that experience, the answer would have been no.

- **Yes: Part time library experience (as a student, etc.) (n=32, 4.6%)**
  - Technical skills were not gained via library school but as a graduate assistant in the library, on-the-job training, and various library and non-library professional development opportunities.

- **Yes: Experience outside library world (n=13, 1.9%)**
  - I received a theoretical basis for cataloging in library school, and a general understanding of the functions in Tech Services, but I did not really gain any practical knowledge from library school. Most of my technical skills came from my work in publishing.
  - I had learned more about business and handling monetary accounts from my experience working in a bank in NYC. The cataloging coursework I did in library school was an excellent start in that area. However, my expertise in acquisitions was gained through experience.
Knowledge to succeed when starting out?

*Open ended question:* Did you have an adequate theoretical foundation in TS librarianship to succeed? (Did you understand the “why”?) Please explain.

N.B. 38 respondents did not provide usable data.
Knowledge to succeed when starting out?

*Open ended question:* Did you have an adequate theoretical foundation in TS librarianship to succeed? (Did you understand the “why”? ) Please explain.

83.2% (n=583) responded positively to the question of having an adequate theoretical foundation.

Less than a tenth (9.7%; n=68) did not feel they had the theoretical foundation.

Neutral responses (11) include:

- LIS Ed., with or without further on-the-job training (467)
- Para-professional experience (88)
- Part time library experience (24)

N.B. 38 respondents did not provide usable data.
Knowledge to succeed when starting out?

*Open ended question:* Did you have an adequate theoretical foundation in TS librarianship to succeed? (Did you understand the “why”?) Please explain.

N.B. 38 respondents did not provide usable data.
Perceptions of knowledge

• **LIS Ed: Yes or qualified yes (n=467, 66.7%)**
  – Yes. I had an excellent cataloguing professor who covered both the theoretical and practical bases of the practice.
  – Yes, in fact I believe my theoretical knowledge was greater than my practical knowledge.
  – **Yes, and that is the value of the MLS.**
  – Yes- I have always felt my library classes gave me the ability to see the big picture and how the departments work together.
  – Yes I understood the theoretical foundation. That part was never the problem.
  – Yes, In my opinion, too much theory, not enough "real" world

• **No or negative approach to responding (n=68, 9.7%)**
  – not really. would have been nice to have some specific work flow education, management of others, and more work with OCLC

• **Neutral, “yes and no”, somewhat (n=11, 1.6%)**
  – More or less
  – To some extent. Understood principles of classification and motivation for service
Perceptions of knowledge, citing reasons outside LIS education

• Yes: Paraprofessional-level work (n=88, 12.6%)
  – I developed this knowledge in the para-professional position I held while working on my MLS.

• Yes: Part time library experience (as a student, etc.) (n=24, 3.4%)
  – Yes. I am not sure if I understood the "why" from my LIS coursework, or rather from my student job in the technical services department of the library.

• Yes: Experience outside library world (n=4, 0.6%)
  – Yes, but it didn't come from LIS coursework; it came from doing an undergraduate thesis.
Perceived ease in learning additional necessary skills

*Likert-type scale.* How easy has it been to learn additional necessary skills?
Positive/Negative **Skills** upon first professional position and self-reported Ease to Learn New Skills

Those who responded positively about their skills were a little more positive about learning new skills. Negative respondents were slightly more negative.
Positive/Negative Knowledge upon first professional position and self-reported Ease to Learn New Skills

Self-Reported Ease To Learn New Skills (as a %)

Those who responded positively about their knowledge were a little more positive about learning new skills. Negative respondents were slightly more negative.
Skills attributed to LIS Ed. or Other upon first professional position and self-reported Ease to Learn New Skills

Self-Reported Ease To Learn New Skills (as a %)

Those who specifically went out of their way to mention something other than LIS education as providing them with skills were a little more positive about the ease of learning new skills.
Knowledge attributed to LIS Ed. or Other upon first professional position and self-reported Ease to Learn New Skills

Self-Reported Ease To Learn New Skills (as a %)

Those who specifically went out of their way to mention something other than LIS education as providing them with knowledge were a little more positive about the ease of learning new skills.
Survey Findings

Continuing Education Opportunities
Continuing Education:
Paid (or cost-inducing) continuing education opportunities sought out in the past year

- Paid training (lib): 186
- Paid training (gen): 53
- Paid webinars (lib): 348
- Paid webinars (gen): 57
- Physical un/conference: 481
- Paid virtual participation in online/hybrid conferences: 46
Continuing Education:
Free continuing education opportunities sought out in the past year
Top C.E. opportunities as reported by respondents

• Physical un/conference (paid) (n=481, 68.7%)
• Webinars, on library topics (free) (n=442, 63.1%)

• Webinars, on library topics (paid) (n=382, 54.6%)

• F2F training, on library topics (paid) (n=186, 26.6%)
• F2F training, on library topics (free) (n=178, 25.4%)
• Webinars, on gen. topics (free) (n=176, 25.1%)
Research Question 1

• RQ1: How adequate is LIS education, both theoretically and practically, for work in technical services?

• A: Based on survey responses, we feel it is adequate.
  – A majority of respondents (83% for both) give positive responses when asked about their skills and theoretical knowledge upon beginning their first professional position.
  • Caveat: no way of knowing how representative this is of all LIS grads, since this is a self-selecting group of employed librarians engaged enough to read email distribution lists and take the time to respond when there was no incentive to do so.
Discussion

• Technical Services might be said to perpetuate an apprenticeship model in education (especially in cataloging).
  – Emphasis by some respondents on movement through the ranks to professional via the MLIS
  – Notion by some paraprofessionals-turned-MLIS that the degree was only for “credentialing”; other respondents felt there is no theory in TS librarianship
    • “I didn't start out as a technical services librarian. I would argue that one doesn't really -need- much of a theoretical foundation. Witness most of the paraprofessionals out there.”
  – Importance of teachers and mentors to learning knowledge and skills
    • “Yes, I had one of the most incredibly talented faculty teaching one of the Masters courses I took. She was very demanding and I learned more in her one class than I did in nearly all of the other courses I had for that degree.”
    • “Yes, very much so. My cataloging and metadata teacher was excellent and did a very good job explaining the why as well as providing practical examples to work from.”
Importance of teachers and mentors

From the question about Knowledge:

• “Yes, I had one of the most incredibly talented faculty teaching one of the Masters courses I took. She was very demanding and I learned more in her one class than I did in nearly all of the other courses I had for that degree.”
• “Yes, very much so. My cataloging and metadata teacher was excellent and did a very good job explaining the why as well as providing practical examples to work from.”
• “Yes. My first cataloguing class was with ----, a leader in the field, using Margaret Mann's Introduction to cataloging and the classification of books. A firm foundation I find recent graduates lack.”
• “Yes. I had an excellent cataloguing professor who covered both the theoretical and practical bases of the practice.”
• “Had an excellent mentor”

Suggests the importance of choice of instructor when offering courses in TS and the importance of supportive and approachable professional TS librarians in administrative or senior librarian roles.

• Does the reliance on instructors and mentors splinter TS from the rest of library services or limit its development at this crucial time?
  – Are mentors truly able to guide new hires/paraprofessionals into the future or do they focus on daily operations and the past?
  – Is the paraprofessional-to-Cataloger a good model given the difference in the kinds of work the two are expected to carry out?
Research Question 2

• RQ2: To what extent do librarians working in technical services feel the need for continuing education?

• A: The vast majority of respondents (n=657, 93.9%) invest their time and resources in diverse continuing education opportunities
Discussion

• The *point of view* (library v. general) of the C.E. option was more important than its status as *free or paid*.
  – Library approaches were at the top of the list indicating they are the most valued

• In-person conferences (paid) were the most common C.E. option.
  – There is a need for webinars (very popular with respondents)
  – Is there also a need for F2F interaction, networking, (commiserating?), etc. during C.E. functions?

• Very few respondents (n=43, 6.1%) reported not engaging in any continuing education in the prior year.
  – TS librarians who are active and involved enough to read email distribution lists and to answer surveys online are generally also seeking out continuing education opportunities.
Conclusions

• Instruction of TS classes will, at present, ideally be assigned to instructors willing and able to assist students in gaining positive mentorship in TS

• LIS programs might consider setting somewhat high minimum requirements on technical skills for incoming students. This would allow TS instructors to focus more class time on library-specific knowledge.

• F2F remains worthy of investment when it comes to C.E. opportunities.
Further study

- Exploration of the idea of an apprenticeship model for education in TS
  - Is it real?
  - If so, what are the benefits/drawbacks in modern librarianship?
  - Does an apprenticeship model negatively affect the nimbleness of TS departments?
- Analysis of the skills and aptitudes needed by TS librarians
  - Where might library schools recruit students with those skills and aptitudes?
  - Are libraries the best places to seek LIS students?
- Assessment of the relationship between online LIS education and student success in terms of knowledge and skills
- Inventory of initiatives taken by new graduates to gain technical or specific skills prior to landing their first professional position
- Analysis of types of continuing education opportunities that are needed
  - Revisit the Park et al. finding about the popularity of webinars
  - Comparison with those being sought out (in traditional and digital environments) to identify gaps
- Exploration of ways to make webinars and other distance C.E. opportunities as valuable as in-person conference experiences.

Thank you.

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