
The Organization of Information Curricula

Jerry D. Saye

The courses which comprise the organization of information specialty in library and information sciences have changed dramatically at the national level in the past two decades. The change in library education from one of preparation for work only in libraries to that of preparing students for careers in the wider arena of the information profession has resulted in changes in the courses which constitute this part of the curriculum. Traditionally, the foundation of the organization of information component of any curriculum had been a basic course in cataloging and classification. Today, because of widening interest in information management, students in library and information science programs around the country are as much concerned with "tuples" and "normal forms" as they are with the details of AACR2 and the intricacies of the Dewey Decimal Classification. This paper explores the extent to which courses in the organization of information in library and information science programs in the state of North Carolina reflect these national trends and what needs to be done to improve preparation for the specialty.

North Carolina has five schools that provide graduate-level courses in the field of library and information sciences.

- Appalachian State University. Department of Library Science and Educational Foundations
- East Carolina University. Department of Library and Information Studies
- North Carolina Central University. School of Library and Information Sciences
- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. School of Library Science
- University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Library Science/Educational Technology Department

Three of these programs, NC Central, UNC-Chapel Hill, and UNC-Greensboro, are accredited by the

American Library Association, while a fourth program, East Carolina, is in the process of review for A.L.A. accreditation.

In order to assess the state of organization of information education in North Carolina, data were gathered from the published literature of each program, the syllabi of organization of information courses, and telephone interviews with selected deans, directors, and faculty members. Although these data provide specific information about the state of organization of information education at individual schools, the purpose of this paper is not to assess the strengths and weaknesses of individual programs, but rather to assess the current condition and future of education in this specialty in North Carolina. Therefore, no effort was made to establish the periodicity in which individual organization of information courses are taught or to determine whether listed courses were actually taught. Instead, it was assumed that each program periodically reviews its courses and purges unused courses from its catalog. Additionally, new program or course initiatives under consideration in the organization of information area were not considered part of an institution's current program. It was felt that this insight into the future could be misleading in that what is planned does not always materialize due to a variety of factors that influence the approval or disapproval of new programs and courses.

The initial step in any assessment of the organization of information component of library and information science education involves the definition of the elements which comprise that part of a curriculum. The *Directory of the Association for Library and Information Science Education*¹ provides a useful starting point for the development of this definition. The *Directory* includes a "Classification Guide" to specialties within the profession which can be used to identify generic course areas. While this "Guide" does not classify the subject specialties into hierarchical relationships, it can be used to develop a list-

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ing of courses which form both the base and the periphery of the organization of information specialty. A diagram of the areas which comprise this specialty and their relationships is presented as Figure 1.

The inclusion or exclusion of any particular course in a list such as this is a subjective matter. In this list, introductory courses in library and information science that include an organization of information element have been excluded. Also excluded were courses in the management of technical services because of their greater emphasis upon the management of the organization of information process over concern for the process itself. Similarly, courses in library automation and computer applications have been excluded because of their greater emphasis upon process rather than information organization. Included in this taxonomy are some courses where the organization of information is a discrete element in a course which specializes in a particular type of material, e.g., government publications. These courses are listed in Figure 1 under the heading "Specialized Courses."

Courses

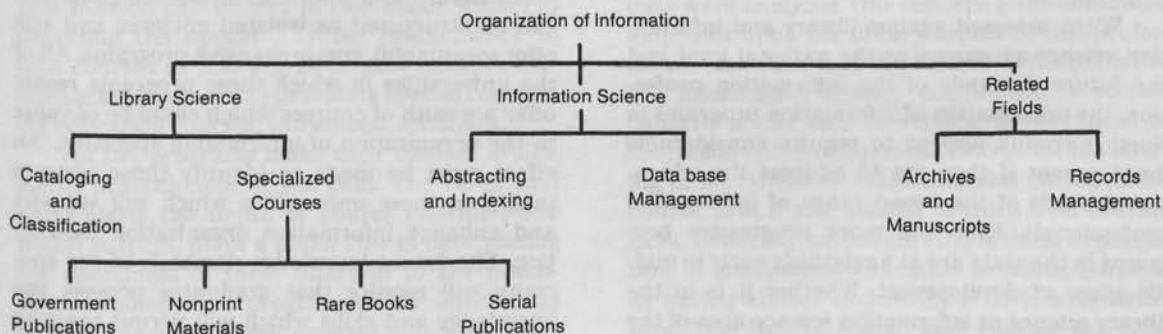
There is a moderate degree of similarity between the five programs, although it appears to be confined mainly to the organization of information courses in library science rather than those in the information science area. As one might expect, each of the five programs provides at least one course in the organization of information specialty. A basic cataloging and classification course is taught in each of the five programs. An analysis of the syllabi from these basic courses reveals that the topics covered are essentially the same—descriptive cataloging, access point and heading work, classification, subject heading work and use of OCLC. Where differences do

exist, they involve the extent to which Library of Congress Classification is addressed in the basic course. What is surprising is that this basic cataloging and classification course is the only course which is common to all five programs in the state. Only three schools offer some form of advanced cataloging and classification instruction—two schools offer it as a separate course, while the third distributes the content of its "advanced course" throughout several courses.

Absent from the courses offered in the state is a course in the Theory of Classification. This course was, for a long time, a staple as an advanced course in the cataloging and classification curriculum. Although some courses in the organization of information area appear to include classification theory as a minor component, this topic no longer occupies the place of importance in the curriculum that it once had. The demise of this course in North Carolina follows a national trend. Although the reasons for this change have not been investigated as a part of this paper, one could opine that, over the years, the field of librarianship has become more process oriented in its approach to the organization of information in libraries and information centers and less concerned with the theoretical underpinnings. As a consequence, the value of a course like the theory of classification has been reduced to a point where it was no longer a viable part of the curriculum. With the continued emphasis on more efficient approaches to the storage and categorization of information for later retrieval in computer-based systems, interest in the area of classification will likely increase, although it may never again achieve a level of importance sufficient to justify the dedication of an entire course to this topic.

Specialized library science courses, those courses which have a small organization of infor-

Figure 1.
Diagrammatic View of the Organization of Information Component
of Library and Information Science Education



mation component, are offered by four of the five programs. A course in government publications is offered by four of the five schools. Beyond this one course, the offering of specialized courses is relatively limited. Unlike many other library and information science programs nationally, none of the programs in the state offers a course which specifically addresses serial publications.

One major consideration in an assessment of any library and information science program is whether a program aims specifically to educate librarians or whether it sees for itself the more general mission of preparing the broader range of information professionals. In the interest of simplicity, this broader area of preparation will be referred to as "information science." Over the last quarter century, the national trend has been toward the education of the broader group of information professionals. The infusion of this information science education into the programs in North Carolina has been moderate. The treatment of the information science component of the curriculum exhibits the greatest difference among the schools. Only two schools appear to have significant course offerings in the area of information science. The other programs appear to confine their instruction to librarianship, essentially limiting the treatment of new information handling technologies to their use in library automation or to an introduction to computer applications. This approach has a major impact upon course offerings addressing the organization of information in non-library settings.

The specialties within the profession are changing too rapidly for the master's degree to continue to be viewed as both entry and terminal professional education offering.

When assessed against library and information science programs at the national level and the future demands of the information profession, the organization of information programs in North Carolina appear to require considerable development if they are to address the educational needs of the broad range of information professionals. Even the more progressive programs in the state are at a relatively early to middle stage of development. Whether it is in the library science or information science area of the

organization of information curriculum, the programs in the state must begin to develop courses beyond the first level, courses which will build upon the one or two courses in information organization which are taken by most students. In most of the programs today, students specializing in the organization of information have relatively few courses from which to select when developing their "major" in this specialty.

Master's Level Interdisciplinary Instruction

Involvement in interdisciplinary instruction in the organization of information area is either non-existent or very limited in all five programs. While each program has some interdisciplinary activity, it is often related to the field of education or media technology rather than to areas which would enhance knowledge in information organization. Only in rare cases do students take courses which deal with the organization of information in other disciplines. Only one program offers courses in the organization of information which are cross-listed with another department (Computer Science). Little appears to have been done in any of the programs to utilize the course offerings in related fields, e.g., linguistics, communications, cognitive psychology, etc., to support the organization of information curriculum at the master's level. Although no data are available against which to gauge the condition of North Carolina's programs in encouraging interdisciplinary activity, it is suspected that it is equal to, or slightly below, other schools when viewed nationally.

It is anticipated that, as the scope of the information profession becomes broadened in terms of the commitment of the educational programs in this state to prepare individuals for the profession, the utilization of interdisciplinary knowledge will become essential to the preparation of persons in most, if not all, specialties in the information profession and particularly information organization. The days are rapidly ending when library and information science programs can be structured as isolated enclaves and still offer meaningful, comprehensive programs. All of the universities in which these programs reside offer a wealth of courses which could be of value to the organization of information specialist. An effort must be made to identify those courses taught in these universities which will support and enhance information organization instruction. The future knowledge demands of the specialty will require that graduates possess the knowledge and skills which will permit them to

adapt to the constantly changing state of information organization. To fail to achieve this will eventually result in North Carolina's programs becoming less and less relevant to the entire information profession and becoming viewed more and more as a place of preparation for work in a single type of institution—libraries—regardless of the names that are given to these programs.

While students in North Carolina's library and information science programs are generally encouraged, if not required, to come into these educational programs with undergraduate backgrounds in other disciplines, for some reason a marriage of this previous knowledge with the newly acquired knowledge is not encouraged. Instead, these programs frequently serve as a new beginning for the student, as though the undergraduate experience, while of some value in reference work, collection development, etc., is essentially irrelevant. Perhaps the cause of this is the fact that this profession does not control, through prerequisites, the background of students entering the field. Rather than requiring quantitative and computational knowledge as requirements for entry into library and information science programs, the extremely limited time in these programs is consumed in attempting to teach this knowledge as a part of the master's program. This problem, affecting not just the organization of information component of the curriculum, is not limited to North Carolina's programs. These programs merely reflect a national problem. Future emphasis needs to be made in all areas, but particularly in information organization, to encourage students with previous preparation in related fields to continue to pursue this interest.

Other Continuing Education Programs for Practitioners

Providing for the continued professional growth of practitioners in the field is generally an accepted mission of a professional education. This mission can be met in two major ways: (1) providing the opportunity for practitioners to take courses as non-degree or post-master's certificate students, or (2) providing special continuing education courses, workshops, seminars.

All five programs make their courses available to practitioners in the field. The range and particularly the depth of course offerings, one would suspect, plays a major role in determining the usefulness of these offerings to the practitioner audience. A program which offers little beyond one or two basic courses in the organiza-

tion of information probably will have little to offer to post-master's practitioners who, very likely, already have had these courses as a part of their master's preparation. Based upon an examination of the course offerings of the five programs, few programs have sufficient courses in both range and depth to meet the continuing education needs of practitioners working in the organization of information area. The involvement of each school in providing continuing education programs in the area of organization of information is also limited where it exists at all. Relatively few organization of information workshops, seminars, etc. have been offered in the state by any of the five programs. Instead, organizations such as SOLINET appear to have assumed this role of keeping library professionals current in some aspects of the organization of information specialty. The few continuing education programs which have been offered in the organization of information area in the past have most often been part of a series of presentations such as alumni conferences or similar programs. The programs in North Carolina, and other programs nationally, must develop a strategy under which, as the information profession changes, practitioners can obtain the knowledge required to keep pace with changes in their chosen specialties or to develop new specialties. The specialties within the profession are changing too rapidly for the master's degree to continue to be viewed as both entry and terminal professional educational offering.

Conclusions


The preparation and continued development of library and information science professionals in the organization of information specialty must be considered to be still somewhat limited in North Carolina compared to developments occurring elsewhere in the United States. Several disturbing aspects to the organization of information education in this state became apparent as the data were analyzed. One concern is the continued emphasis upon the library aspect of this professional education and the limited development of the information science component. A second concern is the lack of vertical development in courses in either component. Except for the offering of an advanced cataloging and classification course, few, if any, second or third level courses exist. Generally, one could characterize organization of information education in North Carolina as having almost exclusively a horizontal structure. This lack of higher level courses serves to

inhibit the post-master's and continuing education development of practicing organization of information professionals as well as shortchanging master's level students wishing to develop in this specialty. This problem is exacerbated by the lack of interdisciplinary development in the field.

It is anticipated that further development in the organization of information area in librarianship will probably remain stable in the near future. The organization of information component in information science can be expected to grow in several of the programs and remain constant or appreciate slight growth at the other schools. The involvement of the five library and information science programs in both the formal and informal education of practicing organization of information professionals is also expected to remain somewhat constant.

Developments in several programs give some cause for hope for organization of information education in North Carolina. These program developments are likely to result in significant increases in their offerings in the information science component of their curriculum and, thus, can be expected to increase the organization of information course offerings in this area. If their development follows the pattern of other institutions in this country which have expanded their information science offering, one can expect that interdisciplinary course-related activity will also increase. The introduction of new faculty members to support these changes holds the prospect of improvement in both teaching and research in the organization of information. To date, none of the programs has developed national visibility as a leader in teaching or research in the organization of information. While not all programs may desire to gain national visibility, it is desirable that perhaps one or more of the programs establish some recognition for producing organization of information specialists. The program changes envisioned in the coming years provide the opportunity for one or more of the programs in this state to accept this and other challenges in the preparation of these specialists.

References

1. Association for Library and Information Science Education. *Directory of the Association for Library and Information Science Education, 1985-1986*. (Directory Issue) 7. 

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