Educating Urban Librarians Summit
Final Report

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

Library and Information Science Program

Summary

Nearly 100 information professionals representing all types of libraries from across the region attended the "Educating Urban Librarians Summit" held on Sept. 5, 2008 at the McGregor Memorial Conference Center on the campus of Wayne State University in midtown Detroit. Hosted by the faculty of the Library and Information Science Program, the primary goal of the summit was to determine what should comprise a meaningful academic program centered on urban librarianship.

Martin Gomez, president of the Urban Libraries Council, delivered the keynote address, which prepared participants for examining the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to deliver high-quality, cutting-edge library services in an urban environment.   Luncheon speaker Juliet Machie, Deputy Director of the Detroit Public Library, discussed the challenges faced in recruiting a diverse work force.

LIS Program faculty and staff led interactive breakout session discussions focused on gathering input from the attending practitioners on the topics of curriculum and practical experience for future urban librarians and gathered advice about how to best help LIS Program students develop the corresponding skill sets necessary to succeed in an urban library setting. The outcomes of the summit will be used to craft a new concentration in urban librarianship that will be implemented by the LIS Program in the fall 2009 semester.

Archives of the presentations are available on the LIS Program website at http://mediasite.lisp.wayne.edu/ULS.

Schedule for September 5, 2008

9:00 – 9:30   Registration and Continental Breakfast

9:30 – 10:00   Welcome and Introductions
                    Sandra Yee, *Dean, WSU Library System*
                    Nancy Barrett, *Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs*
                    Genevieve M. Casey, *Retired Professor*
                    Stephen Bajjaly, *Director, Library and Information Science (LIS) Program*

10:00 – 10:45   Keynote Speaker: Martin Gomez,
                    President, Urban Libraries Council

11:00 – 12:00   Breakout Session Discussion:
                    Components of a Successful Urban Librarianship Curriculum

12:00 – 1:00   Luncheon Speaker: Juliet Machie,
                    Deputy Director, Detroit Public Library

1:15 – 2:15   Breakout Session Discussion:
                    Hiring Urban Librarians: Critical Characteristics

2:30 – 3:00   Breakout Session Reports and Wrap-Up

Represented Organizations

Canton Public Library	Muskegon Public Schools
Cooks School	Oak Park Public Library
DALNET	Pontiac Public Library
Dearborn Public Schools	Public Library of Westland
Detroit Board of Education	Rochester Hills Public Library
Detroit Public Library	Royal Oak Public Library
Detroit Public Library Friends Foundation	Saginaw Public Schools
Detroit Public Schools	Southfield Public Library
DMC Surgery Hospital	Toledo-Lucas County Public Library
Flint Public Library	University of Detroit Mercy
Grand Rapids Public Library	University of Michigan-Dearborn
John D. Dingell VA Medical Center Library	University of Michigan - School of Social Work
Kent District Library	Wayne County Community College District
Lansing School District	Wayne State University
Library of Michigan	West Bloomfield Township Public Library
Marygrove College	
Michigan Library Consortium	

Focus Group Summary

Participants of the Educating Urban Librarians Summit were divided into nine focus groups consisting of approximately 6-8 library directors, librarians and LIS educators per group. Many themes emerged from these discussions - most related to identifying best practices for closing the gaps between library organizational structure and service.

Themes for Urban Librarianship Curriculum

Profiles:

- Urban librarian as community activist and collaborator
- Urban librarian as proactive advocate in presenting and defending libraries
- Urban librarian as pop culture maven
- Urban librarian as teacher and instructional material designer

Cultural Competency:

- An understanding and appreciation of various cultures, a respect for diversity and a willingness to deliver library and information services to each and every patron is needed and in demand.
- Changing demographics, immigration and the aging population are driving this need.

Background and Experiences for Future Urban Librarians:

- Experience in community organizing
- Teaching and instruction experience
- Face-to-face customer service with varied clientele
- Technology training – both technical ability and instruction
- Knowledge of social work, urban planning, education and instructional design
- Preparation for providing non-traditional service and activities
- Engagement in profession and libraries
- Continuum of work experience, study, practicums, cross-training and collaboration

The **"Ultimate Urban Librarian"** would be comfortable in a **multilingual**, **diverse** environment with the ability to take on the role of a **community-rooted activist** with knowledge of **urban planning**, **social work**, **education**, and **instructional design**.

Breakout Group Session Notes

What knowledge, skills, and abilities do you see as critical for working in an urban library setting? What knowledge, skills, and abilities do you use most?

1. Able to deal with difficult clients
2. After school programming
3. Basic computer questions
4. Become activists. Advocates. Why be a librarian? Our profession doesn't have the same certification as law, medicine, or pharmacy. Be leaders, advocates of change. Everyone does their own thing their own way. People think there's nothing to it "I can put the book on the shelf." Students have to be advocates for libraries. A director is supposed to schmooze, get the library publicity. Develop excitement so people want to be involved.
5. Business administration/budgeting/finance/accounting.
6. Career services: apply for jobs, make resumes, etc.
7. Cataloging: we still have our cataloger, but we do a lot of copy cataloging.
8. Challenged/educated
9. Collection development today. We are looking at our storage collection, especially periodicals. How is technology helping or misleading us? With fixed budgets, how do we allocate to databases, etc.
10. Communication skills
11. Community awareness. Knowledge of the community. Developing community relationships. Know your census. Know who your people are. Knowing what your local resources are. Health care resources are common.
12. Confidence
13. Conflict resolution skills (verbal situations). Part of security is about conflict resolution. Learn how to talk to someone.
14. Creativity
15. Critical thinking. America is changing; we have to change with it.
16. Curiosity
17. Dealing with the nontraditional patron. E.g., patrons who are there to find the public transportation schedule.
18. Different holidays people observe; makes a difference in terms of teaching. A matter of business, as you say.
19. Diverse populations. And special populations—folks off their meds. Different behaviors, not necessarily bad behaviors. What's over the line, what's dangerous, and what's not. True security problems. More urban, more dangerous. Management spends a ton of time working out procedures, rules of conduct. Monthly staff training so everyone gets trained. Outside speakers for serious training. Deal with variety without confrontations. Other side of customer service. Having skill in talking with a person so we don't immediately have a conflict.
20. Diversity value and awareness training. A number of corporations make that a mandatory training component. Ability to deal with all kinds of people; impacts the bottom line. A necessary

competency, not just something nice to do. It's about day to day business. Mandatory training for many businesses.

21. Two hours, four hours, or one day "managing diversity." Another aspect to developing curriculum. Once you have awareness, what do you do with it? Major implication on hiring. Moving away from hiring those just like you or who you are comfortable with. An issue by 2010, according to our speaker.

22. Embracing change; being open to accept change. Technology has brought a lot of change in the last 15 years. Change of formats. Withdraw last copy of book . . . That was the fight. *8-track, now cds, downloadable books. How librarians weren't invited to the founding of the internet, and we didn't fight for our place. We need to be there and promote. Embrace and anticipate change. Pack-n-go. Analyze your community, know it. Promote it. Role in changing technologies, dissemination of information.

23. Entrepreneurship

24. Fear on the part of immigrant patrons

25. Fearless, confident, not reluctant or make assumptions

26. Gaming in libraries

27. Generational/age differences

28. Grant writing

29. Health, economic issues

30. Impatience – learn to slow the patron down and educate them about the function of the library

31. Information-gathering/research

32. Instruction capabilities

33. Instructional librarianship. Learn good presentation. Some are scared to talk. Teaching technology. Learn how to structure a presentation so you can teach. Instructional design; teaching other people.

34. Interact with different types of customers; ability to handle varying levels of customer – what is the patron capable of

35. Interpersonal skills

36. Language skills, sign language

37. Leadership skills. How to act like a leader. Develop skills.

38. Listening skills

39. Marketing, fundraising, finance.

40. Marketing/promoting the library: having the political savvy to get your needs met. You need to understand the dynamics of how cities are run and made up and the directions they are going. If you don't get out and talk to the Chamber or the DDA then you are not on their radar and they will not think about you. The alliance the library can have with the local business officials is important. Getting the library out there. Getting out in the schools and presenting what is available. They need to alert me to the needs of the school system, the business community, etc. You need to get out of the library and not always in the library. If you don't partner with the other programs in the city you will fail, your millages will not pass.

41. Multi-skilled. We need our people to be not only a reference or a teen librarian. To do outreach, programming, collection development.

42. New generation of librarians who are comfortable. A course in popular, diverse culture, but also all the 2.0 stuff. Facebook, games, avatars, twitter, etc.
43. Patron handling skills: a whole range
44. People oriented, people with people skills. Most important characteristic is comfort with people of all kinds. Comfort with a whole range of people
45. Personality traits outweigh skills
46. Politics / how power works
47. Pop culture: how about a course like entertainment weekly magazine. A lot of librarians like me have to know a lot about music of all styles, television programs. New programs, cds, dvds, and books. I sit up nights watching bet. I select books for children. I must know their people. All those shows that come on. Sometimes I watch the Spanish station. In the schools, all of the different cultures.
48. Problem solving ability
49. Professional organizations. Being members, being active, even a small part. Be involved in the local community. So we can be out there and hear things. That's local. Larger scale, national, international. Who should know more about organization and access to information than librarians?
50. Security issues.
51. Service orientation embodies a lot of things. "relationships"—establish and maintain. You need to be outreaching. Internally, amongst staff, and externally. Collaboration relationships, ability to work as a team, a member. Initiative. Independent judgment. Interact with patron and their need. At flint, we have a lean staff because of the economic situation. No longer 4 people on the desk—2 seems like a great thing! Can't look to s sup for answers. Come with some experience. Can be trained, but come with some. Technology—depends on what you need. We are looking for some technology based staff, but people who want to serve the public. Meeting people and making change in the community. Library as a vital part in the community. Help them be present, there, open, flexible to the community and people they serve.
52. Setting up 2nd language materials.
53. Technical writing
54. Teen and kids but not latch key. If kids are good, we don't know about them. At closing time. Recognize we are not social workers.
55. Understanding of different cultures
56. Well –rounded
57. Writing skills

When reviewing a potential applicant's resume, would an indication of particular course work stand out as a selection criterion for you? If so, which courses would you most look for?

1. Adapting to customers' tech skills
2. Become involved in the urban settings like visiting the branch settings.
3. Databases
4. Describe a group project – teamwork, proven

5. Digitization.
6. How do you get your news?
7. Knowing what the cultural aspects of an urban environment.
8. Life-long learning
9. Multilingual is a plus. Some communities have a lot of people with a 2nd language and having someone who can run the collection in another language for the people who speak English as a 1st language.
10. Navigating multiple types of people to serve as well as coworkers and colleagues
11. Outreach
12. Practicums
13. Public speaking courses
14. Talking the language is a key. Need basic library skills even in the more advanced programs.
15. Teaching patrons to file job applications over the Internet
16. Technology; Word, spreadsheet, search engines
17. The ability to teach, provide instruction, delivery of education
18. Urban librarian needs the basic core of a basic public library.
19. You need to think of what the urban area has. If they have a lot of little businesses then the librarians should know about business resources. Business resources are critical to any public library. It's not just to help the local businesses but to help regular patrons with regular investment type questions.

Are there particular personality traits or attributes that you seek when hiring librarians to work in urban settings? Are there any traits or attributes that stand out as being particularly challenging for librarians working in an urban setting?

1. "New Age Librarian" – ULC
2. By accepting a profession you also accept the responsibility to provide leadership
3. Community awareness/depth/roots/know the political landscape, who are the key players in the community
4. Fundamental leadership/management tools
5. Human resources, hiring, ADA compliance
6. Involved in community, neighborhood
7. Knowing how to work in an aging facility, security issues, building getting damaged.
8. Knowing personal style of management
9. Legal aspects/ramifications
10. Make sure that the staff understands poverty and don't look down at them. Homeless people are a problem. We don't want librarians that will be condescending to a patron that is homeless or smells bad. You have to have some appreciation for poverty and what it means to be poor as well as an understanding as to how the city got to where it is.
11. Management training tools like time management
12. People who are comfortable in the environment.
13. People who are open to new experiences.

14. People who have worked with multi generations.
15. Professional development
16. Project management
17. Rotary club, city council meetings, neighborhood groups – active community involvement
18. Self leadership

What challenges do you face most often in your work? What are the greatest challenges for your library / library system?

1. Academic relations, treading lightly with faculty and staff
2. Anybody and anything will come through the front door
3. Appearing hip to younger crowds and pleasing older patrons
4. Budget cuts are a challenge
5. Burnout

6. Customer relations – reference, circ, everywhere
7. Customer service (from anywhere, retail food service) – people who have experience with people in their face
8. Dealing with unexpected influxes of information
9. Determining what our goal is/ is that the correct goal
10. Funding
11. Getting the information @ the right time in the right format
12. Giving instruction can be difficult
13. How government leaders look at libraries
14. Integration of resources
15. Keeping up to date with changes
16. Making do on a day to day basis
17. Maybe have practicum in different settings
18. Meeting community expectations
19. OCLC – registered voters' information
20. Plant the seed in graduate school – difficult to prepare for without the experience
21. Politics is everything
22. Role playing or bring in actors
23. Seminars with different cultures represented
24. Sensitivity to cultures
25. Sensitivity to people with disabilities
26. Spend time in an Urban library, whether through a practicum or otherwise
27. Staying relevant as culture evolves
28. Strength of character
29. Structured observation
30. Union restrictions

31. Use comment cards/surveys/stats to receive community input, usability studies, usability courses are important, assessment capabilities, real estate space on web pages, shift from print to electronic/what format to buy, MP3 vs. CD example
32. Younger librarians understanding the importance of contributing to the profession; younger librarians viewing librarianship as "a profession"

When hiring urban librarians, how importance is "work experience" to your hiring decision?

1. A specialty won't cancel them out of the running if they picked something different. If they have something going for them, I will still interview them. IF they have techie skills, great, but they still need people skills. Are staff is all both techie and people skilled. Public service skills are the essential skills; collection development, day to day skills.
2. Community organizer
3. Computer aids working in the lab
4. Conflict resolution
5. Customer service. Hard to train these skills. I can teach them how to catalog or use PowerPoint, but these are more difficult skills to train.
6. Diverse experience, skill transferring
7. For entry level positions libraries can train to what they need to a certain extent. Library specific requirements like a call center or a computer center can be trained to what the library specifically wants.
8. Get a job at a bookstore, for example. You don't get paid much but you are expected to know every book ever printed. Some bookstores have these quizzes. We hire from a local bookstore with these hard quizzes, and we know they will know. Someone who at least know all the classics.
9. Have done a work study
10. Have fun with what you are doing. If it's a job, you don't do well. The young are the most intelligent generation so far. Can multi-task. But what they need is direction, organization. They can do all kinds of stuff. They need guidance from librarians, their classmates. We're organizers, so be better about organizing time.
11. I ask what they read. I want to hear what they say. Are they enthusiastic? "You oughta read it." We didn't get much readers advisory in library school. My library circulates a lot of fiction.
12. I don't need someone who can build a server.
13. I don't think to ask about specialization, but when they tell me I'm impressed.
14. I heard about a music store where they ask about your CD collection in the interview.
15. I see their work experience, not transcript. But if I am curious I'll ask.
16. I would love a partnership about technology. We would love to do these things, but we just don't have the staff. We have a tech department that trains faculty and students, but they are struggling too. I would love to have access to these students.
17. I wouldn't turn a student loose on the public. But I would let them train my staff. We have 5 interns. We get them together to do a sort of techie presentation. Google docs. We don't have enough

computers with Word, so we look for solutions. Cell phones, Facebook, other techie things. We have a tough populace.

18. If they've taken information literacy.
19. Internship service. Maybe they worked in a library—not professionally, but it can translate. A department store, even. Practical experience in working with people. We don't ask a lot about schooling in our interview practice. What kind of group projects they had, and what their role was. Draw them out—how do they express ideas. People, teamwork, presentation skills. Internal/external customer service.
20. Internships is always helpful
21. Is it possible to give students a little inside perspectives on libraries and museums. Understand how the union works. How to navigate them. Have a librarian who knows about the union come talk to your class.
22. Keep the technology, and as practical as possible.
23. Lack of experience conveys a lack of sincerity
24. LJ says "hire for potential" not experience.
25. Maybe they could be backed up by a staff member. Team teaching could be a great learning opportunity. Pair with another trainer. They won't have the whole burden, but they have leadership and backup.
26. Must distinguish yourself from other librarians
27. Mutual respect is necessary among all library workers
28. Not the most important thing
29. Skills, like a foreign language. Spanish. Demographics changing. Learn a language.
30. Teacher
31. Tech is so big. We just assume it. Technology is too big to ignore.
32. There's really no way to prepare them to be a cataloger
33. They need to be good with the public, stellar customer interaction with a variety of population groups, respect for different ethnic and cultural groups
34. Very important
35. We do look for collection development. We don't have centralized ordering.
36. We have our tech department. I can do a lot of things, and we want people to bring those. But also some of the classic skills. Multi-talented, multi-skilled. If we want someone who is a serious techie, we'll go to UM; if we want public librarianship, we go to WSU. Which is not to say we're closed. But that's where we start.
37. We like internships. But wouldn't put students alone on a presentation.
38. We're big libraries. We hire tech people. Smaller communities may need a reference person who is also a technology person.
39. Work experience is relevant not just "library work experience"
40. You might have a lot of tech skills, but still need people skills.

Are there specific work assignments or work settings that particularly stand out for you?

1. Attend select library staff meetings
2. Book knowledge
3. Collection development tasks
4. Customer service experience
5. Digitalization projects
6. Experience working with different cultures, sensitivity
7. Front line experience with the public, work on service desks which require customer interaction
8. Give them assignments in their "least comfortable areas" in order to gain insight and understanding as to why they don't like the task(s)
9. Give them assignments that foster community engagement and interactions with other community organizations to gain insight about patron expectations and how they might use information
10. Knowing the person's area of interest would help when planning assignments
11. Observe "circulation desk" activities to learn patron concerns, primary issues, etc…
12. Practicums should be required if they don't have library experience
13. Skill transfer
14. Special projects i.e.…collection development, web development, digitalization projects, etc…
15. Volunteering

What work settings and/or experiences do you think we should provide for every student in the Urban Libraries concentration?

1. Apprenticeship/journeyman program
2. Be around reading groups or reading clubs. They get to know a small group of their patrons very well.
3. Being on the reference desk to see what type of questions are asked.
4. Can't sell yourself as "urban" if you've only had metropolitan experience
5. Circulation desk
6. Comment about creativity being important.
7. Community outreach – looks good on resume too!
8. Connecting with organizations in the community, understanding the community
9. Definition of urban might need to change
10. Detail of LISP practicum discussed. Within urban library scheme, this would mean being placed in an urban library, experiences with community outreach.
11. Do you seek out mentors? That is important.
12. Emphasis on customer service
13. Experience – depending on your definition on "urban"
14. Exposure to people
15. For Urban libraries, even before practicum, students must spend time in an urban library – it might help people decide if this is their true calling
16. Front line contact with patrons

17. Good experiences might incentivize them.
18. Having opportunities to do service projects in the community. Getting the librarians out and in the public eye helps people realize that the library cares about the community.
19. How does the faculty keep abreast of issues in urban libraries? That seems that it might be difficult. Someone might teach about urban libraries but not have stepped foot in one in years.
20. HR director of library suppliers
21. I hope you will recruit minorities as heavily as possible. That is a problem in hiring we have. For instance, having a Chaldean in our library would be great.
22. I look for passion, respect for others. (I hire consultants—a bit different). People skills are paramount—communications. Project management skills. It might not be as applicable to this discussion, due to the level we're hiring on.
23. I support professional development in my employees, their attending conferences. I pay employees dues, send them to conferences.
24. I will never hire children's librarian without seeing them in front of children, if they have that connection. Second language skills are important. We have an Arabic speaking community, so that is important.
25. I'm sure you provide tips in getting jobs, interviewing skills. Some come in without experience in selling themselves, falling into mere yes and no answers. They definitely need to know about the library where they're interviewing. That shows initiative.
26. Ideal set of experience
27. Intersection of libraries and real world
28. Looking at groups that specifically address mentally disabled
29. Meaningful exposure very early – even just observation
30. Multicultural issues
31. Pool of students interested – have them participate in a small project, whether it be HR, facilities...
32. Practica are good for community college library
33. Prior experience isn't always what I look for. If someone doesn't have the drive and determination, passion, in the beginning—it can't necessarily be instilled by training. So prior work is not necessarily important. People skills can be important, but that will come through in their personality. I'm as willing to take someone fresh out of school as someone with a few jobs. If the job has more specifics, e.g. technology, youth oriented jobs, I may begin to look for experience.
34. Professional development
35. Project based practicums.
36. Recognizing sub communities that have different information needs
37. Relates positive experience with student center in technology at MLA conference. Could there be more seminars where students and practitioners are getting together?
38. Security/safety in post 9/11 world
39. Spending time with community members
40. Talk to economic developer of a city
41. The first five minutes of the interview is crucial. Your education and your experience got you in the door. Now it is up to you to sell yourself. To show your passion.

42. The only reason I like an internship is so that through my informal network I can then call that library director.
43. The students need to have enough time to get experience. 1 or 2 hours a week just to observe is not enough.
44. There IS a market there
45. To some extent, I think strong demands should be placed on hosting organization for practicum, so that certain experiences will be ensured.
46. Working on a virtual reference desk and reading the questions and responses to see how the questions were answered.
47. Working with gangs, real street experience even if it is not library experience
48. Yes, internship is good.
49. Yes. Relates positive personal experience with practicum within social work field.

Other thoughts

- Classes should not be exclusively online because students need exposure to each other and to libraries in the community
- Cross training – librarians need to know the whole process to provide good service
- If students don't have library experience, they should be required to do a practicum
- Immigrants are going to more suburban communities now more than ever. Classes like the history of urban libraries are a very helpful.
- Internships and practicum's to gain on the job experience.
- Joint degree with the urban planning masters program.
- Library greeters
- Library science program should establish a formal promotion and organization of practicums asking all types of libraries to consider taking practicum students. In addition, programs should come up with sample assignments easing the burden of the libraries who take on practicum students, etc.
- Look at what classes can be cross listed from the urban planning program.
- Preference is often be given to people with prior careers because it shows that they have chosen LIS, not just "fallen" into it
- Reference interview has changed because of new technologies, skills, need for speed
- Schools need to attract students from diverse ethnic groups
- See that description fits someone who majors in social work.
- Staff should reflect the ethnicity of community, gender is important in some ethnic communities
- Students' practicum reports/feedback should be shared with the libraries where the practicum takes place.