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## **MLIS Curriculum at Punjab University: Perception and Reflections**

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### **Introduction**

Khurshaid (1992, p. 13) writes that, "LIS Education was started at the University of the Punjab Lahore by Asa Don Dickinson, an American librarian and student of Melvil Dewey, in 1915 as a post-graduate certificate program." Bansal and Tikku (1988, p. 397) add that, "University of the Punjab was the first university outside the USA to introduce regular training in librarianship." An American professor, James C. R. Ewing, then Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Punjab (1910-1917), suggested the recruitment of a trained librarian. The objective was to train those already working in libraries and to reorganize the Punjab University Library. The suggestion was approved by the university administration. Dickenson, who applied for the position in response to an advertisement published in the American press, was appointed for one year (Anwar, 1992; Qarshi, 1992; Ameen, 2007).

Dickinson reached Lahore on October 12, 1915 and began a series of lectures on modern library methods in November 1915. He delivered lectures for about one month and there was practical training in library work for three months. The faculty consisted of Dickinson and his wife and they conducted four examinations to evaluate candidates before awarding certificates (Qarshi, 1992). No records exist that could describe the curriculum for this first class; however, the contents of the *Punjab Library Primer* are regarded as a summary of Dickinson's lectures.

Anwar (1990) points out that, "the *Punjab Library Primer* is the first professional ... literature written as a textbook by a professionally educated librarian and a teacher" (p. 5). Kaiser (1990) describes how Dickinson served as a library educator or an author of textbooks only during his stay in Lahore; otherwise, he only served as a successful library administrator.

The Dickinson course was suspended for two years after his departure and was revived in 1918. This undergraduate course was converted into post-graduate course in 1928. A post-graduate diploma was instituted in 1959 and a masters in 1974, with the M.Phil leading to a PhD programme in 2005.

### **Curriculum Revision in PU**

The curriculum is an instrument that enables LIS professionals to practice their skills in the work environment (Rugambwa, 2001). The addition of information science components in the LIS programmes and the spread of IT have changed the nature of LIS curricula. Qarshi (1992) observes that LIS curriculum revision has been very slow since the 1990s. He describes the development of LIS curriculum at PU as consisting of four stages from 1915-1990. The first began with Dickinson's certificate course that grew to a one-year diploma in library science. In 1959 a course on "Reference Service" was added. In 1974, a master's program was created, including a course on research methods. The fourth stage was the addition of information science components in the 1990s.

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) revised the MLIS curriculum in 1998 and again in 2002. "HEC Curriculum 2002" was implemented in 2004 with local variations. The LIS department PU again revised and implemented its curricula with the consultation of LIS academicians and practitioners in 2007. New courses were offered in the PU MLIS. The MLIS is a two-year programme with 72 credits, along with a compulsory internship of 8 weeks or 288 working hours. A research thesis is optional for students who have 3 out of 4 or more in full CGPA.

### **Objectives of the study**

- To seek the opinions of young LIS professionals in the University of the Punjab on their satisfaction with the MLIS curriculum, including what they have learned, faculty, instructional methods, instructional facilities, etc.
- To point out problems with the curriculum and suggest means for improvement.

### **Research Design**

The study used a questionnaire survey. The literature was reviewed to develop an understanding of the subject and data gathering instruments. Details of the data collection are as follows:

#### **LIS Professional Survey**

Young LIS graduates were surveyed. A semi-structured questionnaire was designed using a Likert scale to collect data. The sample consisted of 40 professionals from three academic years (2005-2007), who graduated from the University of the Punjab, Lahore, and were working in library and information centres. Two hundred twenty-three students, completing their MLIS during these three years in morning and evening sessions, were the target population of this study. The number of graduate students was 65, 77, and 81 in 2005, 2006, and 2007, respectively. A stratified random sample was drawn.

The questionnaire consisted of four parts and a combination of open and closed questions. The questionnaires incorporated questions on:

- personal information
- learning during MLIS degree /curriculum,
- satisfaction level
- suggestions for improving the curriculum

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected from the target group through personal visits. Email and phone calls were used to follow up with participants. A total of 32 (80 percent) of alumni responded to the survey. SPSS was used to analyze and manipulate the quantitative data.

## Data Analysis and Discussion

### LIS Professionals' Opinions/Perceptions

#### Respondents' Profile

Thirty-two LIS professionals out of a possible forty, from thirty libraries, participated in the study. All respondents were PU alumni who graduated in 2005, 2006, and 2007. The response rate was 80 percent. There were 17 (53.1 percent) female respondents and 15 male (46.9 percent). It is worth mentioning that the number of female students was about double that of male students in the PU LIS department, but many female students do not join the profession after graduation. Thirteen (40.6 percent) respondents were from public universities, and 19 (59.4 percent) from private. Most respondents 20 (62.5 percent) got their first job within a month of graduation. The remaining 7 (22 percent) got their first job within two to four months. This shows the good labour market for LIS graduates in Pakistan. Only one respondent got his first job after unemployment of eight months. Eleven (34.4 percent) of respondents graduated in 2005, 12 (37.5 percent) in 2006, and 9 (28.1 percent) in 2007. More than three quarters of respondents were between 20 and 25 years old. Most earn a monthly salary ranging from Rs.10, 000 to Rs. 20,000, while four drew above Rs. 20,000 (because they work in the private sector)

#### Opinion of MLIS Curriculum

The mean scores of LIS professionals' opinions on the curriculum are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Opinion on MLIS curriculum

	Opinion on curriculum	Mean
1	Online searching skills	3.50
2	Course contents are related to practical approach	3.09
3	Research skills	3.09
4	Marketing LIS services	3.06
5	Interpersonal skills	3.00
6	Information storage and retrieval	3.00
7	IT skills	3.00
8	Advanced library software	2.81
9	Presentation skills	2.72
10	Leadership skills	2.63
11	Management of information centres	2.31
12	Database management	2.28
13	Interview skills	2.09
14	Office communication (written)	2.00
15	Human resource management	1.84

Note: 1-Not at all 2-To a minor extent 3-Just okay 4-To a reasonable extent 5-To a great extent

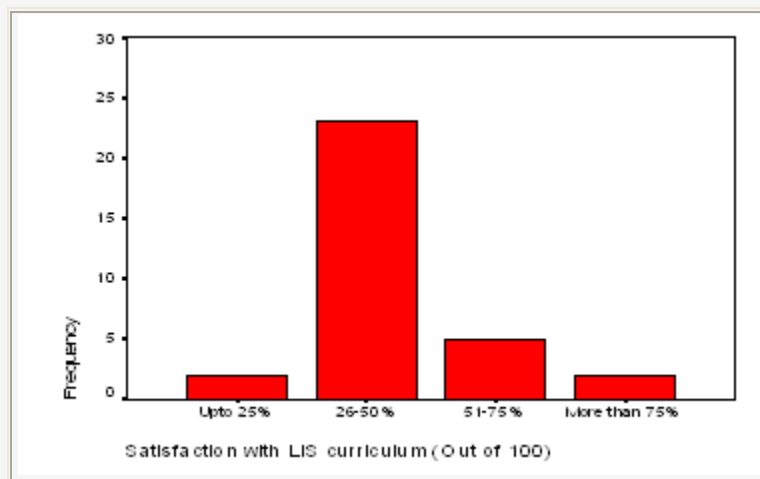
The mean for online searching skills for professionals is 3.5, which is the highest score, followed by course contents related to practical approach, and research skills (Mean= 3.09). The mean for marketing of LIS services is 3.06. The mean of interpersonal skills, information storage and retrieval, and IT skills are all the same (3.00). The lowest mean was for interview skills (2.09), followed by written office

communication (2.00), and human resource management (1.84). The LIS department has now introduced the new compulsory courses on personality development and communication skills and human resource management in the first and second semesters, respectively.

### Overall Satisfaction with the LIS Curriculum

More than three quarters of respondents had up to 50 percent satisfaction with the curriculum, and another 15 percent have up to 75 percent satisfaction.

Bar chart of professionals' satisfaction n=32



### Satisfaction Level

The satisfaction level of LIS professionals with different aspects of the MLIS programme and its parent department was gauged with a five-point scale and the results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Satisfaction level

	Attributes	Mean	SD
1	Teaching methodology	2.62	.554
2	No. of teachers	2.81	.820
3	Guest lectures are arranged	2.28	.851
4	Class environment is encouraging to learning	2.41	.797
5	Relevant texts are available in English	3.50	.708
6	Optional courses are offered on students' demand	2.94	1.268
7	Internet and lab facilities	2.63	.793
8	Information in the contents of courses is sufficient	3.03	.897
9	IT/information courses serve market needs	2.34	.745
10	Research facilities are sufficient	3.47	.719
11	Internship duration	2.84	.954

1-Highly Dissatisfied 2-Dissatisfied 3-Just okay 4-Satisfied 5-Highly Satisfied

The satisfaction level for “Relevant texts are available in English Language” was the highest (Average=3.50, SD=0.70) followed by research facilities (Average=3.47, SD=0.72) and sufficient information in the contents of courses (Average=3.03, SD=0.89). Respondents showed lower satisfaction with regard to guest lecturer, IT courses, class environment, Internet and lab facilities, and teaching methodology. Respondents were also less satisfied with the availability of optional courses, internship duration, and the number of faculty.

### Problems with the MLIS curriculum

Senior LIS professionals face problems in recruiting new librarians. New librarians may have difficulty in their job search. LIS curricula can fail to make new graduates employable.

Table 3 below includes data on this and other problems in LIS curricula

Table 3: Curriculum problems mentioned by LIS professionals about (n=32)

Sr.	Problems	LIS professionals
1	Not proficient in English (spoken and written)	18
2	No knowledge of written office communication	16
3	Lack of interviewing skills	15
4	Not familiar with database management	13
5	Not aware of advanced library software	10
6	Lack of online searching/IT skills	8
7	Poor interpersonal skills	6
8	Lack of specialized trained staff	6
9	Lack of leadership skills	5
10	More emphasis on theoretical perspective	3
11	Weak presentation skills	3
12	Research skills are not developed	3
13	Experience is required for first job	3

The most common problems are lack of communication skills and a lack of knowledge of IT applications and management. Respondents (n=18) were critical that they had not gained proficiency in English, had no knowledge of written office communication (n=16), had not learned interviewing skills in their curriculum (n=15), and that they had to suffer due to the lack of these skills. Thirteen professionals reported that they were not familiar with database management, stated that they were not aware of advanced library software, and three complained that they faced the problem of not having experience for their first job.

### Conclusion

In today's competitive, knowledge-based economy, the theoretical knowledge of an academic subject is not enough for an LIS graduate to survive in the information market. Graduates will have to develop market-oriented skills to meet the challenging and changing needs of the information marketplace. They will have to improve their communication skills, problem-solving ability, knowledge of IT, storage and retrieval of information, presentation skills, proficiency in English, and will have to provide services to customers with motivation and commitment. The inclusion of these features in LIS curriculum will enhance their employability skills. The curriculum of MLIS in PU should mirror these skills.

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