

TO: ALA Executive Board

REPORT: Committee on Accreditation response to items referred by EBD #5.12 - Recommendations 1 and 5(a)

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ATTACHMENTS: Report, as above.

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December 4, 2017

TO: ALA Executive Board
FROM: ALA Committee on Accreditation (COA/the Committee)
SUBJECT: Response to items referred to COA in EBD #5.12:
Recommendations # 1 and # 5(a)

Recommendation #1: *External Review Panel (ERP) teams should reflect specialized areas of expertise represented in LIS programs as indicated in the report, with the ERP recruitment pool expanded to recognize members of related professional associations.... This recommendation complements the recommendation made by the TF on Accreditation – Process and Communications, to “modify and clarify goals of External Review Panel (ERP) site visits and reports.” That recommendation, along with others, has been referred to the ALA Committee on Accreditation which, working with the ALA Office for Accreditation, is reviewing that report and developing an implementation response to the ALA Executive Board.*

Proposed Next Step (1): *Recommendation #1 be referred to the ALA Committee on Accreditation for review and report back to the ALA Executive Board by Midwinter 2018.” [From: Ex. Bd. document 5.9 (30-3-2017)]*

COA response to Recommendation # 1

The COA has long been committed to having an appropriate pool of volunteers to serve as members of External Review Panels (ERP) and has focused on finding volunteers with appropriate expertise and experience to meet the special specialized areas found in LIS programs. We are guided in our selection by the founding documents, specifically, the Charge to the COA and the Memorandum of Understanding between the COA and ALA.

COA Charge: “To be responsible for the execution of the accreditation program of ALA, and to develop and formulate standards of education for library and information studies for the approval of council.” <http://www.ala.org/aboutala/committees/ala/ala-coa>

From the **Memorandum of Understanding** between ALA and COA:

3. “ALA recognizes that COA, as part of the professional association, serves the needs of the profession by protecting the public, including students seeking quality education and consumers of library services, by ensuring that academic programs in library and information studies are qualified to prepare individuals as librarians.” as
<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/accreditation/Memo%20of%20Understanding.pdf>

While the COA has exercised flexibility in accepting the wide variety of specializations and concentrations developed in some of the accredited programs, we note that our Charge and the MoU both specify that we accredit programs for library and information studies, not library *or* information studies. The fact that the ALA Committee on Education will be working on revising the professional competencies for professional librarians may permit us in the future to respond more directly to the call for working more closely with related professional associations. ALA has recently adjusted its policy to have the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) recommend a dean, director or chairperson from among its members to the ALA president-elect for appointment to the COA.

To grow the reviewer pool to include expertise in the many specializations added by programs in recent years may prove a challenge both for ALA in terms of recruiting and training volunteers and for programs by way of expanding the number of viewers on panels.

While an ERP Report is vital to a program review, it is only one part of what goes into an accreditation decision (see [I.15 Accreditation decisions](http://www.ala.org/educationcareers/sites/ala.org.educationcareers/files/content/AP3/4thedition/AP3_4th_ed_I.15_r ev05-17-17.pdf) [pdf] (http://www.ala.org/educationcareers/sites/ala.org.educationcareers/files/content/AP3/4thedition/AP3_4th_ed_I.15_r ev05-17-17.pdf)).

The COA is open to further discussion with representatives of related professional associations on ways to “modify and clarify goals of External Review Panel (ERP) site visits and reports” with the understanding of the COA’s obligation to consider the interests of the primary constituencies: the public, the profession, the students, and the consumers of library services, in any modification of the accreditation procedures.

“Recommendation #5: (a) There be better accommodation of the interdisciplinarity of LIS as it continues to expand and is reflected in programs. This also applies to the long-term tensions / differences between library science and information science.

Proposed Next Steps (5): (a) That the ALA Executive Board refer (a) to COA for incorporation in its current reconsideration of accreditation process, communications and future standards, and to COE, to inform its consideration of competencies and streams of education within the LIS ecosystem.” [From: Ex. Bd. document 5.9 (30-3-2017)]

COA Response to Recommendation # 5(a)

This recommendation raises a number of important and complex issues.

- 1) In the discipline of library and information studies (LIS), the long-standing assumption has been that by placing the professional degree at the graduate level, students would bring a level of interdisciplinarity into a program accredited by ALA. Over the years this concept of the interdisciplinary nature of LIS has become less distinct as we shifted from accepting undergraduate degrees in the liberal arts and sciences to accepting students with professional undergraduate degrees, including students with bachelor degrees in LIS into our graduate programs. Today the focus seems to have shifted to the growth of faculty from a wide variety of disciplines staffing our accredited programs, and has led in some instances to what might be labeled the “de-professionalization of the discipline.” This is an important issue that needs to be explored and considered with great care as we plan the future direction of the ALA-COA accreditation process.
- 2) The reference to the “tensions/ differences between library science and information science” are especially relevant given the development of the iSchool movement, which included a significant number of schools that have dropped the term “library” from their names and in some cases, have no programs with a history or tradition of content that is consistent with the history of LIS education. Furthermore, just as our Memorandum of Understanding with the American Library Association describes the “... central role of the COA accreditation process to the recognition of librarianship as a distinct and autonomous profession...” those representing information science are likely to consider their discipline to be distinct and autonomous from librarianship. This may raise significant questions as to the ALA’s role in evaluating the education programs for information professions that consider themselves distinct and autonomous from librarianship.

The Committee recognizes that these differences are a significant challenge for charting the future as well as responding to the concerns raised in the two Task Force Reports. COA acknowledges that ALA must determine what, if any revisions, it would like to propose to the charge of the Committee and any revisions they would like to propose to the MoU between ALA and COA. We are encouraged that ALA is soliciting input throughout the Association on future directions and hope that the COA will be invited to have representation on any groups involved in the discussion of responses to the two Task Forces and the future direction of accreditation of educational programs for professional librarians.

The Committee will explore ways to build closer ties to organizations with a stake in accreditation such as the Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T), the Special Libraries Association (SLA), etc., to

seek resources to support a sustainable accreditation program as the scope of LIS program content expands its multi/interdisciplinary reach.

Relevant Board documents, including the Task Force Reports are made available from

http://www.ala.org/aboutala/governance/officers/eb_documents The specific Board documents relating to the Task Force Reports are:

- 1) Ex. Bd. document 5.2.1 (21-9-2016)
http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/governance/officers/eb_documents/2016_2017ebdocuments/ebd5_2_1_accred_tf_recommendations.pdf
- 2) Ex. Bd. document 5.9 (30-3-2017)
http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/governance/ebd5_9_TFonFutureContextofAccred.pdf
- 3) Ex. Bd. document 5.12 (7-6-2017; 13-6-Conference Call)
http://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/governance/ebd5_12_Task%20Force%20on%20Context%20for%20Future%20Accreditation.pdf

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