

I.6 Standards for Accreditation overview

The COA develops standards for accreditation through a consensus-building process that involves various communities of interest, including educators, students, and library and information practitioners. Throughout the standards-development process, the COA seeks, receives, and uses comments and suggestions from the communities of interest in both the United States and Canada. The 2015 *Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library and Informational Studies* were adopted by the approval of the ALA Council on February 2, 2015. Previous standards were adopted in 1925, 1933, 1951, 1972, 1992, and 2008.

The *Standards* describe the essential features of programs of education that prepare library and information professionals. Within the context of the school's and program's rights and obligations regarding initiative, experimentation, innovation, and individual programmatic differences, these standards identify the minimum achievement consistent with the needs of the LIS profession as well as the indispensable components of library and information studies programs.

The *Standards* use qualitative rather than quantitative measures throughout and are indicative rather than prescriptive. The intent of the *Standards* is to foster excellence through the development of criteria for evaluating educational effectiveness and to protect the public interest. Members of the public have the right to know whether a given program of education is effective. Programs therefore are expected to make publicly available the results of their evaluation of education effectiveness.

Throughout the *Standards*, the requirements for evaluation include the assessment of outcomes, not only of educational processes and resources, but also of the successful use of those processes and resources to achieve established objectives. Furthermore, institutions seeking accreditation of master's degree programs in library and information studies have an obligation to use the results of their evaluations for broad-based, continuous program planning, development, and improvement and to make those results public.

While the *Standards* provide the basis for self-evaluation and peer review of all accredited master's programs in library and information studies, their qualitative nature enables each program to be considered within its unique context. The *Standards* have been designed to encourage programs to initiate experiments in professional education without creating conflict with the policies and organizational structure of their own institutions.

The *Standards* and the current accreditation process emphasize the use of outcomes assessment by the programs accredited by the ALA. Many institutions have tools and resources that departments and programs can use to help develop and measure outcomes. An annotated list of selected outcomes assessment and evaluation tools is available in the Resources for LIS Administrators section of the Office for Accreditation website.