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"LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE EDUCATION IN THE
AMERICAS: PRESENT AND FUTURE"

Changes in the library and information science curriculum:

The case of México

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I thank the Organization of American States and the American Association of Library Schools for the invitation to participate in this seminar on "Library Education in the Americas: present and future".

I would like to indicate at the outset of this brief presentation, that although deeply interested in library educational problems, and directly engaged in different kinds of programs during the past years, I do not play at present, any role in our library schools.

I would also like to make it clear, that I will be referring most of my presentation to the country I am more familiar with: México.

This contribution does not pretend to evaluate the programs to which reference will be made. It is my hope that it will simply contribute to throw out some light on the present situation of library education in my country and the characteristics of the programs offered. As to the changes foreseen, some information is provided. Some considerations as to the implementation of two core curricula is also given.

General background

There is no doubt that library education is one of the more lively and pressing problems that, so far, has not been solved.

Despite the many serious efforts done, the development reached is still weak, and thus, this weakness is reflected in the quality of the library and information services offered.

This problem has been dealt with long ago, but references will be made to actions taken in the last two decades either at a regional or national level. They are a clear evidence of the interests of the

professionals in the area, or of national or international organizations, for arriving to practical solutions to solve it. Just to mention some of them, it will be important to remember the Workshops at Medellín, Colombia, from 1962 to 1965 (1), devoted to the analysis of the existing curricula. Among other recommendations it was then suggested by the participants that a standard curriculum for the region had to be prepared, as a point of departure for our Latin American countries.

Few years later, in 1972, the Latin American Commission of FID (FID/CLA), sponsored the "Latin American Seminar on the Preparation of Information Scientists" held in México City (2). It was probably one of the first occasion when the expression "information scientists" was used in our region to define the "new" professionals needed and required for the operation of information services, and the role they should play in our modern society was analyzed. It was early in the 1970's when the emergence of some formal programs for information specialists took place. Brazil and Argentina could be mentioned among the first ones who offered them.

Other countries such as Chile and México, started offering, if not a complete program, at least some credit hours in the area known as information science.

So far, the most common courses offered in our programs are in the areas of: automation, communication, information theory and cybernetics, research techniques, documentation, thesauri, information retrieval and a few more. Nevertheless the mere listing of the areas, does not convey any relevant information: the analysis of the subject content is much more important, but the specific programs were not available at this moment.

Other regional meetings were celebrated in the decade of the seventies to deal with this topic: the ones held in Medellín, in May 1974 (3), and in México and Bogotá in September and November 1976 respectively (4 and 5).

At a national level, I will refer to two recent seminars on this topic, held in México and sponsored by the professional associations (6 and 7). One more convened by AMBAC, is to be held in Guanajuato, México, from February 18-22. Its goal is to discuss problems pertaining to education in this field with directors of library schools, and other professionals from various institutions of higher education interested in the implementation of "licenciatura" programs in the short run.

But despite the seminars or workshops held, and the introduction in some countries of formal programs or courses on the subject, it will be pertinent to ask ourselves if the professional required to cope with the present information needs and demands of our modern society, has already been formed.

Have the different national realities been analyzed? Are those courses the answer to them? Has the profile of the professional required been already defined according to national realities, be them librarians, information specialists or documentalists? Or do those programs or courses simply respond to a kind of snobbism, in order to show that the library or information programs of the region, or of a given country, keep up with recent developments?

It could probably not be a surprise for the participants to learn that the last question might reflect the present situation: it has been, in most cases, a matter of dropping and adding courses, without, always, keeping in mind the professional profile delineated in response to specific needs, and so new titles simply hide traditional

contents.

If analyzing and comparing the specific situation in each country, it will reflect a lack of agreement as to the core or basic subjects; their specific content; its duration. Going further into this problem there is also no consensus as to the kind of diplomas or certificates granted; entrance requirements, or identification of the basic supporting material needed, such as collections, laboratories and so forth. All these aspects could easily be proved by going throughout the reports presented in the Seminar convened by UNESCO in November 1976 (5). It is for this reason that one of the widely accepted propositions made by the participants to the regional or even national seminars, or conferences to which reference has just been made - is the need and urgency to propose a core curriculum, that would be designed by a group of experts, to be submitted for consideration to the various library school directors, so as to enrich it with the opinions and experiences of other qualified people.

There would be advantage in designing a core curriculum for the library schools of the region. Those advantages could be:

- a) Definition of the tasks the professional will be capable to perform
- b) Consensus on the definition of entrance requirements.
- c) Identification of the subjects required to form the professional capable of performing the activities that an information unit should carry out.
- d) Agreement on the content of those basic subjects and on their names
- e) Agreement on the number of hours allocated to each subject.
- f) Facilities to disseminate basic bibliography and eventually to exchange it, as well as other supporting material, on the various subjects integrating the core curriculum.

- g) Facilities to prepare teachers and to offer them teaching aids, one of the serious weaknesses of the library education structure
- h) Agreement on the names and quality of degrees, or qualifications awarded.

Such a consensus would allow the library schools to depart from one common and well known floor, but most important to know precisely what kind of a professional is being formed in each one of the schools in the region offering a core curriculum.

There might be objections against the existence of a core curriculum, because it could be said that whereas there are countries where a higher level of development has been reached, and where more sophisticated information activities are already been carried out, there are others whose development is still very weak, a library structure almost nonexistent, and the number of professionals in this field is far from meeting the most basic needs, either for offering direct library services, or even more, for teaching purposes.

This might be a valid observation, so that the benefit from departing from a single core program that could be offered in the several countries of the region, regardless of their stage of development, could be questioned.

This concern could eventually be dealt with by proposing the development of two core curricula, one at a technical level, and another one at the professional level. The last one will correspond to what in most of our countries is known as "licenciatura". In both instances their benefits will be the ones just indicated. At the professional level it will also be a matter of defining the justifications for the development of national master's programs or as a first alternative and when the library infrastructure in a given country is

almost nonexistent, candidates to those programs could attend foreign institutions.

The elaboration of two core curricula would meet the different national needs and realities. If it is true that there have been pro and con arguments for accepting the existence of technical programs, it is unrealistic, for our countries, to determine that the only accepted starting point is the professional level.

Technical programs, respond frequently to particular circumstances and needs, and do not necessarily fall under the responsibility of the library schools. For the reasons already indicated there is a great variety of programs like these, and as a consequence, there is lack of uniformity in their content; variation in the timing allocated to the various subjects; lack of agreement as to the qualifications of professors, teaching methods and so on. Such a diversity of programs explain the so many different types of technicians prepared. There is not a common floor yet, so as to define the tasks such a technician is able to undertake.

There is also the risk and the fear that those technicians will somehow prevent or retard the hiring of professionals.

Despite, these matters that deserve careful attention, there is not doubt that professionals need the support of technicians, and both programs, the technical and the professional, have to be runned in parallel based on national sound reasons and justifications.

A clear identification of the needs to be solved and the tasks the technician will be prepared to undertake is required. Aware of the different national realities and of the role the technical programs should play, it is reasonable to propose the preparation of a core program at this level as a common point of departure, so as to avoid

the so generalized short general basic courses - 1 week, 3 weeks, 5 or more - that are felt - but are only felt, as the solution to specific problems, but which have proved in practice to be almost useless, because the technician who followed them receives a very superficial preparation, reflected afterwards in the quality of their performance. The possibility for developing a curriculum for this level based on modules could be analyzed. This would imply, first, agreement on the basic subjects that should integrate the curriculum which could be taught either as a sequence in a given period of time, or by modules or subjects, in different periods, according to the most pressing needs, and thus, after the identification of the tasks the technician has to be able to perform. This structure could then permit that a single course on, say, services, or periodical publications, could be offered without harming the structure of the whole curriculum. Once the students complete all the subjects, either in a continuous sequence or throughout different periods, the technical diploma is awarded.

Library education in México

In case some of the participants in this Seminar are not familiar with the general panorama of library education in México, it will be valuable to talk briefly about the existing schools and the level of education offered at each one of them.

The information about curricula given here was taken from different brochures or documents prepared by the schools and in most cases was reconfirmed with their directors, or with the persons responsible for them. No evaluation at all is intended here.

In the capital of the country, Mexico City, there are two library

schools: 1) The National School of Librarians and Archivists (ENBA), sponsored by the Ministry of Education, and 2) the programs offered at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters within the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). The first one offers two levels: a) a technical one in 6 semesters, with a number of 94 hours of theory and 84 hours devoted to practice in library science. Secondary certificate is the main entrance educational requirement. At the term of the sixth semester the student is awarded a certificate as a technical librarian, valid also as the third level certificate corresponding to the "bachillerato" or preparatory level. This certificate enables the student to go into another field at the professional level (within the social sciences area), or to continue with professional studies in librarianship. b) The "licenciatura" level is offered in library science in eight semesters. Each week 68 hours are devoted to theory and 46 hours to practice in the field.

The preparatory certificate is required for admission. A thesis and professional exam must be presented before the degree is awarded. Table No. 1 gives the listing of subjects offered at both levels, and the number of hours of theory and practice allocated to each one of them.

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ENBA offers also 20 subjects so called "general" or "cultural" at both levels. These are required courses for all the students. If considering these courses there is a total of 31 courses for the technical level, and 20 for the "licenciatura" one. No further reference will be made here as to their names or number of hours.

It will probably be enough to say that for anybody interested in going into further detail about the programs at ENBA, reference can be made to its publication Bibliotecas y Archivos, No. 8, 1977.

	Technical		"Licenciatura"	
	Theory	Practice	Theory	Practice
Introduction to librarianship	4	2		
Services (I-II)	6	6		
Principles of cataloging	4	2		
Principles of classification	2	4		
Subject headings	2	4		
Acquisition of documentary materials	2	4		
Periodical publications	2	4		
Introduction to bibliography	2	4		
History of the books			2	2
History of libraries			2	2
Reference service			2	2
Special information services (I-II)			4	4
Selection of documentary material			4	2
Cataloging of anonym authors, corperative; subject headings			4	2
Cataloging of special materials			4	2
Application of Dewey classification			4	2
Application of Dewey classification and L.C. classification principles			4	2
Documentation (I-II)			8	4
Bibliography (I-II)			8	4
Library administration (I-II)			4	4
Public libraries			2	2
School and children libraries			2	2
Special libraries			4	2
University libraries			4	2
Planning of library and information services (I-II)			4	4
Comparative librarianship			2	2
TOTAL	24	30	60	46

Table No. 1

The curricula at both levels is under revision at present, and it is likely that some changes might be introduced starting next September. This revision has been undertaken because the present programs, although modified in 1975, do not fully respond, in the opinion of the directors, to the technician or professional required.

The revision affects more directly those courses identified as "general" courses, since ENBA belonged, up to August 1978, to the General Direction of Technological Institutes and thus such courses mainly oriented towards the area of administration had to be credited by the above mentioned Direction. When in 1978 ENBA was transferred under the General Direction of Publications and Libraries, the directors took advantage of this change to reconsider and analyze the whole curricula.

The Faculty of Philosophy and Letters offers "licenciatura" and master programs. The first one is administered by the College of Librarianship (CB) and the second one by the Division of Graduate Studies of the above mentioned Faculty.

At the "licenciatura" level there is a total number of approximately 675 hours. (See Table 2)

It is important to indicate the total number of credit hours in both "licenciatura" programs, ENBA and CB since this information will be the common point of departure for a comparison. There are 368 credit hours at ENBA and 234 at CB, these figures do cover also the "cultural" or "general" courses which, as indicated, they number 20 in the first school, and 4 in the second one. Contact was made with the coordinator of the CB "licenciatura" program in order to obtain the most recent information as to the number of hours of theory and practice allocated to each subject. She mentioned the

Introduction to librarianship (I-II)
Introduction to science and technology (I-II)
Cataloging and classification (I-VIII)
Administration of libraries (I-II)
~~Bibliology~~
History of libraries
Research methods
Audiovisual materials
Reference service
General libraries
Technical services
Introduction to philosophy
Bibliography (I-II)
Special libraries
Selection of materials
History of art
Periodical and serial publications
Planning of library services (I-II)
Psychology applied to teaching
Official publications
Sociological librarianship
Fundamentals of education
Comparative librarianship (I-II)
Didactics of librarianship
Documentation
Mexican bibliography
Teaching practice
Electives

fact that there is no special provision for practice due to the shortness of the teaching periods. The number of hours per subject in a semester runs from 24-26. So, she said, teaching is limited almost exclusively to theory. There are some subjects such as cataloging and classification where, in principle, half of the number of hours allocated should be devoted to practice, but, most unfortunately, if this is ever done, it is not supervised.

This could be considered as an important pitfall of the program. The master program at UNAM is offered in approximately two years. The number of students enrolled at present is of about 30. A candidate holding a "licenciatura" degree in library science can enter this program without been requested to take pre-requisite courses. Candidates holding a "licenciatura" in other areas are requested not more than 8 prerequisite courses in this field, but the number varies according to their previous area of study. The curriculum is integrated by monographic courses and seminars. (See Table 3). This program is at present under a serious revision and there is the hope that it will be modified for the next academic period (October 1980).

Outside Mexico City there is a technical program offered at the University of Guadalajara, started in 1975, with a total number of 450 hours of subjects offered in the library field, distributed in 6 semesters. Twenty four persons, up to July 1979, have pursued the program, and its main objective has been to prepared technicians for their university libraries. All, with the exception of one, so far, have gone further to professional studies.

The courses and number of hours allocated to each one of them are given in Table 4.

Autonomus National University of México, Master program

Monographic courses:

The university library

General linguistics

Universal decimal classification

Scientific administration

Library terminology

Seminars on:

Library research (required for the preparation of the thesis)

Informatics

Computers applied to libraries

Teaching methods

Medical libraries

Medical information sources

Transliteration

Publications of international organizations

Comparative librarianship

Organization of manuscripts

Table No. 3

-Autonomus University of Guadalajara

---(Courses offered at the technical level).

	<u>H</u> <u>O</u> <u>U</u> <u>R</u> <u>S</u>
Introduction to librarianship	30
Library services (I-II)	90
Workshop on classification	60
Ethymologies applied to librarianship	30
Reference sources	30
Workshop on cataloging	60
Bibliography	30
Workshop on catalog organization	60
Statistics applied to libraries	30
Library administration	30
	<hr/>
TOTAL	450 hrs.

Table No. 4

There is also a "licenciatura" program offered at the Autonomus University of Guadalajara (UAG), a private institution. This program follows the lines of and is accredited by the CB.

There are only some exceptions as to the number and kind of elective courses offered at that University.

In respect to master programs, there are two at present being offered in provincial universities: one at the Autonomus University of Nuevo León and the other one at the University of Guanajuato. The first one was started in September 1977, and the second one, in January 1978.

The listing of courses offered at the Autonomus University of Nuevo León is the one indicated in Table 5. All of them last for one quarter, except when otherwise indicated.

Courses marked with an asterisk, although originally contemplated for the program were not offered in the first promotion, due to the fact that the participants main areas of interest were humanities and social sciences. Although considered as required courses, they have been treated as electives in this occasion.

The present promotion which originally enrolled twelve students, out of which eight still remain, will be thru in March 1980, and a new promotion will start in February this year, if a minimum number of ten students apply and are accepted to the program.

Several institutions located in the city of Monterrey have offered their support to the program. Professionals with a master's degree have taught the various academic subjects. Students, residents of that city, work half time for several institutions and devote some hours during the week to their courses. There are no full time professors. It could probably be said that the weakest aspect of this

Autonomous University of Nuevo León

Master program.

Introduction to librarianship

Information sources and services

Bibliographic description and organization of knowledge (two quarters)

Introduction to information science

Resources and reference services in humanities and social sciences.

Administration of libraries and information centers.

Analysis and design of information systems

Research methods

Automation

Storage retrieval and dissemination of information

Library education

* Resource and reference services in science and technology

* Mexican bibliography

* Not offered during the first promotion

Table No. 5

program is the bibliographic support.

The following are the characteristics of the program offered in Guanajuato: it is a full time program; twelve students were enrolled in 1979, and along the course one of them dropped out. Of the remaining eleven, only three presented the essay or research paper required for graduation, and six more indicated that they will present it this year. The collection, in opinion of the profesores, is rather well rounded up, including the suscription to around 45 periodicals in the field.

The original program offered in the first promotion was structured in short intensive modules of three weeks each, 45 hours per course, divided in 3 main areas (See Table 6). Professionals holding a masters degree were invited to teach each one of them.

The only person in residence for the program was the coordinator, who at the same time fulfilled other duties within the university library system.

For the second promotion, started in January 1980, the curriculum was carefully revised, and several modifications were introduced. Some of the main changes are the following: the duration of the courses varies from three to ten weeks, with a total number of 30 to 60 hours: some courses were split into two subjects, so that more emphasis will be given to specific aspects which in the opinion of the coordinator and the professor who taught the course in 1979, deserved more emphasis. This is the case, for instance of "Selection". which originally was taught with "Technical operations". A course on "Education for librarianship" was introduced, as well as two courses on quantitative analysis, as a basis for the course: "Analysis and mechanization of library systems". In 1980 there are two full time professors in residence.

Table 6 gives the original program and Table 7 lists the courses that will be offered this year and the time allocated to each one of them.

The main changes in the structure and duration of the program is justified because after a year of experience it was made clear that the short duration of the courses affected the students learning process.

Information provided here about curricula has been limited again, to the mere listing of subjects. It is most important to undertake a careful analysis of the characteristics and content of the programs, which unfortunately were not available for many of the courses and thus such analysis is still pending. Library school directors should insist on their professors in order to obtain at the earliest possible their programs. This is the only way to gain a detailed knowledge of the curriculum of each school as a perfect integrated unit and, as a byproduct, such individual analysis will serve as the indispensable material to be compared with other national or foreign curricula. After such studies are made, there could be a more solid frame of reference to build up the core curriculum or curricula sought.

A general comment about the above mentioned programs is the fact that elective courses for the different levels, have rarely been offered, and when this is the case they seem to respond to the availability of somebody willing to offer one on a given subject or area. But very seldom they respond to a well round and balanced planning.

University of Guanajuato

(Master program)

1979Courses

Areas: User services and
resources.

The library: its community
 and collections.

The communication process
 and the reference service.

Resources and reference systems
 in humanities, social
 sciences; science and technology.

Specialized materials and services.

Administration and
Research.

The university environment
 Administration.

Mexican academic libraries
 Problem solving (Research
 methods).

Information science
and technology.

Bibliographic description
 (cataloging).

Organization of knowledge
 (classification).

Technical operations

Analysis and mechanization
 of library systems.

University of Guanajuato (Master program)Curriculum 1980

	<u>Hours</u>
Administration (I-II)	60
Reference service and basic bibliography	40
Introduction to library and information sciences	30
Cataloging	40
Selection of materials	30
Classification	60
Research methods	30
Intriduction to quantitative analysis	30
Education for librarianship	30
Reference services in humanities and social sciences	40
Technical operations	30
Applied quantitative analysis	30
Communication	30
Reference services in science an technology	30
Analysis and mechanization of library systems	30
Special materials and services	30
Thesis project	<u>10</u>
TOTAL	510 hours

Table No. 7

Training program

The programs just referred to are those formally established in our schools. But due to the fact that their enrollement is so small, the national demand for librarians will hardly be satisfied.

For this reason, various activities to solve the lack of trained people have been undertaken in the last years. Many of them have been sponsored and organized by individual institutions for their own purposes. No reference to them is made here though, since the aim of this presentation is to deal with curricula aspects, and also because of their very particular objective. Among the most important activities of this sort, there have been some of national outreach. An example of them, were the ENBA-CONACYT courses offered, in a first instance, to persons who were working in libraries of institutions of higher education. Supported by the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT) these courses were offered from 1973 to 1978.

After the second promotion, 1975, persons not yet working for those libraries, but that would be hired for such institutions were also accepted. A number of approximately 270 people were enrolled.

The curriculum for this course was designed by a consultant with a long experience in the development of technical programs.

It was discussed with the directors of ENBA, and with professionals from CONACYT.

As indicated, the program responded to the characteristics and most pressing needs of institutions of higher education. There were periodic evaluations and thus some modifications were made to the original one. English language was also offered.

Training courses

ENBA-CONACYT

Public libraries

No. of hoursSubjectsNo. of hours

60

Introduction to librarianship

40

180

Information sources

72

70

Services

40

200

Technical processes (cataloging, classification, subject headings).

152

30

Periodical publications

-

50

Administration (basic principles and of institutions of higher education

36

30

Research methods and reprography.

-

80

Practice

70

Total 700

Total 410

Table No. 8

Another program of a national wide scope, has just recently been started by the Ministry of Education and offered to persons already working in public libraries.

In this case, the point of departure was the ENBA-CONACYT course, with a reduction in the number of hours to approximately 450, which is expected to be continued this year.

A basic bibliography was selected for both programs and an special effort was done to include as much material in Spanish as possible. Information about courses and number of hours of both programs is given in Table 8.

The programs mentioned above have been a valuable experience and the methodology followed, content, duration, bibliography and so forth are available to anybody interested on them, and could eventually be a point of departure for the development of a core program as proposed here.

Conclusion

If the will of cooperation is clearly stated in this occasion, a practical way to start solid and long lasting actions in the area of library education would be to propose a methodology for analyzing the national realities: identification on the present number of library and information services: number and educational characteristics of their staff; development foreseen in all information sectors: public, school, higher education and research institutions; resources available; expected growth.

From the analysis of these factors, among others, there would be sound basis to identify the kind and number of people needed, either technicians or professionals, and thus the adequate curriculum can be developed.

R E F E R E N C E S

- 1.- Normas para escuelas de bibliotecología. Informe de las Mesas de estudio de la Preparación de los Bibliotecarios en la América Latina. Escuela Interamericana de Bibliotecología. Universidad de Antioquia. Medellín, Colombia 1963-1965. Texto provisional Washington, D.C., Unión Panamericana, 1966. (Cuadernos bibliotecológicos, 29).

- 2.- Federación Internacional de Documentación y Comisión Latinoamericana. Seminario Latino Americano sobre preparación de cientistas da informacao. México, D.F. 23-25 agosto, 1972. Río de Janeiro, IBBID, 1972.

- 3.- Reunión de consulta sobre programas de la OEA para la formación de bibliotecarios. Medellín, Colombia, 26-31 de mayo, 1974.

- 4.- Pre-Session seminar on education and training. UNESCO- FID 20-24 September 1976. México, D.F., CONACYT-UNAM, 1976.

- 5.- Encuentro Latinoamericano de Directores de Escuelas de Bibliotecología. 22 al 26 de noviembre de 1976. Colombia, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. Biblioteca General, 1976.

- 6.- VII Jornadas Mexicanas de Biblioteconomía del 2 al 7 de mayo de 1976. Querétaro, Qro.
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