Appendix 5.2H

7.6 Focus Group Notes

SLIS Focus Group

MLA 2011

Jackson, MS

October 19, 2011

The focus group was led by SLIS Director Dr. M.J. Norton who spoke about the ALA-accreditation process. SLIS will be submitting a draft report to the COA at the end of October and will have an on-site visit in February. The accreditation process examines LIS programs’ quality of education based on ALA professional competency standards.

SLIS has also recently been evaluated by the University of Southern Mississippi’s University Priorities Committee, which reviewed and evaluated all programs for value and potential. During this process, some weak programs were designated to be phased out and some highly-rated programs were identified to receive increased support. SLIS master’s program was rated in the top tier of programs that were to be supported and due to that high rating has been given permission to hire three new faculty members.

Dr. Norton then asked the group of SLIS students, alums, and other interested LIS professionals for their questions, suggestions or feedback about the program.

1. One student would like to see more virtual reference instruction perhaps using applications such as Meebo; would also like to see more online bibliographic instruction (train the trainer), and information about physical maintenance of facilities

   - It was pointed out that new SLIS faculty member, Dr. Stacy Creel, has incorporated innovative new technologies in teaching effective reference transactions such as video podcasting.

2. One student suggested having an online photo directory of alums, which would aid in students finding program alums to mentor them for practicums

   - Dr. Norton stated that they would have to be voluntary due to privacy laws. She also states that the Web site is in the process of undergoing a transformation using new university template. Once the new Web site is done, SLIS will be able to work on producing an online newsletter.

3. A library professional in attendance who is not an alum of SLIS commented that she would have liked to have more information in her program about how to do a library budget.

   - Dr. Haynes noted that the management course in SLIS has included producing a library budget. The budget requirement is a group project and students are allowed to sign up to
the library type of their choice (public, elementary school, high school, academic, special) to produce an appropriate annual budget.

4. It was noted by several that library advocacy, marketing and working with government officials was increasingly important in this era of tight budgets.

- More information, discussion, and requirements related to library advocacy have been recently added to the management course and some of the elective courses.
- It was noted by Dr. Welsh that a grant-writing assignment had been added to the management course due in part to feedback from previous focus groups.

5. How is the online B.A. program approval going?

- Dr. Norton stated that having two additional undergraduate courses approved for online delivery as well as having the B.A. program classified as an online program is in the process of approval but must go through several committee levels at the university. Dr. Haynes added that approval of the program as an online program must also be approved by IHL.

6. How is SLIS enrollment?

- Dr. Norton replied that current enrollment at the master’s level is 175 and that enrollment in recent years varies between 160 - 200.

7. When was the program first accredited by ALA?

- Dr. Norton stated that SLIS was first accredited in 1980

8. What is involved in the accreditation process?

- Even though the ALA evaluation and accreditation of programs is every 7 years, it is a continuous process of assessment and evolving standards and professional competencies.
- One recent program alum remarked that he would like to learn more about the accrediting process and Dr. Norton stated that the final edited COA report would be available online.
- Dr. Haynes has been involved as a member of COA in evaluating two other LIS programs, so her insight into the accreditation process has been invaluable for SLIS

Dr. Norton closed by noting that SLIS needs to hear from alums who are willing to be part of the accreditation process.

- Dr. Welsh recalled that in her first time involved in the accreditation process in 2005, an ALA representative told them that our product is our students and it is very important to know about our graduates professional positions or promotions, publications,
presentation, honors and awards. SLIS Facebook page has been very useful in finding and communicating with program alums

- Dr. Norton noted that for a relatively small program, a number of our graduates go on to get a doctoral degree. Two of our alums are currently in a doctoral program at Simmons.

- One current student noted that students need more information about LIS scholarship opportunities. That was noted and was agreed that more scholarship opportunities should be available with a prominent link on the new SLIS Web page.

About 20 SLIS students and alumnae were in attendance,
SLIS Focus Group
MLA 2010
Vicksburg, MS
October 21, 2010

The focus group was led by Dr. Elizabeth Haynes, who asked the following questions to a group of SLIS students and graduates:

1. What in your library has changed that we need to be addressing?
   - In public libraries, there is a trend of people needing services such as help with job applications, creating or updating resumes
   - Problem patrons, personnel cuts/budgeting what-if scenarios
   - Grant-writing in course or workshop (SLIS mgmt course now requires grant-writing midterm assignment as one way to address this issue)
   - Policies and procedure-writing (advanced management course).

2. What do you envision as the most important issues for new librarians and how should they be addressed?
   - Technology training, basic computer maintenance skills for staff
   - Need survey of technology course or workshop
   - Several students responded positively to follow-up by Dr. Hayes that they would be interested in one-day (Saturday) or two-day weekend technology workshop
   - Dr. Welsh noted that SLIS is thinking about compiling a list of required computer skills with links to tutorials as a way to address this and that received a positive response from attendees.

3. If starting library school today what courses would you most like to take? If you are still in school, what courses have you particularly enjoyed?
   - Collection development, reference, YA Literature
   - What is your dream class?
     - Real-life work such as a practicum or service-learning class
• Survey course of different types of libraries (or Webinar with various alums talking about their libraries)
• Training for school librarians that includes cataloging
• More online guest lecturers, particularly alums, in online courses such as in archives course.

What else is on your mind?

• Appreciate level of communication of SLIS with students
• Like face-to-face opportunities at MLA
• Appreciate that SLIS is valued by Southern Miss so program is not cut
• Would like more face-to-face courses
• Need for students to learn differences between library types
• Many connected with other students via Facebook for support, encouragement
• Appreciate information science course
• Appreciate having requirement of research papers; need detailed feedback so they have better chance to be published or presented
• Several attendees inquired about SLIS doctoral program – Dr. Haynes replied that it is something we would like to explore in the future but it is not possible for the near future due to budget and faculty restraints.

About 20 SLIS students and alumnae attended the session.