

Workforce Issues in Library and Information Science (WILIS): Developing a Model for Career Tracking of LIS Graduates

Abstract

Workforce Issues in Library and Information Science (WILIS) is a three-year research project designed to study the career patterns of graduates of LIS programs. In general, LIS programs have lacked the time and resources to track their graduates. As a result, stakeholders do not have an adequate understanding of what happens to LIS graduates over the long term. LIS educators, in particular, do not have consistent data on the extent to which their programs meet students' expectations, prepare them for the workplace or meet continuing learning needs. Such an understanding would assist in educating and managing the LIS workforce more effectively. WILIS has two major parts. **Part 1** will build an in-depth understanding of educational, workplace, career and retention issues faced by LIS graduates using the life course perspective from the social sciences. This part of the research will be sited in North Carolina where a full range of LIS program types exist. One of the programs is in a historically Black institution, allowing a focus on minority career and retention issues. **Part 2** will use the methods developed in Part 1 to generate a transferable model for career tracking of LIS graduates nationally. The specific research goals are:

- 1. To build a comprehensive understanding of educational, workplace, career and retention issues facing LIS graduates.** The research team will use the following sources to develop a primarily web-based survey of LIS graduates: 1) previous LIS career tracking studies; 2) the expertise of LIS investigators related to type of employment, both library and non-library; 3) the expertise of non-LIS investigators in work and life course studies; 4) the experience of investigators in conducting a similar career-focused, web-based survey in the Workforce Aging in the New Economy (WANE) project; and 5) key informant interviews. WILIS will complement the IMLS *National Study on the Future of Librarians in the Workforce* by gathering more in-depth data on career and retention issues and including LIS graduates who have left the field temporarily or permanently.
- 2. To conduct an in-depth investigation of planning and tracking issues for LIS programs that influence the current and projected supply of LIS professionals.** The study team will conduct key informant interviews with LIS program directors in NC; heads of library and information organizations and associations; and representatives of LIS employers (i.e., academic, public, school and special libraries and non-library employers). Based on the issues that emerge, the team will gather data from LIS programs nationally. The two purposes will be: 1) to determine current planning and tracking practices, including future enrollment plans and views on recruitment, retention and other workforce issues and 2) to gauge the level of interest in and feasibility of developing a national career tracking system for LIS graduates.
- 3. To develop a career tracking model for use by LIS program planners and other stakeholders.** Based on data from Goals 1 and 2, the team will create a model that includes: 1) a theoretical approach to the study of workforce issues based on the life course perspective which takes into account a wide range of factors that affect career patterns; 2) a methodology for conducting a study that can be applied elsewhere; 3) a career tracking survey instrument; and 4) recommendations on the feasibility of a national career tracking system. The model will be available on the project website and could be used by individual or groups of programs at the regional, state or national levels, depending on the level of interest and feasibility established in Goal 2.
- 4. To disseminate study findings in an effort to facilitate workforce planning by stakeholder groups.** A web site will serve as the major communications vehicle for the study. Findings will be reported on an ongoing basis on the web, at conferences and in publications. At the end of the study, the team will conduct a webcast of the findings that will be widely advertised through LIS listservs. Specialized research and practice-oriented publications will be produced by team members. The LIS researchers will produce publications tailored to the needs of specific types of libraries and information services. Particular emphasis will be placed on dissemination of findings that address minorities and minority workforce issues.