

Poster

Bridging the Gap: Library Science Education and the New Engineering Librarian

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The terminology of engineering is enough to frighten the novice librarian without a science background away from academic engineering librarianship. A successful transition from graduate student to practicing engineering librarian requires a complex set of skills and knowledge.

Research Questions

Why do not library science graduates get into the science/technology (sci/tech) librarianship?
How can we give them the information and inspiration they need to sail toward this horizon of our profession?

Research Methodology

The catalogs of all ALA-accredited library schools were surveyed to identify which schools listed science and technology courses and what is the frequency of course offerings. In addition, dual degree programs were identified at the same institutions to determine to what extent library graduate students were exposed to the opportunity to explore a path to sci/tech librarianship. Furthermore, efforts to recruit bright people into the engineering library profession can be fruitful when they unveil the requirements for entering the profession. Substantial support and assistance of experienced librarians is critical and the establishment of support groups for various professional development needs can provide a vehicle for discussing common concerns. From January 2005 to December 2009, the author surveyed graduate assistants working at the Engineering and Physical Sciences Library (EPSL), University of Maryland, to determine the role of mentoring plays in retention to the field.

Analysis and Discussion

The findings revealed that 1 in 3 of the ALA-accredited LIS programs could a full-time student expect to have even the opportunity to take a sci/tech course from the point they entered the program until they graduated. The ration will drop lower if these courses are cancelled due to lack of minimum enrollment. This means that a very large percentage of LIS students never have the opportunity to take a sci/tech course during their studies in a given LIS program, even they had the interest. Furthermore, only 11% of all ALA-accredited LIS programs offer dual degree programs in the sciences. This further limits the number of library students who have the opportunity to explore sci/tech specialization.

In order to make the science-library connection, practical strategies for recruitment and retention of engineering librarians will be offered from the trenches of the Engineering and Physical

Sciences Library. The author will discuss practical strategies to encourage library students to pursue careers and leadership positions in science/engineering libraries. In addition, this poster will highlight issues new librarians encounter in the workplace and will provide advice on how to overcome them.