

Recommendation to the CLA Executive

From the LTA Network, October 2012

Preamble

In December 2011 *Accreditation of Library and Information Technology Programs: A Proposal* was released and circulated in the library community for discussion and feedback. The document was sent to library and library technician/assistant associations, listservs, Library and Information Technology program coordinators/chairs and discussion groups. It was also brought forward and discussed at the BC Library Conference, the CUPE BC Library Conference and the Canadian Library Association Conference in the spring of 2012. Feedback from the library community has been examined in order to determine if accreditation is a desirable and feasible outcome of this proposal.

An analysis of the feedback received, thus far. In essence, respondents, including the LIT program coordinators and chairs, were very supportive of the research findings and the proposal. While there were a number of questions relating to how such a program would be deployed, there was powerful support for a program that would provide continuity and quality assurance for Library and Information Technology programs in Canada. The following is a recommendation to the Canadian Library Association to provide support for this project.

Recommendation

The Canadian Library Association support:

1. the concept of Library Information Technology program accreditation in principle.
2. the creation of a LIT Accreditation Design Team as part of the next phase of exploring the feasibility of an accreditation process for such programs.

The benefits of providing this support include:

1. Bringing prestige and national recognition to CLA.
2. Providing a means for CLA to demonstrate its national scope.
3. Receiving recognition internationally as a leader in areas related to library education.
4. Demonstrating to library employers an active interest in addressing human resource issues related to library support staff.

A substantial amount of research and discussion has already been completed for this project. Very little work is required of the Canadian Library Association's Executive Council. Christina Neigel of the University of the Fraser Valley will provide continued stimulus for this project as part of her own research. Volunteers from the library community will contribute to the next phase of this project. Through its various communication networks, CLA can provide a platform and be a central authority for ongoing discussions and program development. At CLA's identification and discretion, other resources could be made available.

REPORT: 2011/12 Accreditation Feedback and The Next Step

*By Christina Neigel, University of the Fraser Valley
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Introduction

An examination of Library and Information Technology program development in Canada reveals that the scope of discussion about its role in relation to library human resource management has been, at best, sporadic. The lack of centralized discussion and leadership in the area of library education sets unfortunate limits on the amount of planning and problem solving that can occur in this time of disruptive change. Such change includes the growing emphasis of e-books and other digital resources, economic pressures associated with maintaining physical collections and buildings, evolving roles of library support staff and the shift from traditional roles in circulation and technical services to other areas, and more.

The *Accreditation Proposal for Library and Information Technology Programs in Canada*¹ was created in response to change as a means of stimulating a broader discussion about library support staff and the role of the library technician. Regardless of the final outcome, such a proposal prompts those interested in the future of library services in Canada to engage in a wider discussion about the relationships between library education, training, and employer expectations. For the last 10 months, the document has been widely circulated to solicit feedback on the viability of and interest in creating a quality assurance program for library technician programs in Canada.

The following groups were directly targeted for feedback on the proposal:

1. Library Information Technology program chairs and coordinators
2. All provincial and territorial library associations
3. All library technician and assistant associations in Canada
4. Canadian Library Association

All groups contacted were encouraged to share the document with their colleagues as a means of widening the discussion regarding library support staff education. Seven associations have produced letters supporting the endeavor:

1. BC Library Association
2. Library and Technicians' and Assistants' Interest Group (now the Library Technicians' and Assistants' Section of BCLA)
3. Library Association of Alberta
4. Alberta Association of Library Technicians
5. Manitoba Association of Library Technicians
6. Northwest Territories Library Association
7. Ontario Association of Library Technicians

¹ Neigel, C. (December 2011). Accreditation Proposal for Library and Information Technology Programs: A Proposal. <http://www.ufv.ca/Libtech/Resources>

The Library and Information Technology program chairs have been informed of this project from its inception. A meeting of Library and Information Technology program coordinators and chairs, held at the Canadian Library Association in May 2012, involved a dynamic discussion of the project.

The project has also been discussed in sessions held at three conferences in the spring of 2012; the Canadian Library Association, the BC Library Association and the CUPE Western Canada Library Conferences.

The Feedback

The general feedback regarding this endeavor has been overwhelmingly supportive. This strongly indicates that while there may be practical challenges, the basic premise that LIT programs should have the opportunity for quality control is well supported by library technicians and their colleagues, including library technician educators. Nonetheless, several points have been raised about the issue of accreditation for LIT programs that deserve discussion and exploration if such a program is to be developed. Indeed, it is important to consider whether the concerns expressed provide substantial reasons to dismiss an accreditation process or whether it is possible to find workable solutions.

1. Quality Assurance

The overwhelming support for accreditation, as noted in the various letters of support, program chair and coordinator dialogue, and more informal discussions, is based on such a program offering a level of quality assurance that does not currently exist in Canada.

Generally, accreditation is identified as enhancing the quality of education for Library and Information Technology programs and assisting in clarifying the roles and responsibilities of their graduates. The BC Library Association's letter of support states,

“...Periodic review of participating programs would ensure adherence to agreed-upon standards and ongoing accountability to the needs of students, prospective employers and of the greater library community.”²

The Nova Scotia Community College Faculty Working Group goes reinforces this perspective by stating that accreditation:

- Ensures that there is consistency across academic institutions within Canada;
- Ensures high quality programs are identifiable due to the implementation of core standards followed by assessment via unbiased accreditation board;
- Ensures that stakeholders and the broader library community are consulted about the program on regular intervals.

² J. Stockdale, President, 2012-2013 BC Library Association (Personal communication, July 17, 2012).

- May ensure that LIT programs offered via Canada's public academic institutions are differentiated from those offered via private academic institutions, depending upon the structure and accessibility of the accreditation body.³

There is a great deal of support for the concept of an accreditation process to serve, primarily, as a quality assurance program for LIT education.

It is not unreasonable to consider other options for ensuring program quality that may be less intensive or costly. However, an examination of how other fields manage quality in their education programs, including the Master's of Library and Information Studies, suggests that accreditation is a well-regarded method, if well designed.

In the early years of Canadian LIT programs, the Canadian Library Association sponsored a somewhat detailed annual LIT survey with results published in *Feliciter*. While the survey was not mandatory, it was believed that the comparative results would provide a form of peer pressure to conform to *CLA Guidelines*. According to Jean Weihs, a key organizer and designer of this survey program, this was the only significant way in which some form of discussion about programs could be maintained. The survey included questions about admissions requirements, extension studies, institutional resources, courses, advisory committees, and number of graduates. It was not, however, an evaluative process and there were no consequences if programs did not adhere to the *CLA Guidelines*. Although a reinstatement of such a process may be less costly and less involved, it is likely that it would not satisfy the many pressures current programs face. This includes demands made by programs for the expansion or maintenance of resources from their home institutions, parity with other professions and accredited MLIS programs, in-depth analysis of program efficacy and its relationship with the field in Canada and other benefits outlined in the accreditation proposal.

While accreditation may not be the only way to build a quality assurance program, it is, certainly, one of the most common. The support demonstrated for such a program, suggests that it may be an appropriate means of enhancing library technician education.

2. Impact on Pre-Accreditation Technician Graduates

Several technicians who responded to the request for feedback voiced their concerns over the impact a new accreditation program would have on their credibility, having graduated from a program that would pre-date the process. It is understandable that there would be concern for older graduates. It should be made very clear to members of the industry that accreditation does NOT accredit individuals.

³ NSCC LIT Faculty Working Group. (July 23, 2012). *NSCC LIT Program Input Re: Accreditation of LT Programs*. Unpublished manuscript.

Such a program takes time to implement and it should be emphasized to employers that there will be a gradual shift in how programs are recognized. While the structure of the Australian Library and Information Association's accreditation process differs from the Canadian proposal, it offers insight into ways that disparities can be met. ALIA has a process called *Widened Eligibility and Overseas Assessment* which allows people who have not done an ALIA accredited courses to be assessed against ALIA's core skills and knowledge. Since accreditation is required for ALIA membership, this enables ALIA to assess people within Australia and overseas for their membership eligibility.

An assessment program could be designed for Canadian technicians, should the issue of graduating from an accredited school become an employment issue. While careful and consistent consultation with the industry can gently bridge gaps as accreditation is adopted, accreditation program designers should factor in a framework that could address this as a future issue.

3. Cost

A discussion of accreditation held among the 13 attendees of the May 2012 LIT Program Chairs/Coordinator's Meeting, raised the matter of cost for such a process. While the costs remain unclear, the group was comfortable with the fact that if the process has value and offers LIT programs the benefits outlined in the proposal, cost is unavoidable but acceptable.

Accredited programs in other professions differ greatly in their accreditation processes and so, too, do their costs. A cursory probe of such costs reveals that it is not unreasonable to pay \$5000 every five years. LIT chairs and coordinators concurred that there would be time to prepare their institutions to budget for such costs. It would be the responsibility of the design team to carefully balance the need to minimize costs while creating a credible program of quality assurance. Because such a process would not happen "over night", there is ample opportunity for gradual implementation. In addition, the creation of a pilot project would enable designers to properly cost out the process.

4. International and Interprovincial Recognition & Benchmarking

Program educators identified three interesting facets of accreditation and international issues:

- a. *Foreign trained library workers and a means of accurately assessing their qualifications for the Canadian context.*

It is not uncommon for LIT programs to have applications from foreign students who may have had a library related education from another country. Currently, it is very difficult to assess where their previous education "fits" into Canada's library infrastructure. Aside from individual programs evaluating candidates based on their program's internal interests, there is no adequate mechanism to

acknowledge international forms of education, including those from other Commonwealth countries. Clearly articulated program standards may provide a mechanism in which applicants can have their previous knowledge and skills assessed. In turn, this may offer foreign educated individuals a way to receive recognition in Canada.

b. Benchmark for library technician graduates seeking international appointments.

With careful consultation with other countries, there is potential to design an accreditation program that can be recognized internationally, enabling a greater opportunity for graduates to engage in international work. This may also provide other internationally educated technicians an opportunity to find employment in Canada.

c. Online Education

The emergence of many online programs in Canada has created a growing number of students who will not conduct their studies within the province that they reside. Employers would greatly benefit from knowing that out-of-province programs meet the same quality standards as their domestic programs with which they are more familiar.

5. Program Oversight

Informal feedback from the Canadian Library Association President, Karen Adams⁴, was limited to clarifying that CLA has no formal role with the accreditation of Master's program, leaving that responsibility to the American Library Association. Because the American Library Association is so profoundly disconnected from Library and Information Technology programs in Canada, it is not an organization that has an interest or a reason to become involved. From a historical perspective, the Canadian Library Association was heavily involved in LIT development during the early years (1960s-1980s). Many of those who have provided feedback on the current proposal indicated that CLA's historical involvement and current mandate as an association is sufficient reason for the association to participate. Being a national representative entity, it has the ability to pull together contributions from across the country in its existing communications network. It would also provide the association with an opportunity to demonstrate its interest in and support for library support staff. One library technician association president voiced concern that CLA has not voiced its commitment to supporting the library technician community. This accreditation project would present enormous benefits to the association in demonstrating such a commitment.

⁴ K. Adams. (Personal communication, Oct. 20, 2011).

Program chairs and coordinators that were present at the May 2012 meeting at the CLA Conference in Ottawa concurred that CLA was the logical choice as a sponsoring agency. Further examination of CLA's values, past involvement in library technician education (primarily the historical survey and the publication of the *Guidelines for the Education of Library Technicians*⁵), and revised mission statement reinforces this conclusion.

To elaborate on this supposition, it is useful to examine the **CLA Mission** which reads:

CLA/ACB is my advocate and public voice, educator and network. We build the Canadian library and information community and advance its information professionals.

This statement highlights the role of education for its membership. Having attended the CLA conference session discussing the mission, it is clear that the changing landscape of the profession is placing tremendous pressure on what library personnel must know and do in their field. While not all "education" is formal, it is reasonable to assert that in the interests of advancing the profession, there is a need for participation in the conversations that occur between educators and professionals. In fact, CLA has already demonstrated a role in this process when it participated in the formation of the CLA President's Council on the 8R's research. Endorsing this accreditation project would be an excellent mechanism for the association to heighten its national status.

In addition to its mission, two of **CLA's Values** speak directly to the accreditation proposal.

- *Diversity is a major strength of our Association.*
- *An informed and knowledgeable membership is central in achieving library and information policy goals.*

The accreditation initiative is one that addresses key educational concerns for library support staff, primarily library technicians. This has national, if not international, implications. The Australian Library and Information Association is one of the only other associations to recognize program standards for library technicians. This proposal offers Canadian library workers and the Canadian Library Association a unique and important opportunity to lead in the area of library support staff education. Provincial associations serve more regional interests and the other remaining associations serve special interest groups and specialties in the field. There is no other single association in Canada that is as well positioned to provide umbrella support for an LIT accreditation process as the Canadian Library Association.

⁵ *CLA Guidelines for the Education of Library Technicians*. (2011). Canadian Library Association. Retrieved from: http://www.cla.ca/Content/NavigationMenu/CLAAatWork/InterestGroups/LibraryTechnicians/CLA_LTIG_guidelines.pdf

The Next Step

Based on the combination of feedback and research done in the original proposal, the following are recommended actions for continuing the accreditation endeavor. There is interest and momentum to enter the next phase by establishing a team to adopt and shape a framework for the establishment of an accreditation body and standards.

Formation of a Design Team

As outlined in the original proposal, much of how the accreditation process evolves will depend on conclusions made by the team designing its next phases.

The document *Accreditation for Library and Information Technology Programs in Canada: A Proposal* outlines a number of steps required in establishing an accreditation process. These steps will, initially, be carried out by a design task force that can identify priorities and phases for the development of such a program.

While membership on the design team will be dependent on volunteers, it should be comprised of a representative cross-section of the library community. Program coordinators and chairs must have an opportunity to review the plans and provide input.

Establishing Design Task Force

While there may be many details needed in order to create a functioning team of volunteers that will design the framework for an accreditation process, there are some essential steps that need to be followed.

1. In the interests of maintaining an efficient and effective team, it should not consist of more than 9 individuals and no less than 5.
2. The team will require a chair and appointed secretary.
3. A call for participants will be made through CLA communication networks including the program coordinators and chairs group, LTAN, and CLA Digest. A wider call can be made, based on recommendations from CLA and LIT programs.
4. All expressions of interest will be considered by the proposal creator, Christina Neigel, in consultation with the LIT program coordinators and chairs.
5. Applicants will provide a resume or curriculum vitae that outline their areas of experience, knowledge, skills, and interests.
6. Applicants will be considered based on the scope of their backgrounds, the perspectives they offer and level of commitment to the project.

7. All efforts will be made to create a geographically diverse group of representatives to ensure that regionally related issues can be examined and explored.
8. A request will be made for one of the team to be a representative from the Canadian Library Association Executive.
9. While the duration of the design phase is dependent on many factors that are yet to be defined, designers would be asked to participate for the duration of the design phase.
10. The chair will be responsible for managing the creation of a Terms of Reference for the team that includes membership constitution, length of appointment, purpose of the team, etc.

Design Team Objectives

Although many of the design team objectives will be determined after their initial meetings, the following are some basic tasks that this team will have to undergo for a successful outcome:

1. Establishing major objectives for an Accreditation/Approval Agency. Determination of what the scope, authority and control that such a body would possess.
2. Partners that will support the accreditation process. It is likely that the Canadian Library Association will have an important role but there may be other partnerships that should also be forged. For example, building relations with the Australian Library and Information Association may present certain benefits if accreditation is to have some international benefits. Additionally, provincial library associations may be able to offer support as partners, knowing that most provinces have at least one LIT program.
3. Review the *CLA Guidelines for the Education of Library Technicians* to create an outcomes assessment. It will aid in the identification of factors that are considered important to the evaluation process and how this process can be clearly mapped. Doing so will ensure that the process and standards are clear to programs when they prepare for the review process.
4. Prepare outgoing proficiencies for library technician graduates. Although standards would be defined by the Accreditation body, the groundwork done by the design team can set a clear groundwork.
5. With the development of accreditation partners, recommend an accreditation council format that can be presented to the library community and approval.