Education and Training of LIS Para-professionals: The Faculty of Information Management, UiTM's Experience.

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Abstract

The Faculty of Information Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), formerly known as School of Library Science, introduced the Diploma of Information Management programme (IS 110) in June 1999. The programme is offered to Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) holders. This paper discusses the factors, which contributed to the development of the programme. Also included are the objectives of the establishment of the programme and the mission of the faculty. The programme is meant to train para-professionals in information management, information services provision, records and document management, electronic publishing, multimedia, Internet application as well as library and archival works. The paper also emphasizes on the four main competencies the graduates will acquire in these three-year courses such as basic information communication technology, basic information processing, reference and information handling, as well as interpersonal and communication skills. The faculty core courses and university required courses are structured in a six-semester programme offered via the Diploma of Information Management. Opportunities for the graduates to be employed as Medical Records Assistant, Assistant Library Officer and other related jobs are also discussed. These graduates are also the main feeder to the four degrees programme offered by the Faculty. Details of the enrolment of the Diploma students in UiTM's main and branch campuses such as Kedah, Kelantan, Johor and Sarawak are highlighted.

Keywords: LIS para-professionals; Information management; Information professionals; Faculty of Information Management; LIS curriculum

1. Introduction

The library and information science (LIS) profession is service-oriented and requires continually updated knowledge and skills for effective performance. The efficiency of any library or information centre in meeting the information needs of its clientele, to a large extent, depends on the calibre of its staff. The term "paraprofessional" as used in this paper, refers to LIS practitioners who possess the Diploma In Information Management from local universities.

2. Faculty of Information Management: Experiences

Due to several pioneering initiatives since its inception in 1968 (Table 1), the Faculty of Information Management (FIM), Universiti Teknologi MARA is known as the pioneer in Malaysia in the provision of education and research spanning the fields of information, library, and records management.

In 1968, the Faculty was established as the School of Library Science with the aim of preparing students for the external professional examination of the Library Association (United Kingdom). In July 1972, a three-year Diploma programme was introduced to replace the British ALA Examination. The new curriculum was designed to fulfil the local requirements and needs of the professionals in the country. In 1974, the School introduced the postgraduate programme in library science. It offers an opportunity for graduates from local and overseas universities to enrol in the programme, thereby helping them with their professional career in libraries and information science.

In 1997, the name of the School was changed to the Faculty of Information Studies. At the same time, the Master of Science in Information Management (M.Sc.Info.Mgmt.) programme was also introduced on a part-time basis. The faculty began with a single degree programme in library science as well as a one year Postgraduate Diploma in Library Science. By 1992, with the advanced development of IT and the increased demand for new and merging information professionals in the market, there was a need to specialise in a variety of areas in information.

By this time, a new curriculum was approved to offer four separate specialisations, beginning with the area of library science, information science and records management. By 1996, these specialisations were further evaluated and redesigned to enable the creation of four separate programmes in information namely:
   a. B.Sc. Info. Studies (Hons.) Library & Info. Mgmt.
   b. B.Sc. Info. Studies (Hons.) Info. Systems Mgmt.
   c. B.Sc. Info. Studies (Hons.) Records Mgmt.
   d. B.Sc. Info. Studies (Hons.) Info. Resource Centre Mgmt.

The Faculty is responsible for training the information professionals at the highest level locally. December 1999 was another historic moment for the Faculty when it had its first batch of Doctoral students in Information Management.

Besides being actively involved in the academic programmes, the Faculty is also active in the areas of research and consultancy as well as continuing education. The Faculty has successfully developed the only local software in library automation as well as other projects commissioned by various public and private agencies. Such programmes and activities are possible since the Faculty of Information Studies is the first and longest existing faculty specialising in information studies in Malaysia

The Faculty of Information Studies has several goals:
   a. To supply the manpower needs of professionally qualified information personnel for the development of the nation and in support of the Vision 2020;
   b. To train the Bumiputera to become information professionals who are versatile, competitive, creative and proactive;
   c. To provide academic and professional programmes of high quality, innovative and up-to-date;
   d. To provide quality teaching with the support of continuous practical, research, publishing, and consultation work;
   e. To increase the quality, effectiveness and the variety of training programmes according to the needs of the market and the new technology;
   f. To produce graduates who would act as agents towards the promotion of a reading and informed community.

Table 1: Experiences in Provision of LIS Education

Date	First in Malaysia
1968	Institute Teknologi MARA (ITM) established the Department of Library Science in the School of Public Administration and Law to conduct a full-time programme in Librarianship preparing students for the professional qualification "Associate of the Library Associates" (A.L.A-UK.).
971	Establishment of the School of Library Science, Institut Teknologi MARA.
1972	Implemented two full-time academic programme in librarianship based on ITM's internally-designed curriculum: a) Diploma in Library Science b) Post-Graduate Diploma in Library Science

1974	First national seminar on "Library Buildings", 22-23 August. Well-attended by professional architects and librarians from Malaysia and Singapore.
1975	The three-year diploma was recognised by the Public Service Department of Malaysia as equivalent to a University General Degree.
1979	Added "information science" components to the revised curriculum. Changed the School's name from "School of Library Science" to "School of Library and Information Science".
1980	Jointly organized the first international seminar "Information for Productivity and Development" with the Regional Institute of Higher Education and Development, Singapore.
1981	The Public Service Department of Malaysia recognized the Postgraduate Diploma in Library Science as a professional qualification in Librarianship.
1986	First national manpower survey of libraries, information services and archives in Malaysia jointly conducted by the School and UNESCO.
1987	Launched "SISPUKOM- Sistem Perpustakaan Berkomputer", the first made-in Malaysia library automation software produced by the School in collaboration with a private company.
1990	First IRPA project entitled, "Reading Habits and Reading Interests among students in Higher Learning Institutions in Malaysia", a nation-wide study among university students.
1991	Converted the three-year diploma into a four-year Advanced Diploma in Library Science so as to upgrade the qualification to be on par with a university honours degree.
1992	Introduced "Archives and Records Management" into the syllabus of the academic programme, making it the first programme of this nature in Southeast Asia.
1993	First among institutions of higher learning to receive the national award from the Prime Minister's Department for a "Successful Joint Research Innovation between the Public and Private Sector", a tribute to SISPUKOM.
1994	The Public Service Department of Malaysia recognized the Advanced Diploma in Library Science as equivalent to a university Bachelor's Honours Degree.
1994	Launched ILMU (Integrated Library Management Utility), the first made-in Malaysia client-server architecture "Open Database Connectivity" compliant version of library automation software, a collaborative product between the School of Library Information Science, ITM and a private company.
1997	Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Information Studies with four specializations: a) Library and Information Management b) Information System Management c) Records Management d) Resource Centre Management
1997	Master of Science in Information Management
1999	PhD in Information Management
1999	Diploma in Information Management
2000	Master of Science in Information Management by Flexible Learning Mode
2000	Diploma in Information Management at UiTM Machang campus, Kelantan.
2002	The Diploma in Information Management recognised by The Public Service Department of Malaysia.
2003	Master of Knowledge Management
2004	Established the first National Bibliometrics Database: Science and Technology Knowledge Productivity in Malaysia, 1955-2002, for Malaysian Science and Technology Information Centre, Ministry of Science and Innovation, Malaysia.
2006	Master of Library Science

3. Diploma in Information Management

The programme aims to fulfil the needs for information and knowledge workers who play a vital role in the information industries. The graduates are trained to gain specific knowledge on information literacy, information handling, information communication and technology as well as other information-related tasks in order to succeed in attaining Vision 2020. The Malaysian government realizes the importance of information and knowledge as the key for the information society to improve the quality of life, economy and working environment and more importantly to assist in making informed and better decisions. Without information and knowledge as a resource, all their affairs would be vulnerable to disruption. Hence, our country has been transformed from the industrial age to the information age. The proof is in the progress of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) which supports the information industries, whereby Cyberjaya has been chosen as the place for the smart city which will support the industries. Therefore, in line with country's move into a knowledge based economy, it is therefore our main aim to equip our graduates with skills and competencies on knowledge and information management, so that they can become active members, contributors and supporters of the nation's aspirations.

(a) Course Structure

The diploma course is offered to SPM holders with minimum of five credits inclusive Bahasa Melayu, English and Mathematics. The students have to undertake a three-year course which has been structured into six semesters (Table 2).

Table 2: Course Structure

SEMESTER 1		
CODE	COURSE	Credit hours
IMD 101	Information Skills	3
IMD 102	Foundation of Information Studies	3
IMD 103	IT in Information Management	3
IMD 104	Principles of Management	3
UiTM requirements		
KO	Co-Curriculum	1
BEL 100	English 1	3
CTU 101	Prinsip-prinsip Asas Islam	2
	Total	18

SEMESTER 2		
CODE	COURSE	Credit hours
IMD 151	Human Communication in Information Agencies	3
IMD 152	Management of Internet Resources	3
IMD 153	Introduction to Multimedia	3
IMD 154	Instructional Media Applications	3
UiTM requirements		
KO	Co-Curriculum	1
BEL 200	English II	3
CTU 151	Pemikiran & Tamadun Islam	2
	Total	18

SEMESTER 3		
CODE	**COURSE**	**Credit hours**
IMD 201	Access to Information	3
IMD 202	Promotion of Information Products and Services	3
IMD 203	Support Service and Maintenance 1	3
IMD 255	Technical support and Services in Information Agencies	3
UiTM requirements		
BEL 250	English III	3
CTU 264	Pengurusan Maklumat Islam	2
	Total	**17**

SEMESTER 4		
CODE	**COURSE**	**Credit hours**
IMD 251	Support Service and Maintenance II	3
IMD 252	Digital Resource Center	3
IMD 253	Organization of Information	3
IMD 254	Foundation of Records Management	3
IMD204	IT in Information Agencies	3
	Total	**15**

SEMESTER 5		
CODE	**COURSE**	**Credit hours**
IMD 301	Introduction to Cataloguing	3
IMD 302	Foundation of Archives Administration	3
IMD 303	Concepts of Programming	3
IMD 304	Electronic Publishing	3
IMD 305	Preservation of Information Materials	3
	Total	**15**

SEMESTER 6		
CODE	**COURSE**	**Credit hours**
IMD 351	Contemporary Issues in Information Studies	3
IMD 352	Management of Information Agencies	3
IMD 353	Reference & Information Services in Information Agencies	3
IMD 354	Management of Records Center	3
ETR 300	Entrepreneurship	3
	Total	**15**

The Diploma in Information Management students are trained in interdisciplinary skills and would be able to perform well in many information management and provisional functions. Some of the basic competencies that the students may acquire throughout the study are listed below.

(i) ICT (Information Communication Technology)
  a. Demonstrate a basic understanding of the role of technology in the creation, retrieval and delivery of library resources, functions and services
  b. Demonstrate basic skills in the use of computer and audio- visual equipment
  c. Demonstrate the ability to retrieve information from electronic and multimedia formats
  d. Demonstrate an understanding of the library's role and responsibility for introducing applications of technology to the public.

e. Multimedia production.
f. PC assembly, troubleshoot & maintenance

(i) Information Processing

   a. Acquisition
- Demonstrate knowledge of the publishing industry and vendor markets from which libraries acquire material
- Establish and apply effective procedures for verifying, ordering, receiving orders, resolving problems, and fund accounting

   b. Cataloging
- Understand the importance of identifying and locating materials in a library with awareness of end-user demands
- Maintain accurate online catalogs
- Adhere to current regional and national cataloging standards and schemes
- Select appropriate subject headings and call numbers
- Demonstrate knowledge of descriptive content, subject analysis, and relationships of information objects with awareness of end-user demands

   c. Preservation
- Apply appropriate methods and techniques for physical preservation, including repair and binding
- Anticipate the need for protection of library materials
- Apply appropriate methods and techniques for protection of library materials
- Apply appropriate methods and techniques for identification and security of library materials

   d. Information product design
- Web page design
- Electronic publishing
- Repackaging of information.

(iii) Interpersonal & Communication skills

   a. Provide accurate information in a clear and concise manner
   b. Excellent written and verbal communication skills
   c. Ability to interact with all levels of constituents
   d. Ability to represent the library appropriately in outside forums
   e. Develop and maintain appropriate public contacts

(iv) Reference & Information handling

   a. Knowledge of quick reference tools
   b. Knowledge of Internet information sources.
   c. Deals with patron concerns efficiently and effectively
   d. Filling information needs through access to the general collection or through referrals
   e. Use appropriate media to communicate information
   f. Demonstrate knowledge of library collections and resources

(b) Student Enrolment

The total number of the students who are enrolled for the three years enrolments is 7,686 only (Table 3).

Table 3: Enrolment

Year	Session	Branches	Total
2004/2005	I	UiTM Kelantan	411
		UiTM Sarawak	65
		UiTM Johor	438
		UiTM Malaysia	122
		UiTM Kedah	378
		Total	**1,414**
	II	UiTM Kelantan	377
		UiTM Sarawak	95
		UiTM Johor	377
		UiTM Malaysia	24
		UiTM Kedah	326
		Total	**1,199**
2005/2006	I	UiTM Kelantan	344
		UiTM Sarawak	125
		UiTM Johor	325
		UiTM Malaysia	24
		UiTM Kedah	307
		Total	**1,125**
	II	UiTM Kelantan	338
		UiTM Sarawak	167
		UiTM Johor	329
		UiTM Malaysia	23
		UiTM Kedah	340
		Total	**1,197**
2006/2007	I	UiTM Kelantan	366
		UiTM Sarawak	226
		UiTM Johor	358
		UiTM Malaysia	24
		UiTM Kedah	355
		Total	**1,329**
	II	UiTM Kelantan	394
		UiTM Sarawak	254
		UiTM Johor	386
		UiTM Malaysia	31
		UiTM Kedah	357
		Total	**1,422**

(c) Professional Profession

The graduates are categorized in the social or S27 category under the Public Service Scheme of Malaysia. Presently, there are 131 graduates employed as Assistant Library Officers in various information agencies under the Public Service Department. A total; of 28 officers have been promoted to the post of Senior Library Officers. The graduates are

also hired as Assistant Sports Officer and Assistant Medical Records. Some graduates are given the post of assistant librarians in the private sector libraries and information centres.

(d) Feeders of Faculty's Degree Programmes

The Diploma holders are the main feeder to the degree programmes offered by the Faculty of Information Management. Those who have achieved a CGPA of above 2.5 are able to continue their studies at the degree level. The graduates may choose any of these programmes:

i. Library and Information Management

This programme focuses on work related to library management and information organization in libraries and information centres. The programme provides and trains people with skills and competencies in management, ICT, information literacy, information storage and processing and retrieval (manuals and computerized techniques), through a variety of teaching modes and assessment throughout the duration of the programme.

ii. Information Systems Management

The Information Systems Management programme prepares professionals who are capable of managing the various aspects of information systems and applying it to the business organization, and extending its strength in the information content management which is often neglected by many other programmes offered locally. It is hoped that with the amalgamation of three important elements, that is, the systems, management, and information content, professionals produced from this programme would be able to contribute more to the organizations that they are placed in.

iii. Records Management

This programme covers the many facets of managing records and archives in organizations. Students are exposed with principles and techniques of managing active and inactive records and archival materials. Students are also prepared for preservation of archival materials and archival management of electronic records. This programme also emphasizes on the usage and application of information technology in building records system. The programme also focuses on the management of the different categories of records such as management of legal, medical, engineering, business, manuscript, Islamic information and architectural records. It offers the opportunity to study in-depth specific topics relating to records and archival management through the subject of independent study.

iv. Resource Centre Management

Resource Centre Management Programme is a programme which consists of three important fields, namely, ICT (information and communication technology), management, and education. These three fields are offered as major and minor subjects in order to equip the students with knowledge and skills as well as to prepare them towards highly skilled workers in any information agencies and resource centres, private or public sector.

4. Academic Staff

A 100% of the LIS teaching faculty in FIM are employed as full time lecturers. Teaching is a full time commitment for them and most of them teach only 8 to 22 hours per week. About 60% of the lecturers possess a Bachelor's or Master's level and 40% of the teachers have academic qualifications in LIS. A total of 71% have professional qualifications in LIS. Mobility information of LIS teachers within the next five years indicates that 10%

will retire from teaching while 60% of the current teachers are hoping to engage in higher studies.

5. Issues Faced by FIM in Educating and Training of LIS Para-professionals

a) Current programmes - IFLA (1978) identified the major issue in educating LIS as "insufficient library resources to support fully all the courses taught at FIM, other courses taken by school students and research efforts of the teaching staff". The expected English knowledge of students is t insufficient to comprehend most of the LIS materials which are published in English. Therefore, the students have to depend largely on the lecture notes prepared by teachers who have other commitments in addition to teaching. Above all, the part time students are not provided with any library facilities by the teaching institutions.

b) Entry Requirements and Duration - "Selection criteria should have as a principal objective the identification of persons who can contribute to the advancement of the library profession and to the solution of its problems. Persons chosen for the programme should have a strong academic record, a high level of intelligence, problem solving ability, a commitment to the library profession and a desire and capability of working with people of diverse backgrounds" (IFLA, 1978).

Professional LIS education programmes in UiTM seem to have a problem in recruiting suitable candidates. For the Diploma in Information Management, the minimum entry requirement is SPM with a credit in English and Mathematics. For entry into a Degree programme, a student must achieve a minimum CPGA of at least 2.5 in the Diploma in Information Management.

Librarianship as a profession is not a well recognised profession in the country. Therefore, there is no competition for admission from the students. This has led to the admission of students who are unsuccessful in their attempts to gain admission to universities or other training programmes such as accountancy, banking, and computer technology. This contradicts with the IFLA's selection criteria.

Another point that is noted here is the shifting academic standards of the students who have been admitted to the graduate programmes. Fresh graduates from universities who do not possess any work experience as well as senior librarians who have the necessary degree qualification including 10 to 15 years of work experience are in the same class. These two categories have different levels of knowledge about library procedures and different levels of academic capabilities. This creates a problem for the lecturer in balancing the standards in the classroom.

c) Curriculum - All LIS programmes in FIM concentrates on training personnel to manage a library by providing in-depth knowledge of traditional library practices. Cataloguing and classification takes prominence in the curriculum, and trainees are provided with an introductory or basic knowledge of traditional library procedures and concepts. None of the course provides an opportunity for a librarian to specialise in any particular field. This is a serious drawback in the curriculum since we need personnel to introduce current developments in the information domain to Malaysian libraries. Another drawback in the LIS education system is the lack of retraining or continuing education programmes. The few available programmes concentrate only on library automation especially on the use of CDS/ISIS in libraries and information systems.

d) Teaching faculty - The nature of the teaching faculty itself creates several unhealthy conditions. The academics are not provided with any sort of training in teaching methods by the employing organisations. Therefore, teaching methods and expertise depends

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solely on the individual's natural instincts. Curriculum development is not taken seriously because teaching personnel cannot devote time for this.

6. Conclusion

The Faculty is continually reviewing the curriculum to ensure that they are relevant to the new trends in information storage, retrieval and dissemination. Library management and administration have been integrated into the managerial work skills and soft skills so that our graduates are able to meet the present challenges of the organisation and management of libraries and information centres.

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