A tracer study of LIS graduates at the University of Zululand, 2000 -2009[1]

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Abstract

The study traced Library and Information Science (LIS) graduates who graduated from the Department of Library and Information Science (now Information Studies) at the University of Zululand between 2000 and 2009. A survey method was used to access the large and scattered LIS graduate population. A questionnaire consisting of both structured and unstructured questions was used as the main research instrument. A total of 50 graduates participated in the study. The results indicate that most LIS graduates are employed in the public sector, mainly in national, provincial and municipal libraries. Graduates were happy with the skills and knowledge they obtained from the LIS curriculum, but unhappy with the curriculum itself, often for contradictory reasons. The results also revealed that cataloguing and classification and experiential learning remain critical or very important in LIS-related jobs.

Keywords: LIS, tracer study, University of Zululand, University of Zululand alumni,

1. Introduction

A tracer study is a graduate or alumni survey that attempts to trace the activities of the graduates or previous students of an educational institution (Millington, n.d.). The Association of African Universities or AAU (2002), and Boaduo, Mensah and Babitseng (2009), explain that tracer studies enable the contextualization of graduates of a particular university through a system that is dynamic and reliable in order to determine their life path or movement. It also enables the evaluation of the results of the education and training provided by a particular institution and examines and evaluates the current and future career and employment opportunities/ prospects of graduates (Boaduo, Mensah and Babitseng, 2009). Graduates' job titles, years of employment, nature of employment, income levels, and biographical data can be revealed through tracer studies (Schomburg, as cited in Millington, n.d.).

The Department of Information Studies at the University of Zululand has graduated over 249 students (see Appendix A) since the year 2000 (see the DIS Annual report, 2009) in different programmes or qualifications, but does not keep a database or record of its graduates' whereabouts after graduation. This makes it difficult for the department to know where its graduates are, what they do, and the challenges they face in order to make LIS education relevant, enable curriculum reviews, and make alumni support possible. It also makes it difficult to create a network of its alumni that could be helpful for knowledge

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sharing and knowledge about possible job opportunities for its current students. The absence of such information denies the department valuable feedback from graduates and their employers about the value of the degrees on offer by the department, and makes it difficult to re-structure the curriculum for current students in order for them to acquire the knowledge and skills required in the 'real world'.

The aim of this study was to trace graduates of the department of Information Studies at the University of Zululand from the year 2000 to 2009 in order to establish where they are, what they do, and what interventions can be made to improve their professional activities and services. This paper addresses the following research questions: Are Information Studies graduates employed and how many are employed? In what sectors of the economy are they employed? Are the skills, knowledge and attitudes they acquired from their LIS education relevant in their jobs? Which LIS skills and knowledge are in demand?

2. Background

The Department of Information Studies at the University of Zululand (formerly known as Library and Information Science) was founded in 1970 following the introduction of a four-year Bachelor of Library Science degree. An Honours degree in Library Science was introduced in 1973, followed by a Postgraduate Diploma in Library Science in 1978 and a Master's degree in Library Science in 1984. In the late eighties, a Postgraduate Diploma in School Library and Information Science was introduced. In June 1997, the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Library and Information Science) was introduced, and in 2000 a Bachelor of Arts in Information Science was introduced to accommodate students interested in hard or ICT intensive courses. The student enrolment figures for the courses/ modules offered by the department have steadily grown, with no less than 50 students registering in the department during the last two years (The DIS Annual Report, 2009)**.** In 2010, the name of the Department of Library and Information Science was changed to the Department of Information Studies (http://www.lis.uzulu.ac.za/index.php/about-us). The department has produced 249 (see appendix A) graduates from the year 2000 to 2009 (DIS Business Plan, 2010). In 2011, there will be over 410 registered students in the department (http://webreg.uzulu.ac.za:8090/itsquery/showQualEnrollment.jsp) when all students are registered by the end of May (when Master's and Doctorate student registration closes).

3. Literature review

Follow-up or tracer studies have enjoyed popularity in LIS training needs/ assessment analyses over the past 20 years in Africa in studies by scholars such as Anadiran (1988) in Nigeria; Alemna (1991, 1999) and Kisiedu (1993) in Ghana; Rosenberg (1989, 1994) in Kenya; Ocholla (2001 and 2005) and Stilwell (2004) in South Africa; Rugambwa (1998) and Mammo (2007) in Ethiopia; Aina and Moahi (1999) in Botswana; and Lutwana and Kigongo-Bukenya (2004) in Uganda.

Mammo (2007) conducted a study on the status of LIS education in Ethiopia and the perceptions of graduates on the LIS programme. The study revealed that in one university, the LIS programme changed to Information Systems because of university-wide changes, while in another university, the LIS curriculum remained the same. Graduates indicated that they were not satisfied with the LIS programme.

Lutwana and Kigongo-Bukenya (2004) conducted a study on the appropriateness of the EASLIS (East Africa School of Library and Information Science) curriculum to professional practice in Library and Information Science field in Uganda. The purpose of the study was to establish where graduates worked, what they did, and whether their education met employers' expectations. It further identified areas of curriculum revision. The study revealed that most graduates were employed in academic institutions, government departments, banks and NGO's libraries, where they performed various professional activities. The study also revealed that employers complained about the lack of practical skills among the graduates, citing specialization through electives as inadequate.

Aina and Moahi (1999) conducted a tracer study of graduates from the Department of Library and Information Studies at the University of Botswana. The aim of the study was to determine graduates' characteristics, the relevance of their training to their tasks, and their perceptions of the curriculum of the Department of LIS at the University of Botswana. The study revealed that the graduates were employed in traditional library settings. The study also found that their training was relevant to the tasks that they performed, although they advocated the strengthening of the information technology component of the curriculum.

Kaijage (n.d.) conducted a tracer study on the skills and knowledge of B.Com graduates of the University of Dar es Salaam. The study concluded that the knowledge and skills that the graduates obtained from the university were relevant to their jobs. But it also suggested that changes should be made to the programme. There are also many other tracer studies conducted all over the Africa and the rest of the world.

In South Africa, Stilwell (2004) conducted a survey of alumni perceptions of the postgraduate ILS (Information and Library Science programme at the University of Natal). Critical issues, such as balancing the human centred approach with IT, were identified. The findings of the study indicated that the programme achieved its outcomes because it prepared alumni well for the work place. Ocholla's (2001) tracer study of LIS graduates from 1996 - 1997 determined whether the skills and attitudes they gained during their training at the University of Zululand applied in their jobs. The results of the study indicate that graduates obtained sufficient knowledge from the degree programme.

These examples indicate that tracer studies are generally conducted to find out about the fates of departmental graduates or alumni. They investigate where graduates are, whether they are employed, and employers' perceptions about the skills and knowledge that LIS graduates have. They are also used to obtain feedback from employed alumni and employers on the relevance of the programmes offered by different departments. Like most tracer studies, this study addresses the same questions: Are the graduates employable? Is the curriculum relevant? What are the perceptions of graduates and employers about the graduates' skills, knowledge and education?

4. Methodology

A survey of LIS graduates was conducted between October and December, 2010. The aim of the survey was to investigate the job status and challenges facing LIS graduates who graduated from the Department of Information Studies at the University of Zululand between the years 2000 and 2009. A survey method was used to enable us to reach the vast and scattered LIS alumni. Although we were initially targeting 249 LIS graduates during this

period, we ended up using purposive sampling based on the list of students that we could find in the university records. We were able to generate a list of 125 graduates for the study. These students' contact details could be retrieved from the university database. A questionnaire was administered to all 125 students. The questionnaire consisted of both structured and unstructured questions. The questionnaires were first mailed by post to all 125 respondents. Because of the low response rate and the fact that some potential respondents had moved from their last known addresses, we decided to trace them physically to their places of employment. In order to trace more students for the survey, we also used the snowball sampling technique through the help of the students we surveyed. We compiled a list of graduates' phone numbers obtained from their friends, relatives and anybody who had information about any LIS graduate. Using snowball sampling, we were able to physically trace graduates in two countries (South Africa and Swaziland). In South Africa, graduates were located in three provinces: KwaZulu- Natal, Mpumalanga and Gauteng. Data collection took about three months (October, November, and December). Overall, 50 questionnaires were returned. Descriptive statistics and content analysis were used to analyze the data.

5. Results

Most of the respondents had studied B.A. Information Science (36), followed by Library and Information Sciences (14) at undergraduate and the Postgraduate Diploma in Library and Information Sciences (3). A small number had studied up to Honours (5) and Masters (2) levels.

The public sector was identified as the main employer of LIS graduates. Thirty-one of the fifty graduates were employed in the public sector. Only three were employed in the private sector, and two by parastatals (state corporations). Only one graduate was not employed. The rest did not indicate where they worked. Table 1 shows the results.

Table 1: Sectors where LIS graduates work
N=50

Sector	Frequency
Private	3
Public	31
Parastatal	2
NGO	0
Unemployed	1
Did not indicate	13

Those who were employed in the public sector were employed by the local (7), provincial (13) and national government (11).

It was encouraging to note that most of the graduates had been employed for more than a year when the study was conducted. The majority had been employed for more than two years. Only a few (4) had been working for more than five years. Table 2 below shows the results.

Table 2: Work Experience of LIS graduates

Experience (In Years)	Frequency
0	1

<1	10
>1	6
>2	16
>5	4
No Response	13

Advertising (newspaper, websites) appears to be the most popular way to attract LIS talent. More than half of the LIS graduates indicated that they saw the job positions they are currently occupying in different advertisements. Others indicated that they used their own contacts to get jobs. The remaining respondents said that they were head-hunted by their current employers. Recruitment agencies did not seem to be popular among LIS graduates - none indicated that they were recruited by an employment agency (see Table 3).

Table 3: Methods of job recruitment

Method	Frequency
Adverts	30
Own Contacts	3
Head hunted	2
Employment Agencies	0
Other	7
No Response	8

LIS graduates hold different job titles. Most (20) of the respondents held the title of librarian (senior librarian, assistant librarian, information librarian, library intern, principal librarian, teacher librarian, and medical librarian). But others held other titles, including: web developer, registry clerk, lecturer, desktop publisher, intern, records manager, research assistant, information technology specialist, graduate assistant, stack attendant, and IT administrator.

Most LIS graduates therefore held different positions in libraries (mostly public libraries). Only a few worked in other fields such as core IT, teaching, records management, etc. This means that for the majority, the daily tasks were typical library tasks such as cataloguing and classification, referencing, abstracting and indexing, information retrieval, collection development, processing library requests, book circulation, training, general library administration (supervision, budgeting, customer care, etc.), and other library-related tasks. Those in desktop publishing designed adverts, tabloid newspapers, newsletters, cards, pamphlets, calendars, etc., and liaised with the media for publication, while those in IT performed tasks such as IT administration, i.e. networking, updating anti viruses, troubleshooting and fixing PCs, managing IT hardware, and web programming.

There are certain skills that LIS graduates must have in order to be able to carry out their respective duties. The 20 who worked in the library cited cataloguing and classification, information retrieval, library systems, developing library policies, referencing and indexing, marketing, and collection development skills. The two respondents doing core IT functions cited database management skills, hardware and software knowledge, and information systems skills. Others indicated that they were required to know about records management, knowledge management, information management, archival sciences knowledge, and desktop publishing knowledge and skills.

Attitude plays a vital role in every job. The LIS graduates generally agreed that in-order for them to perform well, they were expected to exhibit the following attitudes and characteristics: hard work, love for the job, teamwork, cooperation, confidence, professionalism, dedication, perseverance, a good sense of humour, meticulousness, self discipline, intelligence, friendliness, positive attitude, flexibility, trustworthiness, innovativeness, dependability, patience, politeness, respect, and passion.

The graduates were asked whether the skills they obtained from the department were relevant to their jobs. The majority of the graduates (32) replied in the affirmative. They indicated that they used the skills in their everyday tasks.

One student replied:

> *"While we were studying we were given theory, taken for practical, wrote exams, and did library visits all that broadened my understanding of the LIS field [....] now I can apply what I have learned competitively in my job".*

Another concurred,
"Yes I got a chance to work as a library assistant and used the opportunity to get to learn other things about the library."

Some of those who replied in the affirmative indicated that the skills they acquired from the department were relevant, but more practical work should have been done and more IT related modules could have been covered. Others agreed but were more cautious; one respondent stated that,

> *"Yes, but if we covered more on IT (PHP, MySQL ASP.NET, Photoshop, Corel Draw) I would say I shouldn't have battled finding a job."*

We recognize that the LIS curriculum cannot cover everything that the changing job environment requires. This comment is important for considering short courses for intervention where possible.

Those who replied in the negative (5) indicated that some skills were totally lacking. Most pinpointed the absence of cataloguing and classification in their curriculum. The initial BA (Information Science) left out cataloguing and classification for fear that students would see the programme as another librarianship qualification (when we already had a four year Bachelor of Library and Information Science programme where the contested content was offered).
One student lamented:

> *"We did not get the opportunity to learn cataloguing and classification, and library systems. BA (IS) focuses on technology only."*

Another wrote:
"I think we never studied LIS that deals specifically with library careers."
We're guessing that 'library systems' refers to Library Integrated Software programme (e.g. INOPAC, KOHA), which is essential for working in the library.

The rest of the respondents (13) either did not respond to the question or gave contradictory responses.
For example one respondent replied:

"Yes, I can say that information related modules are relevant, but because I am working in the library and UZ did not offer me more library modules, I think that's what I lack".

While another wrote,
"Yes, but there is a lot I should have studied at UZ. For some reason this was not offered…..I just have to face the truth that I know only 10 % when it comes to web programming".

These two responses are contradictory. The respondents start by agreeing that the skills they obtained from the DIS are relevant to their jobs, but then backtrack. The comments cited here and in the previous paragraph are also rather contradictory as BA (Information Science) is 50 % IT oriented and 50 % library oriented.

Graduates were asked whether they were satisfied with the curriculum that was offered by the Department of Library and Information Science (now Information Studies). Half of the graduates (25) indicated that they were not happy with the curriculum. Only 15 indicated that they were happy with the curriculum. The rest gave unclear and contradictory responses. Many of those who indicated that they were not happy stated that the BA (Information Science) curriculum is misdirected - it does not focus on anything and is just a mixture of modules with no area of specialization.
One respondent noted:
"The curriculum lacked focus and specialization. As a result it became unclear what I was being trained for."

Another respondent wrote,
"I first suffered while I was out of varsity looking for the job. Most of the responses from the employers (some in the private sector) were confused about the modules and said 'it is irrelevant to the job market and mixed up with no majors at 3rd year"

Some LIS graduates indicated that they were satisfied with the knowledge they acquired from the department.

The respondents were then asked to suggest what must be removed and/or added to the DIS curriculum. Most respondents suggested that Communication Science modules, indigenous knowledge systems and all IT modules must be removed. Others suggested that modules such as cataloguing and classification, programming, information and knowledge management, business intelligence, graphics design, customer care, database management, school librarianship, and library and information systems should be included in the curriculum. Others suggested that there must be a 50-50 balance of IT and core Library Science modules - which is now the case - almost all of the respondents indicated that the DIS must introduce six months of fieldwork.

5. Discussion

Most LIS graduates (2000 - 2009) studied B.A. Information Science (36 graduates). This might be because the Bachelor of Library Science degree (BLIS) had lost its popularity during that period; student enrolment figures declined to less than 5 for the whole 4 year degree programme. In fact, the four year (BLIS) programme was archived as there were no takers. Students instead preferred the 3 year B.A (Information Science) degree programme (that graduates, in their responses, seemed to be unsatisfied with). One possible reason for

this was the growing hype in information technology (IT). Most students wanted to study IT-related courses, and the BIS programme offered such modules.

Most graduates were employed in local and provincial governments and the national government, possibly stemming from a shortage of Library Science skills in the public sector. A study by the Department of Arts and Culture (2010) identified the shortages in their report, "The demand for and supply of skills in library and information services, archival services and records management**"**. Lutwana and Kigongo-Bukenya's (2004) also found that the public sector is one of the main employers of LIS graduates. The South African public sector has a renowned internship programme offered by local, provincial and national governments to graduates. This might also explain why most LIS graduates were working in the public sector.

Most of the graduates had been employed for more than two years at the time of study. It was not possible, however, to determine whether or not they had spent some time unemployed prior to their occupations because they were not asked.

Newspapers and websites were identified as the main channels of LIS recruitment. The respondents held different titles at their respective places of employment, but because most were working in libraries, many job titles included the word 'librarian'. Because most of the respondents worked in the library, many performed library related tasks such as cataloguing and classification, indexing, and issuing books. Those who worked in core IT performed IT-related tasks such as database administration, software development and computer troubleshooting. We noted that most of those who worked in the core IT environment were BA (IS) graduates only because of the intensity of the IT modules offered in the BIS programme.

Cataloguing and classification skills are the main skills required by LIS graduates, especially for work in the library. Those who enrolled for the B.A. (Information Science) degree complained about not having cataloguing and classification skills. The DIS did not offer those courses to BIS students until recently. Although some LIS graduates were happy with the skills and knowledge they obtained from the department, half were not happy with their qualifications. The general sentiment was that it lacks specialization. The three year BA (IS) programme focuses on preparing graduates to work in the broader information and knowledge management field. They strongly believe that a fieldwork component must be added to the DIS curriculum BA (IS). They believed that it would expose students to a real life work environment in the library.

It should, however, be noted that the four year professional Bachelor of Library and Information Science programme, where all the professional LIS courses are included, has been revived with an enrolment of 50 students over the last two years (the 2011 enrolment figure stands at 35). There is a fieldwork component in this programme and students also take two non-LIS majors for their qualification in their second year of study. The BA (IS) has also been reviewed and revised. Cataloguing and classification has been introduced, as has a 3rd year specialization stream, and fieldwork logistics are underway. Due to problems of getting fieldwork hosts in their IT intensive programme in the BA (IS), we preferred that students engage in more practical work and produce tangible projects, e.g. develop a website instead of proceeding to an unknown fieldwork environment.

6. Conclusion

We were excited to discover that most LIS graduates were employed, and that most had been employed for more than two years. The implications are that LIS graduates from the University of Zululand are marketable. However, it was quite unexpected to find out that their main employer was the government, and that most were employed by libraries. We had expected a considerable number to work in the private/ corporate sector as records managers, information and knowledge specialists, archivists, web developers, or teach ICT literacy in schools. We believe that the graduates did not expect libraries to be their main employer, hence their dissatisfaction with BA (IS) and not necessarily the department. We also note that some graduates are fulfilling such jobs like stark attendant, spine markers even at the University of Zululand Library with their University degree for sometime that is discouraging. This applied especially to Information Science graduates who had studied mostly information technology (IT) related courses.

As much as the LIS graduates were happy with the knowledge and skills they obtained from the department, they were not happy at all with the curriculum that was offered to them. We have however, revised the curriculum and implemented changes since 2010, and will continue reviewing BA (IS) regularly. We have introduced the changes that would make graduates employable in library environments where cataloguing and classification is essential. The fieldwork for BA (IS) is being introduced in 2011, but the BLIS fieldwork course/ module and activity has existed all along. Our challenge is to introduce fieldwork in the 3rd year BA (IS) programme through service learning. Interestingly, our curriculum reviewers (external assessors) find the programme (BA-IS) to be quite appropriate. They have also emphasized the need for fieldwork and the integration of Library Integrated Systems in the programme. We have appended our undergraduate qualification programme for readers.

Nevertheless, the above highlighted also showed contradictions. Respondents stated that the skills that they obtained from DIS were relevant to their respective jobs. On the other hand, they were not satisfied with the DIS curriculum. Some respondents, particularly B.A. Information Science graduates, complained about doing IT related modules instead of core Library Science modules (cataloguing and classification), despite the fact that BA (IS) is 50 % IT and 50 % LIS. It would be impossible to keep up with the times otherwise. Despite all this, we take note of the outcome of this study seriously for curriculum review and development.

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Appendix A: Graduation Statistics

Graduation Statistics 2000 - 2009

Department of Information Studies, UNIZUL **GRADUATION STATISTICS FROM 2000- 2009**

Title	Codes	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
Bachelor of Arts in Information Science	AIDEG1	0	0	0	3	8	10	11	26	15	21	94
Bachelor of Library & Information Science	AIDEG2	14	14	16	15	2	14	6	0	3	3	87
Postgraduate University Diploma in Library and Info.Science	AIDIP1	0	0	0	0	1	3	7	2	2	3	18
Postgraduate University Diploma in School Librarianship	AIDIP2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	5	4	13
Bachelor in LIS (Honours)	ALB500	0	3	2	3	0	3	3	3	2	2	21
Masters in LIS	ALB700	0	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	1	2	8
Doctor of Philosophy (LIS)	ALB800	0	0	1	0	3	0	1	3	0	0	8
Total 2000-2009		**14**	**17**	**21**	**23**	**15**	**30**	**30**	**36**	**28**	**35**	**249**

Appendix B: Modules offered by the DIS

Core Library and Information Science Modules(both BA(IS) and BLIS

Module	Programme(s) offered in
INFORMATION SCIENCE & INFORMATION LITERACY	BA IS and BLIS
INFORMATION SEARCHING & RETRIEVAL	BA IS and BLIS
ENGLISH I PART A: LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE	BA IS and BLIS
ENGLISH I PART B: LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE	BA IS AND BLIS
MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES & PRACTICES	BA IS and BLIS
LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTERS	BLIS
KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT	BA IS and BLIS
INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR	BA IS and BLIS
RECORDS MANAGMENT	BA IS and BLIS
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	BA IS and BLIS
INFORMATION ETHICS	BA IS AND BLIS
COLLECTION DE VELOPMENT	BLIS
INFORMETRICS	BLIS and BIS
MARKETING PRINCIPLES	BIS and BLIS
MEDIA AND USER STUDIES	BLIS
SETTING UP A SCHOOL LIBRRY	BLIS
CATALOGUING AND CLASSIFICATION	BLIS and BA IS
READERSHIP AND CHILDREN LITERATURE	BLIS
INDEXING AND ABSTRACTING	BLIS and BA IS
PUBLIC RELATIONS	BLIS and BA IS
COMMUNICATION SCIENCE	BLIS and BA IS

Notes: At least two non LIS majors are offered in the 4yr BLIS programme that constitutes 50%. Atleast 25% non LIS courses are offered in the BA(IS) qualification programme.

Core IT Modules

COMPUTER TROUBLESHOOTING & REPAIRS	BA IS
ASSEMBLING & UPGRADING COMPUTERS	BA IS
MULTI-MEDIA 1	BA IS
MULTI-MEDIA 2	BA IS

COMPUTER LITERACY FOR INFORMATION STUDIES 2	BA IS and BLIS
COMPUTER LITERACY FOR INFORMATION STUDIES 1	BA IS and BLIS
COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNICATION	BA IS
ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING	BA IS and BLIS
WEB-PAGE DESIGN 1	BA IS and BLIS
WEB PAGE DESIGN 2	BA IS AND BLIS
SETTING UP WEB SERVERS 1	BA IS
SETTING UP WEB SERVERS 2	BA IS
NETWORKS AND COMPUTER CENTER MANAGEMENT	BA IS