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# School Library Media Preparation Program Review: Perspectives of Two Stakeholder Groups

Donna M. Shannon

Both the American Library Association Committee on Accreditation and the higher education regional accrediting agencies call for outcomes based assessment and involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation of degree programs. This article describes part of a project conducted at the University of South Carolina School of Library and Information Science to study its school library media preparation program through the perspectives of program completers and practicing school library media specialists who supervise student interns. Program completers were surveyed to discover their level of satisfaction for the USC-SLIS school library media preparation program and how well-prepared they were for their role as a school library media specialist (SLMS). Internship supervisors were surveyed about how well-prepared they found their student interns for the work of a SLMS. Results from both groups were positive, but leadership skills and practical skills emerged as areas in the curriculum that need attention. The level of program completers' professional activities is also discussed.

## Introduction and Background

The American Library Association's (ALA) *Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies* calls for involvement of students, faculty, employers, alumni, and other stakeholders in the evaluation of program goals and objectives as well as evaluation of the program's curriculum and assessment of student accomplishments.<sup>1</sup> Standards developed by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) for teacher certification programs also include requirements for involvement of the professional community in development of an assessment system that provides "regular and comprehensive" information on candidate (student) qualifications and proficiencies in order to develop plans for program improvement.<sup>2</sup>

As part of the NCATE review process, the school media faculty at the University of South Carolina School of Library and Information Science (USC-SLIS) in cooperation with the University's Professional Education Unit has engaged in many activities related to program assessment over the

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past several years. Following NCATE's 2003 approval of the American Association of School Librarian's (AASL) new standards for school media preparation programs, our program's curriculum was analyzed by aligning course content with these standards.<sup>3</sup> As part of this comprehensive program review, we gathered data from various stakeholder groups through surveys and focus group interviews. The research reported here represents the results from online surveys of two of those stakeholder groups—program completers and internship supervisors.

The overarching aim of the comprehensive program review was to study the perceived effectiveness of our preparation program for school library media specialists (SLMSs) in order to inform the development of strategies to improve candidate performance. The specific purposes of the part of the project reported here were (1) to study program completer perspectives about the USC-SLIS preparation program for SLMSs, (2) to determine the level of professional activities in which program completers are engaged, and (3) to study the perspectives of practicing SLMSs who serve as internship supervisors regarding the competencies of student interns. Results will inform ongoing efforts for the continuous review of our preparation program for SLMSs and development of appropriate plans for program improvement. These findings may have implications for SLMS preparation programs at other institutions and for planning professional development activities for practicing SLMSs.

Several researchers have studied stakeholder perceptions of which skills and competencies of SLMSs they consider most important. Others have asked participants to compare competencies emphasized in school library media preparation programs and those perceived as most often needed in the world of practice. It is problematic to generalize from the results of studies that employ different methodologies to study different populations at different times, however, there are some common threads that emerge from the results. Competencies identified as most important in many studies revolve around skills needed for day-to-day operation of the school library media center (SLMC) and the more traditional supportive roles of resource provision and reading promotion. Identified as less important are those related to planning, evaluation, curriculum development, and leadership which are roles called for in national standards documents and the professional literature.<sup>4</sup> Researchers who have examined award-winning schools have found that SLMSs supported the philosophy and guidelines included in national standards for school library media programs.<sup>5</sup> Others

who have studied exemplary SLMSs have found that they conformed to descriptions found in the professional literature that call for visionary leadership and a proactive approach to administering library programs and services.<sup>6</sup> Another line of research highlights the importance of interpersonal and communication skills.<sup>7</sup> These factors have been found to be critical to the SLMS's ability to facilitate program integration, collaborative planning, and resource-based learning.

Although many LIS programs survey their graduates and alumni, few reports have appeared in the professional literature that focus on perceptions of school media program completers about their preparation program or perceptions of internship supervisors about the competencies of their student interns. USC-SLIS regularly surveys all students following graduation, however, this is the first time that we have conducted a survey specifically targeting school media certification program completers.

## Context

The USC-SLIS Master's program is accredited by ALA's Committee on Accreditation and the School's school media preparation program is part of the University's Professional Education Unit accredited by NCATE and approved by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDOE). Certified classroom teachers can earn a Master's degree and meet certification requirements in the same 36 credit hour program. Prospective SLMSs who are not credentialed as classroom teachers are required to complete 12 semester hours of education courses in specified categories. Individuals who already hold the MLIS degree can pursue certification as a SLMS through one of the School's advanced programs. The program is available to individuals in all areas of South Carolina through the University's distance education program.

South Carolina's public school system is made up of 85 school districts and 1,144 schools. In terms of size, the largest school district (Greenville) has 61,967 students and the smallest (Dillon 1) has 876.<sup>8</sup> SLMSs are required in all but the smallest schools, some magnet schools, and charter schools. The 1,135 SLMSs working in South Carolina public schools have a strong advocate on the staff of the SCDOE but only a handful of the 85 districts employ an experienced SLMS whose full-time responsibility is to coordinate the district's school library programs. The state's professional association, the South Carolina Association of School Librarians (SCASL), is active in promoting and advocating for the state's library media programs. Because of a shortage of SLMSs in the state, this area of certification is on the SCDOE's "critical needs" list. This means that students can qualify for the South Carolina Teacher Loan Program (for certified teachers) or the South Carolina Career Changer Loan Program (for individuals who are not certified teachers) to pay expenses related to qualifying for certification.

## Research Questions

Specific questions driving this part of the comprehensive review project were:

- What is the background and current employment status of program completers?
- What are the perceptions of program completers regarding their formal preparation for work as SLMSs?
- What is the level of professional activity of program completers?
- What are the perceptions of internship supervisors for how well prepared SLIS students are for their work as SLMSs?

## Method

Participants included (1) students ("program completers") who finished both the MLIS degree and qualified for certification as a SLMS through the School's NCATE-approved program from spring semester 1997 through the fall semester 2003, and (2) practicing library media specialists who supervised school media interns from fall 1999 through spring 2004. (See Table 1 for a breakdown of numbers in the population and numbers who submitted useable surveys.)

Web-based surveys were used to collect data from participants. Surveys were created in Flashlight Online, a web-based service for creating, administering, and analyzing surveys housed at Washington State University. USC has a contractual agreement with Flashlight Online that gives faculty and staff unlimited access to this service. Flashlight Online software computed frequencies for each closed-ended item. Excel was used to compute a mean for each item. Responses to open-ended questions that gave respondents the opportunity to add anything related to survey questions and anything else they felt was important for us to know were studied using techniques common to analysis of qualitative data in order to discover categories and their properties.

**Table 1**  
Survey Participants.

	<b>Number in Target Population</b>	<b>Number Who Completed a Useable Survey</b>	<b>Percent of Target Population Responses</b>
Program completers	299 (275*)	174	58.2% (63.3%)
Internship supervisors	283 (260**)	163	57.6% (62.7%)

\*Working email addresses were not found for 24 of the 299 program completers (1997–2003) so discounting them, the target population actually numbered 275.

\*\*Working email addresses were not found for 23 of the 283 internship supervisors (1999–2004) so discounting them, the target population actually numbered 260.

## Findings

### Program Completer Perspectives

In all, 174 program completers submitted useable surveys. Analysis of demographic data indicated that 143 respondents (82.18%) were working as a SLMS (74 in elementary schools, 23 in middle schools, 33 in high schools, and 13 in other types of schools). Those with teaching experience or who were trained as classroom teachers prior to enrolling in the USC-SLIS program numbered 126 (72.41%); 48 respondents (27.59%) indicated that they did not have experience as a classroom teacher.

Additional characteristics of program completer respondents:

- Of the thirty-one who were not working as a SLMS, only three reported that they were unable to find a position. Ten were working in other jobs in the field of education.
- One hundred twenty-one (69.54%) were part-time students.
- One hundred twenty-two (70.12%) were distance education students.
- With the exception of six African-Americans, all were white, not of Hispanic origin.
- Only nine were males.

The average age of respondents at the time they started the program was 34.4. Table 2 provides a breakdown by age groups.

Beyond demographic queries, program completers were asked questions related to their: (1) level of satisfaction with USC-SLIS's school media preparation program, including their perceptions of the program's quality and how well-prepared they felt to assume the role of SLMS (as described in *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*), and (2) level of participation in selected professional activities.<sup>9</sup> Respondents were also given the opportunity to add anything else about their experience at SLIS that they thought was important for us to know in two open-ended questions at the end of the survey.

**Table 2**  
Age of Respondents.

Age Range	N=173 (one respondent did not answer the question)	Percent of Total Respondents
20-24	31	17.82
25-29	39	22.41
30-34	21	12.07
35-39	18	10.36
40-44	35	20.16
45-49	19	10.92
50-54	10	5.75
Over 54	0	0

### Level of Satisfaction with SLIS Preparation Program

The first group of questions in this part of the survey focused on program completer satisfaction with the quality of the degree program, including program focus, courses, internship, faculty, preparation for the work of a library media specialist and leadership in the profession. Overall, participant responses indicate a high level of satisfaction with the SLIS program. "Expertise of faculty members" was rated highest (mean 3.63 of a possible 4) while "Practical focus of your program" received the lowest rating (mean 3.20) in this group of questions. Rated slightly higher but still low compared with other questions in this group was "preparation for leadership" in your school and profession. (See Table 3 for a summary of these responses. Please note that in this table and the ones that follow, N = the number who responded to the question. Not all respondents answered every question.) In an open-ended question at the end of the survey where respondents were given the opportunity to make additional comments, a number specifically mentioned that they would like to have had more exposure to the "practical" and "nuts and bolts" aspects of the job.

Another group of questions in this part of the survey asked respondents to judge how well-prepared they were to carry out generally accepted aspects of the job as described in school library standards and the professional literature. Overall, respondents felt better prepared in planning, managing, evaluating the library media program and collection than they did in developing an information literacy curriculum or in collaborating with teachers. (See Table 4a). The data from this group of questions were disaggregated in order to compare responses from those who had classroom teaching experience before entering the school media preparation program and those who did not. The mean of responses from program completers with teaching experience was higher on all items than it was for those without such experience. (See Tables 4b and 4c).

**Table 3**  
Quality of SLIS Degree Program.

<b>I was satisfied with my SLIS degree program in each of the following:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Expertise of faculty members	173	3.64
Availability of faculty	173	3.59
Challenge of your courses	174	3.49
Interaction with faculty	174	3.48
Theoretical focus of your program	174	3.46
Overall quality of your program	173	3.45
Interaction with other students	172	3.44
Content of your courses	174	3.36
Preparation to be a leader in your profession	173	3.32
Preparation to be a leader in your school	173	3.29
Practical focus of your program	174	3.20

4 = strongly agree, 3 = agree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree

**Table 4a**  
Preparation for Job of SLMS—All respondents.

<b>Courses and internship prepared me to:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Manage the library media center	174	3.37
Select, acquire, and manage a varied collection of resources	173	3.35
Evaluate the library media program	173	3.35
Plan and administer the library media program	174	3.34
Integrate information literacy skills into the curriculum	174	3.34
Integrate technology skills into the curriculum	174	3.33
Develop an information literacy skills curriculum	174	3.26
Form instructional partnerships and collaborate with teachers	174	3.24

4 = strongly agree, 3 = agree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree

**Table 4b**  
Preparation for Job of SLMS—Respondents with teaching experience.

<b>Courses and internship prepared me to:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Manage the library media center	126	3.38
Select, acquire, and manage a varied collection of resources	126	3.37
Evaluate the library media program	126	3.33
Plan and administer the library media program	126	3.43
Integrate information literacy skills into the curriculum	126	3.41
Integrate technology skills into the curriculum	126	3.33
Develop an information literacy skills curriculum	125	3.32
Form instructional partnerships and collaborate with teachers	125	3.38

4 = strongly agree, 3 = agree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree

**Table 4c**  
Preparation for Job of SLMS—Respondents without teaching experience.

<b>Courses and internship prepared me to:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Manage the library media center	48	2.90
Select, acquire, and manage a varied collection of resources	48	3.27
Evaluate the library media program	48	3.06
Plan and administer the library media program	48	3.10
Integrate information literacy skills into the curriculum	48	3.10
Integrate technology skills into the curriculum	48	3.00
Develop an information literacy skills curriculum	48	3.27
Form instructional partnerships and collaborate with teachers	48	3.27

4 = strongly agree, 3 = agree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree



### Level of Professional Activity

Program completer respondents were asked questions about their professional journal reading habits and professional association activities since completing their preparation program. These activities were considered significant because the USC-SLIS program emphasizes the role of the information professional as a lifelong learner and the important part professional association participation and keeping up-to-date by reading the professional literature play in ongoing professional development. From the orientation to the program in students' first semester through their internship in the last semester, professional association membership and participation is encouraged and expected. Questions included in this part of the survey related to reading professional journals, joining professional associations, working as an officer or committee member of professional associations, attending professional conferences, presenting at professional conferences, and publishing in professional journals.

Respondents were asked how often they read professional journals. Eighty-one (46.55%) reported reading professional journals every month. Fifty-three (30.46%) reported reading journals every week. (See Table 5 for a more complete breakdown of responses to this question.) Respondents were also asked to indicate which professional journals they regularly read by checking the names of journals from a list provided. *School Library Journal* had the highest reported readership at 138 followed by *School Library Media Activities Monthly* at 73. *Knowledge Quest* (official journal of the American Association of School Librarians) was read by 39 respondents. (See Table 6 for a breakdown of responses to this question.) In response to the query about whether or not respondents had published in a professional journal, sixteen of the 155 reported that they had published one or more pieces in a professional journal.

Level of activity in professional associations was the focus of eight questions. Of the 174 respondents, 126 (72.41%) reported membership in SCASL. Because some program completers live and/or work in other states, it cannot be determined what percentage working in South Carolina are members of SCASL. Fewer respondents reported belonging to ALA (48 or 27.59%) or AASL (32 or 18.39%). In addition to the organizations listed in the survey, several respondents reported membership in other pro-

**Table 5**  
Reading of Professional Journals.

How often do you read professional journals?	N=174	Percent of Total Responses
Every day	3	1.72
Every week	53	30.46
Every month	81	46.55
Occasionally (less than once a month)	29	16.67
Rarely or never	8	0.46

**Table 6**  
**Professional Journals Read.**

<b>Journal Name (Check all that you regularly read.)</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
School Library Journal	138	79.30
School Library Media Activities Monthly	73	41.95
Knowledge Quest	39	22.40
Teacher Librarian	34	19.54
LMC Connection	26	14.94
School Library Media Research	15	8.62
Other	56	32.18

professional groups most notably their local school district's library media organization or, for those in other states, their state's school library association. Some indicated membership in state and national organizations related to reading and literacy such as the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English.

Only 15 (8.7%) of the 172 who responded to the question about attendance at a state level professional association conference indicated that they had not attended such a meeting. In response to the question asking if respondents had presented at a state level conference, 35 of the 129 who answered this question reported that they had made one or more presentations. Just over 20% of the 158 who answered the question about attendance at national conferences reported having attended one or more. Two respondents reported having made presentations at a national conference. Respondents were asked if they have held offices or served on committees of professional organizations. Ninety responded that they had either held an office or served on a committee of a local professional organization. (In South Carolina, the library media specialists in several school districts have formed formal organizations that meet regularly throughout the school year.) Fewer reported having served as an officer or as a committee member for state (39) or national (6) professional organizations. (See Table 7 for a summary of this data.)

### **Responses to Open-Ended Questions**

The final set of questions was open-ended and asked respondents (1) to offer any additional information about topics and issues addressed in the survey and (2) to comment on anything they thought was important but that was not specifically asked as part of the survey. Although responses from the sixty (34.48% of the total number who submitted useable surveys) who answered the first question covered a wide range of topics, most offered descriptions of what they perceived as deficiencies in the program. Responses from about half of the sixty who answered the question cited not enough attention to "practical tips," technology equipment, and cataloging. Nineteen comments were related to technology and/or "nuts and bolts" issues. Some

**Table 7**  
Professional Association Activity.

How many times have you done each of the following since completing your degree and/or meeting certification requirements?	N	0	1	2	3	4	5 or more times
Attended a state professional conference	172	15	29	39	27	28	34
Presented at a state professional conference	159	124	24	3	2	3	3
Attended a national conference	158	125	20	6	2	1	4
Presented at a national conference	155	153	0	0	0	1	1
Held office or committee membership at the local or district level	168	78	28	20	12	7	23
Held office or committee membership at the state level	164	125	15	12	4	6	2
Held office or committee membership at the national level	159	153	3	1	1	1	0

said that they did not feel well prepared to handle either audio-visual equipment operation or maintenance or both. A few of those who asked for more "hands-on" experiences specifically referred to library automation systems. Others expressed more general concern for "practical day-to-day tips" for running a media center. Twelve respondents specifically mentioned that they were unprepared for cataloging media center materials.

The second question asked respondents to comment on anything they thought was important for us to know but that was not specifically included on the survey. In addition to addressing some of the same topics mentioned above, a number of respondents commented that they were well-prepared for their positions and that they were grateful for having the opportunity to complete the program through distance education.

### Internship Supervisor Perspectives

Practicing library media specialists who supervise SLIS interns are required to hold a master's degree in library and information science from either an ALA-accredited or an NCATE approved school media preparation program. Of the 163 internship supervisors who responded to the survey, 50% had supervised one intern during 1999–2004; 50% had supervised two or more. One-third worked in elementary schools and just over 61% worked in secondary schools. The other 6% were employed in K–12, K–8, or in another type of school that includes both elementary and secondary school grade levels.

Internship supervisors were asked questions about their most recent student intern's (1) knowledge, (2) competencies and skills, and (3) personal characteristics and leadership skills. With the exception of "personal characteristics," questions were based on principles found in *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*.<sup>10</sup> They were also asked to rate their most recent intern's overall growth in job performance. Two final open-ended questions asked respondents (1) to describe the specific areas in which the intern showed the most growth over the internship period and (2) to add any additional comments about their student interns or the USC-SLIS internship program.

Most supervisors rated their intern's "knowledge" as excellent or good. Of the "knowledge" areas rated, interns' knowledge about curriculum and standards received the lowest score with 19% rated as fair or poor, (but over 80% were rated excellent or good). Interns received the highest "knowledge" ratings for their knowledge of information resources. (See Table 8.) In terms of competencies and skills, interns received their highest overall rating in the area of "productivity software" and their lowest in the area of "assessing student progress" followed by "integrating information literacy skills into the curriculum" and "organizing materials for access and retrieval." (See Table 9.)

Internship supervisors were asked to rate student intern personal characteristics and leadership skills. (See Table 10.) These questions were considered important to include because results of research studies have indicated that interpersonal, communication, and leadership skills are critical to the success of SLMSs.<sup>11</sup> Again, most interns received high marks from their supervisors in these areas. The area that received the fewest excellent and good ratings was for "potential as a curriculum and instructional leader within the school and beyond."

Feedback on how student interns grew during the internship experience was obtained by asking supervisors to rate interns as excellent, good, okay, or poor on overall growth in job performance and in an open-ended question asking about specific areas in which interns showed the most growth. Almost 93% of supervisors rated their intern's overall growth in job perfor-

**Table 8**  
Student Intern Knowledge.

<b>Rate your most recent intern on the knowledge he/she brought to the internship experience:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Information resources	163	3.47
Information literacy	163	3.40
Technology	163	3.37
Children's and YA materials	163	3.33
Curriculum and standards	163	3.20

4 = Excellent, 3 = Good, 2 = Fair, 1 = Poor

**Table 9**  
**Student Intern Competencies and Skills.**

<b>My most recent intern brought the following competencies and skills to the internship experience:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Using productivity software	163	3.58
Using computers	163	3.56
Using information technology	162	3.53
Instructing students and teachers to use library and Internet resources	163	3.49
Using instructional technology	163	3.44
Promoting books and reading	163	3.44
Using (or learning to use) library automation software	163	3.41
Collaborating with teachers	162	3.33
Integrating information literacy skills into the curriculum	163	3.31
Organizing materials for access and retrieval	162	3.31
Assessing student progress	160	3.16

4 = Excellent, 3 = Good, 2 = Fair, 1 = Poor

mance as excellent or good. Only five rated their intern's job performance growth as poor.

The first open-ended question was answered by 146 of the 163 respondents. By far, interns' growth in collaborating and working with teachers was described most often (44 times). Using and integrating technology was mentioned 21 times followed by working with students (19 times) library automation and reading promotion (each 16 times) and cataloging/processing and curriculum and standards (each 15 times). Other growth areas that were mentioned by four or more internship supervisors included: weeding, information literacy, knowledge of information sources, management, and

**Table 10**  
**Student Intern Personal Characteristics and Leadership Skills.**

<b>My most recent intern:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Reported to work on time	163	3.61
Completed tasks in a professional manner	163	3.60
Completed tasks effectively and efficiently	162	3.59
Was well-organized	163	3.57
Related well to students, teachers, and parents	163	3.57
Knew what was expected of him/her	163	3.56
Exhibited good communication skills	163	3.55
Exhibited good interpersonal skills	163	3.54
Exhibited potential as a successful program administrator	162	3.51
Exhibited potential as a curriculum and instructional leader within the school and beyond	161	3.44

4 = Excellent, 3 = Good, 2 = Fair, 1 = Poor

communication/interpersonal skills. Six internship supervisors described their interns as having gained more confidence over the period of the internship.

Ninety-five of the 163 respondents responded to the second and final open-ended question asking for additional comments. Of those, 56 made positive comments about the interns they supervised or the School's internship program. Most responses were complimentary remarks in which internship supervisors commented on students' competencies and contributions to their school programs. Only five wrote about experiences with students who did not perform well during their internship. Three mentioned that students did not possess enough "practical" knowledge and thirteen specifically mentioned that their intern lacked skills in the area of cataloging. A few offered suggestions for how students might benefit from visiting, observing, and interacting with practicing SLMSs prior to the culminating internship period.

### To Summarize

Program completers rated the quality of their degree program very high overall. Rated highest were the expertise and availability of faculty. Practical focus of the program and preparation for leadership received the lowest ratings. (See Table 3.) Most indicated that the program prepared them to assume the responsibilities of a SLMS; managing the library media center and its collection receiving the highest ratings. Developing an information literacy skills curriculum and collaborating with teachers were rated lowest. (See Table 4.) In terms of professional activities, over three-fourths of program completers reported reading professional journals at least every month, but for the great majority their reading of school library related journals was limited to *School Library Journal* and *School Library Media Activities Monthly*. Respondents regularly attend their state school library conference and many are active in their local or school district level professional organizations. Many fewer reported holding office or committee membership at the state or national level and very few have attended national conferences. (See Tables 5, 6, and 7.)

Internship supervisor responses to survey questions indicate their overall satisfaction with student interns' knowledge, competencies and skills, and interpersonal characteristics and leadership skills. Student interns were rated highest in knowledge of information resources and lowest in knowledge of curriculum and standards. (See Table 8.) In terms of competencies, they received their highest marks for using computers and productivity software and their lowest in assessing student progress. (See Table 9) Internship supervisors gave most interns high ratings on their work habits. Their lowest ratings in the "personal characteristics and leadership skills" question set was for potential leadership "within the school and beyond." (See Table 10.)

## Implications

In studying the results of the program completer and internship supervisor surveys reported here, certain patterns emerge. Although program completers give the SLIS preparation program high ratings overall and internship supervisors were generally pleased with student intern performance, their responses provide direction for our program review and may provide guidance for other preparation programs. Areas that program completers and internship supervisors rated lowest are among the topics we will address as we engage in continuous review of our curriculum and consider possible modifications. These areas are discussed below.

### Practical Skills

Concern for the practical skills needed to do the job emerged from program completer responses to both closed-ended questions and open-ended survey questions. As one respondent stated, "... the program needs to be structured to address the daily duties that a librarian faces—the practical, hands-on things." Internship supervisors who identified specific areas in which their interns were weak noted "cataloging" more often than any other area. The concern for more training in the practical skills of school librarianship is consistent with several other studies that indicate respondents envision themselves in a support role and describe provision of access to resources and management of the SLMC as important competencies.<sup>12</sup> In Woodruff's study comparing job competencies taught in preparation programs with competencies required on the job, one conclusion was a recommendation for more preservice training in practical daily management and organization of the SLMC.<sup>13</sup>

This focus on "the practical" may be a reflection of the longstanding tension between what students expect from their professional education and the vision that library school faculty has for graduate level education in a university setting. The dichotomy between theory and practice or "education" and "training" has been discussed in the professional literature for years.<sup>14</sup> In their 1998 review of training and education for library practitioners, Wilson and Hermanson point out that students are sometimes surprised to learn that on-the-job experience is often necessary before they reach a comfort level in their new positions and suggest that "... a little coaching about this dichotomy while students are still in school would help alleviate surprises."<sup>15</sup> Library schools, of course, cannot teach all of the practical skills that students might want or that employers expect. Fallis and Fricke assert that both library schools and employers have a role in addressing the situation and suggest that they get together and "articulate the role of professional education and determine the other educational and training needs of future librarians."<sup>16</sup> They also suggest that one role that LIS programs might play is that of clearinghouse for connecting students to sources of practical training and continuing education.

Unlike most academic and public librarians, SLMSs are usually the only

professional librarian in their libraries and therefore do not have the advantage of having co-workers act as coaches and mentors as they assume their first position. In responses to open-ended questions, some program completers mentioned relying on experienced library media specialists in their school district as well as the SCASL listserv for practical, day-to-day "nuts and bolts" advice. In those South Carolina school districts that employ an experienced SLMS whose full-time responsibility it is to coordinate the district's school library programs, mentors are usually assigned to new SLMSs. In other districts, the process varies and is usually more informal, leaving new hires to find their own support group. In writing about a perceived dissatisfaction with library education among practitioners, Stoffle and Leeder emphasize that responsibility for educating new librarians does not lie with library school faculty alone but with the field as a whole. They further assert that practitioners can "offer aspiring librarians the hands-on experience that coursework is unable to provide."<sup>17</sup> One of the internship supervisor respondents to our survey commented: "... spending some quality time in media center(s) at the beginning of the school media program would make all the following classes much more meaningful to the future SLMSs in the program at USC."

### **Leadership Skills**

SLMSs will need leadership skills in order to develop, share, and promote a vision for their school's library media program. Leadership has been highlighted in school library standards and the professional literature as critical to the success of the SLMS.<sup>18</sup> According to national standards, these leadership skills are necessary for SLMSs to establish and develop partnerships with other educators in their schools.<sup>19</sup> Program completer respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with areas of their preparation program including how well-prepared they were for leadership in their schools and in the profession. These areas were not rated as high as most of the other program-related items in this group of survey questions. (See Table 3.) Leadership is often related to the ability of the SLMS to form instructional partnerships with teachers which was the lowest rated item in the "Preparation for the job of SLMS" area of the program completer survey. (See Table 4.) Internship supervisors also rated student interns lower in leadership skills than in personal skills. (See Table 10.)

In order to evaluate the school media preparation program at the University of Alberta (Canada), Oberg and Easton conducted a series of focus group interviews of the program's stakeholders. One of the most prominent themes identified by participants was the importance of the SLMS for taking a leadership role in advocating for the school library media program.<sup>20</sup> Waters, Marzano, and McNulty describe the traits of school leaders that correlate with student achievement.<sup>21</sup> Their focus is on principals but some of the leadership responsibilities they discuss overlap the role of the SLMS. These include providing teachers with resources and professional development opportunities, playing a role in the design and implementation of cur-



riculum, and establishing strong lines of communication with faculty and staff. In her study of preservice SLMSs enrolled in five LIS programs in the southeast, Vansickle found that a majority of participants believed their role to be one of support rather than leadership. She acknowledges that leadership skills probably develop over time and with practice.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, other researchers who have looked at award-winning schools or exemplary SLMSs have found that leadership qualities are important characteristics of those who are perceived as making positive contributions in their schools.<sup>23</sup> Preparing SLMSs who are ready to assume leadership roles and responsibilities in their schools should be a priority for school media preparation programs.

### **Professional Activity**

In her book, *Enhancing Teaching and Learning: A Leadership Guide for School Library Media Specialists*, Jean Donham reminds us that "library media specialists who aspire to be leaders are always looking for learning opportunities to expand and update their expertise."<sup>24</sup> The field is changing so rapidly that SLMS will want to keep up-to-date through a range of professional activities—attending continuing education sessions, reading professional journals, and participating in professional associations. Active participation in professional association activities on local, state, and national levels—committee work, conferences, and presentations—enhance the work of the SLMS through learning and networking.

As part of the program completion survey we sought to assess their professional activity levels by asking about their professional journal reading habits and their participation in professional organizations. Less than 25% of respondents indicated that they read some of the important professional journals published for SLMSs. (See Table 7.) Ensuring that students are exposed to the variety of professional journals for SLMSs in coursework might motivate them to become regular readers of those publications and to consider making submissions. Respondents reported very high levels of professional activity within their school districts and in their attendance at the state's annual school library association conferences. Membership in national level professional organizations, attendance at national level conferences, and conference presentations were reported by fewer respondents. USC-SLIS school media students are required to attend a state level school library conference or technology conference as part of their internships which may help to explain high attendance rates at those meetings. For most it is the first time they have attended a library-related conference and their experiences are overwhelmingly positive. The fact that only 20% have made presentations at state conferences and only a few have presented at a national level conference may be explained by the fact that the respondents were in the early years of their careers as SLMSs.

Instructors Jurkowski, Antrim, and Robins describe how they involved students at Central Missouri State University in making group presenta-

tions at their state's school library conference as an optional course assignment. Instructors provided the support students needed to succeed through formative feedback and scaffolding.<sup>25</sup> Coaching students in development of presentations for professional conferences is one way to push them to higher levels of participation in professional organizations and lay the groundwork for their leadership role in the profession. This would also give them an authentic audience for course assignments as they refashion them to share with their future colleagues. This same technique might be used to encourage and involve students in submitting pieces for publication in professional journals.

## **Conclusions and Action Steps**

This study was undertaken to gather the perspectives of program completers and internship supervisors as part of a review of the USC-SLIS school media preparation program. Although the program received overall high ratings from program completers and student interns received overall high marks from internship supervisors, several things were learned from the results. To meet the need for additional skills in collaborating with teachers, implementing an information literacy curriculum, and assessing student progress, we developed a course on the curricular role of the SLMS that devotes more attention to these topics. We are also working on a revised course in the area of technical services with greater emphasis on organization of information, cataloging, and library automation.

The findings from this study together with other methods of assessment such as student evaluation of individual courses, students' end-of-course grades, formal evaluation by internship supervisors, evaluation of end-of-program portfolios, exit surveys of graduates, and informal feedback from students all contribute to program evaluation. Data gathered from the program completer survey will serve as baseline information that can be used to track changes that may take place in terms of the background of students who enter the program, their job status, engagement in professional activities following program completion, and their perceptions of their preservice preparation for the job of SLMS. We will continue to look at differences between perceptions of students who have teaching experience and those who do not to determine if patterns emerge suggesting revision to the curriculum for non-teachers is warranted. Because the great majority of those seeking school media certification in the USC-SLIS program are distance education students and the school media specialization courses are all taught as distance education courses, evaluation and assessment of students' online learning experiences is a logical next step.

In addition to the programmatic changes described above, the following "action steps" may enhance the USC-SLIS school media preparation program:

- Communicate with prospective students, practitioners, and employers

about the role of professional education including the balance of the theoretical and the practical.

- Be more intentional in making connections between theory, research, and “best practice” and how these might look when integrated into a school library media program.
- Provide additional opportunities for students to gain “practical” and “nuts and bolts” skills beyond required course work. Match students with mentors from the professional community and encourage them to make periodic visits to their schools where they have opportunities to observe and perform practical skills.
- Act as a clearinghouse for professional development and continuing education opportunities for students and graduates and publicize them.
- Incorporate readings from a variety of professional journals from both school librarianship and education into course assignments.
- Communicate the role professional organizations play in advocating for school librarianship.
- Encourage membership in national level professional organizations and attendance at national level conferences.
- Provide students with opportunities to develop presentations for professional conferences as part of course assignments or organize mini-conferences as part of a course for which they prepare concurrent and poster sessions. Encourage students to submit articles for publication in professional journals on both state and national levels.
- Integrate leadership training into courses to provide students with the tools they will need to assume positions of influence in their schools, school districts, and the profession.

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