

EDUCATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS



Any education for the professions today, and even more so in the future, has to, at the very least, acknowledge some core generic skills and attributes that seem common across the spectrum. Most professional bodies such as ALIA call for this basic knowledge to be included in any university program. Increasingly, employers are looking for graduates with strong communication skills who appreciate the need for transparency and accountability, as well as have the ability to take a big picture, multidisciplinary approach to their work. In addition, there is an expectation that a recent graduate, particularly at the Masters level, will have some knowledge of management, in particular human resource management and project planning; have well developed communication skills; be able to demonstrate initiative and creativity; understand the need for research and have, at least, the foundation knowledge and skills for developing a research program; be aware of ethics and relevant codes and their implementation in practice; understand fundamental IT principles and practices; and, increasingly, have a grounding in sociology (including in the Australian context, Indigenous studies).

At the same time, given the increasing complexity and convergence of the information professions (after all, a digital record is the same whether held in a library, archive, corporation, or in the cloud), there will be a demand for tailored learning with niche topics which will evolve (and disappear), calling for universities to be flexible and

adaptive – just as they expect from their graduates. Thus building on the generic core which will be shared across a range of disciplines within the university (after all, who doesn't need those attributes?), any effective future information studies program will need to provide a wide range of options as another tier on top of the generic subjects, resulting in small specialist classes with probably low enrolments. And in order for this to be practical, the delivery will have to be fully online with some form of consortia agreement (such as the existing WISE – Web Based Information Science Education program, www.wiseeducation.org), which will allow for sharing of expertise – and students.

Developing such programs will require educators, practitioners, and the professional associations to work together more closely in developing future strategies. To some degree, there is, I believe, a one size fits all model where whether you are looking at a career in IT, records and archives, libraries, or the broader information management field, the core generic attributes will form the basis of your education on which the focused, technical, and subject-specific topics will rest. Certainly, there is a lot to think about as our profession, and its practitioners, evolve over the coming decade.

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