The First Annual McCusker Memorial Lecture, presented by Prudence W. Dalrymple, Dean, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Dominican University

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The paths that bring us together this evening are varied. We come from many rooms of life to a shared presence that joins past and future. Students, faculty, administrators, staff, alumni, religious — all of us come to honor the memory of a great woman, and also to look into the future of this profession and of this school.

Lauretta McCusker was born in Quebec, Canada. Her family lived there until she was eleven years of age when they relocated to Washington, D.C. While a teenager, she spent a memorable year living in Scotland with her family. Foreshadowing her career as a librarian and educator, Sister Lauretta recalled, “It was a wonderful year. I didn’t go to school. I just read countless books and played and explored the place.” Upon returning to the U.S., she received a scholarship to Western Maryland College, majored in English and Library Science, and graduated in 1942. After working as a librarian at Annapolis High School, she enrolled at Columbia University’s School of Library Science where she earned her master’s degree and subsequently her Doctor of Library Science. In 1948, she joined the faculty of Iowa State Teacher’s College (now Northern Iowa University) as an assistant professor. She stayed in Iowa for eleven years, until she entered the Sinsinawa Dominican Order in 1959. Four years later, Sister Lauretta began her career at Rosary College as an associate professor in the Master of Arts in Library Science program.

This evening’s lecture will draw together the past and the future. This is a memorial; the woman whose memory we honor is no longer among us. The world she knew as a child, as an adult woman, and as a librarian is largely behind us. We stand at a transitional time. We stand at the temenos, the entrance, the sacred and special spot that belongs to us and to this
moment. In honor of Sister Lauretta, I would like to spend a few moments reflecting on the history of this institution to which she contributed so much, and in her spirit, I will also offer some thoughts on the future of education for the library and information professions.

**The Past**

To begin, it is useful to review the origins of librarianship and particularly, the educational preparation of librarians. In 1883, Melvil Dewey proposed that a school to prepare librarians to be established at Columbia University. Almost immediately, the American Library Association established a committee to monitor the progress of Dewey's venture, thereby establishing a connection, still strong today, between the academy and the profession. Four years later, Dewey successfully established the School of Library Economy at Columbia University in New York City. The idea of a vocational education to prepare librarians, most of whom were women, began to catch on. In 1900, ALA issued a report calling for more participation in library education, particularly to identify and endorse satisfactory programs. They were there four schools in existence: Albany (formerly at Columbia); Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York; Drexel in Philadelphia; and the Armour Institute in Chicago, later moved to the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. In addition, there were several training programs at large urban public libraries.

The ALA formed a Committee on Library Training, processor to ALA's Committee on Accreditation. In 1909, the ALA moved its headquarters to Chicago, which was fast becoming a thriving library city. The great universities of Chicago were growing, and with them, their libraries. The Newberry Library was founded in 1887. In 1891, the Chicago Library Club was formed, making it the oldest club of its kind.

Despite the early education-related activities of the American Library Association, a tug of war between the profession and the academy developed early on. By 1916, a new organization, the American Association of Library Schools (AALS), had formed as an entity separate and distinct from ALA. It was the AALS, not the ALA, that performed the first "accreditation activities" reviewing schools during the winter of 1914–1915. The standards that were in force were promulgated in 1906, making librarianship one of the first professions to set standards for education for itself. New sets of standards followed on a regular basis since that time — in 1931, 1951, 1972, and 1992.

Not all was well in library education, however. While some of the early library education programs were sound, many were little more than trade schools. In the 1920's, many professions began examining the educational preparation for practice and, seeking to establish and upgrade their profession, invested in education. Charles C. Williamson, an eminent educator and librarian, was commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation to head an
inquiry into the state of library education. That report, known as the “Williamson Report,” resulted in a revision of professional preparation for librarianship and, indirectly at least, in establish of the first graduate library school in the field. Called simply The Graduate Library School, GLS was founded at the University of Chicago in 1926; two years later the first doctoral program was established.

In 1930, Rosary College, a Catholic women’s college in suburban Chicago, established a Department of Library Science which awarded the baccalaureate degree. It was accredited by the American Library Association eight years later. By 1930, then, the state of Illinois had in place the three library schools that have continued throughout most of this century to produce librarians, education, and researchers not only for Chicago and Illinois, but for the nation and the world. (A fourth accredited program was opened at Northern Illinois University in 1970 and discontinued in 1994.) Each of these three institutions — Chicago, Illinois and Rosary — developed its unique signature and profile adapting to the needs of the parent institution, students, and the profession throughout the years.

The special Mission of Rosary College derived from its Catholic and Dominican heritage and the perceived need to provide an opportunity for the Catholic religious, particularly sisters, to obtain knowledge and skills necessary to enter the profession librarianship. The forties and fifties brought with them mounting pressure to provide this education at the graduate level. During this time, Rosary was already involved in what we now call “distance education”; it taught courses at the University of Portland from 1944–1952. Under the leadership of Sr. Peter Claver, the school offered its first master’s degree in 1949, and the master’s program was accredited in 1962. Shortly afterward, Sister Lauretta McCusker, a close associate of Sr. Peter Claver, the school offered its first master’s degree in 1949, and the master’s program was accredited in 1962. Shortly afterward, Sister Lauretta McCusker, a close associate of Sr. Peter Claver, joined the faculty. Dr. William Brace and shortly afterward, Dr. Tze–chung Li joined the faculty. Among the three of them, they represented an international perspective, a focus toward the newly emerging field of information science, and an awareness of the growing importance of the computer to libraries and librarians.

In the expansionist mode of the 1960s, the faculty and student body grew rapidly — doubling and tripling. The curriculum broadened. In 1964, Rosary offered one of the first courses in the uses of data processing in the library. It held the first seminar in the Chicago area on library automation on 18–19 March 1966.

Sr. Lauretta’s studies at Columbia had included a course in Comparative Librarianship. She introduced a similar course at Rosary and taught it for more than twenty years. The course usually attracted a substantial number of students, many of whom later remarked on her ability to help them understand similarities and differences between U.S. libraries and those abroad. Another contribution of Sister Lauretta’s to the curriculum was a course in Planning
and Equipping Libraries. Theses were two of her special interests and they converged in her keen interest in the magnificent libraries under construction for the British Library and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. She followed the work and asked faculty colleagues who had been to London and Paris their views of the buildings. It was her fond but unrealized hope to visit both buildings when they were actually in operation.

When Sr. Lauretta McCusker was named dean of the School of Library Science in 1967, Rosary was poised at the brink of an exciting future. A beautiful new building — the Rebecca Crown Library — was soon to become a reality. A sixth–year certificate program in library science was approved. Rosary began to draw upon the rich resources of Chicago not only for an advisory board, but also for talented adjunct faculty.

In conducting the research for this article, I found yet another instance of early efforts to address issues that face the profession today. In 1973/74 Rosary participated with the American Library Association in a special Minorities Manpower Project funded by the Illinois State Library. Today, similar proposals aimed at recruiting talented minority students tot he profession are in place, drawing upon the diverse and rich talent pool of the Chicago metropolitan area. This synopsis of the history of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science enables us to provide a foundation from which to view the future — not only of the School, but also of professional education in the field of library and information studies.

**The Future**

An increasingly diverse, technological, de–centralized environment calls for a response from the library world. And it is getting a response. Despite a recent article in *Wired* magazine that compared librarians to “primates who escape from subservience to takeover the world,” even skeptics admit that librarians are “crawling out from behind their card catalogs to rule the global datasphere.” While the same magazine proclaimed that the number of graduate degrees in library science “plunged from 8,037 in 1975–76 to 4,845 last year”, a more complete picture emerges when a longer timeline is presented. In a recent *American Libraries* article, this author pointed out that from a low of fewer than 4,000 graduates in 1985, the profession has bounced back to 5,271. This is comparable to the number of graduates produced prior to the expansion of American higher education in the sixties. In 1975–76, the number of graduates peaked, and the number of jobs was small, as graduates of the mid–seventies can attest. The last two decades have been a period of readjustment and calibration as the numbers of graduates are beginning to grow again. The number of individuals selecting ALA–accredited master’s programs for graduate study suggests that this trend is unlikely to reverse itself in the near future. The FTE enrollment in ALA–accredited programs has remained stable over the past few years. In 1992 for example, FTE enrollment
was 8,049; in 1996 it was 8,274. Of perhaps greater interest is the rapid growth in the number of students enrolled in bachelor’s degree programs. In 1992, there were four programs that enrolled 135 students (103 FTE) while in 1996 there were eight programs that enrolled 686 students (600 FTE).

It is interesting to compare Dominican University’s GSLIS with other programs in North America. The average faculty numbers eleven full–time members, about equally divided between men and women. Dominican’s faculty is slightly smaller, with eight — plus one who is jointly appointed by the GSLIS and the School of Business. Faculties are aging; nearly half are between 45 and 54–years–old; at Dominican, the faculty is even grayer, with no faculty under 40 and half over 55 years of age. Like many other schools, the GSLIS will likely be seeing new recruits to its faculty within the foreseeable future.

In 1997, 80 percent of required courses were taught by regular faculty and 20 percent by adjunct faculty nationally, while 68 percent of elective courses were taught by regular faculty, and 32 percent were taught by adjuncts. At Dominican, teaching responsibilities are shared equally by full–time and adjunct faculty. About half the courses in academic year 1996–97 were taught by regular faculty, with the balance of the teaching carried out by a cadre of adjunct faculty. While required courses are taught by full–time faculty, adjuncts are appreciated by students because they bring a “real life” perspective to specialized elective courses. Over–reliance on adjuncts, however, can make it difficult to monitor the quality of instruction, to ensure consistency across courses, and to prevent redundancy and omission in content coverage. The national debate over academic tenure and faculty roles and responsibilities will likely affect LIS education as well. Smaller schools whose primary emphasis is teaching, such as Dominican, may require fewer adjustments than larger, research–oriented institutions.

Schools of library and information science, like all of American higher education, are seeking to deliver their educational programs in locations and with schedules that meet the perceived market demands. Asynchronous, location–independent learning has become routine — all that differs is the modality selected and the skill with which it is designed and delivered. Of the 49 LIS programs in the U.S., 32 offer some form of distance education; 11 of these are location–independent. This number will surely grow, as demand increases and technologies evolve and improve. Faculties will continue to be challenged to adapt their teaching styles to new media.

LIS educators, like teachers in other professions, have realized that most students wear many hats. Few have the luxury of full–time study, but this can benefit both students and educators as faculty frequently that they and the students learn together in a fast–paced, technologically evolving world. Education is increasing recognized as a life–long enterprise, and the line between “professional entry–level education” and continuing professional
education are blurring. Students enroll in classes for a variety of reasons, such as personal growth, professional enhancement, increased compensation, and broadened employment opportunities.

Despite the increasingly diverse and distributed systems of delivery of education, the need to build a community of learning continues. The need for a personal connection and involvement in education can be met in many ways — through student and faculty social activities, through faculty–student colloquia and discussion, and in joint research and study projects. Students are taking more responsibility for their own learning; as faculty, we can build upon that initiative by creating learning situations in which all of us participate in the learning experience, from our own unique and valid perspectives. This is not to shrink our responsibility as intellectual leaders, but to acknowledge that education is a lifelong process, and that knowledge has become so vast and so specialized that no single person can be an authority in an area. Diversity of experience and expertise can enrich and enliven the learning process. This philosophy is grounded in the Dominican tradition that values the ability of the teacher to point to the truth and to actively pursue the truth, but to never to assume that he or she embodies the truth.

The ways in which instruction is delivered affects the formation of learning communities. The "containers" that we have come to know as courses or semesters are being transformed — compressed and expanded, distributed in various ways in response to student needs and in ways that the subject matter allows. More and more faculty engage students in class discussions, in partnerships for study, in class projects and in break-out groups and group projects and presentations. Not all students find it easy to adjust to learning in this way, but increasingly, employers stress the need for new graduates to possess skills that will enable them to lead, to delegate, to motivate, and collaborate in the workplace. Flexible class schedules consisting of compressed intensive courses, weekend college, and modular courses that can be combined to equate to a traditional instructional unit are increasingly popular.

In addition to the need for students and faculty to develop a learning community during professional education, opportunities for practical application of newly acquired knowledge and skills are essential in preparing today's librarians and informational professionals. Although few LIS programs require a practicum of all students, most programs provide an opportunity for students to work in a library or information center under the guidance and supervision of a professional. Students pay tuition and earn academic credit in return. Many students go to school part-time and find that they have neither the time nor the inclination to participate in a practicum. For those who have no library work experience or wish to gain exposure to a different setting or type of work, a practicum is a valuable opportunity. Internships taken concurrently or after graduation, paid or unpaid, for credit or not for credit, also provide valuable enhancements to traditional classroom–based education.
Even the tools of the educational and professional trade are transforming themselves before our very eyes. The work of librarians and information professionals is changing, as the process of creating, organizing, disseminating, and preserving individual and collective knowledge adapts to the digital revolution. The pace of change is so rapid its nature so intense and evasive, that we can no longer approach issues by thinking of translating current operations into digital ones. Rather, we must learn to “think digitally” and “educate digitally,” while retaining the core value of placing the user at the center of our value system.

The supply of applicants into the LIS programs and the number of students graduating from programs has remained stable during the nineties. About the same number enroll as graduate, indicating perhaps that librarians tend to finish what they start. It is worth noting that overall enrollment in LIS programs has increased by about 25 percent when undergraduate and doctoral students are included in the total enrollment figures. While the master’s degree accredited by the American Library Association remains the primary focus of most schools, increasing attention is being paid to developing undergraduate majors and minors, and to post–master’s study, either for a post–master’s certificate or simply as a collection of courses. Significant concentrations in archives or information science, for example, may be developed within the master’s degree as a “track.” Some schools are also bringing forward additional degrees for accreditation by the ALA, such as a master’s degree in information science. In concluding this reflection, it is fitting to draw upon the reading that was shared earlier this evening from the Book of Wisdom. It is a fine memorial to a woman whose life touched the lives of many, and whole life inspired those of us who pursue a vision for the ongoing health and vitality of library and information science.

She who dwells in wisdom in “fairer than the sun and surpasses every constellation of the stars.” Compared to light, she takes precedence. Wickedness prevails not over wisdom. Wisdom reaches from end to end mightily and governs all things well.

References


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About the Author

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Historians study the past. We try to understand events that have already taken place in their appropriate historical contexts and are rightfully wary of the danger that presentism will distort our analysis. In contrast, most people care primarily about the future. After giving a talk to a general audience, historians are used to being asked only about the implications of our work for the future. We tend to be reluctant to answer with tangible predictions knowing from our workaday immersion in the materials of the past that predictions are almost invariably wrong. So historians leave the future... Military history is littered with mistaken predictions about the future of warfare that have left forecasters militarily unprepared—sometimes disastrously so—for the conflicts ahead. The United States has suffered its own share of bad predictions. "When it comes to predicting the nature and location of our next military engagements, since Vietnam, our record has been perfect. We have never gotten it right, from the Mayagüez to Grenada, Panama, Somalia, the Balkans, Haiti, Kuwait, Iraq, and more—"we had no idea a year before any of those missions that we would be so engaged." U.S. Secr