The Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE): Past, present, future

Heidi Julien  
School of Library & Information Studies, University of Alberta, 3-20 Rutherford South, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2J4  
Tel.: +1 780 492 3934; Fax: +1 780 492 2430; E-mail: heidi.julien@ualberta.ca

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The Association for Library and Information Science (ALISE) is now over 90 years old. Recently recommitted to a focus on research in library and information science teaching and pedagogy, and support for educators in the field, ALISE serves its members with a range of publications, awards, and services. Membership is strong and conference attendance is relatively high. Content analysis of the Association journal, the *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, indicates consistency with ALISE goals. One potential area of growth is internationalization; ALISE membership, leadership and journal content reflect a North American bias.

1. Introduction

The Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) has existed in official form since 1915. Thus, in 2005 the Association celebrated the 90th anniversary of its founding. The “official” history of ALISE, posted on the Association website (www.alise.org) states:

“The Association now known as the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) was founded as the Association of American Library Schools. The original association grew out of a series of informal meetings of library school faculty at American Library Association conferences which was known as the Round Table of Library School Instructors. The Round Table voted in 1915 to form a permanent organization and to be identified as the Association of American Library Schools. The Association has provided a forum for library educators to share ideas, to discuss issues, and to seek solutions to common problems. In 1983, the Association changed its name to its present form to reflect more accurately the mission, goals, and membership of the Association.”

More detailed histories of the Association have been recorded by Summers [1] and Davis [2]. ALISE has been led by presidents representing schools of library and information science education, as well as libraries, from all over the United States. In addition, Canada has contributed two presidents from the University of Toronto, one from Dalhousie University, and one from the University of British Columbia.
There have been no presidents from outside North America. The leadership reflects the Association’s focus on North America, despite openness to international participation. The ALISE journal, the *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* (JELIS), has actively invited and published work which represents international perspectives and describes initiatives in library and information science education globally. These efforts represent some limited success in moving toward a more global focus for ALISE.

2. ALISE focus

The current ALISE Strategic Plan, drafted by ALISE President Ken Haycock (2005–2006) and approved by the membership at the Annual Conference in 2005, outlines the vision, mission, and enduring purpose of the organization:

2.1. *Our vision*

By 2008, ALISE will be the visionary organization in Library and Information Science education. The Association will be known for its unique purpose, build its strength and communicate that strength through vision, voice and visibility.

2.2. *Our mission*

ALISE promotes excellence in research, teaching and service for Library and Information Science educators through leadership, collaboration, advocacy and dissemination of research.

2.3. *Our enduring purpose*

ALISE promotes research that informs the scholarship of teaching and learning for Library and Information Science, enabling members to integrate research into teaching and learning.

In 1989 the ALISE membership approved the following mission: Promote excellence in research, teaching, and service for library and information science education [3]. Thus, the fundamental mission of ALISE did not change over that 15-year period.

The current vision, mission, and purpose statements are intended to guide ALISE decision-making, particularly in conference planning, support for research projects, and recognition of individuals who have served LIS education with distinction.

The ALISE Board has recently attempted to strengthen the focus of ALISE interests on issues directly related to LIS education in order to reflect the fundamental purpose of the organization. Recent additions to the ALISE website include a statement on “Research in LIS Pedagogy”, accompanied by
a list of relevant research questions related to LIS teaching and pedagogy (http://www.alise.org/awards/research_statement.html). This statement is intended to encourage research relating to the mission of ALISE. The annual ALISE Research Grant competition also is intended to support research related to LIS education. The 2007 Research Grant was won by Eileen Abels and Denise Agosto (Drexel University) and Lorri Mon (The Florida State University) for “Remote Reference in Practice and the Classroom.”

3. Membership

Membership in ALISE is open to any individual who shares the Association’s objectives, and institutional memberships are open to schools of LIS education. Membership figures appear to be at an all-time high; at the time of writing in early 2007, ALISE membership included 62 institutional members, three institutional affiliate members, one international institutional affiliate member, and 774 personal members. Member benefits include a subscription to the Journal of Library and Information Science Education (JELIS), which was started as Journal of Education of Librarianship in 1960. JELIS is published quarterly and its scope is noted on the ALISE website: “JELIS is a scholarly journal that serves as a forum for discussion and presentation of research and issues within the field of library and information science (LIS) education” [4]. A Statistical Report is also published by ALISE, providing data about institutional members’ programs of LIS education. A Directory of LIS Programs and Faculty and a Membership Directory also are published regularly. The ALISE website provides a listing of open teaching and leadership positions in LIS education. An ALISE members’ listserv complements the longstanding JESSE listserv for LIS education, providing a forum for discussion of issues relating to LIS education and posting job opportunities in the field. An ALISE newsletter has appeared irregularly on the website, although a new commitment to produce a periodic newsletter recently has been made. Another ALISE initiative has been an Education Pavilion, which is set up in the Exhibit area of the Annual Conference of the American Library Association (ALA) (typically held in June of each year). The Pavilion provides an opportunity for the Association and its institutional members to display marketing material and answer queries from conference attendees. In addition, the Pavilion typifies the Association’s longstanding relationship with the ALA, a particularly important sister organization in part because the ALA’s Committee on Accreditation accredits the educational programs at schools of library and information science in North America. The International Federation of Library Associations is another sister organization with which ALISE has had a longstanding relationship.

4. ALISE organization

ALISE is led by a seven-member Board of Directors; each Board member has responsibility for leadership and liaison in a particular area of Association manage-
ment. The Board is assisted in its administrative work by a series of committees made up of personal ALISE members. Currently ALISE is managed by an Executive Director, Kathleen Combs, and team of assistants, who are headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. In addition, ALISE has a network of representatives, one from each LIS school, who provide primary institutional liaison with the Association. As is typical for non-profit associations everywhere, the organization’s activities depend heavily on the volunteer efforts of many members. ALISE is no exception, and the membership as a whole benefits tremendously from the hard work of many individuals who are dedicated to the ALISE mission.

ALISE has promulgated several position papers and policy statements; currently a statement on Information Ethics for LIS Education is under consideration by the Association. Special Interest Groups (SIGs) within ALISE include those devoted to particular roles and responsibilities (such as the Doctoral Students SIG), some focused on teaching and learning (such as the Curriculum SIG), and some focused on particular subject areas (such as the Youth Services SIG). SIGs are formed around the common interests of ALISE members and frequently sponsor annual conference sessions, such as panel discussions.

5. ALISE annual conference

The Annual Conference is the most visible benefit for ALISE members. The Conference includes juried papers, plenary speakers of international reputation, panel discussions, and dozens of informal interviews between job seekers and employers. From the perspective of doctoral students in LIS, and programs seeking new faculty members, the interviewing process that occurs during the conference is of primary importance. Deans and directors of LIS schools and programs also meet at the conference to explore shared challenges. Typically the Conference is held just prior to the mid-winter American Library Association (ALA) Conference, and in the same host city. This connection provides opportunities for educators to make efficient use of conference time, and is a logical choice because of the longstanding and mutually beneficial relationship between these sister organizations.

At the annual conference ALISE presents several annual awards recognizing service, teaching, and research contributions. The Association also sponsors a grant to send one or two deserving doctoral students to the Annual Conference. One research competition which has received significant attention in the decade since its inception is the Doctoral Students’ Poster Competition, which provides an opportunity for doctoral students in LIS to present their research in poster form to the annual ALISE conference. The poster forum provides a unique opportunity for doctoral students, many of whom attend the ALISE Conference for preliminary interviews with prospective employers (i.e., LIS education programs), to show off their dissertation research, to chat with LIS educators, and to meet prominent researchers in the field.
One indicator of the current focus of ALISE is the relative proportion of annual conference presentations that relate directly to the purpose of the organization. In 2006 the Conference theme was “From Research to Practice: The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in LIS Education.” Of 25 juried papers accepted for presentation at that Conference, 18 (72%) could reasonably be said to contribute to the enduring purpose of the organization. Of course, other Conference programs, such as plenary talks and panel discussions organized by Special Interest Groups, may or may not directly address ALISE goals. In 2005, the Conference theme was “Boundary Crossings: LIS Education in a Global Context.” At that Conference, 15 of 25 juried paper presentations (60%) were clearly related to the stated purpose of ALISE. At the 2004 Conference, admittedly organized prior to the new strategic vision for ALISE, the overall theme was “Declaration of Interdependence: Connecting Researchers and Practitioners.” Eight out of 22 (36%) juried papers were related to the current ALISE goals. This relatively low proportion clearly points to the need for increased focus for the organization, which motivated the 2004 vision and mission statements.

6. Journal of education for library and information science

Another representation of the Association and its focus is evident in its official journal, JELIS. In order to examine the consistency between the mission of ALISE and its journal, a content analysis was done of JELIS articles in issues from volume 37 (1997) to volume 47 (2006), and results are reported here. The temporal limits were selected for convenience only, to examine trends over the past decade. Variables analyzed include: article type, first author’s affiliation, implied subject (LIS faculty, students, librarians, paraprofessionals), and primary subject matter (ALISE as an organization, continuing education, curriculum, distance education, international issues, JELIS, perceptions, professional identity, teaching methods, and technology). Subject matter was not treated as mutually exclusive, so articles were coded for up to three primary subjects. In addition, historical approaches and application of theoretical frameworks were identified. All these variables were derived inductively from reading the set of articles included in the analysis, so the range of subjects represented are those evident in the sample. A complete list of the variables and values can be found in the Appendix. A subset of articles was analyzed by two independent coders to achieve definitional and coding agreement before the analyses were done by both coders.

In total, 352 articles (as defined in the Appendix) were identified in the data set. The most common type of article published in JELIS within the time frame of the analysis was feature articles, representing 45% \( (n = 159) \) of journal content. The second most common article \( (21%, n = 74) \) were papers published in JELIS Series. There were three main series: Continuing Education, International Library Education, and “The Visible College”. Articles appeared under these banners several times a year but not necessarily in every single issue. Conference papers accounted
for 14% \( (n = 49) \) of articles, book reviews for 10% \( (n = 36) \) and editorials for 6% \( (n = 22) \) of journal content.

First authors of articles were largely affiliated with North American institutions \( (80\%, n = 282) \), consistent with the North American focus of the ALISE leadership and membership, and not too different from the results of an earlier study of JELIS [5]. The implied subject of articles, or whom the article primarily discusses, included LIS faculty \( (35\%, n = 122) \), students \( (20\%, n = 69) \) and librarians \( (10\%, n = 35) \). Thus, the journal represents a bias towards faculty members as people of interest, an outcome consistent with the Association membership and focus.

The most prevalent topic or subject matter represented in the data set was curriculum \( (e.g., \text{course and program content}) \) \( (29\%, n = 102) \); again, this result is consistent with ALISE goals. LIS competencies was the second most prevalent subject \( (16\%, n = 55) \). In descending order of proportional representation, the following subjects were also evident: international issues and contexts \( (15\%, n = 54) \), continuing education \( (13\%, n = 44) \), distance education \( (10\%, n = 35) \), ALISE as an organization \( (8\%, n = 29) \), and the journal JELIS itself \( (5\%, n = 18) \). Thus, JELIS content demonstrates a relatively minor interest in global issues, which is consistent with the journal’s editorial board membership: only a single member of the board was affiliated with an institution outside of North America during the period analyzed.

Journal content relating to perceptions or opinions of LIS faculty, students, or librarians constituted 40% \( (n = 138) \) of the data set, making that type of data relatively commonly represented in the journal. Discussions of professional identity were also well represented, evident in 23% \( (n = 80) \) of the articles. Teaching methods, an area that could be expected to be of significant interest to the JELIS readership, were discussed in 20% \( (n = 70) \) of the sample. Technology was a focus of interest in 15% \( (n = 52) \) of articles. Forty-six articles \( (13\%) \) had an historical focus. Only 10% \( (n = 34) \) of articles could be classified as having a theoretical framework. That finding is disappointing in light of other research that highlights the need for more theory use in LIS [6]. There were no discernable longitudinal trends, except that the feature articles published in the earlier years of the sample represented a closer fit to the journal’s stated scope; this impression is qualitative in nature.

7. Conclusions

As an organization ALISE is flourishing, with a renewed focus and strong membership numbers. There is continuing interest in the annual conference and the efforts made there to recognize and reward outstanding research and service, as well as excellent doctoral student work. Job seekers value the ALISE conference for the opportunity to meet program representatives with open faculty positions, and attendees value the chance to discuss curriculum and pedagogy. Opportunity does exist, however, in the area of internationalization. Association membership, leadership, and focus in the Association’s journal, could all benefit from increasing attention to
a more global orientation. There is no logical geographical limit to ALISE goals; conceptually these are relevant across borders. However, progress is likely to take proactive effort on the part of ALISE, and perhaps demonstrable concern on the part of the international LIS community.

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Appendix: JELIS Content Analysis Variables and Values

Article Type
- 1 Feature Article (Non-Conference, Non-Series, includes Research Studies)
- 2 ALISE Conference Paper (as identified within the journal)
- 3 Editorial
- 4 Book Review
- 5 Paper published in JELIS Series

Author’s Place of Work (first author only)
- 1 Within North America
- 2 Not within North America

Implied Subject (whom the article primarily discusses)
- 1 LIS Faculty (including LIS educators and/or researchers)
- 2 Students (including current or prospective students in LIS programs; also includes non-LIS students)
- 3 Librarians (including alumni of LIS programs)
- 4 Non-librarian library staff (includes paraprofessionals)
- 5 No implied subject

SUBJECT MATTER(one to three subjects only)

ALISE
Definition: the Association for Library and Information Science Education. Articles in this category may discuss the history or evolution of ALISE, or any activities relating to ALISE such as the annual conference, meetings, administration, etc.
- 1 Yes
Competencies
Definition: skills; “a capacity or capability”\(^1\); this would also include, but is not limited to, the concepts of “admission requirements” and “program requirements” in relation to LIS students. This category also includes skills and capacities of all professionals and paraprofessionals in LIS-related fields, such as faculty and librarians.

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Continuing Education
Definition: “the philosophy underlying continuing education is that real learning is a lifelong process and embraces a wide range of experiences.” A synonym for continuing education would be “lifelong learning.” This category includes all ongoing training and professional development of librarians, library staff, and LIS faculty.

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Curriculum
Definition: “a predetermined [... ] range of instructional activities”; for example, the required content of LIS courses and programs. This category would include discussions of curriculum change, evolution, or course specialization.

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Distance Education
Definition: “home study based on the correspondence course” model. Sometimes referred to as “remote education.”

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

International
Definition: any LIS or LIS-related activities not within North America. May include case studies of “how things are done” around the world. May also include surveys comparing different international contexts, or comparing an international context to a North American context.

\(^1\) All quoted definitions here have been taken from *The Dictionary of Educational Terms* by David Blake and Vincent Hanley; Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1995.
JELIS
Definition: the *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*. Articles in this category may discuss the history of JELIS, its contents, its readership, or anything else that is journal-focused.
- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Perceptions
Definition: includes any of the following: personal interpretations, insights and reflections of study participants, students, faculty, librarians, or library staff. This category also includes editorializing, such as by authors of articles.
- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Professional Identity
Definition: the means and factors by which LIS educators, students, or professionals are defined as such; includes changes to these definitions. This category also includes population-related changes and concerns within LIS and librarianship generally, such as diversity, recruitment, retirement, and role specialization.
- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Teaching Method
Definition: “the way in which a teacher organizes the classroom, instruction, and children so as to promote learning.” This category includes instructional strategies, classroom management, facilitation, lesson planning, and anything else relating to how instructors implement curriculum requirements in any learning environment.
- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Technology
Definition: this category includes all technology-focused topics, including but not limited to instructional technology, communications technology, and library technologies such as databases, catalogues, and digital reference tools.
- 1 Yes
THE ARTICLE’S APPROACH (An article may employ an approach from beginning to end, or just in some sections.)

**Historical**
Definition: the application of an historical lens in order to examine an issue or generate insights.

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

**Theoretical**
Definition: the application of theoretical frameworks to a real-life situation or study population in order to generate insights; for example, chaos theory, discourse analysis theory, minimalist theory.

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

**References**