I’ve Got My MLIS, Now What? Further Educational Opportunities for LIS Professionals

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Abstract

After five plus years of post-secondary study, most MLIS/MSLIS graduates are happy to wave goodbye to their student days but may find that more education is needed to land that all-important first professional position. Mid- and near-end career library and information science professionals realize that continuing education is an effective way to move forward on the career track and to stay relevant in the field but may see a return to school as frightening, time-consuming and expensive. With time, location and cost in mind, the authors explore degree, college, workshop, volunteer and international opportunities for further education in information science and related fields. Their personal experience informs their research, as one has held a CEO position in a multi-branch public library for over twenty years, and the other, with over a decade of public library experience, has just completed her MSLIS. This article will discuss specific programs available for professional development as well as provide resources with which to explore additional opportunities.

Keywords

continuing education; professional development; career development; distance education; online education; librarians; library and information science

Introduction

Having trouble trying to land that all-important first professional job? Mid-career and wanting a change and/or upward mobility options? Senior staff but feeling the need to stay up to date in the field? Further education is an ideal way to meet these needs. As a profession that espouses the value of life-long education, it only makes sense that we apply this value to ourselves. This article will give you a brief sampling of the many options available. The rest is up to you!
Before stepping out into the educational void there are a number of considerations you will need to review.

1) What do you want to accomplish through further education?
2) What financial commitment are you willing to make?
3) Where is the educational facility of your choice located – do you have to attend physically?
4) How much time can you devote to further your education?

There are a number of educational alternatives to consider: universities (Canada, international), colleges (community and private), adult learning centres, conferences/workshops, employer-arranged training opportunities, volunteering and mentoring. These alternatives offer a range of options including: degrees, diplomas, certificates, individual courses, workshops, webinars, conferences and volunteer placements.

**Degree Options**

If you are considering augmenting your current skill set with another advanced degree, there are many possibilities beyond the MBA and Executive MBA (several of which are now offered on weekends and online). Key examples of opportunities for professional development include San Jose State University’s [Gateway PhD in Library and Information Science](http://example.com) with Queensland University of Technology – this is an online degree (two weeks residency required each year) that can be taken part-time. Royal Roads University offers a [Doctor of Social Sciences](http://example.com) intended for working professionals with blended start dates. There are a number of Canadian universities that offer a distance and in-class Honours BA in social work. And of course, there are many MA and MSc degrees in subject areas that may appeal to you that are available locally or by distance. The University of Guelph, for example, has an [MA (Leadership) Program](http://example.com) that can be completed online (with an on-campus residential component).

**Diploma/Certificate Programs**

Diploma and certificate programs may also meet your specific needs. Examples of educational opportunities in these areas include the following: the University of Ottawa’s [Graduate Diploma in Information Studies](http://example.com), the University of Victoria which offers a [Graduate Professional Certificate in Library Sector Leadership](http://example.com) (minimum entrance requirement is a BA, MA preferred) which is delivered online with some on-campus work, and a fairly new opportunity provided by the Southern Ontario Library Services and the University of Waterloo which have teamed up to provide a certificate in [Advancing Public Library Leadership](http://example.com). This program is also primarily online with group intensive sessions each spring and fall. The [University of Toronto iSchool Institute](http://example.com) also offers certificate programs relevant to our field.
Maybe you don’t feel the need for a full program to get you where you need to go. The University of Toronto iSchool Institute also has a wealth of continuing education offerings both in class and online. San Jose State University offers a Post-Master’s Certificate on-line. The University of the Fraser Valley has a Library Technician Post-Diploma Certificate.

**Individual Courses**

Interested in just perusing courses for free? Good examples of free educational opportunities include the open courses online from Harvard Extension School and MIT. Dalhousie University’s Continuing Education department has a Brown Bag Lunch series and an Information Management Public Lecture Series if you are in the vicinity. Community colleges offering Library Techniques diplomas, such as Mohawk College, may allow MLIS grads the opportunity to take some of their courses. If you feel that you could use an update in some areas, why not enroll?

And of course, don’t forget MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). They are free, although you can upgrade to a pay-for-course option that will give you a completion certificate that has more clout in the market place. San Jose State University and the Syracuse University School of Information Studies are both offering library and information science related MOOCs this year. If your community has an adult learning centre or an alternative high school you may be able to pick up courses relative to your interests.

**Researching Opportunities**

But how do you find the programs/courses you might be interested in? First, turn to your professional associations and listservs. They often have this information readily accessible for would-be learners. Next, peruse the Association of University and Colleges of Canada’s website which allows you to search by university name or program subject. The Ontario Colleges website provides the same information for publicly funded colleges in Ontario. Also try these websites: canadian-universities.net, Canadian Virtual University, and the Education Institute. For Ontario MLIS grads, try Southern Ontario Library Service or Ontario Library Service – North. These crown agencies were set up by the provincial government to serve the needs of public libraries in Ontario, and their websites include information on educational opportunities in their geographic areas as well as ones they offer themselves.

**Other Opportunities**

Want to go a little farther afield in terms of subjects and educational venues without ever leaving home? Try the University of the Arctic or the University of the Highlands and Islands. The University of the Arctic is a network of universities and research institutions in the Circumpolar North. Many of these offer courses through the University of the Arctic, but the University of the Arctic itself is not a
degree granting institution. The University of The Highlands and Islands is located in Scotland. It has thirteen colleges and more than seventy local learning centres – or you can take courses online! And yes, don’t forget the many MBA programs out there. Trinity Western University’s MBA program has an option to specialize in non-profit management.

If time, cash and travel are very limited, consider volunteering locally. Volunteering can give you a new perspective, valuable skills and important contacts. Mentorship may be another option. Check out your provincial/regional library association to see if they have mentorship opportunities. If they don’t, advocate for the initiation of this important educational possibility.

This article has concentrated primarily on distance education opportunities because so many of us are not in a position to give up our day jobs to improve our marketability. In many parts of the country, distance and online education are the only ways we can connect with post-secondary education and library and information sector training without an exorbitant amount of time spent commuting. There may be options closer to home. Some universities and colleges will teach programs and courses off-campus at facilities in other communities. The emphasis on educational opportunities in Ontario in this article is a bias the authors recognize. Despite the fact that one of us just completed a MSLIS from Syracuse University in New York State, we do have a tendency to focus on the province in which we live and work. Please do not let this deter you from further exploring opportunities in your own province or territory. And when you hit on the educational option best for you, drop us a line and let us know!