Equivalency and Reciprocity of Qualifications for LIS Professionals in a Web 2.0 Environment

Anna Maria Tammaro, Parma University, Parma, Italy.
Email: annamaria.tammaro@unipr.it

Terry L. Weech, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, Illinois. 61820 USA.
Email: weech@illinois.edu

Abstract: In the age of Web 2.0 and globalization of information, the challenge of information professionals included the determination of equivalent educational experiences as professionals move more freely in the international information environment. Reciprocity of degrees among recognized LIS education program is one possible solution, but the establishment of an international program of reciprocity has been difficult up to this time. The authors discuss the background of efforts over a 30 year period to develop acceptable guidelines for international equivalency and reciprocity of qualifications for LIS professionals by IFLA and other library interests. The challenges of the latest IFLA effort our detailed and options provided in a 2.0 web environment are explored. The possibility that applying the principles of interactivity of the web in the 21st Century to provide a solution to the equivalency and reciprocity problem are analyzed and specific proposal are presented for discussion. The results of surveys of library education professionals are presented and specific proposal for the future are outlined.

Key Subject Words: Web 2.0, LIS Education, Reciprocity, Equivalency, Professional Qualifications.

Background:

Prior to the 21st Century and the development of Web 2.0 technology and culture, There is a long history of efforts to develop procedures and provide guidance in assessing the equivalency of educational qualifications for professional librarians and reciprocity of degree and certificate programs across national borders. Much of this work has been done by library organizations and associations in countries with long standing degree and training programs for professional librarians and other information professionals. The United States, Canada, and the U.K. have been in the forefront of many of these efforts.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) through its Section on Education and Training began discussing the issue of equivalence and reciprocity of LIS degrees and qualifications in 1977. (Harbo and Bowden, 2004, p. 2) These early efforts to establish guidelines for equivalence included consultation with ICA (International Council on Archives) and FID (The International Federation for Information and Documentation) FID of course, no longer exists. The ICA is still active. (http://www.ica.org/) But the attempts to establish guidelines and implement procedures proved to be elusive.

Between 1977 when the issue was first introduced in the Education and Training Section of IFLA and 1987, the topic did appear as part of discussions in the meetings of the Section's Standing Committee. After ten years of such discussions, a working group was established and developed the following recommendations in 1987:

I. Adopt the Unesco standards of Level and Length of Programs for LIS education.

   Primary and secondary level, generally of 11-12 years total

   Tertiary level (Undergraduate level) of 3-4 years after secondary level

   Post-tertiary level (Graduate or post-graduate level

It was recognized that professional LIS education would be at the tertiary and/or post-tertiary level in most countries.

II. Course and Program Content would be based on specified topics such as appear in the current IFLA Education and Training Section Guidelines for LIS Programs. While recognizing that the IFLA developed *International Guide to Library and Information Science Education (The 1995 edition was entitled World Guide to Library, Archive, and Information Science Education)* would assist in determining the content of specific programs, the Working Group did make three specific "final recommendations"

   1. To install an International Committee of Experts for the assessment of LIS education on advisory basis;

   2. To develop an International Resource Center for relevant information on LIS education;

   3. To endorse the national and international recognition of LIS professional qualifications, and to promote the professional status of librarians and information scientists in all countries.

The working group also presented a "model form" for use in assessing LIS education. The form was intended to be used in conjunction with the information provided in the *International Guide* and was designed to be completed by individuals and their LIS educational institution for those seeking recognition of their LIS degrees or certificates in other countries. There is no evidence that any of these recommendations were adopted or implemented nor any history of the use of the recommended forms by IFLA or any other organizations. This fact is confirmed in a 25 June, 2007 communication with Josephine Fang, in which she reported that "… after checking with Edith Fischer of Austria, we agreed that the recommendations had only been verbally discussed, but no formal further action was taken." (Fang, 2007). Thus the most significant prior attempt to establish guidelines for equivalency and reciprocity in LIS qualifications ended without any action on the part of IFLA.

In 1991, Josephine Fang and Paul Nauta summarized the contributions of IFLA to LIS education. (Fang and Nauta, 1991). This article reviewed the events in the 1980s

and again emphasized the importance of the *International Guide* as a tool to be used in conjunction with the 1987 "Guidelines to Equivalence and Reciprocity of Professional Qualifications." The development of the forms for establishing equivalency of degrees was also noted. But no examples of implementation of any of the recommendations in the 1987 could be found in the literature review for this paper. The article did announce the plans by the Education and Training Section to issued a revised and expanded edition of the *International Guide* which was eventually published in 1995 under the title *World Guide to Library, Archive and Information Science Education* (Fang, et. al. 1995)

In his 1994 Paper, Ole Harbo reviews the functions of the European Association for Library and Information Education and Research (EUCLID) and suggests that this organization might be the appropriate regional organization to oversee the determination of the equivalence of professional qualifications in the LIS field. (Harbo, 1994. p 3)

In Denmark in 1997, the IFLA Education and Training Section workshop had the theme of "Equivalencies and Harmonization of Library and Information Degrees" and was held at the Royal School of Library and Information Science. Contributors included Aira Lepik (Estonia), Brown and Pollack (US), Greene (Australia) and Banranababi (Iran). The Lepik and Brown and Pollack papers were specifically on the theme of equivalencies and the other two papers are not available in the proceedings. (Harbo and Bowden, 2004, p. 14)

In "An Investigation of LIS Qualifications Throughout the World," Dalton and Levinson reported in 2000 on a study at an IFLA's Education and Training section program on LIS qualifications worldwide. The stated goal was to increase international parity of LIS qualifications to facilitate international mobility of LIS professionals. The paper presented details three possible approaches to establishing international parity of LIS professional qualifications.

1) A database of national accreditation criteria by national library associations

2) International expansion of the existing NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) service in the EU

3) A detailed database of LIS course content and duration of the course work for each LIS education institution in the world.

The first approach, the database of national accreditation criteria, proved impractical since it was discovered that most of the world did not have accreditation criteria specifically for LIS education. Turning to the second approach, the expansion of the existing NARIC service internationally, Dillon and Levinson concluded that since NARIC is limited to only EU countries, to expand the database internationally would be an overwhelming task. And even if accomplished, it would only provide "generic" equivalencies between countries and would not meet the needs of those countries, such as the UK and USA, that have professional accreditation of programs or courses. As to the third approach, the development of an international database of course titles and content to provide the basis for assessment of specific LIS education programs, the researchers concluded that further investigation would be necessary to determine

its feasibility. They noted the challenges of keeping such a database current as well as the recognition that most countries do not have library associations that oversee the quality of LIS education programs. These facts were seen as significant barriers to the realization of the third proposed approach. (Dalton and Levinson, 2000)

Dalton and Levinson conclude their 2000 report with the note that they were continuing their investigations and collecting further information from professional organizations concerning the individual system of LIS education and professional recognition and qualifications. But communications with Dalton indicate that they did not follow up with further research (Dalton, 2007)

In 2004, Wallace Koehler presented an international review of cooperative organizations for LIS schools as background for the possible establishment of LISNET-ECS (a LIS Network for LIS programs in eastern, Central, and Southern Africa. He noted the need for international as well as national standards or equivalencies for qualifications for professional librarians. His paper provides a review of regional and national organizations and associations that are involved with promoting communication and cooperation among LIS programs, ranging from ALISE in the U.S. and Canada, EUCLID in the EU, and the AIESI (*Association Internationale des Écoles des Sciences de l'Information*) in Europe and Africa. But one organization that specifically attempted to establish an international network of schools of library and information science was SLISNET (Schools of Library and Information Science NETwork) This project was funded by UNESCO. The organizational meeting was held in 1995. The formal proposal did not specifically mention the role of establishing equivalency and reciprocity mechanisms. It did list as one of its proposed activities the establishment of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (http://www.enssib.fr/autres-sites/SLISNET/concpapen.htm, paragraph, 3.3.7)

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms could certainly be a foundation for eventual equivalency determination. Unfortunately, SLISNET has been inactive since the late 1990s and in a 2001 article, Ian Johnson indicated that "…UNESCO's SLISNET project appears to have stalled, partly because of linguistic and cultural barriers, and partly because UNESCO lacked the funds and political will to sustain it, but perhaps also because most of the prospective participants had never met each other and therefore lacked confidence in using the system." (Johnson, 2001, p. 3)

In 2007, Michael Dowling of the International Relations Office of the American Library Association reviewed international credentialing from the perspective of the American Library Association. Dowling called for IFLA to identify accrediting agencies for LIS programs in each country so libraries could determine degrees and/or credentials that are equivalent to ALA accredited degrees. Of course, as we know from the above literature review, the challenge is that few countries outside those in the Anglo-American tradition have an organization or national body that has the responsibility to recognize LIS education programs.
http://www.ala.org/ala/ourassociation/governingdocs/policymanual/librarypersonnel.htm
Accessed 22 May, 2007.

Quality Assurance of LIS education and training programs is, of course, an essential component of any guidelines for equivalency and reciprocity. The assumptions in

much of the research analyzed to this point seems to be that the assurance of quality can be assessed using existing measures, such as established accreditation or certification, or by reviewing the course content and length of instruction of educational programs. But some have noted the limitation to these assumptions, namely that only a few countries, and primarily those in the Anglo-American tradition of education, have formal and recognized accreditation or certification systems for LIS professional qualifications.

Anna Maria Tammaro completed her study of Quality Assurance models in LIS programs in 2005. She concluded that learning outcomes could be a critical indicator of quality of LIS programs. She specifically recommended that a benchmarking system be established by sharing best experiences of LIS schools creating benchmarks to assess quality through a peer review process She also suggested a second approach linking quality assurance of LIS education to the assessment of LIS programs by professionals who successfully completed the courses at each school. (Tammaro, 2005, p. 19)

Ambiguities are not lacking either for the learning outcomes approach as a whole. Learning outcomes has been represented as a paradigm shift from the traditional modes of measuring and expressing learning, characterised as input approaches (with emphasis on the number of teaching hours and the sum of resources), to output focused techniques using learning outcomes and competencies. The learning outcome approach focuses attention on explicit and detailed statements of what students learn: the skills, understanding and abilities the course seeks to develop and then test. In practice it is not clear what the learning outcomes subject to evaluation are, and hence it is not easy to decide how they can be measured.

It should be noted that when speaking of the outcomes that students ought to demonstrate at the end of a course, the concepts frequently remain vague and confused. The main reason for the confusion appears to be due to the two different approaches that can be pursued. In the first approach the learning outcomes are understood as skills. These are based on the lists compiled either by employers or by many professional associations. Such lists, however, do not contemplate the disciplinary knowledge or the ethics of the librarian. They are, moreover, subject to continual change. This approach to learning outcomes is linked to the problem of professional recognition and the accumulation of the various credits comprising those related to formal learning and university training. In this approach the learning outcomes are linked to professional levels or grades and the knowledge or skills required for each level. In another approach the learning outcomes are understood as the result of a training process. In this case they are based on theories of learning, and the definition is linked in particular to Bloom's learning taxonomy (Bloom 1964). The second approach is that pursued by the educators.

There are limits to using learning outcomes as a measure of Quality Assurance for LIS educational programs. Not the least of the challenges is developing a list of core competencies that can be agreed on internationally. But it is the conclusion of this study that learning outcomes should be investigated as a means of establishing Quality Assurance when determining the feasibility of guidelines for equivalency and reciprocity of LIS Professional Qualifications.

Based on this review of the background of dealing with Equivalency and Reciprocity of LIS Qualifications, it is clear that what is lacking is a uniform basis of assessing equivalent degrees internationally. For a small number of countries maintaining LIS education in the Anglo-American model, there are organizations and/or national bodies that provide a basis for making some comparisons and assessments. But for most of the rest of the world, there are no organizations or national bodies that take on this responsibility. The question remains, what is the feasibility of developing some form of procedures or guidelines that will be applicable internationally? The establishment of an international database of course content and assessment measures does not seem sustainable in terms of the time and expense that would be required to establish it and maintain it over time.

That leaves us trying to determine what measures would be acceptable for reciprocity of degrees in those countries that have formal accreditation or credentialing programs and what would be acceptable in those countries that have no such formal process of accreditation or credentialing in place. In an attempt to determine what would be acceptable, a survey of LIS educators was undertaken.

Survey of LIS Education Professionals:

In 2007 and 2008 the authors developed a survey that was distributed to LIS education professionals internationally. The purpose of the survey was:

- To determine acceptable criteria and procedures for establishing equivalency and reciprocity of LIS Professional Qualifications

- To determine best measures of quality assurance of LIS educational programs in the judgement of LIS professionals and LIS faculty worldwide.

In addition, it was hoped that the responses would provide an indication of the feasibility of establishing the three 1987 IFLA Education and Training section recommendations that are listed above in this paper.

Information was also gathered that was intended to assess the preferences for quality assurance procedures for LIS programs:

1. A Peer review team of LIS Professionals and Faculty to select best experiences Benchmarks of LIS Professional Education Best Practice

2. A database of LIS Professionals survey results of the programs where they have taken courses

      Student evaluation of learning experience

      Employer evaluation of employee learning outcomes

      Exams used to assess student learning outcomes.

What should be the basis of assessing learning outcomes?

Core course content as specified in IFLA standards?

Employer established first day on the job criteria?

How much is each of these options worth paying for (Contingent Value)

The survey was conducted by email. The resources of the Education and Training Section of IFLA were utilized to facilitate the data gathering.

In addition, two focus groups have been held: the first in September 2007 at a conference on LIS education in Lisbon, Portugal, and the second during a European regional workshop organised in Zadar, Croatia, in January 2008.

The authors recognize that the low response rate from US and Asia and the lack of response from any of the LIS educators from Africa limit the ability to generalize from the results, but we present the findings here for review and discussion.

Responses on Professional qualifications

Most of the respondents indicated that the most common first professional entry level degree in Europe and in Asia is the LIS Batchelor's degree. In the US and other countries, (as for example UK, Poland, Turkey) the LIS Master's degree is the entry level degree for a professional position.. A Batchelor's degree (not in LIS) is required by countries, such as Portugal, Bulgaria, Italy and Japan,

For civil servants, additional requirements are: certification of individuals (Estonia, Belgium), professional exam (Spain, Croatia), generic exam (Italy). For career advancement in Public Administration, there are special requirements, such as professional retraining in a 2 years curricula (Russia), or Master's degree completion (France).

Responses on the Professional Association role

Who is leading the quality assurance process?

In US and some other countries (U.K. Australia) the library association is leading the accreditation process of LIS courses. In Europe, library associations, except the UK, are not involved in quality assurance of LIS programmes.

The role of library associations could be especially important for the recognition of professionalism, and also for facilitating equivalency of qualifications at the international level.

Most of the participants in the IFLA survey in Europe (73%), US (50%) and Asia (50%) suggest IFLA assume an active role in stimulating associations in their country for this issue. They felt that a Quality Assessment model should be developed by IFLA, to achieve transparency and facilitate recognition.

IFLA encouraging QA model
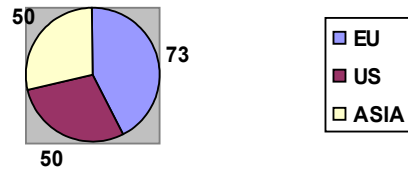
Respondents from Asia and Europe would like IFLA to encourage member associations and institutions to establish systems of accreditation and/or certification in their county or region based on a recognized Quality Assurance model (73%) For some of the respondents in Europe (20%) and in Asia (50%), it was felt that IFLA should have a more active role encouraging the national recognition of qualifications.

IFLA promoting accreditation/certification
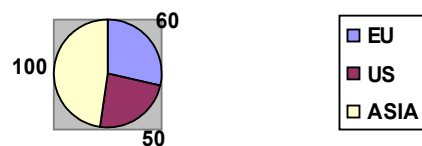
Accreditation and recognition procedure

How can IFLA or an international library organisation realise the task of accreditation? Three models have been indicated:

- international resource centre on relevant information about LIS education
- international experts committee for the assessment of LIS education on an advisory basis
- learning outcomes to be met by all LIS professionals who wish to have their training recognized internationally.

The replies indicate that many of the respondents would prefer the third approach: a quality model focused on learning outcomes (53% in Europe, 50% in US and 50% in Asia). In order of preference, the other approaches are: an international resource center (50% in Europe, Asia and US) or the international experts committee (respectively 50% in Asia and 40% in Europe, none in US).

The respondents were asked also to give their opinion on two different approaches to learning outcomes:

- a benchmarking system established by sharing best experiences of LIS schools creating benchmarks to assess quality through a peer review process
- a linking of Quality Assurance of LIS education to the assessment of LIS programs by professionals who successfully completed the courses at each school. (Tammaro, 2005, p. 19)

Benchmarking was preferred by 60% of respondents in Europe, 100% in Asia and 50% in the US. The Quality Assurance approach was preferred by 50% in Asia and the US and 53% of the respondents in Europe.

An Alternative Approach in the Web 2.0 Environment

All the suggested options over the past 30 years have met barriers in terms of successful implementation of an international program for assessing qualifications relating the equivalency of LIS education and training programs that would provide reciprocity of degree holders in obtaining professional positions in the ever more global employment world. One application of the Web 2.0 environment would be to construct a website that would enable organizations that employ graduates of specific LIS programs as well as the graduates of those programs to evaluate the satisfaction with the quality of the output (the educational program). It might be modelled after Angie's List, the online services assessment Web 2.0 based site.
https://www.angieslist.com/AngiesList/Login.aspx
The assessment list, which might be labelled "LIS Education Assessment" or LIS-AE, might be maintained by IFLA volunteers or by volunteers that are coordinated by IFLA. The postings would be vetted by the volunteers, giving the evaluated programs an opportunity to respond with comments to the postings. All comments and responses would be anonymous and specific comments that an the evaluated program objected to would not be listed, but an evaluation score provided by the person making the assessment would be posted as well as a listing of the number of comments the evaluated organization or program had requested for non-posting. Thus the list would provide an indication of the overall assessment score by all who chose to make an assessment and a measure of the number of comments that the assessed program found not acceptable.

This approach might seem fraught with difficulties in 2008 as many of us, especially representatives of LIS education programs, may not be as comfortable with the transparency and openness that is the foundation of much of Web 2.0 communication culture. Certainly the oversight of the Website volunteers to assure the validity and reliability of the postings is an essential component of the potential success of such an effort. It is presented here for discussion and further exploration.

Conclusion

The survey on Quality Assurance models, completed in 2005, presented evidence that a learning outcomes orientation could be helpful for improving quality in LIS schools. The findings of the project have indicated that learning outcomes of graduates of academic programs are considered a critical indicator of how effectively LIS schools are defining and instilling the skills and attributes needed by their graduates, with success in the labour market being the most obvious indicator of good outcomes.

The validation of learning outcomes is a challenge considering the variety of criteria and cultures that exist in LIS education internationally. The principle question asked of the student or graduate will no longer be "what did you do to obtain your degree?" but rather "what can you do now that you have obtained your degree?". The identification of appropriate learning outcomes and competencies would also facilitate

the ability of employers and academic institutions to establish international reciprocity and equivalency of qualification guidelines in the global world of library and information professionals. While the Web 2.0 proposed solution of establishing a participatory website that permits employers and graduates of programs to assess the resulting quality indicated by the employer's and the graduate's assessments of what they can do now that they have received their education, may seem nearly impossible to implement today; in a very short time the Web 2.0 generation will begin assuming responsible roles in institutions and organizations that employ the graduates of these LIS education programs. When both the graduates and the employers represent a generation that are accustomed to online social networking and the transparency that it can provide, we may see much less resistance to this approach of assessing the quality of professional LIS educational programs. When the time is right for this Web 2.0 application, it is crucial that LIS education is ready and able to provide the structure to enable the application of an assessment procedure that may finally overcome the barriers that have plagued efforts to establish measures of equivalency and reciprocity for so many years.

References:

Bloom, B. (1964). *The taxonomy of educational objectives*, Longman, London.

Dalton P., Levinson K. (2000), An investigation of LIS qualifications throughout the world, *66th IFLA Council and General Conference Proceedings, Jerusalem.* Available online http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla66/papers/061-161e.htm Accessed September 28, 2008.

Dalton, P. (2007). Email communication, May 30, 2007.

Dowling, Michael. 2007. "International Credentialing, Certification, and Recognition in the United States." *New Library World* 108, no.1/2: 79-82.

Fang, J. R. (2007) Email communication with Josephine Fang, 25 June, 2007.

Fang, J. R. (1988). "International Cooperation in Library and Information Science Education: Recommendations for Equivalence and Reciprocity of Qualifications." *Education and Research in Library and Information Science in the Information Age: Means of Modern Technology and Management. Proceedings of the IFLA/China Society of Library Science Seminar, Beijing, September 1-5, 1986.* Edited by Miriam H. Tees. IFLA Publications 43, .K.G. Saur, Munich, 1988. 22-30

Fang, J.R. E. Fischer and P. Nauta, (1987) "Guidelines to equivalence and reciprocity of professional qualifications," *IFLA Journal* 13 (1987), 133–140.

Fang, J R, and P Nauta. (1991). "IFLA's contributions to education for library and information science." *IFLA Journal* 17, no. 3: 229-231.

Fang, J.R., R.D. Studear and K. Tuamsuk, (1995). *World Guide to Library, Archive and Information Science Education*, (2nd ed.), Munich: K.G. Saur, (IFLA Publications 72/73).

Harbo. Ole. 1994 **"**Library and information science education in Europe: the role of EUCLID in curriculum development and equivalence of qualifications," in *60th IFLA General Conference Proceedings, Havana, Cuba, 21-27 August 1994* Available online: http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla60/60-haro.htm Accessed September 28, 2008.

Harbo, Ole and Russell Bowden (2004). *Development of the Profession: a history of the IFLA Section for Education & Training from 1974 to 2003* IFLA, Education and Training Section. Available online: http://www.ifla.org/VII/s23/pub/History1974-2003.pdf Accessed September 28, 2008.

Johnson, Ian M. (2000). "The role of associations of information and library education in teaching and research: Recent and potential developments in Britain and Europe(n1)." *Education for Information* 18, no. 2/3: 201-220.

Johnson, Ian (2001) "Research and international technical cooperation programmes," in Proceedings of 67th IFLA Council and General Conference, August 16-25, 2001. http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla67/papers/055-165e.pdf

Rochester, Maxine K.(1994) "Equivalence of qualifications in Anglo/American countries" in *60th IFLA General Conference Proceedings Havana, Cuba, 21-27 August 1994* Available online: http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla60/60-rocm.htm   Accessed September 28, 2008.

Tammaro, A.M. (2005) *Survey on quality assurance models in Library and Information Science (LIS) programs*. December, 2005. IFLA-Section on Education and Training. 33 p. http://www.ifla.org/VII/s23/pub/s23_Report-QA-2005.pdf