

Introduction

This ALA Biennial Narrative Report covers the time from the most recent reaccreditation in January 2019 to the present of the Master of Information (MI) Program in the Department of Library and Information Science, School of Communication and Information (SC&I), at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. Following the sequence of the ALA/COA standards, we address the progress, changes and developments impacting the MI Program.

Standard I: Systematic Planning

The mechanics of systematic planning continue to evolve throughout the program, department, and SC&I. Since the last review, Dr. Marie L. Radford has been appointed as Chair of LIS and her leadership carries forward the planning processes for departmental and program development and growth. The COVID 19 pandemic has been disruptive, but fortunately, because of our long-established niche in online education, the transition to distance or remote learning was seamless. The majority of our MI classes were already in asynchronous online mode, with the remainder being launched in virtual mode within a few days of the Rutgers University-wide move to all virtual instruction in March of 2020, so student engagement and learning disruption was kept to a minimum. Because of our strong online course offerings, most MI students had previously, or were currently, engaged in virtual classes so they were already skilled in this learning environment.

All meetings and other departmental, administrative tasks and functions were quickly brought online via Webex, Zoom, or other video platforms, as needed. Our strength as a program and department was heavily reliant on our experience in the online learning

environment and the university and school's administrative and technical support network that evolved around this function. The LIS department and SC&I demonstrated agility and managed to continue everyday operations within the new world of COVID-19. New initiatives since our previous ALA COA report include:

1. A formal mentorship program was developed with participation of the faculty, led by a Mentorship Taskforce for all faculty that is managed by the Chair. As part of the mentorship program, each faculty member chooses a mentor and regular meetings/touchpoints are part of the process to ensure steady progress and engagement of tenured, tenure track and non-tenure track faculty.
2. A SC&I wide diversity initiative was initiated and headed by Associate Dean Dafna Lemish. This initiative centers on the concepts of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA). The LIS Curriculum Committee has begun to focus on potential curriculum initiatives: review of program goals, review of existing course syllabi, developing specific IDEAS centric courses. Related aspects include classroom climate, student issues and COVID-19 specific disparities.
3. A new SC&I interdisciplinary program rolled out in spring 2021 (Masters in Health Communication and Information). The MI program participates by cross-listing appropriate health and wellness-related courses.
4. A new scheduling system (CourseAtlas) was implemented by the university which has required scheduling processes to shift to a long-term vision of course planning and scheduling.

5. A Data Visualization Taskforce was established to analyze and quantify program assessment data (Dr. Lilia Pavlovsky; Dr. Anselm Spoerri) in response to the ERP recommendation to quantify program assessment data collected in the 17:510:503 ePortfolio capstone to address ERP comments on page 10 of the narrative report that illuminated the need to keep up with assessment reporting challenges.

Standard II: Curriculum.

The curriculum review, assessment and development process remain strong and vital to the program's identity. Internal reviews of strengths and weaknesses continue. Addition of newly hired faculty members brings new expertise. Societal forces and factors have impacted curricular design, including enhanced emphasis in curriculum development with regard to social justice, equity and health. Since our last ALA/COA report, the following additions, changes, and revisions have been made to existing courses in the MI curriculum:

1. 17:610:531: Algorithms and Society (new course in approval stage)
2. 17:610:567: Information Security Management (revised; added to curriculum)
3. 17:610:517: Planning Outreach Services (being revised as "Planning Inclusive Services")
4. 17:610:564: Machine Learning for Data Science (revised)
5. 17:610:579: Ethics, Values and Change in Information Practices (revised and renamed, was formerly Ethical Decision Making in Information Practices)

The following courses are new Special Topics offerings:

1. Health Informatics for Information Professionals (developed and taught by Dr. Charles Senteio)

2. Issues in Social Justice and Information Institutions (developed and taught by Dr. Emil Lawrence)
3. Information and Misinformation (developed and taught by Dr. Michael Lesk)

The curriculum committee continues to meet regularly under the direction of Dr. Ross J. Todd, Chair of the Curriculum Committee. Current members include: Dr. Suchintha Fernando, Dr. Nina Wacholder, Dr. Sunyoung Kim, Dr. Lilia Pavlovsky, and Dr. Warren Allen (Undergraduate Information Technology and Informatics Program Director). A strategic decision was made to engage more newly-hired and/or pre-tenure faculty in the curriculum decision-making process.

Dr. Sunyoung Kim was appointed to head a taskforce to evaluate the Interaction Design and Informatics (IDI) concentration, as well as to build on its strengths by developing new courses and strategic partnerships to enhance student learning experiences. IDI is an area of concentration that requires hands-on studio time. Design of online (and on campus) learning outcomes and experiences pose new challenges and opportunities, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, that will be evaluated and addressed as the project moves forward.

Standard III Faculty:

The 2018 ERP report (p. 17) identified the major challenge of attracting new full-time tenure-track faculty members and the replacement of retiring senior faculty who have served in administrative capacities and contributed to the Program's outstanding national and international research reputation, and to address challenges posed by expanding MI enrollment. Since this report, the following changes in departmental leadership and in full-time faculty retirements or resignations have taken place:

1. Dr. Marie L. Radford was appointed as Chair of the LIS Department in January 2019 following the completion of Dr. Ross J. Todd's term.
2. Dr. Nicholas Belkin, Distinguished Professor of Library and Information Science, retired in July 2020, achieving Emeritus status.
3. Dr. Chirag Shah resigned and accepted an appointment as Associate Professor at the Information School, University of Washington, Seattle in 2019.

Since 2019, the LIS Department has engaged in a robust program of hiring new faculty. To date, **LIS has hired 6 new faculty (below)** with a search currently in progress for a full-time tenure-track faculty member in the Data Science area.

1. Dr. Tawfiq Ammari, Assistant Professor of Library and Information Science. Ph.D. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (Information Science). His research and teaching center on the intersection of Social Computing, Data Science, and Science, Technology, and Society studies (STS). His work focuses on the interplay between technological and social role change and machine learning.
2. Dr. Emil Lawrence, Assistant Professor of Library and Information Science. Ph.D. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Library & Information Science). His research and teaching areas center on adult reading interests, information ethics, marginalized and under-represented groups, social justice, and political civic engagement
3. Dr. Britt Paris, Assistant Professor of Library and Information Science. Ph.D. University of California - Los Angeles (Information Studies). Her research and teaching center on interrogating contemporary discourse and practice around using data-driven technology

to solve growing social, political, and environmental problems; ethics in formation institutions; and algorithms and society.

4. Dr. Gretchen Stahlman, Assistant Professor of Library and Information Science. Ph.D. University of Arizona (Information). Her research and teaching center on the characteristics and accessibility of data associated with published journal articles, science communication, information behavior of scientists, organizing information, and digital libraries.
5. Dr. Megan Threats, Assistant Professor of Library and Information Science. Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Information and Library Science). Her research and teaching center on the influence of socio-ecological factors on health information practices and sexual and reproductive healthcare utilization; reference sources and services.
6. Dr. Warren Allen, Assistant Teaching and Director of our undergraduate major in Information Technology and Informatics (ITI). Ph.D., Drexel University, College of Computing and Informatics. His research and teaching center on the role of information technology in our social, civic, and professional lives; social network theory and analysis; cybersecurity and information assurance; and web design and development.

The following LIS faculty were promoted:

Dr. Marija Dalbello was promoted to Full Professor as of July 2019

Dr. Vivek Singh was promoted to Associate Professor as of July 2020

Dr. Joyce Valenza was promoted to Associate Teaching Professor as of July 2020

Dr. Marc Aronson was promoted to Associate Professor of Practice as of July 2020

Dr. Suchintha Fernando was promoted to Assistant Teaching Professor as of July 2020

Standard IV: Students:

The student population of the MI program is being maintained at a sustainable level of between 400 and 500 students. The MI program continues to be supported by the various units of SC&I (e.g., Student Services, Strategic Communication, Career Services, Instructional Design, Information Technology Services). A few changes since 2019 should be noted:

1. Rutgers University did not renew the Pearson Online program management contract. Prior to the end of the contract, the “online managed program” groups (of which we were one) did their respective due diligence to determine the costs and benefits of aligning with a new partner. As a result of this process, SC&I determined that it would be most beneficial to the school and our programs to bring marketing and student support functions in-house. With respect to enrollment coaching, SC&I independently hired [Inside Track](#), an organization with whom we had a prior relationship, to manage only the enrollment coaching portion of the marketing/recruiting functions. [SCG](#), an advertising and marketing firm was hired to work with an in-house marketing team to help with google ads and other marketing functions beyond in-house expertise. It should be noted that despite these major organizational changes there was no impact on enrollment. Another positive outcome resulting from the dissolution of the Pearson contract is that the student community is not administratively divided between online and on-campus classifications.
2. Target X (Salesforce) is now a robust student management system that enables a centralized way of student record/academic performance management. Since the ERP

visit it has evolved into an, up-to-the-minute, robust resource of student data managed by Maureen Newman, Information Systems Manager (MLIS program alum).

3. Academic advising for students is now centralized through the initial zero-credit course *17:610: 501 Introduction to Library and Information Professions* that is required to be taken by each student in their first semester. In this class, students fill out a spreadsheet with information pertaining to their learning and career goals. They can either select their adviser based on their knowledge of the faculty or an adviser is assigned to them (by the MI Director) based on the information entered. This document provides evidence that all students are formally assigned an adviser and they are informed that they can change faculty advisers at any point in time.
4. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Student Support staff and faculty have been on “high alert” to ensure that students who have been negatively impacted by the crisis situation receive the help and resources they need. For the two initial semesters during the COVID-19 pandemic, students were able to petition to take their classes as PNC (Pass No Credit) at their discretion, if their academic studies were impacted by COVID-19. Their petitions were reviewed by Student Services staff in conjunction with Program Directors for approval. Student support staff also serves as an information clearinghouse to help students navigate university financial resources for COVID-19 related needs.
5. *17:610:503 ePortfolio capstone data*: In this non-credit required course, taken in the last semester of study, students are asked to create a program assessment portfolio that, in part, helps them reflect on their learning experience in the program and, in part, enables them to make suggestions for program improvement. The ERP suggested that

we review this process and consider transitioning some of the data that is collected into a quantitative form that will provide measurable values to support decision making for program administrators and faculty. In fall 2020, a Data Visualization Taskforce (Drs. Pavlovsky and Spoerri) was convened by the chair and one of its charges was to explore this suggestion and possible implementation of this practice. In 2019, a new group of data was collected from this class by the Director (in conjunction with the Career Services Director) that includes salary and job data. Here is an example of the [Career Outcomes report](#) (2019). The 2020 report will be coming out within the next month as it was the first project for the Data Visualization Taskforce.

Standard V: Administration and financial support

Finance: While Rutgers overall is dealing with a significant budgetary shortfall due mostly to auxiliary service issues and reduced income during COVID-19, the SC&I budget was net positive for 2019-20 and we expect it to be positive for 2020-21 as well. State appropriations to the university were affected by COVID-19, but state-paid fringe benefits were not, and that is how SC&I receives its state support. Rutgers implemented COVID-19 related hiring and spending freezes with exceptions possible, and SC&I has been able to continue our academic programming, research projects, and operations mostly as planned, given our financial position.

Facilities: Because of COVID-19 spending restrictions at the university, one renovation of office space was halted last spring, but renovation of two classrooms in our main building was allowed to proceed. Early in 2021, we completed a feasibility study for a new SC&I building; the plan would allow us to vacate all of our existing facilities. The Chancellor and Vice-

President for Operations have endorsed the project, and therefore we have permission to proceed with fundraising. It is unclear how quickly that will advance in the current economic climate. In addition, the university's capacity for additional debt is extremely limited, given other recent improvements across its campuses. Given these situations, it is unlikely we will be able to begin architectural work for a new building until after approximately five years have passed. On the positive side, a delayed project will result in a better financial position for us when it does happen, since we will have more time to plan and raise funds. We continue to lobby for additional space on campus in the meantime, even if the quality is not as high as we would like, and there is some movement towards SC&I being assigned one other building adjacent to our existing six buildings next year.

Major Institutional Changes in Administration/Leadership: Dr. Jonathan Holloway (former Northwestern provost, and a historian) became the 21st President of Rutgers University on July 1, 2020. President Holloway envisions a culture that emphasizes diversity, inclusion, and respect, as Rutgers refines its mission of becoming an exemplar of excellence as a public research university. Jonathan Holloway appointed Dr. Prabhas Moghe (former provost of Rutgers-New Brunswick, a biomedical engineer) as Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs. Dr. Francine Conway (dean of Graduate Psychology in Rutgers) became provost. Dr. Christopher J. Molloy was appointed chancellor of Rutgers University–New Brunswick in 2019, following his role as Acting Chancellor at the time of the ERP visit in 2018.

Submitted by: *Dr. Marie L. Radford, Chair; Dr. Lilia Pavlovsky, Director; Dr. Ross J. Todd, Chair Curriculum Committee.*