

Independency, Interdisciplinarity and Inevitability...3I's for Information Science Education

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Abstract

The paper attempts to argue that library and information science as an independent academic discipline in historical discourse, societal relevance and in rapidly changing context. Interdisciplinarity is a pluralistic philosophy of enquiry that makes information science a unique discipline in its own right and amalgamation of all major disciplines. Information revolution of the 21st century necessitates an inevitable need to shift our priority and role from mere servitors to creators. It suggested a holistic and pragmatic approach for library and information science education and research.

Let us not look back in anger, nor forward in fear, but around in awareness.

-James Thurber

Let us look back...

By the nineteenth century librarians were beginning to speak about library science. The term was used in connection with a search for common principles of library work. Martin Schrettinger and his contemporary of the Bavarian State library and his contemporary F. A. Ebert of Dresden are the pioneers in laying the foundation of library science. Schrettinger dispelled the detailed techniques and Ebert wrote a manual entitled *The Training of Librarians*. He looked on libraries as "scientific archives for future generations" and his librarian was one prepared to study and appreciate the timeless literary texts and works of scholarship in their original languages. Other preparation should provide him with a profound knowledge of history and acquaintance with literary history, bibliography, and basic diplomatics. Ebert's suggested humanistic preparation in languages and history for a scholarly librarian of his day was his systematic attempt to delineate the educational

requirements.

Story in India

The seed of library science education was sown in 1911 in India owing to the initiatives taken by Sayaji Roa Gackwad II, the ruler of the erstwhile Baroda state who had realized the importance of libraries as the most crucial factors for all round development of the society and for education of the masses. Thus it's history of library science education is almost 104 years old. In the last 100 years, world has completely metamorphosed socio-culturally, economically and technologically. In fact the era before internet and after internet is two completely different worlds. Priorities of the society have been changed and this change is quite obvious and inevitable too. We must embrace the change to accommodate it in the society.

Presently India has second highest internet users after china. Even US comes after us in the position three. 1.25 billion citizens of India have great expectations than earlier before. 550 millions are below the age of 25. Highly educated and highly trained people are great assets of India. India has huge potential to become knowledge society in real sense but the task of realizing is daunting too. There should be a paradigm shift towards a knowledge centered growth particularly in the field of education, R & D and innovation system which will aim for sustained and qualitative as well as quantitative capacity building. National Knowledge Commission (NKC) of India was established in 2005 and according to NKC *-The Commission focused on five key aspects of knowledge enhancing access to knowledge, reinvigorating institutions where knowledge concepts are imparted, creating a world class environment for creation of knowledge, promoting applications of knowledge for sustained and inclusive growth and using knowledge applications in efficient delivery of public services. Specific focus areas were identified to realize each of these objectives.*

Change is in the air

Information revolution is so penetrative and pervasive. University as a social institution of the society for the society and by the society can neither afford nor ignore this information revolution. University always stands for promotion of scholarship and advancement of learning. Societal needs before a century has gone a sea change. Library science is no way exception. It has also added 'Information Science' in its nomenclature of the degree as well as name of the relevant department

has been changed from the Department of Library Science to the Department of Library & Information Science. But this nomenclatural change did not reflect in the course curriculum unfortunately. In the Curricular Development Committee set up by the UGC for Library & Information Science chaired by Prof. C.R. Karisiddappa in 2001 talked about the acceptance of this change and suggested a roadmap towards a symbiosis of technology and tradition. Friedrich Nietzsche, German philosopher once said –*“It is our needs that interpret the world”*. Embracing the information revolution through all of our social actions and manifestations including education is our societal need and demand of our generations. Even the UGC in its mandate clearly said- *“promoting and coordinating university education”*.

How Many Roads Must We Walk Down...Before We Are Allowed To Think Free?

We must introspect ourselves what exactly we are lacking when we juxtapose library & information science education in India with other subjects. Though library & information science education was started a century ago but still we could not start a 3 years honours course in Information Studies. We are extremely lagging behind from the rest of the world and rest of the disciplines. But the subjects like oceanography, bioinformatics, nanotechnology, biotechnology, environmental sc, microbiology, international relations, public administration, folklore, culture studies have not taken its birth not more than some 30 years or less. All these subjects from its birth have been enjoying distinct academic status and gradually they acquire strong research base. Library is one of the most important social institutions and heart and soul of any academic institutions, no doubt. But, it is just one of the channels through which information is sought and disseminated in the society. In this context, I would like to mention that library and information science department across the globe has accepted the change and responded positively to address the issue and they have started and running successfully undergraduate programmes in information studies. Few universities and their Bachelor programmes on information studies across the globe along with their details are given in the following:

Undergraduate program in School of Information Studies in Syracuse University (iSchool)

B.S. in Information Management & Technology

http://coursecatalog.syr.edu/2014/programs/information_management_and_technology

B.S. in Systems and Information Science

http://coursecatalog.syr.edu/2014/programs/systems_and_information_science

School of Information Sciences, University of Pittsburgh (iSchool)

BS in Information Science

<http://www.ischool.pitt.edu/bsis/about/program-details.php>

School of Information Studies, University of Glasgow, UK

Bachelor in Digital Media & Information Studies

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/undergraduate/degrees/digitalmedia/>

School of Information Studies, Charles Stuart University, Australia

Bachelor of Information Studies

<http://www.csu.edu.au/courses/information-studies>

School of Information Science, Cornell University, US

Students can pursue a Bachelor of Arts degree in Information Science through the College of Arts & Sciences (BA-IS) or a Bachelor of Science degree in Information Science through the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) (BS-IS). These two degree programs are very similar, differing primarily in their associated college-level requirements.

<http://infosci.cornell.edu/academics/undergraduate>

School of Information, Florida State University

Bachelor in Information

<http://ischool.cci.fsu.edu/admissions/undergraduate/>

American University, Dubai

Bachelor of Communication and Information Studies (B.C.I.S)

http://www.aud.edu/academic_affairs/en/page/2358/bachelor-of-communication-and-information-studies-bcis-?show_title=1

Faculty of Environment and Information Studies, Keio University, Japan

Bachelor in Environment & Information Studies

The Faculty of Environment and Information Studies was established in 1990 as one of the twin faculties at SFC where innovation routinely takes place ahead of time. This faculty was designed as a trans-disciplinary and 'integrated disciplinary' faculty to train students to become professionals who can identify various issues and find workable solutions to them by applying advanced skills and knowledge in various fields of science, technology, and design. In order to realize this goal, the faculty offers a unique curriculum which allows students to enroll in any of the courses offered by it or by its twin faculty, the Faculty of Policy Management.

<http://www.global.keio.ac.jp/en/programs/undergrad/ei.html>

Faculty of Media and Information Studies, University of Western Ontario, Canada

Bachelor in Media, Information & Techno culture

http://www.fims.uwo.ca/acad_programs/undergrad.htm

University Massey, New Zealand

Bachelor of Information Sciences

http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/learning/programme-course-paper/programme.cfm?prog_id=93068

Loughborough University, UK

B.Sc (Hons.) in Information Management & Computing

<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/>

Bar-Ilan University, Israel

BA in Information Science

<http://is.biu.ac.il/en/ba>

Incontrovertible Truth

Though it may sound a bit harsh (not to hurt anybody), with few exceptions majority of the students choose to study this library and information science as subject and their future profession as a last resort to get a job after their graduation and post-graduation and even after Ph.D in some cases. If we fail to attract the good students then how will it be possible to compete with other subjects in terms of its

intellectual content and research base? Traditionally this subject has always been considered as a supplier of servitors to serve academicians, researchers, scientists, technologists, administrators, planners, decision makers, corporate managers and similar other. It was never aimed to produce world class philosophers and scholars but rather driven by the employment market only to supply manpower in libraries only. Information as an entity has far more applications in the society other than librarians. We never tried to attract bright students to promote this subject intellectually to solve and established unique and innovative path of enquiry. Very few students after 10+ 2 know the existence of this subject in the society. Even 'Education' as an Honours subject has been evolved in our country and a very popular career option among the students in different colleges of many Universities in India. Very unfortunately, library and information science as a (so called professional?) subject is being nurtured from our unrealistic non-academic market driven philosophy of demand-supply. There was no remarkable initiative to transform so-called professional subject to an academic subject like other subjects in the last 100 years. On a contrary, M.Phil and Ph.D are regularly conducted in this subjects that are not commensurate with its self-claimed professional tag. In fact if we strictly judge library & information science education in India whether it is a professional Course or not, we find:

- No professional accreditation like ALA (American Library Association) or iSchool (Information School) Tag
- No Registration to start entrepreneurship/self business like MCI (Medical Council of India) for medical education or Bar Council for law education
- No Professional Quality Control in LIS programs in India as in other countries

The negation of above said parameters makes it non-eligible for professional subject. In reality, the question or conflict of professional Vs academic is a relative one and every subject is leading towards some career or a profession or a vocation and in that sense such distinction is quite blurring. Rather, let us envision a future in which our students will spread around the world in the widely spread information field including

library for creating innovative systems and designing information solutions that benefit individuals, organizations, and society at large.

Our graduates will fill the personnel and leadership needs of organizations of all types and sizes; and our areas of research and inquiry will attract strong support and have profound impacts on society and on the formulation of policy from local to international levels. Prof. Karisiddappa said in Curricular Development Committee Report in 2001 which reinforced our philosophy in present context in library & information science (LIS) ... *“The LIS has the attributes of being discipline of disciplines. The subject commenced its advent with a clinical approach and gradually attained the status of scientific field, emerged subsequently as one of the subjects of highly interdisciplinary approach, with a blend of theories, philosophies and practices incorporated from a host of other subjects. The subject area under discourse in its fold has thus imbibed applications from diverse subjects like psychology, statistics, linguistics, management science, computer and communication technology and also from many others. The convergence of these fields with LIS has led to its transformations....now expresses itself as field intensively dealing with information science and technology” (p. 1).*

Interdisciplinarity and Information Science...Roads Ahead

Interdisciplinarity is pluralistic in method and focus. It may be conducted by individuals or groups and may be driven by scientific curiosity or practical needs. The increasing specialization and cross-fertilizations among disciplines require new modes of organization and a modified reward structure to facilitate interdisciplinary interactions. Interdisciplinary thinking is rapidly becoming an integral feature of research as a result of four powerful “drivers”: the inherent complexity of nature and society, the desire to explore problems and questions that are not confined to a single discipline, the need to solve societal problems, and the power of new technologies. Successful interdisciplinary researchers have found ways to integrate and synthesize disciplinary depth with breadth of interests, visions, and skills. Students, especially undergraduates, are strongly attracted to inter-disciplinary courses, especially those of societal relevance. The success of interdisciplinarity depends on institutional commitment and research leadership. Leaders with clear vision and effective communication and team-building skills can catalyze the integration of disciplines. It

is typically collaborative and involves people of disparate backgrounds. Thus, it may take extra time for building consensus and for learning new methods, languages, and cultures. Besides, professional societies have the opportunity to facilitate interdisciplinarity producing state-of-the-art reports on recent research developments and on curriculum, assessment, and accreditation methods; enhancing personal interactions; building partnerships among societies; publishing interdisciplinary journals and special editions of disciplinary journals; and promoting mutual understanding of disciplinary methods, languages, and cultures.

We must be zeroing in on its novel research and distinct line of enquiry in subject specific informatics (*information science or information studies or informatics more or less analogous terms*) research like:

- social informatics
- Health informatics
- ecological informatics
- biodiversity informatics
- chemoinformatics
- patent informatics
- geoinformatics
- legal informatics

and many more...

At the same time various departments in science, social sc, humanities should be interacted for content, research collaboration & teaching. Next step, we can optimistically foresee, there will be 3 years (Hons. or Major) course may be started in the colleges very soon in Information studies like education. Only then the subject will get its long due social recognition and respect among the students, parents and society as a good career option. Because of this, even practitioners in this field i.e. librarians in various set ups are undermined and that impedes them to discharge their duties with full satisfaction.

You Can't Have A Better Tomorrow If You Don't Stop Thinking About Yesterday

We must accept that information science is also a self-reliant full-fledged academic discipline and not an isolated, parasitic add-on course like yesteryears that always requires a host for its existence. It is a special branch of inquiry and philosophy not a

mere professional field. Time has come to embrace 'Information Science or Information Studies' as full-fledged discipline like others. It's inevitability and it's the need of the hour. One year graduate and one year postgraduate programme in library & information science after the graduation in other subjects cannot give the students a coherent knowledge base in the complex world of information like all other subjects. Thus studying 3 years undergraduate programme in information studies will equip and certainly give the students right edge for the 21st century information milieu. This may be an innovative programme-one of its own kind can pave the roadmap in the history of information science in the years to come. I believe this will surely bring a permanent qualitative change in this field motivated by the academic excellence only.

Suggested Readings:

1. A Vision of Interdisciplinary Research. (2004). In *Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research* (p. 16). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
2. Asundi, A.Y., and C.R. Karisiddappa. "Library and Information Science Education in India: International Perspectives with Special Reference to Developing Countries." *DESIDOC Bulletin of Information Technology* 27.2 (2007): 5-11. Print.
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4. <http://knowledgecommissionarchive.nic.in/>
5. Karisiddappa CR: Introduction. In UGC Model Curriculum -Library & Information Science. IN: University Grants Commission (UGC); 2001:1.