

Investigating LIS Educator and Practitioner Perspectives of Professional Development: The 2025 ALISE Leadership Development Intern Panel

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ABSTRACT

Throughout our history, the field of librarianship has adapted to rapid changes in society and technology. In recent years, the list of challenges to which librarians must either adapt or push against has only continued to grow. In this context, the evolving field of library and information science (LIS) demands renewed attention into how LIS as a domain supports its researchers, educators, and practitioners and prepares students for practice in a field where our work is often subject to transitions, disruptions, and transformation. These challenges occur at many levels, from the macro-level of the social and political climate, the field-level with shifting demands on library practitioners, the education-level with the need for educators to meet these shifting demands, and the individual-level where personal circumstances shape our career trajectories.

Much has already been written about the evolving nature of LIS and the need for library education to respond, though the nature of these recommended responses varies (Abels et al., 2015; Cronin, 2012; Godsett & Koziura, 2016; Lillard & Wales, 2003; Myburgh, 2003; Sutton, 1999; Van House & Sutton, 1996; Wilson, 2002). This research is often motivated by the belief that “a system of professional education can purposefully adapt and that an understanding of environmental change and the strategies by which its components can enhance their survival is therefore useful” (Van House & Sutton, 1996, p. 133). Sutton (1999) describes both the slow, incremental changes and the discontinuous, rapid changes that the library field experiences and points to the need to prepare professionals for both. He argues that while the field may prepare librarians for the former, it may not be adequately preparing them for the latter.

LIS professional associations exist to support the profession and the professionals engaged within it (Henczel, 2015). They, along with LIS education, engage with and define the LIS habitus, or perceptions and assumptions, in the field (Van House & Sutton, 1996). Loan

(2019) expands on this, offering five laws of Library and Information Science associations that outline ways associations can or should support individuals and advance the profession. The five laws include the “law of mission,” “law of action,” “law of identity,” “law of recognition,” and “law of unity” (p.1-6). ALISE, founded in 1915 as the Association of American Library Schools, is a professional organization that serves the LIS educator (ALISE, 2025). Summers (1986) notes that the organization has undergone many different and sometimes disparate themes. As a professional organization, ALISE supports its members through the annual conference, annual awards and grants, and the doctoral poster competition, designed to help engage and welcome new future LIS educators into the field (Julien, 2007). However, how ALISE’s support is perceived by its members and information professionals outside of the organization is unknown.

This panel shares preliminary findings from the 2024-2025 Inaugural ALISE Leadership Development Internship project, which examined how practicing information professionals (both educators and practitioners) understand and experience the benefits and challenges of our field, including the professional organizations that support us. This project aims to help bridge the gap between LIS practitioners and educators, which was noted among participants and has been observed in the field more broadly (Lillard & Wales, 2003; Van House & Sutton, 1996). Drawing on 38 semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviews with both information science educators and practitioners conducted between February and May of 2025, this panel centers on three key research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What challenges do LIS educators and librarians experience in the field of library and information science?

RQ2: What do practicing librarians want LIS educators to know about their jobs and preparation to work in the field?

RQ3: What is the role of professional organizations in supporting both LIS educators and librarians?

Through qualitative thematic analysis, we developed a four-domain framework (M.L.I.S) which we used to further organize how participants articulated challenges and opportunities: Macro Domain (M); LIS (L); Institutional Domain (I); and Self Domain (S). The Macro Domain included participant responses to national and structural forces shaping LIS work, including national referendums, policy, funding, and shifting technologies. The LIS Domain included participant responses to pedagogical approaches, potential gaps in their Master's curriculum, and research relevance within LIS education. The Institutional Domain included participant responses on organizational culture within their institution (library or university), administration, and the expectations of LIS professionals on the job. Finally, in the Self Domain, we included participant comments focused on professional identity, self-efficacy, and emotional labor.

Findings reveal gratitude for LIS training yet persistent disconnects between education and professional demands. Within the Macro Domain, participants noted a need for LIS programs to better engage with professional challenges like funding cuts and censorship as well as build advocacy skills. In the LIS Domain, interviewees emphasized the importance of grounding curriculum in practical skills, including management training and adapting to new technologies. Within the Institutional Domain, participants discussed the pressure to manage workloads, navigate internal hierarchies, and respond to emergent crises (e.g., book challenges). Many felt LIS programs did not adequately prepare them to understand institutional dynamics or

practices. Participants described how their personal values, well-being, and evolving identities shaped how they approached their work. They acknowledged the emotional dimensions of the profession, like burnout and the resilience required in public-facing roles.

In this panel, the 2024-25 internship cohort will share the findings from this project, explain our motivations for pursuing this project, and seek input from participants on how they might consider these findings in the context of their own instruction. This panel session features three segments: (1) A 30-minute presentation of qualitative findings from the 2024-2025 Inaugural ALISE Leadership Development Internship Project; (2) A 30-minute moderated panel discussion of each domain's tensions and opportunities; and (3) A 30-minute facilitated interactive segment inviting participants to share experiences and reimagine the MLIS framework. This panel is especially relevant for LIS educators and practitioners, doctoral students, early-career professionals, and professional association leaders. It encourages a nuanced, reflective conversation about how to co-create a more responsive, sustainable, and values-centered vision for LIS education and professional development.

Author Note: All three authors contributed equally to the development, analysis, and writing of this project. Authorship is listed in alphabetical order.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Education; Curriculum, Pedagogy, Critical librarianship.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Library practice, Library education, Professional development, Professional associations.

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