School of Library and Information Science
Task Force on Graduate Education: Selective Excellence
Strategic Assessment

Mission:
The School of Library and Information Science offers a graduate-level program of professional and academic preparation for careers in libraries and information centers. The program is accredited by the American Library Association. In concert with the mission of The University of Iowa (UI), the School seeks excellence in its education of future library and information professionals, its contribution to the knowledge base of Library and Information Science, and its service to the School's local, regional, national and international constituencies.

Admission Processes and Criteria:
Demand for this degree is heavy. U.S. News and World Report ranks librarianship as one of its "Best Careers of 2009" (http://www.usnews.com/money/careers/articles/2008/12/11/best-careers-2009-librarian.html). Over the past five-year period, we have seen on average one-hundred applications for every admissions cycle. We admit 35 students to each incoming class. We do almost no recruitment since demand for our program is so high. We can not admit more students than we do because we would need more faculty to teach these students.

Criteria for Selection:
Academic standards and documentation:

• A bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university, with a minimum grade-point average of 3.0 on a 4.00 scale.
• A score of 1000 (combined verbal/quantitative) or above and an analytic score of 4.0 on the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test.

Professional criteria:

• Application information, including a written statement of purpose;
• Three letters of recommendation from persons who can assess the scope and quality of the applicant's past academic work or employment;
• On-campus or telephone interview with a member of the faculty.

Applicants are expected to have basic computer competencies. In addition, applicants whose native or official language is not English are required to achieve a TOEFL score of 550 (paper version) or 213 (computer version). If admitted with scores of under 600 (paper version) or 250 (computer version), students are given an English Proficiency Evaluation upon arrival on campus, to determine whether remedial coursework is needed.

Success in Enrolling the Highest Quality Students
Being an MA only program, we do not have much access to student support in terms of scholarships or assistantships. We therefore lose a number of students to larger schools in the country who do have Ph.D. programs or more funding for student support. Unfortunately, these are the students most likely to bring diversity in all its forms to our department. Nonetheless, we do have good success with enrolling our best students. We generally have a waiting list of 10-12 students (depending on the class). We have always been able to fill our pipeline with this list.

Diverse Student Body
We struggle to attract diverse students to our field. Part of the problem is that our field itself attracts a narrow demographic (overwhelmingly white, overwhelmingly female). The problem is compounded by the general whiteness of Iowa. However, we do participate in the LAMP program—a grant funded project to attract diversity to Library and Information Science, and we have been able to attract modest numbers of minority students to our school. It helps that we have an extremely diverse faculty. Out of six active faculty members, one-third are African American and one-half are non-Caucasian. We are evenly split in gender.
Funding for Students
University funding for students is minimal. We have an allocation from the Graduate College that covers four one-half time graduate assistantships. We have aggressively pursued grants to assist with student funding, and currently we have fifty students in our program on full funding from federal grants. One grant funds full tuition for forty Iowa teachers earning licenses to become school librarians. Another grant provides generous fellowships to ten students pursuing a track in digital librarianship (ten students have already graduates on this funded track).

Program Outcomes
Degree Completion and Time to Degree
The MA in Library and Information Science is 36 credit hours. Normal time to degree is two years. Some students are able to complete slightly faster (three semesters and a summer). Part-time students may take longer. It is extremely rare for a student to not complete the program.

Fellowships, Awards, Honors, Publications
We encourage students to present their work at regional and national conferences for practitioners. These venues include the Iowa Library Association and the American Library Association. Many of our students choose to publish work produced in the program in journals for practitioners. For example, one of our students (Amy Slowik) published an article this fall on collecting Medieval manuscripts. Several of our students have gone on to pursue Ph.D.s at other institutions and through the Informatics program here at Iowa. Being an MA program, we do not generally compete for Fellowships and Awards targeted for Ph.D. students.

Placements
Graduates of the School of Library and Information Science pursue a variety of careers, both as librarians and as entrepreneurial information workers. During the past few years, the majority of our placements were evenly split between libraries in higher education (both colleges and universities) and public libraries. Trailing somewhat farther behind, but gaining ground is the field of school librarianship, with anticipated openings of upward of one-hundred jobs in the state due to retirement in the next five years. Students also work in corporate and special libraries (like John Deere, Pioneer Seed, ACT, locally). While it is difficult to track graduates, we estimate that our placement rate exceeds 90% for students who are able to broaden their geographic searches beyond Iowa.

Program Characteristics
Size
Of course, determining the appropriate size of a graduate program is subjective at best. We graduate about thirty students a year. We do not teach undergraduates. Our current FTE size is 6.25, which makes us viable. We could easily double our student enrollment and still recruit a strong student body. At our current size we are very vulnerable to faculty resignation or re-assignments, and a larger faculty would give us more stability and more ability to cover the increasingly complex research environment of our field. It is a commonplace to say that we live in an “Information Age.” Given the explosion of information and the ways it is researched and used in society today, there are abundant opportunities for growth, and indeed, there is real need for us to expand our research and teaching into these new areas. That would require new faculty lines. To date, we have not been successful in arguing for new lines to support this growth.

Comparison with National Programs
We are one of the smallest Library and Information Schools accredited by the American Library Association, and yet we compete nationally for faculty quite successfully. In our most recent round of hires, we competed successfully against the largest schools in the country (Pittsburg, Syracuse, North Carolina, and Texas) for top Ph.D. graduates in 2007. Indeed, I would argue that we have the best junior faculty in the nation right now. In 2009, we became ranked in U.S. News and World Report for the first time, coming in at 23rd among public research universities.
Unlike at Iowa, large programs in Library and Information Science have expanded to become free-standing colleges at some schools (Maryland, Florida State, Penn State, and Drexel, most prominently). Many are five times our size. The Information School at the University of Washington, for example, lists 55 faculty members (32 tenure track and 23 part-time or affiliated). The University of Illinois at Urbana Champagne (the top ranked school in the United States), has thirty-one core faculty. We believe we could evolve into a school comparable to these to the extent we are allowed a level playing field on campus for future growth.

**Candid Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses**

As we have indicated above, our potential contribution to the university and to our field is huge. We are collaborative by definition, accommodating great diversity within our faculty. We have faculty members with backgrounds in Computer Science, English, Communication Studies, Rhetoric, Law and Management Science. We are connected by joint appointments and working relationships to Language Literacy and Culture (in the College of Education), Computer Science, Project on Rhetoric of Inquiry, Informatics, and UI Center for the Book. We have been significant participants in developing the umbrella Ph.D. program in Informatics. We have been very successful for our size in pursuing grant funding, currently managing almost $2,000,000 in federal grants. Given the synergies between computing technology and bio-medical, humanistic, and social science inquiry, an inherently interdisciplinary field like ours has great potential for growth and contribution to campus vitality, and strategically, one can look at larger schools like those cited above for examples of how such growth can work.

Our biggest weakness right now is our size. At 6.25 FTE (with .75 unfilled due to budget issues), we are viable but vulnerable, and small changes in faculty structure can have significant consequences for our ability to deliver our program. We currently have a leadership issue. Recent faculty turnover has left us with a very junior-heavy department (only one tenured faculty member with duties in the school). With a rotating DEO model, we are without a tenured faculty member to rotate into the position when the current DEO steps down in 2010. We strongly believe that we need a permanent Director to lead our school, to be an advocate for growth, and to be a committed presence in setting strategic vision and developing external relations for the school. The rotating DEO model, while perhaps workable in the past, has not proven very successful for maintaining direction and momentum for the school.

**Potential Reorganization**

Many models for organization have been tried in Schools of Library and Information Science around the country. Some schools are affiliated with Colleges of Education, some with Communication Studies, and some with Journalism. Some have evolved as free-standing colleges. There has been much discussion on this campus about Informatics, and it makes some sense for us to be affiliated with the Informatics program. Such an affiliation would give us the opportunity to work within and help shape a coherent Ph.D. program aligned with our faculty’s research interests.

We have also discussed a potential alliance with the University of Northern Iowa’s School of Library and Information Science. UNI’s program is not accredited by the American Library Association, but they have an excellent program for educating school librarians. Establishing a formal affiliation with UNI (with whatever governance structure would make sense) would be an interesting way to leverage resources of two Regents Universities into one large program that would serve the state.

It would be imperative, were we to reorganize in any direction, for us to maintain our current level of excellence in our MA program. The MA in Library and Information Science is the terminal degree for our professional field. Protecting the quality of that degree would be crucial to any successful reorganization plan.

**Conclusion**

The future of our school is very bright. We continue to attract an intellectually diverse student body, and even in these economic times, our spring 2009 graduates are finding employment. Our highly
diverse faculty is productive and collegial. We see great potential for our work and for our school. With a small measure of support from the university, the School of Library and Information Science could make a big step forward in terms of student body size and reputation in the region and the country.