

# **Towards a Re-Conceptualisation of Education for Information Management: A Survey of Views on Education from the Information Management Profession.**

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Forty-five years ago under John Metcalfe's leadership, LIS education was first taught at university level in Australia. But today LIS education programs are in a 'crisis'<sup>2</sup> not only in Australia but worldwide.<sup>3</sup> Information management, organization, management systems, and service are no longer the sole domain of Library and Information Studies. These fields now encompass many new areas of expertise and have broadened to be relevant to every sector and industry, not only the so-called information-sector. The time is now ripe for a re-thinking of the education necessary to prepare graduates for careers in the spheres of information management, information organization, knowledge management, and the supporting technologies and systems.

Charles Leadbeater<sup>4</sup> suggests that 'librarians as a profession are stuck ...' and he goes on to suggest that the longer they remain stuck, crises will develop and that over time this will become a chronic condition from which it will be very hard to recover. The recovery he predicts will take from 5-10 years and requires real leadership with the courage to take big risks.

Many university library programs changed faculty and re-branded themselves during the 1990s. These changes have been token and insufficient to encompass the changes brought about by the electronic age. [The impetus to develop strategic ideas and programs to halt the decline and to re-invigorate the debate on education for information management requires vision and new leadership.](#) Old concerns for a narrow view of 'professionalisation' need to be

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<sup>2</sup> Dillon & Norris (2005) state that "the notion of crisis is best understood as indicative of a moment of change and an opportunity to significantly affect the long-term future of the field."

<sup>3</sup> See for example, Berry (2004), *European Curriculum Reflections On Library And Information Science Education* (2005), and papers by Hallam; Sarrafzadeh et al; Tam & Mills; Wright & Lombardi; Combes & Anderson; Smith & Harvey among others from the recent conference Proceedings of Asia-Pacific Conference on Library and Information Education and Practice (A-LIEP-2006).

<sup>4</sup> Charles Leadbeater is a corporate thinker, strategist and consultant who has spoken and published widely, recently concentrating primarily on innovation theory. In 2003, he released an important report on public libraries in the UK, called *Overdue: how to create a modern public library service*.

abandoned in favour of a broad and eclectic view of information management and organisation.

Because information management work is endemic and no industry can fully function without the use of management systems and knowledge creation, new roles for information education are required. It may be that education for the new roles in information are better suited to being opened up (de-institutionalised) so that students can take a range of self-selected training paths choosing subjects or courses within various disciplines and faculties. For example, there is a cogent argument for students picking up courses within business studies, e-commerce, computer science, information technology, arts and the humanities. Not all employers want the same type of graduate – and the job advertisements attest to this change in opportunities for graduates. Thus a diversified program with the choice of different specializations for students would suit the changing work environment.

Using notions from Charles Leadbeater (2005) and a cross-European study of LIS curriculum issues (2005), we explore aspects of the current environment for information management education including professional recognition and placement, new workplaces, and the drawbacks of a corporatised university reluctant to host programs with uneconomic rates of enrolment.

The paper will discuss the results from an exploration of views about education for information (broadly defined) gathered in interviews with a range of information professionals. For the interviews we targeted senior people, past graduates and current students, personnel in the information sectors of education, government, public service agencies, and in recruitment agencies, as well as personell in selected business environments where information and knowledge management are essential components of their core business. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule with most questions being discussion starters or, at the very least, open-ended in nature. Interviews were tape-recorded and the transcripts of interviews coded to identify trends, as well as similarities and differences of opinion, views and recommendations for change.

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