

**Simmons College SLIS**  
**Skills and Knowledge Survey**  
**Executive Summary**

The field of library and information science is changing rapidly, and it is incumbent on LIS programs to keep up with and anticipate trends in the field in order to ensure that program graduates have the skills, knowledge, and competencies necessary to succeed in their professional lives. In April of 2017, Simmons College School of Library and Information Science conducted a survey as part of a larger curriculum review project. The purpose of this survey was to gather stakeholder input on which skills and knowledge areas these stakeholders see as most important, both now and in the near future. Further, the survey aimed to differentiate between “core” areas, or knowledge, skills, and competencies in which all LIS graduates should be grounded regardless of their areas of specialization or ultimate career paths; and specialized areas, or knowledge, skills and competencies that are only likely to be needed in specific positions or information settings.

The survey consisted of a list of 53 skills and knowledge areas, culled from various sources including competency standards, LIS literature, and job listings. The skills were broken down into the following five categories: General, Communications, User Services, Management, and Technology. Survey respondents were asked to rate each skills according to the following scale: 1. Core: All MS LIS graduates should have a strong foundation in this area, regardless of area of specialization or career path; 2. Very important: Most professionals will need to know/be able to do this; 3. Important: Many professionals will need to know/be able to do this; 4. Specialized: Only professionals in specialized positions are likely to need this skill/knowledge; 5. Not important. An open-text question asked respondents to list any skills or knowledge areas that were not reflected in the original list.

The survey was first piloted with Simmons SLIS faculty. 16 faculty members took the survey and were given the opportunity to offer feedback on the instrument. Based on their input, the original survey did not need to be modified.

The survey was then delivered to a number of different stakeholders and venues, including through the following channels:

1. Direct email to 4625 SLIS alums
2. Direct email to SLIS adjuncts
3. Direct email to SLIS internship/practicum supervisors
4. Email to SLA Boston chapter listserv
5. Email to Massachusetts public library directors listserv
6. Email to the Boston Library Consortium listserv
7. Email to the Board of Library Commissioners listserv
8. Email to the NEASIS listserv
9. Email to the Massachusetts School Librarians Association listserv
10. Email to the Massachusetts Library System Members Directors
11. Email to the LITA listserv
12. Email to SAA New England listserv

13. Email to the Massachusetts Library Association listserv

14. Email to the Associate University Librarians Community of Interest of the BLC

The survey was distributed on April 3<sup>rd</sup> and closed on April 21<sup>st</sup>.

In total, 1117 responses were collected.

The responses show some clear patterns for which skills and knowledge areas are considered core or specialized. Setting a cut-off point of 45%, Table 1 illustrates the skills were identified as core for all MSLIS students by 45% or more of respondents, listed in descending order:

**Table 1: Core Skills and Knowledge Areas**

Skills/Knowledge Area	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Interpersonal communication	940	86%
Search skills (ability to search databases, internet resources, and catalogs efficiently and effectively)	878	80.5%
Writing	868	79.5%
Knowledge of professional ethics	861	78.6%
Evaluating and selecting information resources	845	77.6%
Teamwork	814	74.6%
Customer service skills	798	73%
Cultural competence (ability to work effectively in cross-cultural situations/with people of various cultural backgrounds)	675	61.6%
Interacting with diverse communities	619	56.7%
Reference interview/question negotiation	541	49.5%
Reflective practice grounded in diversity & inclusion	533	48.9%
Describing information resources	511	47%
Fundamentals of management	504	46.1%

In addition, certain skills were identified as specialized. Table 2 lists skills that were identified as specialized by 45% or more of respondents.

**Table 2: Specialized Skills and Knowledge Areas**

Skill/Knowledge area	No. of Respondents	Percentage
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Management of archival records and manuscripts	716	65.3%
Managing network systems	601	54.8%
Preservation of non-digital resources	551	50.4%

All other skills were ranked as “very important” or “important” by a plurality of respondents, suggesting that those skills are relevant to a broad range of professionals across a variety of positions and settings, but are not necessarily core.

The survey also included an open-ended question inviting respondents to list any additional skills or knowledge areas not included in quantitative portion of the survey. Participants provided over 300 responses to the open-ended question. These responses were reviewed and coded, resulting in 58 additional skills and knowledge areas. Table 3 provides a summary of the qualitative responses, listing the skills and knowledge areas identified, along with the number of mentions each received. It is important to note that in a number of places, the write-in responses duplicated skills or knowledge areas from the quantitative part of the study. In some cases, respondents indicated that they recognized they were repeating answers, but that they were doing so for emphasis. In other cases, the duplication appears to be a matter of interpretation or possible misunderstanding. For example, the quantitative portion of the survey included the item “evaluate and select information resources,” which was meant to encompass collection development. However, several respondents included collection development in the open-ended response, saying that they did not see it represented in the quantitative portion of the survey. Finally, it is important to note that respondents did not always intend for their open-ended answers to reflect core skills and knowledge areas. Some respondents indicated that they were listing skills from a certain perspective or setting, such as public libraries, school libraries, or archives. For purposes of completeness and transparency, the qualitative summary below includes all responses, whether or not they duplicated answers, and whether or not that duplication appeared to be purposeful.

**Table 3: Qualitative Responses**

Skill/Knowledge area	No. of Mentions
Working with emotionally disabled/difficult/IS and SSW	24
Management, including managing up, project management	17
Understanding of government role, esp. funding	16
Working with diverse populations, including anti-oppression/anti-racism, cultural competence	15
Statistics/Working with Data	14
Instruction, literacy, IL, classroom management	14
Practical Experience	13
Outreach and advocacy	13
Negotiation, including vendor, licensing	13
Customer service	13
Collection Development	12

Professionalism	11
Budgeting, fundraising, prospect research, grant-writing	11
Professional Development/Lifelong learning/Professional Networking	10
Open Access/Open Source/OER	10
Working with Boards, Friends, Unions	9
Library systems/OPACs	9
Database Construction/Management, including query languages	9
Conflict resolution	9
Crisis/Disaster Management/Safety Planning	8
Materials Processing	7
Digital Assessment Management	7
Competitive Intelligence/Corporate libraries	7
Writing, including Technical writing	6
Search skills	6
Scholarly Communications/Publications	6
Facilities Management	6
Emerging Tech	6
Data Science/Curation/Management	6
Community relations and community needs assessment	6
Records Management	5
Presentation/Public Speaking	5
Evaluation & assessment	5
Ethics/Values	5
eResource Management	5
Design thinking, innovation, creativity	5
Copyright, public policy, regulatory law	5
Web/graphic Design, Info Architecture	4
Strategic planning	4
Reference, including specialized (medical, humanities, etc.)	4
Donor Relations	4
Cybersecurity, digital forensics	4
Cataloging and related	4
Accessibility, assistive tech, ADA	4
Research Methods	3
Multi-tasking, time management	3
Theories of LIS	2
Ability to talk to IT professionals	2
Knowledge Management	2
Digital Libraries/repositories	2
Access Services	2
Archival basics/lit	2

Knowledge of language other than English	2
Succession planning	1
Policy Development	1
Learning Platforms (Moodle, etc.)	1
Content Management	1
Bibliometrics	1

We at SLIS will continue to analyze this data and use it to review and improve our curriculum. Thank you to all those who took the time to respond to the survey, and those who helped to distribute it.