

SLAIS Director's and Program Chairs' Forum

Date: 14 March 2011

Time: 12:00-13:30

Location: IKBLC 260

Present:

Caroline Haythornthwaite, SLAIS Director

Judith Saltman, MACL Chair

Edie Rasmussen, Ph.D. Chair

Luciana Duranti, MAS Chair

Susie Stephenson, MLIS Chair

Approximately 25 SLAIS students were in attendance.

The Director's forum takes place once per semester and provides SLAIS students of all programs with the opportunity to meet with the director. For the second forum of the 2010-2011 school year, the program chairs of the MACL, MAS, MLIS, and Ph.D. programs were also invited to participate.

Most questions were asked in person, some students submitted questions ahead of time via email to LASSA executives to be asked on their behalf.

LASSA co-president Leah Hopton opened the forum and introduced the panel.

SLAIS has recently joined the iSchools – what was the history around this decision?

- (Caroline) In the past, information programs have not been strongly connected to the library tradition. Initially, only major research schools joined the iSchools as one of the main requirements was that a school report to a provost, making it a small group. SLAIS reports to a dean, and was not eligible to join until recently. The information field has been increasingly open to everyone; there is recognition that archives and library programs are doing work in the area of information science. The iSchool community provides a home for research that would otherwise remain independent, and has become a major forum for information science research. Caroline came to SLAIS from an iSchool, and wondered why UBC was not part of this community, as it provides the opportunity for schools like SLAIS to be heard. Caroline asked the faculty in the fall to consider SLAIS joining the iSchool community, and a vote was taken providing the go-ahead for applying. SLAIS now gets to present all relevant research to the iSchool community, including archival research, which previously was not visible to this community.

What does this mean for SLAIS? Will this change course offerings?

- (Edie) More visibility for SLAIS; we were well-represented at the iConference last month
- (Caroline) SLAIS will be able to better showcase masters and doctoral research. There will be little impact on curriculum in the short term, though it will inform a more general orientation towards research. SLAIS is hoping to see faculty give courses in their area of specialization in the form of seminars.

Concern was expressed around the technology courses unrelated to the core courses. Are we keeping up with technology in SLAIS courses?

- (Edie) SLAIS uses software packages that are well-accepted for programs like ours, though these may not be cutting edge
- (Susie) The library automation course focuses on using open-source integrated library resources, though SLAIS does take advantage of other expensive software sources. Generally, there is more concern with students being familiar with key concepts around the use of software than in-depth knowledge of a particular program (e.g. using MS Access for database design to teach database concepts instead of other programs that one might find in the workplace). SLAIS simply does not have the money required for most software programs; we will never be in a position to get the latest, newest thing. Curriculum cannot react that quickly, and software needs to support courses. SLAIS will be purchasing a premium Adobe design suite, but we can only afford it for one machine. We will also be purchasing iPads and e-readers for student and faculty use. In general, though, UBC doesn't provide well for software – they are better on hardware. Archival software tends to be enterprise software, which we cannot support for other reasons (such as server space). Coincidentally, SLAIS has added a 1 credit course on open-source software for archives.

Will there be money for apps for the iPads (as they are useless without apps)?

- (Susie) SLAIS will have to find some money for this; will likely be on a case-by-case basis. Faculty might also purchase apps for their research purposes, which will come out of their research budgets.

How do students access the iPads and e-readers?

- (Susie) This will be booked through Kiki in the office. They will be available on a first-come-first-serve basis as is the case with laptops and projectors.

What kind of training does an adjunct instructor (or faculty) have to have in order to teach particular software programs?

- (Susie) Instructors are not going to teach any program they are unfamiliar with. Generally, adjuncts have experience with a particular program they use in their work place. They should be keeping up with technology. It is also up to students to contact adjuncts to ask whether or not a particular course will suit their needs.
- (Caroline) Instructors also have master's degrees.

There seems to be a divide between doing research and getting the course work required for job preparation. The 12 credit thesis is a major commitment which limits the amount of coursework that students will get to do. Why not a 6 credit thesis?

- (Edie) In the past, SLAIS has had a 6 credit thesis, and the credit awarded was found not to reflect the value of the work put into the thesis (which is 100 pages of original research).
- (Caroline) There are many organizations (such as Library and Archives Canada) that want employees to be able to do research, so research and employment do align.
- (Edie) This is also true in academic libraries. There are 3 courses at SLAIS that do require research, such as a directed study.
- (Luciana) In graduate studies, there are two types of programs: thesis or no thesis. If a thesis is required as part of a program, then it is not necessary for a student to get credits. The optional thesis (such as SLAIS has) is confusing in this way to Graduate Studies because it has to be considered equivalent to two or more courses, otherwise nobody would select a thesis if the credits attached to it were 0. As it regards LAC (Library and Archives Canada) looking for employees educated in a research, this is a consequence of an institutional trend towards R&D, as technology is changing so quickly and solutions to the issues they present are wanted instantly.

The HCI specialization requires a lot of credits outside of SLAIS. Is there a way to make it easier for students to navigate these options and take courses outside of SLAIS?

- (Susie) SLAIS does not have control over these courses; MAGIC (Media and Graphics Interdisciplinary Centre) does, and we have to adapt to what they require. We recommend that students work closely with their advisors to get into such classes. It is not generally difficult to get into classes (such as those below the master's level), but we have found that many students end up dropping out of these classes as they don't have the implied background requirements.

What about specialization tracks in SLAIS programs?

- (Edie) SLAIS is looking to make changes in this area, by creating specializations in programs collectively. The MLIS and MAS programs may have 3 or 4 areas of strength. One example might be a digital culture stream which would draw on both archival and library courses.

- (Caroline) Students can also develop specializations on their own. Many students have focused on a particular area in their coursework, anyway. Students don't need something official from SLAIS to say that they have concentrated on an area, they just need to emphasize this specialized focus in their coursework through their CVs.

There has been concern over summer course offerings – especially this summer – with students being waitlisted for 6 courses. What is going on?

- (Caroline) SLAIS is trying to figure out a solution to this in the future – ideas include system workarounds such as initially limiting enrolment or limiting the number of courses that students can register/be waitlisted for (unless a student is graduating). We could add more courses, but we risk more classes being cancelled due to low enrolment. This was a problem last summer when many people dropped courses that they had registered for. Students often sign up for courses as “insurance” in case they don't get a co-op or other job. Another consideration is that faculty do not teach in the summer – we only have adjuncts (who are on a different pay structure than regular faculty).

There are issues around tuition fees and funding for US students in this area, who do not get money unless they are enrolled in at least one *on-campus* course. How can SLAIS do a better job of appraising the needs of US students?

- (Caroline) We can look into these deadlines.
- (Susie) Re summer tuition payment: Tuition requirements are decided at the Senate level, and it is a coincidence that the 3rd tuition instalment happens to come right before the summer term. However, giving priority to US students over other students in summer courses is very tricky. The waitlist ultimately does work, though there may be some issues with it. We could try having some courses in a different building so as to accommodate more students. On the flip side of things, what if we let 40 students in a class hoping that 10 people will eventually drop, but no one does? We are likely going to see a similar situation in the June registration, though people are generally not as angst-ridden over the fall semester as they are less likely to be leaving town. The reality is that summer courses will always have lower enrolment. SLAIS does actually offer more on-campus summer courses than most other graduate units at UBC.

Students are receiving mixed messages regarding registration for summer classes as the co-op office suggests that students sign up for courses in case students do not get a co-op placement. Perhaps communication with the co-op office is necessary on this point? Additionally, some students don't hear about a co-op placement until partway into summer which adds to difficulty of making plans for the summer. Is it possible for students to take more than one internship or practical experience or other course that doesn't require faculty?

- (Caroline) This comes back to curriculum review; there is also an issue with credits and changes to the category of courses. Should a person be taking a repeat of independent study or going to class? We would rather have people doing independent studies as doing something unique, not as a substitute for a class.

Students starting in January have fewer options with respect to summer courses/internships/professional experiences because they have fewer courses (and thus pre-requisites) under their belts. Is it possible to let these students do professional experiences sooner?

- (Caroline) This is something that SLAIS can look into.

What changes are occurring in each of the different programs at SLAIS?

- (Judith) Not a lot of changes at the moment; admissions is the same; looking for more cross-fertilization with other SLAIS programs/courses.
- (Edie) Vision for MLIS/MAS. There is always a committee for curriculum development; we are currently involved in a major revision. This is especially important for accreditation purposes. There has been significant faculty renewal over the last while, and we want to have new faculty involved in the curriculum development in order to cater to the strengths/research interests of these faculty members. We also want to do some general clean up. What are students interested in? What has been successful or not? What gaps do we need to fill? Also want to consider results from last task force survey. We are hoping to better integrate the two programs through specialization. Looking to introduce a shorter MAS core, which would give opportunities for students to take electives in the other program. Would like to introduce common experiences, especially for dual students in the first couple of weeks before they split off to complete separate core classes.
- (Luciana) We are trying to reduce core classes to 4, which means repackaging all the necessary theoretical knowledge into 4 courses. This will make things easier on dual students, who will have more elective options. We are considering different tracks in the MAS program, such as traditional archives, records managements, and digital forensics/preservation (this last one might be able to be shared across programs). We might consider a partnership with the University of Washington, which has a specialization in cyber security and forensic readiness and would link well with the digital forensics track. The courses in each track would be available to students in other tracks as second year electives. We are getting different types of people applying to the MAS program than we have in the past, as there are different areas in the job market for people with archival knowledge.

In light of our membership with the iSchools, are we moving in the direction of a unified core?

- (Luciana) No – the MAS degree has a place separate from the MLIS program. Certainly archival ideas are turning up in other programs, but we need to maintain a distinction.
- (Susie) The current curriculum review will be done by the entire Curriculum committee (and the full faculty), and it will be looking to find commonalities between programs (to see which courses might be able to be cross-listed). We will be taking special consideration of dual students, as we know that duplication is an issue. Can we minimize this – or ensure that an issue is looked at from two separate perspectives? Changing curriculum is a slow process, however, and can take between 18-24 months to update the UBC calendar.
- (Luciana) We might consider structuring courses into modules to allow for easier teaching from both sides. For example, the public service course deals with the same topics on both sides, but each program will want to teach different content in that course for the aspects of service that are unique to each while common content could be taught for areas that overlap.

What are the priorities when hiring new faculty members? Where do teaching and research achievements sit on the list of priorities?

- (Caroline) New hires are evaluated on research (40%), teaching (40%), and service (20%). UBC takes teaching very seriously, and it is 40% of the hiring decision.

Considering the angst of SLAIS grads in finding a job, does SLAIS consider this in setting the limits on admission?

- (Caroline) No. SLAIS is trying to keep up with what courses would be relevant for job searches. We do have a lower cap on MAS and DUAL enrolment currently, until we get more faculty members.
- (Edie) Schools operates on a market-driven model or cap model when it comes to admissions. SLAIS operates on the cap model – we take all applicants and rank them, and then offer the top number a place. It is harder to get into UBC than other places. We don't modify the cap based on the job market. We do look to the survey taken of recent graduates, but this date is not currently telling us that SLAIS is taking in too many students.
- (Susie) Students also need to consider that many SLAIS alumni are still in the area. Local organizations have too many well-equipped people looking for jobs. If you look at job placement and salary in the survey online, you will see that the results are pretty good. It still comes down to the right place at the right time for many students.
- (Edie) On the other hand, we get pleas from institutions in more remote areas that want an overflow of students – so that more might consider going to these remote areas.

Does the same type of cap apply to the Ph.D. program? And does SLAIS look at previous SLAIS students more favourably than students from other schools?

- (Edie) SLAIS looks at a number of things when granting admission to the Ph.D program, including the GRE and the research essay that students write. We want to see that students have carefully thought through their research question. A fit with faculty is also very important.
- (Caroline) It is very important that applicants to the Ph.D. program have formed a question (even if it changes) and have relevant knowledge in the area of their proposed research.

The digital humanities are having an increased presence in the humanities. Jobs are also opening up in this area. Does SLAIS have any plans to meet this need?

- (Caroline) There are general principles associated with any kind of digital analysis, such as data mining or managing digital data or being a digital librarian. SLAIS covers a fair bit of this, but perhaps we could identify the relevance to digital humanities; specializations could come into this. Students might consider working with their advisor in this.
- (Susie) If students are interested in an area and SLAIS doesn't have it, work with faculty advisors to get it. Students can take credits outside of SLAIS. Be proactive, look at WISE courses, and courses offered through the Western Dean's Agreement (which are offered at no extra cost to SLAIS students). Work with your advisor in this.
- (Caroline) Consider your SLAIS degree with your previous degree – you may already be a qualified specialist and may need to learn the vocabulary of that area.

With respect to MLIS students starting in January who are interested in transferring to the DUAL program, the February application deadline is rather impossible to meet. Would there be any thought to making this deadline more flexible?

- (Susie) This is something that could be looked at by the admissions committee, but there may not be a lot of flexibility on this.
- (Luciana) Moving such deadlines back can make things difficult for outside students who are applying to SLAIS as well as other schools and who may need to know if they have been accepted to a program quite early on.