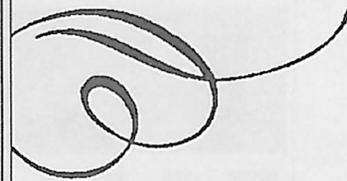


DOCTORAL DEGREES AND THE ACADEMIC LIBRARIAN, OR, IS "THERE A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE?"

by Jean-Pierre V.M. Herubel



Recently, discussions have emerged concerning newly minted Ph.D.s entering the professional field of librarianship. To be certain, these discussions have revolved around the potential entrance of Ph.D. holders into academic librarianship, something that has caused concern over the value of the master's degree in library and information science (LIS). Of continuing professional interest is whether Ph.D.s should be permitted to compete for and hold professional positions within academic libraries, without the requisite master's degree in LIS. Todd Gilman, a librarian at Yale University, and Tatiana Weinstein, a public librarian in Illinois, hold similar views when upholding the necessity of LIS training as a viable vehicle for professional librarianship (Johnson, 2003). Others propounding possible postdoctoral training programs, without LIS educational options, may hold differing views, often oriented toward the need for doctoral expertise vis-à-vis the need to fill specialized positions, i.e., archival, special collections, or rare books librarianship (Gilman, 2003; Gilman, 2005; Weinstein, 2005). Such discussions have prompted some interesting and insightful concerns over the necessity of LIS education as the *sine qua non* for any position—all for the better understanding of what the essential purpose the LIS fulfils (Mayer and Terrell, 2005). Beyond the perceived professional characteristics offered the holder, i.e. union membership privileges, the master's degree in library science constitutes the only viable and recognized form of professional acculturation (Hérubel, 1991).

As with law, medicine, architecture, and nursing, there are acculturative properties that characterize academic librarianship. Approaches, normative modes of thinking (within and outside the box), as well as a foundational understanding, firmly grounded in theory and philosophical frameworks of knowledge and service, converge to form a core value system animating the professional academic librarian. Each profession exhibits its own unique principals, with its particular values and processes, something that professions maintain and nurture. Implicitly or not, such core values and processes are critical to the health and

evolution of professions, without which distinctive professions could not exist. Within this sociological construction, professional education *and* training are nestled and are intimately bound up in professional characteristics, which both initiate and perpetuate professional properties of intellect and process (Macdonald, 1995). Lawyers, physicians, architects, and nurses think, respond, and process knowledge or unknown phenomena and carry about sundry activities accordingly, each within its respective acculturative universe.

The question of professional characteristics and professional employment is not new, nor is the necessity of situating questions of whether one's professional education is inextricably bound to the profession itself. For if the two are only tangentially linked, however tenuously or not, the central question of legitimacy is paramount to the health and dynamism of professional practice. Autodidactic behavior is laudable and exercised by all, whether before or after initial formal education and training. Without this essential ingredient, professionals would not be able to live any life, professional or otherwise. However, the argument here is the unqualified importance of acculturative conditions offered through sustained and engaged learning. Under the acculturation offered by professional faculty who have vested intellectual interests and concerns in a profession, students undergo normative learning conditions receptively or grudgingly. Education is not only exposure to knowledge, but one's own ignorance as well. Acculturative properties of professional behavior—the very act of acceptance or just as critically, *rejection* of those acculturative properties—forms indelible impressions on students and professors (Mitchell & Morton, 1992).

Several salient characteristics emphasize this, such as courses, student/professorial interaction, and student interaction with knowledge and technique. The process of engagement, with its entire sociologically constructed environment, forces students into the position of passive and active involvement. Even as pedagogy itself constitutes an imperfect process, the experience of participating within formalized venues

affects the student's sense of professional identity and recognition of others who have undergone the same experience. Often this becomes evident when practitioners are faced with compelling problems that essentially demand all their theoretical learning and framing of knowledge as they have re-conceptualized them into their professional practice and continual adaptation and evolution. The purpose of the master's degree in LIS is to acculturate the professional mind and to inculcate perennial questions and theoretical perspectives. Technique or hands-on practice is not the common denominator for library science students, but the cultural framing of LIS interests and concerns is.

If one takes a sociological approach to reflexivity, the professional who examines his/her profession and its intellectual condition has the special vantage point from which to observe that profession's most inner workings (Bourdieu, 1988). Nowhere is this truer than when professional education is examined by the professional. For one to say that acculturation is the most salient feature of professional education seems ludicrous; yet, the fact is that techniques once learned, methodologies once mastered, and temporally-based ideas and approaches, once in place, are simply the flotsam and jetsam eventually discarded or so deformed by practice that they obsolesce quickly. What remains is the acculturation that one has undergone, that is, the sociologically and pedagogically powerful forces that have shaped, for good or for ill, the practicing academic librarian. Without this acculturation, little progress or evolution could result. Most practicing academic librarians have their recollection of library school and often many have expressed their criticism. Such is to be expected, for rarely does the preparation for a profession equate directly to the reality of professional life and concerns (Kempe, 1997). All professions suffer from this terrible dichotomy; whether professional education can effectively and completely prepare a practitioner for the daily exigencies of professional life has always been beyond its scope and purview. Its primary directive is the acculturation of students into the active, reflective, and discerning professional.

Having said this, where does the discussion of Ph.D.s and their entrance into academic librarianship rest? A partial answer lies in the above discussion. Special knowledge, in-depth and acute, grounded in rigorous experience and intellectual and scholarly challenge, does not equate to the acculturative properties attendant in LIS education. The recent subject Ph.D. has undergone such a long acculturative gestation that he or she carries perforce disciplinary orientations and perspectives that must be addressed. Strategically speaking, this can itself constitute problems of adaptation if one is still prescribing to the disciplinary intellectual habits and protocols. The desire to become an academic librarian requires the candidate to become

receptive to the acculturative processes of LIS education. Not doing so can result in cognitive dissonance as well as misunderstanding among colleagues. Just as disciplinary acculturative conditions help to form the historian, the literary scholar, the chemist, and the philosopher, so too does LIS education, albeit shorter, since most LIS students are acculturated within one to two year graduate professional programs.

An additional acculturative property that must be addressed is the subject of research. Research as a good and as a *raison d'être* is paramount in the education of disciplinary Ph.D.s. If the research ethos still dominates the Ph.D. in any manifestation, this can prove to be problematic when a practice-based profession is concerned, whether it be law, medicine, or librarianship. Since most LIS students have not undergone sustained acculturation in research, emphasizing research and demanding research competencies and performance, this may constitute another acculturative condition that may prove problematic for Ph.D.s (Hérubel, 2005). Faculty status and publishing issues aside, the practice of academic librarianship does not value to the same acculturative degree the necessity for research as a hallmark of the productive scholar. The essential caveat here is that disciplinary Ph.D.s must discover successful ways to neutralize or accommodate research acculturation and proclivities if they are to become practicing academic librarians (Jackson, 2000). Even for faculty status librarians, the balance between research and publishing and daily practice is a delicate condition of professional life.

Rush Miller offered evidence that Ph.D.s enriched academic librarianship (Miller, 1976). For Miller, Ph.D.s offer additional acculturation in subject expertise and an understanding of the research process. Such expertise is valuable when applied to collection management or when interacting with disciplinary academics on campus. Since his study, disciplinary doctoral recipients have entered academic librarianship and have contributed to the profession. According to Miller, Ph.D. s have gained strong recognition in collection management, archives, special collections, and in specialized venues such as advanced subject-oriented reference services. In the majority of cases, doctoral holders have undergone the acculturation of master's degree education in LIS. Candidates who have been acculturated in LIS master's programs have been exposed to the essential intellectual and theoretical properties that animate library and information science. Without this acculturation, Ph.D.s remain with their disciplinary attributes, both intellectual and professional comportment, without salient LIS intellectual or theoretical basis from which to interact with the larger issues in academic librarianship.

Further discussion on this topic are needed since Ph.D.s will continue to enter academic librarianship as more graduate students find disciplinary careers

difficult to attain in constricted academic venues. Learning technique or hands-on approaches to library practice *do not a librarian make*, just as reading law books does not make for an educated lawyer. Too often, LIS students do want the technique over the theory, yet it is the theory and the principles that acculturate and remain. So it is with disciplinary Ph.D.s. The problematic response of hiring Ph.D.s without formal LIS education is the mirror image of privileging technique over the theoretical, the acculturative. As professional librarians demand the master's degree in library science as *sine qua non*, academic librarians must understand and privilege the acculturative theoretical properties inherent in LIS education, so as to clearly enunciate the principles guiding the requirement of the master's in LIS.

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