DEVELOPMENTS IN POST-MASTERS EDUCATION FOR
PUBLIC LIBRARY ADMINISTRATION IN NORTH AMERICA:
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE PUBLIC LIBRARY
ADMINISTRATORS’ CERTIFICATE PROGRAM AT THE
PALMER SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION
SCIENCE

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Abstract
This paper describes the development of a movement within American public libraries to provide a mechanism to support formal post-masters degree education for public librarians in the area of management and administration, and examines the critical aspects of one such successful programme. The paper traces the developments within the North American library education community of programs addressing the need for continuing professional development for public librarians to prepare them for administrative and managerial positions. In addition, it provides a case study of the development of a formal five-course post-Masters Certificate in Public Library Administration now hosted at the Palmer School of Library and Information Science, Long Island University, New York. Recognised by the New York State Education Department, this is the first such program in the U.S., and offers a workable prototype for similar efforts. The recent American Library Association – Allied Professional Association discussions regarding the need for quality continuing education in the area of public library administration and management has generated considerable interest throughout the profession yet the overall response to this concern from the library education community has so far been modest.

Introduction – the push for post-Masters education
In 1996 the American Library Association’s Public Library Association and Library Administration and Management Association Executive Boards approved ‘in concept’ the establishment of a Certified Public Library Administrator1 program. The focus of this effort was to establish a formalized and documented certification process to determine if an individual was qualified in terms of the knowledge and skills particular to the management of
public libraries. The Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA) soon joined this effort. ALA staff thereafter was directed to thoroughly explore the idea and to encourage widespread discussion throughout ALA of the proposal. In 1998 the ALA Executive Board also approved the proposal ‘in concept’. ALA leadership envisioned the program as a voluntary post-Masters regimen wherein candidates demonstrate evidence of competencies in a number of critical areas such as finance, personnel, facilities, technology, security, leadership, fundraising, and service to diverse populations.2

A key obstacle to the proposal was the federal tax-exempt status of the American Library Association and its Divisions. Under the federal tax code, the Association as a charitable organization was fully able to establish standards for the profession and offer educational opportunities to assist professionals to meet and maintain these standards. However, as a 501(c) 3 charitable organization, ALA was not permitted to certify individuals. Under the U.S. federal tax code only ‘Professional Societies’ organised as 501(c) 6 organizations are permitted to do so. The answer was deceptively simple: create a twin 501(c) 6 organization for ALA to offer certification for Public Library Administrators and similar professional competencies. This type of organization could also undertake lobbying efforts in areas such as compensation and salary issues not allowed ALA as a 501(c) 3 association.3

The proposal for the ALA-Allied Professional Association (APA) was not met with universal approval. Significant concerns were raised within ALA regarding the necessity for such a separate organization. Educational institutions voiced their concerns regarding potential competition from their own professional association and genuine concerns were (and still are) expressed regarding the financial viability of the enterprise since it cannot be subsidized by ALA and must be self sustaining. Subsequently additional issues have come into play, most notably ALA’s campaign for professional compensation and the call for certification of library support staff. Nonetheless, the process continues.

As of this writing ASCLA, PLA and LAMA are in the process of establishing a Standard of Professional Practice that will be utilized by APA as the benchmark for their certification process. The certification will require individuals to provide evidence of professional level coursework in several critical competencies. Course providers will be required to offer appropriate content and to provide and implement a mechanism for outcomes assessment in order to be recognized by ALA-APA. Ultimately ALA-APA will be able to certify professional public library administrators as meeting nationally recognized standards in education and experience, an essential step to the future success of public libraries in the United States. For a comprehensive examination of the process and timely information on the ALA-APA certification program visit http://www.ala-apa.org/.

**Development of a certificate program at the Palmer School**

The program offered through the Palmer School of Library and Information Science is a post-Masters curriculum resulting in a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Public Library Administration. It consists of a fifteen credit hour five-course sequence for students who already have the MS in LIS degree and are aiming for more senior jobs in the administration of public libraries. The program is aimed at professional librarians already working in public libraries and is approved by the New York State Education Department. This program is the result of an eight-year effort by regional library administrators and organizations to develop a meaningful educational experience for the next generation of public library leaders. The continued success and growth of this program is a direct result of four factors: content, cost, recognition, and reward.

In 1996, the Public Library Directors’ Association of Suffolk County (Long Island,
New York) and the region’s public library system, the Suffolk Cooperative Library System, determined that the growing sophistication of their libraries required a far more formal effort in administrative continuing education and training. The library system, similar to many cooperatives in New York State, is comprised of 56 independent public libraries. The libraries submit their operating budgets to their community voters annually for approval. Most of the Library Boards are elected as well. Today, the average library budget in this region is more than two million dollars.

The result of these discussions was the development of a post-Masters graduate program consisting of five three-credit courses in the areas of management; law and legislation; human resources; facilities and technology; and finance. The concept was modeled after the New York State Education Department’s School District Administrator’s Certificate and first offered as a contract course by the library system through the State University of New York at Stony Brook. The curriculum was developed in an effort to focus on the practical, as well as theoretical, aspects of public library management. The primary instructor and project coordinator was (and still is) a well-known public library administrator in the area with considerable teaching experience. Numerous subject specialists and experts from the field are brought in to teach particular classes to add their insights in the practice of library management.

In 2003, the program was moved to the Palmer School of Library and Information Science at the C.W. Post campus of Long Island University to take advantage of the University’s institutional commitment to graduate programs in librarianship (including the PhD) and to access their graduate schools in business and public administration. In turn, the University petitioned the New York State Education Department to recognize graduates of the program as completing a State approved Certificate in Advanced Studies in Public Library Administration. In September 2004 the New York State Education Department formally recognized the program as an Advanced Certificate in Public Library Administration, the first such state approved program in the nation.

Overview of the certificate program

The Public Library Director’s Certificate Program consists of five courses, which carry graduate academic credit and culminate in a Certificate in Public Library Administration. The five course content areas are:

- Principles of Public Library Organization & Management
- Financial Management of Public Libraries
- Human Resource Administration in the Public Library
- Legal Issues & the Regulatory/Governance Environment of the Public Library
- Public Library Facilities, Automated Systems and Telecommunications

Students in the certificate program are encouraged to register as a cohort, learning together through the five courses while establishing a professional network that will stay with them throughout their careers. However, the quality of the offerings has also attracted sitting directors anxious to increase their knowledge in particular areas of library administration by taking an occasional course. Thirty-four public librarians are presently enrolled. Of the fifty-one students who have completed the program since 1996, well over half are now serving as public library directors or assistant directors in the Long Island region. Commencing in January 2005, the certificate program was offered on two L.I.U. campuses on Long Island and, in the fall of 2005, it will be offered at the Westchester (on the mainland) campus as well. Plans call for developing online versions as well as intensive, weeklong seminars to be offered at remote sites. Also being planned is a mini version of the program designed for Public Library Trustees.
Lessons learned

There are several aspects necessary to assure the success of such a program, even with the most appropriate coursework and interesting instructors. These include institutional support, a tangible reward for participants and reasonable cost for the program.

In addition to a demonstrated professional need, there must be a tangible reward for the students upon completion. There is of course the factor that possession of the certificate puts those who have completed the program in a more competitive position for senior jobs. However, public libraries, unlike many public school systems, offer no direct financial incentive for the completion of graduate coursework beyond the Master’s degree. With this in mind, discussions were held with the regional and state civil service departments to incorporate the components of these courses into the public library director examination series in New York State (most public libraries in the region are governed by Civil Service regulations.) Those who have successfully completed the program receive additional credit on their examination and therefore are at the higher end of the eligible lists. This represents a very tangible and persuasive reason for a working librarian to pursue a graduate course each semester for two and a half years. Furthermore, as time has gone by the ‘market penetration’ of the program has also created an expectation by library boards in the region for an advanced degree in management or completion of the program by candidates for administrative positions. The lesson learned is that if at all possible there should be some built-in tangible reward for completing a program such as this, above and beyond simply having a line on one’s resume that you hope will make you more competitive.

A further critical concern, especially in the library field, is cost. Therefore each course in the certificate program is offered on either a one-credit or three-credit basis, with corresponding fees. The coursework is identical and the certificate is awarded regardless of the number of credits. However, those electing to matriculate in the program at the full three credit graduate level may submit the courses for transfer into other graduate programs, including the MBA, MPA or Ph.D. And, of course, should they find themselves in a system that financially rewards course work beyond the Masters degree, typically a system in which salary is tied to formal qualifications, then those credits would place them higher on the pay scale. Approximately 20% of the students opt for the full credit. This structure will sound quite unusual to those who hail from states where almost all tertiary education is at tax supported institutions, but in the North American context in which there are numerous independent non tax supported institutions, such as Long Island University, as well as tax supported institutions, this method works, fitting both the economic constraints of a private institution and the economic realities of the target population of working public librarians.

In addition to the financial cost to the student, there is also a sizeable opportunity cost to the student – the time expended to pursue the program. Particularly for students who are already working professionals, many with family commitments, all with other community commitments, this is a very real and significant cost. This results then in an obvious balance to be achieved between a program sufficiently extensive to impart substantial content, yet not so time consuming as to impose an unacceptable or impractical opportunity cost. It would appear that the success of this program demonstrates that something on the order of five graduate courses is the right size – of sufficient length to be content rich and not so long as to be impractical.

Another lesson learned is that programs of this sort should be based in an institution that regards LIS education as part of its mission. The institution in which this program was originally housed was chosen primarily for the convenience of its physical location, and because as a tax supported institution it could offer low tuition fees. However, little support
was provided and no attempt was made to register the program with the appropriate authorities, and it was clear that should the product champion move on to other challenges elsewhere, the program would be allowed to fade. With the program housed in an institution with LIS education as its mission, it is no longer dependent on the enthusiasm of one or two product champions, but is now woven into the fabric of the Palmer School.

**Other North American programs**

This area of post-Masters education for public librarianship, though much discussed is one that has received comparatively little attention from accredited LIS education programs in North America. The Palmer School program is certainly not the only program that addresses this need, but it is the case that to date the concern of the public library community has elicited very little response from LIS educators. A call on Jesse, the listserv that serves LIS programs in the U.S. brought forth very little response. What we have uncovered, in descending order of similarity, is:

Louisiana State University, LSU, offers a post masters program in government administration. It is a cooperative effort between the School of Library and Information Science, SLIS, and the Public Administration Institute. The Public Administration Institute is a department within the Center for Economics and Business Administration. Individuals who have obtained their Masters degree in library science, but who seek additional post-Masters training in government administration, are allowed to enrol in SLIS’s post-Masters certificate program, and specialize in public management. Students can take courses in the Masters of Public Administration program. The courses focus on budgeting, personnel, program evaluation, and policy analysis. The students may also take courses in the MBA, Master of Business Administration, program.

The program requires 24 credit hours (eight 3 credit courses, of which at least two must be LIS courses, at least two from public administration or business administration, and including three credit hours of directed independent study). The LSU program is the only other program that we came across in our investigation that was designed with the proposed post-professional standards training program draft developed by PLA specifically in mind.

Queens College in New York is an example of a program that a student can tailor to public librarianship. Queens has a certificate program (post-Masters Studies in Librarianship) in which students, with the advice of a faculty adviser, select courses from Queen’s regular offerings. The program is a 30 credit program (ten 3 credit courses). In their literature Queens does mention administration as an area that can be focused upon, but not public library administration per se. Dominican University has a similar post-Masters program, 15 credits (five 3 credit courses) in library administration, but again with no particular focus on public libraries. Several other institutions have similar programs.

The Professional Learning Centre of the Faculty of Information Studies at the University of Toronto offers a Certificate in Managing Information Enterprises program. This program is aimed at all information professionals, not just public librarians. It is short and concentrated, running over 14 days and consisting of seven 2-day courses covering the following facets: Applied Strategic and Business Planning, Change Leadership, Communicating for Decision Making, Designing Products and Services, Measuring Customer Satisfaction in Information Services, Project Management for Information Managers, and Information Audit. This program is much shorter than what is typically regarded as a certificate program, but much more extensive and coordinated than the usual run of continuing education workshops. (Non-North American readers should be advised that in North America and in the U.S. in particular there is nothing like the degree of
The Urban Libraries Council has run a program, called the Executive Leadership Institute, in which promising junior staff at large urban public libraries are selected to receive intensive one-on-one mentoring and education. The program was supported by grant money from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a U.S. government agency. The program was regarded as quite effective, but because of its cost - approximately $25,000 per person - it has been implemented only twice and for only a single digit number of persons each time. With the funding exhausted, it is quite problematic whether it will either be run again or serve as a model for other programmes. Another related model, almost certainly unique, is that the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul Minnesota offers an undergraduate certificate program in Urban Public Libraries. Undergraduate library education is uncommon in North America. The College of St. Catherine is not an ALA accredited institution per se, but it does offer the ALA accredited Masters degree in collaboration with Dominican University, and it has plans to apply for ALA accreditation in its own right in the near future.8

Conclusion

In summary, this paper proposes that the Palmer School program clearly meets the needs for post-Masters education that has been articulated by the public library community. Equally importantly, we believe that it can be a model for other such programs, a model that demonstrates how to meet the operational criteria of content, cost, recognition, and reward. It is hoped that the program and awareness of it will serve as a catalyst for the development of other similar programs. The recognition that professionally managed libraries require professional, trained library administrators is essential for the continued viability of our profession and our institutions. To prepare colleagues for the challenges of public administration programs of this type must be replicated throughout North America and be considered a prerequisite for a public library leadership position.

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