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Student Publications at UBC's School of Library, Archival and Information Studies: An Anecdotal Bibliography

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Abstract:

This paper analyzes and reflects on two School of Library, Archival and Information Studies student publications: *ADLIB* (1962-1972) and *Overdue* (1982-1997). Both publications offer rich insights into the experiences of students in the UBC program as it has developed over time.

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In February 2015, I received an e-mail from a colleague with the suggestion that students interested in contributing to *See Also* might consider consulting the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies fonds at the UBC Archives to see what past student publications had looked like. I supported the idea that the new student journal should have some acknowledgement of those who had toiled with similar aims in the past, and I was glad to have a distraction from classes and an excuse to spend some time in the Archives digging through bits of the school's history. What follows is a loose reflection on the two major newsletter-style publications produced by library and archives students over the life of the school to date: *ADLIB* (1962-1972) and *Overdue* (1982-1997). Both publications offer rich insights into the experiences of students in the Bachelor, then Master of Library Science program (which replaced the BLS in 1971), and later the Master of Library and Information Studies, Master of Archival Studies, and Master of Arts in Children's Literature programs now offered under the iSchool@UBC banner. The voices contained in *ADLIB* and *Overdue* complement and counter Maurizio Dattilo and Judith Saltman's 2001 *Forty Years of Library Education: The School of Library, Archival and Information Studies, University of British Columbia, 1961-2001*, which communicates the history of the school through faculty interviews and administrative records. In turn, the histories available through these three sources should be placed in conversation with the other records in the SLAIS fonds. For the purposes

of this paper I reflect only on the content of the student publications. *ADLIB* and *Overdue* express a character that *See Also* ought to attempt to replicate, because I believe it speaks to an enduring quality of SLAIS student voices over the past fifty years: a character that is by turns irreverent, passionate, challenging and thoughtful concerning the tenets of librarians and archivists as professionals and practitioners. Reading these newsletters is meaningful because they reflect so forcefully on the present: just as now, students in the past encountered and debated a profession in flux due to changing demands and technologies; put educational principles, pedagogies and content under scrutiny; and observed the ongoing need to communicate outside of the barriers of the school, the university, and the profession.

ADLIB was first published in October 1962. Its founders were the second class of students enrolled in the Bachelor of Library Science degree that was established by UBC in 1961 (Dattilo & Saltman, 2001). Based on the holdings at the Archives, the newsletter ran to 49 issues from 1962 to 1972 or 1973 (the final few issues are undated). Issues appeared every month during the term from October to April, though this schedule was often inconsistent. From 1970 to 1972 it was released bi-weekly with fewer pages per issue and a greater emphasis on events listings. The physical format of *ADLIB* remained fairly stable over the decade: a stapled booklet of anywhere from 3 to 18 mimeographed, double-sided 8.5 x 11 or 8.5 x 14 inch pages. The masthead occasionally displays interesting uses of typography and some issues have coloured paper covers with the newsletter name printed by linotype. As a whole, the newsletter was a fairly informal mix of commentary and editorials; comedic anecdotes, scripts and stories treating the various aspects of the library profession; discussions of the various field trips that cohorts then took to libraries in Vancouver, Victoria and Seattle; and UBC campus news and events of interest to students. Since the Bachelor of Library Science program lasted only a year, each class commonly reflected on the year prior and their upcoming transition

to employment. Later, the publication communicates student unrest and protest about the state of the library program and some of the growing pains students experienced when the degree transitioned from the BLS to the MLS. At times, the newsletter delved into broader political and social topics, including student politics at UBC, censorship, and national and international political issues, such as the FLQ crisis and the Vietnam War (“How can the same,” 1970). Dr. Samuel Rothstein, the much-loved founder of the school, was one of several faculty members who would occasionally contribute to the newsletter.

As editor John Dell writes in the opening editorial for *ADLIB*, the intention of the publication was “to help the members of the class get to know one another and their teachers through a series of short biographies... Later, we hope to use this publication, possibly, as a sounding board for class opinion; but an even greater purpose is to lessen the rigours of assignments by introducing a note of humour into the scene once and a while.” (Dell, 1962, p. 1). While the biography idea was quickly abandoned, the humour remained throughout *ADLIB*’s life. One student’s dark one-liner from 1963: “The only thing I want to get out of Library School is myself” is repeated in the same spirit at the beginning of 1970: “If I thought that being a librarian bore any resemblance to being a student at a library school, I’d quit.” (“Overheard,” 1963, n.p.; “One student’s impression,” 1970, n.p.). In the issue for October 1965, November 12 or 13 is suggested as “NO WHINE DAY” with “the rule of the day be as follows: No sole person of this establishment shall speak harshly or even speak of assignments for the entire day.” (“Editorial,” 1965, p. 1; emphasis in original). The class of 1966 cheekily took it upon itself to index *Playboy* by suggesting that “A scholarly index of *Playboy* could be THE contribution of U.B.C.’s 1966 class of Library School Students,” but the magazine dourly responded that it already had a suitable index (“If you are interested,” 1965, p. 9). A 1967 puzzle asked librarians to decode the Dewey class numbers to complete this Valentine’s

story: "Once upon a time, at a 394.25 a young male 023.5 had his 152.14 stimulated by a 155.533 who had 111.85 as of an 759.45. His 153.733 was caught at once, and he 153.42 to himself, 'My 611.12 is 612.171, my 612.14 is rising, and my 612.2 is speeding up.'" ("A Valentine story," 1967, p. 2). At other times, parodic course reviews suggested that students should complete assignments like "List the first 150,000 books you will choose for your library, annotating each with full bibliographical detail. (Use only one side of a 5 x 7 card.)" ("Courses," 1962. p. 3).

Serious rumination on the state of librarianship occurred near the end of the newsletter's run. In the November 1969 issue, Sam Rothstein wrote an editorial suggesting that the 1970s will be "the decade when the fundamental tenets of librarianship will be up for grabs. There is something very heady about regarding nothing as 'given.' I don't know whether to envy you people [for] your chance for the joys of conflict or to be sorry for you" (p. 1). In response, Garth Homer published a lengthy piece in the January 1970 issue that argued that the school was too isolated as a department at UBC and from other library schools in Canada. He concludes that, "Perhaps the most damaging type of isolation for the student is from those that actually practice in the profession. Students have no real idea if the education that they are obtaining is what the profession actually wants in a trained librarian" (p. 1). Homer advocates for the proposed two-year MLS program, reflecting Rothstein's comments above:

With the advent of the two year program this opinion is going to carry more weight. The student with two years at a library school is going to have much more to say, and perhaps feel twice as strongly about the matters that concern his education. The days of the mild mannered, passive librarian are rapidly fading into the past. His training will be different, his ideas novel, his demands new. (p. 2).

The opening of greater criticism about the program brought some controversial

complaints to *ADLIB*'s pages, particularly about an anonymously authored January 1971 article that negatively reviewed courses and faculty. The practice was banned from the newsletter, and in its place, a grievance committee formed "to examine the causes of such complaints, and to present them to the faculty" ("Editorial," 1971, p. 2). In the same challenging spirit, Michael Pearl began a panel series during the following year addressing such topics as gender, unions and GLBT issues in libraries called "The Alternate Library School" to confront "various problems at the School of Librarianship: lack of community and social activities[,] lack of and/or deficiencies in social and political perspectives in course content [and] lack of genuine concern for the future realities in librarianship as reflected in course content" (1972, p. 9-10). Similarly, the transition from the BLS to MLS is documented from student perspectives as somewhat painful, a circumstance which is not mentioned by Dattilo and Saltman. Once the program increased from one to two years in length, the problem of finding work during the summer suddenly presented itself. A 1971 student-faculty meeting reported by Stephen Toney addressed the issue, with the faculty represented by then-Director Roy Stokes and Margaret Burke:

They feel that there really are no effective cudgels, if there are any at all, to make libraries come across with jobs; that they cannot gauge the magnitude of the problem because in previous years students were looking for permanent jobs and the libraries knew this. (p. 2-3).

Students also felt that the two year program created silos of students based on their year. One editorial by Jim Henderson complained that students no longer socialized as a single unit. However, he notes that changes in pedagogy might address this problem: "Communication and teamwork among students are being encouraged more recently through the increased use of discussion groups and team projects" (1972, p. 7).

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ADLIB ended rather unceremoniously with an unnumbered and undated “special issue,” probably from early 1973, that treated upcoming elections to the library student association. Despite its end, it is impressive that the publication lasted a decade, especially when student turnover occurred on a yearly basis in its early years. Despite its loose production, the journal nevertheless stands as one of the only sources of students’ experiences of the first decade of UBC’s library school. As the above survey of its pages demonstrates, it is evidence of an active and thoughtful student body questioning classic problems of library education: the relationship between theory and practice, the possibilities of interdisciplinarity, and the position of the librarian as a social and political actor.

Overdue is by and large a much tamer publication compared with *ADLIB*, and consequently, my comments on it are more limited. It also ran for a lengthy period of time, from September 1982 to April 1997, producing 47 issues with a production schedule of 3 issues per term. From 1982-1989 its format was a folded set of 8.5 x 14 inch coloured sheets to form a small booklet. In 1990 the format changed to a stapled set of 8.5 x 11 sheets, also on coloured paper. The journal typically ran from 15 to 25 pages, and included news items concerning the school, events and activities, and student politics at UBC. Recurring features were descriptions of library and archival work experiences and practicums and interviews with faculty members. Some items tended more towards academic publications, such as a 1982 bibliography of Canadian poetry for young adults by Shelley Civkin. The tendency to humorously reflect on the experiences of library school was not lost from *ADLIB* in the ten year gap between the publications: there are the usual articles reflecting on the trials of the library student’s first semester, and one of the final issues is a tongue-in-cheek “corporate sell-out issue” with the suggestion that all librarians should sell their services to the highest bidder.

Overdue's less critical stance on the library school's curriculum and development may have been due to it being a more formal, news-focused publication, or it reflects a greater sense of stability felt by the students during this time (though this seems hardly possible at any time). Only later in the journal's tenure are questions raised about the direction of the program. A 1992 interview with Ken Haycock, then serving as the school's Director, signalled that some changes were afoot as he questioned the future focus of the school, asking: "Should we be focusing more on information science, on computer developments and applications?" (p. 5). Perhaps as a consequence of these questions, the MLS was changed to the Master of Library and Information Studies in 1995. Another 1992 issue addressed student comments on some apparently proposed "restructuring" and "harmonization" of the School's programs that seemed to point to the combination of the MAS and MLS degrees. Students asked, "Does this mean that SLAIS is moving toward offering an Information Studies program? Why is none of this being discussed openly?" though it is unclear if these questions were based on rumour or reality ("On harmonization," 1992, p. 2-3). As the newsletter moved into the late 1990s it became much shorter and more devoted to news notes rather than discussion. The April 1997 issue is titled the "last overdue" though the reasons behind the newsletter's end are not given by the editors.

I would be remiss if I did not give a brief mention of two other known SLAIS student publications for the sake of completeness. Both had runs of just two issues, though more may have been produced that were not filed for the archives. The first is *Grad Tidings* (1970), a newsletter produced by alumni to allow them to keep in touch. The second is SLAIN (subtitled "Because that's how we feel") that appeared in 1999 as a LASSA-created newsletter to promote events. The reasons behind the short life of these two publications are likely the usual ones: not enough time, resources or energy to continue creating, editing and printing content.

Today, we lack the kinds of records these newsletters have left behind, as the need to communicate basic news to students has been replaced by e-mails, online calendars, Twitter feeds and Facebook posts. Though I would like to think otherwise, it is unlikely that these records of student thoughts and experiences will be preserved in so compact a form as an addition to the existing SLAIS fonds. I hope that *See Also* offers a new opportunity to revive a strong tradition of student expression, dissent and thought as the program moves forward that inherits the vibrant tradition of *ADLIB* and *Overdue*.

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