

**Sam Houston State University**  
**Self-Study**  
**Master of Library Science Program**  
**External Reviewer Report**

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This report is prepared as part of a self-study for the Master of Library Science program at Sam Houston State University. I visited Sam Houston State University on April 27, 28, and 29, 2014. As an external reviewer, it is my opinion that the Master of Library Science program is successful in meeting the goals and objectives of the University, College of Education, and the Department of Library Science. Evidences of the attainment of goals are derived from personal interviews with students, faculty, and administration as well as from an analysis of data provided by the department and data verified by external sources. All components of the self-study are addressed herein.

### **Master of Library science Program Profile**

First, evidence of the attainment of goals includes alignment of courses with the American Library Association/ American Association of School Librarians (ALA/AASL) Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians (2010). These five standards are Teaching for Learning, Literacy, Information Technology, Advocacy and Management. The process by which programs gain alignment is through an independent review of peers, unbeknownst to the department or university. As a reviewer on the ALA/AASL NCATE committee, this is a thorough and rigorous process. Sam Houston State University is the only program in Texas with this distinction. This alignment can be verified at: <http://www.ala.org/aasl/education/ncate/programs>.

Through a review of the assessments in the program, it can be stated that this program meets the ALA/AASL Standards. One particular distinction is SHSU's successful attainment of Standard 4: Advocacy and Leadership. This is particularly important as school librarians are commonly the only library professional on the campus and a network of support is critical. An interview of alumni and current students revealed that the required task of joining professional organizations such as LM\_Net, ALA and TLA were helpful in networking with other librarians. Joining these organizations in the beginning of their matriculation assisted students in applying content from their coursework to real-life settings.

The program is offered to students in a convenient, online platform to meet the demand of today's working professional. The SHSU MLS department strives to increase enrollment and is successful through the provision of consistent, accessible, high-quality education.

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Clear and explicit expectations, guidelines, and policies are implemented to ensure academic integrity as well as equitable, valid assessment of students. Measures for academic dishonesty and measures failure in the program are openly outlined. These procedures may be verified by the Graduate Catalog: <http://www.shsu.edu/graduate-catalog/2013-2015/>.

The application process includes controls to ensure that the most qualified applicants are approved for admission. Students who were interviewed described the application process as expedient and efficient—absent of unnecessary bureaucracy due to a decentralized system. A recent implementation of Hobsons, a tracking system that permits all parties to monitor an application in process, has further improved the system.

Academic advisement flows through a systematic approach. It includes a student resource tool, DegreeWorks, which allows students and advisors to monitor progress toward matriculation. Additionally, a Blackboard group, LSSL, allows for communication to students regarding advisement and program requirements.

Students in the program express satisfaction with technical support and other departments within the institution. Delta, an academic technology resource, provides effective and appreciated assistance in the area of technology support and training students in the online environment.

**Curriculum**

The 36-hour Master of Library Science degree program is specifically structured to prepare school library media specialists in their roles as information leaders. A routine survey of employers and graduates gathers stakeholder input to ensure that community needs are met by the program. As opposed to a thesis option, candidates are required to assemble a portfolio to demonstrate competence in each of the five ALA/ASSL Standards for the Initial Preparation of School Librarians (2010). The curriculum is aligned with the ALA/AASL Standards as well as accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE/CAEP) as part of the College of Education.

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The courses in the program also adequately prepare candidates for the TExES School Library Certification Exam. This exam is required for certification in School Library Media in the state of Texas. Educator standards addressed are learner-centered teaching and learning, program leadership and management, technology and information access, library environment, connections to the community, and information science and librarianship.

The library science program has been acknowledged as a nationally recognized school librarian preparation program for last 15+ years. This can be verified on the ALA website:

<http://www.ala.org/aasl/education/ncate/programs>

### **Faculty**

The faculty and staff are perpetually striving to utilize the best methods, materials, and resources with which to train students to be school leaders and disseminators of information. The reviewer observed the faculty while engaged in a discussion of some of the course assignments and the ensuing dialogue flowed into a productive brainstorm of ideas. Five out of five alumni and current students interviewed voiced the opinion that the faculty is accessible, helpful, and compassionate. Students were impressed that faculty even shared their cell phone numbers with them for assistance. All students who were interviewed expressed appreciation for the organization of the courses, the detailed instructions, and the support by faculty members.

The faculty is productive in research, service, and grant writing projects as evidenced by verifiable data. There are five full-time faculty members and the course load is three courses in fall and spring with two courses in the summer. Faculty members are as productive as possible; however the responsibilities of course load, professional service, university service, community service, and scholarly projects place limitations on productivity.

### **Students**

An interview of previous and current students as well as available data revealed that students were being employed and successful in the work environment. One particular student communicated that she was hired for her job because her interviewer was impressed with her

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terminology, knowledge and grasp on issues facing school librarians today. All five students interviewed by the external reviewer communicated that they were highly satisfied with their education at SHSU and would choose this institution again. Another student attended SHSU because her school librarian was a graduate and recommended it highly. This particular student has gone on to a supervisory position in libraries. She attributes her success to her strong academic foundation. Many students have received awards, recognition, and grants as a demonstration of competence. One example is the Texas Librarian's Outstanding New Librarian of the Year Award.

Alumni and current students were exceptionally complimentary of the faculty and staff. Five out of five alumni and current students interviewed voiced the opinion that the faculty is accessible, helpful and compassionate. All students were satisfied with their education and would choose Sam Houston's MLS program again. Key points gleaned from students included the following:

- The professors/staff are accessible and helpful.
- The courses are well organized and assembled.
- Course directions were clear, detailed and easily understood.
- There was abundant, timely and meaningful feedback.
- There were plenty of hands-on experiences that supplied a foundation for learning.
- Students appreciated the faculty being flexible. They could access classes ahead of time and know the necessary materials.
- To describe their experience at SHSU, students used wording such as, "amazing", "I loved it", and "Great".
- Students like the LIB\_SCI YAHOO Listserv Group, which is an internet discussion group of students, faculty and alumni. It allows for a prolific exchange of information and promotes healthy communication.

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Communication to students is essential and students indicate that they feel knowledgeable about all facets and requirements of the program. The LIB\_SCI listserv is used to communicate with alumni and graduate students.

Based on a comparison of the graduation rates to the enrollment rates, the Department of Library Science is successful in retention of students. In recent years, the library science faculty was concerned about the certification pass rate of students. In 2010-11, there was a 2% failure rate on the TExES Exam. This increased in the next couple of years. One reason was identified to be the new preparation materials from the testing agency. However, the faculty met and created a glossary of terms as an exam study aid. After receiving positive feedback about the glossary, faculty members have decided to implement an online exam over the glossary. Additionally, scenarios are currently being developed to assist students with the presentation style of the exam.

The reviewer surveyed the alumni and current students as to potential improvements that could be made by the program. Four out of five communicated that increased financial assistance would be a deciding factor in attending the program. Due to tuition costs, they would not have been able to attend and continue in the program without financial assistance.

### **Resources and Finances**

The College of Education provides the Department of Library Science with travel funds. Faculty expressed satisfaction with funds available to pursue professional development, research and other scholarly opportunities.

The Department identified a need for additional scholarships for eligible library science students, particularly for those students who begin their studies in Summer I. The application for scholarships is accepted on the due date of February 1; therefore, the students are ineligible because the distribution would occur after they graduate.

The Department does not receive funds for graduate assistantships.

### **Facilities and Equipment**

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In terms of faculty facilities, each faculty member was observed to have adequate office space on one floor, compatible with collaborating. All faculty members have desks, computers, and filing cabinets for storage and book shelves. Lighting is adequate and includes pleasant natural light from windows. A conference room is available for meetings with supporting technology. Adjacent to offices is a work room that includes a copy machine, fax machine and other materials necessary for instruction, advising, presenting and doing business.

Each faculty member receives one desktop or laptop as well as one mobile computing device. The instructional program is online so there are no physical spaces necessary for students; however, plentiful program-specific databases and resources are easily accessed to meet the needs of the graduate students.

### **Assessment Efforts**

Surveys are administered to alumni and employers of graduate to garner data about satisfaction. However, the reply percentage is typically low. The department has edited the surveys so that the required amount of time to complete them is short. The department will continue to oversee the response rate and pinpoint areas for improvement.

Clinical supervisors are surveyed as part of the candidate internship. The evaluation is based upon the ALA/AASL Standards for the Initial Preparation of School Librarians (2010). Each school library media candidate is evaluated by his/her supervisor on learning outcomes that correlate with the Standards.

TK 20 is a system that allows the College of Education to conduct systematic teaching and assessments for all students in the college. This system has allowed the department to collect data that will identify strengths and potential areas of improvement. In response to a 2009 SPA Report, the department changed its Graduate Seminars from being held on Friday nights to being integrated into coursework. Sufficient assessments provide evidence of content knowledge: the TExES, the licensure test, the electronic portfolio, a youth literature project and an information technology project. Four assessments supply evidence of professional and pedagogical knowledge, skills and dispositions: the internship, an administration project, and advocacy and leadership project, and a field experience assessments.

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Livebinders is the platform for an electronic portfolio, which provides evidences of competencies in each of the five ALA/AASL Standards. Candidates submit artifacts from the program to support each of these standards.

Additionally, in the internship experience, candidates are assessed by their supervising librarians at their placement schools as well as by university professors. The university professor visits the candidate once after the completion of 100 hours. One assessment of interns is a collaborative information literacy lesson that includes impact on pK-12 learning evaluated through pretest and posttest assessments. Others include an assessment checklist of ALA/AASL Standards, which is completed by the supervising librarian, journal entries for 130 hours in a school library, participation in two synchronous meetings with classmates and the completion of Dispositions and Diversity Proficiencies instrument.

### **Recruitment and Marketing Efforts**

Throughout the nation as well as Texas, some schools have placed paraprofessionals in the role of the school librarian in an attempt to reduce budgets. This move can be detrimental to school librarian educator programs. However, SHSU has taken steps to increase enrollment by marketing in farther areas such as El Paso. They have nurtured relationships with administrations of schools and school systems to advocate the importance of the school librarian to literacy and educational goals.

The department is fruitful in upholding a positive community presence within the area as well as throughout the state through many activities. One example is the free book stands on campus. These free book stands not only enhance awareness of the program, but they also provide a service to SHSU.

The program has embraced a social media presence, using Facebook and Twitter to generate interest. The department participates in Teacher Career Fairs and Graduate Student Fairs, and exhibit booths at conferences. Attractive brochures exist that are designed for promoting the program. The department places promotional slides on the television monitors mounted in the Academic Building and surrounding buildings. These slides market the program to current students at the University.



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For many potential students, the website is the first point of contact with the department. The website is easily accessible, designed well and navigable. It contains important links for potential as well as current students to gain information and to communicate with faculty and staff.

### **Outreach**

First, the Jan Paris Bookfest is a campus conference that attracts award-winning authors and experts in the fields of literature for youth. This event is a long-standing service to the community and to library professionals. This information may be verified at:

<http://www.janparisbookfest.com/>

The faculty has been actively engaged in service and community relationships. There are numerous projects served by faculty that enrich family literacy by the donations of books in the community as well as the university. One such service project is the donation of books to the SHSU methods undergraduate students. Others are the “Hats off to Reading”, the book dispenser located on campus, and the books donated from the Notable Children’s Books Committee.

The faculty is also deeply involved in professional organizations and is dedicated to imparting the service ethic to students. The Library Science Students Association (LSSA) is a library school chapter of the Texas Library Association, in which the department facilitates.

### **Program Specific Issues**

Prior to and during 2009, there was a 100% pass rate on the TExES Exam School Library Media Certification Exam. Beginning in 2009, scores dropped to an overall 80% success rate. The department has identified factors that contribute to the decline in pass rate percentages. One factor is the exclusion of the TExES Exam to reflect the 2010 changes in ALA/AASL Standards. However, because the department identified that some candidates elect to take the exam early in their program rather than waiting until their coursework is complete, the department has implemented procedures to improve the scores on the TExES. One measure implemented is

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that students have been required to pass a practice TExES Exam before attempting the official one. Another measure to ensure success on the Certification Exam is that students are required to pass a practice test to pass the Internship course.

The faculty has also identified the Electronic Portfolio as a specific issue that is crucial to the department. This project is the culminating activity for students to prove competence in the ALA/AASL Standards. The faculty continues to fine-tune this project as a means of demonstrating candidate preparation and proficiency.

### **Program Strengths and Recommendations**

- In order to recruit and retain qualified students, the department would benefit from increased scholarship awards and funding opportunities for students. This statement is made on the basis of student and faculty interviews as well as a review of data. Many students are first-generation college students and financial assistance is crucial and necessary to complete the program.
- SHSU experienced a dramatic increase in enrollment in the 2011-12 year due to the support of an Institute of Museum and Library Science grant. The University offered scholarship funding to the prospective students who were not offered the IMLS funds. The average number of students almost tripled in the 2010-11 year contrasted with the 2012-13 year. The MLS department may continue to pursue other funding sources for students; however, many grant sources are decreasing nationally. Therefore, for continued growth in recruitment, it is recommended that the University assist the department with funding opportunities for students.
- Funds for graduate level assistants would benefit the program. The department is as productive as it can be with its size. Graduate assistants would aid productivity and would enable faculty to pursue increased publishing and presentation opportunities, thereby allowing them to better compete with larger institutions such as UT, TWU and Texas A and M. Graduate assistants could be helpful in tasks such as tracking students through the program, completing paperwork and helping with BookFest. Although undergraduate students have been utilized in the past, graduate students prove to be more mature, reliable and professional.

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- The department would benefit from having the newest technology available in a timely manner for students to use in the k-12 schools. In a technology-driven profession, it is essential that students possess skills that will be competitive in the marketplace. When interns go to complete hours with their placement schools, they need to be proficient in the same current technologies that the schools are utilizing.
- With a current faculty member approaching retirement, it will be crucial to provide funds for a competitive salary. To remain competitive, higher educational institutions must hire faculty members who shine in their fields, not only professors who are academically sound but possess dedication to the University, to the profession, and to the students.
- Consider the feasibility of utilizing two diverse age levels in the Internship course. For example, students might complete some hours in the elementary setting and some hours in the secondary setting. Logistics may prevent this but it can be valuable for candidates to gain experience in two widely different grade levels. It may be that students could accomplish working with a range of age levels in other assignments. However, candidates would have the opportunity to see a school library media center that serves two very dissimilar populations.

The strengths of the Sam Houston State University Master of Library Science program are numerous; they include faculty competence and dedication, student satisfaction and alignment to ALA/AASL Standards (2010).

#### **Faculty**

As stated earlier, based on a review of data and interviews, it is evident that the faculty and staff are dedicated to upholding excellence in the preparation of school librarians. Their ongoing evaluation of courses and programs, customer service mindset and outreach to the community and profession is easily ascertained by numerical data as well as qualitative interviews.

#### **ALA/AASL Alignment to 2010 Standards**

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The program has been deemed to be in alignment with ALA/AASL Standards for the Initial Preparation of School Librarians (2010). This accolade is outstanding; relatively few university programs in the country have achieved this standard. It is a rigorous and comprehensive process of peer review of program data. All of these standards exist to ensure candidate competence and Sam Houston State University MLS program has gained this recognition.

**Student Satisfaction**

After interviewing a sample of five recent graduates or current students and reviewing relevant data, it can be stated that Sam Houston is successfully preparing competent librarians for their roles as providers of instruction, collaborative partners and school leaders. Alumni and students hold a highly favorable view of their experience at Sam Houston. Five out of five interviewees reported that they would choose Sam Houston over another institution again. Feedback from students indicated that the faculty and staff are dedicated to student success. Classes are organized and include abundant details. They appreciated the accessibility of professors, the convenience of the asynchronous classes, and the relevance of associated assignments.

In conclusion, based on independent observations, research and a study of the evidence, it is my opinion that Sam Houston State University Master of Library Science program is doing an inspiring job of preparing their students for their future as educational leaders and information specialists. The faculty and staff have a strong dedication to this profession and it is without reservation that I would send my own child to Sam Houston's MLS program.



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