UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION STUDIES
COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
DATA-GATHERING FOR PROGRAM ENHANCEMENT

Summer 2009

Were the comprehensive exam questions representative of the content included in the learning experiences undertaken during your master’s program (not necessarily in any specific class)?

For the most part, yes. I expected an Intellectual Freedom question and did not see one which specifically about this topic.

Somewhat. I felt that some of the questions were more focused on elective classes which seemed inappropriate given the fact that we all take different electives that cover different topics. There is no way I could have passed that test going on what I learned in my classes alone. I studied from March until June and still felt unprepared. I feel that the only classes and professors that prepared me for the exam were Dr. Hawamdeh (because of the formatting of his classes and the fact that he expects essay assignments) and Dr. Taylor (because of the practical assignments and her ability to give a lot of information in a focused manner).

I think there are several issues that need to be covered better in the program classes including what the difference is between information/knowledge/network society, aspects of cataloging, ethics, and digital libraries. One of the questions covered a tracking system (RFID) that I have never heard about in ANY of my classes and did not come across in four months of studying.

My main thoughts on the questions are that they seem to be questions relating to practical issues while a lot of what we deal with in our classes, at least for me, was theory. I didn’t feel like I was prepared to answer questions from a practical standpoint. I also felt as though we weren’t given a diverse range of questions even though we were expecting a wide variety of topics. If I remember correctly, I think that two of the five questions were about ethics. If someone isn’t strong in ethics then they are automatically required to answer the other three without a choice.

Yes. At the same time, familiarity with current issues and trends was very important for recognizing the underlying complexities in each of the questions.

Was the wording of each of the exam questions easy for you to understand?

Generally, yes.

NO. Although each question appeared to be written from a perspective that allowed for a wide variety of answers I also felt as though the way in which they were written were very confusing and misleading. I shouldn’t have to reread a question ten times during the course of the exam to make sure that I understand what is being asked. It doesn’t seem fair that the questions are loaded with too many examples that may lead people off track. I usually work well under pressure but I had a hard time understanding what some of the questions were asking me because there were too many examples thrown into the questions.

Yes.
Yes. The questions were clear and well-constructed in that each seemed to allow for both a superficial answer as well as a deeper answer involving the “hidden” issue behind each question.

Did you attend a comprehensive orientation session?

Yes.

Almost three years ago, yes.

Yes, twice.

If your answer is yes, did the session appropriately represent the faculty expectations of student responses on the comprehensive exam questions?

The one I attended would have been better earlier in the program. It would have helped me prepare along the way.

Yes.

Yes. The stress of not knowing what will be on the test can be intense and can even hinder some students from doing as well as they might under different circumstances, but I’m not sure there is another way to conduct this type of exam.

No. I felt very much in the dark in regards what types of answers I was expected to give. While I appreciated the talks from past students, the information given by professors was extremely inconsistent. Some professors were anxious to help and asked how I would approach certain questions while others said it would be inappropriate to give any study suggestions or to talk about the comps in general with the students. I went to the orientation session about a year ago and if I remember correctly the only helpful bit of information regarding what was expected of me was that I didn’t need to cite anything directly in my answers.

Frankly, I don’t remember. Though I did take helpful cues from the exam packet I received just prior to the test.

Do you have suggestions that could help SLIS improve the comprehensive exam process for students?

Give more information about the process, how grading is done, expectations, etc.

Yes. I noticed some students had time-management problems. It might help them if the test was broken up. 90 minutes for the first question, then a ten-minute break. 90 minutes for the second question, etc. Of course, this would mean not having choices at all OR having a choice of two for each question. And some might not want to take 5 hours. They might have been able to finish the test earlier. To be frank, I wouldn’t have liked this system. But others may appreciate the structure.

Yes, though not specifically. I had a body of knowledge to draw from but was specifically informed by current reading and ALA-related information.

I have several suggestions:
1. The questions shouldn’t be specific since different teachers with different teaching styles teach the core classes. Although I didn’t see this so much on my test I did notice it from a past list of questions that I used to study.
2. Students should be given examples of well written and poorly written past essays so that they have some sort of idea of what a good quality answer is. I don’t think it is fair to expect us to know how to approach questions without some sort explained expectation when our degree is hanging on the line. I suppose this is what the orientation session was for but I didn’t feel that it lived up to that.

3. A large pool of questions should be given to the students before the exam and the five test questions should be pulled from those on the day of the exam. I just find it very wrong to have students in a two year program and then the determining factor in whether or not they get their degree is if they can pass a test that involved three random questions on a VERY wide variety of questions. I know people that are managers of libraries that didn’t pass the exam. Maybe they aren’t good managers, but what if they are? Shouldn’t they be able to past the test?

OR

4. The test should be take home with questions that are designed for each individual based on their personal classes.

OR

5. If the exam will continue to be given in the manner that it is right now (four hours, three questions from five that are not known beforehand) I think the students should be given at least six hours. I am a very fast writer and have always preferred essay tests but even I did not have enough time to write everything I wanted to say in four hours. Given the importance of the test and the fact that your degree rests on whether you pass or not I think that four hours is not nearly enough time (especially because people might start to panic – it took me 15 minutes to even start the test).