

**SLAIS HOME**

ABOUT SLAIS

PEOPLE

ADMISSIONS & AWARDS

PROGRAMS

COURSES

RESEARCH & TEACHING

TECHNOLOGY

NEWS &
ANNOUNCEMENTS

Current News

SLAIS Calendar
of Events

SLAIS Colloquia

Career Expo 2009

RESOURCES

SEARCH SLAIS SITE

CONTACT SLAIS

CELEBRATE RESEARCHWEEK AT SLAIS, MARCH 6-10, 2006**Monday, March 6, TEF III Lounge**
Opening Talk: "Research at SLAIS"
Presenter: Heather MacNeil

I want to begin by thanking Joe Tennis for organizing this poster session which showcases student and faculty research here in SLAIS. My brief is to say a few words about the role of research in professional education.

Graduate level programs in library, archival and information studies are based on a fundamental distinction between professional training and professional education. Professional training is associated with the building of skills and the acquisition of practical knowledge in specific contexts. Professional education is associated with the development of an intellectual framework applicable to a variety of settings, and the cultivation of a professional ethos. Although education and training are both essential, education is more fundamental and wide-ranging in its scope and purpose. It communicates theory, methodology, and professional skills within a university setting where it is possible to practise scholarly enquiry, interdisciplinary work, and research (1).

Research is a critical component of a graduate level program such as ours because it is an expression of the intellectual nature of the information disciplines, the scholarly substance of the work that information and record professionals do and the status of library, archival and information studies with respect to other graduate programs.

In SLAIS, the importance we attach to research in the Master's level program is evident in a number of course offerings that enable students to engage in scholarly enquiry of various kinds. The most obvious example is the thesis, which students may choose to undertake in the LIS and MAS Programs and which they are required to undertake in the MACL program. Students have an opportunity to conduct research on a smaller scale through a directed research project or a directed study; both these courses involve in-depth investigation of a specific issue or problem. They also have the opportunity to work closely with a faculty member on an ongoing research project through the collaborative research course. Students may also work as paid research assistants on faculty research projects.

In a Master's level program such as ours, the cultivation of research skills must be balanced with the development of professional knowledge. Anne Gilliland-Swetland has written that: "Teaching professional and research skills within a single curriculum is rather like bilingual education. ...[S]tudents are ...learning how to read and to speak two languages, that of practice and that of research" (2). So perhaps the most important thing we can do in the context of a Master's level program is to provide opportunities for students to engage in research and to inculcate in them a sense of the relevance of research to their professional lives. This is why research methods is a required course in the LIS and MACL Programs and a strongly encouraged one in the MAS Program. The course aims to equip students with the knowledge necessary not only to produce new research but also to understand and interpret existing research.

A few years ago we introduced a doctoral level program, which will increase opportunities and incentives for more systematic and comprehensive research here at SLAIS. Whereas the primary aim of our Master's level program is to educate future professionals; the primary purpose of the doctoral program is to educate future scholars. Instituting a doctoral program is, thus, a logical next step in advancing research agendas in the information disciplines. It is also an essential step in strengthening the status of library, archival and information studies within the university. Graduate programs are judged to a significant degree by the quality and quantity of the research produced by faculty and students. Faculty members in professional programs are expected to conduct grant-funded research like those in other disciplines, and to use their research projects as a means of training students to be researchers. This is why expanding the opportunities for research in programs like ours is vital to their success and growth (3).

An important funding agency for research in the information disciplines is the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and several SLAIS faculty are principal and co-investigators on a wide range of SSHRC-funded projects. Judi Saltman's investigation of Canadian Children's Illustrated books in English, Ann Curry's transaction log analysis of internet use in public libraries and Rick Kopak's exploration of link types as semantic signposts in hypermedia are just a few examples of research funded through SSHRC's standard research grant program. SLAIS faculty have also been successful in obtaining funding from SSHRC's major collaborative research initiatives program. That program has funded the InterPARES Project, which is an international and multi-disciplinary initiative that is investigating means for ensuring the long-term preservation of authentic electronic records. Luciana Duranti heads the project, which is headquartered here at SLAIS, and Terry Eastwood and Joe Tennis are co-investigators.

The decision of SSHRC to allocate substantial funding to these research initiatives constitutes an important recognition by the academic community of the scholarly substance of the work of information and record professionals. That recognition is crucial for practical reasons as well as symbolic ones. Recognition translates into an enhanced profile for SLAIS within the university. An enhanced profile, in turn, increases the likelihood of maintaining and perhaps even increasing the level of funding allocated to SLAIS programs.

Of course, recognition by the university is not the only measure of the value of research to SLAIS. Students benefit enormously from the opportunities research projects provide for acquiring research skills and contributing to the advancement of disciplinary knowledge. Once the students graduate and begin their working lives, the knowledge and experience they have gained through their participation in research translates into a benefit to the institutions that employ them.

That is all I wish to say. I hope I have succeeded in communicating some sense of the significance and relevance of research to library, archival and information studies education. I invite you now to take a look at the posters on display and discover for yourself the types of research that are engaging and inspiring our students and faculty.

Endnotes

(1) Association of Canadian Archivists, *ACA Guidelines for the Development of a Two-Year Curriculum for a Master of Archival Studies* (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1990), 3-4, available at <http://archivists.ca/downloads/documentloader.aspx?id=1912>.

(2) Anne J. Gilliland-Swetland, "Archival Research: A "New Issue for Graduate Education," *American Archivist* 63 (Fall/Winter 2000): 259.

(3) Terry Eastwood, "Archival Research: The University of British Columbia Experience," *American Archivist* 63:2 (Fall-Winter 2000): 244.

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[to top](#)

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