CONCLUSION: SYNTHESIS AND OVERVIEW

The self-study report for reaccreditation of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, submitted in 2009 to the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, is entitled Excellence, Innovation, and Access (http://www.reaccreditation.illinois.edu/University_of_Illinois_Self-Study_2009.pdf). As a unit of UIUC, GSLIS has embraced these ideals and they are manifest in the MS program for which we are seeking reaccreditation. The discussion of the standards in the main body of this report provides evidence related to excellence, innovation, and access. Three data points are highlighted here by way of summary.

Excellence.
One figure from the WILIS 2 data (see Appendix F, p. 19) is particularly compelling. In response to the question, “How would you rate the overall experience that you had with your program?”, 69% of respondents said “Excellent”, compared to 41% of respondents for all 39 programs for which data were compiled.

Innovation.
Searching the awards database (http://www.imls.gov/search.asp) on the IMLS web site for all grants made in the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program demonstrates that 306 grants have been awarded over the period 2003-2011. Illinois faculty participated in 17 (5.3%) as either principal investigator (PI) or co-PI, including two among the grants announced in June 2011. Six award categories (continuing education, doctoral programs, master’s level programs, pre-professional programs, programs to build institutional capacity, research in early careers development) are represented by one or more grants awarded to GSLIS.

Access.
Over the first 15 years of LEEP, 1067 students have earned their degrees online. These students would not otherwise have been able to earn a degree from Illinois. Dimensions of their diversity include:
- Gender (female: 868; male: 199)
- Location (in-state: 625; out of state 442—from almost all 50 states and 11 foreign countries)
- Ethnic/racial group (Asian American: 38; African American: 38; Hispanic: 38; American Indian: 6; Caucasian: 901; Non-specified: 30; International: 16)
Participation in the WISE consortium is a model for increasing access to specialized courses across institutional boundaries.

The volume celebrating the School’s centennial in 1993 (that is now available through the institutional repository at UIUC, IDEALS, Illinois Digital Environment for Access to Learning and Scholarship, http://www.ideals.illinois.edu/handle/2142/18680) is entitled Ideas and Standards: The History of the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science, 1893-1993. As we look ahead to our 120th anniversary in 2013 and beyond, we strive to achieve the ideals of excellence, innovation, and access while continuously working to meet the Standards for Accreditation of Master’s Programs in Library and Information Studies.

GSLIS has contributed to library literature for almost 60 years through Library Trends. The journal reflects our commitment to “explore critical trends in professional librarianship” (http://www.lis.illinois.edu/about-gslis/publications/Library_Trends) in the same spirit in which we educate students, as stated in our program objectives:
"We foster critical thinking about the literature of LIS and related fields, and we encourage high standards of professionalism and service. Our graduates are prepared to develop and evaluate resources and programs, and to understand the needs of many different kinds of users. Students who have completed our program are equipped to anticipate social and technological changes, and to promote change that advances the profession, improves technology, and encourages positive social transformation."

Themes from the most recent issues of *Library Trends* demonstrate some of the challenges and opportunities for our graduates and those of other programs in the 21st century:

- “Digital Books and the Impact on Libraries,” edited by Peter Brantley (Volume 57, Number 1)
- “Institutional Repositories: Current State and Future,” edited by Sarah L. Shreeves and Melissa H. Cragin (Volume 57, Number 2)
- “Library and Information Services to Incarcerated Persons: Global Perspectives,” edited by Vibeke Lehmann (Volume 59, Number 3)
- "Involving Users in the Co-Construction of Digital Knowledge in Libraries, Archives, and Museums," edited by Paul F. Marty and Michelle M. Kazmer (Volume 59, Number 4)

The program presentation narrative, together with the many links provided to sources of evidence, documents the ways in which GSLIS seeks to meet the Standards. We have numerous strengths embodied in our faculty, students, staff, alumni, curriculum, technical and financial resources, library resources, and physical facilities. We are in a university context that will continue to place a strong emphasis on quality and performance evaluation and that will encourage and reward innovation. Although GSLIS is one of the smallest units at UIUC, the faculty are involved in areas of teaching and research that touch many others on campus. We have taken advantage of the growth of our field and the culture of this institution to build an increasingly strong research program, to expand the reach of our teaching, and to make significant links across campus and across disciplines.

Preparation of this program presentation has demonstrated that there are also a few areas in need of improvement that we are working to address. In many cases initiatives are already under way that should lead to tangible changes that further support the School’s reputation as responsive, inclusive, and innovative. We anticipate that efforts in the following areas can further strengthen our MS program:

- **Increasing the full-time faculty.** Enrollment in the MS program has grown without a corresponding increase in the full-time faculty. While the courses taught by part-time faculty are of a high caliber, it is important that full-time faculty contribute significantly to the teaching of MS students both on-campus and online. We also feel the need to ensure that core areas of the curriculum are represented by one or more of the full-time faculty, who can take a leadership role in teaching, research, curriculum development, and advising. At the same time we are finding more ways to integrate part-time/adjunct faculty into the School, by including them in discussions of the future of the School, giving them access to travel funds, and providing more opportunities to enhance teaching skills. The campus remains cautious about authorizing new faculty searches, but GSLIS has received approval to conduct a search for one new faculty member to be hired to begin in fall 2012.

- **Matching curriculum and course scheduling to available faculty resources.** We have been through a period of rapid expansion in MS course offerings as faculty developed a wide variety of new special topics courses. We now need to work to identify which to offer on a recurring basis and make a permanent part of the curriculum as well as to identify any that should be eliminated or consolidated.
• **Developing more complete advising documents and procedures.** As we work to prepare students for a wider range of career options, we see the need for more complete documentation regarding the structure of our curriculum and how it relates to the preparation required for various areas of specialization.

• **Managing enrollments and coordinating degree programs.** Since 1996 we have integrated scheduling and management of other aspects of the two MS enrollment options to very good effect. Resources are also invested in offering courses in the undergraduate informatics minor, the MS in bioinformatics, the Certificate of Advanced Study (including the CAS in digital libraries), and the doctoral program (soon to include a PhD in informatics [https://www.informatics.illinois.edu/display/infophd/Home](https://www.informatics.illinois.edu/display/infophd/Home) as well as the PhD in library and information science). We anticipate that students in the accredited MS will benefit from the enrichment in course offerings that all of these initiatives stimulate, but we need to actively plan enrollment targets and resource allocation across these various programs to ensure the continued quality of the accredited MS program. This will become even more pressing if current discussions regarding expansion of undergraduate offerings from a minor to a major in informatics result in implementation of a new degree program as this will require development and teaching of courses beyond those already taught as part of the minor.

• **Maintaining a sense of community within and across enrollment options.** From the beginning of the LEEP program, we have been very purposeful about building and sustaining community among LEEP students as a means for improving the quality of the experience and enhancing student retention. In LEEP the program focuses on communication and community in its design and learning is more than gaining knowledge as an individual; it also involves learning from others, developing skills in collaboration and communication, and creating a strong professional identity and community. Concerns expressed by on-campus students in spring 2011 demonstrate that we must enhance our focus on building that same sense and value of community among on-campus students as well—co-location does not automatically guarantee community building.

• **Building a more diverse community.** Recruitment and retention of a more diverse faculty remains an only partially realized goal and we need to continue efforts to increase diversity of both our full-time and part-time faculty. Given the potential to recruit LEEP adjuncts from anywhere in the U.S., more efforts need to be made to enhance diversity of those teaching in LEEP. We have made greater progress in recruitment and retention of a more diverse student population by pursuing multiple strategies and are particularly pleased to be able to give individuals who are place-bound an opportunity to pursue their MS degree via LEEP. We still have additional work to do in enhancing school climate and further developing cultural competence of all students, faculty, and staff.

In conclusion, we feel that we continue to be in a strong position as a graduate professional program because our priorities as a school resonate with those of the University and are responsive to the changing work environments in which our graduates find themselves.