

INTERNATIONALIZATION OF LIS PROGRAM THROUGH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

YUSHIANA MANSOR

*Department of Library and Information Science,
Faculty of ICT, International Islamic University Malaysia
yushiana@iiu.edu.my*

NOORAINI ISMAIL

*Library
International Islamic University Malaysia
nooraini@iiu.edu.my*

Introduction

The demand of the global market has resulted into the development of many internationalization initiatives in the educational sector, including the library and information science field (LIS). The Department of Library and Information Science (DLIS), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) is committed towards achieving the mission of the university, i.e. Integration, Islamization, Internationalization, and Comprehensive Excellence. The paper reports on the recent development at the DLIS in the effort to enhance the marketability of its graduates.

Method

A special ad-hoc committee was formed to reevaluate the programs offered at the DLIS as an effort to align the DLIS strategic plan with the IIUM goals and strategies towards internationalization and research excellence. The committee members constituted representatives from the DLIS and the IIUM library. Current and proposed collaborative initiatives were deliberated, outlining how internationalization through strategic partnership can be achieved to support teaching, learning, and research endeavors in LIS.

Results

Six potential areas of partnership have been identified, namely: Internationalization of curriculum; Niche areas; Fieldwork; Internship; Research and special projects; Training and development.

Conclusion

Internationalization has a great potential in positioning the DLIS to gain competitive advantage. In focus, collaborative partnership with the IIUM library has been identified as an important catalyst towards achieving excellence at the international level.

Introduction

The year 2008 marks the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) (<http://www.iiu.edu.my>). Since its inception, the IIUM is always proud to serve its mission of the Triple IICES, i.e. Integration, Islamization, Internationalization, and Comprehensive Excellence. With currently more than 20,000 students coming from over 99 countries, and faculty members from various nationalities, IIUM is among the pioneering higher learning institutions in Malaysia that has opened its door to the world. The international composition of its university population has positioned the university as an important player in the educational arena, particularly among Islamic countries, and the developing countries in general. Table 1 below illustrates the cumulative statistics of IIUM graduates in 2008 since its establishment.

Table: IIUM Graduates 1987-2008

UNDERGRADUATE			POSTGRADUATE			TOTAL
MSIAN	INTL	TOTAL	MSIAN	INTL	TOTAL	
28,546	2,937	31,483	9,668	1,797	11,465	42,948

The Department of Library and Information Science (DLIS), IIUM was established in 1992, and currently offers Masters and Ph.D. in Library and Information Science. After more than fifteen years producing library and information science professionals, in its recent academic review exercise, a need was identified to re-brand and re-position the LIS programs offered at the DLIS. In our SWOT analysis, the feedbacks received from various stakeholders have indicated, among other things, the international outlook of our programs coupled with the emphasis on Islamization, has naturally carved a unique niche for the DLIS.

In addition, the changing demands of the workplace have called for a new set of skills for the twenty-first century LIS professionals. As Myburgh (2003, p.226) observed, "The education of skilled information professionals must evolve to meet the many new challenges that have resulted from the complex, knowledge-based environment in which we live". The challenge is to ensure the curriculum of DLIS is internationally relevant, and international mobility of graduates is guaranteed. Thus, internationalization was identified as one of the strategic initiatives of the DLIS.

Internationalization and collaborative partnership

The term 'globalization' has been used interchangeably with internationalization (OECD, 2004). In a nutshell, globalization is associated with competition, while internationalization denotes cooperation. Vadosek (2002) described internationalization

as “better knowledge of each other; reciprocal recognition of professional qualifications and degrees; international exchange and cooperation; and internationalization of content”. Two approaches to internationalization are internationalization at home and cross-border education. The former emphasizes on the international and intercultural dimension of curriculum, teaching and research. It helps students to develop international and intercultural skills without leaving the country. On the other hand, internationalization through cross-border education assumes student, faculty, researcher, programs, etc that require cross-national jurisdiction borders (OECD, 2004). Maceviciute (2002) highlighted the need to introduce change in the LIS field for the survival in the competitive information society. Internationalization helps promote a global view on cultural, social, political, economic and ethnic issues of the field. The emphasis is on the diversity of the world, thus suggesting the need to provide students with the skills necessary to function effectively across cultures and nations.

A study among Canadian HE had observed ten rationales for internationalization as below (Knight, 1997):

- (1) prepare graduates who are internationally-knowledgeable and inter-culturally competent
- (2) maintain competitiveness
- (3) achieve international standards
- (4) encourage scholarship on topics regarding interdependence of nations
- (5) research national and international issues
- (6) export educational services and projects
- (7) work force social change
- (8) appreciate the ethnic and cultural diversity of one’s nation
- (9) generate income for educational institutions
- (10) maintain internal security and peaceful relations

The literature is replete with reports on internationalization initiatives in the educational sector, particularly LIS. Kajberg (2004) reported on the internationalization and international collaboration initiatives of European higher education institutions within LIS. There was an observed trend towards internationalization of the curricula through European collaborative schemes such as TEMPUS, SOCRATES and ERASMUS. Knight (2005) noted on the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education. The process revolves around issues such as integrating institutional strategy, mobility of students and academic staff, curriculum-related matters, and research collaboration.

Juznic and Badovinac (2005) in their survey had identified obstacles to internationalization of LIS program in the EU countries. The barriers include difference in languages, insufficient resources, cultural and political differences, and historical/traditional reluctance to openness. Abdullahi and Kajberg (2004) surveyed 60 LIS programs in the Europe, USA and Canada and found that majority are interested in

international issues of LIS. Internationalization was found to be accomplished through formal and informal agreements. However, no standards were found for inclusion of international issues in LIS curricula.

Strategic partnership: DLIS and the IIUM library

The emergence of cooperative partnership in the educational sector is driven by many factors such as to remain competitive, resources and financial constraints, and to narrow the gap between theory and practice. According to Chan (2004) universities form linkages with each other in order to be able to compete. The massification and marketization of HE have led to competition and globalization, and more strategic alliances among multiple partners across national borders are formed. Ayoubi and al-Habaibeh (2006) highlighted on the model for the objectives and implementation of international partnership that promotes to pool expertise and develop critical mass in order to compete at the international level. Enser (2001) noted that the competition from other disciplines such as computer science, suggest that LIS should collaborate, rather than compete. LIS must also be open towards the idea of converging interests with those who exercise skills and knowledge in the LIS field. The trend towards webification of information resources, for example, has led to the emergence and convergence of many key players in the information-related domain. As such, building partnership with the various entities through various initiatives could result into a much richer output, a win-win situation.

One of the driving forces for partnership in the academic sector is the serious gap between theory and practice. Strategic alliance between industry and academia in various fields in support of teaching, learning and research is not new. The DLIS has identified that partnership with the university library can be strategically aligned towards achieving educational excellence.

In IIUM, the university library (<http://lib.iiu.edu.my>) is reputed as playing a very proactive role with various stakeholders in the university environment in support of teaching, learning, and research activities. This is evidenced through many awards received by the library, particularly in customer service excellence. Besides serving internal partners, the library has also established several international ties by providing in-service training and hosting numerous educational visits to international clients. Thus, the DLIS is determined that, partnering with the library can be an important tool in the process of internationalizing the DLIS and the programs offered. The following outlines the possible partnership initiatives between the DLIS and the IIUM library, particularly in the area of internationalization.

- a) Internationalization of curriculum
- b) Niche areas
- c) Fieldwork

- d) Internship
- e) Research and special projects
- f) Training and development

Internationalization of curriculum

The curriculum of LIS programs should be able to produce graduates with international perspectives. They should be able to think globally and look at issues from a variety of perspectives. The existing students' population at the DLIS is very internationalized, with students coming from Asian, Middle-Eastern, African, and European countries. The IUM library has a very long standing experience in serving international clients, students and staff. The vast industrial experience of the IUM librarians could assist the DLIS in preparing course content in reflects of internationalization. For example, the development of course outlines could incorporate issues such as services to multi-cultural and multi-lingual clients. This would hopefully help identify real, international, LIS problems to be discussed and addressed.

Niche areas

Another important accomplishment during the DLIS academic review was the identification of niche areas for DLIS. Two areas were identified in consideration of the university's mission and vision, and the strength of the DLIS. The areas are Islamic Libraries and Information Services (ILIS) and International Comparative Librarianship (ICL). The first looks at issues pertaining to the management of Islamic information resources and information institutions in Islamic countries. This area will take advantage of the university's position as an esteemed higher education institution, highly recognized by Islamic countries all over the world. ICL focuses on issues related to comparative, international librarianship, not necessarily limited to Islamic information resources. A trend was observed in which DLIS students are addressing the LIS-related issues pertaining to their home countries during class projects and research work. Taking advantage of this scenario, comparative librarianship would be a strategic niche area for LIS to integrate in course content, training and research.

Strong support from the library is needed in providing the DLIS faculty and students with the access to literature on world librarianship, particularly from the perspectives of developing countries.

Fieldwork

The Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree of DLIS requires students to complete two-month fieldwork training at LIS workplace. Positive feedback from the students who did their fieldwork at the IUM library suggest that they realized the need not only to effectively serve international clients, but also to work with international level LIS industry key players such as vendors, and internationally accepted tools and standards such as in cataloging, classification, and digitization processes. Thus,

the international identity of the library does give an advantage to MLIS students during their fieldwork.

Internship

In addition to the fieldwork, practical experience while taking classes can be accomplished through internship program. Besides enhancing academic and industry partnership, internship program provides students with hands-on experience and complement what is being taught in classrooms. Such internship program has not been established yet between the DLIS and the IIUM library. Formal agreement needs to be resolved in identifying suitable areas for internship. Possible areas include answering reference questions, cataloging, inter-library loan, and online information searches. The DLIS will also look at the potential of internship as a source of financial assistance to students. Another approach is to look at the academic background of the students prior to joining the MLIS. Internship can help to develop students' specialization in areas such as law librarianship, medical librarianship, and Islamic librarianship.

Research and special projects

Research is an important agenda at the DLIS. Research outputs such as in terms of publication and presentation papers, for example help extend the DLIS network internationally. Partnering with the library in research-related work has already been in place but mainly in the form of assisting students and researches in their research activities. It is foreseen that bringing in librarians as research partners in a formalized manner would benefit both parties. Research at DLIS can be better aligned to reflect real-world setting with active participation from librarians. As such, research culture can be fostered among the LIS professionals both at the academic and industry level. Academic researchers can tap on the professional network of the IIUM librarians both at the local an international level to ensure the applicability and significance of the research is secured.

Training and development

The IIUM library has been recognized as being the training grounds for librarians from developing countries. For example, numerous in-service trainings have been provided to librarians from developing countries such as Brunei, Indonesia, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Middle East. Cooperation between the DLIS and the library can help develop a coordinated curriculum and delivery of different packages of in-service training for LIS professional and non-professional staff. In the long run, such cooperation is hoped to metamorphise into a center of excellence for LIS professionals in developing and Islamic countries. Such venture will help both the DLIS and the library to gain a greater height of acknowledgement from the LIS profession. Besides in-house training, the DLIS and the library have been successful in co-organizing talks, seminars, local and

international conferences. Such synergetic endeavor exemplified how cooperative partnership benefits the DLIS, IIUM library and LIS professionals. A win-win-win situation!

Challenges

The above are among possible collaborative efforts between the DLIS and the IIUM library. Although most of the initiatives are at their infancy, the following areas outlined lessons learnt so far and the challenges ahead:

1. Mutual agreement must be established by both the DLIS and the IIUM library to recognize internationalization of LIS education and the role of IIUM library in the internationalization process.
2. There is a need for a clear guideline at the LIS for the inclusion of international issues in the curriculum. Possible areas for cooperation from the IIUM library must be clearly identified and the nature of contribution from both parties must be identified.
3. There is a need to formalize all cooperative programs between the DLIS and the IIUM library in ensuring long-term commitment from both parties.
4. Employing faculty members with knowledge of international LIS.

Conclusion

The Department of Library and Information Science, International Islamic University Malaysia can become a hub for the training and development of LIS professionals internationally. Strategic partnership between the DLIS and the IIUM Library can be initiated as a mechanism to improve LIS education and preparing LIS workforce with necessary international perspectives of LIS. Potential areas of partnership include internationalization of curriculum, identification of niche areas, fieldwork, internship, research and special projects, and training and development. Strategic partnership between the DLIS and the IIUM library, promises the role of IIUM in producing internationally-driven information professionals, thus becoming a leading higher learning institution in developing as well as Islamic countries.

References

- Abdullahi, I. and Kajberg, L (2004). A study of international issues in library and information science education: survey of LIS schools in Europe, the USA and Canada. *New Library World*. 105(1204/1205), 345-356.

- Ayoubi, R. M. and al-Habaibeh, A. (2006). An investigation into international business collaboration in higher education organisations. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 20(5), 380-396.
- Chan, W.E.Y. (2004). International cooperation in higher education: theory and practice. *Journal of International Education*, 8(1), 15-21.
- Enser, P. (2001). On continuity, culture, competition-cooperation and convergence too. *New Library World*, 102(1170/1171), 423-428.
- Vadosek, P. (2002). , Internationalisation of LIS education : Premises, Conditions, and Chances. In *Proceedings of the 10th International Bobcatsss Symposium on Library and Information Science*, Portoroz, (Slovenia), 2002, 10-15.
- Kajberg, L. (2004). A survey of internationalisation activities in European library and information science schools. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 8(4), (352-376).
- Knight, J. (1997). Internationalization of higher education: A conceptual framework. In J. Knight and H. de Wit (Eds.). *Internationalization of higher education in Asia Pacific countries*. Amsterdam: European Association for International Education Publications, 5-19.
- Maceviciute, E. (2002). Information management in the Baltic, Nordic, and UK LIS Schools. *Library Review*, 51(3/4)190-1999.
- Myburgh, S. (2003). Education directions for new information professionals. *Australian Library Journal*, 52(3)42-56.
- OECD (2004). *Internationalization and trade of higher education – challenges and opportunities*. Paris: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

About the Authors

Nooraini Ismail earned her BA in sociology/anthropology from University of Malaya, Malaysia, and an MLIS from University of Pittsburgh, USA. She is currently the Chief Librarian at International Islamic University Malaysia.

Yushiana Mansor earned a BBA in Computer-Based Information System from University of Missouri, Kansas City, USA, an MLIS from International Islamic University Malaysia, and a Ph.D. from University of Pittsburgh, USA. She is currently an associate professor, and Head of Department of Library & Information Science.