Tales From the Field:
The right mix of theory, practice, and soft skills for educating digital library leaders

Research Summary
Technology skills have entered the LIS curriculum, but an overlooked variable in employability is often the perception of graduates’ soft skills. Communication skills, consensus-building and strategic thinking are critical to employers and by integrating coursework, internship experience, and networking opportunities as part of the core educational experience new graduates can set themselves apart as they enter the workforce. Research shows that programs that most effectively prepare future digital librarians are those that complement theory with interdisciplinary practice by developing partnerships and offer mentoring opportunities. This paper presents two perspectives identifying strategies to help develop leadership skills for the digital library field, representing the view of a new graduate employed in a digital library and a practicing librarian engaged in mentoring and training future digital librarians.

New Librarian View
Large gap between coursework offered in graduate programs and expectations of employers
Responsibilities for digital librarian positions vary widely
Skills acquired mainly through specialized practical experience
Mentorship best preparation for complex DL decision-making in the workplace

Practicing Librarian View
Important to introduce students to community of practice
International collaboration can result allow students to participate in developing DL projects with an international focus
Practicing librarians serve not only as mentors but also as partners students both learn and teach

Program Strategies
• Develop a set of practical and technical skills in the context of actual DL projects
• Seek unique skills and subject knowledge for development of DL projects
• Participants share recent DL developments learned from coursework
• Gain fresh user perspectives
• Mentor to build leadership skills for workplace

Balance skill sets  Develop professional support systems
Initiate into communities of practice  Build “soft skills”
Offer real-life scenarios  Model communication methods

Cory Lampert  
Digitization Projects Librarian  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
cory.lampert@unlv.edu

Krystyna Matusiak
Digital Collections Librarian  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
kkm@uwm.edu