LIBRARY EDUCATION, YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Research and Education for Library and Information Science: Waples in Retrospect

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In his article published in the first issue of Library Quarterly (1931), Douglas Waples describes the rationale for the newly created academic program of the University of Chicago Graduate Library School. A commitment to interdisciplinary research was central to the school's mission. Though it can be argued that we have made considerable progress in library schools since Waples's statement was published, the contention of this paper is that the academic desiderata outlined by Waples have yet to be fully achieved, that our schools of library and information science are once again intellectually impoverished, and that the Graduate Library School ought to be reinvented or re-created.

Fifty-five years ago, Douglas Waples articulated what he "believed" to "approximate a consensus of faculty opinion" about the "policies and practices," the "conditions and enterprises," of the recently established Graduate Library School (GLS) at the University of Chicago. He referred his reader, however, "to more interesting and significant evidence concerning the work of the School" than his own particular account, "coloured no doubt by the writer's individual views" [1, p. 26]. This evidence was to be provided by the reports of the investigations carried on in the school (at the end of his article, he listed the studies then underway). Waples indicated that these research reports would appear in a newly created journal, The Library Quarterly. His remarks about the

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school appeared in the first issue of the journal and were intended explicitly to herald the way for such reports.

The opening paragraphs of Waples’s “The Graduate Library School at Chicago” are of interest not so much for what they say as for what they imply. It seems worthwhile to devote a moment to them before the substance of his account is examined. First, it is clear that at the time there existed no library journal that might as a matter of course accept the reports of research envisaged as flowing from the Graduate Library School. It is equally clear that in Waples’s opinion such research was unlikely to emanate from any of the existing library schools—hence the need for the new school.

That Waples should offer a semblance of very considerable caution in the introduction to his discussion of the new school’s programs, though he shows no sign of it later, hints at the complexity of the relationships of the school’s early faculty and ultimately at the forthrightness of Waples’s own character. It hints also at something lying deeper: the existence within a common academic enterprise of dissenting opinions and tolerance of them. Today we recognize these conditions as constituting academic freedom, which is indispensable to the intellectual vitality of the academy. Waples was one professor speaking on behalf of several for a new program of instruction and a field of research not previously recognized as such. He was obviously aware that these conditions were a necessary part of the academic initiative in librarianship to which the University of Chicago had so recently committed itself. He knew, too, that dissent, to be productive and acceptable, as opposed to being merely capricious and adversarial, must be based in the evaluation and the skillful deployment of evidence in argument. He identifies directly, at the very outset of his remarks, sources of appropriate evidence for the skeptical or disputatious and at once both creates a new tone in library literature and exemplifies the critical, academic approach to librarianship that the Graduate Library School was created to represent.

Waples’s statement about the library school at Chicago continues to be important for several reasons. Not the least of these reasons is related to the history of the school itself. Waples’s statement could be taken as a kind of touchstone for comparison of what has happened to the school since its formative years, which were turbulent with sometimes vituperative argument, a time in the memories of the few who remain to us from that era haloed in a kind of nostalgic golden glow.

Yet, given the existence of so much historical writing about the school [2, 3, 4], it would seem more interesting to consider how Waples’s statement compares more generally with the present condition and status of education for librarianship. Considered thus, it can be argued that his statement has been overtaken by events and has little to say to us.
Alternatively, it can also be argued that his statement has a vital contemporary relevance. It expresses an ideal, despite the swirl of initial controversy over the founding of the school, to which lip service is now widely paid in library education. It can help us to understand why the ideal has generally been so elusive. It can also illuminate a curious dilemma of modern librarianship: the loss in basic professional education of an important research component at the same time that the field acknowledges a serious need for research to guide professional practice.

Research and the Academic Standard

The key to the uniqueness of the Graduate Library School's early program, as presented in Waples's statement, lies in the words "scholarship" and "research." Waples listed the first two major policies of the new school: (1) The most important single responsibility of the school is to meet the standards of scholarship and research maintained by the graduate departments of the university, both in the character of work undertaken by the staff and by the research interests of its graduates. (2) The major aim is research, defined as "extending the existing body of factual knowledge concerning the values and procedures of libraries in their many aspects, and including the development of methods of investigation whereby significant data are obtained, tested and applied" [1, p. 26].

The faculty was expected to conduct research at a level of quality comparable with the faculty of other units of the university. Its new programs of instruction, one leading to the first Ph.D. in library science in the United States, were to attract Ph.D. and other students of a caliber similar to that of students elsewhere in the university and require research of them no less sophisticated and rigorous. But the early faculty of the GLS had no doctrinaire or limited view of "library science," as has sometimes been alleged [5]. For them, "library science" meant only "a scientific approach to library problems" [1, p. 30].

Waples drew heavily on John Dewey's Sources of a Science of Education [6] in setting forth the school's expectations of and conditions for the scientific investigation of library problems. First, he stated, such study was necessary because of the impact of librarianship as a "social enterprise" on "the advance of scholarship and hence . . . the welfare of society" [1, p. 30]. A library science was no trivial pursuit because of the critical importance and endless ramifications of that fundamental human activity that Waples believed undergirded all the institutional arrangements of librarianship: reading. Moreover, he believed, scientific investigation "of the phenomenon of librarianship, like all such investigation, enables us to see new problems, devise new procedures, and in general makes for diversification rather than uniformity" [1, p. 32].
But Waples wanted it to be understood that the early GLS faculty realized that the gathering of scientific data had only an indirect, delayed value in relation to daily observation and routine. For them the major value of scientific study of library problems was not instantly to revolutionize the way libraries were organized and run but, rather, “to make common sense more common” [1, p. 32]. Moreover, given the complexity of the social enterprise involved, the accumulation of substantial, useful data was likely to be a slow and difficult process. “Don’t be impatient for a science of librarianship,” he warned [1, p. 33].

Waples distinguished between what might be called basic research that deals with “fundamental problems” [1, p. 32] and applied research. For the former, some time is needed in order that (quoting Dewey) “isolated conclusions . . . isolated results . . . are linked together to form a relatively coherent system” [1, p. 33]. To be avoided are unrealistic expectations of library studies and impetuous, premature attempts to apply their results. The school recognized “an obligation to study problems that the profession considers important” [1, p. 34]. It is in the context of this remark that one of the school’s major policies is pertinent: “Not all studies undertaken by the School need be confined to research in its restricted meaning of ‘search for abstract principles.’ In many instances, they may more properly be called service studies, studies intended to increase the effectiveness of library service” [1, p. 29].

That library science must draw on other disciplines was another fundamental conviction of the school’s faculty. How and to what extent it should do this Waples found difficult to say: “We are just beginning at Chicago to find out what elements of other university departments and disciplines pertain to library problems” [1, p. 33]. But the list in 1931 was already long: bibliography, education, history, law, literary criticism, philosophy, political science, psychology, social science, administration, sociology, and statistics. The work the school’s students had done in these disciplines, Waples remarked, “has contributed plenty to disturb our complacency over what library science amounts to today” [1, p. 34].

A vision of research and scholarship lay at the core of Waples’s statement, a spirit of inquiry that embraced everything—fundamental problems, problems related directly to professional practice, “service studies,” other disciplines. Courses were developed “to define somewhat specifically the problems which invited investigation . . . and to indicate ways of attacking the problems” [1, p. 29]. In order to acquire the knowledge and skill they needed and to find their way elsewhere in the university, students were required to work very closely with a faculty advisor. The curriculum of study was designed to be as flexible as possible and responsive to the individual needs of students as they learned to identify and investigate research problems. Thus research was not a separate element in the curriculum; the curriculum was de-
signed to embody optimal intellectual conditions for the conduct of research. Research was not one of a range of competing responsibilities of the school's faculty, it was the preeminent responsibility from which all others grew.

Finally, if the school's work was to contribute to the development of a useful library science and to the improvement of librarianship, the school's faculty had an obligation to "prepare," "collect," and "publish" the results of significant studies. Hence the creation of Library Quarterly. And monographs, conference proceedings, and Library Quarterly articles reporting research or discussing important issues in librarianship cascaded from the pens of the school's early faculty and students. As a group, if they did not entirely create a modern library literature, these pioneers were at least responsible for increasing its volume (library literature was then only a trickle compared to the flood it has become), broadening its scope, elevating its quality, and through it introducing into librarianship a new kind of professional discourse.

But this obligation had its own special additional requirement of which the faculty was all too aware. Again, having quoted a somewhat obscure passage of Dewey's, Waples observed, "The final reality of library science is not found in books about it, nor experiments set up in libraries, nor the classrooms of library schools, but in the minds of those engaged in directing the work and policies of libraries" [1, pp. 30–31]. Knowledge must be discovered, systematized, imparted, and applied. Application, however, must not be routine or by formula but thoughtful, critical, and animated by a scientific spirit within librarians themselves whose aim must be "to make library functions more intelligent" [1, p. 31].

Ideals Unattainable or Betrayed

What, then, is the contemporary importance, if any, of all of this to library schools as they are now and to the broader profession of which the schools are a part? One could take the view that, fifty years later, Waples's statement has little relevance. One might claim that, at the time of its foundation, the Chicago school could hope to manage its affairs in the dynamic, flexible, intimate, interdisciplinary, unhurried, single-minded way that it regarded as its objective because it was a "postgraduate" school whose mission was precisely and single-mindedly defined as research. It aspired to only a very small student body (Waples indicated that each faculty member should be responsible at any one time for no more than five Ph.D. students). Students were required already to be both qualified and experienced in librarianship. They were
also required not only to evince a special orientation toward research but to have in mind a potentially important, investigable problem.

Such conditions, it could be observed, were unrealistic then and are more so now. Other schools, then as now, have the obligation of training neophytes for professional practice. Especially in these latter days of cost- and revenue-conscious academic administrators, the larger the number of students clamoring at their institutional doors the better. Basic programs, necessarily limited in time, must be tightly structured. One assumes that they must also require faculty to have a special attitude toward their subject matter and their students, and a close, practical connection to the field itself. Moreover, while these conditions are certainly different from those believed necessary at Chicago in its early days, the Chicago faculty rather soon compromised their position. They created a basic professional degree program and admitted beginning students to it. Thus they themselves, it can be argued, could not sustain their first ideals and had to abandon essential ingredients of their program as enunciated by Waples. In addition, the underlying rationalization for the early program was centered in the social importance of reading, and research in this area, so closely connected with Waples's own interests, seems to have exhausted itself with Waples [7]. It is certainly not now generally accepted as capable of providing the intellectual foundation for a general field of research and of professional activity.

Nine years ago, Scarecrow Press published a fairly lengthy indictment of what might be described as the "sincerity" of the school's commitment to research. In a book called *The Search for a Scientific Profession* [5], L. Houser and Alvin Shrader analyzed the early history of the Chicago school in terms of a putative ideal of pure research that the school set out to attain, and it might have reached had it only continued to hew ideologically to the correct line. They believed that the school's accommodation to the practical desirability of a larger student body and what they saw as a commitment to library administration compromised the ideal of research.

That the school has been affected historically by developments in the field cannot be denied. It is equally true that it has itself helped shape some of these developments. While the school added a basic professional degree program to its original research degrees, and so might be construed as having reduced the distinctiveness that set it originally so apart from other schools, that basic degree was firmly embraced within its central research mission. It required of students the preparation of a thesis under close faculty supervision. Other schools, however, added preparation for the Ph.D.—by definition a research degree—to their basic programs. Ph.D.-degree programs inevitably tinted the schools
that introduced them with a Chicago hue (to say nothing of the fact that for many years the faculties responsible in large part for the direction of these degrees were Chicago graduates). Moreover, many schools also began to require theses at the level of the basic degree.

A recognition that librarianship has a critical social value remains no less necessary today than in earlier times to sustain the institutional and personal commitment necessary for research. Nowadays, the justification for library science in the importance of reading for society has been replaced by a broader, perhaps vaguer, justification for library and information science in society’s need for effective access to recorded information and knowledge. But this represents not so much a repudiation of Waple’s ideas as a reformulation or broadening of what Waples believed reading involved.

Ideals Attained

One ought not be discouraged from attending to Waples’s statement today because it presents ideals that, it can be argued, proved to have been unattainable, or that were betrayed, or that were falsely anchored intellectually. Indeed, one might argue that what Waples has to say has become so commonly accepted that it can have only historical interest as a first formulation of academic desiderata for library education and librarianship. Most library school faculties, especially their younger members, would now argue that they should be equal members of the broader university communities of which their schools are part, that standards of research applicable elsewhere in the university are equally applicable to them, and that they must publish or perish. Not only do universities require this of them for promotion and tenure, the profession demands it of them as well for the accreditation of their schools. Prominent in the accreditation standards promulgated by the American Library Association is the requirement that library school faculties (as a whole) engage in research and be seen to be equal to and to be treated no differently from other university faculty. Full curricula vitae for faculty must be included in the self-study reports that are central to the accreditation process. In these curricula vitae, faculty are required to list what books, parts of books, journal articles, and so on they have published of a research and scholarly nature. They must list the research grants they have held and now hold and describe the research projects they have undertaken in the recent past and those that now absorb them.

An interesting manifestation of a concern for research in the profession has been the appearance of textbooks about how to go about doing research in library and information science [for example, 8, 9]. While
such works certainly do not set forth "methods of investigation" peculiar to library science, the development of which was one of the objectives of the early Chicago school, they represent attempts to distill from a large body of widely accepted research methodologies and statistical and other techniques, mostly drawn from the social sciences, what seems most relevant to the library field.

At a different level, the existence of Houser and Shrader's work [5] is part of a different kind of testimony to the assimilation of a commitment to research into librarianship. There is a body of scholarly writing that examines the ways in which research has been or might be conducted in librarianship or information science. Some of this, though in part also historical, is less "revisionist" than Houser or Shrader [for example, 10, 11]. Some of it, however, is even more tendentious and extreme, such as a recent paper by Michael Harris, "The Dialectic of Defeat: Antinomies in Research in Library and Information Science" [12].

These works, whatever their content and cogency, may be construed as being reflections on themes similar to those that exercised Waples and his colleagues at Chicago in the early 1930s. What a scientific approach that is relevant to the field might be like has become a subject for discussion. Although such discussions today are unlikely to be a direct legacy of the early Chicago school, they may derive from academic and professional conditions and circumstances that found an early expression in the school's creation. If these contemporary discussions are to be anything more than elaborate exercises in shadowboxing, then there must now exist an ample and complex body of research and a group of scholars numerous enough and disparate enough in their work to warrant such scrutiny. If all this is true, then Waples's statement is once again only of historical interest. What he set out as desiderata for the early Chicago school have either been generally attained or have evolved into something else.

A Picture of Imperfection

I have presented elsewhere [13, 14, 15] several extended arguments that express a different opinion. These arguments need not be repeated in detail here, but if they are sound, then library school faculty are insufficiently academic, and their professional allegiance often conflicts with and undermines their allegiance to research as one of the central missions of the university. The volume and quality of research produced by library schools are not what we might expect, especially given the

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2. This paper may itself be an example of this phenomenon.
passage of fifty-five years since the enunciation in the GLS of a research commitment for librarianship and library education that seems to have won fairly wide professional acceptance.

I have argued that doctoral programs are far too small and that students in them, too few in number, are frequently not of the highest intellectual caliber and seem often to be motivated in ways that do not lead to the production of important dissertations or sustained research careers. On the whole, these Ph.D. students do not seem generally to be selected or subsequently guided in the ways Waples describes as obtaining at Chicago in its early days. The historical record suggests how effective the school then was in terms of initial motivation and subsequent accomplishment of its Ph.D. students. The problem of the size of our contemporary Ph.D. programs is dramatically demonstrated in the October 9, 1985, Chronicle of Higher Education. A total of fifty-two Ph.D. degrees were awarded in the 1982–83 academic year. This represents a decline of 49 percent in a ten-year period. Parenthetically, this mirrors the decline in number of master’s degrees awarded in the same period [16, p. 22].

I have alleged that library schools tend to be isolated on their campuses and unable to exploit effectively the interdisciplinarity that Waples and his colleagues believed to be so important to the emergence of a library science and that today one may regard as even more crucial in the development of library and information science. I would also argue that the discussions of the research process, as opposed to critical analysis of actual research, what might be called metalevel discussions of research and science in relation to library and information science, represented by the work of Houser and Shrader, Harris, and others, are a form of curious but easily penetrated subterfuge. For the hard work of doing something substantial and important, they substitute long talk of why it was not, is not, cannot, or should not be done.

I have also argued that basic programs of library education are too short and do not provide the opportunity to socialize or train students in research. Indeed, most library schools have now abandoned the thesis requirement in their basic programs, though often offering what must be peculiarly sterile courses in research methods. This has led to a curious reversal. Waples believed that schools like Chicago could be effective in inculcating a critical, scientific orientation in the minds of students that would be brought to bear on subsequent professional practice, and that, finally, library “science” was nothing until it was assimilated intellectually by working librarians. The importance of this observation and the difficulty library schools now have in dealing practically with it are borne out by the interest in research that now emerges from the field itself. There are innumerable research forums and work-
shops devoted not to presenting and discussing the results of actual research but to helping participants who desire to do research to rid themselves of fear of research, to form an appropriate research orientation, and to acquire basic research skills—something one might reasonably expect library schools to have already done in preparing these persons for professional practice. These occasions are sponsored variously by library associations and library schools, not as part of a fundamental mission but as a form of continuing or supplemental education. The papers that are presented at them are sometimes published for broader consumption and use.\(^3\)

This palpable problem of inadequate research preparation in library schools, like other deficiencies and problems to which I have alluded, are illuminated by Waples’s statement. For the early Chicago program, research was central; it was all permeating. It shaped the curriculum; it determined selection standards for students; it ordered the academic life of faculty and students alike. No other schools were able to make this kind of commitment, and the Chicago school itself has not been able to maintain a Ph.D. program of the size and quality that characterized the earlier period. The consequence for library schools, for their students, for their faculties, for professional librarians, and for library “science” itself, has been at best a kind of retarded development, at worst a special kind of failure. Indeed, it is my view that we are at a similar point of scholarly impoverishment in library schools that, in an earlier period, gave impetus to the founding of the Graduate Library School and supports the idea that the Graduate Library School itself needs reinventing or re-creating.

Though we must recognize the progress that has been made in articulating appropriate academic standards for library education and in accepting the importance of research for the library field, a cup half full is also half empty. Thus, Waples’s statement, with its unequivocal declaration of the centrality of research for the development of academic

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3. Two such papers from a conference at the University of North Carolina Graduate School of Library Science in March 1979 were published under the general heading of the conference itself, “Library Research for Librarians” [17]. Another group of papers directed essentially at children’s librarians was drawn from a two-day preconference held at the ALA Annual Conference in New York in 1980 and published under the heading “Research: The How and Why of It” [18]. Note especially in this connection the work of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) research and development committee, which is “launching a plan to stimulate superior research among academic librarians” [19, p. 180]. The committee sponsored a day-long research clinic in Chicago, July 8, 1985, on the occasion of the American Library Association’s annual meeting. The organizers hope that this clinic will be repeated perhaps with a different format and that a research manual might be developed either from it or to be used in association with it.
programs of special quality and for the development of the field itself, continues to have enormous relevance. No less important is the simple, extraordinarily generous conception of science that he expresses. His statement could become, if heeded today, a fresh breeze that would help to blow away mists of confusion and obfuscation that have gathered around the idea of what constitutes research and science as they bear on our field. It is my contention that today we need the single-minded commitment to a generously formulated conception of research represented by Waples's statement as much as—or more than—we ever did. We need a school committed to the investigation of important problems of information generation, storage, access, dissemination, and use, a school able to attract and support a corps, small though it may be, of intellectually first-rate faculty and doctoral students, a school anchored intellectually in a flexible, interdisciplinary academic environment. We need a new Graduate Library School, however titled, to become a model, a beacon, a major source of teachers for other schools. Only thus will we find a new direction for the field and effectively reshape and develop innovative library and information services to meet the technological, social, and economic challenges we now face. Only thus will our present-day library schools be helped to overcome their manifest inadequacies and "meet the standards of scholarship and research maintained by the [other] graduate departments of [their universities]" [1, p. 26].

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