

# How we missed the boat: reading scholarship and the field of LIS

Reading  
scholarship

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Received 19 January 2015  
Revised 15 February 2015  
Accepted 16 February 2015

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to examine the reasons for the gradual extinction of reading scholarship in Library and Information Science (LIS) departments and to identify three problematic areas accounting for its dropping prestige: paradigmatic conflicts, the influence of the corporate university and low awareness of the potential of reading research. It also proposes possible solutions to each problem.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Close reading and analysis of an extensive selection of sources with novel conceptualization and critical perspectives.

**Findings** – The information science paradigm, which has dominated LIS, is not sufficient to accommodate reading research. The information science model has a detrimentally restrictive effect on reading scholarship. Library science, which should be considered an autonomous discipline rather than an appendix of information science, is more conducive to the study of reading. Non-specialization-based academic hiring to increase values-based diversity in LIS through a larger influx of reading scholars is advocated.

**Originality/value** – Reading scholarship, unduly deemed “old-fashioned”, or euphemistically “traditional”, is one of the most potent areas of academic inquiry, to which LIS scholars are perfectly positioned to make a unique contribution. Reading research in LIS has great merit irrespective of its connection to information and technology; a set of evaluative questions to determine the quality of reading scholarship is introduced. Using a case study, the paper illustrates the potential of reading research for interdisciplinary connections, community partnerships and the enrichment of LIS education and professional practices. An honest look at one of the most exciting academic fields, regrettably neglected by LIS.

**Keywords** Library & Information Science, Diversity, Paradigm, Academic hiring, Corporate university, Reading scholarship

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

The big, exciting, research-to-practice and practice-to-research venture, spanning several academic and applied fields, is gaining speed and momentum, and we have missed the boat. Not by accident, not by mistake. We missed it because we have chosen to.

## Introduction

Consider the following. Capitalizing on the healing potential of literature, a team of researchers from the Central Michigan University develops the Bibliotherapy Education

The article highlights were presented at the 100th conference of the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE), Chicago, January 28, 2015, in fulfilment of the requirements for the inaugural Connie Van Fleet Award for Research Excellence in Public Library Services to Adults ([www.alise.org/alise-connie-van-fleet-award](http://www.alise.org/alise-connie-van-fleet-award)) received by the article author. The author wholeheartedly thanks the NLW reviewers and editors for their constructive, thoughtful and supportive comments on the earlier draft of the article.



New Library World  
Vol. 116 No. 9/10, 2015  
pp. 477-502  
© Emerald Group Publishing Limited  
0307-4803  
DOI 10.1108/NLW-01-2015-0007

Project, with the main goals of helping users locate books that have been evaluated for their therapeutic qualities and to enable users to do such evaluation independently. To that end, the project website incorporates a browsable and searchable book database and introduces the nuanced Bibliotherapy Evaluation Tool ([Bibliotherapy Education Project: EHS & Kromer Instructional Materials Center, n.d.](#)). The Centre for Research into Reading, Literature and Society at the University of Liverpool works in collaboration with the charity Reader Organisation and focuses on its Shared Reading Scheme, aimed at creating “a national culture of shared reading” ([The Reader Organisation, 2013](#)). The goal of collaboration and experimental research is “(t)o identify the intrinsic value components of the reading aloud shared-reading model” for the individual and the community and to explore its potential “therapeutic, health, economic, [and] social [...] benefits” ([Davis et al., 2014](#), p. 3). A related venture examines the influence of reading on the quality of life for people living with dementia ([Read to Care, 2014](#)). Other initiatives are set to evaluate “a [l]iterature-based intervention for people with chronic pain” ([Billington, 2014](#)) and to investigate the effect of reading on depression and well-being ([Billington, 2010](#)). University professors, working with the criminal justice system and correctional services, establish “an alternative sentencing program” – Changing Lives Through Literature (CLTL) – “in response to a growing need within [the USA] criminal justice system to find alternatives to incarceration” ([Changing Lives through Literature \(CLTL\): An Alternative Sentencing Program, 2003](#)). An additional partnership is created to run a pilot evaluation of “a literature based intervention with women in prison” ([Robinson and Billington, 2013](#)).

This is just a small sample from an array of projects that result from the partnership of governmental agencies, not-for-profit organizations and academic institutions and that span such diverse areas as the development of bibliographic evaluative instruments, bibliotherapy, leisure reading, mental and general health, gerontology and criminal justice. And this is just a brief list of impressive, intellectually exciting, innovative and socially significant interdisciplinary reading projects, spearheaded by scholars from the fields of education, psychology and literature, in which Library and Information Science (LIS) scholars have taken no part.

We should have, and we could have, had we retained the critical mass of expertise and enthusiasm for reading research that existed in the field of library science and then LIS since its inception. We could have offered a unique contribution to these endeavours, considering our democratic approach to reading interests, which legitimizes and validates the plurality of reading choices, not only the reading of high-brow literature. And yet, we are not there. The big, exciting research-to-practice and practice-to-research venture, spanning several academic and applied fields, is gaining speed and momentum, and we have missed the boat. Not by accident, not by mistake. We missed it because we have chosen to[1].

In our largely text-based society, the centrality of reading is impossible to overestimate. It is an activity that permeates and underlies our academic endeavours, learning, entertainment, socialization, daily routine, communication, information consumption and professional pursuits, and this inventory is by no means complete. It would stand to reason, therefore, that the field of LIS would treat reading with the greatest interest and count it among its hottest and most relevant research areas. However, over the past few years, I have found myself more and more frequently advocating for the status and importance of reading scholarship in LIS. It may seem

far-fetched that something as fundamental and congenital to our discipline as reading would need advocacy at all. And yet [...].

### The reading paradox in LIS

Today, we have a paradoxical situation with regard to the status of reading research in LIS. On the one hand, the popularity and relevance of reading are growing not only with all types of libraries, including public, academic and special, but also with governmental agencies, such as correctional services, in light of the realization that reading is significant in the rehabilitation of incarcerated persons (Prison Reading Groups, 2015); health care, with the advance of bibliotherapy, which presents a huge potential field of contribution for LIS researchers and practitioners (Brewster *et al.*, 2012; McAllister *et al.*, 2014; Riahi Nia, 2011; Walwyn and Rowley, 2011); educational settings, including special education (with examples too numerous to mention); and not-for-profit organizations, such as the Canadian National Institute for the Blind ([www.cnib.ca/en](http://www.cnib.ca/en)) or its counterparts in other countries (e.g. the National Federation of the Blind ([www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org)) in the USA and the Royal National Institute of Blind People ([www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)) in the UK). Last but not least, reading is greatly popular with a large number of prospective and incoming LIS students. As Cox (2010, p. 115) puts it:

The technology of book publishing and the economics of printing have been transformed, but the mechanism of reading persists much as it has since Augustine discovered his mentor silently perusing a book. The scholarly interest in reading, from various disciplines in the humanities, has been matched by popular interest in the nature of reading and the proliferation of book groups [...].

In his heartfelt and astute *The Demise of the Library School* (2010), Cox recounts the experience familiar to many of us who have sat on admission committees and read master's student applications.

As I read the personal statement portion of the applications to our MLIS program, I cannot but help notice [sic] how many profess that a *love*[2] of reading and books, often connected to childhood experiences of parents reading to them, is what motivates them to submit their application (Cox, 2010, p. 55).

As students go through LIS programmes, they become disillusioned and disenchanted with how little, in fact, we talk and teach about reading, especially when they discover that some:

[...] faculty of these schools believe the book is dead, technical skills [are] the focus of the courses, and reading is more an exercise akin to surfing the World Wide Web (p. 123).

Consequently, they begin to feel less affinity with the chosen field. Cox is concerned "that the reasons many students come to the schools might be unsupported" (p. 22). Reading scholarship and the teaching of reading have fallen out of grace a while ago and are on the road to losing the last hold in LIS programmes. In fact, to borrow from the metaphors for academic extinction used by Cronin (2012), reading scholars in LIS may have already followed "in the footsteps of the brontosaurus, the dodo and the panda"[3].

Interestingly enough, the area of reading practices of children and young adults is not detrimentally affected because children and youth, in general, garner much scholarly attention. The same can be said about the area of book history and print culture (BHPC), especially when it intersects with digital humanities. However, BHPC is a very

interdisciplinary area of research, and LIS scholars are neither the only nor the most numerous contributors to the field, which pools the expertise of historians, literary scholars, sociologists, psychologists, cultural studies and education researchers, anthropologists, archaeologists and others. As Cox (2010, p. 13) also notices:

[...] some of the most compelling assessments on books, their history, [and] the reading of them [...] are mostly coming from individuals outside of the library and information science community.

Sorely missing is LIS research into the contemporary reading practices of adults, including seniors, immigrant and ethnic communities, marginalized readers (e.g. prisoners) and readers with print disabilities. Such studies can be found in other disciplines, as mentioned earlier, and there are several exemplary LIS studies from the UK (Birdi, 2011, 2014; Spacey *et al.*, 2014; Usherwood and Toyne, 2002; Yu and O'Brien, 1999), but there is no significant presence or impact of North American LIS scholars in the area of reading research. There are almost no studies that discuss reading as an individual-level phenomenon, focusing on personality-related and group-related factors and accounting for the personal and familial context of the reader's life. Similarly, there is a shortage of research on reading as a social phenomenon, which would investigate ideological, political, cultural, historical and technological forces that form and shape our reading practices. LIS departments[4] across North America try to position themselves as global and international research institutions, and yet, when it comes to reading research, the absence of comparative reading studies and studies set in other geo-cultural contexts is very conspicuous.

Of course, for a reading scholar, such as myself, the state of reading scholarship in LIS is one of the main concerns, although I am certainly not alone in worrying about the future of reading research. In my opinion, one of the most vocal advocacies of reading in recent years has come from the earlier cited *The Demise of the Library School*. Cox is not a reading scholar, nor is his book specifically about reading. However, having a wealth of pedagogical and scholarly experience, he has a holistic view of our field, which makes his argument in defence of reading all the more powerful and noteworthy. For those who have not read Cox's book, the title can be a little bit misleading. In fact, he does not seem to lament the dissolution of those old library schools that "were producing librarians but failed to meet the academic standards of leading research universities" (pp. 22-23, citing Olson and Grudin, 2009, pp. 15-16). Yet, he does worry "whether some of the important things that the old library schools did might be lost in the trendy new information schools" (p. 22). In particular, he regrets the disappearance of reading from the scholarship and curricula of contemporary LIS departments, including iSchools, pointing at the possibly detrimental consequences of this development.

Sometimes, we see reading-related studies conducted by LIS scholars. However, reading is often secondary or tangential to these scholars' expertise, and there is often an informational or technological aspect to these studies (e.g. e-book formats and platforms, information retrieval, metadata, software/catalogue design). It seems as though to justify the existence of reading scholarship in LIS departments and to give it legitimacy and a chance to be accepted, we have to necessarily connect it to the study of information and technology and, sometimes, to force this connection. The sphere of digital reading and digital reading materials is certainly still very new and unexplored, with ample potential for both focused and robust research projects. This fact

notwithstanding, there are reading audiences for whom digital reading is still largely irrelevant, who live on the other side of the digital divide, and whose interests have very little to do with technology. Focusing exclusively on digital reading would mean neglecting these reading audiences.

There are numerous points of intersection between information and reading research, as there are similarities between information and reading behaviours. But the truth at the heart of it is that the study of reading *is not and cannot* always be related to the study of information. Reading scholarship differs from information scholarship. It also transcends the narrow focus on reading practices and reading audiences, forging connections with such disciplines as psychology (Fong *et al.*, 2013; Mar *et al.*, 2011; Oatley, 2011), sociology (Griswold *et al.*, 2005; Knulst and Kraaykamp, 1998; Knulst and van den Broek, 2003), education and medicine through the medium of bibliotherapy and medical humanities. Outside of the obviously cognate disciplines of literature, digital humanities, publishing and history, it also makes connections with such interdisciplinary fields as feminist, women's and gender studies (Littau, 2006; Sweeney, 2010); immigration and ethnic studies (Dali, 2012, 2013a, 2013b); and disability studies (Spacey *et al.*, 2014). As a result, reading scholarship contributes to and enriches the academic environment *irrespective* of its association with information and technology. But does this mean that reading scholarship does not belong in the field of LIS and, specifically, in the environment of newer iSchools?

In trying to answer this question, I identify three large problematic areas in relation to reading scholarship in LIS:

- (1) paradigmatic conflicts;
- (2) the influence of the corporate university; and
- (3) low awareness of the potential of reading scholarship.

I also offer solutions that, in my opinion, can alleviate each of the three problems – solutions that are often interdependent. To illustrate my suggested approach to the advocacy of reading in LIS, I use an example from my research. Although this article is written as a conceptual piece, it should also be seen as a viewpoint presentation.

### **Reading scholarship and paradigmatic conflicts**

Interestingly enough, contemporary iSchools welcome a variety of areas under their umbrella, some of which have a fairly tenuous connection to the study of information. Even the frequently present studies of surveillance and identity, critical making, records management and museum studies do not necessarily rely on information scholarship and do not always claim affinity with the concept of information. If LIS departments meet this kind of research with open arms, why can the same not be applied to reading research?

A partial answer may be found in the different perceptions of the aforementioned fields. While the study of identity and technology, for instance, is deemed cutting-edge, in step with the times, auspicious, and exciting, reading scholarship often suffers from the stigma of being conservative and all too predictable to generate the same excitement. The euphemism “traditional” is often applied. Indeed, in LIS, reading is associated with the “librarianship” or “library science” side of LIS, which is viewed by some information scholars to be a vocational pursuit rather than a scholarly endeavour (Cronin, 1995). And although it would probably be hard to find a harsher pronouncement than “library

science' is an oxymoron" (Cronin, 1995, p. 897), by now, the paradigmatic absorption of library science by information science is considered a truism by many in the LIS field. An attempt to demarcate "information science" and contrast it with "library science" includes the acknowledgement that information science:

[...] does at least attempt to fashion theories, model reality, probe for generalizations, predict behaviors and outcomes, and build systematically on insights developed through both basic and applied research [...]. It is an elastic and eclectic field, one that sources ideas from a range of cognate domains (Cronin, 1995, p. 898).

Overlooked is the fact that library science does just the same and has the same eclecticism and elasticity. However, it draws on and reaches out to a slightly different constellation of disciplines, named in the "Reading Paradox" section above. That is to say that the scope of information science is not sufficient to accommodate the needs of library science. Despite claims to the contrary, the information science paradigm does *not* contain "the necessary elements for the universe of discourse" (Vakkari, 1994, p. 2, cited in Cronin, 1995, p. 897) required to advance library science in general and reading research in particular.

Two specific aspects make an application of the information science paradigm to reading scholarship problematic: the scope of what is considered "information sciences"[5], and the notion of a meta-discipline.

#### *Reading scholarship and the limitations of information science*

That "the contributions of the library science partner are defined increasingly in terms of professional values and fuzzy philosophical ideals rather than theory building and rigorous research" (Cronin, 1995, p. 897) is one of the deepest misconceptions that exist. To admit to the validity of this statement, we have to adopt the definition of science that valorizes "value neutrality" (Cronin, 1995, p. 897; see also Bates, 1999, p. 1,049) and presupposes following the so-called "engineering model" "without political or explicitly value-laden objectives" (Bates, 1999, p. 1,049). Clearly, this is not the type of model or philosophical frame suitable for the study of reading and readership.

Interestingly, this is not even a model or paradigm that fully or representatively describes information science itself. Information science has been in constant flux in the past few decades, attempting to chart its boundaries, outline its scope and formulate a more inclusive and accurate self-definition. The field is so complex and multifaceted that it would be erroneous to say that a single, categorical and unflinching definition is reflective of its character. Any attempt to stake out the territory of information science in absolute terms would be reductive, and even scholars who attempt these definitions admit to their transformative, expansive nature and acknowledge that there are different perspectives on information science (Bates, 2011; Hjørland, 2011). A great intellectual debate about information science notwithstanding, the definition and scope of the field outlined in a series of works by Bates (1999, 2007, 2011; Bates and Maack, 2008) are held as authoritative, valid and popular by both major sources (e.g. *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences*) and scholars with the superior knowledge of information science history (Saracevic, 2009) and Bates' work (Hartel, 2012). To cite Bates (2007):

The information disciplines all deal with the collection, organization, retrieval, and presentation of information in various contexts and on various subject matters. That social purpose, of collecting, organizing, and disseminating information shapes all the activities of the information disciplines [...].

Unfortunately, this definition and scope are not receptive to reading scholarship.

Crowley (2008, p. 22) contends that offering “what has become an influential rationale for subsuming ‘library’ under ‘information’”, Bates “was correct in several particulars but was fundamentally wrong in her conception of libraries”. Among other things, he is disheartened that under the dominating information science model, which incorporates library science as only one of its components, the entire universe of library work has been reduced to information provision. This, according to Crowley and other critics he cites in his book, has had detrimental effects on both LIS education and LIS practice. Analogously, under the same model privileging information- and technology-driven research, non-informational library research has been often dismissed as something less scientific, rigorous and timely. Reading scholarship is an example thereof.

For instance, it is remarkable that in their “Introduction” to the *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences*, Bates and Maack (2008) list “Library and Information Science” under the general umbrella of “Information Sciences”. In the same list of information disciplines, “Museum Studies” is listed as is. Why did Bates and Maack deem it necessary to duplicate and reinforce the notion of “information science” in the rubric for LIS when it is already clear that this rubric denotes one of the information sciences? Given this peculiar repetition, what does LIS *really* mean in this context? The study of library *and* the study of information? If so, are all the other disciplines on the list not the studies of information as well? Or does LIS mean the study of information in the context of libraries? If so, then the thus-defined “LIS” leaves no room for the study of non-informational aspects of library. Library science does not exist as an autonomous entry in the presented list of information disciplines (Bates and Maack, 2008)[6].

Subsequently, if we assume that reading is indeed associated with library science and that library science can only exist in tandem with information science, then we circle back to the argument I advanced earlier: reading research in LIS is only legitimate and acceptable when it claims affinity with information and has an informational aspect.

#### *Reading scholarship and the LIS notion of a meta-discipline*

Issues created by a scope of information science that does not seem to accommodate non-informational reading research are exacerbated by the notion of information science as a meta-discipline. Take, for example, one of the perennial statements from Bates’ (1999, p. 1,044) seminal work “The invisible substrate of information science”: “In applied information science, we find ourselves primarily concerned with the form and organization of information, its underlying structure, and only secondarily with its content” (Bates and Maack, 2008). At the same time, it is exactly our focus on the “form” and the “universe of documentation” (Bates, 2007) – that is, library fiction and non-fiction collections, the categorization of reading genres, catalogue records for fiction and non-fiction, social discovery platforms, readers’ advisory websites and tools – that limited the extent and diversity of reading research in our field.

At least two negative outcomes of applying this restrictive notion of a meta-discipline to reading research are immediately obvious. First, it leaves LIS reading scholarship insulated and inwardly focused, contained within the bounds of a single discipline and bereft of interdisciplinary cross-pollination. Second, it forecloses the richest, most exciting possibilities for the study of both reading materials and reading practices that are *content-dependent*. By “content” in this case I refer to the psychology and sociology

of reading behaviours, the peculiarities of different genres and media and their connection to personality traits and emotional response, the knowledge of reading audiences and communities and the interplay between societal ideologies and the production and dissemination of reading matters. That is absolutely not to say that research on reading materials, genres and collections is unworthy or unnecessary; rather, caught up in the analogies of information science research, we have devoted insufficient energy to bolder and more extensive studies of non-informational reading behaviours and activities and of reading as a social phenomena and social institution.

As a meta-discipline, information science has a very particular understanding of reading, which can be illustrated by an example from Bates' (2007) article. The inventory of "The Information Sub-Disciplines" (Figure 4 of the article) contains "Reading interests" and "Publishing studies", a legitimate part of the reading scholarship universe. However, both sub-disciplines are situated on the intersection of arts and humanities, which seems incomplete and thus objectionable. They should cross over arts, humanities *and* social and behavioural sciences; otherwise, the focus of reading and publishing research remains solely on objects and excludes reading behaviours, social interactions and the geo-political and cultural context of these activities. In this classification of sub-disciplines, the disadvantageous material-oriented focus of reading scholarship is perpetuated.

*The suggested solution: reading scholarship and library science*

If not the information science paradigm, then what should be guiding reading research in our field? My answer is the paradigm of library science. Although a comprehensive discussion of what I consider to be "library science" would take this paper on a huge tangent, I feel that a brief statement in this regard is in order to make my case in support of reading scholarship. First, library science is not a chimera. That something cannot (or should not) exist just because it has not existed before is a weak argument; by extension, the absence of "disciplines like 'hospital science' or 'jailhouse science'" (Wersig, 1992, p. 202, cited in Cronin, 1995, p. 897) does not mean that the discipline of library science cannot or should not exist. If the development of new disciplines were based purely on precedents and historical antecedents, there would be neither new fields of knowledge nor evolution of science.

Second, the concept of "library" is not equivalent to the concept of "jailhouse" or "hospital" (I am trying to ignore the sarcastic tone and grotesque similes, which, incidentally, do not strengthen the author's case). The concept of "library" is more comparable to the concept of criminal justice and healthcare management. "Library" is not just an institutional designator; library is not just an administrative structure. The concept of library, especially in the contemporary digital world, defies physical, administrative and institutional boundaries. By extension, library science is the study of various phenomena, activities and behaviours which were *traditionally* and *historically* associated with libraries but now transcend the walls of a single institution and reside in a much wider space. Reading and reading-related activities are just one representative example thereof[7]. That is to say, library scientists engage in research that may or may not be bound to physical or digital libraries. In this sense, I would agree with Cronin's (1995, p. 897) statement that library science "is a misnomer", although, of course, he meant a completely different thing. In terming it a misnomer, I refer to the fact that library science is *more* than the study of the library as institution.



What makes it *library science* a unique lens and principles that once *originated* in the library environment and are now applied in a much broader context of inquiry. What philosophical and methodological principles stemming from library science would guide reading research, specifically? Some of them are shared by library science with other disciplines, while others are unique to it. Whatever the case may be, these foundations must be understood in the context of the following definition of “science”: “the methodological production of new, systematic knowledge” (Kvale, 1996, p. 60) rather than a value-neutral intellectual engagement. The principles are:

- “Reading unlimited” is our inquiry domain; that is, we do not let the boundaries and perspective of a single discipline define and limit the content and scope of reading research and follow reading research wherever research questions take us.
- The flexibility and variety of engaged paradigms and employed methodologies are encouraged.
- Innovative interdisciplinary combinations of theories and methods geared towards the study of reading are crucial to advancing reading research[8].
- We take a non-hierarchical approach to reading genres (i.e. recognizing the differentiation of genres into low-, middle- and high-brow, based on the so-called objective quality of literary production, which exists in the world of publishing, literary criticism and other spheres, we do not make it a guiding principle in our work).
- We accept the plurality of reading choices and reading omnivorism as valid.
- We recognize the non-dependence of the reading experience on the quality of reading material (i.e. the quality of reading experience may not necessarily coincide with the genre categorization indicated in Item 4, and reading formulaic literature, for example, may provide a satisfying reading experience).
- The quality of reading is determined primarily by the experience of pleasure and personal satisfaction rather than the practical usefulness or educational value of reading[9].
- The reader, not the critic, educator, librarian or another expert, is the one who decides how “good” reading material is.
- Reading is a transaction between a reader and a reading matter whereby meaning is generated; that is, the meaning of the same work can differ from reader-to-reader (based on the reader response theory of reading-as-a-transaction, formulated and developed by Rosenblatt (1938, 1978)[10].
- The reading process and the reading act have inherent goodness and merit.
- Access to reading materials, freedom to read and various types of literacy form one of the foundations of civil society and democracy.

In sum, I contend that the outlined boundaries of information science are too restrictive for reading scholarship. Ignoring the content in reading research keeps LIS isolated and deficient. On the other hand, the domain of library science, which today transcends the boundaries of a single institution, allows for much more large-scale and encompassing scholarly engagement with reading. Hence, to legitimize broadly conceived reading research

in our field, we have to acknowledge the autonomy of library science. Just like information science does not limit the study of information to the domain of libraries, library science is more than the study of information in libraries. And yet, misconceptions about library science in general and the study of reading in particular persist.

### **The influence of the corporate university on reading scholarship**

Adding to this regrettable and erroneous perception of reading scholarship are the atmosphere and values of the contemporary corporate university that privileges all things science and technology over something that seems to represent soft humanities research. Cited in Cox (2010, p. 119), Waters (2004, p. 15, p. 67) “laments that the commercialized university has little tolerance for those who espouse humanistic pursuits”. While reading scholarship is certainly – and unapologetically – related to the humanities, it would be inaccurate and unjustified to reduce it to a single field of knowledge. It is both multi- and interdisciplinary and crosses over numerous areas of the humanities, social sciences, sciences, arts and technology. The main reason for the stigma of staleness and predictability is low awareness in the LIS community of the true potential and significance of reading scholarship. Reading research may be seen as limited to the realm of libraries, without much promise for forging interdepartmental and interinstitutional collaborations, for establishing partnerships outside of academia, for receiving recognition on the part of community stakeholders and university administrations and for attracting external funding, all of which are part and parcel of what is encouraged by the contemporary corporate university (Cox, 2010; Crowley, 2008; Dilevko, 2009).

A number of comments are in order. First, interdisciplinarity is not automatically a mark of excellence and not a necessary condition for a higher-quality scholarly investigation. Second, the underlying assumptions of the obsolescence, narrow focus and limited reach of reading research in LIS are erroneous; just like any other type of scholarship, reading research may be either focused or transcendental. Third, the same charges are rarely advanced against other areas of LIS, for example information-seeking. At the same time, information-seeking research, which has established itself as one of the most prolific areas of LIS, is replete with reports of fairly limited application, something that Cronin (2012) would call studies “of the cookie-cutter variety: Information needs of \_\_\_\_”. Information-seeking studies may not necessarily go beyond the specialized field of LIS and, despite their diligent design, may not be exactly groundbreaking or original. That is to say, reasons for stigmatization – of any kind – cannot always be fully explained. It is still not entirely clear why reading scholarship is deemed old-fashioned, or euphemistically “traditional”, although it may also have something to do with the very different sizes of the scholarly communities that deal with information science research (e.g. information-seeking) and reading research, respectively.

#### *Where did all the young reading scholars go?*

The community of reading scholars in North America is tiny; dedicated reading scholars are few and far between[11]. As a result, we do not produce a sufficient volume of empirical research that could reach a critical mass and make an impact on any significant scale. The plentiful publications about reading appearing in both professional and peer-reviewed LIS journals are, in fact, not based on empirical investigations. In the flood of opinion pieces, experience-sharing articles and literature reviews, empirical reading studies of innovative value are easy to overlook and under-appreciate.

Interestingly, we have more PhD students graduating with reading-related dissertations from LIS departments than we have dedicated tenure-track and tenured reading scholars[12]. Most newly minted PhDs very quickly encounter the realities of the North American academic job market and realize that their expertise in reading will not get them far. Rarely do we see any job postings that outline “reading” as a desired area of research or, at least, describe a field in which an incoming reading scholar could fit without twisting his or her expertise and knowledge into an unnaturally contorted formulation. Young reading scholars have an option of looking for employment elsewhere – in the fields of education, cultural studies, women’s studies, sociology, psychology and English literature – whatever befits their cognate expertise. However, if they resolve to stay with LIS, they have to recast themselves as something else for the purposes of job searching: user experience, information services, information-seeking or digital libraries. Once on tenure track, they may publish one or several articles based on their doctoral work, but they are likely to put reading research – and their passion for doing it – on ice and to continue doing whatever it is that helped them land the job in the first place. A few may get back into studying reading primarily or exclusively, but the following scenario is more likely. By the time that most ex-reading PhDs are tenured, they will have been doing “something else” for a few years, which will result in depleted expertise and outdated knowledge in the area of reading practices. They will have built a scholarly network, institutional connections and interdisciplinary partnerships in other fields of research, largely losing momentum and enthusiasm for the dedicated study of reading. And once they join the ranks of information-seeking scholars, user experience scholars or policy scholars, the community of LIS reading scholars will shrink even more.

To avoid misunderstanding, I should note that I do not draw a polarizing line between “information scholars” and “reading scholars”. After all, most of us dip our toes into different types of research in the course of our careers, and there are always multiple points of intersection between reading and information or reading and technology in research. However, we are all known for our chief areas of expertise, and it is the extinction of scholars for whom reading is one of the primary academic and professional concerns that I lament. Moreover, despite the fact that we have more PhD students studying reading than we have reading scholars, their number is drastically lower than the number of doctoral students in other areas of LIS. Unfortunately, we cannot claim that we are educating a new generation of the reading researchers, who will harness the power of interdisciplinarity and capitalize on the amazing flexibility of methodologies and theoretical frameworks allowed by the receptive, welcoming and eclectic nature of LIS. We cannot claim that we prepare reading scholars who will advance reading scholarship in a way that would not be possible in more conservative disciplines. As a result, scholars from other fields – most notably, English literature, psychology and education – have taken the lead in studying reading and reading practices, while we allowed ourselves to be sidelined in the field of inquiry that has been both uniquely integral to LIS and rapidly transforming in response to social, cultural, political and technological changes at the same time.

#### *Reading scholars and values-based diversity*

Disallowing for a larger influx of reading scholars and of other scholars who are not primarily information-oriented may bring about the lack of values-based diversity in some LIS departments, that is “diversity that’s not just based on visible characteristics

and demographics. It is [...] diversity in thought, diversity in approach, and diversity in ideas” (Hudson-Ward, 2014; The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2014). It is no secret that our personalities, private histories and personal values affect the choice of our academic careers and research paths (Adams and Rice-Lively, 2009) and that individuals with different sensibilities, priorities and perceptions of the world are capable of introducing a great deal of values-based diversity. This kind of diversity may brew latent fears in LIS departments that are operating in survival mode in the contemporary corporate university. Values-based diversity, which has a good chance to transform into a convincing opposition and a voice of dissent, may be seen as a threat to group cohesion on which said survival predicates. A “lone humanist [...] often offering minority opinions about curriculum design, course delivery, and entrance and graduation requirements” (Cox, 2010, p. 117) and upsetting a delicate equilibrium may not be a popular figure to keep around. A significantly divergent view on the issues of LIS, its future course and the state of higher education, which reading scholars can bring to bear on the LIS departments in flux, may not be viewed as desirable.

To avoid misunderstanding, I should point out that I do not claim that the filtering of alternative thinkers and dissenting points of view takes place in every department that does not hire reading scholars. However, such filtering cannot be completely ruled out and may not even be overt or deliberate; it may be subtle and almost subconscious, done by silent, unwritten but clearly understood consensus of *too many* likeminded, information-science-oriented individuals working in the same place without reasonable intellectual opposition.

*The suggested solution: learning from Google, focusing on the future*

Interestingly enough, a successful solution for the problematic LIS hiring may be found in the corporate world to which academia so often looks up these days. Unfortunately, we may be ignoring exactly those corporate practices that can help us remedy the situation, namely, the hiring practices “focused on bringing the best possible people into the company, even if their experience might not match one of the open roles” (Schmidt *et al.*, 2014, p. 98). Google leaders are under the impression that this is what is done in academia, but they are only partially correct. Although academic hiring is “peer-based, not hierarchical, with decisions made by committees”, subjectivity is impossible to eliminate; just like in the case of hierarchical hiring, “human nature [may get] in the way” and hiring decisions may just as easily be “usurped” (Schmidt *et al.*, 2014, p. 98) by the personal biases and motivations of people threatened by a candidate who is different and able to stir up controversy or pursue an alternate line of thought. Googlers insist on hiring people who possess “intellect, creativity” (p. 107), and passion, who are “well-rounded and engaged with the world” (p.105), with whom “you could have an interesting conversation [...] and respect”, “*not*[13] necessarily someone you have to like” (p. 107). How well it is implemented in academia varies on a case-by-case basis and depends on how healthy the departmental atmosphere is and on whether the departmental culture emphasizes collaboration or valorizes competition. Googlers elaborate:

You must work with people you don’t like, because a workforce comprised of people who are all “best office buddies” can be homogeneous, and homogeneity in an organization breeds failure. A multiplicity of viewpoints – aka diversity – is your best defense against myopia (p. 107) [...]. These differences of perspective generate insights that can’t be taught (pp. 107-108) [...]. Great talent often doesn’t look and act like you (p. 108).

Most importantly, however, Google managers warn against “[f]avoring specialization over intelligence” (p. 104) and encourage potential employers to hire so-called “learning animals” who possess a “growth mindset” (p. 103, citing Dweck, 2006). Those are the candidates “who keep learning” (p. 102), who do not “believe that the qualities defining [them] are carved in stone” and do not get “stuck trying to prove them over and over again, regardless of the circumstances” (p. 103). Those are the people who are capable of change and adaptation and who allow themselves “to take risks” instead of setting “‘performance goals’ to maintain [their] self-image” (p. 103). In other words, candidates should be hired not just “for the knowledge they possess” (p. 102) already but for their ability to learn, advance and evolve professionally or, in this case, scholastically. I do not believe that Schmidt, Rosenberg and Eagle call for the complete and unequivocal disregard of specializations in hiring, but I do believe that they strongly caution against filtering out candidates with massive social and intellectual capital solely or primarily based on their areas of expertise.

Perhaps the situation in other disciplines is different, but the LIS academic job market, in the past few years at least[14], has been dominated by postings emphasizing particular, sometimes very narrow, desired areas of expertise (e.g. telehealth, GIS, gaming for learning), which sound more like professional job posts or specialist roles than academic positions. All sorts of specializations related to health information, data (big data, data management, data curation, data preservation, data science), human–computer interactions, knowledge management, information systems and technologies, information visualization and cognate fields, to name just a few, are consistently in high demand across the board. Children and youth topics figure as well, in addition to less frequently appearing information behaviour and information policy, and nearly exotic information literacy, scholarly communication and library services. These specific requirements and the particularistic hiring that ensues by and large exclude reading scholars from the get-go, no matter how talented, accomplished, creative, flexible and interesting they are. If truth be told, they exclude not only reading scholars. No one will actually find out about these candidates’ potential because they will likely be sieved out of the running at a very early stage and never have a shot at an interview. Some other postings that are intentionally – and usefully – broader and worded to draw a large and diverse academic crowd may contain a more implicit limiter. For example, by calling for the expertise in various fields of *information and communication technology* or *social aspects of information and technology*, these postings give out a less-than-subtle hint that reading scholars are not likely to fit in. Some anecdotal data suggest that it is not uncommon for LIS reading scholars to receive a letter in response to their job applications that their research agenda does not align with a future direction that a department has chosen.

Nevertheless, any statement about a supposed future direction is, to some extent, presumptuous and illusory. It implies that the department in question knows exactly where it will arrive in several years and, most importantly, what the future holds and how bumpy (or smooth) the road to this future will be. Of course, certain projections will hold water, but no one can predict the future: the “world is changing so fast [...] that it’s a given the role for which you’re hiring is going to change” (Schmidt *et al.*, 2014, p. 104). Therefore, in reality, any ostensibly future-oriented statement reflects the *current* situation and *immediate* demand rather than future trends. In the meantime, in pursuit of trendy specializations, LIS departments in question leave behind a large number of energetic, gifted, creative individuals with a “growth mindset”, a proclivity for learning,

adaptability to change and unorthodox approaches to life and scholarship, that is scholars who increase intellectual diversity. Reading scholars are among them. By the time LIS programmes realize that these individuals are needed to sustain and move LIS forward, they will have left the field or joined other – more welcoming – disciplines. The privileging of research areas over the entire intellectual potential is much more consequential in academia than it is in industry, although Googlers, too, consider it a recipe for a festering business. The Doctor of Philosophy distinction should have the gravitas of reaching beyond a single narrow area of knowledge (or even a few areas). It should imply the holistic vision of the world and the mind of a scientist. What would the future hold for academic departments that ignore this kind of potential?

### **Low awareness of the potential of reading scholarship in LIS**

If elevating the status and prestige of reading scholarship in LIS is possible, I personally see no other way to achieve this than advocacy, the sole purpose of which would be raising awareness of the potential and transcendental reach of reading research and the liberation of reading scholarship from a stigmatized and erroneous perception.

This advocacy is not easy for a number of reasons. The first one is limited opportunity for public exposure and visibility in the academic community. There is more demand for presentations on reading at LIS professional conferences than at LIS academic venues because the latter are often information- and technology-themed. Consequently, reading research may be seen as out of the scope. The same can be said about the publication of articles. Some journals, while claiming commitment to LIS, in fact emphasize the informational aspect of the field and turn away reading-oriented submissions as out of tune with the mandate and mission of the journal[15]. Editors who do view such submissions as suitable may have a hard time locating reviewers who would have both sufficient expertise to evaluate a manuscript on reading and sufficient distance from the author to make such an evaluation objective. Sometimes, manuscripts on reading are sent to reviewers who approach and judge them as though they were information science research pieces, thus identifying flaws where, in fact, there are none. These reviewers fail to view the manuscripts on their own merit – as studies of reading, not studies of information – and provide comments and suggestions that cannot be implemented without disrupting the integrity of papers. For the same reasons, conference proposals containing a reading theme have a hard time finding home at information science academic conferences.

However, assuming that reading scholars do have a chance to present their research – especially through conferences and invited talks – they should take this opportunity to advocate for reading scholarship, highlighting its value *irrespective of its informational and technology-related aspects*. This brings me back to the point I made earlier: in trying to determine the merit of reading scholarship, we should be replacing the question on whether or not it is connected to the study of information or technology with the following questions:

- Q1. Is it good science, insofar as science is broadly conceived of as “the methodological production of new, systematic knowledge” (Kvale, 1996, p. 60) rather than a value-neutral intellectual engagement?
- Q2. Does it foster interdisciplinary connections and contribute to the development of other disciplines?

- Q3. Does it have pragmatic validation through the improvement of professional practices?
- Q4. Does it help to forge partnerships with governmental and community organizations in order to see through the implementation of research findings for the benefit of resolving real-life problems?
- Q5. Does it enrich LIS education and curricula?
- Q6. Does it make LIS more visible, relatable and important in the eyes of the general public?

Guided by these questions, advocacy for reading should encompass everything from scholarly knowledge creation to the practical application of knowledge. I will try to demonstrate this type of advocacy based on my own work. By no means do I try to present my own research as exemplary or the best. There are many excellent reading studies by other researchers that contribute a great deal to the field of LIS and beyond (Birdi, 2011, 2014; Mackey, 2007; Pecoskie, 2012; Ross, 1999[16]; Spacey *et al.*, 2014; Toane and Rothbauer, 2014; Usherwood and Toyne, 2002; Yu and O'Brien, 1999). I rely on my own work because it allows me to trace the process of research conception, design, argumentation and publication from the insider's perspective. I am also trying to take advantage of the combined viewpoint/conceptual article format in order to share my personal research journey as a reading scholar in LIS. Below is an example of interdisciplinary reading research which originates in and transcends the boundaries of library science.

### **Demonstrating the merit of reading research: a case study**

The chosen case study is about the role of leisure reading in the acculturation of immigrants in a host country.

#### *Theoretical frame summary*

In the absence of previous research on the topic, this study was exploratory and addressed the broadest possible research problem with a focus on the chosen reader population: "What is the nature and role of leisure reading in the lives of Russian-speaking immigrants in the new country?", which, in turn, was broken into specific research questions. Epistemologically guided by hermeneutic phenomenology, the study used a novel theoretical framework combining reading and immigration scholarships. The latter was in itself interdisciplinary and eclectic and pooled knowledge from immigration psychology, communication studies, social work, social anthropology and industrial relations. Berry's (2001) model, which identified four acculturation types exhibited by immigrants depending on their desire to reach out to the host society and their drive to preserve the ethno-cultural heritage, was one of the pillars; the identified acculturation types were assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization. Berry's model was refined by the model of Integration As Functional (partial) Specialization (Boski, 2008), which postulated that the same immigrants can manifest different acculturation strategies in their private and public life domains. Two models from the field of management and industrial relations, dissecting the concept of acculturation stress at the workplace and its resolution (Bhagat and London, 1999), were reworked, combined into a single model and modified for application to the domain of leisure and culture. Finally, to account for the complex and nuanced nature of the

immigration experience, the following concepts were brought in from various fields: immigration as a life transition (from social work, e.g. Golan, 1981), culture shock (from anthropology, e.g. Oberg, 1960), ethno-cultural and personal identity and ethno-cultural continuity in immigration (from sociology, communication studies and psychology, e.g. Al-Haj, 2002; Gudykunst and Hammer, 1988; Ward, 2008) and culture learning (from psychology, e.g. Gezentsvey, 2007; Ward, 2008), among others.

*Summary of results.* This complex, involved and nuanced framework allowed me to interrogate the troubling question:

Why do even seemingly well-adjusted immigrants, fluent in the host-country language and economically integrated and successful, live their lives as strangers in a strange land, suffering from the sense of non-belonging, remaining alienated from mainstream society, and feeling lonely in the wonderful, civilized, and peaceful country they have come to like and appreciate? (Dali, 2012, p. 210).

This essentially means that while the study was originally conceived of as the research of reading behaviours (with leisure reading as the main end), in the process, leisure reading also became an instrument of studying immigration and acculturation.

The study results demonstrated that:

[...] eading and books [still] comprised an integral part of immigrants' daily lives, and [that] the importance of leisure reading was not diminished by the challenges of acculturation and resettlement (Dali, 2012, pp. 208-209).

However, while certain preferences and habits remained relatively stable, many aspects of reading behaviour did change. The major areas of changes in leisure reading were "the types of chosen books and criteria for selecting new books; the ways of finding out about new titles; and the methods of obtaining new titles" (Dali, 2012, p. 209). It also became clear that the need to rebuild a new social and physical reading space in immigration led immigrant readers into the state of acculturation stress accompanied by tension and decision-making around the choice of languages, genres and ways of obtaining desired materials. Among other things, acculturation patterns of the chosen group of immigrants – who exhibited integration in the public life domain but separation from the host society in the private life domain – affected the resolution of acculturation stress. The preference of immigrant readers for informal socialization and friendships with co-ethnics and their belief that it was only reading in the mother tongue that could be pleasurable and enjoyable resulted in their conscious choice to read for leisure almost exclusively in Russian, especially when it came to humour and spirituality (Dali, 2012). The reading repertoire of immigrants included very few titles in English and the selection thereof was accidental and sporadic at best. Reading was shaped by acculturation patterns and simultaneously contributed to the process of acculturation. Leisure reading greatly improved readers' well-being, alleviated overall stress, facilitated the resolution of confused identity, ensured ethno-cultural continuity and familiarized readers with the new social milieu and mentality. However, not all the influences of reading on acculturation were positive, and some types of reading reinforced immigrants' alienation from the host population (Dali, 2013b).

All in all, originating in the domain of leisure and culture, reading transcended its boundaries and affected all other areas of immigrant life, from linguistic to professional. In this sense, leisure reading was both an *indicator* and a *facilitator* of acculturation, a *measure* and a *determinant*.



*Subsequent work*

The results of this study were reported in two major papers (Dali, 2012, 2013b). However, as is the case with many qualitative exploratory studies, there were some data that did not fit into the canvas and structure of the articles. These data sets were used independently and, with additional research and conceptualization, developed into three other papers. One paper has taken on revising the longstanding concept of book appeal articulated by Joyce Saricks (Dali, 2014), which has remained largely unchanged since the late 1980s. The new approach has refocused appeal from book/object-oriented to reader-centred, accounting for the importance of the reader's characteristics and the reading context. The article also introduced a new temporal–dynamic model of reading, which connected the anticipated reading effect with the role(s) of reading through the mediating notion of multi-dimensional appeal. The model helped to better understand the reading process and reading motivation. A follow-up paper offered a pedagogical approach to teaching the new concept of appeal to LIS students (Dali, 2013c). Finally, while the original large study did not specifically explore libraries and readers' advisory, a serendipitous data set was collected, whereby immigrant readers reflected on their relationships with public librarians and expectations of and experiences with readers' advisory services. Framed through the Uncertainty Reduction Based Theory of Intercultural Adaptation, a resulting article reviewed readers' advisory interactions between librarians and immigrant readers as an instance of an intercultural encounter. This encounter is much more significant than a conversation about reading and books and has the potential to improve (or worsen) immigrants' acculturation (Dali, 2013a).

*Research evaluation*[17]

- *Is it good science (rigour and novelty)?* The study was rigorously designed and implemented, with multiple control mechanisms made transparent at every stage. Most importantly, it addressed the area of research that had not been previously investigated and used a novel theoretical combination of reading and immigration scholarships.
- *Interdisciplinary connections:* The study relied on knowledge from multiple disciplines to create a complex and nuanced theoretical framework that helped to make sense of the study findings. I believe that the findings are of interest to LIS scholars with different specializations; to reading scholars in any field, including education, sociology, psychology and cultural studies; to scholars in the interdisciplinary field of immigration and ethnic studies; and, due to the focus on Russian-speaking immigrants, to scholars in the field of Russian and East European studies.
- *Professional practices:* Ever since the articles started to come out, I have been receiving invitations from public libraries and library associations across Canada and the USA for keynote speeches, guest talks and workshops for library staff. These workshops and presentations are related to both reading work with immigrants and the new reader-centred approach to appeal and readers' advisory. Librarians everywhere feel a genuine need for the radical rethinking of professional reading practices and the improvement of reading work with immigrant populations. The very recent textbook on readers' advisory (Orr, 2014), p. 34 has already incorporated the reader-centred approach to appeal in several

chapters, and the textbook author expressed her hope “that even more library school professors will turn their attention to readers’ advisory service in their research in the future”.

- *Partnerships and resolving real-life problems*: This type of research has the potential to serve as a basis for not only future research engagements but also collaborative initiatives of the kind described in the “Reading Paradox” section. Some examples of future collaborative projects in Canadian settings could be a partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services (government); the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (charitable/not-for-profit); the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and University of Toronto Health Network (healthcare); the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (government; health); boards of education; and, of course, provincial and national library associations, especially their Literacy and Readers’ Advisory Committees and Special Interest Groups.
- *Enrichment of LIS education and curricula*: I believe this kind of research brings a valuable evidence-based addition to the LIS curriculum, especially if community partnerships and engagements are integrated as active parts of graduate courses. It also brings diversification into the teaching of reading, which has been marked by a high degree of consensus, unwelcome stability and homogeneity for a long time.
- *Improved visibility of LIS scholarship*: Community-oriented reading research and reading initiatives, as well as ventures established to improve the integration and adaptation of immigrants in a new country, are easy to relate to from the standpoint of the general public, especially in such societies as Canada and the USA, which are multicultural and boast rich reading environments and reading cultures.

### Discussion and conclusion

If all six evaluative questions can be answered in the affirmative, if the study in question embodies scholarly rigour and brings about the social good, does it really matter if this study has a technology- or information-related angle? And if it does not matter, why would LIS departments, which claim to welcome interdisciplinarity and intellectual diversity, willingly let go of such a vast research potential that makes them connected, popular and understandable inside and outside of academia?

iSchools in particular have to take the time to ponder this question. The iSchool concept is supposed to broaden the intellectual embrace and reach of these academic units, which leads Cox to assume that “the new interdisciplinary approaches to such topics [as reading, writing, libraries, and books] *may*[18] have a better home in the new iSchools” (p. 12). However, if the iSchool vision imposes an information-dependent limiter, thus inducing disciplinary myopia, then something is not right with either the concept or its implementation. If so, are iSchools really a step forward compared with L-Schools, which have been cited for insufficient scholarship and excessive vocational training? In their defence, I note that most L-schools have allowed the “informational” and the “non-informational” to coexist under their roofs, insofar as it benefited research, students and the profession, as have some iSchools. This makes me think that the fault is not in the iSchool concept *per se* but in its implementation in specific settings. Some

iSchools have successfully developed their technology-driven and digitally rich research and teaching agendas without losing sight of the arts and humanities sector of our field and without compromising its quality and robustness.

It has taken me a while to embrace the concept of the iSchool as *potentially* conducive to (rather than discouraging of) reading scholarship, but I am concerned that this potential is not being realized in the actual settings of many iSchools. I question whether the *i* in iSchools has become a doorknob that turns a glass window into a mirror in which we can see nothing but our own reflection[19]? Why can this *i* not stand for “more than information”? Why can it not signify “innovation”, “inspiration”, “imagination”, “inclusion” and the “integration” of *all* the research that moves our field forward, making it more prominent and relatable? Why would we voluntarily limit ourselves to a single intellectual domain of information and ignore others, like reading?

Half a century ago, Sayers (1965 p. 43) reflected:

A love of reading encompasses the whole of life: information, knowledge, insight and understanding, pleasure; the power to think, to select, to act, to create – all of these are inherent in a love of reading ([20].

Right there, in Sayers’ quote, lies the unsurpassed potential of reading as a field of study; as a pillar of general and information literacy; as a staple of human communication; as a steering wheel of leisure and entertainment; as a driving force of learning and knowledge; as an imperative and enabler for social engagement and activism; as a nourishment of human creativity; in other words, as an underlying force for our private activities, learning endeavours, professional engagements and scholarly pursuits. Why are we not interested?

Burroughs (1908) said that “The lure of the distant and the difficult is deceptive. The great opportunity is where you are”. Reading is an LIS opportunity at hand. Marching into the technology-driven digital future, why do we *choose* to overlook something that has always been an inherent and unique strength of our field?

Cox (2010, p. 84) hopes that the move “toward the iSchool model” signifies an attempt to put graduate education in a broader social context and re-orient professional and scholarly activities towards the social good, “but only time will allow us to assess how serious this may be”. This attempt should necessarily include reintegrating a larger humanities component – specifically, the scholarship and teaching of reading – into the research and pedagogical agenda. Hopefully, by the time this reintegration materializes – if it materializes – not all reading scholars will have become extinct.

To conclude, a few words to clarify my position. My readers may wonder whether I call for steering away from researching libraries and library-related activities, and for capitalizing instead on the potential of reading for interdisciplinary partnerships, as encouraged in the corporate university climate, sometimes without particular regard for the usefulness of interdisciplinarity. I do not. First, taking advantage of the power of reading scholarship to transcend the boundaries of a single discipline by no means detracts from its contribution to library research. On the contrary, it expands the reach of library-inspired thinking and philosophy. The study and teaching of reading has tremendous value and relevance even if it serves primarily our home field and retains this value irrespective of its interdisciplinary contributions. However, even if we choose to follow the business model in LIS departments, marginalizing reading is academically

short-sighted and politically non-strategic because reading is one of the most *consistently* potent and consistently diverse areas of scholarly inquiry.

Additionally, in case I have created an erroneous impression, I am not unsupportive of information science. I am unsupportive of imposing the information science framework on the study of reading, whereas a restrictive effect of such an imposition is all too obvious. I absolutely believe that information science and library science can co-exist in the same department, insofar as neither side proclaims dominance and demands subordination. I would like reading scholarship to reside in departments of LIS and take full advantage of the LIS eclectic and accommodating philosophical and epistemological approaches. I feel that the current proliferation of digital reading practices will provide more fruitful opportunities for the fusion of information and reading. However, I would like reading scholarship in LIS to assert the freedom to engage with highly meritorious and creative endeavours that are not information- or technology-driven. I would also like to see that reading scholarship is not dubbed old-fashioned and irrelevant to the field every time this freedom is exercised. If these conditions do not materialize, I hope that remaining reading scholars with the LIS-inspired vision will be able to find home in other academic departments.

I believe that LIS has already missed the boat on the journey through exciting interdisciplinary reading research. I just hope that we can still catch up. Soon.

#### Notes

1. For the sake of accuracy, I should note that each of these projects either certainly or likely relied on the participation of librarians and other individuals connected to the world of books, reading and libraries; dedicated reading scholars working in the departments of LIS, sadly, did not contribute. Some community-initiated projects involve librarians, although they are mostly run by educators, writers, community activists and volunteers/reading enthusiasts without a background in LIS. When librarians are involved, they often contribute as private individuals, not as part of their work-related responsibilities.
2. Original emphasis.
3. Note that Cronin derives these metaphors from other sources he references in his paper, specifically (in chronological order), Lewis (1980), Blake (1985), Van House and Sutton (1996) and Vallandingham (2003).
4. Here and henceforth, the term "LIS departments" refers to both L-Schools and iSchools. Note that this article focuses primarily on North American LIS; the situation with reading scholarship in other countries may be different.
5. I use the term "information sciences" here to make it consistent with the discussion presented in Bates' works; when the plural form is used elsewhere in my article, it simply designates "information disciplines".
6. In general, I feel that even authors who write a great deal about the structure of the field sometimes use the combo of "LIS" as a matter of habit, and even in the works of the most prominent thinkers, there is no consistency in usage. For example, in another article by Bates (2007), the abstract operates with "library and information science"; Figure 3 divides it up, placing "library science" under the "Disciplines of the Cultural Record" and "information science" under "The Sciences of Information"; and the later section, freely uses "library science" as is: "Museum studies is rather like a cousin to library science and archives".

7. I do not mean to suggest that in the past reading existed only in libraries. Of course, it existed in the private sphere and in education settings, to name just a few. However, more reading activities, at both the group and the individual levels, were dependent on libraries and library collections.
8. These principles are formulated based on the vast body of work that has been created in the field of LIS since the 1980s, most prominently, multiple works by (in alphabetical order) Mary K. Chelton, Lynne (E.F.) McKechnie, Catherine Sheldrick Ross and others, as well as a vast array of scholarly publication on reading from other disciplines, many of which are referenced in this article.
9. This particular point represents my personal philosophical adherence, which is shared by many other reading scholars in the discipline. There are others in the LIS reading research community who disagree with this stance, most notably, [Dilevko and Magowan \(2007\)](#) and [Crowley \(2014\)](#) (although Crowley's position is not unequivocal and is complex).
10. Rosenblatt's work and transactional theory are much richer, of course. It is absolutely not my intention to reduce her work to a single statement; this is just one aspect of her theory that I use in my argument.
11. I do not count scholars and researchers in the area of children and young adults, as this scholarly community is larger, growing and not focused solely on reading practices.
12. A search done in Proquest Dissertations and Theses: Global on November 30, 2014, brought up 79 dissertations with the word "read\*" in the subject and relevant to LIS. Although it was difficult to validly limit this search by department (e.g., defended in an LIS or Information Science department) and although many dissertations were indeed about children, young adults, BHPC issues or something entirely different (e.g., technology skills acquisition), there were still a couple of dozen dissertations on reading practices defended in the field of LIS since 2000. There are not nearly as many dedicated reading scholars who have joined the LIS ranks since 2000 and have made their mark in reading research.
13. Original emphasis.
14. It is an impressionistic opinion based on the ongoing survey of tenure-track LIS job postings appearing on the ALISE job site ([www.alise.org/alise-job-placement-index](http://www.alise.org/alise-job-placement-index)), HigherEdJobs ([www.higheredjobs.com/faculty/search.cfm?JobCat=182&NumJobs=100](http://www.higheredjobs.com/faculty/search.cfm?JobCat=182&NumJobs=100)) and the iSchools job site (<http://ischools.org/jobs/>). I did not perform any systematic data analysis.
15. I thank my colleagues/other reading scholars for supportive and enlightening discussions of these issues a few years ago.
16. Catherine Sheldrick Ross has produced multiple works on adult reading practices; this is just one example.
17. See the preceding section for complete evaluation questions.
18. Emphasis mine.
19. This metaphor is derivative from the imagery included in the poem by Shmuel Halkin, the original of which I failed to locate and which I second-referenced through [Maeots \(2000\)](#).
20. This quote and, subsequently, Sayers' book were brought to my attention by Richard Cox's *The Demise of the Library School*. I am grateful to Richard Cox for helping me compose my must-read list for a few years.

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### Further reading

- Moffatt, M. (1989), "If peer review is acceptable for evaluating research, why shouldn't it also be used to evaluate teaching?", *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol. 36 No. 5, pp. B1-B2.

### About the author

Keren Dali is at the Faculty of Information & Media Studies, Western University. She is currently working on the comparative study of immigrant readers (Toronto, Canada and New York, USA), funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and leading the creation of a Web-based bibliography on bibliotherapy, a project funded by the American Library Association Carnegie-Whitney Grant. She is an author and co-author of two dozen publications in the field of LIS, which focus on the reading experience, multicultural communities, immigration, readers' advisory, library resources and services and international fiction, and a co-author of the reference volume *Contemporary World Fiction: A Guide to Literature in Translation*. Dr Dali is a winner of the inaugural Connie Van Fleet Award for Research Excellence in Public Library Services to Adults from the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) and a recipient of the inaugural Outstanding Instructor Award at the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto, Canada. Keren Dali can be contacted at: [kdali@uwo.ca](mailto:kdali@uwo.ca)

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