

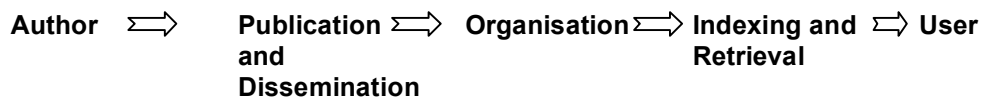


## 1) What is information science and what is library science?

Our course begins by considering the question of what is meant by library and information science as a discipline or subject. There are many papers and opinions attempting to answer this in the literature. In fact we need first to step back and consider the question of “what is a discipline”? These concepts are discussed in more detail in our class, but for now it is perhaps most helpful to use the following explanation.

We view ‘library and information science’, or ‘the information sciences’ as a single disciplinary spectrum; with different courses embracing a different perspective. Our subject studies the information communication chain. That is, we are concerned with the understanding and management of information as it is transmitted from author or creator, to user.

A typical version of the information chain is:



- Information Science is concerned with all aspects of information management within a specific subject area, such as law, business, music or healthcare, perhaps involving an information technology solution for data handling.
- Library Science focuses on management of a specific collection of information, for an intended audience. The collection may be print based and/or virtual.
- Our IMCS course combines information management with cultural policy modules, relating information skills to library and information work in this specific sector.

There is considerable overlap between our three courses; they are all focused on the topic of *information*.

The exact definition of *information* is left open, and although it is usual to associate libraries with books, information science encompasses anything from numerical datasets, text files and printed documents, to web-based media, and on to virtual worlds.

Information science answers questions about knowledge organization, information access and behaviour. It is a generalist discipline, with a liberal arts focus, which connects intimately with other fields, such as computer science, web architecture, artificial intelligence, psychology, biology, sociology, media, law, philosophy and physics.

## 2) Which course should I choose?

Many students wonder which course they should choose. Whilst it is impossible to offer a fool-proof formula, the choice between Library Science and Information Science is really one of whether you are more inclined towards general library/information services, or towards subject specific information skills. The two are not mutually exclusive, and a glance at current job descriptions will show that the body of knowledge for library professionals and information specialists has a common basis. This view is shared by the leading practitioners who input to our course content – the consensus is that broad information management skills are expected from a masters course graduate.

For those with a background in, and ideally work experience within the cultural sector, (e.g. art libraries, galleries, museums and archives) our IMCS course may be suitable – this option has a steep learning curve for those with little or no professional experience, and potential

applicants are encouraged to think clearly about what sort of role they are hoping for within the workplace. The IMCS course suits those wishing to undertake LIS roles within a variety of cultural institutions, such as art and music libraries, as well as galleries, archives and museums. This course has a strong UK policy focus.

Whilst many of us undertake jobs that did not exist 10 years ago, it is a good idea for potential applicants to familiarize themselves with current job descriptions for information professionals, and for those with no experience in the profession to arrange to visit, talk with or volunteer for a variety of information related roles. This will ensure that you understand the sort of tasks information professionals undertake, and that you feel confident that this is the sort of work you wish to prepare for. Professional bodies such as TFPL and CILIP offer advice on careers, and specialist recruitment agencies, such as Sue Hill, are also a good place to start if you are interested in what sort of work and skills are needed for a career in the information professions.

Our courses are not an apprenticeship, and they will not cover everything you need to know for any one particular job. The courses do offer a conceptual and practical overview of the information sciences, from which you will be ideally placed to progress your career. Our aim is to enable our graduates to learn to undertake professional roles and to embrace lifelong learning.

An analysis of our alumni data does not show a correlation between course taken and eventual destination – the masters course is a starting point from which to begin your career, which may take many routes, as the table below will show.

One very important point to consider is that whatever role you undertake as an information professional, this will require skills in information technology, and communication. The profession demands technically literate, skilled communicators with a flexible, forward thinking approach to life.

Library and information science as a subject is infinitely diverse, covering every field from academia to personal interests. Everybody in today's information society can benefit from understanding information communication.

### **3) What careers do people studying IS, LS or IMCS undertake?**

Our alumni go on to a variety of careers; the course taken does not obviously relate to subsequent job titles. Some examples from a recent alumni survey are shown below.

Librarian	Web Designer
Library Assistant	Trainer
Systems Librarian	User Support
Law Librarian	Customer Training
Healthcare Information Specialist	Knowledge Manager
Researcher/Analyst	Online Services Marketing
Information Specialist	Government Information Specialist
Executive Search Specialist	Industrial Information Specialist
Prospect Researcher	Data Manager
Content Manager	Web Production Editor
Information Architect	Records & Documents Man. Social Care
Publisher	Stock and Promotions Librarian
Editor/Indexer	Science Reference Librarian
Cataloguer	PhD Student
Image Library Manager	Rights Manager
Library and Collections Curator (IMCS)	Information Officer (IMCS)
Information Manager (IMCS)	Commissioning Editor (IMCS)

Tutor Librarian (IMCS)	Acquisitions Librarian (IMCS)
Special Collections Manager	Greek Language Researcher

#### 4) What is unique about our courses at City University London?

As an academic masters course, our content is research based, and refers extensively to our personal papers and to the literature. All our staff are educated to doctoral level, and are active within the research community. We are all committed to excellence in teaching practice, promoting a strong, student-centred focus based on regular class feedback and engagement with social media.

Our popular course is based in London, with its wealth of experience and opportunities, and we have the unique support of leading practitioners in our challenge to demonstrate the relationship between theory and practice.

Our content embraces the liberal-arts, and takes a broad approach in order to foster professionals with flexible skills and an ability to think critically in a range of careers – the courses are seen as a starting point for lifelong learning and development.

We have a unique focus on history and philosophy of information, and we are known for our emphasis on the understanding and application of technology and the digital environment. We promote the synergy between the management of diverse information collections, including: printed materials, electronic documents and records, museum collections, gallery artefacts and archival items.

We believe that theory is essential to good practice, and to answer questions such as:

- What is the role of the public library in today's society?
- Do we live in an information society?
- What is the impact of digitization on the library as a place?
- What is a document and how should it be represented?
- How can knowledge be organized?
- How are information systems designed?
- What is the role of the archive or museum?
- Who are the users?
- What services do they want?

All our graduates understand the relevance of technology to our profession, and are technologically literate. We also provide students with the research skills necessary to answer questions at management level, and the ability to communicate effectively to a professional audience.

Library and information science is a practical discipline which focuses on existing information, but it is also one which generates information, in the form of its own research. This is why we use the term 'science'.

We work closely with practitioner colleagues, to ensure that our content is related to the working environment, and that students have every opportunity to hear and interact with leading members of the profession, talking about recent developments, current challenges and the skills needed in today's workforce. We take full advantage of our London location, linking with institutions such as the British Library, the House of Commons, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, City of London Libraries, London Transport Museum, the French Institute, CILIP, Sue Hill Recruitment, the National Archives, GCHQ, the London School of Economics and Linklaters. We also work with colleagues throughout the UK (e.g. Cambridge University Library and INASP [International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications]), and forge international links with partners in Denmark, Sweden, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Slovenia and the US.

We do not aim to train students for any one specific job; our masters course is a preparation for lifelong learning and thinking skills within the information profession.

### 5) What do the course modules cover?

Library Science and Information Science students take 8 taught modules (one elective), plus the dissertation (individual project) module.

IMCS students take six core modules and two electives, plus the dissertation.

Indicative module content can be found via the **course content** link in the left-hand frame of the respective course pages on our website.

[http://www.soi.city.ac.uk/organisation/is/is\\_scheme.html](http://www.soi.city.ac.uk/organisation/is/is_scheme.html)

DIS modules are usually assessed by coursework.

It is not possible to provide exact details of what each module covers, as individual lectures will change from year to year to reflect trends and developments.

Although the subject matter of library and information science is common to all courses, other institutions will offer modules with differing emphases. Please ensure that you check what is available on other courses, especially if there is a particular focus that you are hoping to study.

If you would like to find out more about library and information science as a subject, please go to my catalogue at: <http://librarything.com/catalog/lynrobinson> then search for background-reading. (enter the phrase **background-reading** into the search box for my catalogue).

### 6) How many hours per week should I study?

This depends somewhat on your aptitude for studying in general, and for library and information science specifically. As a guideline, we suggest 40 hours per week for full time students, and 20 for part timers. The dissertation requires the equivalent of 14 weeks full time work.

Each of the eight 15 credit module requires, on average, 150 hours study. About 30 hours of these are contact time (i.e. lectures, seminars, practical sessions, visits, tutorials). The remaining 120 hours are self-study.

The number of hours required to study should not be underestimated; please consider carefully your ability to commit to the time needed, and to attend classes. All of the classes contribute to the course, and it is not advisable to start the course knowing you will miss any of the classes.

### 7) Does the course require additional reading?

A large amount of your self-study time will be spent on reading. You should expect that all lecture notes include some form of bibliography, references or further reading. Although tutors may use different terms, it should be clear that each item falls into one of four categories:

**Required reading.** It is essential that students read these items in order to gain an understanding of the topic.

**Recommended reading.** While it is not essential, it is recommended that students read these items. They will usually be the most appropriate or most accessible on their subject.

**Further, or additional, reading.** These items, which may make up a long list, are provided so that students can select from them as many as they wish, either to follow up a topic in which they have a particular interest, or to get different perspectives on aspects which they may find difficult.

**References.** These are items which are cited in the text of the lecture notes. They are included so that students can see the justification for statements in the notes, and can follow up any items to find more details.

## 8) Library Resources.

ISS courses are fully supported by our subject librarian, and we work closely with the library to ensure that as many publications as possible are available to our students. Nevertheless, library and information science is a very broad subject, and we do not restrict our view to those publications which are available in the library. We suggest that students register to use the nearby British Library, and ensure they are fully conversant with national library facilities open to students – details available from the library.

## 9) Do I have to attend lectures?

Our courses are delivered face-to-face. You need to attend classes to obtain the maximum benefit from the course material, speakers and fellow students.

We use an e-learning environment, (Moodle) as a tool to enhance teaching and learning. This allows for some flexibility in attendance, as students can read background notes, follow up references and join in discussion for classes they have missed, but this should not be confused with distance learning.

**Please note: the content of the courses is not restricted to tutor prepared notes and slides. Where available, these are for guidance only and students should be able to identify relevant materials, background and follow-up reading for themselves.**

## 10) On which days do I have to attend the university?

Teaching for IS and LS takes place on Mondays and Fridays.

Full-time students attend on both days for semesters 1 and 2.

Part-time students attend on Mondays for year 1, and Fridays for year 2.

Students do not have a fixed schedule whilst undertaking their individual project (dissertation), over the summer.

IMCS students will attend the Department of Information Science on Monday. If they are part-time students, the first year will be spent in Department of Information Science, and the second year with the Department of Cultural Policy and Management. **Please Note:** IMCS students will also be required to check which days they should attend for modules run by the Department for Cultural Policy and Management.

## 11) What entry qualifications do I need?

Our Information Studies Scheme is designed to be inclusive, so that if you really wish to join us, we will do our utmost to accommodate you. As our course is taught at masters level however, we strongly recommend that you already hold a good first degree (2:2 or above) from a British University, or an equivalent qualification from an international institution.

Alternatively, we will consider your application if you have relevant work experience at **postgraduate** level, or a relevant vocational qualification.

Applicants should have good professional English. For students whose first language is not English, an IELTS score of **6.5** or TOEFL score of **100 (internet-based) 600 (paper-based) or 250 (computer-based version)** is required.

We very much hope that our ISS students enjoy their time with us, and to this end we try to ensure that potential students are fully aware of the nature of our course content, and the sort of work that our graduates usually undertake. Before accepting a place on one of our courses we strongly recommend that you familiarize yourself with the nature of library and information science as a discipline, and that you are clear on the sort of professional work our courses prepare you for.

Exact details of our entry requirements can be found on the relevant course pages of our website, as described above.

### **12) Is work experience necessary before starting the course?**

We do not require previous, relevant work experience for admission to our courses. However, we do strongly suggest that applicants with no background in the information profession undertake at least some voluntary work, to ensure they have a good understanding of what the day-to-day environment is like. It is also helpful to talk to current members of the profession wherever possible, to gain an insider viewpoint.

Internships, where a period of placement work counts toward your qualification, are NOT part of ISS courses.

Students looking for paid employment are advised to register with a suitable agency, or to look for work in the usual way.

We have some contacts with organisations and institutions throughout London, and occasionally we are sent opportunities for voluntary work experience for suitable and interested students. Sometimes these are opportunities to gain experience, and sometimes they are for projects suitable for a dissertation. We are unable to guarantee the availability of either though. Details of these opportunities are posted to our bulleting board on Moodle.

### **13) What sort of references do I need to apply for the course?**

Our application guidelines state that two references are required, and that one of these should be from an academic referee where appropriate. We understand however, that some applicants are no longer able to make contact with their undergraduate tutors, and in this instance, two professional referees are acceptable.

### **14) I have an arts background – will I cope with the technology content of the course?**

Many of our students have a background in the arts, and most pass the course. Some participants do find technology daunting at first, but soon gain confidence as the year progresses, and some even choose more advanced technology modules for their electives. Almost all our graduates comment on their satisfaction with being able to understand technical colleagues, and to feel confident in the workplace, after taking our course.

Technology is **impossible** to avoid in the modern library and information science professions.

### **15) What is the difference between the MA and the MSc for the Library Science course?**

There is no difference. If you prefer one accreditation to another, we will do our best to accommodate you.

### **16) Where else could I study?**

Several institutions offer courses related to library and information science. A few are shown below. A more complete listing can be found on my Delicious site ([www.delicious.com/lynrobinson](http://www.delicious.com/lynrobinson)) - they are listed under the tag lis-school).

- University College London
- London Metropolitan University
- University of Brighton
- University of Strathclyde
- Loughborough University
- Sheffield University
- University of Aberystwyth

### **17) What factors should I consider when choosing a course**

Students often have their own reasons (such as location) for choosing a particular institution and course, but you could also bear in mind the following criteria:

- Course reputation
- Staff reputation and experience
- Career placement record
- Return on investment
- Ambience
- Specialisations
- Student profile
- Networking opportunities
- Rankings
- Scholarships
- Location

### **18) What are the alternatives to a masters degree?**

Library and information science courses are offered at some institutions at undergraduate level, e.g. Manchester Metropolitan,

NVQs offer a more practical, vocational qualification.

- <http://www.cityandguilds.com/cps/rde/xchg/SID-D38035F7-401E2C3F/cgonline/hs.xsl/1680.html>
- <http://www.cityandguilds.com/cps/rde/xchg/SID-D38035F7-401E2C3F/cgonline/hs.xsl/1679.html>

CILIP chartership may be undertaken by their mentoring and portfolio scheme.

- <http://www.cilip.org.uk/qualificationschartership/>

CPD: several organisations offer short courses suitable for library and information professionals, e.g. TFPL, CILIP. There are also many conferences and events run by professional organisations which serve as an opportunity to enhance skills and keep up-to-date.