The Library Support Staff Certification Program: Past, Present, and Future

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Abstract
The Library Support Staff Certification Program (LSSCP) addresses library support staff (LSS) needs for a voluntary national certification program to help the profession standardize expectations for LSS, help the large number of LSS master critical job competencies; provide educators with guidance for training curriculums; and help employers articulate job requirements. In 2007, ALA and the Western Council of State Libraries received funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Service's Laura Bush Librarians for the 21st Century Program to establish the LSSCP. This presentation will provide an overview of the history of LSSCP, its current status, and future endeavors. Results from a national survey conducted on LSS competencies will be discussed.

Introduction

The majority (69%) of staff working in academic and public libraries do not have a master's degree in library and information studies. Further, it is estimated that at least half of all of the nation's 16,000 public library outlets, and particularly those in rural areas and urban branches, are operated by individuals without the MLS.[1] These staff members play a crucial role in the quality of library and information services in virtually every community and every college and university in this country, but the training available to them varies considerably. In the case of smaller public libraries, the individual states have each developed "home grown" training programs, but in the majority of instances, little or no training is available to these staff. What is available varies considerably in content, and is not transferable from one situation – or state – to another.

The Library Support Staff Certification Program (LSSCP) addresses library support staff (LSS) needs for a voluntary national certification program to help the profession standardize expectations for LSS, help the large number of LSS master critical job competencies; provide educators with guidance for training curriculums; and help employers articulate job requirements.

Benefits of a National Certification Program
A Library Support Staff Certification Program has benefits for the individual, the library and the public.

    Benefits to the individual
- Many LSS have a desire to improve their understanding of library operation
- Many LSS would like to be eligible for advancement with the library structure as determined by the individual library
- Many LSS believe that their performance is instrumental in quality public service and would like to deliver the best service possible

    Benefits to the institution
- Staff who are knowledgeable about broad aspects of library operation

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[1] National Center for Education Statistics (2004). 2004 Academic Libraries Survey. Retrieved December 11, 2006 from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007301.pdf
 National Center for Education Statistics (2004). Federal-State Cooperative System Survey. Retrieved December 11, 2006 from http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/libraries/pub_data.asp.

- Staff who might be able to serve the library in a number of different positions
- Staff who have demonstrated ability and willingness to accept higher level responsibility

Benefits to the library user
- Library users served by the best trained staff possible.
- Better support of the library's mission and goals based on fuller staff understanding[2]

Questions Regarding Certification

Certification attests to the possession by an individual of a specified body of knowledge and/or skills. Certification can occur at entry level, as part of career development, or as recognition of career achievement. A school or educational program - in ALA's (American Library Association) case programs (not schools) in Library and Information Studies - are accredited to deliver a particular education program. Certification and licensure attest to an individual's possession of a specified set of knowledge and skills. Both accreditation and certification are voluntary. Licensure is mandatory and governmental. Some professions (e.g. medicine) use all three: accreditation, certification and licensure. LIS has historically, generally, used *only* accreditation. There are, however, examples of certification-like programs within the field of library and information studies: the Medical Library Association's portfolio-based Academy of Health Information Professionals[3] and the now defunct Special Libraries Association's Middle Management Institutes

Certification would be an additional piece of information that the employer could utilize in determining the relative qualification of candidates. It would be a means by which library support staff might seek to demonstrate their preparation, as public librarians are through the ALA-APA Certified Public Library Administrator Program (CPLA).[4] The CPLA program was the brainchild of three ALA divisions – Public Library Association (PLA), Library Administration and Management Association (LAMA), and Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA). These divisions developed nine competencies for public librarians who were or wished to be managers, of which four are essential or core – Budget and Finance, Organization and Personnel Management, Management of Technology and Planning Management of Buildings. Candidates, who all have at least three years of management experience in a public library, take courses with projects from all four core courses and choose courses covering three of five electives. The projects or assignments help their instructors and the committee members reviewing their work determine whether the candidates have mastered the competency.

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[2] Bolt, N. (2007). Overview of Library Support Staff Certification Project. Unpublished manuscript.
[3] The Academy of Health Information Professionals (2008). Retrieved on April 30, 2008 from http://www.mlanet.org/academy/
[4] Certified Public Library Administrator Program (n.d.). Retrieved on April 30, 2008 from http://ala-apa.org/certification/cplaapplication.html

History of Certification Efforts

COLT

One of the earliest serious discussions of support staff certification originated with the Council on Library/Media Technicians (COLT). The Council on Library/Media Technicians was founded in 1967 by people who administered two-year associate degree programs for the training of library technical assistants. These librarians and educators recognized that the library support staff of the future would be called upon to provide increasingly more technical service to the libraries in which they worked and would need to continually update their skills. COLT became recognized as a national organization with members drawn from the full spectrum of those who work in and care about libraries including librarians, library support staff, library administrators and educators.

Though an independent organization, COLT, then, as now, believed in working with other groups with similar objectives. To this end, COLT became an affiliate of the American Library Association (ALA) in 1976 cooperating with ALA in mutually beneficial projects including the drafting of a statement to guide the establishment of Library Technology education programs.

Certification became an important issue in 1981 when COLT formed a special committee to study the advisability of certification for Library/Media Technical Assistants. The committee consisted of representatives from the American Library Association, the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, the American Association of Law Libraries, and other interested groups. After much study, COLT decided to table the issue until the possibility of implementing national certification would have a greater chance to be successful. [5]

Library Support Staff Interests Round Table (LSSIRT)

In 1996, the ALA Library Support Staff Interests Round Table (LSSIRT) announced that it had an interest in national standards for certification, but it had "decided to focus on other equally important issues that include, but are not limited to, pay equity and increasing opportunities for professional development." [6] In 2004, an online survey on certification of library support staff was conducted. The survey was an outcome of the 3rd Congress on Professional Education: Focus on Support Staff (COPE3), which was held in May of 2003. The COPE3 Implementation Recommendations asked that LSSIRT study the issue of national certification for support staff.

In response, LSSIRT created a Certification Task Force with a charge to "study the issue of national certification for support staff, prepare and administer a national poll for expectations, compile statistics from research, and keep the LSSIRT Steering Committee informed of Task Force progress." From the results of this Certification Survey, LSSIRT determined the level of

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[5] Council on Library/Media Technicians (2000). Retrieved April 30, 2008 from http://colt.ucr.edu/history.html
[6] LSSIRT: Library Support Staff Interests Round Table (2008). Retrieved April 13, 2008 from http://www.ala.org/ala/lssirt/lssirt.htm

interest, and the perceived benefit, of a voluntary certification program. Survey results indicated that the 3,318 responders overwhelmingly endorsed certification for support staff. [7]

Western Council of State Libraries
Another influence on the current national certification program is The Western Council of State Libraries, which received an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant in 2003 to improve library services by defining the essential skills of library practitioners and increasing and improving training opportunities. Library practitioners are library directors who do not have MLS degrees. One of grant's activities was to define competencies for library practitioners and build a certification program on these competencies. The competencies represent a consensus opinion about what is the essential knowledge, skills and ability for public library practitioners. The certification program began in January 2007. Twenty-two state libraries west of the Mississippi River are members of Western Council. [8]

Support for Library Support Staff Certification
From the LSSIRT survey, the respondents were evenly divided between support staff in academic libraries (46%) and public libraries (41%) with a smaller number from other types of libraries. They came from all 50 states. Fifty-six percent were already supervising other staff. Most had financial support (71%) and time off (78%) to attend continuing education events. Forty-nine percent of libraries provided tuition reimbursement. Sixty-six percent felt a certification program would benefit Library Support Staff.   Eighty-five percent felt training of LSS would improve the public's image of the library. Seventy-six percent felt that nationally recognized standards were important, very important or somewhat important and 66% felt that certification was very or somewhat beneficial for LSS. [9]

The American Library Association (ALA) has been discussing a certification program for Library Support Staff for over 20 years. In the ALAhead 2010 strategic plan, the issue was addressed directly:

Goals II: Education
Through its leadership, ALA ensures the highest quality graduate and continuing education opportunities for librarians and library staff.
> *Objective 4:*
> *Establish standards for educational programs for library support staff*

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[7] LSSIRT Newsletter (2005). Retrieved April 23, 2008 from http://209.85.165.104/search?q=cache:dM_osJOVmV4J:lib.colostate.edu/lts/jk/Aug2005Newsletter.pdf+lssirt+certification&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=10&gl=us

[8] Library Practitioner Certification Program (n.d.) Retrieved April 13, 2008 from http://certificate.westernco.org/

[9] Library Support Staff Certification Program (2005). FAQ. Retrieved April 13, 2008 from http://ala-apa.org/certification/supportstafffaq.html

In addition, one of the recommendations from the Congress of Professional Education III was:

> *ALA, in cooperation with LSSIRT and other appropriate stakeholders, should study the feasibility of developi8ng a voluntary national support staff certification program administered by the ALA-APA. Successful state models should be studied and access, practicality, and quality should be included in the considerations.*

Many Division goals also include training for Library Support Staff. [10]

Certified Public Library Administrator Program (CPLA)

As mentioned above, the CPLA program is specifically focused on training public library managers. The program began accepting applicants in 2006 and has more than 100 candidates and six graduates. Because the courses are offered by providers like library schools, regional library associations and ALA divisions, and because they are generally not restricted to only librarians or only CPLA candidates, support staff in public and academic libraries have been taking courses, even though they do not lead to the CPLA® designation. The CPLA courses, as well as the model and process, serve as examples the LSSCP consultants and Advisory Council (described below) are using to develop the program.

The Library Support Staff Certification Task Force

In 2005, ALA and its companion organization, ALA-APA (American Library Association-Allied Professional Association) initiated an effort to move forward on a national voluntary certification program for Library Support Staff. Nancy Bolt was hired by ALA to lead a task force and prepare a feasibility report for establishing such a certification program. The task force became an Advisory Council when the project received IMLS funding in the summer of 2007.

Long-term preliminary goals of the task force were:
- Seek sponsorship of one or more ALA Divisions for a LSS Certification Program
- Build a consortium of interested ALA Divisions, Round Tables, Committees, and other organizations to form a LSS Certification Task Force and move forward on the project.
- Negotiate a relationship with Western Council of State Libraries to cooperate with them on a LSS Certification Program.
- Using Western Council developed competencies as a basis, initiate discussion in the LSS Certification Task Force on a final set of competencies.
- Develop an implementation model for ALA.
- Develop a cost model for ALA. [11]

The task force met for the first time during ALA Midwinter in January, 2007, followed by another meeting in March, 2007. Fourteen persons comprised the group, representing various types of libraries and the following affiliations: ACRL, ALCTS, ASCLA, PLA, RUSA, LAMA,

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[10] ALAhead to 2010 (2005). Retrieved April 14, 2008 from
http://www.ala.org/ala/ourassociation/governingdocs/aheadto2010/adoptedstrategicplan.cfm
[11] Bolt, N. (2006). Overview of Library Support Staff Certification Program. Unpublished manuscript.

and ALA Committee on Education, LSSIRT, ALA-APA, Western Council of State Libraries, and one educational expert.

During the initial meeting, the LSSCP Task Force agreed upon the following purpose statement and program objectives:

In order to assist in the improvement of public and academic library service, develop a national voluntary certification program for public and academic library support staff based on a set of competencies. The program is:
- *individually based in that the certification is accomplished by individuals*
- *would be portable from state to state (assuming the state library or another library in the state accepts it)*
- *would not guarantee any salary raise or promotion benefits – all such decisions are made by the local library*
- *would include a basic set of skills and competencies*
- *would establish a basic standard of LSS competency nationwide.*

The competencies should be contextual and not theoretical; we will be looking at situations where someone would have a work setting to apply what they learn.

Discussion of the Value of the Certification
The task force acknowledged that a key concern about a certification program for LSS was that it might somehow devalue the MLS degree. Several answers to this argument were mentioned:
- The LSS TF is validating the reality of the current hiring situation in many public libraries and giving a tool to managers to evaluate LSS the hire.
- Current certification programs in states have not caused a reduction in MLSs
- The program will delineate differences and expectations between MLS and library support staff work.
- Certification would allow LSS to serve the public better (some research shows this now)
- Every other profession has it – a delineation between professional and support staff

Competency Ground Rules
- Before discussion competencies themselves, the task force identified criteria that need to be in place first. These are:
- The competencies should be applicable to public and academic libraries of any size.
- The competencies are basic and not detailed for every job in a library.
- The TF is open to different levels of competencies from entry position to management (not decided yet)
- The TF is considering a set of basic level of competencies (core) and some electives (example of the CPLA program)
- The competencies should not be task-oriented because tasks change but rather more general.
- The competencies should be as discreet as possible; do not combine multiple competencies into one comp

- In developing the competencies, assessment, measurement, and verifiability should be considered but not a deciding factor in writing a competency at this point
- The competencies should not be easily dated although the assumption is that they will be revised periodically
- It should be possible for more specific competencies to be built on the basic competencies – a division might want to do that
- The competencies are not job descriptions, but a set of knowledge and skills [12]

Initial Competency Areas

The LSSCP Task Force brainstormed basic categories in which they would like to have competencies. The following areas were considered with members assigned to develop the first draft of competencies within those areas: Technical Services; Circulation /ILL; Reference; Reader's Advisory; Technology; Foundation (mission, role, ethics); Supervision/Management; Personal Skills; Marketing/PR; Youth/Students; and Public Programming/Exhibits.

During the March 2007 meeting, the group review approaches to the competencies and the actual competencies themselves with suggestions for revisions. The group decided on the following format:
- Introduce the competency with a short statement that establishes the context for the competency in library work
- Begin each competency with the words: *Library support staff will be able to:*
- Start each sentence with a verb and try to avoid using "demonstrate" too often.
- Also consider which part of the competency might be part of an "Introduction to the Library" competency that identifies what EVERY library support staff should know and be able to do. [13]

Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Grant

The first meeting of the LSSCP Task Force concluded with a discussion of a grant proposal that was sent to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) seeking funding for a three year program to work intensely on a certification program for LSS. The American Library Association (ALA) and the Western Council of State Librarians are requested $407,111, to be matched by ALA, for a three-year project to develop a Library Support Staff Certification Program (LSSCP) to meet this need. The grant was awarded in the summer of 2007.

The goal of the grant project is that users of academic and public libraries will have improved services because of a national certification program for library support staff, provided by the American Library Association. The project's objectives are to:
- Develop a set of national core competencies for library support staff that are applicable in academic and public libraries in Year One;
- Develop and implement the policies and procedures for the LSSCP in Year Two;

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[12] Bolt, N. (2007a). Interim report of The Library Support Staff Certification Program. Unpublished manuscript.
[13] Bolt, N. (2007b). Task Force on LSS Certification: Decisions made at the March 23-24 meeting. Unpublished manuscript.

- Provide alternative options for assessment of current knowledge and experience and new learning in Year Two;
- Thoroughly test the model at five demonstration sites in Year Three and establish a certification program at ALA.[14]

Project Staff

Mary Ghikas, Senior Associate Executive Director at ALA, serves as the Grant Administrator. The project is co-directed by Dr. Karen Strege and Ms. Nancy Bolt, both former state librarians with extensive experience in project management and staff development. Jenifer Grady, Director of the ALA-Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA), serves as the Chief ALA Liaison. Other ALA staff, and an Advisory Committee (formerly the LSSCP Task Force) composed of representatives from ALA Divisions, Round Tables, Committees, and particularly, library support staff, are assisting the project directors. Ms. Grady also supervises a part-time project assistant.

Project Outcomes and Impact

The intended outcomes of the project include:
- Competencies for library support staff, identified and validated for use by ALA or by any state or other library organization;
- Policies and procedures to administer the certification program;
- A comprehensive assessment schema;
- Adoption by the American Library Association and commitment to continue the certification program after the grant.

Results of the project will be disseminated widely to all state libraries, library associations, library cooperatives and networks, and community and junior colleges. A website has been created that tracks the progress of LSSCP and will evolve into a tool for use by LSSCP participants - http://www.ala-apa.org/certification/supportstaff.html.

The project will have many positive impacts on the nation's libraries and their users. Library users will be served by well-trained LSS, who have positive proof of their mastery of vocational competencies. Libraries can hire workers who have participated in the LSSCP, certain that they possess a specific body of knowledge and skills. The employer may also use the LSSCP as part of a career ladder within its organization. Finally, the profession will have identified the competencies of LSS and by doing so, recognize the differences between support staff and librarians with an MLS. In addition, comprehensive areas and skills that support staff should master for their careers will be defined. [15]

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[14] American Library Association Library Support Staff Certification Program LSSCP (2006). Grant Narrative.
[15] Ibid.

Project Components

Competencies Finalized

By November, 2007, the task force became the Advisory Council for the grant project. Competency areas were narrowed down to:

- Foundations
- Personal
- Reference and Information Services
- Youth Services
- Technology
- Public Programming
- Access
- Reader's Advisory
- Technical Services
- Management; and Marketing
- The competencies within each area were refined, with a final draft completed at the January 2008 meeting at ALA Midwinter. Each area was identified as a core competency or an elective.

Competency Survey Results

In March 2008, the project directors surveyed the library community, asking respondents to rate the importance of each competency/item/job responsibility under each competency area. The survey was sent to more than 30,000 ALA members who were members of relevant ALA divisions, round tables, and committees. Others were invited to participate through press releases sent by the ALA Public Information Office to library media, the ALA Chapter Relations Office to its audience, and Advisory Council members and project staff to related electronic discussion lists. Almost 4000 support staff, librarians, LIS professors, directors, and others completed at least some portion of the survey. They represented public libraries of all sizes, community colleges, universities, state libraries, and library cooperatives.

The survey was lengthy and respondents were instructed that they did not have to complete all eleven competency areas. Each competency area has two sections: what support staff will know and be able to do. The number of competencies/items/job responsibilities under each ranged from six for Public Programming/Exhibits to 26 for Technical Services, which includes sections on Cataloging, Acquisitions and Processing, and Collection Management; and 27 for Supervision and Management. This means that for the almost 3000 respondents who completed the entire survey, they answered whether hundreds of responsibilities in eleven areas were very important, important, not important, or not applicable.

At the time of this writing, the Advisory Council had recently been provided the results to review and discuss at the ALA Annual Conference in June 2008. In-depth analysis will be forthcoming after the conference for those interested. The project staff are mining the data to discern which competencies and items within competencies were rated very highly (2.5 or above on a 3 point scale), differences between support staff and librarian opinions, and differences between public

and academic library responses. The first analysis will help the project staff confirm the applicability and comprehensiveness of the competency areas. The second will indicate whether there are responsibilities that each group feels are more appropriate for support staff, which admittedly may also be a function of library size or library structure, the latter of which was beyond the scope of the study. The third analysis will detect any biases towards one type of library or another and guide the project staff in its decisions about whether certain competencies should be core or elective.

High level analysis reveals that respondents were in agreement with the competencies under two areas, Communication and Teamwork and Foundations of Librarianship. Communication had 95% of the items rated highly (very important or 2.5 and above) and Foundations, 82%. Those which had the lowest number of highly rated items overall were Public Programming at 0% and Readers Advisory at 0%, though they did have items that were rated between 2 and 2.49, and individual groups and library types thought they were more important than others, e.g., public libraries thought "The value of programming to a library's service community and the elements that contribute to a successful program or exhibit" was more important for support staff to know than academic libraries (2.53 vs. 2.34) in Public Programming and library support staff thought "Popular and classic fiction, including a knowledge of authors, various fiction genres and popular, current non-fiction" was more important for support staff to know than librarians (2.52 vs. 2.03). Youth Services had no significant differences between public and academic libraries, while Readers Advisory, as mentioned earlier, had several significant differences. [16]

Additional findings will be released after the ALA Annual Conference. The comments and suggestions for other competencies are being carefully categorized and will be examined for potential inclusion.

Field Testing

The first two years of the project, 2007-2009, will be spent in planning and developing the LSSCP including writing and validating competencies, preparing policies and procedures for the Program, and deciding how learning will be assessed. In 2009-2010, a field test of the Program is planned.

Purpose of the Field Tests
The field tests are designed to test the various elements of the LSSCP and to receive feedback from test site coordinators, participants, and any course instructors. Because five different types of library organizations have been selected to participate in the field tests, we also hope to learn about the differences among these library organizations in implementing the LSSCP.   Following the field tests, the program will be revised and presented to the ALA Executive Board.

Field Test Sites
The Library Support Staff Certification Program has asked five library groups to participate in the field test:
- State Library – Arizona State Library

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[16] Strege, K. (2008). General report of all competencies. Unpublished manuscript.

- State Library Association – Texas Library Association
- Regional Library Cooperative – North Suburban Library Cooperative, Illinois
- Community College – Highline Community College, Washington
- ALA Division – Association of Library Collection Development and Technical Services (ALCTS)

Responsibilities of Field Test Sites
Each of the five Field Test Sites will implement the LSSCP differently depending on its specific situation. However, there are common requirements for the test sites. The LSSCP Project Co-directors and ALA-APA staffs are prepared to help in whatever way possible.

Marketing
The field test site will be expected to market the program to potential participants. LSSCP will provide marketing tools that the Field Test Site can use. Field Test Sites are encouraged to adapt the marketing tools (flyers, handouts, MS PowerPoint presentations, etc.) as appropriate. Each test site will be expected to recruit LSSCP participants. This may be an existing audience of the Field Test Site or a new audience recruited as part of this project.

Identify providers
To achieve a LSS certificate, participants must achieve certain competencies. Participants can achieve the competencies through formal new training and through prior on-the-job learning. Therefore, one role of the field test site is to identify providers for formal learning, e.g., institutions or individuals that can effectively teach in one or more of the competency areas and provide a structure (online course software, classroom space, etc.). In some cases (the Highline Community College, for example) the learning provider and the Field Test Site may be the same. In others, (North Suburban, for example) existing relationships with institutions may be used. Other sites may already have staff dedicated to continuing education that can develop learning opportunities to teach the competencies. In any case, it is the Field Test Site that will identify providers to teach the competencies. . LSSCP will provide the competency sets so that the field test sites can select providers that can teach one or more of the competency sets. .

The logistics of providing training will be at the discretion of the test site, including scheduling of learning opportunities, frequency of offering opportunities, locations, and all associated costs and fees.

Evaluate the process
Each field test site will be expected to provide regular feedback on the program. They will also be expected to keep and submit a log of questions asked by participants and providers (LSSCP will assist answering the questions.) Each site is expected to evaluate the policies and procedures as they relate to the field test effort. [17]

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[17] Bolt, N. (2008). LSSCP field test: information for field test sites. Unpublished manuscript.

Date	Activity
Spring, 2008	Reconfirm willingness of Field Test Sites to participate in the field tests. Identify coordinator in each Field Test Site. Invite Field Test contacts to all future Advisory Council meetings
ALA annual, 2008	Invite Field Test coordinators to attend AC meeting.
ALA Midwinter, 2009	Invite Field Test coordinators to attend AC meeting
Spring, 2009	Invite Field Test Site coordinators to attend a special meeting on the field test procedures. Grant funding may be used to attend this meeting.
ALA Annual, 2009	Invite Field Test coordinators to attend AC meeting
Summer 2009	Field Test sites identify providers and participants
Fall, 2009	Field tests begin
Winter/Spring, 2009/2110	Continue to implement field tests
Spring, 2110	Present results of field tests

Assessment

Currently, the LSSCP Advisory Council has not decided on how participant learning will be assessed. An assessment expert has been hired to help with these decisions. Assessment may involve workshops, courses, exams, portfolios, a combination of these or another method.

There are several issues relating to assessment in the LSSCP. The project timeline calls for assessment to be discussed and decisions made in year 2. However, issues relating to assessment impact the competencies, the policies and procedures and the field tests. There is funding in the budget in year 2 to employ an assessment expert to assist in determining resolution to these issues.

Purpose of assessment
The purpose of assessment is to establish a valid, reliable, and consistent method of determining if participants in LSSCP have met the competencies. One of our reasons for establishing LSSCP is to provide a consistent understanding of the role of LSS in public and academic libraries and also to assure (but not guarantee) potential employers that LSS certified by ALA actually can perform as described in the competency areas.

Definitions
The LSSCP accepts the following statements regarding certification:
"The certification of specialized skill-sets affirms a knowledge and experience base for practitioners in a particular field, their employers, and the public at large. Certification represents a declaration of a particular individual's professional competence. Certification

enhances the employability and career advancement of the individual practitioner or employee."[18]

Assessment Methods
Assessment is determining if the participants in LSSCP have met (achieved?) the competencies. There are multiple ways described in the literature to assess learning. The most common are testing, observation, portfolios, and evaluation of projects relating to the competencies.

There are three possible assessment approaches:
- Assessment of the learning by participants in courses, workshops, and learning events provided by approved providers
- Individual assessment of participants achievement of competencies whether they achieved the competencies via new learning events or by demonstrating past learning
- Assessment based on review of individual achievement or passing a national test [19]

The only way to provide that assurance is through a valid assessment.

Approve providers
This approach would be very similar to what CPLA is already doing.   The providers are actually a proxy for ALA-APA doing the assessment of each individual participant. In applying for approval to be a provider, the providers would presumably have to indicate the following:
- the curriculum so that the committee doing the approving can see that the curriculum actually teaches all the competencies in a competency area
- how the provider will evaluate if the participants meet the competencies
- who will teach the course so that the committee can be assured that the instructor has the appropriate experience and/or education in the competency area
- how the course will be offered so that the committee and participants know whether it will be face-to-face, online, synchronous or asynchronous or a combination

The actual degree of detail desired in an application from a provider (assignments, teachers/presenters, course purpose and philosophy) would have to be determined, as well as the length of time a course should be offered, if this is deemed relevant, e.g., credit hours, contact hours, CEUs, etc.

In order to be successful in obtaining approval, providers would have to understand what the LSSCP wants taught and any preferences about evaluation. Are the competencies as currently written specific enough that it will be clear to a provider what needs to be taught/learned?   Does LSSCP prefer a specific type of evaluation; for example, portfolios or demonstrations over a paper test?

Once a participant has taken a learning event in a competency area, either the provider or the participant would have to send information to ALA-APA indicating successful achievement of the competencies. If it is the participant who sends this to ALA-APA, the provider would need

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[18] National Organization for Competency Assurance (2007). What is certification? Retrieved April 30, 2008 from http://www.noca.org/GeneralInformation/WhatisCertification/tabid/63/Default.aspx.
[19] Bolt, N. (2007c). Issues relating to assessment in the LSSCP. Unpublished manuscript.

to give some secure evidence to the participant that can be trusted by ALA-APA that the achievement actually occurred.

Approving providers also provides a funding stream for ALA-APA.[20]

Not approving providers
ALA-APA can forego approving providers. In this scenario, ALA-APA would develop a method of assessing if participants achieved the competencies. In this method, participants would need to be very clear on what is required to achieve a competency since they would be evaluating whether any given provider could provide the learning required.

Individual assessment of individuals' achievement of the competencies
In this approach, no providers would be approved.   Each individual participant would be expected to take courses or learning events to achieve the competencies or demonstrate that they already have the required knowledge, ability and skills through past learning experiences at work. [21]

Assessing prior learning experience
Many library support staff have indicated a desire to demonstrate that they are already competent based on prior learning. Susan Simosko in *Assessing Learning* [22]makes the point that people should not receive credit for past experience but for learning that comes from that experience. She calls this experiential learning and defines it that "experience often leads to learning and the learning to understanding. From understanding comes the ability to generalize and from that comes insight…. Experiential learning is defined as learning in which the learner is in direct contact with the realities being studied or practiced to achieve a level of competence in a particular skill or knowledge domain."   Paul Pottinger and Joan Goldsmith, editors of *Defining and Measuring Competence,* define this as "the professional abilities to apply knowledge in the context of specific tasks and situations and to integrate knowledge, skills, and judgment in the many complex processes required on the job." [23]
One approach to this demonstration would be through portfolios. For this approach to be successful, the participants would need to be very clear on what is expected of them in demonstrating the competencies.

One method adapted from David Kolb's Experiential Learning would involve four aspects: Indication of past experience in the competency area[24]
- Reflective observation on the learning from that experience
- Reporting current research on new trends in the competency area
- Examples of possible future applications in the competency area

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Simosko, S. (1988). Assessing learning: a CAEL handbook for faculty. ERIC document, # ED323842.
[23] Pottinger, P. and J. Goldsmith (1979) Editors' notes in *Defining and measuring competence.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
[24] Kolb, D. A. (1984). Experiential learning: Experience as a source of learning and development. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

The process to allow participants to prove that they have achieved the competencies would require:

- explicit description of the learning outcomes expected for the credit (Is this in our set of competency areas and are they sufficiently detailed?)
- how that learning can be demonstrated
- explicit articulation of criteria to be used in evaluating the work (What constitutes a minimally acceptable response?)
- training of the evaluators to insure consistency and fairness [25]

Assessing individual's achievements toward the competencies could be a revenue stream for ALA-APA.

A National Test
A national test could be developed and then administered in some way by ALA-APA or administered by an outside organization such as the National Center for Competency Testing. The National Organization of Competency Assurance specializes in helping organizations and associations develop a national certification program that meets standards for certification programs. They also certify that certification programs meet these standards.

The national test would not necessarily test all aspects of every competency area but test enough to be assured that the participant knew the content. Participants could prepare for the test in any way they choose: taking courses, reading, relying on past experience. ALA-APA would not be involved in how a participant in LSSCP prepared for the test. Administering the test or the participant's taking of the test would be a funding stream for ALA-APA. [26]

Combining approaches
It would also be possible to combine some of the approaches outlined above. For example, ALA-APA could approve providers and also allow for assessment of individual achievement of the competencies where the participant wished to demonstrate learning from past work experiences.

National tests could cover only the core competencies and electives could be achieved through approved providers or individual assessment. [27]

In all of these approaches, participants might desire extensive guidance to help them decide which learning events to take, how to demonstrate their learning, and or how to prepare for a national test.

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[25] Bolt, Nancy (2007c). Issues relating to assessment in the LSSCP. Unpublished manuscript.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

Conclusion

As the LSSCP enters into its second year, much work lies ahead. However, significant progress has been made in the making the certification program a reality. A set of nationally validated competencies is close to being a reality. Assessment issues are being discussed and will continue to be analyzed and refined. Field testing will take place during the next year of the grant and will provide valuable feedback on the certification process.

The LSSCP will benefit individual staff, the libraries in which they work, library users, and the profession. Certificate holders will have positive proof of their mastery of vocational competencies and a broader understanding of their work/functional area and its role in the library and the field of librarianship. Libraries can hire an employee who has been certified to have a specified body of knowledge and skills. The employer may also use the LSSCP as part of a career ladder in the library. [28] The benefits of such a program to both individuals and institutions alike make such efforts not only worthwhile, but essential.

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[28] Library Support Staff Certification Program (2005). FAQ. Retrieved April 30, 2008 from http://ala-apa.org/certification/supportstafffaq.html

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