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### The More Things Change, The More They Stay the Same: Educational and Disciplinary Backgrounds of American Librarians, 1950-2015

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#### Recommended Citation

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# The More Things Change, The More They Stay the Same: Educational and Disciplinary Backgrounds of American Librarians, 1950-2015

## Description/Abstract

Discussions of diversity in American librarianship usually focus on gender or ethnicity, but historical studies also show a lack of diversity in educational and disciplinary backgrounds. Librarians traditionally hail from the humanities, especially English and history. But as current educational attention shifts to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, are librarians reflecting this change?

Anonymized data from ALA-accredited graduate programs from the last five years was collected, coded, and classified to determine librarians' educational and disciplinary backgrounds and in what ways, if any, they differ from the past 65 years and from the contemporary U.S. general population. Unsurprisingly, we found that contemporary librarians still hail predominantly from English and history—a stark contrast from the business and health undergraduate degrees earned by the general U.S. population. Backgrounds in STEM fields remain lacking in librarianship, but librarians with undergraduate education in the arts are on the rise, perhaps supporting the creativity, flexibility, innovation and risk-taking necessary in 21st century libraries.

## Keywords

LIS education, undergraduate education, bachelor degrees, educational diversity, academic disciplines

## Disciplines

Library and Information Science

## Additional Information

Author's Accepted Manuscript, to be published in the Journal of Education for Library and Information science (JELIS).

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## **The More Things Change, The More They Stay the Same: Educational and Disciplinary Backgrounds of American Librarians, 1950-2015**

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Discussions of diversity in American librarianship usually focus on gender or ethnicity, but historical studies also show a lack of diversity in educational and disciplinary backgrounds. Librarians traditionally hail from the humanities, especially English and history. But as current educational attention shifts to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, are librarians reflecting this change? Anonymized data from ALA-accredited graduate programs from the last five years was collected, coded, and classified to determine librarians' educational and disciplinary backgrounds and in what ways, if any, they differ from the past 65 years and from the contemporary U.S. general population. Unsurprisingly, we found that contemporary librarians still hail predominantly from English and history—a stark contrast from the business and health undergraduate degrees earned by the general U.S. population. Backgrounds in STEM fields remain lacking in librarianship, but librarians with undergraduate education in the arts are on the rise, perhaps supporting the creativity, flexibility, innovation and risk-taking necessary in 21st century libraries.

### **Keywords**

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### **Introduction**

In recent years, increased attention has been paid to diversity in American librarianship, or discussions of the lack thereof. While many of these discussions have focused on gender or ethnicity, other factors, such as educational and disciplinary background, also contribute to diverse perspectives. This is especially true in American librarianship, where the master's degree serves as the professional criteria for the field, thus presuming previous undergraduate education. But contemporary librarianship needs to represent and reflect the diversity of today's needs. An increased focus on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields is underway, with employment in these fields growing significantly faster (24.4%) than non-STEM jobs (4.0%) (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2017). This growing emphasis on STEM, combined with the advent of creative tools like makerspaces in libraries and the need for 21st century librarians to be innovative, flexible, creative problem-solvers (Bertot, Sarin, & Percell, 2015) means that librarians need knowledge and education that supports these new areas of strength.

To support these needs, we need a more educationally diverse library profession. This study examines the educational diversity of American librarianship. Drawing on both historical and contemporary data, we investigate the following research questions:

1. What are the educational and disciplinary backgrounds of contemporary librarians?
2. In what ways, if any, do the educational and disciplinary backgrounds of contemporary librarians differ from those of the past, or from the contemporary general population?

We conclude with a discussion of potential implications for the field of American librarianship, with special consideration paid to the needs of the field going forward in the 21st century.

## Literature Review

Many studies in the course of contemporary American librarianship have sought to profile the educational and disciplinary backgrounds of various types of library practitioners. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, education for librarianship was often provided through training courses at functioning libraries. But as librarianship became increasingly established as a profession, more formalized approaches to education emerged. In 1948 the American Library Association passed a resolution calling for library education to only be offered at the graduate level (Bobinski, 2007) and by 1951, the American Library Association had limited accreditation to programs offering master's (i.e., graduate level) degrees (Quinn, 2014). At this time, the earliest reported data on librarians' education backgrounds showed that only 58% of public librarians in America held college degrees; of those who did, one-third majored in English and one-sixth in social science (Bryan, 1952, p. 58-60). While one-third of 58% does not represent a majority of librarians in the field at the time, this sample does reflect a starting point for a persistent pattern, where English and social science majors are consistently represented at higher rates in studies dealing with general populations of librarians. A few years later, Douglass (1957) found English to, again, represent at a much higher rate as a major area of undergraduate study, with 35.8% of 545 contemporary library school students focusing on it in their undergraduate education (p. 59). 14.4% studied history; 10.7% foreign languages; 8.17% education; 7.78% social sciences; 7.2% library sciences; 4.28% biological sciences; 3.7% physical sciences; 1.75% fine arts and 1.36% business administration [Categories of "other," "no answer," or "undefined" are not included here; thus percentages may not total 100%]. Based on available data, it seems that most librarians hailed from humanistic backgrounds despite the post-World War II rise of information science, the Space Race, and other contemporary national interests in science and technology.

Morrison (1969) found that 72% of academic librarians in the United States pursued humanities as an undergraduate course of study; this included those who majored in a foreign language but not history, which comprised an additional 26% (p. 19) [Per Morrison, some subjects reported two or more majors; thus, percentages total more than 100.] 16% studied social sciences; 10% natural sciences, and 7% education. The next decade reflected much of the same. In a survey of 1,969 students across 45 ALA-accredited library education programs, White and Macklin (1970) found "the large majority are from liberal arts backgrounds, with English and history being the two largest concentrations" (p. 12). 28% of students had undergraduate majors in English; 17% history and government; 13% education; 11% behavioral sciences; 10% foreign languages; 5%

physical sciences and math; and 2% biological sciences (p. 12). “However,” they claim, “there is also a small, but growing, number who are coming from the sciences and this is likely to increase as information science gets more emphasis in the library school” (p. 13). Although White and Macklin were correct about the increasing influence of information science on library schools, their optimism seems to have been misplaced. It is also unclear how White and Macklin could lay claim to any changes since they only collected and analyzed one year of data. Denis (1970) reported similar findings for public and academic librarians in Canada at the time, with no significant differences between the two types of librarians: “the educational background of the vast majority of respondents is in the humanities and to a lesser extent the social sciences” (p. 66, 183).

By the 1980s, it was well-established that librarians across the board came from predominantly liberal arts educational backgrounds. Although not universally representative, a survey of 440 students enrolled in three ALA-accredited master’s programs at the time—Atlanta University, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, and University of South Carolina—showed that 51.9% held undergraduate degrees in the humanities; 6.6% in library science; 5.0% in the sciences; 2.7% in business; and 2.0% in agriculture, nursing, etc. (Brown, 1988, p. 65). Studies began to focus on narrower slices of librarianship, such as one’s role or position in the library, or librarians in subject-based libraries, but little changed in librarians’ educational backgrounds. Across 300 college libraries, Reynolds (1982) found the educational backgrounds of the staff as follows: 44% humanities (including English, classics, foreign languages, literature, linguistics, philosophy & religion); 16.7% education; 5.2% library science. No information for any other major areas of study was mentioned (p. 17). Karr (1983) profiled average public and academic library directors in 1981 as a 51-year-old male from the northeastern United States who had majored in the liberal arts. Library directors at the time majored mostly in English (28%) and history (21%), followed by other humanities (13%), social sciences (13%), science and engineering (9%), education (6%), library sciences (5%), and business (4%) (p. 344). Mech (1985) also found library directors at small Midwest colleges majored “mostly in the humanities and liberal arts”: again a predominance of English (26%) and history (22%), followed by education (14%), other humanities (9%), foreign languages (8%), non-social sciences (7.5%), social sciences (6%), library science (3%), and business (2.5%) (p. 9). Cain (1988) was one of the first to also look at trends in further graduate education in addition to undergraduate area of study. Using demographic data sourced from the Vita Bank, Cain found that 50% of librarians (with or without MLS or equivalent degrees) have at least one graduate degree other than the MLS. After coding the degrees by discipline, humanities again stands out. The highest percentage of undergraduate degrees (32.3%) and non-MLS master’s degrees (25.4%) were coded as humanities subjects (p. 294). These are significant percentages on their own, but Cain categorizes history as a “humanities social science,” meaning that history is not included in the numbers for humanities. When broken out by specific subject, history leads both undergraduate and non-MLS master’s degrees, followed, predictably, by English and education (p. 294). Cain finds the fact that nearly 60% of undergraduate degrees are in the same four fields “disturbing” and laments the poor representation in the hard sciences: “they indicate that we have a fairly narrow educational perspective from which to examine issues or approach problems” (p. 296).

This concern seemed to lead into investigation of academic and education backgrounds of librarians specializing in science and related fields (what today we might call STEM, or science,

technology, engineering and mathematics). Responses from 100 academic science librarians engaged in bibliographic instruction showed that nearly two-fifths (37%) had a degree at any level—undergraduate, master’s, or doctoral—in a scientific discipline (Thomas, 1988, p. 253). Another survey of “sci-tech librarians” asked whether or not they “had either an undergraduate degree or extensive coursework in a field of science or technology.” 59 respondents (67%) said they did (Sandy, Lembo, & Manasco, 1998, p. 16). Another survey of 56 engineering librarians revealed that 11% had been social science majors; 10% English, 9% liberal arts, 9% education, 9% fine arts, 9% biology, 7% engineering, 7% chemistry, 7% history, 5% natural sciences, 4% math, 4% journalism (Mosley, 1995, p. 57). Of 119 science and engineering librarians who were members of the science and technology section of ACRL, 20% had majored in biology; 12.2% in physics/chemistry; 11.1% in history; 7.8% in English; and 5.6% in foreign languages (Winston, 2001, p. 17). Winston acknowledges the propensity toward humanities backgrounds and the difference from this in his population, yet acknowledges that issues of representation still exist: “In a profession in which English and history majors are the most predominant, the academic science and engineering specialty includes more science majors, as well as those with more traditional backgrounds. However, there were very few reported engineering majors” (p. 22). A subsequent study showed the continuing trend for science librarians to have science backgrounds. Of 72 physical science librarians, 63% majored in a science field as undergraduates and 18% earned a master’s degree in a science. “The data collected suggest that a greater number of physical science librarians have an undergraduate science degree than do science librarians in general” (Ortega & Brown, 2005, p. 75).

The pattern of educational backgrounds of STEM librarians seems to be anomalous. Other studies focusing on specific types of librarians follow the general overall trend of favoring the humanities. A survey of 162 academic business librarians found 23.5% majored in history; 19% in English; 6% in education, and less than 5% for all other identifiable majors. In terms of additional master’s degrees, 17.3% of the respondents had an MBA, followed by 9% history and 3% English (Kendrick, 1990, p. 395-396). A demographic survey of 198 children’s librarians found 23.2% had an undergraduate major in English; 18.7% in education; 10.1% in history; 5.1% in fine arts; 5.1% in psychology; 3.5% in sociology/social work; and 3.0% in communications/journalism (Winston & Dunne, 2001, p. 31-32). 12.6% reported having “double majors,” but no data was included about what subjects those might entail. Of business librarians, only 15% hold a bachelor’s degree in a business field (Perret, 2011, p. 50). A survey of librarians dealing with “media” (such as videos, film, audiovisual, and other non-print materials) noted that out of 98 respondents, “the only degree held by a significant number of respondents [17] was a Bachelor’s degree in English” (Laskowski, 2010, p. 394). And out of 280 art librarians, 35% had a degree in art history and 12% in art/studio art (Tewell, 2012, p. 37). 52% of respondents had a second masters; of those, the most frequent areas were art history (52%), fine arts (16%) architecture (11%) and history (4%) (p. 37). Interestingly, with the exception of Denis, this is the only study of the ones discussed that addresses an international audience; all other studies were focused on librarians in the United States.

In recent years, some librarians have found their way to the profession after completing doctoral education in another field. Of academic librarians with subject doctorates (other than LIS) earned between 1965-2006, 72% chose to pursue librarianship either during or after their PhD studies (Lindquist & Gilman, 2008, p. 36). Although the fields of study varied, doctoral degrees earned

prior to librarianship still skew significantly toward the arts and humanities (59.9%), trailed by professions/applied sciences (24.4%); social sciences (8.8%); and natural sciences (5.4%) (p. 40-41).

While we acknowledge that differences exist across various library settings making the data from these previous studies seem disparate, all librarians are required to complete the same master's level degree as professional qualification regardless of what type of library (academic, public, school, etc.) they find themselves working in. While some librarians have specific goals regarding organizational placement, other librarians may change from one library type to another (e.g. academic to public) in the course of their career. The data reviewed here from these historical studies offers a broad picture of librarianship at large.

## Methods

Studies throughout the past 75 years clearly show librarians skewing heavily toward backgrounds in English, the humanities, and social sciences. But contemporary librarianship is increasingly emphasizing support for STEM fields in library activities such as teaching, information literacy, collection development, outreach, research and publishing (Gubnitska & Smallwood, 2014; Mardis, 2015). Outreach and other instructional endeavors, such as the “Big Orange STEM Saturday” at the University of Knoxville (TN) have increased in popularity and offerings (Flash et. al., 2017). Scientific-focused information literacy instruction is increasingly incorporated into academic curricula and requires the support of academic librarians (Scaramozzino, 2008; 2010). Laherty (2000) emphasizes the need for librarians incorporating information literacy into science education programs to be competent in the theories, pedagogies, and standards of scientific fields. But academic libraries are not the only libraries emphasizing STEM learning. STEM activities and programs, such as science fairs, non-fiction book clubs, and other programming strategies are popular in public libraries, as are displays, reading lists and other readers' advisory services promoting STEM topics (Hopwood, 2012; Myers, Spencer, & Huss, 2013; Roberson, 2015). School libraries support STEM curriculum through similar techniques (Duff, 2012; Lamb, 2016). As contemporary librarianship increases support for STEM fields, one might think that the backgrounds of librarians might also be shifting in this direction. Is this truly the case? What actually comprises the educational and disciplinary backgrounds of contemporary librarians? In what ways, if any, do contemporary librarians' educational and disciplinary backgrounds differ from those of the past, or from the general population at large?

To ensure the most current and up-to-date information for this study, contemporary librarians were considered those on the cusp of their library careers—i.e., current and recent master's level students in librarianship over the previous 5 years (2012-2016). Although previously the ALISE Annual Report included data about prior areas of study, they discontinued collecting undergraduate major data in 1980 (Saye & Lan, 1997, p. 74). Instead, anonymous de-identified data about matriculated students' year of enrollment, previous undergraduate and graduate degrees and the areas of study for those degrees was solicited from every ALA-accredited master's programs in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico. (See Appendix A for the letter soliciting participation.) Although many of the previous studies reviewed above solicited data via survey questionnaires, this form of data collection was chosen over a survey in an attempt to

collect a more thorough and representative set of data, not reliant on individual personal responses.

Requests for data were sent in January 2017 to the 60 institutions with ALA-accredited master's degree programs. Of these, 7 U.S.-based institutions (12%) agreed to provide program data for the study. Thirty additional institutions (50%) responded but opted not to participate. While reasons for non-participation varied, most reflected the unavailability of the data in a readily sharable format and/or the labor-intensive nature of data collection and the program's inability to devote staff time or resources to the task. The requests stated a preference for de-identified data but also stated that special arrangements could be made to collect identifiable data while still protecting students' information, an offer extended after consultation with Syracuse University's Institutional Review Board. Despite the assurance of IRB compliance several institutions declined to participate because of concerns over student privacy, with one institution going so far as to seek counsel on the matter from their legal department before declining to participate. To encourage participation in the study, data was collected in whatever format was most convenient for the institution, resulting in a variety of formats from spreadsheets to simple lists. The data were standardized and aggregated, and then coded based on a scheme developed during a pilot study with admission data from the University of Washington Information School (Clarke, 2016). The coding scheme was revised and expanded to accommodate the data from additional schools (See Appendix B for the full coding scheme).

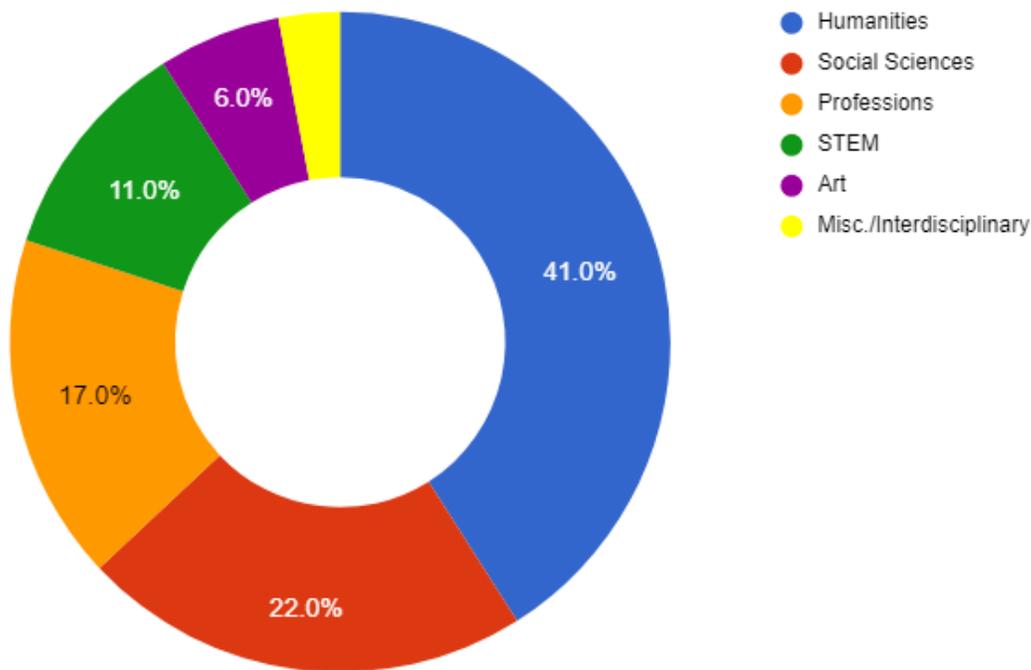
Every degree subject was normalized; for example, degrees listed with subjects in Classics, Classical Studies, and Classical Civilization were all synonymized to Classics. In addition, every normalized subject was hierarchically classified under a broader discipline code (e.g., History was classified as a humanities discipline). Although many subjects are well-recognized as falling into certain disciplinary categories some classifications, especially for new and emerging subjects, proved challenging. Whenever possible, we investigated the subjects and degrees and attempted to represent their actual nature. If the degree-granting institution was known, we examined web pages and other information about the degree to determine which discipline might be appropriate. We consulted established classifications and definitions, such as the National Endowment for the Humanities, to guide our classification. When subject and disciplinary classification was complete, descriptive statistics were used to understand the landscape of educational backgrounds in contemporary librarianship, as well as to compare with historical data. After presenting preliminary results at the American Library Association's annual conference (Clarke, 2017), we also coded every undergraduate degree a second time based on the IPEDS Classification of Instructional Programs taxonomic scheme, based on external feedback and suggestions. This allowed us to compare the distribution of subjects among librarians' undergraduate degrees with that of undergraduate degrees in the American population at large.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Current overall educational and disciplinary profile of contemporary American librarians***

Based on the data from 7 institutions with ALA-accredited master's programs, contemporary librarians predominantly hail from disciplinary backgrounds in the humanities, with 41% of previous degrees having been awarded in this discipline. This is followed by social sciences

(22%), professions (17%), then STEM (11%), the arts (6%), and miscellaneous/interdisciplinary studies (3%) (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Disciplinary backgrounds of contemporary librarians.

In addition to overarching disciplines, we also tabulated counts for specific areas of study (e.g., the “major” or topic of study of each degree). The predominant areas of study reflected in previous degrees held by matriculating MLIS students also emphasizes subjects in the humanities, with English and history topping the list (see Table 1). These subjects rose to the top even without including counts for more specific topics in those areas, such as English literature (6th most common), art history (10th), or creative writing (22nd). Degrees in education were the third most common, but they represent a very distant third place compared to the top two subjects.

**Table 1.** Top 25 degree subjects across all LIS programs.

Degree Subject	Number of Degrees Awarded	Percentage of All Degrees Awarded
Humanities: English	643	14.68%
Humanities: History	457	10.43%
Professions: Education	151	3.45%
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies	143	3.26%
Social Sciences: Psychology	138	3.15%
Humanities: English: English Literature	129	2.95%
Humanities: Languages	120	2.74%

Social Sciences: Political Science	105	2.40%
Professions: LIS	105	2.40%
Humanities: Art History, Theory, & Criticism	99	2.26%
Social Sciences: Anthropology	88	2.01%
Humanities: Religious Studies	78	1.78%
Professions: Law	78	1.78%
Social Sciences: Communication	73	1.67%
Social Sciences: Economics	73	1.67%
STEM: Computer Sciences	70	1.60%
Professions: Business: Administration	70	1.60%
Social Sciences: Sociology	67	1.53%
Social Sciences: Journalism/Mass Communication	57	1.30%
Professions: Information Sciences	57	1.30%
STEM: Engineering: Electrical Engineering	49	1.12%
Humanities: English: Creative Writing	48	1.10%
Miscellaneous: Interdisciplinary	47	1.07%
Humanities: Philosophy	46	1.05%
Art: Other/General/Miscellaneous	44	1.00%

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While this table reflects the subjects of previous degrees earned by matriculated master's students, it does not delineate the levels of those degrees. Some students entered into a master's level library education program with only a single undergraduate degree, while others entered with an undergraduate degree as well as a master's degree, or some other combination of degrees (e.g., multiple bachelor's and/or master's degrees; associate degrees; law degrees, doctoral degrees, etc.). No attempt was made to distinguish the level of education a student received based on the level of degree; that is, no assumption was made that a graduate degree conferred more expertise or education in a particular subject than an undergraduate degree. Only the subjects were noted. 3,191 students recorded 4,380 degrees, giving an average of 1.37 degrees per student.

### ***Current undergraduate educational and disciplinary backgrounds***

While all entering MLIS students are required to have earned an undergraduate degree, not all have earned additional graduate or other degrees. Including all degrees, as we did above, offers a holistic picture of focus of study by discipline, but it also may skew the results toward subjects in which additional degrees were earned. It also makes comparisons with other data sets, both historical and contemporary, more difficult.

For instance, based on the above data, librarians seem to over-represent humanistic disciplines. But perhaps humanistic courses of study are popular across the board, not just in librarianship. To determine whether or not the undergraduate degree subjects of librarians differ from the population at large, we compared the subjects of the undergraduate degrees in our data set to national data from the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data

System (IPEDS). IPEDS is a system of annual surveys conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics. Every college, university, and technical and vocational institution that participates in federal student aid financial programs are required to self-report numerous pieces of institutional data, including data related to institutional characteristics and prices, admissions, measures of enrollment and access, and degrees conferred, among others” (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], n.d-a).

We took several steps to prepare our study data for comparison with national data from IPEDS. First, all non-undergraduate degrees were removed from our data set as IPEDS only collects data relating to post-secondary, non-graduate studies. Next, each degree from our original coding scheme was checked against IPEDS’ Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) searchable site (NCES, n.d.-b) in order to crosswalk our data. CIP is the taxonomic scheme utilized by IPEDS, a scheme that organizes degrees into fields of study and sub-fields. Our data was crosswalked at the higher field level in order to compare it to national numbers reported in the *Digest of Education Statistics*, an annual compilation of American educational statistical information with data drawn from many sources, including IPEDS. Our data set was then re-coded to match the CIP scheme. Table 322.10 (NCES, 2016) from the *Digest* contains data for bachelor’s degrees conferred by all reporting institutions between 1970-71 and 2014-15, the latter being the most recent year for which complete IPEDS data is available. Numbers for the 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15 academic years were aggregated across our data set and IPEDS data for comparison purposes. These academic years were selected because complete data for these years was available across both data sets [It should be noted that data from one program was dropped for this particular comparison, since their data was provided to us in aggregate form and we were unable to isolate the years in question].

Our comparison shows a number of stark differences in patterns of undergraduate study (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** IPEDS fields of study – aggregates for 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15

<b>CIP Field of Study</b>	<b>Aggregate Across All LIS Programs</b>	<b>Percentage Across All LIS Programs</b>	<b>Aggregate of IPEDS</b>	<b>Percentage of IPEDS</b>
Agriculture and Natural Resources	17	0.81%	104,994	1.87%
Architecture and Related Services	8	0.38%	27,996	0.50%
Area, Ethnic, Cultural, Gender, and Group Studies	51	2.42%	24,907	0.44%
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	29	1.37%	314,950	5.62%
Business	87	4.12%	1,082,818	19.32%
Communication, Journalism, and Related Programs	87	4.12%	263,080	4.69%
Communications Technologies	0	0.00%	15,113	0.27%
Computer and Information Sciences	138	6.54%	165,813	2.96%
Education	86	4.08%	295,159	5.27%
Engineering	57	2.70%	276,014	4.92%
Engineering Technologies	5	0.24%	51,055	0.91%
English Language and Literature/Letters	429	20.33%	148,712	2.65%

Family and Consumer Sciences/Human Sciences	1	0.05%	73,203	1.31%
Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics	132	6.26%	61,472	1.10%
Health Professions and Related Programs	4	0.19%	596,154	10.64%
Homeland Security, Law Enforcement, Firefighting and Related Protective Services	6	0.28%	185,403	3.31%
Legal Professions and Studies	3	0.14%	13,358	0.24%
Liberal Arts and Sciences, General Studies and Humanities	32	1.52%	135,718	2.42%
Library Science	53	2.51%	328	0.01%
Mathematics and Statistics	26	1.23%	63,289	1.13%
Military Technologies and Applied Sciences, Other	0	0.00%	566	0.01%
Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies	50	2.37%	143,606	2.56%
Other*	15	0.71%	0	0.00%
Parks, Recreation, and Leisure, and Fitness Studies	4	0.19%	137,681	2.46%
Philosophy and Religious Studies	50	2.37%	35,863	0.64%
Physical Sciences	13	0.62%	87,398	1.56%
Precision Production	0	0.00%	121	0.00%
Psychology	81	3.84%	349,315	6.23%
Public Administration and Social Service Professions	6	0.28%	99,796	1.78%
Social Sciences and History	451	21.37%	517,843	9.24%
Theology and Religious Vocations	7	0.33%	28,735	0.51%
Transportation and Materials Moving	1	0.05%	13,960	0.25%
Visual and Performing Arts	181	8.58%	291,045	5.19%

\*Other: Degrees within LIS Programs data set that do not fit any CIP category

IPEDS classifies history with social sciences, making social sciences the highest percentage (21.37%) of undergraduate degrees earned by MLIS students between 2012-2015. However, English language, literature and letters is also a large percentage (20.33%), and would likely be the highest percentage were history not conjoined with social sciences. Both social sciences and English are much more concentrated in librarianship than the U.S. population at large, which saw only 9.24% of undergraduates completing degrees in social sciences and 2.65% in English. Conversely, the largest category of degrees earned in the U.S. population were in business subjects (19.32%), followed by health professions at 10.64%. In librarianship, 4.12% and 0.19% of MLIS students earned undergraduate degrees in these subjects, respectively. There is obviously a significant disconnect in librarians' representation of the population at large.

Although IPEDS does not present a unified category for STEM as an overall discipline, we can identify individual subjects representing the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics to present a more holistic picture. We identified the following IPEDS-designated fields as STEM-relevant fields (see Table 3):

**Table 3.** IPEDS STEM fields of study – aggregates for 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15

<b>CIP Fields of Study</b>	<b>Aggregate Across All LIS Programs</b>	<b>Percentage of Aggregate Across All LIS Programs</b>	<b>Aggregate of IPEDS</b>	<b>Percentage of IPEDS</b>
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Health Professions and Related Programs	4	0.19%	596,154	10.64%
Mathematics and Statistics	26	1.23%	63,289	1.13%
Physical Sciences	13	0.62%	87,398	1.56%
<b>TOTAL of all IPEDS Fields of Study</b>	<b>289</b>		<b>1,674,780</b>	

Most of the subjects in the STEM disciplines--agriculture; biology; engineering; health; and physical sciences--show a higher rate in the overall population than in librarianship. In contrast, the percentage of MLIS students holding undergraduate degrees in computer & information science (6.54%) is twice as high as the overall rate (2.96%). This may be due to the inclusion of information science alongside computer science in the IPEDS classification; MLIS students often have undergraduate degrees in library and information science (LIS). This could also be due to data from programs offering a broader graduate level degree in information with tracks or specializations for LIS, computer science, information management, user experience (UX) and other cognate fields. IPEDS does offer a separate category specifically for library science, and that is where we classified undergraduate LIS degrees from our dataset. However, other non-library information-related degrees, such as information administration and management were assigned to the IPEDS category of computer & information sciences. Computer science degrees may also be more highly represented due to the types of MLIS programs that responded: several contemporary degree programs now admit students to a general information-based course of study, where students subsequently may select to pursue a specialization or track in library science and librarianship. Therefore, some degrees in our dataset surely represent matriculated students who went on to pursue information degrees exclusive of the MLIS.

A similar issue arises in the area of law. At least one of the MLIS programs that contributed data offered a specialization in law librarianship, thus attracting people with previous experience in that area. Although this may not be evident in the undergraduate data (0.14% in librarianship compared with 0.24% overall), 1.78% of all previous degrees (undergraduate, graduate, and post-grad) earned by incoming MLIS students were in law. This likely reflects the fact that the juris doctor (JD), a degree earned only after already earning an undergraduate degree, is considered the first degree in law in the United States (Law School Admission Council, n.d.).

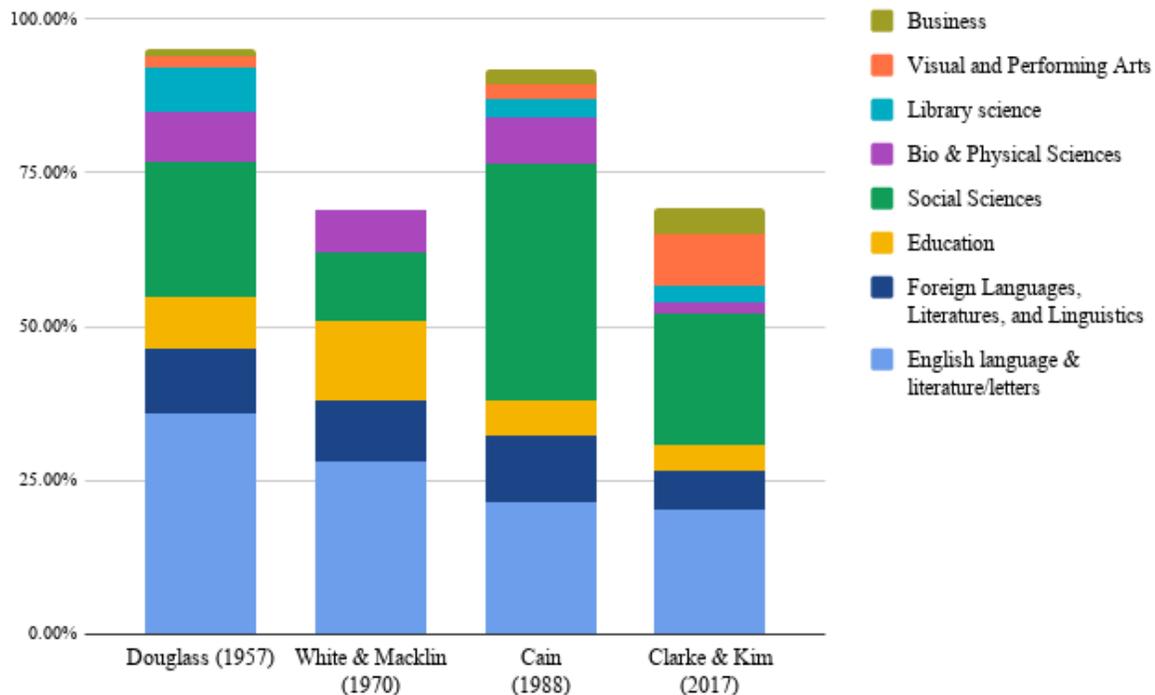
Surprisingly, the percentage of MLIS students with undergraduate degrees in mathematics and statistics is nearly identical to the overall rate (1.23% in librarianship vs. 1.13% overall). The

only other categories with similar distributions were architecture, communications/journalism, and multi/interdisciplinary studies.

***The ways in which this profile compares to previous studies***

Librarianship clearly reflects a different distribution of undergraduate degrees than the U.S. population at large. To investigate whether this distribution is a new trend reflecting contemporary needs, or has remained constant over time, we compared undergraduate degree data from our dataset to similar data reported on in previous studies (see Figure 2). Data from Douglass (1957), White & Macklin (1970) and Cain (1988) were used for this comparison as they all offered a similar level of specificity to the IPEDS classification of undergraduate majors. Two of the studies gleaned data from questionnaire responses of undergraduate students (Douglass and White & Macklin) while Cain relied on data from Vita Bank, an attempted census of practicing librarians. Not all subject designations were reflected in each study; notably White and Macklin did not specifically report library science, business, or arts undergraduate degrees as individual categories. Totals do not add up to 100% due to additional subject area designations not consistently reported across all four studies, as well as accounting for other/miscellaneous degrees. It should be noted, as per the previous discussion of IPEDS classification, history is categorized as a social science rather than with the humanities subjects.

**Figure 2.** Undergraduate degrees across four studies.



Despite still comprising a near-majority, earning an undergraduate humanities degree prior to librarianship appears to be on the decline. Social sciences are represented in higher numbers in more recent years, however this could possibly be attributed to a number of reasons. The

classification of history as a social science certainly affects these results in a significant way. But a higher number of social science undergraduates pursuing librarianship could also correspond with the evolutionary alignment of librarianship to information science, which is often positioned as a social science. Or perhaps more options for social science degrees have become available in recent years.

Some professions, such as education, library science, and business, were called out individually in most of the studies, while other professions determined by our own original inductive coding were not. Again, this may be an artifact of an evolving education space, which now includes degrees in subjects that were previously not offered in the academy. Of the specific professions highlighted in three of the four studies compared here, education seems to have peaked in the 1970s and declined since then. Although librarianship is still often affiliated with an educational bent, especially when considering its historical foundations and core values, a decline in this focus has been noted as a result of the field's alignment with information science (Dali, 2015). When compared with the contemporary IPEDS data, librarianship actually slightly lags the nation in undergraduate education degrees (5.27% nationally vs. 4.08% in librarianship). Business, on the other hand, has seen slight rise, from 1.36% of undergraduate degrees in 1957 to 4.12% today, but as previously noted, this is starkly out of proportion from the national figure of 19.32%.

Interestingly enough, degrees in the visual and performing arts appear to be on the rise, perhaps due to graduates of those degrees facing increased challenges in securing jobs in fields directly related to their studies.

## **Implications and Conclusions**

This work set out to investigate the educational and disciplinary backgrounds of contemporary librarians, as well as to understand how these backgrounds compared to librarians of the past as well as the general population. Unsurprisingly, we found that contemporary librarians, represented by MLIS students on the cusp of their career so as to reflect the future landscape as much as possible, still hail predominantly from humanities backgrounds, especially English. History is also a strongly represented area of study. The large number of people with humanities backgrounds may have made sense when libraries were focused on books, literature, and reading. However, by the time library education shifted to the graduate level in the United States, librarianship itself had also already begun the shift toward becoming the social science field it is considered today. Yet the undergraduate backgrounds of people pursuing librarianship do not seem to have shifted at the same rate. This leaves library educators with the difficult task of training people with humanities backgrounds to do social science work--a fundamentally different approach that risks mismatches in disciplinary norms. While most students with humanities backgrounds are more than capable writers, their unfamiliarity with the research methodologies and genre conventions often found in MLIS curricula, which is more closely aligned with the social sciences, leaves many of these students struggling to understand expectations. Mandel (2017) reports that this same skill set is especially valuable in post-MLIS employment, where "the ability of library and information professionals to responsibly consume and competently produce research is critical to the growth of the field and to the way other disciplines view LIS" (p. 200). This is true for academic librarians who may be required to

engage in primary research as part of their tenure obligations, and for librarians in the field in general, who are increasingly called upon to demonstrate the value and impact of their work through evidence-based practice (Oakleaf, 2010, p. 6).

The backgrounds of librarians are quite different from those of the college-educated American populace at large, where 33% of adults 25 years and older by age have bachelor's degrees or more (United States Census Bureau, 2015), with especially noticeable differences in business and health fields, as evidenced in the most recently available IPEDS data. Additional emphases on STEM in American society calling for increased research, resources, and education in these fields implies the needs for librarians to support these services. But the small number of people with STEM backgrounds going into librarianship leaves a disconnect. For future librarians to serve patrons in these areas, MLIS programs must recruit more people with undergraduate education in these areas, and/or integrate education regarding services for these populations in graduate level library education curricula. We are not claiming that STEM librarians who have an undergraduate background in the humanities or social sciences are unqualified and unable to fulfill their professional duties, only positing that an increase of librarians with STEM undergraduate education can help serve the profession's increased need for STEM support and contribute to more diverse perspectives in MLIS education.

Although they are still a small percentage overall, librarians with undergraduate education in the arts are on the rise. While perhaps not as concrete as the needs in STEM fields, people with arts backgrounds may be able to offer some of the skills necessary for 21st century librarianship, such as creativity, flexibility, innovation and risk-taking (Bertot, Sarin, & Percell, 2015). Undergraduate art education, especially the studio arts, explicitly offers instruction that fosters creativity (Clarke & Cripps 2012). Undergraduate studio art education includes learning how to take risks, view topics from multiple and flexible points of view and appreciate various perspectives (Salazar 2013). Innovation--even in scientific fields--has long been linked with creative pursuits like the arts. For example, Gurnon, Voss-Andrae and Stanley (2013) show how including visual arts in undergraduate science curriculum can help develop scientific imagination. Such integration underlies the revision of STEM to STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics), a movement encouraging the inclusion of art and design as integral aspects of STEM (Rhode Island School of Design, 2018). Although skills derived from art and design are certainly used by librarians, Clarke's (2016) historical research shows that they have been implicit and underdeveloped in American librarianship and have yet to be explicitly taught in library education. Given the argument that library work is actually more aligned with the discipline of design than social sciences (Clarke, 2016, 2018), people with art and design backgrounds may be better equipped with the creative skills necessary for 21st century library careers. Yet until MLIS education embraces a design approach, these students may find themselves trapped in similar patterns as those mentioned for humanities students above, and risk the inability to apply the skills learned in their design educations to librarianship.

These findings may be useful, but like all studies of this nature, they are not without flaws. Despite our attempt to collect census data from all 60 ALA-accredited degree programs, only seven cooperated. The schools from which we collected data varied in program structure, size, ranking, and other characteristics. Some schools offered multiple degrees (both ALA-accredited and not); some offered specific focus areas or concentrations that surely affected our findings.

Hence our attempt to collect census population data. While we understand and respect the reasons why programs did not share their data, we remain unsatisfied. Data on undergraduate degrees was systematically collected in the past for the ALISE statistical report until 1980. We could find no reason for this decision and the motivation for no longer collecting such data remains a mystery, when it could surely assist with recruitment and outreach for a more educationally diverse profession. Perhaps given some of the challenges faced by library programs in the late 20th century, such data became a kind of “competitive intelligence,” making sharing prohibitive and reflecting a change from the traditions of cooperation so commonly seen in librarianship to a more competitive landscape where MLIS program sought various means of staying afloat. Despite these limitations, this study still illustrates trends in librarians’ educational backgrounds in the 21st century, which can help shape MLIS education in this contemporary evolving space.

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Appendix A  
Request for Data Sent in January 2017

Subject: Request for Data Related to Educational Backgrounds of Graduate LIS Program Applicants

Dear [NAME],

You are receiving this email because you appear to be the person in your department who handles data related to the LIS program at your institution.

We are conducting a study examining the educational backgrounds of graduate LIS program applicants. To that end we are reaching out to all ALA accredited master's programs in library and information science across the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico with the hopes of collecting relevant program data to assist with this study.

We are seeking the following information, ideally for at least the last 5 years. For each matriculated MLIS (or equivalent) student, we would like to have the **matriculation year**, the student's **previous academic degrees** (undergraduate and graduate), the **major areas of study** for those degrees, and, if possible, **the schools which awarded those degrees**. For example, a specific student that matriculated in 2015 might have a bachelor of arts in English from California State University Long Beach and a master's degree in history from the University of Florida.

We understand that this data may exist in a variety of formats, and in an effort to make this process as easy as possible, we will accept data in whatever format you have on hand and we are happy to provide support in any way. Ideally we would prefer data that has been de-identified (that is, data that does not include names, Social Security numbers, or other identifying information), but if your data cannot be de-identified or you don't have the time or resources to de-identify it yourself, please let us know and we can make arrangements to collect your identifiable data while still protecting students' information. If we have reached you by mistake and you are not the person who handles data related to the LIS program, we would appreciate it if you could please forward this email to the appropriate person.

We appreciate the time involved in gathering this data and are grateful for any assistance you can provide. Please reply to this email with any data you are able to share or if you have questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Rachel Ivy Clarke & Young-In Kim, Syracuse University, The iSchool

## Appendix B Study Coding Scheme

### **Humanities**

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Humanities: Art History, Theory, & Criticism  
Humanities: Classics  
Humanities: Comparative Literature  
Humanities: English  
Humanities: English: Creative Writing  
Humanities: English: Non-Creative Writing  
Humanities: English: English Education  
Humanities: English: English Literature  
Humanities: English: Rhetoric  
Humanities: History  
Humanities: History: Ancient Studies  
Humanities: History: Medieval/Renaissance Studies  
Humanities: History: Music History  
Humanities: History: Public History  
Humanities: Languages (Includes specific languages)  
Humanities: Languages: Education  
Humanities: Culture, Language & Literature (Non-English)  
Humanities: Philosophy  
Humanities: Religious Studies (Includes specific religions, comparative religion)  
Humanities: Interdisciplinary: Folklore  
Humanities: General/Other/Miscellaneous

### **Social Sciences**

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Social Sciences: Anthropology  
Social Sciences: Archaeology  
Social Sciences: Communication  
Social Sciences: Community Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: African American Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: African Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: American Indian Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: American Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: Area Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: Asian Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: Comparative Cultural Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: Ethnic Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: Eurasian Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: European Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: Gender and Women's Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: German Studies

Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: Hispanic Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: Irish Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: Jewish Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: Latin American Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: Latino Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: Middle Eastern Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: Near Eastern Languages and Civilization  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: Russian Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: Southeast Asian Studies  
Social Sciences: Cultural Studies: Urban Studies  
Social Sciences: Economics  
Social Sciences: Education  
Social Sciences: Ethnomusicology  
Social Sciences: Family and Consumer Sciences  
Social Sciences: Geography  
Social Sciences: Global Studies/International Studies  
Social Sciences: Human Services  
Social Sciences: Human Development  
Social Sciences: Interpreting and Translating  
Social Sciences: Journalism/Mass Communication  
Social Sciences: Labor Relations  
Social Sciences: Linguistics  
Social Sciences: Media and Film Studies  
Social Sciences: Media Production  
Social Sciences: Medical Anthropology  
Social Sciences: National Security Affairs  
Social Sciences: Parks, Recreation and Leisure  
Social Sciences: Political Science  
Social Sciences: Psychology  
Social Sciences: Psychology: Biopsychology  
Social Sciences: Psychology: Cognitive  
Social Sciences: Psychology: Counseling  
Social Sciences: Psychology: Developmental Psychology  
Social Sciences: Psychology: Social Psychology  
Social Sciences: Public Administration  
Social Sciences: Public Policy  
Social Sciences: Reconciliation Studies  
Social Sciences: Society, Ethics, and Human Behavior  
Social Sciences: Social Work  
Social Sciences: Sociology  
Social Sciences: Urban/Regional Planning  
Social Sciences: Urban/Regional Planning: Landscape Architecture  
Social Sciences: Interdisciplinary: Cognitive Science

Social Sciences: Interdisciplinary: Comparative History of Ideas

Social Sciences: Interdisciplinary: New Media

Social Sciences: General/Other/Miscellaneous

**Professions**

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Professions: Business

Professions: Business: Accounting

Professions: Business: Accounting and Information Systems

Professions: Business: Administration

Professions: Business: Advertising

Professions: Business: Banking

Professions: Business: Business Information Technology

Professions: Business: Education

Professions: Business: E-Commerce

Professions: Business: Electronic Business

Professions: Business: Engineering Management

Professions: Business: Finance

Professions: Business: Human Resources

Professions: Business: International Affairs/International Relations

Professions: Business: Management Information Systems

Professions: Business: Management

Professions: Business: Marketing

Professions: Business: Organizational Management

Professions: Business: Public Relations

Professions: Business: Sports Management

Professions: Business: Trade

Professions: Education

Professions: Education: Administrative

Professions: Education: Childhood Development

Professions: Education: Curriculum and Instruction

Professions: Education: Educational Psychology

Professions: Education: Educational Technology

Professions: Education: Instructional Design

Professions: Education: Learning Disabilities and Behavioral Disorders

Professions: Education: Literacy

Professions: Education: Museum Education

Professions: Education: School Counseling

Professions: Education: Secondary English Education

Professions: Hospitality

Professions: Information and Communication Technology

Professions: Information Sciences

Professions: Information Systems

Professions: Law

Professions: Law: Criminal Justice

Professions: LIS

Professions: LIS: Archives

Professions: Museum Studies

**STEM**

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STEM: Agriculture

STEM: Allied Health: Dietetics

STEM: Allied Health: Health and Wellness

STEM: Allied Health: Health Policy and Administration

STEM: Allied Health: Occupational Therapy

STEM: Allied Health: Public Health

STEM: Allied Health: Speech and Hearing Sciences

STEM: Health Sciences: Kinesiology

STEM: Allied Health: Dietetics

STEM: Allied Health: Health and Wellness

STEM: Allied Health: Health Policy and Administration

STEM: Allied Health: Occupational Therapy

STEM: Allied Health: Public Health

STEM: Allied Health: Speech and Hearing Sciences

STEM: Health Sciences: Kinesiology

STEM: Allied Health: Dietetics

STEM: Allied Health: Health and Wellness

STEM: Astronomy

STEM: Aviation Science

STEM: Biological Sciences

STEM: Biological Sciences: Animal Science

STEM: Biological Sciences: Aquatic and Fishery Sciences

STEM: Biological Sciences: Biochemistry

STEM: Biological Sciences: Biology

STEM: Biological Sciences: Biomedical Engineering

STEM: Biological Sciences: Cellular and Molecular Biology

STEM: Biological Sciences: Ecology

STEM: Biological Sciences: Genetics

STEM: Biological Sciences: Marine Biology

STEM: Biological Sciences: Microbiology

STEM: Biological Sciences: Neuroscience

STEM: Biological Sciences: Zoology

STEM: Botany

STEM: Botany: Horticulture

STEM: Chemical Sciences

STEM: Chemical Sciences: Chemistry

STEM: Chemical Sciences: Chemistry Education

STEM: Chemical Sciences: Geochemistry

STEM: Computer Sciences

STEM: Computer Sciences: Computer Engineering  
STEM: Computer Sciences: Computer Graphics  
STEM: Computer Sciences: Computer Information Systems  
STEM: Computer Sciences: Computer Technology  
STEM: Computer Science: Information Security  
STEM: Computer Science: Information Technology  
STEM: Computer Sciences: Software Engineering  
STEM: Computer Sciences: Technology/Web Design  
STEM: Computer Sciences: Telecommunications  
STEM: Earth Sciences: Environmental Science  
STEM: Earth Sciences: Forestry  
STEM: Earth Sciences: Geology  
STEM: Earth Sciences: Oceanography  
STEM: Engineering  
STEM: Engineering: Architectural Engineering  
STEM: Engineering: Automation  
STEM: Engineering: Ceramic Engineering  
STEM: Engineering: Chemical Engineering  
STEM: Engineering: Civil and Environmental Engineering  
STEM: Engineering: Communication Engineering  
STEM: Engineering: Computer Engineering  
STEM: Engineering: Electrical Engineering  
STEM: Engineering: Industrial Engineering  
STEM: Engineering: Information Systems/Technology  
STEM: Engineering: Instrumentation Technology  
STEM: Engineering: Materials Science  
STEM: Engineering: Measuring and Control Technology  
STEM: Engineering: Mechanical Engineering  
STEM: Engineering: Surveying and Mapping  
STEM: Engineering: Systems Engineering  
STEM: Health Sciences: Nutrition  
STEM: Health Sciences: Medicine  
STEM: Health Sciences: Pharmacology  
STEM: Health Sciences: Veterinary Medicine  
STEM: Informatics/Information Management  
STEM: Mathematics  
STEM: Mathematics: Actuarial Science  
STEM: Mathematics: Applied  
STEM: Mathematics: Education  
STEM: Mathematics: Statistics  
STEM: Physics  
STEM: Interdisciplinary: Applied Technology and Performance Improvement  
STEM: Interdisciplinary: Biotechnology

STEM: Interdisciplinary: E-commerce Engineering with Law  
STEM: Interdisciplinary: Engineering Management  
STEM: Interdisciplinary: Human Computer Interaction  
STEM: Interdisciplinary: Human Ecology  
STEM: Interdisciplinary: Microbial Engineering  
STEM: Interdisciplinary: Natural Science  
STEM: Interdisciplinary: Renewable Resource Management

## **Art**

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Art: Administration and Policy  
Art: Architecture  
Art: Book Arts  
Art: Dance  
Art: Design  
Art: Design: Fashion Design  
Art: Design: Graphic Design  
Art: Design: Industrial Design  
Art: Design: Interior Design  
Art: Design: Media Arts  
Art: Design: Visual Communication  
Art: Education  
Art: Management  
Art: Music  
Art: Music: Education  
Art: Music: Performance  
Art: Music: Theory  
Art: Studio Art  
Art: Studio Art: Animation  
Art: Studio Art: Illustration  
Art: Studio Art: Painting  
Art: Studio Art: Photography  
Art: Studio Art: Sculpture

## **Miscellaneous**

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Miscellaneous: General Studies  
Miscellaneous: Individualized Studies  
Miscellaneous: Interdisciplinary  
Miscellaneous: Liberal Arts