

# Documentalist and librarian education in Catalonia

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**Abstract** From its foundation in 1915, the Escola Universitària de Biblioteconomia i Documentació (University School of Librarianship and Documentation) in Barcelona has been playing an important role in the training of professionals responsible for libraries. This paper describes the history, the situation in our days, and the trends for the future of the professional training of the librarians in Catalonia, with references to the rest of Spain.

## Introduction

For many years now in the Catalan library world, when someone speaks of “l'Escola” (the School), everyone knows exactly what is being referred to. “L'Escola” is a synonym for the education and development of librarians as well as a synonym for an advanced response to the educational needs of Spain. It has become an obligatory point of reference for the information field.

Library education in Catalonia means the “Jordi Rubió i Balaguer” University School of Librarianship and Documentation. This forceful statement may sound unjustified and pedantic to those unfamiliar with the evolution of library education in Catalonia, but there has long been a sensitivity here towards the need to have well-equipped libraries and qualified staff.

## The historical background

In 1915, when the Mancomunitat de Catalunya (former Catalan autonomous government) decided to create a public library network, qualified staff was needed to cope with the specific tasks involved in the development of this network. For this reason the Escola Superior de Bibliotecàries (Higher School for

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Librarians) was founded with the aim of educating staff responsible for the success of public libraries in Catalonia.<sup>1</sup>

This idea, which was well received by the intellectual world, has had very important repercussions on the professional development and education of librarians all through this century.

Despite all the political and historical changes taking place in the country, the *Escola Superior de Bibliotecàries* maintained its three year programme throughout the years. Although this programme has been a three year programme since its creation, it has evolved according to educational needs and the legal framework set by the educational system of the country. Now, "l'Escola" offers the first level library science degree (3 years) and a new curriculum of studies which should be introduced next year.

While in the rest of Spain one can find only half-hearted educational attempts with no continuity through the century, in Catalonia we find university professors who have provided specialized training for librarians since the beginning of this century.

The School has passed different stages, usually caused by political changes, and it has had some periods better than others with regard to the pedagogic methods used in it. Nevertheless, one of the main characteristics of the School is that from the beginning the requirements to become a student of it have always been the same as the one that the University demands.

### **The legal background**

Spanish laws on education cover the academic training of documentalists-librarians from 1978, when university studies on library and information science are introduced and programme guidelines are established.<sup>2</sup> The level of these studies is that of a diplomatura (three year degree). From 1982 onwards, the eight schools existing in Spain have been founded.

In 1983 the reform of Spanish universities begins,<sup>3</sup> and as a consequence the debate on library studies starts. Staff and the schools are consulted and they participate in the formulation of proposals for a new programme of studies. These proposals recommend the creation of a complete university programme: diplomatura (3 year degree), licenciatura (5 year) and doctorat (7 year). The aim is to combine the programmes for librarianship, information science and archival management

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1. For more details on the history, see: Assumpta Estivill i Rius, *L'Escola de Bibliotecàries: 1915-1939*. Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona, 1992. 508 p. ISBN 84-7794-176-9.

2. "Real Decreto 3104/1978, de 1 de diciembre" which establishes the curriculum of Library and Information Science in University Education, *Boletín Oficial de Estado*, 9 de enero, 1979, p. 368-369; and "Orden de 24 de febrero de 1981" in which the guidelines for the Programmes of Studies for University Schools for Librarianship and Documentation are established, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 14 de marzo, 1981, p. 5.711-5.712.

3. Ley Orgánica 11/1983, de 25 de agosto, about the University Reform.

without losing the flexibility created by the university reform, and to bring education closer to societal needs by offering different degrees and specializations.<sup>4</sup>

At the moment all schools are introducing new programmes for diplomatura degrees, but none have started yet to work out programmes for the llicenciatura level.

The new programmes of studies established as a consequence of the Spanish university reform has a wide range of degrees with specialized bibliography classes incorporated into its list of course requirements.

The structure of the university programmes also allows for the organization of graduate courses on specialized bibliography aimed at graduates with a llicenciatura who wish to specialize in the bibliography within their field.

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### **The Present: L'Escola Universitària "Jordi Rubió i Balaguer" de Biblioteconomia i Documentació**

In Spain, "l'Escola" was the first to offer officially recognized library degrees. In 1982 it gained university status and adapted its programme of studies to the guidelines formulated by the government. Seminars were organized to give staff educated before the reform the opportunity to have their studies recognized and adapted to the new accredited degree.

In the last ten years "l'Escola" has adapted to the professional needs of the moment and thus maintained the spirit that has guided it from the beginning. The curriculum has been subject to variations in order to establish a more structured and directed professional education, to increase the presence of archival studies within the programme and to introduce more optional courses according to professional interests. An example is the beginning of a course about on-line databases at a time when only a few very specialized centres in the country offered this service.

"L'Escola" has collaborated with the Col·legi Oficial de Bibliotecaris-Documentalistes de Catalunya (Official Association of Librarians-Documentalists of Catalonia) since its creation in 1986, the same way it did with the Associació de Bibliotecaris de Catalunya (Library Association of Catalonia) created in 1974.<sup>5</sup> The

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4. A reflection on which direction the new programme of studies for diplomatura should take according to the basic criteria and objectives of the Spanish University Reform and the trends in education according to recommendations by international professional institutions can be found in: M. Carme Mayol i Fernández, Angels Massísimo i Sánchez de Boado, "Marc docent per a un nou pla d'estudis a l'Escola Universitària 'Jordi Rubió i Balaguer' de Biblioteconomia i Documentació", in the *Seminari internacional de docència bibliotecària* (Barcelona, 20, 21 i 22 de desembre de 1990), Barcelona: Escola Jordi Rubió i Balaguer de Biblioteconomia i Documentació, 1990, p. 183-207. ISBN 84-7794-108-4.

5. In 1983 the Associació de Bibliotecaris de Catalunya starts a campaign to demand the second part of the university programme for librarianship to complete education for librarians at the university level. See: "La necessitat d'un segon cicle per als estudis de biblioteconomia i documentació" in *Butlletí de l'Associació de Bibliotecaris de Catalunya*, núm. 3 (gener-juny 1983), p. 5.

School has always supported their activities, such as organizing courses for professional development and defending the profession, while also relying on the corresponding collaboration of these institutions.

As an acknowledgement of its experience in library education, "l'Escola" participated directly in the elaboration of guideline proposals for the new programme of studies presented by the Ministry of Education.<sup>6</sup>

An openness towards international trends and initiatives has been a constant characteristic of the School. "L'Escola" has made considerable efforts to participate in the meetings of international associations (IFLA, FID and ICA), to attend professional seminars and courses organized outside the country (EUSIDIC, Online Meeting, congresses in France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Portugal) and to arrange regular visits to outstanding European library centres. At the same time outstanding professionals, specialists and representatives of international associations are invited to participate in seminars and courses organized regularly. "L'Escola" participates in EC library programmes. These activities together with the management of one of the most important professional libraries in the country assures that the School is up-to-date in the latest trends in library and information science. Since 1984, the library has been the only IFLA clearinghouse in Spain.

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### **The new programme of studies**

The University Council guidelines provide a framework for the programme of studies which is organized into mandatory core courses taught by all schools in the country seeking accreditation. It also establishes the number of credits students must take from the mandatory core courses as well as the credits they can choose from a wide range of optional subjects or electives. The programme is divided into semesters and the recommended minimum duration is three years.

The School has worked out a programme of studies dependent now on the approval of the University Council. A total of 210 credits is required (2.100 hours).

The following subjects form the core of the programme:

- \* Cataloguing and classification
- \* Archival management
- \* Information sources
- \* Library management and organization
- \* Documentation

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6. "Jordi Rubió i Balaguer" University School of Librarianship and Documentation participated, at the request of the University Council, in the preparation of the guidelines for the programme of studies for the diplomatura as well as for the licenciatura.

- \* Historiographic techniques
- \* Information technology
- \* Library internship

These mandatory courses are aimed at all students to give them the fundamentals needed to develop essential skills for all professionals. Each student has to complete his studies by summing up the compulsory courses with those chosen from the electives offered by the School and the credits gained during his internship.

Following l'Escola's tradition, an effort is made to organize internships for all students in libraries, documentation centres or archives where under the guidance of a professor from the School they can put their academic knowledge to practical use.

A small group of electives offer additional subjects to those students who might need it. For example, although secondary schools offer computer classes, there are great differences in students' levels which makes it necessary to offer an introductory course on computer applications in libraries in order to balance the students' knowledge.

Most of the electives offered reflect two directions which, although diverging are not incompatible. One of these groups of electives focuses on only one type of collection and covers all aspects of its management: acquisitions, technical processing, preservation, access, etc. Examples from this group are classes dedicated to rare books and to official publications, amongst others.

The second group represents in-depth specializations in one of the broader fields. Students who want to specialize in the field of archives can choose from an appropriate group of electives: archival management, historical archives, etc. Electronic information, multimedia systems, special services in public libraries or children's collections and services are other optional courses to choose from.

## **Llicenciatura**

After a long wait, in 1992 the llicenciatura degree is created. Some Catalan universities have expressed their interest in offering a llicenciatura degree. Up until now this degree has not started because the diplomatura programme must be revised beforehand.

## **Graduate courses**

The Catalan universities offer several specialized graduate courses. The School collaborates in the organization of some of these courses. They offer a programme of 150 to 300 hours for graduates who wish to specialize in the field of documentation. They include:

- Graduate course in Management of Information Systems in Business (Institut Català de Tecnologia - Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya).
- Graduate course in School Libraries (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona - Associació de Mestres de Rosa Sensat).
- Graduate course in Information and Documentation (Escola de Documentació Casp).
- Masters in On-Line and Compact-Disc Search Services and Systems (Universitat de Barcelona).
- Specialization course in Medical Information Retrieval (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).
- Graduate course in Computerized Information Retrieval Systems in Education (Universitat de Barcelona).
- Masters in Archival Management (Associació d'Arxivers de Catalunya).

### **Professional Development**

Various institutions offer courses which last between 20 and 300 hours to specialize in different fields of information science. This continuing education programme is mainly aimed at the professionals wishing to keep up-to-date. In particular, the institutions offer courses on new aspects of bibliographic control and the application of new information technologies.

Outstanding courses are offered by the Col·legi Oficial de Bibliotecaris-Documentalistes de Catalunya and by SOCADI (Catalan Society for Documentation and Information) who recognize the need for furthering the education of their professional members.

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### **Conclusions**

In Catalonia, library education has had a tradition reflected in the wide range of educational activities, in the sensitivity that exists towards libraries and in the demand for qualified professionals.

Public libraries have always had well-qualified staff graduating from the "l'Escola".

The close relationship between "l'Escola" and the public libraries has created an environment in which the students are able to do their internships. Not only has the programme never been limited by mere theory, but it has always been embedded in the profession's reality.

University libraries were not legally obliged to employ librarians, but the strong library tradition in Catalonia caused the directors of these libraries to consider the importance of the accredited library degree.

For many years, the relationship between "l'Escola" and the professional associations facilitated very positive dialogues and interactions regarding the evolu-

tion of library education and the proposals for a complete university level programme.

The variety that the programme offers is a reflection of the activities existing in Catalonia within the world of information. The new and varied aspects presented by the library field need imaginative and diverse answers. In this respect Catalan professionals are very active.

The structure of the official programmes within the Catalan universities provides appropriate answers to the needs that appear.

We, the professionals committed to the education of librarians and documentalists have a very important challenge which we are eagerly ready to face.