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**Support Staff**

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## A Comparison of an LTA Certificate Program with an MLIS Graduate Program

By **Ben Wappler**

At the close of this summer session, if things go as planned, I will have completed my MLIS degree at [Dominican University's Graduate School of Library and Information Science](#) (GSLIS). It has been a rigorous program that allowed me to mature and grow in different ways. Here are my reflections on the experiences in the Library Technical Assistant (LTA) Certificate Program and the Graduate School of Library and Information Science. Before attending GSLIS I completed a Library Technical Assistant Certificate at the [College of DuPage](#) (COD) in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, in 1999. A year later, I started working at the Brookfield Public Library as a circulation assistant. I desired to learn more about library science and improve my skills in the library field and decided to attend the Dominican University's GSLIS.

I entered the Library Technical Assistance program at the College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, in the fall quarter, 1998. Glen Ellyn is one of the farther western suburbs of Chicago. I was living in Berwyn and had quite a commute to attend classes. Acceptance into this school was a breeze, since I already had completed a Bachelor's degree in 1995 at Dominican University. However, I found the LTA program more rigorous than expected. My mother, who was living with me at the time, had just graduated from the Graduate School Library and Information Science at Dominican University in 1995. She also was surprised at the heavy coursework involved in the LTA program. She thought, as well as I, that the LTA program prepared students well for library work.

Five years later, after experience and hard work, I was accepted into graduate school. I entered GSLIS in the winter semester of 2004, after going through a difficult process of passing graduate entrance exams, and going through the admissions procedure. Shortly before this semester officially began, I attended the opening ceremonial dinner at Dominican University. Many of the administrators and professors introduced themselves to this new incoming class. The statement that stood out the most that evening was by one professor, "We consider the students as our peers." This was the first difference from any undergraduate experience that I noticed and appreciated about entering graduate school.

The Introduction to Libraries course, required to be taken first by all GSLIS students, introduced me to many of the professional associations available to librarians for membership. I knew a strong sense of professionalism was to be expected as part of the program, which I had not yet experienced until this time.

However, the foremost difference between the LTA certificate and the Graduate School of Library and Information Science experience was the stronger emphasis on the theoretical learning at the GSLIS. The LTA program emphasized more of the practical side of library work. This is not to say that the LTA program did not stress any theoretical side of library employment, but the GSLIS course offered more of this aspect of librarianship. The LTA prepared students for library employment in support staff positions, which included circulation assistants/clerks; youth services assistants, technical services, and reference assistants. There was more "hands-on" coursework involved in the LTA program. For example, the LTA

program required a course in audiovisual services, and students learned how to use various audiovisual machines and devices. These included microfiche, film projectors, VCRs, etc. This program also offered a course in Circulation Services, a class subject area unique to mostly LTA programs. The GSLIS offers no specific course in Circulation Services.

The LTA general reference course was nearly as rigorous as the General Reference course at the GSLIS. The LTA Reference course covered mostly all print reference sources, since online computer resources were not as advanced and utilized as today. Throughout the entire LTA program, at no fault to the program at that time, online reference sources were hardly explored. The LTA courses used many printed paper assignments, while today GSLIS assignments are online. Today, seven years after I completed my certificate, courses for many of the LTA programs in community colleges around the Chicago area are taught online. [Wilbur Wright College](#) on the northwest side of Chicago offers their students the entire LTA coursework online.

A benefit of the emphasis on practical learning was that the LTA program had students actually visiting many libraries on site. I had a chance to visit Benedictine University Library (Lisle), Skokie Public Library, Berwyn Public Library, Warrenville Public Library, Arlington Heights Public Library and Glen Ellyn Public Library. All of these libraries are located throughout the Chicago suburbs. GSLIS professors at Dominican University often show the class different parts of Dominican University's Rebecca Crown Library, but I have not experienced an actual outside library visit as part of a class. However, the GSLIS invites many outside speakers related to the library field to the university to talk with many the classes.

In conclusion, the both the LTA program and GSLIS program were both enriching and rewarding experiences. The LTA program prepared me enough for the first stage of my library work experience. The GSLIS program is now preparing me for higher level positions in the library. However, there are limits to how much the certificate and degree prepare a student for the work experience. Each library has requirements that employees are expected to meet. A strong challenge comes day-to-day on the job when I am expected to perform the job well, sustain a positive attitude and influence the patrons I interact with for their good. This is I am learning to do through my trials and successes faced in my employment and educational experiences.

## **Accreditation for Library Technical Assistant Programs? Links to RUSA's Community and Junior College Libraries Section, Library Technical Assistant (LTA) Education Committee Investigations**

The Library Technical Assistant Education Committee issued a survey asking the nation's Library Technical Assistant Training programs what is being taught, how courses are being taught and how the programs are administered. The results are summarized in a [report](#). The committee's [Web site](#) also has a [map](#) of where programs are located across the country, last updated in 2005.

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