

# THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

---



Clinical Associate Professor **David Shumaker** provides an overview of the activities and successes of The Department of Library and Information Science at The Catholic University of America to date, emphasizing the role of personal information management systems

**To begin, could you introduce the Department of Library and Information Science (LIS) at The Catholic University of America (CUA) and outline its overarching objectives?**

LIS is a unit of the School of Arts and Science. We provide professional education and support lifelong learning in the tradition of CUA. Our aim is to produce innovative leaders with professional values informed by the CUA core values of reason, faith and service, and the LIS values of collaboration, community, innovation and excellence. Our education is characterized by a strong grounding in the theory and practice of the LIS field, engagement with the rich cultural and human resources of the Washington metropolitan area, and the creative use of information technology. LIS is committed to applying the principles of library and information science towards the betterment of the individual, communities and society.

**What are your responsibilities as Clinical Associate Professor?**

My responsibilities focus on three areas: teaching, research and service. I teach in the areas of management, marketing, library service relationships with communities and the public, human information behaviour, the role of librarians in society and, occasionally, other aspects of librarianship. As a 'clinical' faculty member, who came to academe after a long career as a corporate librarian, my research is heavily orientated towards applied, actionable issues. In particular, I focus on the emerging role shifts for librarians in all settings. As for service, I contribute to my university as well as to various professional groups while outside the university, I'm most deeply involved in the Special Libraries Association.

**How do you see the landscape of management education and indeed management research changing in the near future in North America?**

There's so much going on that I couldn't possibly summarize all the developments that are likely to happen. So I'll just focus on one trend that I find fascinating, exciting and particularly relevant to my work – the synthesis of right-brain and left-brain skills; of data analysis and data driven strategic management with the 'soft skills'; and concern for organizational culture and social responsibility. And because nobody is good at achieving all of that, the synthesis leads us to the need for teams, and the study of teams and diversity. I think the work on cognitive diversity (social scientist Scott Page, for example) has been a major influence on where the field is heading. Page is a professor at the University of

Michigan and author of 'The Difference' – a meta-analysis supporting the value of cognitive diversity.

**What is a personal information management system? In what ways can it be used to control a person's flow of information?**

We all have personal information management systems, whether we know it or not. That is, we all develop implicit (rarely explicit) policies and processes that guide what information we receive; what we pay attention to; what we store, how and for how long; and what and how we choose to communicate. It's easy to articulate this for the case of a scholar or researcher using the scholarly literature. We set up various alerts to tell us when there are new publications in our field, we scan those alerts and decide what documents to read, we record some of those documents in a personal bibliography manager, we save copies whether digitally or as physical objects, and we use these documents to inform our own research, writing and speaking.

**How does the LIS Department operate within the framework of the US Government?**

Over the past several years, we've received grants from the US Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for initiatives in the areas of healthcare informatics and cultural heritage information management. Leveraging our location in Washington, DC, we maintain strong relationships with many Federal agencies, including the Library of Congress, Smithsonian Institution, National Library of Medicine and National Archives, among many others. Some of our students are employed full time in these agencies while attending our programme; others perform internships and field projects with them. Many go on to professional positions, and eventually leadership positions, in these agencies. We also collaborate with Federal employees on R&D initiatives.

**Can you elaborate on the Department's priority areas for work on methods and tools as well as good practices?**

Although we are a small faculty, we are diverse, and the faculty has a wide range of research and service initiatives. One of the most important is Cultural Heritage Information Management. Under a grant from the US IMLS, the Department is advancing the theory and application of this field, including the foundations of cultural heritage management, digital curation, preservation and digital technology.



**How is your research seeking to bring ‘embedded librarianship’ to the attention of US policy makers as well as the importance of information specialists as a policy issue?**

The emphasis of my research, speaking and writing has been on the supply side of embedded librarianship: that is, highlighting the emerging opportunities, including embedded roles, that are already presenting themselves for the librarians who are ready to take them on. Everybody already agrees on the importance of information, and what we need most are librarians who are orientated and capable of taking on the challenge of supplying society’s information needs in new ways. As more librarians seek out these roles, I believe the recognition of the importance of librarians and information specialists will grow organically.

**You recently purported that embedded librarians can enhance the use of information and knowledge amongst industries. Are you able to offer an example of this?**

Librarians develop and maintain the personal and team information management systems that contribute to organizational effectiveness. They contribute by advancing the creation and use of knowledge. In the private sector, they are most frequently engaged with the marketing and R&D functions. I can think of two examples from the private sector that I encountered in my research. At a large multinational law firm, a librarian was embedded in the firm’s marketing department. The librarian recognized a shared need on the part of marketing staff for better information about events that would be good marketing opportunities, and created a system to meet that need. In a large, privately-held corporation, librarians are frequently called in to participate in special projects, where they take responsibility for various elements of the project team’s information system. The head of one such team found the librarian’s contribution so valuable in achieving the objectives that he termed the librarians ‘the best bargain in the company’.

**In what ways can librarians and information vendors support and multiply one another’s efforts?**

Over 20 years ago, the Belgian author and librarian Michel Bauwens expressed the idea that the librarian operates within three networks: the network of organizational or community groups that process information; the network of other librarians; and the network of information sources and suppliers. Thus, for the librarian, vendors of essential content and tools are essential partners. The individual librarian – even the network of librarians – cannot supply the necessary content and tools on their own. At the same time, taking the vendor’s perspective, there is a gulf between the vendor and the ultimate consumer that’s really hard to bridge.

Vendors seek to build relationships and become partners, but in truth those consumers may not want partnerships. That’s because, as I have recently argued in the context of personal information management, people don’t have much time for the information management aspect of their lives. They don’t pay a lot of attention to it, because

their focus is elsewhere. That’s where librarians come in. The fortunate vendor is the vendor who builds a strong relationship with a librarian who really knows the community of end users. And the fortunate librarian is the one who builds strong relationships with both the vendors of essential content and tools, and with the community of end users.

**To what extent do you forge relationships between industry, academia and government?**

Forging relationships lies at the heart of our approach to librarianship. For the past seven years, we have organized an annual ‘Bridging the Spectrum’ symposium – a one-day event that brings together library and information professionals from all sectors – mostly from Washington, DC, Maryland and Virginia, but also other regions. The librarians come together to share their innovations and insights with one another. We also invite a professional leader to give the keynote address, which, this year, was delivered by Mary Alice Baish of the US Government Publishing Office.

The symposium is organized around opportunities for sharing and conversation among the diverse information professionals who attend. You can see the history of these events at <http://lis.cua.edu/symposium>. If you come to one of our symposia, you’ll feel the energy in the room as industry, academia and government all come together.

**More broadly, how does the LIS Department encourage and support education and career development?**

We are strong advocates for formal and informal professional education and career development. Most of our Master’s degree students are working adults, and we admit non-degree students to our post-Master’s certificate programmes. We’ve evolved the modes of delivery to fit the needs of our audience, with a strong component of blended (in-person and virtual) instruction. Our Online-Weekend Learning programme is very popular.

Besides these options for formal education, we also provide a variety of co-curricular opportunities as a service to our community. These include the symposia, evening colloquia featuring professional and academic leaders, the annual Elizabeth Stone Lecture, and programmes and events sponsored by our student groups and alumni board. We aim to continue playing a leadership role in advancing the knowledge and skills of the professional community.

**In the coming five to 10 years, where do you foresee the LIS Department developing?**

The LIS Department has a strong identity through our student-centred education, relationships with the profession, connection to the rich Catholic intellectual tradition and concern for social responsibility and social justice. As society, technology and librarianship evolve, we will continue to lead the introduction of new knowledge into the profession and the development of the librarians who can bring it to bear on the needs of society.



[www.lis.cua.edu](http://www.lis.cua.edu)