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"I felt like a real librarian": Field experiences as an opportunity for professional identity development

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“I felt like a real librarian”
**Field experiences as an opportunity for
professional identity development**

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Professional Identity

the set of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences that contribute to people's definition of themselves in professional roles (Schein, 1978)

Field Experiences

“lectures and reading alone will not achieve the best results in training without the conference, problems, study of various libraries in successful operation and actual work in a library.”

- Melville Dewey, 1884

Field Experiences in Canada

University	Title of FE	Length of FE	Credit Units	Req' d
Dalhousie University	Practicum	One term, 500 total hours	None	Yes
McGill University	Practicum	One term, 10h/week	3 cu	No
University of Alberta	Practicum	One term, 10h/week	3 cu	No
University of British Columbia	Practicum	2 weeks	None	Yes
University of British Columbia	Co-op	One or two terms, Full time	None	No
University of British Columbia	Professional Experience	One term, 10h/week	3 cu	No
Universite de Montreal	Internship (le stage)	One term, 36 days, 10h/week	3 cu	No
University of Toronto	Practicum	One term	3 cu	No
Western University	Co-op	One or two terms, Full time	None	No
University of Ottawa	Co-op	Two terms	12 cu	No

Methods

Data Sources:

Semi-structured interviews

- Experiences and daily activities during co-op placement
- Perceptions of professional identity
- Professional goals and aspirations

Student progress reports

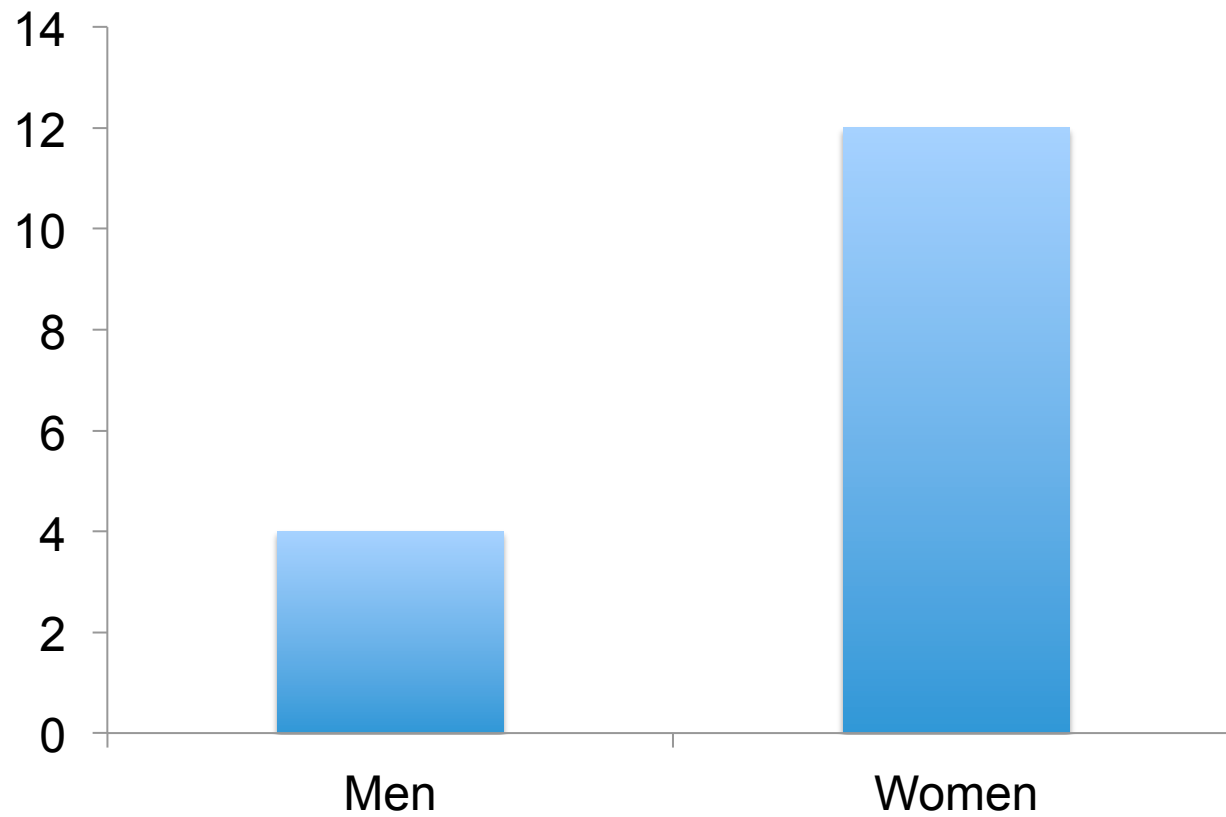
- Mid-term report
- Final report

Differences in Data Sources

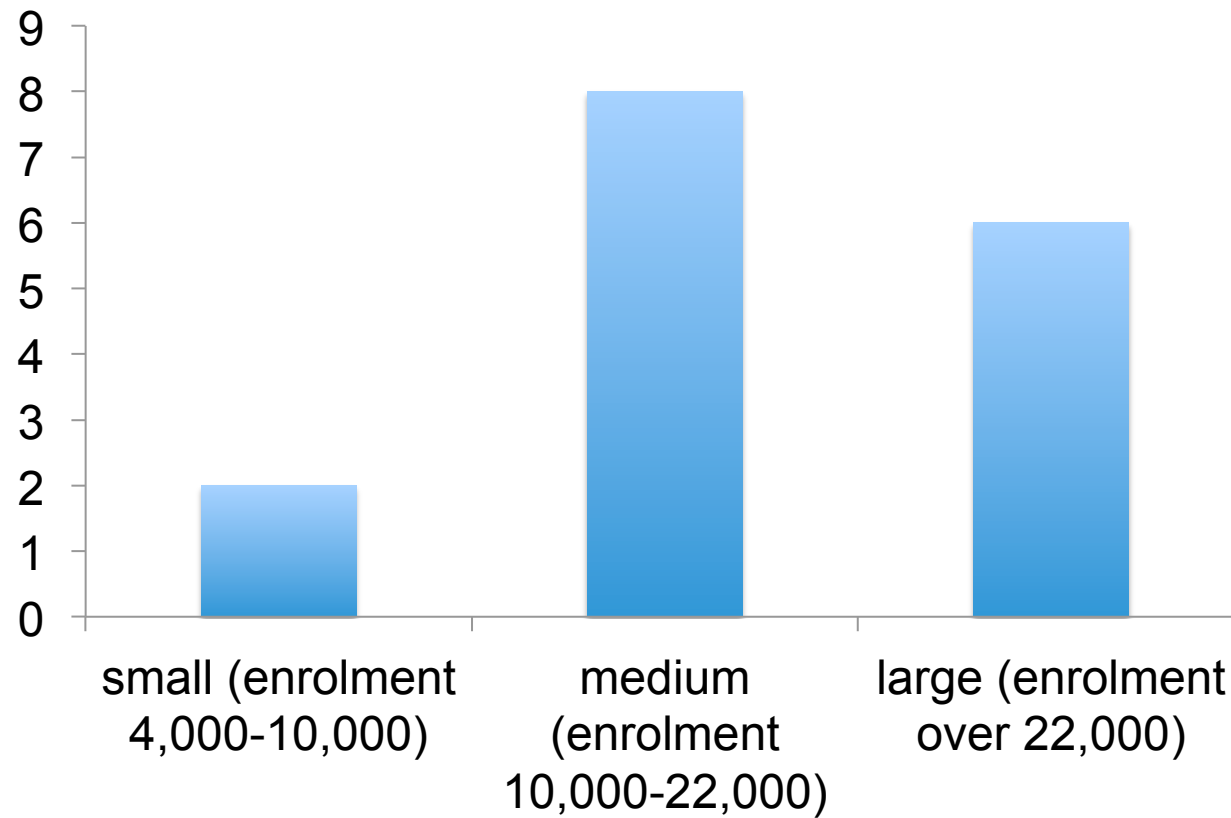
Co-op reports: students were aware of their audience and adopted a formal tone

Interviews: students were more casual and forthcoming in their descriptions and explanations

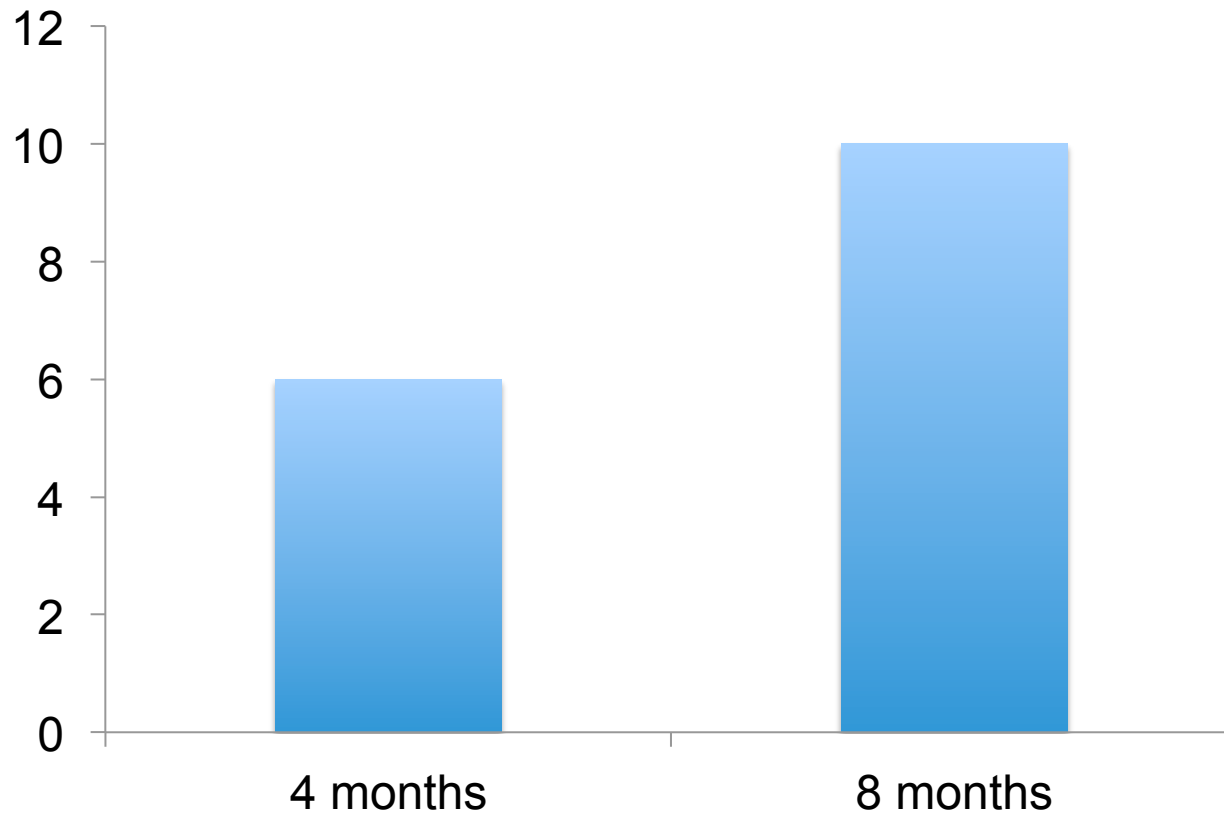
Participants



Host Institutions



Length of Co-op Placement



Connections and Disconnections with the LIS
Classroom

Availability and Experience of Training

Authenticity of the Professional Experience

Importance of Working as an Equal with Librarians

Connections and Disconnections with the LIS Classroom

Classroom provides a theoretical foundation

when you're working in a library ... you don't necessarily have time to sit back and... talk about these big existential issues like the economics of information-- but I mean I think that that's why you have to do it as a part of your studies. (P9)

Bringing ideas together

you're having kind of a smattering of different topics ... and it's valuable, but disjointed. ... The nice thing about the co-op was that ...you see how they fit together and what it means practically to be a librarian. (P2)

Students experienced:

- Autonomy
- Breadth of librarianship
- “Inner workings” of libraries
- Volume of librarians’ work
- Nuances and implications of working with people

Volume of librarians' work

The sheer volume of work... that... that's a little bit...
okay, that's something I'm not prepared... you know, a
never ending stream of work (P5)

Experiencing librarianship is different

I found myself many times in my co-op thinking to myself 'Oh, so this is what they were talking about' in library school or... 'Oh, usage statistics' you know, 'they're really important.' [Laughs] I was told that but now I know why. (P1)

you learn more about reference from doing it that from that course. (P5)

Availability and Experience of Training

No need for formal training

I feel... there was no training [Laughs] ...But that was adequate (P2)

it's interesting because I heard over and over again that "oh, it doesn't matter you'll learn on the job. (P10)

Importance of informal training

it wasn't training one on one, but just by watching how they taught, watching how they did things. (P1 I)

[there was] not really any formal training, but I... always had the sense, I mean, throughout the 8 months, if I ever had a question I felt completely comfortable asking anybody ... (P2)

Previous experience

And the nice thing was that I was given responsibilities based on kind of what my experience... my previous experiences and strengths already were. (P7)

Authenticity of the Professional Experience

Students' activities included:

- Reference desk shifts
- Marketing & outreach
- Information literacy instruction
- Collection management
- Research
- Website development
- Professional development

Support role

I think that what I was doing sort of reflected things that needed to be done, but that were sort of ... the other librarians didn't have time for. (P10)

I felt that I was doing the work that librarians do ... ultimately other people were accountable for those projects being completed. So I felt that I was kind of insulated from real responsibility. (P3)

Importance of Working as an Equal with Librarians

Collegial relationships

I felt that they put a lot of confidence and trust in me and responsibilities, so I really appreciated that. (P11)

Making a difference

So, I did feel that I contributed a lot to ... what we were providing to patrons. (P7)

Sharing in conversation

connecting with people who are actually in the profession... I think just having talked with [librarians]...we'd sit at the desk and have some very interesting conversations just about librarianship in general... it was kind of interesting just to bounce thoughts of some and just explore (P10)

Field Experiences

- Reinforce and illuminate concepts from coursework
- Help students to negotiate their place in the community of librarians
- Adopt and understand attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences

Emerging Professional Identity

- Lifelong learning
- Community
- Breadth & scope of the profession

Further Research

- Professional identity formation in online programs
- Differences in settings: college vs. university; health libraries; small vs. large
- Focus on mid-career librarians