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## **Academic Librarian Competency as Defined in the Library and Information Science Journal Literature of 2001–2005 and 2011**

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### **Abstract**

Competency definitions continue to become more popular in Library and Information Science (LIS) and are being used not only to describe library positions but also as a means of assessment. This study investigates competency in the LIS academic context using English language peer-reviewed articles from the LIS journal literature for 2001–2005, with findings tested by the later inclusion of 2011 data. A quadripartite definition consisting of cognitive, functional, behavioral, and meta-competence elements is used as a template against which to explore definition creation and use. Results offer a template for critical analysis of competency as found within the LIS journal literature. The methodology used, one of coding, reveals a commonality to discussions of competency within these articles, reflecting a more holistic understanding than expected. But authors' highlighted competency definitions tend not to parallel the discussion in their respective articles, as shown by the lack of inclusion of multiple elements from the same quadripartite definition.

### **Keywords**

competency theory; competency definition; competency typology; librarianship; academic librarians; higher education librarians

### **Introduction**

Library and Information Science (LIS) competency statements are being used as a means of assessment in libraries. The Special Libraries Association's (SLA) *Competencies for Information Professionals of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* and the Canadian Association of Research Libraries' *Core Competencies for 21<sup>st</sup> Century CARL Librarians* are two examples among the many statements available that define librarian competency. There is also a growing use of the concept not just in assessment but in developing job descriptions and as guidelines when hiring

or evaluating librarians. The continuing proliferation of non-traditional positions in libraries, such as digital services librarians or user services librarians, not easily covered within the traditional position description framework, also speaks to the drive towards competency as an evaluative framework.

Thus, it is important to discover more about competency as expressed in the LIS literature because of this demand for new frameworks, the need to adapt for new roles along with requirements for renewal, promotion and permanence in the changing library context (McNeil; 8Rs Research Team; Whitmell), the proliferation of these competency statements, and the push for increased accountability in libraries (Stoffle et al. 364). Further, since 1968 there has been a continuing perception that our profession “has many competent and thoughtful people...who are deeply disturbed by the disparity between what they believe constitutes professional practice and what most librarians now do” (Bundy and Wasserman 7).

This study was a result of explorations in 2006 for theory around the concept of competency, along with considerations of its positive and negative impacts in LIS and discussion on the appropriateness of it for implementation in the LIS field.

## ***Literature Review***

It was felt an article that investigated definitions formulation was a logical start to lay the ground for research on LIS competency. Because of this lack of research the following literature review encompasses business-related literature regarding competency definitions.

Competencies describe requirements for positions in an attempt to improve human performance (Rothwell and Lindholm 91). In the human resources and business contexts they are used for evaluation and to determine education and training requirements, usually for managers. According to Johnson and Winterton, there is “considerable confusion and debate” around competency (7). This is attributed to the proliferation of approaches (definitions, models, frameworks, standards, practices) to competency.

Behavioral competencies are traditionally associated with a United States (US) approach to competence. White says these are “personality characteristics associated with superior performance and high motivation” (qtd. in Le Deist and Winterton 31). This has changed over time, and now “a broader conception of competence, which emphasizes also job-related functional skills and knowledge, is clearly gaining ground” (Le Deist and Winterton 33). Further, “...much of the recent US literature focuses on job-related (functional) competences...often with associated underpinning behavioral competencies” (Le Deist and Winterton 33).

Functional approaches are more commonly associated with the United Kingdom (UK). These are “grounded in functional analysis of occupations” (Le Deist &

Winterton referencing Mansfield and Mitchell 34). Thus, the "...emphasis [is] on functional competence and the ability to demonstrate performance to the standards required of employment in a work context" (Knasel and Meed qtd. in Le Deist and Winterton 34). The definition is expanded in many instances to include a more behavioral dimension, but "the main approach...remains one of functional competence" (Le Deist and Winterton 35).

Le Deist and Winterton posit a multi-dimensional or holistic approach which introduces a distinction between personal competences and job-related ones and ultimately creates four dimensions of competence:

The competences required of an occupation include both conceptual (cognitive, *knowledge* and understanding) and operational (functional, psycho-motor and applied *skill*) competences. The competences more associated with individual effectiveness are also both conceptual (*meta-competence*, including learning to learn) and operational (social competence, including *behaviours* and attitudes)... Meta-competence... is concerned with facilitating the acquisition of the other substantive competences... [and as such] is an over-arching input [*author's italics*] (39).

Nagata's comments support the notion of a move to a more holistic understanding of competency. He believes that it "is a matter of first priority [that] the threshold competencies, knowledge and skills, have received most attention so far" (75) and investigates differentiating competencies in his paper. Differentiating competencies are "factors that distinguish superior from average performers" (Nagata 75) such as attitudes, motives and traits (76). Al Ansari and al Khader mention "threshold competencies – those considered necessary...to possess to be hired for a given situation – and the leverage competencies that help one excel in a given job," (245) hinting again at a more holistic approach.

For the purposes of the present article, competency is identified as the reframing of work by deconstructing positions or jobs and rephrasing their content as components or elements, typically as knowledge (cognitive), skills (functional) and attitudes (behavioral) with an eye to those that determine success. Success is dependent on the ability to learn how to learn: the "meta-competence" previously mentioned. This quadripartite definition is used in this article as a framework of enquiry for exploring librarian competency in the LIS literature.

## **Purpose**

The LIS literature on academic librarian competency was investigated to understand how competency was approached and constructed. This paper also responds to LeDeist and Winterton's call to "...extend the depth of analysis" (41) and tests the domains of Koufogiannakis, Slater and Crumley to find out how

easy they are to use and what they might expose regarding the LIS journal literature on academic librarian competency.

Published peer-reviewed articles were chosen for this study because of the existence of critical discussions dealing with theory and competency in the business journal literature, and an initial assumption that a parallel discussion existed in the LIS literature. Articles were also chosen because the investigator was interested in what authors were thinking regarding competency and wished to investigate those reflections on theory, versus applications of competency such as those that may be found in ads placed for professional LIS positions.

Using a qualitative, iterative approach to textual analysis, the following questions were investigated: What are the areas of conversation in competency? Who is writing on the topic? How do they describe and use competency? Are there trends in how the concept is used, and is there such a thing as a standard definition? Are they critically evaluating and reflexively approaching the concept?

## ***Methodology***

This analysis is based on two data sets developed using the methodology explained below. The initial data set consisted of articles published from 2001 to 2005. This data set, while relevant, was considered dated, and thus a set of articles from 2011 was collected for the sole purpose of confirming whether the results of the initial investigation were still valid.

Five indexes<sup>1</sup> were used to identify articles for this paper. Three were selected because they are the LIS indexes most commonly used in the field. CINAHL and ERIC were included for congruency with the Crumley and Koufogiannakis study that reviewed the LIS literature and noted where library information is being indexed. The search string *competenc\** and *librar\** and (*universit\** or *colleg\** or *academic*) was used to retrieve the most comprehensive set of English language search results. Peer-reviewed articles were identified using Ulrich's web-based Periodicals Directory and by using publisher or journal websites.

Articles based on citations from the years 2001–2005 were collected in 2006 and represented the most current discussion of competency at the time of retrieval. Articles published in 2011, reflecting the most complete and current year available, were used to test the findings of the earlier results set.<sup>2</sup> The 2011 articles represented 42% of the size of the 2001–2005 set, which should allow some confidence in assessing the relevance of the results of the original data set in the year 2011.

The research process involved repeated reading and reflection. This process identified some irrelevant articles, reducing the original data set to 66 articles for 2001–2005 (2001: 11; 2002: 14; 2003: 18; 2004: 10; 2005:13) and 28 articles for 2011.

When coding for the presence of elements of the definition, abstracts, figures and tables, etc. were included along with the main text. These parts were included because they were considered a reflection of the LIS authors' thinking and a part of their construction or conceptualization of their resulting definition(s). To quote Busch et al., "[m]ental models are groups or networks of interrelated concepts that are thought to reflect conscious or subconscious perceptions of reality."

Using a spreadsheet, coded attributes were linked to each article's year of publication, author names and journal title. Authors' corporate affiliations and their geographic location were recorded. Graduate student authors and faculty at LIS schools were combined as there were few graduate students writing on competency — most co-authoring with faculty.

Geographic affiliations were included to test for any differences in their approaches to and definitions of competency. This was based on the comments of LeDeist and Winterton regarding geographic distinctions between definitions of competency. US-based versus non-US-based authors were recorded. These results are combined with the rest of the data to identify trends in competency definitions based on author location.

The author's initial exploration of the LIS literature on competency (Soutter) created a need to frame the contexts within which discussion occurred, to define any foci. In their 2002 article, Crumley and Koufogiannakis (61-70) developed a framework and process to describe the activity of LIS research (specifically Evidence-Based Librarianship or EBL). This was expressed as six domains, subjects or topic areas (63). The award-winning article published by Koufogiannakis, Slater and Crumley in 2004<sup>3</sup> tested these subjects against the LIS research literature published in 2001 resulting in an updated list of domains with definitions added, as seen in Table 1 below. These domains were added to the coding done by this author to discover what they might tell us about competency for this study.

Table 1: Librarianship domains

Librarianship Domains	Definition
Collections	Building a high-quality collection of print and electronic materials that is useful, cost-effective and meets the users' needs.
Education - LIS Education [subset]	Incorporating teaching methods and strategies to educate users about library resources and how to improve research skills. - Specifically pertaining to the professional education of librarians
Information Access & Retrieval	Creating better systems and methods for information retrieval and access.

Management	Managing people and resources within an organization. This includes marketing and promotion as well as human resources.
Professional Issues	Exploring issues that affect librarianship as a profession.
Reference/Enquiries	Providing service and information access that meets the needs of library users.

This domain framework was used to identify any trends in where conversations about competency were taking place. The research question of each article was defined and then assigned along with its corresponding article to a domain (Koufogiannakis, Slater and Crumley 230). For this investigation the descriptions for some domains were not granular enough. The Education–LIS Education sub-domain definition was extended to include any education associated with a library school or continuing professional development. If the article was on training, especially library in-house training, or oriented towards specific work-related situations and issues, it was defined as belonging to the Management domain.

Further, the Professional Issues definition was expanded such that if the author(s) acknowledged that the issue affects the larger profession it was included in this domain. If the author(s) created their own boundaries restricting the application of their findings, for example geographic limits, or didn't acknowledge impacts on the larger profession, their articles were assigned to the Management domain.

Competency, for the purposes of this research study, was defined as reframing work by deconstructing positions or jobs and rephrasing their content as components or elements, typically as knowledge (cognitive), skills (functional) and attitudes (behavioral), with an eye to those that determine success. This success was dependent on the ability to learn how to learn: “meta-competence”. Based on this definition, all articles were initially coded for the presence or absence of the words: knowledge, skills and attitudes, along with the term meta-competence. New words emerged with repeated reading and reflection, specifically synonyms of the initial four words: for example, education and training as synonyms for knowledge.

The esoteric definition for the fourth dimension of meta-competence was less straightforward to code for than the others:

Meta-competence, including learning to learn...is concerned with facilitating the acquisition of the other substantive competences [cognitive, functional, social, or if you prefer, knowledge, skills and attitudes] [and]...is presented as an over-arching input that facilitates the acquisition of output competences (Le Deist and Winterton 39-40).

Based on this description, meta-competence may be interpreted as not only a recognition of the need to learn and the ability to learn but also the thinking about learning and the actual learning and successful or even unsuccessful application of that learning in the cognitive, functional and social dimensions.

A few authors used the phrase “learning to learn” outright, and others discussed “lifelong learning”, with a few others having less concise wording. This investigator interpreted lifelong learning as not just a type of learning but incorporating an ability to learn in its description and implying a degree of self-reflection and thinking about learning and the application of learning. Thus the presence of “learning to learn” and “lifelong learning” (the latter as a specific construct of a type of learning that incorporates learning to learn, in the investigator’s opinion) were coded as meta-competence.

As reading and reflection continued and trends and attributes emerged, these were coded, including the approach used by authors for defining competency and the type of definition and its topic. If there was a separately located or highlighted definition (described in detail in the next section below), this definition was independently coded using the same words and terms noted above.

## ***Results and Discussion***

### **Common Definition**

The quadripartite definition is used as a template to tease out similarities and differences in LIS authors’ competency discussions and definitions at the article level. A few authors made a point of stating that they are only discussing “traits” (one article), skills (five articles), skills and competencies (one article), competencies as being the same as skills (two articles), knowledge and skills only (one article) or that they are excluding attitudes (one article) or behavior (one article). The only element of the quadripartite definition that is missing in half of these articles is meta-competence. This finding is congruent with the rest of the articles, and so these articles are included in the analysis below (Table 2).

Sixty-four of the 66 articles in the 2001–2005 set contain the functional element, and 59 of the 64 contain the behavioral element. For 2011, 27 of the 28 articles contain the functional element definition and all 28 contain the behavioral element.

All 66 articles from the original data set and all 28 articles from 2011 reference the cognitive element (see Table 2). But only about one-third of the articles from 2001–2005 mention meta-competence while less than one-fifth mention it in 2011. No meaningful geographic differentiation between US and non-US articles was detected. Thus, the results show the more commonly used expression of competency is one containing cognitive, functional and behavioral elements, irrespective of the geographic location of authors. A chi-square test was

performed (see Table 2) which confirmed that there is no significant difference between the 2001–2005 and 2011 data with respect to the presence of elements of the quadripartite definition.

Table 2: Quadripartite elements in competency discussion: article level definitions

Data Set	Total # Articles	Cognitive	Functional	Behavioral	Meta-Competence
2001–2005	66	66	64	59	23
2011	28	27	28	26	5

$\chi^2 = 1.8872$ ,  $df = 3$ , difference is significant at the 5 per cent level; critical value = 7.81.

Only 22 (33%) of the 2001–2005 articles mention all four elements. Thirty-six articles mention the first three elements and exclude meta-competence. For the 2011 data, only four articles (14%) mention all four elements within each article. Twenty-five articles (89%) mention the first three elements together.

To repeat, based on the above evidence the authors' residency in specific geographic locations no longer has the same impact it once did over definition formulation. The most commonly used definition is one with cognitive, functional and behavioral elements which by definition incorporates both UK and US approaches to competence. Based on the LeDeist and Winterton definition of competency previously described, both occupation-related competencies such as knowledge and skills (at the cognitive and operational level) are present in most discussions, but only one of the personal competencies is present, namely the behavioral competencies at the operational level. Meta-competence representing the conceptual aspect of personal competencies is commonly absent.

### Typographically Highlighted Definitions within Articles

Coding occurred at both the "article level" (see the common definition data) and at a level the investigator termed a "typographically highlighted" or "physically separate" definition (when available). The typographically highlighted definition was one of the unexpected results of this investigation. A number of authors include elements of the quadripartite definition in their discussions at the article level (including definitions mentioned within the body of the text), but when they provide a physically separate or typographically highlighted definition (definitions highlighted by being located in tables, lists, figures and appendices for example) there are differences in content. So, while they may discuss the need for cognitive (education, training), functional (skills and expertise), and behavioral (attitude and ability) elements in a cataloguer or reference librarian in the body of the article (article-level), when a definition is provided in a table or appendix, it may not list any of the competency definition elements, except perhaps skills (See Charts 1a and 1b).

This approach raises questions including but not limited to the utility of such definitions, reflections on distinctions between theory and implementation (and between coding for theory versus using a different methodology to examine the tools resulting from theory) and makes one wonder if excluded elements are connected to an inability to effectively use and measure those elements as part of an evaluative mechanism.

Chart 1a. Quadripartite elements in articles and physically separate definitions, 2001-2005

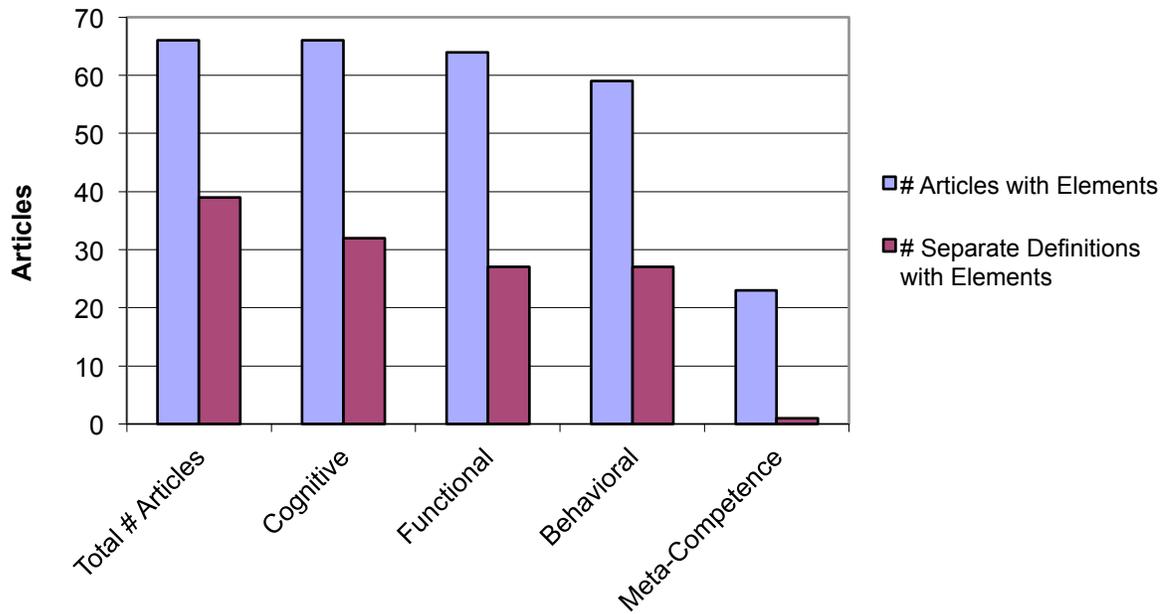
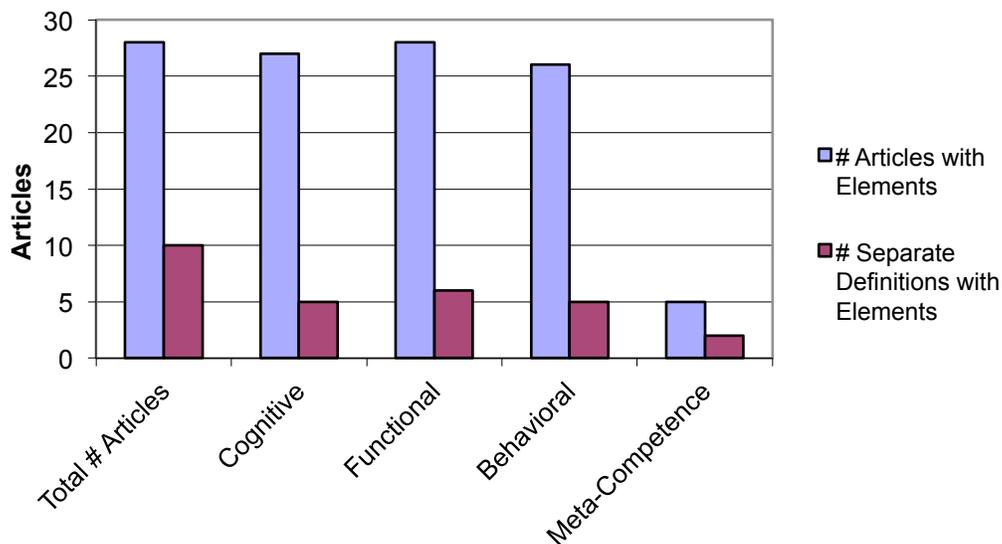


Chart 1b. Quadripartite elements in articles and physically separate definitions, 2011



In the 2001–2005 set, 39 of the 66 articles (59%) have a separate definition. As previously noted, 22 of the 66 articles mention all four elements of the quadripartite definition in their discussion. In comparison, of the 39 articles with separate definitions only a single separated, highlighted definition contains all four elements. Fifty-eight of the 66 articles mention the first three elements (some of these go on to include the fourth), but only 20 (51%) of the typographically highlighted definitions include all three terms. Of the 2011 set, only ten articles (36%) have a typographically highlighted definition, and only one of these contains all four elements, with two articles containing the first three elements.

## **Domains**

Discussions of academic librarian competency in the LIS journal literature cover four of the six domains for the original data set but only three of the six for 2011 (see Table 3), with a majority in both instances in the Management domain. The LIS Education sub-domain has the second largest number of articles, with the Professional Issues domain third in both sets. The 2011 results parallel the pattern of the original data set regarding which domains LIS authors prefer to publish within, be it a conscious decision or not on their part.

Table 3: Total number of articles by domain and year of publication

Domains	2001-2005 Total Articles	2011 Articles
Collections	1	0
Education	1	0
Education - LIS Education	19	10
Management	35	17
Professional Issues	10	1
Information Access & Retrieval	0	0
Reference/Enquiries	0	0

In 2001–2005 a majority of the articles in the Management domain were written by authors affiliated with academic libraries. This changed in the 2011 data which shows an almost equal breakdown of articles between the three categories of corporate body affiliations: academic libraries, library schools, and other types of libraries or university departments, etc.

Chart 2a. Domains 2001-2005

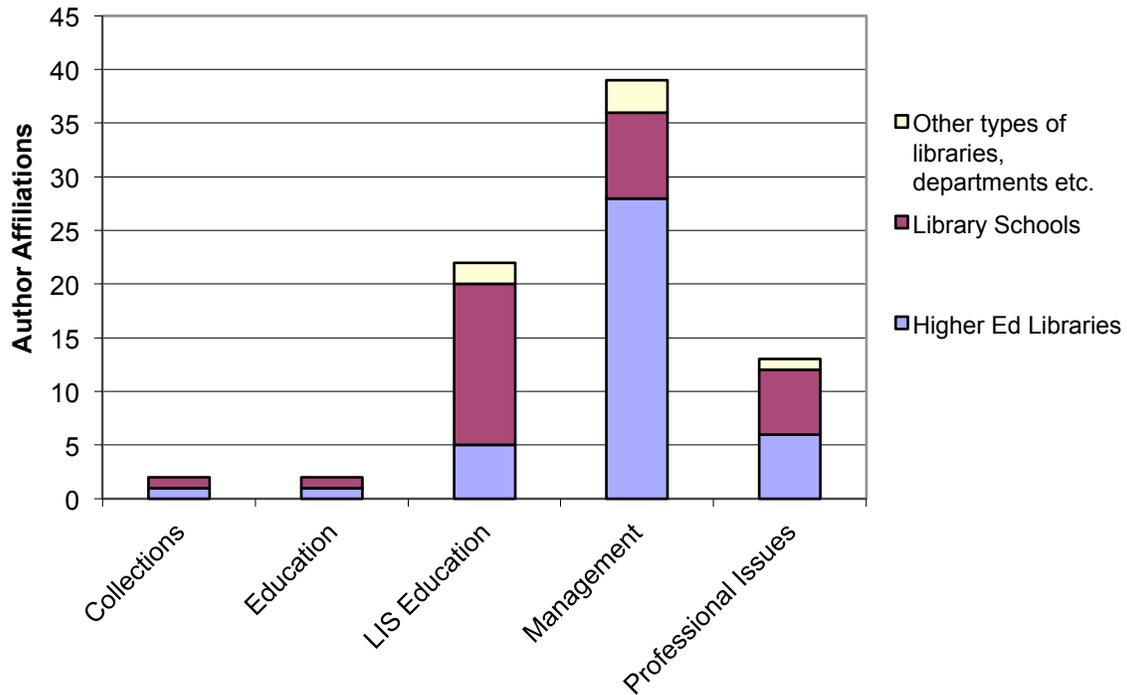
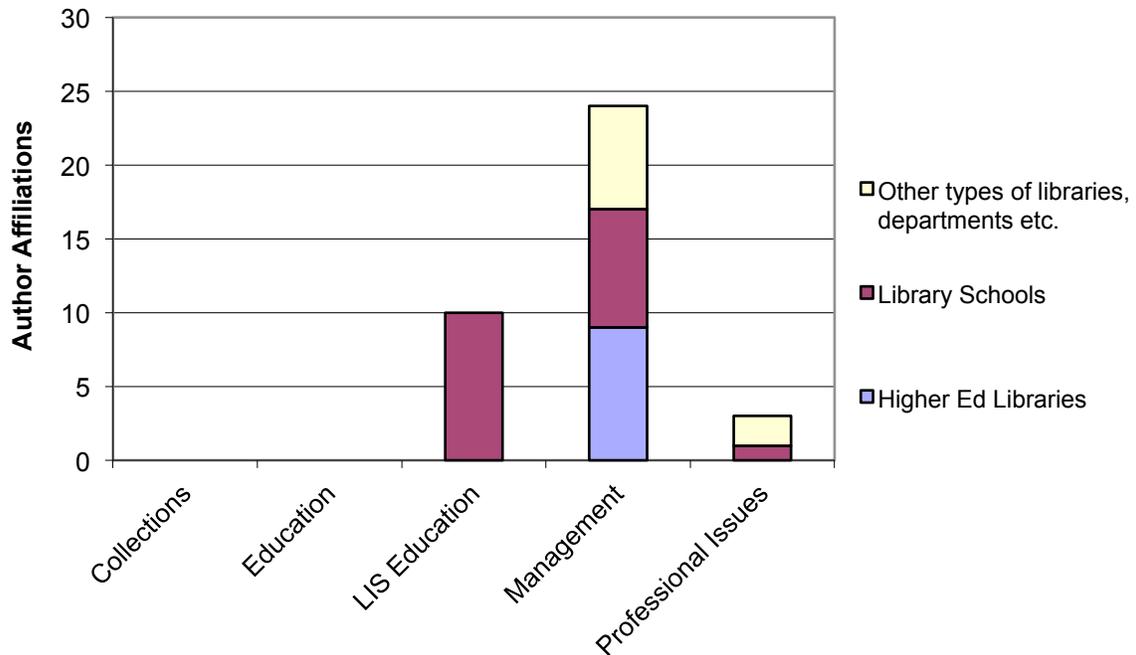


Chart 2b. Domains 2011



In the 2001–2005 and in the 2011 LIS literature, the majority of authors writing on LIS Education are associated with library schools, and most of these authors are not based in the US. It should be noted that there are 38 articles (57%)

associated with US-based authors in the 2001–2005 data set and ten (36%) in the 2011 data set. In the earlier data set, 15 of 19 LIS-Education domain articles were written by authors associated with library schools. Of the 19, only seven have US-based authors, two associated with library schools and five with academic libraries. In 2011, of the ten LIS-Education articles, all were from authors associated with library schools. Only three of these have US-based authors. The implication is that a majority of articles written on LIS Education are not being written by US-based authors.

### ***Definition Typology***

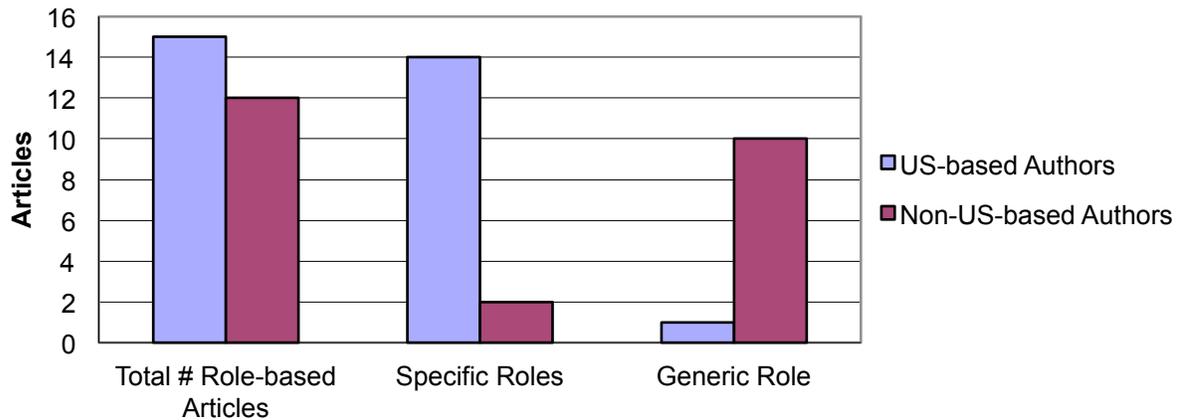
Another unexpected result of this investigation was the emergence of a typology of definitions. For purposes of discussion, this typology consists of “generic” versus “specific” definitions and within the specific definitions two further sub-types: role-based and aspect-based definitions. In two instances (2001–2005 data) for articles containing specific definitions, it is uncertain which approach (role or aspect) took precedence, making it clear this typology is not inflexible. These two articles were identified as “both” in the coding, with an additional article having “neither” approach. Also, it should be noted that the presence of generic versus specific definitions are not mutually exclusive within articles. Findings are described below and used in conjunction with other attributes to identify more potential trends in competency and competency definitions in the LIS literature.

### ***Specific Definitions: Role versus Aspect***

Twenty-seven (41%) of the 66 articles in the original 2001–2005 data set incorporate a role-based approach when defining academic librarian competency. Of these, 15 (55.5%) are in the Management domain, while six (9%) are in the LIS Education domain and four (6%) are in Professional Issues. This breakdown roughly parallels the results from cataloguing all articles into domains (see Table 3).

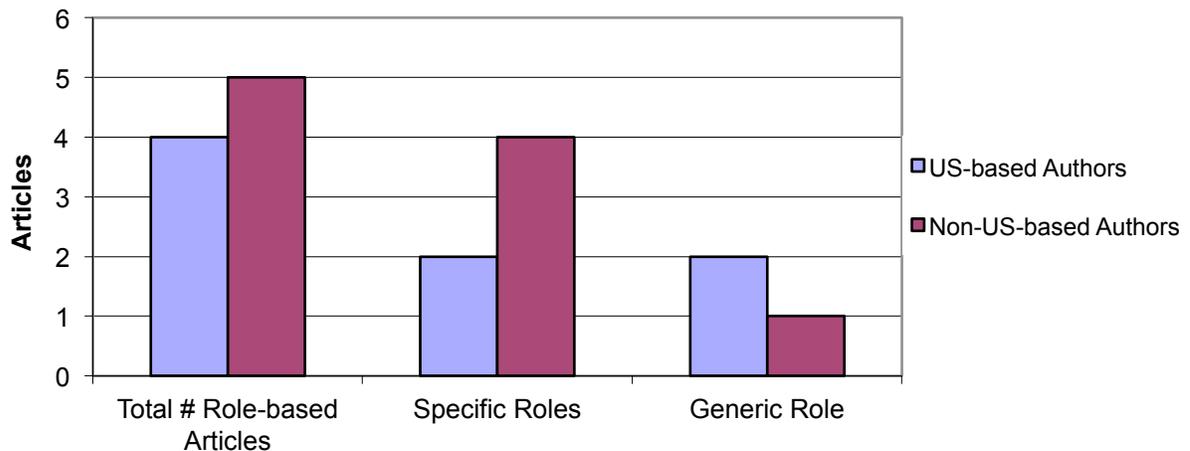
Roles covered include reference librarians, health librarians, acquisitions librarians, cataloguers, library staff, reference department heads, technical services administrators and the non-specific role of LIS professional. Most of the role-based articles are US-based (see Chart 3a). Ten out of twelve of the non-US, role-based articles discuss the non-specific role of LIS professional.

Chart 3a. Trends in role-based articles for 2001-2005



Nine (32%) of the 28 articles from 2011 incorporate a role-based approach when defining academic librarian competency (see Chart 3b). Of these, six (66%) are in the Management domain and three in LIS Education, with none in Professional Issues. Only three articles (33%) deal with generic roles, those of LIS professionals (US, Thailand) and one with LIS staff generally (US). More data would need to be collected to confirm findings with respect to the non-specific role of LIS professional. Roles covered in 2011 include rural librarians, information and knowledge management professionals, and legal information professionals.

Chart 3b. Trends in role-based articles, 2011



As for the 36 aspect-based articles (2001–2005), 18 (50%) fall into the Management domain, 13 (36%) into LIS Education and five (13.8%) into Professional Issues — again roughly paralleling the overall breakdown of articles into domains (see Table 3). These authors discuss aspects or parts of roles, including competence in IT or ICT, data services, instruction or information literacy, and leadership/management, among others.

In 2011, 19 aspect-based articles (67%) are identified. Eleven (58%) are in the Management domain, seven in LIS Education (37%) and one in Professional Issues. These authors discuss aspects such as social competence, cultural competence, and electronic records management, among others.

### **Generic**

The generic definition is more theoretical, containing some mix of the quadripartite elements. Generic definitions are author definitions and/or proposed frameworks for competency, quotes of others' work that authors accept and use as a foundation to their own work, and/or definitions constructed through literature reviews, among others. As was mentioned, these may appear in articles along with specific definitions, as these types are not mutually exclusive.

For 2001–2005, 26 of the 66 research articles contain generic definitions. Though there are more Management domain articles with generic definitions being written than for any other domains (see Table 4), the number of generic definitions per domain is similar to the total article breakdown per domain in Table 3.

Table 4: Generic definitions in domains

Domain	Total # Articles for years 2001–2005	Total # Articles with Generic for years 2001–2005	Total # Articles 2011	Total # Generic 2011
Collections	1	0	0	0
Education	1	0	0	0
Education - LIS Education	19	10	10	3
Management	35	14	17	9
Professional Issues	10	2	1	0

Fifteen of the 26 articles in the initial data set also contain role-based approaches to definitions, and ten reflect aspect-based approaches, with one article reflecting both. This suggests that role-based articles with generic definitions are more common. Twelve (43%) of the 28 articles in 2011 have generic definitions, with six being aspect-based and six role-based. More research needs to be done to clarify whether role-based articles with generic definitions are more common.

Generic definitions were coded for the presence of quadripartite definition terms. Only three articles have generic definitions that contain all quadripartite elements. Half of the 26 articles with generic definitions contain three of the elements: cognitive, functional and behavioral. Of these, eight are in the Management domain. Six of those eight are role-based articles. The next closest domain in quantity of articles is the LIS Education domain with five: three role-based articles and two aspect-based.

Of potential interest are the 18 articles (69%) with generic definitions which also contain a physically separate definition. When these articles were coded for the presence of quadripartite elements and also typed by aspect or role-based approaches, no meaningful results were found.

## **Conclusions**

There is a commonly used definition of competency based on discussions found in the LIS peer-reviewed journal literature. Almost 88% of the 2001–2005 articles incorporate the first three elements, the cognitive, functional and behavioral, in their discussions. In 2011, 89% of the articles have those same first three elements, thus leading us to a conclusion regarding a common definition: it exists and consists of the first three elements. The chi-square test showed no significant differences between the data sets, thus the 2011 data confirms the original data describing a holistic definition. The first three elements represent both the occupation-related competencies (conceptual and operational) as described by LeDeist and Winterton (39) but only one of the personal competencies elements: the (operational) behavioral element.

It seems hasty to state there is a standard definition for LIS when one considers physically separate definitions, though. Authors who highlight competency definitions through physical separation do not carry all elements found in their discussions through to these highlighted definitions. As the reader may recall, when coding physically separate or typographically highlighted definitions, only half of the original data set that have separate definitions contain the first three elements, as opposed to 20% of the separate definitions in 2011. There is an extra caution worth noting here. One should not extract these highlighted definitions from their articles for one's own use(s) and assume they comprehensively reflect the authors' thoughts on competency definition.

This raises a number of questions, some which have already been mentioned. Why include elements in the discussion (the article) but not include them in any existing, typographically highlighted or physically separate definition? Also, what should a definition of competency consist of? Are the three elements enough for LIS purposes? How necessary is meta-competence? As such, these findings demand a careful and considered approach to competency when reading this LIS literature and when grappling with various issues involving definitions, such as recruitment, evaluation, and the education of new librarians, among others.

This investigator would argue that any competency definition that excludes meta-competence is incomplete. Including meta-competence allows for flexibility in our professional lives. When the authors investigated in this study incorporate this dimension in their articles, their described roles and aspects of roles exist in infinite worlds, while those that don't mention it seem to exist within a more restricted realm with pre-defined limits for operating as a professional. For

example, authors of one article present and investigate cataloguing competencies (as an aspect or part of the larger role of an LIS professional) as a limited set of pre-existing or known competencies. The ability to learn or to recognize the need to learn in the face of change is not considered nor is the capacity to adapt to what is previously unknown. As professionals, we do not operate within a static environment. We are constantly adapting, learning and learning how to learn in order to be the best we can be in response to the stated needs of our users and our organizations.

One concern arising from this research is that, with the single exception of al Ansari and al Khader (245), none of the articles retrieved dealt with the implications of developing and using competency definitions in an academic context. Al Ansari and al Khader mention criticisms regarding competency modeling, recommend wise use of their model and the need for its revision as the nature of librarianship changes. The rest of the authors in both data sets simply accept or assume such formulations of competency are neutral, or are uncritical. There is little consideration in this journal literature of the implications of competency definitions as is found in the business literature, as a method of identity control (Alvesson and Willmott), as a carrier of organizational ideology (Finch-Lees, Mabey and Liefoghe) or of the conceptual limitations of frameworks of competence (Damian) with respect to higher education settings. If, “in the broadest sense, a reflective practitioner is any individual who engages in a systemic [of or pertaining to a system] inquiry about his/her own practice and pays deliberate attention to his/her own professional experiences” (Labaree and Sciemca 46-47) then there is a disturbing lack of reflexivity or reflective practice regarding theory and/or the utility of competency in these articles.

Management is the most common domain in which the authors consider and discuss competency. The majority of the articles are concerned with training. This is where authors reflect on the needs of working professionals. Is this symptomatic of a lack in the educational system or reflective of a need at the point of transition from theory into practice in the working world? Or is this simply a reflection of two different arenas: of education versus workplace-based training? Or perhaps it is reflective of the changes in the LIS profession and the need to identify relevant competencies to handle these changes. Also of note, there is the question of why there are more non-US-based than US-based authors working in the LIS Education sub-domain in these data sets.

An outcome of this research study is the creation of a typology to assist in critically evaluating LIS standards, guidelines, etc. of competency. This typology consists of generic definitions that reflect a more theoretical approach to competency versus specific definitions: the latter reflecting a specific application or attribution of competencies to a role or to an aspect of a role.

There are more aspect-based articles than role-based articles, and it isn't clear why the different authors chose their approach to competency discussion and

definition. Those defining an aspect of a role cover topics such as leadership or IT competencies, among others. Also of interest, more role-based articles than aspect-based articles in each data set contain generic definitions. Overall, the generic definitions tend to include only the first three quadripartite elements, which parallels the findings regarding the commonly held definition.

Based on these research results, we are left with a number of questions. Why do typographically highlighted definitions not reflect the discussion found in their respective articles? What is the reason there are more articles related to training than anything else? Why are the majority of LIS Education articles in each data set written by non-US authors? Where are the evaluation frameworks for competency? Also of interest would be expanding the research into association frameworks and guidelines and exploring their relationship to the findings of this paper or even into an investigation of tools such as the typographically highlighted definitions (implied in the highlighting by authors), job descriptions and job ads.

Investigating the lack of theory in the LIS journal literature regarding the topic of academic librarian competency is also a worthy topic, as is further research on competencies, generally speaking, in all types or formats of the LIS literature. Through further research and awareness, hopefully reflexivity in our consideration and use of academic librarian competency will become second nature.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> CINAHL, ERIC, LIBLIT, LISA, and LISTA are the five indexes.

<sup>2</sup> The list of papers used for this study is available on request.

<sup>3</sup> Koufogiannakis, Denise, Linda Slater and Ellen Crumley. "A Content Analysis of Librarianship Research." *Journal of Information Science* 30 (June 2004): 227-39 received the 2005 Robert H. Blackburn Distinguished Paper Award given by the Canadian Association for College and University Libraries, a division of the Canadian Library Association.

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