School of Information and Library Science – From Dewey to Twitter
Celebrating 80 years of a winning tradition of building an innovative future

Since its beginning 80 years ago, the School of Information and Library Science (SILS) has focused on educating those who organize, research, locate, preserve and share information in its many forms for its many audiences with an emphasis on the user’s experience. The aim has been, and still is, to produce leaders who will shape the future of information in all contexts, and to investigate and develop information theories and practices that lead to higher levels of prosperity, equity and understanding. What was especially relevant and important in the 20th century was demonstrated in this world-renowned School. In the 21st century, just as librarians transitioned from catalogs to online databases and servers, SILS has transitioned from a program that educated only librarians to one that leads the way in the digital domain. While the School will always educate leaders who move into the world’s libraries, archives and cultural institutions; today SILS also educates leaders in corporate, government and business settings who manage and preserve information in all its forms. Graduates move into new fields such as social media strategy, health informatics, cyber and Internet security, Web development, database design and more.

SILS prides itself on providing high quality educational and research opportunities in a dynamic, interdisciplinary learning environment. Ranked number one in the nation by U.S. News & World Report, SILS consistently takes a leadership role in today’s ever-changing information and library science landscape. An Information School rooted in the values of library science: universal access, collaboration, intellectual freedom, learning, organization and stewardship, SILS attracts the brightest and the best students.

Information is the focus and passion of the award-winning faculty of the school who are well-known for not only their commitment to research, teaching and service, but also for their interaction with students. Faculty come from a wide variety of backgrounds ranging from information retrieval, digital libraries, bioinformatics and human-computer interaction, to children’s and museum services, and archives management. They are internationally recognized leaders in their fields who are committed to sustaining excellence in information and library science research and practice.

On September 17, 1931, the first class of 37 students and five faculty was held in the home of the School at that time, the beautiful Wilson Library. As the school celebrates its 80th anniversary, it continues with the goal set by Dr. Louis Round Wilson, the school’s founder, to tap “the vast reservoir of human knowledge.”

Although a student could not receive a degree in library science until almost three decades later, library education really began at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as early as 1904, when Dr. Wilson began offering summer school classes. In 1929, just as the new library building was finished on the UNC campus, Wilson wrote an article in the Library in Modern Education that made evident a need for a library school.

The School of Library Science opened at Chapel Hill in the fall of 1931, with a $100,000 grant from the Carnegie Corporation that enabled the school to operate for three years and make permanent its conditional accreditation from the American Library Association. When, in 1987, it became apparent that the study of information use and management was of central importance to society, the faculty of the School of Library Science voted to change the program and the name of the school to include Information Science. Since its beginning 80 years ago, the school has sent out more than 4,700 educated information specialists and librarians who are employed throughout the nation and the world.

From the Dewey Decimal System and card catalogs; to current technologies such as smart phones, Facebook and Twitter; SILS has been at the forefront— predicting and managing through the changing technologies that enable a stellar education for its students. Academic excellence has been a hallmark of the School since its inception— resulting in alumni who excel in their careers as information professionals and librarians around the world, serving as ambassadors to SILS and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Because of this tradition of strong leadership and innovation set by the School’s founder and deans, as well as the great dedication shown by its faculty and staff over the years, the school stands on a solid foundation that is rooted in a rich past and aimed toward a bright future. Today it celebrates 80 years of a winning tradition to build an innovative future.

For more information about SILS, visit: sils.unc.edu