School Library Education in Canada: Leading for the Future
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School Library Communities: Background

The 2024 IFLA Information Futures Summit (Lowry, 2024) focused on the theme of partnerships: partnering with each other; partnering with communities; and partnering with external stakeholders. Participants in the "partnering with each other" session noted the importance of school libraries as 'feeders' for other library types, 'creating lifelong learners' – the library users of the future. School libraries, as part of the 'lifecycle' of library services, work with children as they develop and build their awareness of the value of library resources and of non-commercial public spaces.

Almost every school in Canada has a library facility but many school libraries are poorly resourced and staffed. School libraries began to develop rapidly during the educational reforms of the 1960s, but throughout the 1990s funding for school libraries was particularly hard hit, and many district library consultant positions disappeared. Budget cuts to public education has continued to the present. Although there are national standards for the size of collections, for staff and physical facilities, and for the role of the teacher-librarian in curriculum development, many school libraries do not meet those standards. The role of the school library often depends on the willingness of the individual school board and principal to provide space, personnel, funding and materials.

The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) estimates that there are about 2.8 million libraries worldwide and that school libraries make up 2.2 million of the total (https://librarymap.ifla.org/). According to data gathered by the National Core Library Statistics Program, as of 2008, Canada had about 22,000 libraries, including 1000 public libraries (with about 4000 service points), 200 academic libraries, 600 government and private special libraries, and 16,000 school libraries. The large number of school libraries within the world's library community suggests that the potential market for school library education is large, but the market has been diminishing since the 1990s. The budget cuts across both the K-12 and university sectors that has continued until today has meant fewer K-12 teacher-librarian positions and fewer teachers willing to invest in school library education.

Changes in School Libraries and School Library Education

My own career progression reflects that history of change. I entered the K-12 sector as a classroom teacher in the 1960s and completed my initial school library education in 1984, with a Diploma in School Libraries and a Master of Library Science. I had barely completed my school library education before I was elected to the Executive Council of the Canadian School Library Association (CSLA). I served as President 1987-1988. I was born just before the Boomers, and my story illustrates how I had every opportunity possible to serve and to lead in my chosen field. CSLA was adamant that all elected

positions be filled via a competitive process. The Elections Committee called me, asking me to be a second candidate for the position of Vice-President in order to fulfill that mandate. When I protested that I was too junior to run for the position, I was assured that I was not well-known enough to win. However, just before nominations closed, a third candidate threw his hat in the ring. That split the vote, and I ("the newbie") was catapulted into national school library leadership!

Serving at the national level gave me a broad perspective on the school library community and school library education situation across the country at the time (Oberg, 1989). School library education at the diploma and master's level was offered by ten universities across Canada, mostly through education faculties, in most cases staffed with two tenure-track professors active in teaching and research. In Ontario, school librarianship was taught within the Additional Qualifications system, leading to a Specialist Qualification.

Today school library education in Canada is available only in three provinces: through the University of British Columbia (Certificate and Diploma), through the University of Alberta (MEd; MLIS), and through Ontario's ten accredited providers of the Additional Qualification credential. Most of the students completing Part One of Ontario's Additional Qualifications School Librarianship program do not go on to complete Parts Two and Three which would qualify them for the Specialist Qualification.

Table 1

Status of School Library Education, Then and Now, in Canada		
Providers, Then (1980s)	Providers, Now (2020s)	Programs Being Offered Now (2024)
U Victoria		
U British Columbia	Yes	U/G Certificate (15 cr); Diploma (30 cr)
U Alberta	Yes	Graduate MEd (30 cr); MLIS (39 cr)
U Calgary		
U Saskatchewan		
U Regina		
U Manitoba		
Dalhousie U		
U Prince Edward Is.		
Memorial U		
Ontario AQ (10)	Yes	U/G Additional Qualifications (Specialist)

In 1986, I was seconded to the University of Alberta. I found three pathways in school library education; an 8-course post-baccalaureate Diploma (24 credits); a 12-course MEd (36 credits); and a 15-course Learning Resources specialization MLS (45 credits) for students who had already completed a Diploma in School Librarianship. My 8-month secondment turned into a 25-year career as a faculty member. During the next fifteen years, the Diploma was disbanded, and the Master of Education program was moved online. In the late 1990s, there were over 90 students enrolled in the Teacher-Librarianship by Distance Learning (TL-DL). Online was clearly the way to go!

In 2008, when I wrote an overview of library education in Canada for the Bulletin of the Education and Training Section of IFLA, I confidently stated:

> The future of library education looks positive in Canada. Demand is strong for the education programs available for professional librarians, teacher-librarians and library technicians, and the quality of applicants remains high. Challenges remain. Library education programs need to increase the diversity of their applicants through targeted marketing and through outreach to communities whose members are under-represented in the library workforce. Library education programs also need to continually review and revise curricula to respond to the needs of library clientele in a fast-paced ever-changing information world. (Oberg, 2008, p. 15)

University of Alberta School Library Education: Graduate Level Only

The development of the online program in school librarianship at University of Alberta led to a rapid increase in student numbers. A small niche program grew to 80+ students, the largest of the post-baccalaureate and graduate programs in the Department. Delivering two very different programs in school librarianship resulted in teaching and advising roles that were complicated and demanding. The lack of consistency in the individualized Diploma program was also a concern, especially because students in the Diploma could not take the two graduate-level courses that we deemed essential for school leadership. The MEd program, with three mandated courses in research methods, curriculum theory, and a culminating paper or thesis, provided the knowledge and skills that teacher-librarians as school leaders required. In addition, the MEd program could be offered in a cohort model which allowed group advising by the faculty members and adjunct instructors.

The chapter I wrote about the development of the online program (Oberg, 2011) identified three problems and proposed possible solutions for those problems. Fifteen years ago, the three most pressing challenges revolved around the size of the program, the impact of new and emerging technologies, and the need to maintain the flexibility of the program in a time of financial uncertainty.

Program Size
The initial rapid growth of the Teacher-Librarianship by Distance Learning program was astounding (and overwhelming). In response, we closed the Diploma program, which was a less-rigorous route to teacher-librarianship, in order to focus on the MEd which addresses all the competencies that teacher-librarians need to attain and that could be delivered in a cohort model (see Branch-Mueller & Rodger, 2011). The cohort approach brought greater coherence and consistency to the program and freed up scarce faculty resources. Each cohort group has the opportunity to form a strong professional learning community where the students themselves take on many of the advising roles once carried solely by a faculty member or other instructor.

Now we are experiencing a shocking reduction in program size, from very high to very low (today, fewer than a dozen MEd students). Alberta has no provincial

government guidelines (let alone mandated formulas) for school library staffing. There is no provincial consultant for school libraries (not even part time). Funding for the K-12 and university sectors is at its lowest level, despite AB being a rich province.

Technologies
When TL-DL began in 2000, most of our students were hesitant about learning online. Today our students are concerned about learning how to use new and emerging technologies and how to integrate them into the teaching and learning in their schools. Instructors use a variety of technologies in their pedagogy, so they are modelling for our students the pedagogical uses of the new and emerging technologies. Instructors also are researching the experiences of their students in order to continue the work of course and program development from a base of evidence (see, for example, deGroot & Branch, 2009).

Flexibility
Because in the Province of Alberta (and in other areas of Canada) positions for teacher-librarians are not mandated, there is a great deal of movement in and out of the profession. Those coming into the profession often do so on very short notice and with the new "teacher-librarian" having little or no education in teacher-librarianship. Thus, most students start their MEd programs in the Winter (January) term. Students also can take their first courses as Open Studies or Special Students and then apply for admission to the program after they have already begun studying. Students can transfer six credits of coursework into their programs, either courses taken before their admission or courses taken from another institution during their program. For the MEd program, only three of the ten courses needed to complete the MEd program are required (a research course, a curriculum studies course, and a final capping paper course).

Challenges for the Future
Teacher-Librarianship by Distance Learning is now almost 25 years old. Over the years, TL-DL at the University of Alberta and the programs at UBC and the Ontario AQ program have met challenges related to program size, technologies, and flexibility. Today, however, the school library community in Canada faces threats to its very existence, including limited access to graduate-level education and extremely limited access to instructors and researchers. Where are the leaders of tomorrow?

Challenge #1 Education for Leadership: Maintain access to school library education that prepares teacher-librarians for leadership. The leadership role of teacher-librarians has been affirmed in two Canadian school library standards, *Achieving Information Literacy* (ATLC/CSLA, 2003) and *Leading Learning* (CLA, 2014), and in the international *School Library Guidelines* (IFLA, 2015). The international standards explain that:

> Because a school library facilitates teaching and learning, the program of a school library needs to be under the direction of professional staff with the same level of education and preparation as classroom teachers. Where a school librarian is expected to take a leadership role in the

school, the school librarian needs to have the same level of education and preparation as other leaders in the school, such as school administrators and learning specialists. (IFLA, 2015, p. 25)

University of Alberta School Library Education: The Laddering Model

Although the online MEd cohort model has increased program rigour and manageability, there is still a need to respond to the needs of teachers newly-appointed to positions in teacher-librarianship without the requisite school library education. There is also a small but growing number of teachers who already have graduate degrees but are interested in some of the courses offered in teacher-librarianship. The answer for us is the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies: School Librarianship. The GCES program of four courses can be completed as a stand-alone graduate certificate which can then be laddered into a Master of Educational Studies (MES) program. Scholarships of $1200, to be awarded to three or more GCES students annually, will be available on a competitive basis to students who have completed six-credits of coursework. Selection will be based on superior academic achievement and on leadership contributions to the educational community. Detailed Information about the GCES: School Librarianship is provided in Appendix A.

Discussion: Challenges, Resources, and Action

It seems that each year has brought new challenges for school library education in Canada. Some of the challenges have come from forces beyond the control of the school library community, such as low funding for schools and universities, lack of school library policy, lack of mandated support for libraries, and lack of mandated education for teacher-librarians.

"Recommendations to support continued growth" in *Leading into the Future* (CLA/ACB, *Leading Learning*, 2014, p. 25) includes useful ideas for addressing problems at the provincial/territorial and local levels. Here is one example:

- "Ensure that teacher-librarian training prepares teacher leaders" for *Leading into the Future.* School library education is inconsistent across the country (specialist qualifications, certificates, diplomas, masters). A graduate certificate will be added to the mix in 2026 (see Appendix A).
- Potential resources – partnerships of library schools + education departments + associations.
  E.g., UBC – online – 15-credit Certificate, 30-credit Diploma – Current faculty: new Assistant Professor (Teaching) coordinating LIBE; BCTF/BCTLA – strong association
  E.g., U of Alberta – online – 30-credit MEd/MES, 39-credit MLIS – Current faculty: Professor/Associate Dean; ATA/no specialist council
  E.g., Ontario – 10 AQ providers – potentials: OLA/OSLA – strong association; Coordination? Researchers?

- Funding and technical support for school library research:
  [Note: tenure-track faculty chose their topics and find funding.]
  - E.g.,OLA: *Information Literacy from High School to University: Report of the Ontario School Library Impact Project* (PI: Mary Cavanagh, University of Ottawa) 2021.
  - E.g., OLA, Queen's University, and People for Education: *Exemplary School Libraries in Ontario*. Klinger, D.A.; Lee, E.A.; Stephenson, G.; Deluca, C.; Luu, K.; 2009

I invite you to reflect on today's challenges that are facing school library education, to identify potential resources, and to begin to take action. The laddering model for the MEd/MES in school library education is an example of what one university is proposing. What challenges might you anticipate for this school library education program? What resources might be available? What actions can be taken *Leading into the Future*?
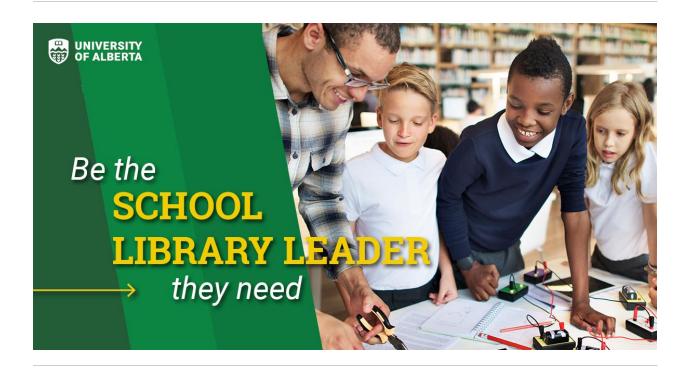
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Appendix A: Detailed Information about the GCES (School Librarianship)

University of Alberta's **Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies: School Librarianship**, will be offered by the Faculty of Education's Professional Learning unit. The initial cohort will start January 2026 with one three-credit course. The program is laddered; the first four courses earn the Graduate Certificate.

*This program can ladder into a Master's degree with an additional six three-credit courses (***Master of Education in Educational Studies (MES) - Ladder Cohort)**. [Click here](#)* for more information.

The intake for this program is for Winter 2026 (January). The application portal will be open from May 1 to October 31, 2025.

The primary focus of the **Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies - School Librarianship** is to explore/investigate current issues and challenges for those working or hoping to work in school libraries/learning commons in K-12 schools. This program will engage in the study of contemporary issues, research, and cutting edge practices

for building quality school library programs, whether it be in Alberta, other Canadian provinces, or in International contexts.

This online program will provide opportunities for interchange and interaction among those working in, or interested in working in, a school library learning commons. We will share ideas and critical reflections and engage in inquiry about the role of the teacher/school librarian. It is designed to accommodate classroom teachers and curriculum leaders.

The program explores questions such as the following:
- What are the current issues and trends in school librarianship?
- How can my work be informed by research and various theories pertaining to school librarianship?
- How do I collaborate with teachers to support inquiry-based learning?
- How do I build a school library collection to meet the needs of my school community
- What are the opportunities and challenges of emerging technologies for the school library learning commons?

Program Goals
The following program goals are specific to School Librarianship:
- Provide practical links between theory and practice in order to develop deep understandings about effective school library programs.
- Demonstrate academic curiosity through critical reading and reflection of personal practice.
- Explore contemporary challenges in school librarianship including collection development, censorship, book challenges, collaborative learning and teaching, supporting students with diverse learning needs, information, digital and media literacy, and generative AI.
- Consider research, theories and practice connected to the integration of technology into schools and school libraries.
- Provide a professional community of practice where those interested in school libraries/learning commons across different locations can connect with others to explore current issues and literature in the field.
- Provide an opportunity to experience graduate-level coursework with the future possibility to 'ladder in' coursework for a Master's degree.

Participants will be encouraged to extend and develop their own literacy practices, and enhance their ability to communicate with students, parents, and colleagues.

Admission Requirements

In order to be considered for the GCES program, you must meet the following requirements:
1. A four-year baccalaureate degree from a recognized university with a 3.0 GPA on the last 60 credits of course work (6.5 on the 9 point scale).

> *Note: For lower GPAs, admission may be granted based on work experience - see [Guidelines for Considering Life Achievement](#).*
2. Two years of teaching experience
3. English Language Proficiency (see [How to Apply](#))

Questions? See our [FAQs page](#), or contact us at [gcesinfo@ualberta.ca](#).

Tuition and Fees

Domestic Tuition

2025-26 tuition for domestic students (Canadian Citizens and Permanent Residents) is $1,529.00 per course (subject to change). Tuition is assessed each semester, by course.

Note: Tuition for GCES domestic students may be listed at a higher rate. However, to maintain tuition rates across all Professional Learning programs, the Faculty of Education will provide a bursary to keep the amount paid at $1,529.00 per course. If applicable, the bursary will be applied after the add/drop deadline and prior to the fee payment deadline. All tuition fees and bursary amounts are subject to change.

Scholarships

Because the GCES is a part-time, course-based program, students do not qualify for many University of Alberta scholarships.
- You may be eligible for the $1200 Oberg Prize in Teacher-Librarianship
- You may be eligible for funding through your local school division and/or the [Alberta Teachers Association](#).
- Métis students may be eligible for funding through the [Belcourt Brosseau Métis Awards](#).

The **Master of Education in Educational Studies (MES) - Ladder Cohort** - is designed for teachers, educational administrators, and educational leaders who want to enhance their knowledge and practice in the areas of leadership and school improvement. Coursework is structured to allow you to build your knowledge in an area of education that is of particular interest to you. The MES provides you with opportunities to develop educational research skills and apply them in your educational context.

The Master of Education in Educational Studies (MES) is a 10-course, course-based degree. For admission into this cohort, students must have completed a [Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies](#) (GCES) or a [Graduate Certificate in School Leadership](#) (GCSL) at the University of Alberta - four courses; 12 credits. They will complete the MES by taking six graduate-level courses (18 credits); four core courses and two electives.

Courses

These are graduate-level, credit courses, requiring between five and ten hours of coursework per week in the fall and winter terms (13 weeks). The summer term course is condensed (three weeks), so the amount of time spent on coursework is increased. This includes time spent on readings, assignments, presentations (group and

individual), and writing papers.

Winter 2026

EDU 595 Contemporary Issues in School Librarianship ★3

This course will explore evolving trends, challenges, and opportunities in K-12 libraries through an examination of current research and practice. Students will critically examine one current issue in school librarianship.

Summer 2026

EDU 595 Collaboration through Inquiry ★3

This course will explore collaboration and inquiry-based learning through an examination of current research and practice. Students will create collaborative, inquiry-based learning activities and unit plans.

Fall 2026

EDU 595 Technology in School Libraries ★3

This course will explore evolving trends, challenges and opportunities of technology through an examination of current research and practice. Students will critically evaluate technologies that can be used to support teaching and learning in the school library.

Winter 2027

EDU 595 School Library Collection Development ★3

This course will explore school library collection development through an examination of current research and practice. Students will critically evaluate a school library collection and plan for new materials to enhance the resources available for the school community.