

VSU MLIS Program and Conditional ALA COA Accreditation

February 2012

The Valdosta State University Master of Library and Information Science Program was informed in late November 2010, that its accreditation status had been changed from regular to conditional. Since 2010, the VSU MLIS Program has submitted several reports to address its accreditation status. It is to submit a final Revised Plan for Removal of Conditional Accreditation Status in March 2012 to demonstrate that the Program employs a periodic, systematic, and cyclical program assessment process based largely on student learning outcomes. It is the understanding of the MLIS Program that if the March 2012 plan is not accepted by ALA COA, accreditation will be withdrawn from the Program.

The VSU MLIS Program remains an accredited program and will remain one if and until accreditation is withdrawn. For current students and potential students, the change in status to “full” to “conditional” has no immediate impact. There are no consequences of this action for graduates of the MLIS Program. Students who graduated from the Program two years prior to the original date of accreditation (June 2007) forward remain graduates of an accredited program. As explained below, current and future students will also remain graduates of an accredited Program until and unless accreditation is withdrawn. Even then, students would have a two year period in which to graduate from an accredited program.

The American Library Association Committee on Accreditation (ALA COA) found that the VSU MLIS strategic planning process is in need of improvement. Quoting from the letter from ALA COA to the Program, dated November 20, 2010, the decision is based upon an ALA COA finding “based on ‘totality of the accomplishments and the environment for learning... rather than from a consideration of the isolated particulars.’” Further, ALA COA states: “...’we find an absence of ‘a systematic planning, assessment, and revision process based on the Program’s Objectives,’ ... program objectives stated in terms of Student Learning Outcomes, ... methods by which you assess those outcomes, and ways in which you integrate those outcomes and their assessment within that planning. ... In particular, none of the five program goals submitted in your special report is stated in terms of student learning outcomes.”

This leaves many questions for VSU MLIS students, graduates, and prospective students. There is a process the VSU MLIS Program is mandated to follow to remedy the status change.

1. The VSU MLIS Program submitted a Plan for Removal of Conditional Accreditation Status in May 2011. This was a plan on how the Program will proceed, rather than a new final report. Program and University officers met with ALA COA in June 2011.
2. As a result of the June meeting, the Program is to submit an additional report in March 2012.

3. If the March 2012 report is accepted, the Program is to prepare for its next comprehensive review in fall 2013. This is a change in schedule from early 2014.

We would therefore expect there to be no change in the Program's accreditation status before April 2012. If the plan is accepted by ALA COA there are two probable outcomes:

1. Conditional accreditation could be continued and preparation for the Program review in 2013 will proceed.. Again, this action would have no effect on the "accredited" status of the Program and its graduates.
2. Accreditation could be withdrawn. Under ALA COA rules, graduates of the Program within two years of the date of withdrawal of accreditation would be considered graduates of an accredited program. For example, if accreditation were to be withdrawn in 2012, graduates through June 2014 would still be graduates of an accredited Program.
3. A third we think highly unlikely outcome is possible: "Standard" accreditation could be restored.

The VSU MLIS Program pledges to do everything in its power and ability to restore the Program to "standard" accreditation by 2013. We expect it. We will achieve it.

For additional information on the ALA COA accreditation process, might we suggest their website: <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/accreditation/>. Should you have questions about the process, please consider contacting the Office for Accreditation directly. Their contact information is available on their website. Ms. Karen O'Brien is Director of that Office.

We welcome any and all input from students and other stakeholders on how best to accomplish this goal.

When and as the VSU MLIS Program has additional updates on accreditation, it will be posted here.