A proposal to establish a diploma in Librarianship at the university was first submitted for consideration to the NSW University of Technology by John Metcalfe, Principal Librarian at the Public Library of NSW in 1954. Other requests were received from the Library Association of Australia, the Library Board of NSW, and the Trustees of the Public Library of NSW. At the time qualifications in librarianship were obtained by completing the Library Association of Australia’s examination by correspondence. At a Council meeting on 10 Nov 1958 John Metcalfe was invited to accept the position of University Librarian at the University of NSW. His duties would involve being responsible for the organisation and management of the University’s library services and the establishment and supervision of such courses in library training as may be approved by the university. Metcalfe was also made a member of the Professorial Board. Metcalfe commenced duty on 2 February 1959.

Immediately after taking up his appointment as University Librarian, Metcalfe made submissions regarding library education at the university to the Professorial Board. At the Council meeting of 13 July 1959 approval was given for a graduate diploma course in Librarianship. Metcalfe was appointed as Director of the School as well as continuing his role as University Librarian. The School of Librarianship was located within the Faculty of Arts and offered courses leading to the Diploma in Librarianship for the first time in March 1960. This made it the first school of librarianship in a tertiary institution in Australia.

John Metcalfe retired as University Librarian in May 1966 but remained as Director of the School of Librarianship until 1968. On his retirement he was succeeded by Wilma Radford who was appointed foundation professor of librarianship and head of school.

Administratively the School was placed with the Board of Vocational Studies from 1971 until 1974, with the Board of Professional Studies during 1974, and with the Faculty of Professional Studies from 1975. New programs were introduced in 1964 (Master of Librarianship by research), 1972 (Master of Librarianship by coursework) 1973 (Diploma in Archives Administration) and 1980 (Master of Archives Administration by research). The Diploma in Archives Administration was designed to provide education in the principles and methods of the administration of archives and manuscripts, and various aspects of current records management. A major course revision in 1981, which introduced a common core of subjects for both the librarianship and archives diploma students, saw the diplomas renamed Diploma in Information Management – Librarianship and Diploma in Information Management – Archives Administration.
School of Librarianship to the School of Information, Library and Archive Studies. [resolution CL92/16] On 2 December 1996 Council resolved to dissolve the Faculty of Professional Studies from 1 January 1997 with the School of Information, Library and Archive Studies being transferred to the Faculty of Commerce and Economics. [resolution CL96/88/3; Uniken 6 Dec 1996: 4]

In 1997 approval was given for a third academic stream within the School, this time in audiovisual management. This was primarily an internet-based program which was developed through a partnership between the university and the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra. [SRF - UNSW - SILAS]

During 1998 as part of the UNSW 2000 planning exercise discussions were held with the School of Information Systems about the feasibility of a merger. Following the receipt of a report by a working party headed by Professor W Boyd Rayward, members of staff of the School of Information, Library and Archive Studies voted to pursue a merger. [SRF - UNSW - SILAS] At a Council meeting on 7 June 1999 the School of Information Systems and the School of Information, Library and Archive Studies were formally disestablished and a new school to be known as the School of Information Systems, Technology and Management was established. The new school was to be located within the Faculty of Commerce and Economics. [resolution CL99/33 (c)]