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Trends in the Job Market for Librarians: 1985-2000



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Abstract

This article discusses the major influence that the information age has had on librarianship. Computer-related technology has changed the way librarians do their jobs, their duties and has created a whole new realm of opportunities for librarians. Data from the *Library Journal* annual salary surveys and the ALA Placement Center are included in charts and figures to track job market trends from 1985-2000. Issues such as salary, job mobility and education are also discussed.

Introduction

The role of libraries has changed dramatically since the dawn of the Internet. As the roles of libraries have changed, so have the duties of librarians. It is hard for new librarians entering the job market today to fathom reference work or library service without the aid of computers. No longer is the profession just for book lovers, it is now for technology and information lovers as well.

With the advent of the electronic age, new job options have arisen for librarians. While once confined to the typical library setting, librarians, or "information specialists" can now work in a variety of special libraries, or for themselves. The job market is spectacular for employees right now, making it a particularly marketable time to be a librarian. The Occupational Outlook Handbook listed librarians on its list of fastest growing occupations projected to have the largest numerical increase in employment between 1998 and 2008^[1]. This article will explore some of the changes in the roles of librarians, discuss new job avenues and track the job market for librarians since 1985.

Technology-Help or Harm?

When the Internet was first introduced, it was unclear as to how useful it would become as a reference tool. Since then, the Internet has become savvier and more dependable. With all the databases offering full text journals online, one can do a good deal of research with a few keystrokes. While this is a great improvement to the researcher, what does it mean to the librarian? Understandably, some librarians were reluctant to embrace a technology that might be their replacement. For a while it looked as though the profession might be endangered, and everyone in the profession had to at least wonder what this would mean to his or her job security.

The question becomes, is it realistic for librarians to expect information technology to empower our profession in the long run? There is a long history of technology rendering certain work forms obsolete. The problem is that those qualities and values embedded in that work also become obsolete. I have reservations about helping to develop and create products and markets which may destroy those qualities and values contained within libraries and librarianship^[2].

It is inarguable that new technologies have forever changed the face of libraries, but most librarians have embraced the changes, and with it, the new job duties. The Internet has been a

benefit to almost all areas of librarianship, and so far it seems to have provided more job security than harm to librarians. While machines can do many things, librarians are still better at categorizing and making the right information available. As Elspeth Hyams discussed in her article, the public will still need help determining and narrowing the relevant information from the plethora of citations that they might receive from a search^[3]. New technologies introduced new duties for librarians, including web page design and maintenance, troubleshooting and the need to become an Internet searching expert. While it is good to see the profession expanding, some are resentful of having to take on new job duties and challenges at the same pay. Indeed, the pay for librarians is nowhere near equal to other fields in which information technology is so greatly utilized. This is a major factor explaining why some traditional libraries have a hard time competing with special libraries with more attractive employment packages. A SLA Biennial Salary Survey reported that the median salaries in corporate libraries are now as much as 35% higher than salaries in academic libraries^[4].

New Options

Because of the advent of new technologies, new avenues have been created for the information professional, including positions with dot coms, vendors, corporations, and as information brokers or consultants. While some of these positions were around before the new technologies, they are even more possible now thanks to all of the material available over the Internet. New titles have arisen since the dawn of the Internet including LAN administrator, CIO (Chief Information Officer), Webmaster, Knowledge Manager and Systems Librarian, to name a few. These new positions often earn more money than those with just the title of librarian. "The Knowledge Manager salary ranges from \$50,000-\$90,000, and the Corporate Intelligence Officer starts at \$69,000 and goes to \$100,000 for Vice President of Corporate Intelligence"^[5]. Librarians have to be willing to expand their horizons and apply for jobs for which they would be highly qualified for with an MLIS degree, but for which they might not necessarily need one.

With each avenue of librarianship having its pros and cons, job searchers have to quantify what is important to them. If the main goal is a high salary, one might want to look in the corporate sector. If the main objective is autonomy and flexibility, information brokerage might be the best field to enter. Finally, if job security is the most important factor, traditional libraries would be the best option. The fall of some of the "invincible" dot coms and the recent slump of the economy could lead to downsizing. Unfortunately, in the corporate sector, it is usually the libraries that are the first to go.

Salary

While most entering the profession know that they are not going to become rich, often the pay seems too meager for a position that is considered professional and that needs professional training. In a study of *Library Journal* articles from 1910-1920 by William Robinson, it is striking the number of concerns that are still relevant today.

A vigorous 1920 comment that '...library salaries are [far] too low for the grade of education and intelligence demanded by the work' might have appeared in 1984. Today's American Library Association should follow an earlier generation and lobby vigorously for a "growing" rather than a "living" wage^[6].

While this article itself was written over a decade ago, the sentiment is still true. Academic and public libraries are often the worst paying, with some geographical regions paying better than others. In some academic libraries, the prestige supposedly makes up for the pay, but prestige, while nice, will not pay the bills. Men have repeatedly made higher beginning salaries than women in the *Library Journal's* annual salary surveys, but reasons for this haven't been thoroughly discussed. Some reasons for the gender gap could be that some men go back to their old companies or businesses and obtain a raise, or they may be more apt to seek out positions with

special libraries. Since the salary surveys have been compiled by a variety of writers over the years, the style and topics that are presented varies. The percent of change of beginning salaries from year to year were recalculated and rounded to the first decimal point so the percentages would be more accurate and consistent with the style of the more recent years of the survey. The percentage of change each year was then plotted in Figure 1 to illustrate the change over the years.

As Table 1 and Figure 1 illustrate, the 1999 salary increase of 6.5% marked the largest increase since 1987, over a decade. The last two years have shown significant increases in salary, and it looks as though librarians are finally feeling some of the financial benefits of the information age.

Job Mobility

In some organizations, the only way to get ahead is to get out. While this is discouraging to many, it has also led to much greater job mobility than in the past. This is a trend across all professions, not just librarianship. With new factors such as portable retirement packages, better pay, new avenues and a plethora of openings, job mobility is greater than ever. Gone are the days when employees settled in at a job for thirty years straight out of college. It is no longer considered odd for people to change jobs several times in their careers. The Internet has also made the job search easier, with so many organizations now advertising online and so many services that specialize in finding people jobs. Librarians no longer need to stay in jobs where advancement is limited, and they aren't. Librarians who have the ability to move are the best off. Although mobility is on the rise, the *Library Journal* 1998 Salary Survey reported that "Most new LIS graduates still tend to find jobs in the same state as their library school: 65.9% in 1998, as compared to 64% in 1997 and 1996"^[7]. This could be because many entering the library profession chose librarianship as a second career path and have families or are too established in a state or region to consider moving. Those who can move though, will find a no shortage of job opportunities available to them. Librarians with a background in business, science or math are still the most marketable and are also the hardest jobs for employers to fill.

New York Public Library has had a particularly hard time retaining librarians. The salaries are reportedly so low that once the librarians are trained they often look for jobs in better paying sectors. Particularly hard to retain are the children's librarians, because they are offered much better salary packages to be school media specialists in the public schools. NYPL administrators have appealed to city officials for a pay increase in an effort to keep experienced employees. While this problem has been occurring for over a decade, it has now reached an apex^[8].

While the Placement Center at ALA's annual conferences doesn't represent the whole field, its statistics do give a general sense of the current job market. Table 2 and Figure 2 chart the placement center statistics from 1985-2000. From 1992-1997 the number of applicants outweighed the number of available jobs, but in the last three years running, the available jobs have far outweighed the applicants, with a higher than three to one ratio at the 2000 convention.

Schools Change with the Times

Library schools have had to adapt to the electronic age as well. While theoretical classes can stay largely the same, the schools have had to overhaul their curriculum to revolve around a much more technologically based focus. Students from all fields of interest and backgrounds are now encouraged to join the profession, whereas in the past, it was mainly encouraged for those who loved literature^[9].

In the mid nineties, the Kellogg Foundation gave grants to four institutions offering the MLIS degree to help fund innovative new approaches to educating those in the field. The schools that received these grants were the University of Michigan, Drexel University, the University of Illinois/Urbana Champaign, and Florida State University. Each school put its own spin on altering

the curriculum, and some of the results were interesting. The University of Michigan and Drexel decided not only to change the curriculum, but also the names of their programs, changing them to the School of Information, and the College of Information Science and Technology, respectively. The new names included no mention of libraries, and this stirred up commotion in the library profession, with some voicing their disapproval.

The University of Michigan used its monies to hire new faculty and to expand its curriculum to involve more technologically based courses. Drexel used its funds to integrate the undergraduate, graduate and continuing education programs in the information sciences and for utilizing new technologies for teaching classes, including real time audio. Florida State University, already working on an undergraduate program at the time that it received funding, was able to make headway towards that goal and start the program. It also integrated other schools on campus to give the program more of an interdisciplinary feel.

All four of these schools recognized that library science programs are part of a larger information landscape. Instead of disbanding its existing library science curriculum, each school opted to use new moneys to expand the boundaries of the field and to make a statement about the role that such a school could play^[10].

For a while, it seemed as though few were attracted to the profession of librarianship. "Between 1974 and 1986, the number of accredited MLS graduates dropped almost by half, from 6370 to 3538"^[11]. Another worry was that women, who make up a large majority of the field (traditionally around 80%), were finding other jobs that were not options to them in the past because of their gender. The widespread closing of many ALA accredited programs was discouraging as well. Some states were left without any accredited programs; dissuading those that could not, or would not, relocate to obtain a master's degree. The new opportunities in distance education may turn this problem around, if distance was a major factor for some. Table 3 shows the number of graduates from programs in LIS from 1985-1999. Because a different number of schools reported each year regarding their student population, the number of students per school was averaged to make the numbers comparable. From the chart, one can see that the peak years of graduation seem to be in 1993 and 1995. While the numbers since 1995 have declined, they are still higher than those graduating from the profession in the 1980's. The statistics are surprising, given the fact that librarianship is such a marketable profession right now. The low number of graduates is most likely another factor into the job market being so open. It is also interesting to compare the number of graduates to the statistics at the ALA Placement Center. In the years where the highest numbers of graduates were coming out of school the number of jobs available fell below the average.

Conclusion

While change is always frightening to some, it is also inevitable. For a while it seemed possible that machines could replace librarians, but it hasn't proven to be the case. In fact, to the contrary, the recent advances in technology have provided new job opportunities for librarians, while making research a much more convenient and timely process. The beginning salaries for the past two years have risen substantially, and it will be interesting to see if the 2000 beginning salaries will follow the same trend. The decline of graduates since the 1970's may turn around, as people are made aware of the variety of new opportunities that await those with a MLIS degree. More men may be attracted to the profession as the stigma of bookworm is lifted from the title of librarian and replaced with thoughts of a technologically savvy and multifaceted individual. It is a great time to be in the profession, with a plethora of information and opportunities at our fingertips.

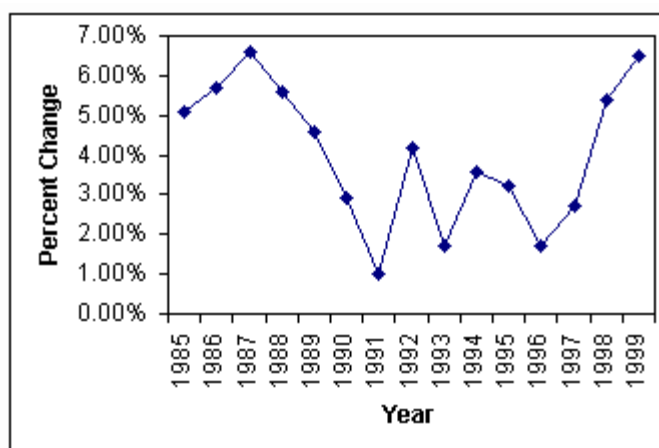
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Table 1

*Salaries for 1985-1999 and
Percentage of Change from Prior Year*

Year	Salary	% Change
1985	\$19,753	5.1%
1986	\$20,874	5.7%
1987	\$22,247	6.6%
1988	\$23,491	5.6%
1989	\$24,581	4.6%
1990	\$25,306	2.9%
1991	\$25,583	1.0%
1992	\$26,666	4.2%*
1993	\$27,116	1.7%

**Figure 1**

*Percentage of Change of Beginning Salaries
From Prior Year*

1994	\$28,086	3.6%
1995	\$28,997	3.2%
1996	\$29,480	1.7%
1997	\$30,270	2.7%
1998	\$31,915	5.4%
1999	\$33,976	6.5%

* 1992 article states 6.5%, but when recalculated, actual percent was 4.2%.

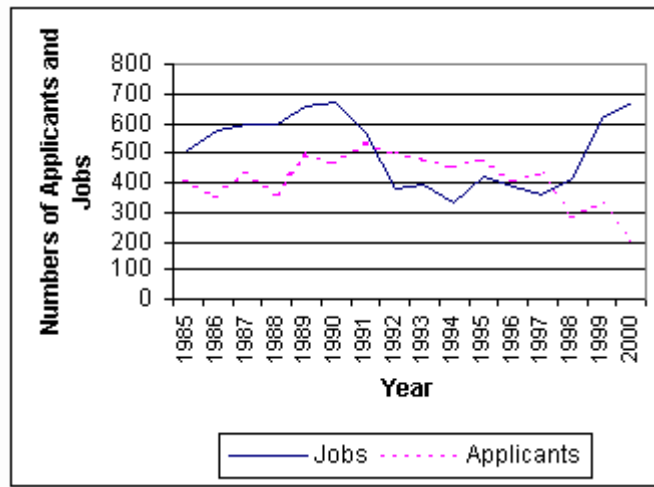
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Table 2

*Statistics on Number of Jobs
Advertised and Applicants from
ALA Annual Conferences 1985-2000*

Year	Jobs	Applicants
1985	510	416
1986	574	353
1987	596	444
1988	595	357
1989	659	495

1990	674	468
1991	567	538
1992	377	500
1993	395	483
1994	333	452
1995	421	484
1996	384	405
1997	360	436
1998	416	283
1999	615	334
2000	669	202

**Figure 2**

Number of Applicants vs. Jobs Available at ALA Annual Conferences 1985-2000

Information used to create Table 2 and Figure 2 came from Lorelle Swader, e-mail to ALA's Office for Human Resource Development and Recruitment, Feb. 12, 2001.

Table 3

Statistics Regarding the Number of Students Graduating with a MLIS degree from 1985-1999

Table 3			
Year	Schools Reporting	Graduates	Average Per School
1985	58	3,484	60
1986	53	3,538	67
1987	55	3,702	67

1988	51	3,691	72
1989	43	3,356	78
1990	42	3,522	83
1991	45	3,907	87
1992	41	3,625	88
1993	47	4,754	101
1994	48	4,363	91
1995	42	4,222	101
1996	44	4,136	94
1997	46	4,370	95
1998	50	4,577	92
1999	50	4,201	84

See note for Table 1.

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