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1-1-2011

A Graduate Degree in Library or Information Science Is Required, but not Sufficient, to Enter the Profession

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Citation of this paper:
Torabi, Nazi, "A Graduate Degree in Library or Information Science Is Required, but not Sufficient, to Enter the Profession" (2011). *Western Libraries Staff Publications.* Paper 21.
http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/wlpub/21

Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Evidence Summary

A Graduate Degree in Library or Information Science Is Required, but not Sufficient, to Enter the Profession

A Review of:
Reeves, R., & Hahn, T. (2010). Job advertisements for recent graduates: Advising, curriculum, and job-seeking implications. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science, 51*(2), 103-119.

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Received: 31 Aug. 2010 **Accepted:** 7 Dec. 2010

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Abstract

Objective – To analyze the current state of the job market for recent MLS or MLIS graduates.

Design – Content analysis of job postings.

Setting – Online library or archival job advertisements published between 15 April, 2006 and 10 May, 2009 and collected from two national library publications (American Libraries and Library Journal), two electronic lists (Maryland's iSchool Discussion list and the Archives and Archivists list sponsored by the Society of American Archivists), two Internet job banks (USAJobs.gov and LISJobs.com), and several local chapters of library and archival organizations in the South Atlantic region of the United States.

Subjects – 1,042 online library or archival job advertisements. Salary data were obtained from 401 available online job advertisements.

Methods – The methodology for collection and content analysis of job ads was adapted from earlier studies, with slight modification wherever appropriate. The following criteria for selecting the ads were applied:

- Ad says "entry-level"
- No mention of professional experience
- No experience or duties impossible for entry-level librarians to gain
- Only ads that required an MLS or MLIS degree from an ALA-accredited institution
- Part-time or temporary positions of less than nine months were excluded

The authors removed duplicated job postings and identified three major areas of content analysis. Table 1 lists a brief summary of these areas and further sub-categories for each area. The content analysis was performed using a custom Microsoft Access database for data organization and storage and Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for data manipulation. SPSS was used for statistical analysis.

Main Results – The two largest represented institution types for library positions were academic (63.6%) and public (17.5%). For archival positions, the academic (62.7%) and "other" (25.4%) institutions rank first and second. When the job ads were broken down into the position types, which were covering a wide range of responsibilities, the greatest numbers of entry-level library positions are found to be public service (52.2%) and technical services (23.9%) positions. The two largest represented position types in archives are technical services (50.7 %) and generalist (40.5%).

Table 1. The Three Major Areas of Job Ads Content Analysis

Basic information	Personal attributes	Knowledge and experience
• Date • Source of advertisement • Position title • Location (by state, census region, and division) • Salary • Type of institution • Type of position • Years of required non-professional experience	• Emotional Intelligence (EI) competency (p. 115) o E1- Self Awareness o E2- Self Regulation o E3- Motivation o E4- Empathy o E5- Social Skills	• General o 2nd Master Degree o Budgeting o Foreign Language o Marketing o Preservation o Children's programming o Supervisory experience • Technology o General IT Skills o Automated Library Systems o Next-Gen Library Systems o Computer/Network Hardware & Software o Digitization o Programming/markup language o Web Design o Web Maintenance • Library/Archive specific o Administrative o Instruction o Public/Access Services o Reference o Systems o Technical services

While average salaries increased slightly over the four years of study, there is a more significant increase in the salaries of positions posted in 2009. The highest average salaries were found to be $43K for archivists working for government and $60K for library positions in the "other" category. In addition, the number of entry-level positions has increased from year to year over this period.

Social competencies such as communication, collaboration and team work, and service orientation were the most emphasized traits for novice librarians and archivists. General information technology skills and knowledge of technical services were the most common skills required for both library and archive positions. Overall, the entry-level job postings did not require non-professional experience. However, 13.6% of the library and 18.7% of the archival positions required supervisory experience. Experience with preservation of physical objects and the knowledge of programming and mark-up languages were also common requirements for archives positions. Instructional and reference experience ranks the second and third essential skills for librarians.

Conclusion – Based on the research results, a graduate degree in library or information science is required, but not sufficient, to enter the profession. Practical experience, either through internships, co-op programs, or part-time or full-time employment, is essential for new graduates seeking employment, but the majority of postings do not require a subject expertise, second Master's degree, or knowledge of a foreign language. Since the job content analysis in this study only evaluated broad components of library services and archival operation, it might not provide sufficient data on new trends in the job market for the MLS curriculum review.

Commentary

This study offers useful information about the current state of the job market for new MLS graduates. The authors took advantage of previous research in this area by adapting the methodology and research design. More specifically, they aimed to update the research conducted by Sproles and Ratledge in 2004 by focusing primarily on positions geared toward recent MLS graduates. However, several significant flaws in the methodology and the data presentation affected the validity of the results.

The authors retained almost the same research design, sources of data collection, and a standardized list of terms for content analysis from previous studies. While the previous studies, conducted by Promis on Emotional Intelligence competencies (2008) and Grimes and Grimes on the academic library labour market (2008), proved to be useful to establish a solid framework for content analysis (pp. 105-106), the research suffers from the same shortcoming as other research in this area. A new study conducted by Applegate (2010), has questioned the sources of academic job ads and how representative the data is for job content analysis studies. According to Applegate, collecting job ad samples directly from institutions is time-consuming but proves to be more representative of all available job postings (p. 163). In addition, she has shown that the most appropriate academic library job aggregators are Academic Employment Network and ALA JobLIST (p. 167). Similar analysis must be conducted for other areas in the field of libraries and archives before the most representative data source could be selected. In this current work, the source of advertisements was chosen without any good reasoning. The authors noted that almost half of the positions collected for this study were located in the South Atlantic region of the U.S. (p. 109). Therefore, one can argue that the job distributions by institution and position types may not be representative of all the job postings in the U.S.

Data analysis is not clearly described and needs more explanation. For example, as one of the selection criteria, the authors explicitly removed ads stating the need for professional experience. However, they found that

institutions increasingly required entry level professionals to have some experience. Also, job ads for less than nine months have been removed. This might raise some concerns about the validity of the data, since new graduates might strongly consider temporary positions. In addition, during economic downturn (the last period of study), there might have been more temporary or part-time positions available for new graduates.

On several occasions, the way results are presented can be misleading for the readers. It also prevents drawing solid conclusions. The authors of the article do not provide any rationale for combining the results obtained for archival positions with those for library positions. They noted the wide variance between archive and library positions in terms of position and institution types (e.g., 0.7% for public archives vs. 17.5% public libraries) (p. 109). However, they still chose to aggregate the results and present the total number in Table 2.

In subsequent sections, the great difference between the two professions (library and archive) is again clear. For example, on page 110, the greatest number of entry-level positions for libraries and archives was found to be 52.2% for public service and 50.7 % for technical services, respectively. The results are aggregated in Table 3 and again presented in percentage in Figure 1, to which there is no reference in the text. This can be confusing for readers. On the same page, Figure 2 is also redundant and provides the same information as Table 2. The competencies and required knowledge and experience for the two professions (library and archive) also differ. Yet, the results for both professions have been combined and presented as a total. For example, in Table 10, knowledge of technical services was found to be a requirement for archival positions for 69.7% of cases while this number is 28.8% for library positions. The total of 39.9% is under-representative of what is required for archival positions and it is over-representative of the requirements for library jobs. There are many similar examples presented in Tables 8, 10 and 11.

The authors mentioned that only 38.5% of ads reported salaries (p. 111). It is important to determine whether this is a sufficient sample size to investigate the difference between salaries among different positions in various geographical locations. Also, the authors conducted the ANOVA test for salary means across position and institution types. Similar analysis for salaries by U.S. Census Region and Division would be ideal.

One main conclusion by the authors is that job ads have shifted from print to electronic sources. Although this is based only on anecdotal evidence and previous studies, it is notable for the profession as well as potential researchers in this area as electronic job ads are not always archived as effectively as print sources, making it difficult for other researchers to conduct historical research or refer to the raw data.

The main implication of this study is to emphasize the importance of technical skills and practical experience to recent graduates of MLIS programs. As information technology continues to advance, it should be assumed that experience with technology will appear even more in job ads. MLIS programs should provide students with multiple practical opportunities, especially for those students who have entered the program directly from undergraduate school and with limited professional experiences in any area. Also, MLIS programs should integrate practical experience as part of the core curriculum to facilitate the students' transition from school to the profession (Sproles & Ratledge, 2004).

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