

Part A: Job Descriptions

This is interesting. I did this part last – and I have to say that I feel a bit perplexed. I just looked over eighteen job postings that I found on the Simmon's College job network page. All six jobs discussed for the assignment were listed within these, but the perplexing thing was that only six of these eighteen required an MLS degree. I guess this surprises me only in that I just spent hours writing about salaries for MLS degreed librarians and it turns out that you don't even need an MLS in many cases. I'm not sure that the degreed jobs pay more. I'm feeling a bit bleak about this degree today.

I found a range of jobs just because I wanted to have a larger body to compare. I have also found out that in many cases for Director position, it might not list an MLS specifically, but instead says that you must be able to receive certification from the Mass. Board of Library Commissioners. I did a bit of research to see what this actually means and it appears that while having an MLS will most easily qualify you – other education and experience may also qualify. This certification is needed by a director in order for his/her library to be able to apply for state aid and funds. This was not a requirement for all libraries though – which makes me wonder how they are getting along without state aid? The town must have enough to finance, or perhaps the increase in salary they would have to pay a degreed candidate wouldn't be offset by the amount of money they would get from the state. Supervisory experience seems to be the biggest qualification. I always assumed that a library director would have to have an MLS – but then I've met a few in this class and found that isn't always the case!

Found four different reference librarian jobs. Two require or prefer an MLS – the other two don't even mention it. They want experience over a degree. Skills dealing with the public are also stressed. For the most part, the reference librarian job descriptions were some of the briefest – just a few lines. Some of these jobs list benefits, some don't, some do after a probationary period. It doesn't seem to be consistent. The director positions actually didn't list benefits, but I just assumed they would have them. A big mistake I know.

Children's and YA Librarians were similar to reference librarians in that they seemed to stress experience over the MLS. Often times these jobs were listed together. Though when they were separate the YA Librarian postings did want an MLS. I wonder whether this is just true of this sampling, or if they realize the benefit of having a trained person putting together a YA program? For the children's librarian words such as “energetic, personable, enjoys working with children and parents” were stressed. And again, they wanted experience. The pay varied with these positions – tending to lurk around \$32,000. Benefits were the norm with these positions.

The Head of Tech Services job I found does embrace the benefits of a degree. I only found one of these and it was a very detailed and quite challenging job description. A degree along with five years of experience *after* the degree is needed. The salary is quite nice for this job – from 51K-67K. This is not a job for the newly graduated MLS student.

The “Information Librarian” is the techie on the staff. The position I found did not require an MLS and simply wanted strong computer skills with an eye to public

service. The pay is 35K-37K – which until the “new economy” wouldn’t have gotten you a whole lot in the way of tech support. This position included benefits.

In all but the Director and the Head of Tech Services, evening and weekend hours were required. These positions also tended to stress experience over a degree - this makes it tricky for a new graduate to get a foot in the door. Which isn’t to say it couldn’t happen – hopefully they would take an extra look at an MLS candidate – unless they thought they would simply have to pay them more.

Other than those mentioned, the requirements were pretty straightforward. Public service people needed to have the skills to deal with a wide range of people for hours at a time. Programming skills were important for the children and YA librarian, while it wasn’t really mentioned for the reference librarian. The Director and Head of Tech Services seemed to need the most polished resume, the most supervisory experience and experience with leadership and libraries. None of these jobs screamed – “new librarian!” which perhaps speaks to the fact that many people in library school are currently working in a library – killing two birds with one stone.

Part B: Salaries

I read two articles, “There is no Honor in Being Underpaid” and “Strategies for Improving Library Salaries.” I found these articles interesting in that “Strategies” left me feeling a tiny bit hopeful, while “Underpaid” simply left me mad. The facts and figures the author quotes were fascinatingly horrible. “Strategies” gave similar statistics about the plight of librarians. The author also touched on a very important fact that many new MLS grads once were seeking employment elsewhere, among their dot com brethren. The present economy has changed this a bit – as companies layoff their “information

professionals” and “information architects” – but the time will come again. Libraries must be able to be competitive in this market.

Overall, I think librarian salaries are quite low. If an advanced degree is needed for a profession, then the wages should be well above the level of qualifying for public assistance. Through my exploration this week it has also become apparent that public librarians end up on the short end of the stick, almost always. During the course of this program I have thought that I would like to work in a public library. I enjoy academia, but I think I would enjoy programming in a public library. Well, this unit has taught me that I better not get my hopes up. It is a bit alarming that the starting salary for a degreed librarian is lower than what I am currently making. Granted, I have been working at MIT for about eight years, I have experience that perhaps would boost any salary I might get at a new job, but even if that did happen, it wouldn't be that much. Most people go to school with the knowledge that a degree will earn them more money, more prestige – I didn't. I am going to school because I have hit a wall at MIT. I needed the degree to move anywhere but backwards. As my boss once told me, “it is like getting your union card.” Something seems very skewed about this. Since starting the program I have thought of many great things I would love to do in libraries – however now I'm finding out that to do them, I'll probably need to sign up for food stamps as well.

As far as minimum...well, it is an advanced degree, they probably have various loans to pay off, they are living in a high cost of living environment, I think 40K is a reasonable spot to start a new librarian. And as I will discuss in the next section, the Massachusetts Library Association seems to agree. Remember though, I am steeped in the academic world of Cambridge, MA – and so that is what I am referencing.

I think the profession needs to gain respect, plain and simple. Like teaching, it is underpaid and undervalued. It isn't something that can happen overnight though, because it is worked in to the social fabric of our country. It isn't a coincidence that every librarian you see on television fits the stereotype to a tee. I think we need to be vocal – continually. If nothing else perhaps we will annoy and wear someone down enough to the point where they raise the salaries just so we will leave them alone. Also, marketing is something we must do, that historically we haven't been good at – not at any level in my opinion. We are librarians at the beginning cusp of the digital age – it is a new world with new demands and we have to make our voice heard within this new world. If we don't, we will be taken for granted and underpaid for another century.

Part C: State survey

Massachusetts organizes its salary report by population groups A-H. “A” being the smallest at 0-1,999 residents, going up H at 100,000+. Obviously, the differences in salaries – and even staffing are generally quite large. However, this isn't always the case. In fact in the town of Chilmark (pop. 843) the library director makes \$47,995 a year. Odd indeed – perhaps they have a dual role – of sheriff as well. Some of the directors in the small town don't even appear to have other staff. As the towns go up in population, in general the wages of the staff also increase, however this is not always the case. Given the amount of towns in MA with their own library, the numbers are really all over the place. The wealthy towns generally pay the best, the poorer neighborhoods the worst, simple economics really. When I put size up against wealth, wealth would be more of the deciding factor.

Library Director:

This job is listed with a stipend in some of the smaller communities. However, as a library director (with an MLS) in MA you could make between \$15,501 in Pelham and \$144,354 in Boston. Again, the salaries generally went up with population increase – but when the numbers seemed particularly high, they were always tied to a wealthy town. Also, directors holding MLS degrees went up as the size of the town increased – most directors in the smallest towns did not have an MLS and were paid on average less than 10K. I'm assuming these people have other duties within the town.

Reference Librarian:

This was reported in hourly wages. I had to go up a few populations groups just to find anyone that might fit the description of “reference librarian” according to the report. Hourly rates were as low as \$6.95/hr – but more typically the low end was around \$13/hr and the high end went up to \$27.40/hr at the BPL. The average was probably around \$19/hr.

Children's Librarian:

An interesting thing about the Children's Librarian – many times a town would not list a reference or adult librarian, but it would have a Children's Librarian. It wasn't until populations got over about 10,000 that there was a consistent presence of an adult librarian. On the low end was \$7/hr, with the averages playing out much as the Ref.

Librarian position did. Many libraries had the same for adult and children's librarians (avoiding fights undoubtedly).

Head of Technical Services:

Massachusetts lists this as Technical Librarian. There aren't many of them in the smaller libraries either. The wages start around \$9/hr and stay fairly consistent with other librarians. On a whole though I would say they are a dollar or two lower just skimming the charts. Their average seems to be around \$15 or \$16/hr – though as the size of the town increases the average goes up.

Young Adult Services:

Most notable thing – the majority of libraries don't have specific YA Librarians. I assume that the Children's librarian absorbs these duties. Only 47 of the towns reported having a YA Librarian. That is out of close to 400 towns. When population groups get over 50,000 – then the presence of a YA librarian goes up dramatically. Their hourly rate goes from \$10.20/hr to \$27.40/hr. Their average is similar to the adult and children's librarian – though from the figures I have it appears higher simply because the larger, usually better paying libraries, are the ones employing a YA Librarian.

Automation/Technology Librarian:

The salary report does not list this position. I would have to say that they haven't caught up with themselves yet. There is another category marked "other" and when it is used the rate of pay tends to be slightly higher than the average librarian – perhaps this is

where libraries are listing their automation librarian if they have one. The pay for “other” ranges from \$10/hr to \$31.49 – while it is just a guess – I could easily see a technology librarian getting paid \$31.49 – at that library the other librarian jobs top out at \$27/hr.

Part D: Minimum salary

This was interesting. In the January issue of *American Libraries* it listed the state minimum for MA as \$31,362. However, on the MA Library Association page I had found the figure of \$40,385. I found this curious, but upon further investigation I noticed that indeed in the most recent issue of *American Libraries* the figure had been updated to the new amount. While I’m not sure when this change was made, it is clear by looking at the incredible increase that it has been a while since they looked at it. It made me wonder if this was the same for other states. From the Jan. issue to the Nov. issue only two states had changed their recommended minimums. But what a change! Over a 9K difference per year – that is really significant. Perhaps the efforts of the ALA task force are getting state associations to take another look at their minimum. As it stands, MA now looks like the best place to work for librarians (comparatively speaking). New Jersey also went up about 2K (perhaps in reaction to the article mentioning them in January). I have to say that I was feeling very discouraged when I saw the 31K figure, but feel a bit better with the 40K. Particularly as this is what I thought an appropriate starting salary might be.

From the article, and from this list I am very sad for the librarians of West Virginia. No wonder the librarians I encountered as a child never seemed happy. They were probably dirt poor. Everything is certainly relative, and the cost of living in

Wheeling, WV is certainly lower than Cambridge, MA – but \$22K for an advanced degree position? If men outnumbered women in these positions you can believe the salaries would go straight through the roof. Looking at the list as a whole it is really quite pathetic. And only 19 of the 50 states have these minimums – even though three of the states list them as “varies”. Well that isn’t terribly helpful. The whole thing just makes me frustrated. It makes me want to call up Maurice Freedman and set a meeting with him. But I get on my soapbox about teachers and social workers too. And it all seems to come back to the common point of gender. But that is for another paper.