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Struggling to Juggle: Part-time Temporary Work in Libraries

Emily Ford

February 9, 2011 @ 6:00 am



[1]

Thanks to Flickr user stuant63 for use of this image.

Several of my In the Library with the Lead Pipe posts have centered around work/life balance, or being happy and healthy in a job. When I wrote about losing my [mojo](#) ^[2] I also mentioned that a big thing for me was my transition from working full-time to half-time.

After that post I enjoyed a summer of half-time work in which I was able to pay rent, eat, go on day trips to the Oregon Coast and Columbia River Gorge for hikes, and generally re-infuse myself with energy. I needed the break. It was great, but I knew it wouldn't last. I wasn't saving any money and my position was temporary, with a one-year contract. I knew I would eventually need to pick up another part-time job to get my student loans paid more quickly, save money in case my temporary part-time job was not refunded in the next fiscal year, and, of course, to indulge occasionally at an out-of-my-price-range restaurant. I also knew that I wanted to accept the right part-time job. And I eventually did. In late September I accepted a part-time hourly wage contract position to fill in as a reference and instruction librarian at a local state university.

Of the six jobs I've held over the past three and a half years since I've had my MLS, only one of

my positions was permanent (and it had its issues, which is why I left) and only three have been full-time. Currently I'm working two part-time temporary jobs. One is as a Scholarly Communication Librarian at a medical school and the other as a Reference and Instruction Librarian at a large, urban state university. Don't get me wrong; I am lucky. Despite its part-time temporary nature one of my jobs offers me health insurance, professional development funding, faculty status, and the ability to work on engaging projects. But my current experience is taking me back to the right-out-of-library-school piecemealing together of part-time work to pay the rent. It's an experience all too common these days and it can be difficult to professionally balance more than one job, let alone balance life and work.

With this post I'd like to examine a bit more in depth some of the professional issues facing many librarians today who are working not one, but maybe 2 or 3 or 4 part-time library jobs.

The Library Journal [Placement and Salaries Survey 2010](#) ^[3] indicates that while full-time placement is up, so are part-time, temporary and non-professional placements of LIS grads. While some people work part-time jobs as a choice, others work part-time jobs because these are the only employment opportunities afforded them. The trend to work numerous part-time temporary jobs is growing, and there seems to be no end in sight. Balancing work and life is one challenge in and of itself, but what of the challenge of balancing numerous positions and a life?

Being curious I did a pretty extensive search of the professional literature to find discussions surrounding part-time work. I found articles that fell into one of several categories:

- Articles that discuss part-time employment and [job sharing](#) ^[4] as good ways to maintain work/life balance. These articles (to be referenced later) focus on those individuals who choose to work part-time.
- Criticisms of employers and institutions regarding part-time work in the form of letters to the editor.
- The employer's perspective of how cost-efficient part-time work can be at the administrative level.
- Articles discussing the advantages and the disadvantages of part-time work.

One of the things that stuck me about my literature searching is that few of these articles are recent. In fact, several of the longer substantive articles date from the 1980s. The nature of libraries has changed quite a bit in the past 30 years, and we have yet to get a handle on what it means to have a growing part-time temporary work force. For perspective, many newer librarians, such as myself, were still in elementary school at time these articles were written. There is much debate about the use of adjunct or part-time instructors in higher education in general. Longmate & Cosco (2002) cite the growing trend for community colleges to have an instructor workforce comprised of 60% part-time instructors; compared to 20% in 1970. Given discussions in academe regarding part-time work and the growing numbers of part-time temporary library workers, it is again time to have national dialog about part-time temporary librarianship.

The Benefits

The benefits of having a part-time job or a job share situation are, indeed, rich and plentiful. Lori Wamsley, (2008) like many of her predecessors from the 1980s and 1990s, points to the advantages of flexibility, networking, gaining experience, and staying in a local area. Others point to the advantages for people who have children and families (Library Personnel News, 1993; Notowitz, 1983; Dinerman, 1988; Laynor, 1987). Indeed, when I worked part-time I enjoyed my hobbies more and was able to spend more time with loved ones.

Working two positions enables me to have diverse work experiences. I have different job descriptions that concentrate in differing library work. In one position I am deeply engaged in scholarly communication, providing education and support to a community about the NIH Public Access Policy, and supporting publishing issues such as author rights. In the other position I serve as a subject librarian, providing reference services to a diverse audience of students, graduate students, and faculty. About 40% of my time in this position is at a busy reference desk—a kind of work I find quite satisfying. I also deeply enjoy the classroom teaching, collection development, and other aspects of this position. This diversity of day-to-day duties brings me great satisfaction.

Additionally, working in more than one library enables me to develop professional relationships with an abundance of coworkers. Where one library does not employ subject specialists, the

other has many with specialized research and publications interests. Where one library employs those who are expert searchers and work in rigorous research support, the other excels in instruction development for undergraduate students. Working at two different institutions affords me the opportunity to engage with a wealth of individuals who have a diversity of expertise. From my coworkers at both institutions I have amassed a great deal of knowledge and experience.

To this end I am able to bring what I have learned from one institution and use it at the other. For example, during a reference shift at the large university library I received a phone call from a faculty member concerned about copyright and fair use for her coming term's course-pack. Using my knowledge of copyright and publishing as a Scholarly Communication librarian, I was able to assist her by explaining fair use, even though at the time I was serving as a Reference and Instruction Librarian. Similarly, I am able to use my knowledge of resources offered by both libraries to refer students and faculty from each school to the other when the respective institution's resources aren't what a patron needs.

For some individuals not being tied down to one job is a benefit. Temporary part-time contracts mean that you can work when you need to work. Conversely, if you want a day off you can simply request it. Contract work allows for the flexibility of choosing which contracts to take. If you are working a part-time temporary position and you are offered a contract extension or a contract renewal, you don't have to take it. For some, this is quite a benefit to be able to choose when and how much one works.

Finally, I am able to live in the city I love. When I finished library school I knew that I didn't want to live anywhere other than my home city so I made the choice to move home without a job. I knew in my heart that I would be happier in my chosen surroundings than by choosing a job over a city. Luckily I have been able to remain employed over the past three and a half years, which is a feat in and of itself.

The Disadvantages

Part-time temporary work has numerous disadvantages that must be considered. For many people working more than one part-time temporary position is the only employment choice afforded them. It can feel like being between a rock and a hard place, especially if you want to work full-time in the library profession but don't have the opportunity to do so. What some of the family-friendly articles I read fail to mention is that the income of part-time positions is not enough to support a family. Some people might choose to work full-time in another profession for health benefits and to support their families, while others decide to take numerous part-time temporary library jobs (to end up working full-time or more than full-time) so that they might use their coveted MLS in the library field. Sometimes individuals accept positions that do not require an MLS, often remaining in paraprofessional positions.

For many, accepting part-time temporary work is the decision to be a librarian. I fear that many individuals feel they don't have a choice but to accept and be grateful for any library-related job opportunity that comes their way. As a result, individuals work several part-time temporary positions, struggling to balance numerous jobs and life. Ultimately, individuals will need to make a choice that best suits their life needs.

Working less than full-time is simply not economically viable for most people these days. Librarians, in particular, who frequently have student loan debt from undergraduate and graduate careers, feel the pressure to repay their loans. I personally don't know anyone who went into librarianship for the money, so we can assume that the full-time pay, much less the part-time pay, is not enough. The fact that I was able to work half-time for three months was a definite luxury, but after that time I needed to find additional work.

As discussed by almost all of the articles I read, part-time temporary jobs do not pay health, retirement, vacation or sick time benefits. The hourly wages for these positions fall below those of an institution's full-time counterparts, and employees have no guarantee that they will continue to have a position from contract to contract. "Nearly 64 percent of part-time librarians are paid at the low end of the wage scale" argues Gover (1994) citing Hogue & Sisson (1993). For many the inequity in pay is a big frustration.

Another disadvantage that has been discussed in the literature is exclusion from the work environment (Wamsley, 2008; Maxwell, 1997; Gover, 1994; Pontau & Rothschild, 1986; Anderson, 1995; Braudy & Tuckerman, 1986). As a part-time temporary worker one might not be

well trained to know library policies. Moreover, individuals may feel disconnected from coworkers by not being invited to participate in meetings, institutional and department decision-making (Anderson, 1995) and by being the individuals who work the undesirable shifts (Braudy & Tuckerman, 1986). Barbara Mettler (1988) points out that sometimes being a substitute leads to "Some staff view subs as 'fair game' and will do 'creative' things with their schedules." (p. 9) She discusses a situation where a coworker left the substitute alone while the coworker took extended lunch breaks. While I'd like to think this is not a normal practice, it shows how inequity in the work place can grow between part-time temporary staff and regular employees.

One of the disadvantages that I have not seen discussed in any articles is commuting. While I personally have the luck of working jobs situated only a mile and a half apart, many of my librarian colleagues work far away from their homes. I would find it much more difficult to hold two part-time professional positions if such proximity between institutions did not exist. My colleagues' several jobs are far from one another and can result in the stress of rushing from one job to the next. Additionally the time and money individuals spend commuting in cars, paying for gas, parking, and daycare just so they can work numerous jobs adds up to be quite an expense. As an example, when I began looking for part-time work, I turned down a part-time temporary substitute librarian position 21 miles from my home, and 20 miles from my half-time job. I was sad to do this because the library environment seemed energetic, but I knew that I could not balance such a long commute between two positions, home, and an uncertain work schedule. For some, part of this equation is also how long they are asked to work. Will they be driving a long ways to fill in for only a 2 hour shift?

This leads us to yet another disadvantage: scheduling. Scheduling between multiple part-time jobs can be onerous and difficult. Just keeping track of what days and what shifts you work can be a chore; especially if your shifts vary week to week. In my case I have caught myself, in the middle of an instruction session, referring to the wrong library!

Another scheduling dilemma is that many substitute librarians might not feel that they are able to say no when they are asked to fill in for a shift. If they say no once, they might not be called in the future to cover for a shift. "But it is a fine balance between being available and unavailable for work; you don't want to be too unavailable to work, because then you likely won't get any scheduled hours," (p. 7, Wamsley, 2008). Sometimes this can result in forgoing the luxury of a weekend so that you can keep working in the future, pay the rent, etc.

Many part-timers also struggle with a work/life balance on top of the work/work balance. Part-time librarians typically work more undesirable hours than their full-time permanent counterparts. Evening and weekend shifts are typically covered by part-time employees (Braudy & Tuckerman, 1986; Wamsley, 2008). Substitutes or on-call workers have unpredictable hours. You might receive a call only one hour before a shift to see if you can cover for someone who is out sick. For some librarians this can be a difficulty. Friends and family may have regular 8-5 jobs, so connecting with loved ones can be a hardship.

One of the most troubling disadvantages is that part-time workers often have little to no support to engage in professional development and service. Having been a professional for over three years I am a member of various committees locally and nationally. With a full-time position I was supported to participate in librarianship in this manner and I continue to do so. Again, I am lucky that one of my positions supports my professional service and scholarship in the form of travel to conferences, committee participation, and writing. However, when I am gone from my hourly position for committee work or am attending a conference, I receive no pay for that time. This has resulted in me facing the difficult choice to sacrifice either money, in the form of pay, or sacrifice my professional development in missing committee meetings and conferences. The other choice I face is whether to make up missed work hours when I do participate in a conference. Will I work Saturday and Sunday for the paycheck?

Most individuals who work part-time temporary positions are not supported in their endeavors to participate in professional development opportunities. By this I mean they are not supported financially to attend conferences, nor are they given the release time to work on committee obligations or attend conferences and workshops. And yet, in the future when they apply for full-time permanent jobs employers might favor a librarian who has engaged in service and professional development over one who has not.

Chan and Auster (2003) point to the need to address professional development and training for part-time library workers, stating that "part-time status reduces opportunities for updating; because libraries have come to rely on part-time librarians, the updating needs of these part-time employees should be addressed" (p. 282-283). Part-timers typically must attend

conferences on their own time and on their own dime. For many part-timers the decision becomes “learn or get paid” and that is not an easy decision to make. Some might choose to make up lost pay by working weekends or extending work hours, so as not to lose too much pay for attending a conference or workshop.



[5]

Thanks to DigitalNative at Flickr for use of this image.

Balancing more than one job

Part of my decision to work two jobs was financial; I needed to be able to save money and pay off my student loans. The other issue at hand is that the job market in my city is tight, and there are few full-time permanent jobs to be had in any field, let alone in libraries. I am not alone in this employment situation. As I mentioned in the introduction, the part-time nature of academic work is growing. With this growing population of part-timers, we are all facing the conundrum of how to find good balance between two jobs.

One of the reasons I wanted to write this post was to discuss the challenges I've faced, but also look at the positive aspects and growth that I experience working two fulfilling library positions. I have enough money coming in between both positions, and my ability to retain the perks of a regular employee at one institution has assisted me professionally. Both positions are part-time temporary and I enjoy both of them greatly. However, I find that on any given day one job will get my better self and the other will get the worse. Just like work/life balance, work/work balance demands a person to choose one thing over another. (Remember the cycle of rotating neglect I talked about in [How do You Say No?](#)^[6]) To this end I don't feel that on any day either job gets my best. Ideally, I would be able to have one job and concentrate my energies on providing the best service to patrons and making the best decisions for my library. Being in more than one place can spread energies thin, and can result in confusion, disconnectedness, and exhaustion.

I've found some techniques that are helpful for balancing two professional positions. One, I try to be present within my communities. When I walk in the door of the medical school library I consciously put on my Scholarly Communication and Medical Librarian hat. Likewise, when I enter the door at the state university library, take off my Medical Librarian hat and I put on my Reference and Instruction hat. I try to NOT check my other work's e-mail when I'm at either institution, but sometimes I fail at this.

Changing hats is just one way that I try to be fully engaged at either institution when I arrive. It helps me to keep up by regarding daily announcements and news from either institution, so that I feel like I'm in the loop with each place. I read staff blogs, weekly e-mail announcements,

meeting minutes and other work related materials. These make me feel more connected to what is happening at each work place. It alleviates some of the disconnection that can result from only being around part of the time.

Sometimes changing hats and perspectives in the middle of the day can be tough. I'll find myself going through selection slips at one institution and think, "I should buy this for my other library!" And sometimes I do forward myself book titles to purchase, e-mail tidbits on resources, etc that will benefit my other job at the other library. Frequently I'm still thinking about presentations I gave at my other place of work, or an instruction session I gave the previous evening.

The different nature of my part-time temporary positions has created some inequities in how I view and treat each workplace. Since the medical school does support my service activities and some conference travel, I try to pack in all of my professional development and committee work while I'm on their dollar. Since I also have a job to do, a lot of these commitments will bleed into my weekends, which I've long valued as sacred, non-working times. Conversely, my other employer is unable to support my committee service. As with my professional commitments, I use the benefits from my salaried, faculty position to visit the doctor, or make necessary car mechanic appointments. As a result I sometimes feel frustrated by trying to be a professional and do a professional job without the institutional support that would make it easier and my job more fulfilling.

Likewise my differing employee classification between the two institutions can be a strain. I am faculty at one institution and not at the other. As a faculty member I participate actively within the library and work on library-wide projects rather than my singular job duties. As an hourly wage employee, I do not participate in long-term projects, nor do I participate at the same level as my full-time permanent counterparts. My situation is quite unique in this regard. The divergent nature of my employee status at the institutions stems from my 3-year work history at the medical school and my newness at the state university. Because of my experience as a faculty member at the medical school figuring out how to be a professional in an hourly-wage position is complicated. I would like to be involved at the larger level for library decision-making, but I don't have the institutional knowledge, nor do I feel comfortable within the organization's culture to participate as fully as I would like.

When I took on a second temporary part-time position my partner warned me that I was going to be exhausted and that it was going to be arduous. He was right. Yet I deeply enjoy both of my positions and while I feel certain frustrations, I am comforted in knowing that I'm gaining rich experiences and that this situation will not last forever.

The employer's perspective

Certainly the use of part-time temporary employees stems from economic need. There is no doubt that library budgets are suffering and as a result personal budgets are, too. Chervinko (1986) points out that:

"Using temporary workers is an excellent means of solving some staffing problems in the library. The business world has long recognized the value of these workers and is using them in greater numbers for specialized jobs. Libraries can use them efficiently and economically for staffing major in-house projects. To achieve the maximum benefits from their service, it is necessary that they be carefully selected and thoroughly trained and motivated to produce high quality work. Moreover, they must be treated as equal members of the library staff." (p. 220)

One of the aspects that I value from this business and administrative perspective is the need to treat part-time employees as equal members of the library staff. From the numerous articles I've read and from personal experience, part-time employees do not feel they are treated as equal to their full-time permanent counterparts. Again, in this regard I have been very lucky to be in positions that respect my experience and ideas.

Bette Anderson also addresses this issue in her 1995 article *Trends in the Workplace: Part-time librarians*. "My personal assessment is that the practice of relying on part-timers may save money for employers, but without enlightened management it can result in hidden costs in terms of employee morale and quality of public service" (p. 264). She continues, pointing out that "As outsiders, they are not invited to become part of the decision-making process" (p. 265).

These two quotes point to the need for management and administration to be sensitive to

implementing part-time temporary work. Part-time temporary jobs are cheap for libraries, but at what cost? Is turnover for part-time temporary work high? What are the training costs? Before implementing part-time temporary positions library administrations should put plans in place that address the needs for part-time workers to be treated professionally. For example, where will these employees be able to hang their coats? What are best practices for hiring part-time temporary workers? Professional treatment might include providing some contract hours to engage in professional development activities, or allow paid sick leave. Not all of these suggestions will be feasible for every institution, but they are points for managers and administrators to consider.

What can employees do?

As a new librarian, an underemployed librarian, or someone who only wants to work part-time, what can you do when it comes to the tension of piecemealing together part-time jobs? I would encourage you to ask about professional development possibilities before signing any contracts. Engage in a dialogue with your potential employer and potential supervisor to see if there can be an agreement that will make working several part-time jobs more enjoyable and avoid some of the common disadvantages of working part-time temporary positions. Try to ask for a few hours of your contract work to serve on a committee, or ask if you may attend a conference and receive some financial support to attend.

It is pivotal that we, as professionals, have a clear, constructive dialogue about both the benefits and the disadvantages of part-time temporary work. Harsh letters to the editor regarding poor treatment by an employer will not help part-time temporary employees anywhere. Instead, consider entering into dialogue with your supervisor about how to balance your time. Part-time temporary employees should remain sensitive to the budgetary and political obstructions facing institutions and library administrators. Likewise, institutions and administrators should seriously evaluate how to make and use part-time employees in a responsible and respectful manner. It would be interesting if part-time employees might draft a set of best practices or points for consideration for their libraries. In the future, the library's administrators might use these points when hiring more part-time and/or part-time temporary employees.

Conclusion

If part-time work with benefits were the norm in libraries, then libraries, patrons, and employees would benefit. For many libraries and institutions this kind of solution is not feasible with their tiny, and continually shrinking budgets. Since part-time temporary workers are becoming the new norm in libraries, I think it's time for us to engage in healthy discussion about these issues. This post is my call to have individuals, institutions, and organizations once again examine the issues of part-time temporary labor. Let's talk about creative solutions and ideas that will benefit institutions AND individuals.

As Gover pointed out in 1994, it's time for further study. Where is the study? Who's going to do it? (It's probably not going to be the part-timers, because they have enough on their plates.) But it is time for us to have a greater national dialogue and come up with some techniques to improve working environments for librarians in the trenches. You can contribute by adding your voice. Share your story, your concerns, your triumphs. What have you experienced as advantages to part time work? What about disadvantages?

I'd like to hear from the administrative perspective answers to the following: Have you supervised part-time employees? What challenges did you face? What were your successes? What went in to the decisions to create the positions? What would you look for from a part-time temporary employee in the future?

From the non-administrative side I'd like to hear answers to: What is your experience with part-time temporary work/workers? What would best practices look like to you? Do you have any other benefits or disadvantages to mention? What might lead you to a decision to work part-time temporary jobs?

Many thanks to fellow part-timers Chau Hoang-Fossen and Kim Read for their comments and feedback. Additional thanks to Lead Pipe bloggers, Hilary Davis, Ellie Collier, and Kim Leeder for thoughtful comments; and to Tom Raffensperger and Michael Bowman for conversations, feedback, and their perspectives regarding this topic.

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- [Rising through the Ranks: On Upward Mobility in Librarianship](#) ^[9]
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53 Comments To "Struggling to Juggle: Part-time Temporary Work in Libraries" 53 Comments ([Open](#) | [Close](#))

#1 Comment By [Michele](#) On February 9, 2011 @ 8:52 am

Great piece, Emily!

I think every situation is different. I understand and empathize with your struggles and challenges while working two PT jobs. My personal opinion is that your case is exceptional and, as you say, lucky. You have been working in professional positions since graduation. I think there is a large swath of library school graduates who are never able to get that first FT or PT professional position. Obviously I'm biased, since I am one of those people!

I started working in a paraprofessional position at an academic library while finishing my MLS. (I graduated in 2008.) I found out the hard way that the job market was not great, so I decided to take advantage of my employer's tuition policy and begin a second Master's program. Now, I've backed myself into a corner. I don't want to leave my paraprofessional position because I won't get tuition benefits. There are no jobs for me at this institution. Do I stay or do I go? Do I continue to valiantly try to remain in academic librarianship, or do I try to move into Public, where I have no experience? Add to that the fact that the work I do now is not necessarily the professional direction I want to go in. (Throw in some internships, and a PT Reference Librarian job, too.) When the perfect opportunity to work in the special library I wanted to work in came up, albeit PT, I took it. I still work FT and, now, PT. Caveat should be my middle name! I get paid horribly at my PT job and the people in the organization (I work in a special library in a culinary school) have no respect or esteem for the library. I am the only staff there and I get to manage (and conduct) every single aspect of the library from ordering, reference, IT, cataloging, managing a web presence, software testing, faculty liaising, donor relations, and whatever else needs to be done. The consultant they hired to catalog the library randomly chose a special LOC system that she failed to document, so I need to re-catalog the entire library (yay!). With all of this that I'm able to put on my resume, I'm still on the fence (and have been for over 9 months) about whether I should stay or not.

Anywho, I know I'm not alone in trying to do whatever it takes to find that professional position, but I honestly think I'd be less-stressed working two professional, PT positions, than the one FT paraprofessional position and one PT professional-even-though-my-own-employer-thinks-the-library-is-a-joke position. I don't feel like either of my jobs is a "real" job. Yes, I'm lucky to have a job at all, much less two, but it can be grueling!

(Sorry for the rant! This piece really hit a personal nerve because I'm in a multi-job situation myself!)

#2 Comment By [Megan](#) On February 9, 2011 @ 12:01 pm

Michele,

I'm in a very similar situation to yours; I began working as a paraprofessional at an academic library 3 years ago and am still here, 6 months after graduation, because I cannot find a full-time professional job. In January I began teaching a semester-long information literacy class two evenings a week at a local career college. It's great experience, but exhausting to work 9-5 M-F at my paraprofessional job and 6-10pm Th-F at my professional job (and that doesn't take into account lesson planning and grading, which I do evenings and weekends, and commuting; my part-time position is 30 miles from my full-time job and 20 miles from home). Like Emily, I do not get release time for professional development/committee work/conference attendance at either of my jobs, so I worked 13 days straight in order to attend Midwinter last month. Also like Emily, I realize this is key to my eventually finding a full-time professional job—it's the one thing that makes up for my lack of professional experience—so I'm (mostly!) happy to pursue these activities on my own time.

I do seem to be getting a better response to my job applications, though, so I'm hopeful the pervasive tiredness is worth it!

#3 Comment By [Ellie Collier](#) On February 9, 2011 @ 1:31 pm

Thanks for tackling this topic Emily, particularly the techniques on how to help deal with the disconnect. At one point shortly after graduating I was working three different part-time positions at once, spread all around town and it is definitely stressful. I did eventually take an LAII position so that I could have full time work and benefits. It was a very difficult decision and I was lucky to find full time professional work only a semester later. I also picked up hourly evening work while being employed full time to help pay off those student loans faster. It was a wonderful experience and change of pace since it was a different type of library, but it was incredibly draining and left me with very little free time.

#4 Comment By [Olin](#) On February 9, 2011 @ 1:51 pm

Good read Emily. I just finished my MLS in December and am lucky enough to have gotten a PT temporary position at the place I was interning in last semester. I've been told that a full time position might be opening up soon, but so far nothing. Luckily my fiancee earns enough to bring home the bacon and I'm getting benefits through her, otherwise I would really be in dire straits.

#5 Comment By [Jenny E.](#) On February 9, 2011 @ 5:48 pm

I received my MLS in May 2009. Since August 2005 I have worked 2 part time paraprofessional positions at two different public libraries in my hometown. I jobhunted on and off all through grad school and have jobunted "full time" since my last semester or two. I live right on the line of two states. Been job hunting in both. No luck so far. I'm glad to hear I'm not alone and I'm also not the only one working two part time library jobs. I am devoted to this profession. That's why I'm stuck with two part time jobs. I can't imagine working in a different field. Ideally I'd like to find a full time job near my hometown but at this point I've tried within 3 hours.

#6 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 9, 2011 @ 7:51 pm

Thanks for leaving a comment, Michele. My case IS exceptional and I feel very lucky and am happy with the choices I have made. Just because it's challenging, it doesn't mean I don't enjoy it.

It sounds like your situation is really frustrating! When this happens to me I try my best to focus on the positive things, the experiences I'm gaining, etc.

We're all in it together. hang in there, Michele.

#7 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 9, 2011 @ 7:54 pm

I have my fingers crossed for you, Olin! I'm glad you're working in a library, so many people don't even have that opportunity.

I also find it interesting that you comment here about your fiancee bringing home the bacon. Many of the articles I read about this topic were about women who made the choice to move to half-time jobs so that they could take care of their children and husbands. My how times have changed... I just don't see that we are able to do that anymore.

#8 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 9, 2011 @ 7:55 pm

That's the decision that so many people make, Jenny. Piece together work IN THE PROFESSION rather than taking a job outside of libraries. Times are tough everywhere. Your devotion will serve you well. :)

#9 Comment By [Deb](#) On February 10, 2011 @ 1:35 pm

I'm one of those who choose to work p/t while my son was young, and I was fortunate to have a husband who had/has a f/t job with benefits. I'm back working f/t now. Having been in the profession for many years, my advice to newly minted librarians who are job hunting is if at all possible to not limit yourself geographically. Also, network, network, network. Who you know and who knows and respects you could get you a one-up on the competition. If you're still in library school, make sure you get work experience--internships, field placements, etc.--join library student groups and be an active not passive member. Go to state and national conferences and take advantage of the student intern opportunities that many library professional organizations have. This obviously requires a monetary investment, but it could pay off in the long run. Like anything in life, it's a risk... Lots of good luck as well to you all :-)

#10 Comment By [Ashley](#) On February 10, 2011 @ 3:19 pm

Glad to see you tackling this topic! I got a full-time job right out of library school in 2005 (ah, the old days when the economy was good), but then after moving for the sake of my husband's new job in 2007, I've been unable to find a full-time job in a library, even though I live near a fairly large city. I've combined a part-time library job with a part-time-work-from-home consulting gig.

Currently, I'm working temporarily in a full-time position at the library while a full search is conducted. I can apply, but I'm not guaranteed anything except to be able to return to my part-time hours, which is probably more generous than a lot of situations would be, though it's still frustrating.

I would be more than happy to consider paraprofessional work to land a full-time library job, but my experience is that libraries won't hire a librarian in a paraprofessional job because they're afraid she'll either quit or become confrontational with other librarians or a non-librarian supervisor. I don't want to leave the profession because I know it will be almost impossible to return, but I don't know how much longer I can do this. The inconsistent schedule is tough on my family, and my lack of success is pretty hard on my self-esteem.

#11 Comment By [Karen](#) On February 11, 2011 @ 1:20 pm

Great piece, Emily!

I have experience from both sides of this issue.

I worked from many years as a paraprofessional at a university before decided to get my MLS. Once I did, I continued in my FT paraprofessional job and also worked as an adjunct librarian at the local community college. It was actually a great experience for me as the pay was excellent, I got some great experience, and my supervisor at the FT position was willing to work with my schedule.

Within six months of graduation, I was offered a FT contract librarian position at the university where I had been working as a paraprofessional. I continued to work the PT adjunct position and it worked out very well – until the university developed budget issues and made the decision not to renew librarian contracts.

I had to take a job outside the library field for six months. During that time I wasn't able to work at the community college because my new employer would not allow it (they considered it a conflict of interest). I am back to working full time managing the library at a small private college. I have picked up an occasional adjunct shift at the community college, but it is exhausting since I have a 30 mile commute one way for the FT job and difficult hours.

At the college where I manage the library, I hired and supervised a part-time librarian. Knowing that this was her first job out of library school, I really tried to provide her with opportunities to work on projects that would help further her career (although there was no support or funding for professional development). When she first started, I told her the same thing a former library supervisor told me years and years ago – that my job was to ensure that she would move on to a better job before I did. I'm sad to say that due to budget cuts, she was let go.

It can be extremely hard to include a part-time librarian in the life of the library. Their work hours typically fall outside those of their manager, so written communication skills (on both sides) and the ability to work independently are crucial. I would encourage library managers to do everything possible to support your part-time people. They are a wonderful resource. Just don't take advantage of them.

#12 Comment By [Heather](#) On February 11, 2011 @ 6:18 pm

I'll echo the others: terrific (and very timely) piece, Emily. I always enjoy your posts.

I too have experiences from both sides of the issue. In the two years after I graduated from library school in late 2004, I actually had **four** different p/t library jobs at once. Talk about juggling! For me, it was by choice, for a few different reasons: I wanted to gain work experience in as many different libraries as possible (my positions were as a pre-pro in tech. services at a very large city main branch; a copy cataloger at an outsourcing firm; a weekend supervisor at a medical school; and a sole elementary school librarian). Additionally, I knew that I wanted to take some time off to teach English in Europe for a year before I came back and started my

search for a full-time, professional position. For me, it worked out really well: I discovered that tech. services was the right fit for me, and my supervisors during my time in these positions have since become wonderful contacts/colleagues in the field. I remained in touch with my supervisor at the medical school while teaching in France and, knowing of my experience in tech. services at the other library and outsourcing firm, as well as being familiar with my work ethic, she offered me the full-time tech. services librarian position at the school. I have been here for four years now, and still love it. I use all of the skills I honed in all of my part-time jobs — even the non-tech. services ones! [Additionally, my time as a school librarian taught me that, although I'd spent most of my time at library school studying to be a children's librarian, in actuality it was not something I enjoyed as much as I thought I would!]

On the other side of things...when our f/t systems librarian at the medical school left a year or so ago, it was decided that his position would be cut into half-time. We subsequently had two librarians who stayed only until they found full-time work elsewhere (which ended up being less than three months for each of them — just long enough for us to train them). The entire process was frustrating for everyone involved — not to mention the time-sink of reviewing and interviewing candidates!

Not to go on and on here, but I agree — there are definitely benefits and drawbacks to part-time work, for all parties involved. The reality is, though, that it's going to become more and more common...and my one hope is that people who are considering and/or starting library school right now understand that the part-time conundrum will almost certainly be in their future. It's definitely "the new normal."

#13 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 12, 2011 @ 1:51 pm

Thanks for sharing, Ellie. I think for many this is a very hard decision to take a classified position, even though we have the coveted MLS.

The thing I like about your story is that you did it for a while, and now you're not having to juggle a full-time job and a part-time job! It's good to know that these situations aren't going to last forever.

#14 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 12, 2011 @ 1:55 pm

Thanks so much for commenting, Deb! I agree with you that networking is key. In fact, the jobs I currently have are places where I had informational interviews when I was a library school student.

Also, regarding not limiting oneself geographically is tough. I thought about this a lot before I came back to Portland from library school in Bloomington, dead set on finding a job in Portland. As my 3.5 year history shows, that limit is perhaps the very reason that I've not been able to find Full-time permanent work. However, when I did make the decision to move back home I was following the advice of a true friend who told me. "Emily, if you take a job somewhere else for a while you're still going to have your heart set on Portland. Just move home. You'll be able to find some kind of job and you'll be happier." She was right. I still owe her for that great advice to this day.

#15 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 12, 2011 @ 1:56 pm

That sounds like a frustrating position to be in, Ashley. I'm wishing you the best of luck!

#16 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 12, 2011 @ 1:59 pm

Thanks for talking about how you work with part-time employees, Karen. I think that your communication to them seems to be key! I'm sure it makes those individuals feel appreciated and supported— which I think is something that part-timers might not get a lot of. (not that they aren't appreciated or supported, but that the communication about it isn't there.)

I have also supervised people before who had differing work schedules than mine. It is tough! Thanks for talking to that point. I think that if part-timers can put their feet in a supervisor's shoes, it is really helpful to ease frustrations.

#17 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 12, 2011 @ 2:03 pm

Thanks for bringing up your experience with the part-time librarians in your current institution. That is really a conundrum, when training and hiring are such investments to lose good people

to other work.

One of the keys that I think is part of the hiring process, is making sure hires WANT part-time work. While not everyone does, my situation, when I picked up a second job, was that I did want the part-time work. My supervisors, who were doing the hiring, wanted to ensure that there wouldn't be as much attrition by hiring people who would be ok with the part-time part. Being in a situation where I was guaranteed a half-time job with benefits for a year, I felt quite comfortable in accepting the hourly contract position.

#18 Comment By [Alesia](#) On February 13, 2011 @ 6:25 pm

Hi Emily, This is a timely post for me as I just started a new job as a director of a community college library and most of the public services staff are part-time librarians. I'm still getting to know them and their situations but several also work part time at a public library. As I look at how to make changes at our library, it is challenging to get their input because of the varied schedules and desk coverage. So far meetings have been with full time staff. I do talk to them when I'm out at the desk and a couple regularly send me email with input and ideas.

I inherited this situation but I feel badly that I don't have an opportunity to hire them full time or at least provide some benefits. Over time, I would like to reduce our reliance on part-time staff and convert some of these positions to full time. In the couple months I've been here, my observation is that my salary budget is very dependent on the larger college priorities. In our case, they have to hire more full-time faculty teachers because increasing enrollment has thrown the student teacher ratio out of whack.

Also, my ability to effect change is dependent on the budget planning cycle. Our FY12-13 budget was submitted this fall before I started. So my first opportunity to develop my own budget request won't be until next fall!

I appreciate your raising awareness of this issue and it has reminded me that I need to take time to develop and engage the part-time staff.

#19 Comment By [Piqbitin Mad](#) On February 15, 2011 @ 9:44 am

The more I learn about libraries, the more I have learned to hate them and everybody who works in them. The prevailing advice seems to suggest that you should work 70 hours a week for peanuts to get a job that pays \$15,000 per year. I didn't do an internship in library school because I had a paraprofessional full time job in an academic library. I knew I could never get hired there, but I thought it would at least look okay to another type of institution. Not so. However, it is not just libraries. It is our entire economy being hijacked by Birchers and other Tea Baggers. If we don't fight with guns and bombs I don't think anything will improve...EVER.

#20 Comment By [AnnaLaura Brown](#) On February 17, 2011 @ 6:08 pm

What a great article. As someone who worked for 3.5 years part time at the same college library and who recently was luck enough to get upgraded to full time, I can totally relate to everything you say here. In some ways I'm rethinking my decision to be a librarian but my sky high student loans won't let me do anything else right now. Oh well, I still love libraries.

#21 Comment By [Michelle Oleson](#) On February 17, 2011 @ 6:23 pm

I also work 2 part time library jobs, while supplementing my income from online web work. The library gigs I have weren't meant for someone with an MLS degree like me. I even have experience working professionally at an academic library. But when I moved to Minneapolis, where I want to live permanently, there were no jobs for a professional. I took two paraprofessional jobs, with the promise from my employers that something full time would likely come up soon. One of the jobs will end in three months, and that full time promise has come to nothing. Once again, I'll be looking for additional part time work. I wish people could retire so the younger generation could move in to their spots. All the older librarians I talk to can't afford to retire.

#22 Comment By [Susan](#) On February 17, 2011 @ 6:30 pm

I got my master's in library science back in 2006, and found my first full-time professional job quite easily- a month and a half long job search yielding two offers. However, I had to leave that job when my fiance relocated and had the hardest time finding a job since the economy tanked.

I couldn't turn down the two part-time offers I had because even part-time work in my sub-field of library science was so scarce. That said, I'm having a hard time imagining continuing working two part-time jobs for much longer.

Emily, you seem to have a much more ideal scenario. I have found that my two part-time jobs leave me with a very very small amount of vacation time (one is a benefited part-time job, so I cannot take unpaid time off, and the other is a contracted position with no time off) nevermind a regular schedule that leaves me wiped out by the week's end, with one day every week where I leave my house at 10 am and don't return until 9:30 pm.

On top of the 40 hours I work for the two positions, I also work every other weekend. I have struggled mightily with both work-work balance and work-life balance, and dream of my old job, where my biggest grievances were my quirky co-workers!

With a fair amount of experience under my belt (I had a supervisory position before, and worked with a wide age range), I feel vastly underpaid and underutilized. I feel left out of organizational decision making, and it seems I am always missing the fun stuff at once place when I am scheduled to work at the other.

I am torn between my initial love for the profession and the cold hard reality that I cannot continue along this path if its my only hope to remain in the profession. I have graduate student loans to pay off, and never thought that as I worked more years, I would be moving DOWN the pay scale.

I probably sound more disheartened than I am, but I don't want to provide too much personal information about my situation. There are aspects that I enjoy about both positions, and I do received professional support for conferences. However, at this point, I am trying to think of another field where my skills would be valued.

#23 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 17, 2011 @ 7:23 pm

Alesia, I'm so glad to hear your management perspective on this. Budgets are definitely one the main reasons that I see as why so many part-time temporary positions exist. And yes, larger institutional priorities always effect libraries and their budgets. Thanks agian for commenting.

#24 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 17, 2011 @ 7:27 pm

I'm sorry you're so frustrated, Pigbitin Mad, that you would consider taking up arms to solve problems.

As I mentioned in this article and in my previous writing, I don't think that airing dirty laundry as angrily as you have here is a constructive means to affect positive changes in our profession; nor do I feel it is appropriate to engage in professional discourse using a moniker that asks no accountability of yourself.

I realize you're frustrated, but being as angry as you are will not help any of us make the positive changes we all need in libraries. I urge you to consider how your actions are effecting the hundreds and maybe thousands of unemployed or underemployed or unsteadily employed library workers out there. We should all be in this together.

#25 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 17, 2011 @ 7:28 pm

AnnaLaura, I'm so glad you're sticking with it! I'd hate to see good passionate people, like yourself, give up on libraries.

#26 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 17, 2011 @ 7:51 pm

Michelle, the economy tanking really has had huge effects on labor issues, as you've pointed to here. Many people lost their nest egg, their retirement funds, and can't retire even though they'd like to!

But I'd also like to point to the long line of conversation in librarianship that deals with the myth of the graying of the profession. Where are the jobs?

#27 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 17, 2011 @ 7:59 pm

Susan, it sounds like you're facing some tough choices. Unfortunately that's what part-time work makes us do, face the hard choices. "Do I work this weekend shift or do I take a much

needed break?"

For some people, as you are an example, the choice becomes, "Do I continue to work in libraries?" It must be incredibly disheartening, Susan, and I think that you sound quite positive given your current frustrating and hard situation.

I'm thinking good thoughts for you. :)

#28 Comment By [Michelle Oleson](#) On February 17, 2011 @ 8:34 pm

I think you jumped to the end of a discussion on me. My librarian friends who are also looking for jobs and I often talk about the fact that there **are** jobs out there. There **are** libraries that aren't closing. Those jobs already have people in them. Even if a position comes open, it's gone to someone who knew someone in HR or administration. That's where the jobs are: they're already taken.

#29 Comment By [Amy](#) On February 17, 2011 @ 11:25 pm

I find this piece informative, but also very depressing. One of the reasons I decided to go back to school to get my masters, and chose library science over arts administration and education, was that I wanted to be able to have one full time job that I loved doing. For the last two years, before starting school, I was working at an entry-level paraprofessional education position – it was all right for the moment, and helped me to really see what career paths I was most interested in, but the low pay meant working two other part time jobs just to barely make ends meet. It might have been more tolerable had been living more comfortably between 3 jobs instead of month to month . . . but it was nevertheless, a recipe for burn out. I don't think I could do that again, especially not with graduate loan debt on top of my undergraduate loans.

#30 Comment By [Sara](#) On February 17, 2011 @ 11:39 pm

Yes, yes, and yes. Thanks so much for this article. It's really important to treat this topic seriously since more librarians (and archivists) are finding themselves in this working situation and institutions are relying on more temp workers. I don't think that managers or professional organizations are asking enough real questions about how a shift away from full-time permanent professional jobs is affecting those they hire, the morale of all staff and the field as a whole.

I'm going on three years of part-time, temp employment. All great projects, fantastic institutions, but yes– very low pay and no benefits, no involvement in larger library issues or policy making, no support for professional activities and long-distance commutes. Thanks again for calling attention to these issues.

#31 Comment By [Debbie Graham](#) On February 18, 2011 @ 9:51 am

The fact is, the United States is unique among industrialized nations in that the benefits for part-time workers are so limited and employers take advantage of it. In France for example, most people do not work part-time because part-timers get the same benefits as full-time workers. (Employers get around this disadvantage to a certain extent by offering short-term rather than permanent contracts because everyone works under a type of contract...but at least while you're working you get benefits and then unemployment is generous). What this means here in the library world is that more and more libraries "make do" knowing that as professionals the staff will work hard. Having worked part-time at 3 libraries I know that is far harder than working full-time at one position AND you really can get much more work of a part-time worker—it depends on what responsibilities are given and that can vary widely. In fact, oddly enough, I often had more day-to-day work when I worked 6 hours straight, 5 days a week than now when I work full time. And there is the relief of not working every weekend or even every other weekend—I am grateful every day. Good luck to you all. But until the US changes (not likely) labor laws, this is perhaps going to get worse before it gets better.

#32 Comment By [Rachael](#) On February 18, 2011 @ 10:13 am

Emily, thank you for your post. I'm a Portland girl myself, and did my graduate work on the east coast. It never crossed my mind that living off the west coast was an option, but as I hit the job market I applied for any job available (coincidentally all east of the Mississippi) and ended up taking a "dream job" on the east coast. It has definitely been a wonderful experience, and I am grateful for the amazing professional work I've been able to do; but as you say, my heart is still in Portland. It's a tough decision on what is more important – career or quality home life

(arguably effected by lack of career). I don't have the right answer, but I did appreciate your perspective and sharing your decision on returning home. It was a nice look over the fence to where the grass is always greener, and has given me a lot to think about.

#33 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 18, 2011 @ 10:40 am

I'm really glad you brought this up, Debbie. I see myself working harder and accomplishing more with half-time than I was able to with full-time.

I feel very strongly about work/life balance, and have often wondered about a more European model where a full-time work week is not 40 hours, but more like 30. How would society benefit?

#34 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 18, 2011 @ 10:42 am

You're right, Sara. It's becoming ubiquitous, and that is scary. But as several of my colleagues have pointed out to me, it's less so in libraries right now than say, in community colleges in general; a big problem.

I'm glad you're still able to see the positive in your positions! That can be hard sometimes when one's exhausted from working and commuting and making up missed work hours from being sick, etc.

#35 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 18, 2011 @ 10:45 am

Amy, you're right. I can be disheartening. But that's why I wrote it. Despite how disheartening working part-time temporary jobs can be, they can also be really good experiences. It's all about choices and patience sometimes. Hang in there!

#36 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 18, 2011 @ 10:48 am

oh, and I forgot to say...

YES I think professional organizations, institutions, and administrators SHOULD be asking hard questions, examining this practice, and engaging in dialogue with part-time workers.

As I wrote in my post I am very lucky. I CHOSE to go half-time for a while and I when I got a second job I CHOSE the right one. I also work with people who are very sympathetic and understanding. This is a pretty rare situation. Realizing how rare my positive situation is, and still getting disheartened by it sometimes, I felt like I had to write about it for all of the others who don't have it so lucky. Thanks for commenting.

#37 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 18, 2011 @ 10:51 am

I hope you're right, and I hope you're wrong at the same time, Michelle. I'd like to think that positions are filled with the best fitting and most qualified person, rather than someone's friend.

I think part of my slant is that I'm in Portland, where the job market is slim, and we have an over saturated market, due to a Portland co-hort of a distance education program, and the fact that no one wants to leave this city!

#38 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 18, 2011 @ 10:54 am

You're welcome, Rachael. When I was looking I had other advice, too. People whom I trust and respect deeply were also telling me NOT to go home without a job, that it was dangerous, that I needed to find a job, get experience, and then get a job in Portland later. I was impatient. I'm still happy with my decision, because my life is rich with friends and loved ones, excellent coffee, bicycling like mad, and the best breakfasts in the country. To me, it's been worth it. :)

#39 Comment By [Marcia](#) On February 18, 2011 @ 10:59 am

Emily,

Very interesting article. I feel for librarians just starting out.

I worked as a part-time librarian for 5 years and 3 months until June 2010 when I was laid off. This status of part-time began by choice, as I had developed severe carpal tunnel syndrome at my previous job of 7 years as an internet cataloging librarian. Unlike most people, my part-time employment did offer the same benefits as full-time employment.

Currently, I am looking for work, but I feel because of my age (mid-50's), I am not going to be considered for most positions. I love library work, however, I don't want to be a digital librarian. I am not in a financial position to retire yet, and, fortunately, my only child is out of college with no debt on our part. So it's just me to support right now.

I have considered the entrepreneurial route in my current city of Wash., DC, but feel somewhat overwhelmed by all the technology that grows more pervasive everyday. My desire to set up a website, blog, tweet, facebook, upload videos, etc., etc., is kind of low, due, in part, to the fear of aggravating my carpal tunnel yet again.

Just some thoughts from an aging librarian with 26 years of professional work and no where to channel it in an income-producing way just yet.

#40 Comment By [Michelle Oleson](#) On February 18, 2011 @ 11:52 am

I think you're definitely right about market over-saturation. It's why I went into web design as well, but that's a hit or miss market too. :)

#41 Comment By [Hannah Storm](#) On February 18, 2011 @ 12:01 pm

—"my advice to newly minted librarians who are job hunting is if at all possible to not limit yourself geographically."

I need to highlight this since it is one of the most often cited pieces of advice. But who exactly is this advice intended for? - I think we need to be clear. It's utterly not helpful for the individual that's either married, or single with child(ren) and an existing support network in their locale. In my case, I can't just move off to where the jobs are because my husband, the primary breadwinner, would need to secure a job first (he's in a field that, gasp, pays the relocation) which is significant. Then there's our young daughter, what kind of place would it be for her? - that's a major consideration. We don't currently have a support network to leave, but we have each other; the single parent would be ill advised up and leave if they're not going to have the necessary support network, especially if it involves childcare.

I'm not going to go there with the networking since this (in my experience) seems to be so closely tied to the professional development/continuing education piece which was already discussed thoroughly in the post, along with the monetary ramifications of it.

I'm speaking from the vantage of a MLS holder, who has worked exclusively as a temp and/or part library worker (some part-time positions cobbled together at one time). I've since left the library field to work full time at a healthcare IT company. (I'm also a Ptown native, living elsewhere for 6 years).

#42 Comment By [Mary](#) On February 18, 2011 @ 12:35 pm

Marcia, don't give up hope! A former colleague of mine just got a new FT supervisory position last summer at the age of 62. We got laid off together and after nearly a year of searching and many interviews she got a job.

I'm a paraprofessional (FT) at a public library. In 2009 I was laid off when my position was eliminated and spent a year searching for work without success. 6 months ago I was called back to my library when a colleague left and a spot opened up. I've been here for 10 years. For about half of that time, I felt it was mostly rewarding here. Office politics, personnel dysfunction; a contentious staff-to-Admin relationship and the general wearing-down of living in a severely economically depressed area have taken their toll on my enthusiasm. Getting laid off and called back after such a long period as forever altered the way I view my place as part of the team (shaky). If the state budget is slashed again (likely), I will still be the most vulnerable to layoff as the least-tenured paraprofessional (after a decade!) While I have fallen back into the old routine, my relationships with my remaining colleagues are professional but no longer friendly. I keep repeating to myself like a mantra that I am fortunate to have this job, but it is a test of mental fortitude to navigate this workplace environment every day. Once upon a time I wanted to pursue the MLS, but I see degreed professionals struggling to find even PT work at wages equivalent to what I made as an entry-level paraprofessional 10 years ago (and my library is on the low end of the scale for wages), and I no longer think that's a worthwhile investment of time or effort. I'm exploring other masters' options now in my original field of TESOL education. Life is too short to be continually stressed and miserable at work. Over the past two years, I have seen 90% of the postings in the public library field demanding MLIS for even very PT positions. So there is work to be had if you're willing to do the juggle thing. I'm wondering if FT positions in libraries are an endangered species.

Very interesting article, Emily. Good job!

#43 Comment By [Denise](#) On February 18, 2011 @ 2:30 pm

Emily,

You are indeed fortunate to have benefits and responsibilities with your jobs. When I get sick, I have to decide whether to expose everyone at work to what I have or lose pay. I am the one that covers the desk while everyone else gets to attend staff meetings. One library I worked at had a staff day where they completely manned the library with temp workers while they spent a day in training. I would get called so seldom to work there that in between times they often moved things around and I couldn't find where things were to show patrons. I had a stack of e-mails waiting for me to wade through every time I went to work there, and as you say, I might be called in for 1 1/2 hours although I spent nearly as long commuting to and from the job. In my current position, every time I ask to be given some responsibilities, I am told I can wash book covers or rubber band groups of books together. I used to be included in trainings, but they've cut that out too. For a while, I was trying to take webinars while I was on the desk to keep my skills up, but when my boss found out, she put a stop to that. I used to feel like I was competent to be hired, but now I can't even get paraprofessional jobs. I even tried applying for one where I knew the library director and I didn't get it. I can't afford membership dues or committee work any more, and my morale is at an all time low. I had thought librarianship would be a career, but it has become just a job until I can retire. I no longer harbor any hopes of being anything more than a temporary less-than-part-time library worker. I graduated in 2006 and have been willing to relocate. I've gone to interviews out of state that depleted my savings, but to no avail. I'm wondering if I wasn't better off before I went to library school?

#44 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 18, 2011 @ 7:23 pm

thanks for bringing this up, Hannah. It's definitely a big issue; especially when librarianship is a 2nd or 3rd career for many people who already have established "adult" lives.

You are quite right that networking is really tied in with the professional development community. However, I have seen people do amazing networking just by harnessing the power of their ISPs and logging into LinkedIn, ALAConnect, and other sites. Have you tried networking in that way at all? If so, was it useful?

#45 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 18, 2011 @ 7:26 pm

This must be so incredibly discouraging, Marcia! I really hope that some library will see the light and be able to recognize your incredible experience and dedication to the profession. Don't give up, we need people like you in librarianship!

#46 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 18, 2011 @ 7:30 pm

I'm sorry you're having a negative experience, Denise. That certainly doesn't sound like your professional skills are being put to good use. Without a challenge we are all apt to get bored and aggravated!

I wonder if you could talk to your supervisor's boss about some of your issues? Would it help to try and advocate for yourself that way?

No one likes being in a bad work environment that doesn't support you being proactive about your learning. It sounds like you might try to create some conversation about your situation where you work to see if there might be some opportunities for you to have more support to use your skills. Hang in there!

#47 Comment By [Tom](#) On February 19, 2011 @ 6:56 pm

Seems like crux of this p-t stuff is this: do you want the job(s) and is there requisite pay, benefits and professional respect? I'm part-time for 3.4 years since downsizing. Not enough of any of the above is much coming my way (especially any carrying of any bit of insurance costs/coverage). Been exclusively looking for library jobs, but believe I need to move outside being captive of that box. I'm closer to retirement than I am for an extensive career. Balancing? How? Get one-part time job and how do you fit in the next? In many libraries you're on 2 nights per week. Will the 2nd (or 3rd) p-t place ask the same? Likely. What will give? Working all nights?

No one guarantees you job in life, but after awhile you gotta' tire of the struggle. I work in a

public, and the masses are beaten down for its lack of jobs and its facing similar issues. I put on a happy face, but how long does anyone persevere?

#48 Comment By [Robin](#) On February 20, 2011 @ 8:39 pm

Thanks, Emily, for the article. Thanks, all, for the discussion/venting/sharing.

I've worked half-time in a paraprofessional position for decades, watching FT positions being cut into two PT along the way. To make ends meet I've always had at least three jobs, sometimes temporary or seasonal.

In 2002 I made the decision to get the MLS, dreaming of working in one place, FT, with a better salary level. While commuting to school full time I was working at two jobs until my last year when I picked up another library job. I graduated in 2006 and the dream is dimming.

Suffice it to say I am unable to relocate in the near future, maybe never if my situation does not change. So, I am working as a paraprofessional in a half-time position with some benefits in one library. I work as a paraprofessional in a part-time position (one day a week plus sub work) with no benefits during the school year in another library. Then, I work as a professional librarian (no benefits) in yet another library, but as a "sub." So that's three libraries. On the side I've had two other part-time positions (not in the library field) for decades. Yet, I make less than 30k/year. I'm blessed to say that I love each of my jobs, and I love the variety. Even the three library positions are very different from each other. But I still would like to stop job juggling – it is draining. I would like to be able to focus and really make a difference.

Alas, I am not alone. In my half-time position the vast majority of staff are also job juggling. Most of us feel like we have so much more to offer, but we are in boxes in many ways and on many levels.

In keeping my eyes peeled for library jobs, I'm seeing more and more PT with not-so-good pay. In my area of the country the vast majority of libraries are one-horse-shows requiring an MLS and experience, usually, but not always.

Although financially it is tough (and I've been crowned the Queen of Make-Do and Ms. Frugal) I'm glad that I have jobs. I will persevere and look forward to better times!

#49 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 22, 2011 @ 6:14 pm

Not for very long, Tom, and that's one of the problems? It IS hard to persevere. It IS hard to not be exhausted... I am thinking good thoughts for you and your job search.

#50 Comment By [Emily Ford](#) On February 22, 2011 @ 6:15 pm

Thanks for sharing your experience, Robin.

#51 Comment By [simbqczyc](#) On April 22, 2011 @ 11:40 pm

AiECaW [13]

#52 Comment By [Pigbitin Mad](#) On May 3, 2011 @ 7:50 pm

Well, all degrees are now useless. The only thing to do is move to India and become a medical coder. We should demand that our president nuke that country unless they allow Americans to move there and take advantage of their incredibly low standard of living so that we too can make 20 cents an hour doing medical coding.

As Al Capone was reputed to have said: You can get a lot farther with a smile and gun than you can with just a smile. This country is finished.

#53 Pingback By [Emily Ford ...In Six | INALJ \(I Need a Library Job\)](#) On January 30, 2012 @ 9:24 am

[...] based in reality that was the slow start to my stable employment, which consisted of jumping from temporary job to temporary job for the past four years. For so long just having a permanent job (one with a line item in the [...])

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[3] Placement and Salaries Survey 2010:

http://www.libraryjournal.com/lj/careers/salaries/887218-305/placements__salaries_survey_2010.html.csp

[4] job sharing: **http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Job_sharing**

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[6] How do You Say No?:

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[7] <http://chronicle.com.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/article/Part-Time-Instructors-Deserve/23489/>:

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<http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2008/our-librarian-bodies-our-librarian-selves/>

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