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The Post-Pandemic Job Market for Academic Librarians in the Southeast United States

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the state of the post-pandemic academic library job market in the Southeastern region of the United States. This analysis of academic librarian job advertisements collected from 2022 and 2023 reveals that while some new jobs have emerged there is a continued demand for traditional roles, prior work experience and the ALA-accredited master's degree. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are prominent in job advertisements despite some regional political opposition. Remote work options are limited, signaling a nuanced approach to work modality post-pandemic.

KEYWORDS

Academic Libraries, Librarians, Content Analysis, Job Descriptions, Employment

INTRODUCTION

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, library employees adopted a range of work modalities and libraries adapted services to meet demands, such as offering curbside pickup or home delivery to comply with safety protocols issued from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Institutions turned to video conferencing and collaboration software to perform tasks that would have otherwise happened in-person. Online instruction demanded a different approach to engage virtual learners who reported experiencing “Zoom fatigue.” Teaching online required instructors and librarians to develop new skills and abilities. Libraries proactively developed alternate access to materials and resources.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the American Library Association, as well as universities across the nation published anti-violence and anti-racist statements in response to the death of George Floyd (ALA, 2020; Wesley et al., 2021). Soon after, libraries and institutions alike created diversity statements to demonstrate their commitment to diverse and inclusive practices, including recruitment and retention of marginalized groups. Additionally, institutions and libraries created diversity officer positions and task forces to strategically respond to the history of exclusion and marginalization of underrepresented faculty, staff, and students. In the classroom, instructors and librarians adopted inclusive, affordable, accessible, learning options. What initially looked like a temporary adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic and the social and political events of 2020 has continued to influence the culture of libraries and institutions.

Within this new post-pandemic environment, this study aims to assess the academic library job market in the Southeastern United States. Using a content analysis of job advertisements collected in 2022 and 2023, the authors focus on academic librarian positions from twelve southern states due to the distinct political, cultural, and socioeconomic factors shaping the region's job market.

Four areas guide this exploratory study of academic librarian job advertisements in the Southeast region.

1. What job types are present?
2. What job qualifications, including skills and work experience, are present?
3. What institution characteristics, including inclusivity, are present?
4. What job characteristics, including work modality, are present?

To provide context, the authors draw on similar studies, including a 2015 study by Triumph and Beile, "The trending academic library job market: An analysis of library position announcements from 2011 with comparisons to 1996 and 1988."

LITERATURE REVIEW

Using job advertisements as research data is a commonly used method of studying job trends and requirements in the field of library and information science (LIS) (Kim & Angnakoon, 2016). Triumph and Beile (2015) used content analysis to look at academic librarian job advertisements from 2011 and compared the results to previous studies by Beile and Adams published in 2000 and Reser and Schuneman in 1992; they identified job trends over time, suggesting that library positions have become increasingly specialized with computer skills a priority (Triumph & Beile, 2015).

Job Characteristics

In addition to providing an overview of the librarian profession, content analysis of job advertisements has been used to study emerging roles for specific library positions in specific areas, such as reference services (White, 2000), electronic and digital services (Croneis & Henderson, 2002), technical services (Deeken & Thomas, 2006), and promotion, marketing, and outreach (Okamoto & Polger, 2012).

In 2017, Reiter and Zabel published a study of job advertisements focusing on flexible work arrangements. They found that many did not mention the issue, and those that did suggested that the employee should be flexible to work when needed, not that the employee had flexibility. A recent study by Petersen (2023) of pre and post pandemic job advertisements found that there was an increase in health science librarian positions advertising remote or hybrid work.

Institution Characteristics

Diversity statements in job advertisements can signal an institution's commitment to diversity and the existence of an inclusive culture to potential applicants. Despite the number of studies examining job advertisements in LIS, there are few published analyses on the presence of diversity statements or inclusive content in job advertisements.

In 2020, Dow et al. studied reference librarian job advertisements from 12 academic libraries in the Midwestern United States for words that reflected diversity and equality; invited applicants from diverse groups to apply; or presented potential barriers for individuals with disabilities or marginalized groups. Bell (2021) analyzed diversity statements in fifty online job advertisements for Canadian academic librarian and archivist positions. Muir et al. (2020) analyzed Australian library job advertisements for instances that invited applications from diverse groups including people with disabilities, members of the LGBTIQ+ community, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, culturally and linguistically diverse groups, as well as populations experiencing age or gender bias.

Job Qualifications

Looking at the evolution of job requirements can help illuminate trends in librarianship. A study by Lynch and Smith (2001) analyzed advertisements to understand job qualifications, finding that by 1998 computer skills and instruction were more integrated across jobs and soft skills like communication had become prevalent as job requirements. Hartnett (2014) tracked the unique role of electronic resources positions over a ten-year period. The results found an increasing requirement for specialized software knowledge and project management skills. The study indicated job requirements for electronic resources positions were ever-evolving due to the heavy reliance on technology.

Detmering and Sproles (2012) and Todorinova (2018) studied requirements for first-year and entry-level academic librarian positions. Hodge, et al. (2021) examined qualities and skills of librarians who advanced to middle management. These studies not only help new librarians understand what skills are important to build, but also help explain how different roles are perceived (Hall, 2013) and what emerging positions entail (Yuan-Ho, 2021). For example, a study (Reed & Carroll, 2020) examined advertisements of health sciences librarian positions to determine job requirements for emerging health-

related research practices, revealing a focus on traditional librarian competencies rather than emerging areas, such as data science, grant support or research impact.

A more recent study by Yadav (2022) analyzed job advertisements for skills and competencies required for librarians in the “digital age.” The results demonstrated that requirements for computer knowledge, technology skills, managerial experience, and other soft skills were increasingly important.

METHODOLOGY

For this study, library job advertisements issued in 2022 and 2023 were collected from online job sites and/or listservs hosted by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, HigherEdJobs, the American Library Association (ALA), the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the Southeastern Library Association (SELA) and Amigos Library Services. Duplicate entries were eliminated with the advertisement with the greatest detail being retained.

The review of advertisements was limited to positions in the Southeastern United States, specifically those twelve states within the coverage of the Southeastern Library Association: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. The positions needed to be full-time professional academic library appointments of a minimum of two years. A total of 182 unique job advertisements, published in 2022 and 2023 met the criteria. While this sample is not necessarily comprehensive due to the nature of online and dynamic recruitment systems, it does provide a representative sample of academic librarian jobs advertisements from Southeastern academic libraries.

The authors created a repository of advertisements that tracked a total of fourteen data points, including job characteristics, such as job title, salary, faculty status, tenure-track status, work modality; institutional characteristics, such as institution name, location, and workplace inclusivity; as well as, job requirements, such as ALA-accredited library degree, other advanced degrees, foreign language skills, and work experience.

Classifications

Three authors independently analyzed each advertisement’s job title, roles, and responsibilities, and classified each position according to job type (e.g., cataloging/metadata or reference) and primary division of duties (e.g., technical, public, or electronic). Then, the authors compared and discussed each position until at least two of the three authors agreed upon the final categorizations.

Four pre-existing job classification systems were applied, including the ALA Joblist’s job categories (ALA, 2024), the College and University Professional Association for Human Resource (CUPA-HR) Job Description Index (ACRL, 2022), Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education (Carnegie, n.d.), and a classification system published by Triumph and Beile in 2015.

ANALYSIS

Institution Characteristics

Institution, Classification

Based on the American Council of Education’s Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education, an examination of the size and research scope of the institutions offering library positions found that a majority were large with a high level of research activity. Universities with high research activity constituted approximately two-thirds of the positions, as 91 positions (50 percent) were from Carnegie Classification R1: Doctoral Universities Very High Research Activity and 27 (15 percent) were from R2: Doctoral Universities High Research Activity. Seventy percent (128) of the positions were from four-year large universities (based on Carnegie size classifications).

Location

An identification of the geographic location of the job advertisements found that the distribution of advertisements according to state did not necessarily correlate to the population or the number of possible academic librarian jobs of the various states. The largest number of announcements were from Alabama and Virginia (at 26 each) and the fewest were found from Louisiana (3) and West Virginia (1).

Table 1

Positions Advertised by State, by Total Number, by Percent

State	Number	Percent
Alabama	26	14%
Arkansas	18	10%
Florida	17	9%
Georgia	23	13%
Kentucky	9	5%
Louisiana	3	2%
Mississippi	11	6%
North Carolina	21	11%
South Carolina	10	5%
Tennessee	17	9%
Virginia	26	14%
West Virginia	1	1%

Diversity Statement from the Institution

The authors searched job advertisements for word occurrences related to the concept of diversity (e.g., diverse, diversity, equity, inclusion, women, gender, underrepresented). Words found in the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) policy, which prohibits specific types of job discrimination in certain workplaces, were not counted. Sixty eight percent of advertisements used various wording that referred to diversity in its recruitment process or institutional/library culture.

Diversity Statement from the Applicant

Only seven percent of advertisements required applicants to submit a DEI statement as part of the application process while 53 percent did not require a DEI statement and 38 percent did not indicate documents needed for the application process. Two percent of the advertisements indicated applicants could submit an optional DEI statement. In the analysis, DEI statements were considered “not required” if the job posting contained a list of documents required for application and a DEI statement or statement of diversity was not included. If the advertisement did not mention documents, it was considered “not stated.”

Many state legislative bodies in the Southeastern United States indicated having reservations and/or hostility to DEI initiatives (Lu, 2023). It should be noted that many of the job advertisements included in this study were posted prior to much of the legislative and executive action of various states, so it is unclear what impact political action will have on the prevalence of DEI wording and statements in the future.

Job Characteristics

Job Division Classification

Public service positions accounted for 58 percent of the advertised jobs, electronic service positions accounted for 23 percent and technical service positions accounted for 19 percent. Seven executive leadership positions were excluded from the analysis (e.g., dean, director, etc.).

Table 2*Positions Advertised by Division by Total Number, by Percent (n=175)*

Job Division	Number	Percent
Electronic	40	23%
Public	101	58%
Technical	34	19%

Job divisions for the Southeast region were comparable to those reported in Triumph and Beile's 2015 study. For example, public service jobs were very comparable (i.e., within one percentage point), technical services jobs were a bit less (by approximately four percentage points), and electronic jobs a bit more (by approximately four percentage points). This may indicate a slight transition in technical services positions as collections and delivery methods become increasingly technology driven.

Job Type, Classification

An examination of positions by ALA Joblist categories found the greatest number of jobs to be in the roles of subject specialist/liaison (18 percent), administration/management (15 percent), special collections/archives (13 percent) or information literacy and instruction (nine percent). The liaison role of librarians continued to be of significant importance, as positions in the areas of collections, outreach and instruction, not counted in the liaison category, also had liaison duties included. A closer examination of 33 liaison positions found that a large number of these positions (48 percent) were in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Liaison positions generally also contained instruction, collection development and/or outreach responsibilities. See Table 3 for additional position information.

Table 3*Positions Advertised by Job Type, Using ALA JobList Categories (n=182)*

Job Type	Number	Percent
Subject Specialist/Liaison	33	18%
Administration/Management	27	15%
Special Collections/Archives	24	13%
Information Literacy and Instruction	16	9%
Collection Development/Acquisitions	12	7%
Scholarly Communication/Copyright	9	5%
IT/Systems/Web	8	4%
Instructional Design and Technology	7	4%
Medical	7	4%
Data Services	6	3%
Electronic Resources	6	3%
Assessment	4	2%
Cataloging/Metadata	4	2%
Digital Projects and Initiatives	4	2%
Reference	3	2%
Research	3	2%
Access Services/Circulation	2	1%
Law	2	1%
Outreach and Public Programs	2	1%
Government Documents	1	1%
Resource Sharing/ILL	1	1%
Technical Services	1	1%

Faculty Status

The majority (67 percent) of the job advertisements indicated faculty status for the position. A

relatively large number of advertisements (31 percent) did not state if the position was faculty status, and only two percent stated that they were non-faculty positions. Faculty status was assumed if the job announcement stated the position was tenure-track.

Tenure-Track Status

Of the 122 advertisements for positions with faculty status, 43 percent were tenure-track and 32 percent were non-tenure-track. There was no mention of tenure status in 25 percent of the advertisements.

Table 4

Faculty Status by Total Number, by Percent (n=182)

Faculty Status	Number	Percent
Faculty	122	67%
Non faculty	4	2%
Not stated	56	31%

Table 5

Tenure Status by Total Number, by Percent (n=122)

Tenure Status	Number	Percent
Non tenure track	39	32%
Not stated	31	25%
Tenure track	52	43%

Salary

Of the job advertisements reviewed, 92 listed salary information. Most frequently (54 percent) the advertisements included a minimum/starting salary; salary ranges were provided in 46 percent of the advertisements. Where salaries were not listed, there was often a generic statement, e.g. salary commensurate with qualifications and/or experience.

Table 6

Minimum Salaries by Total Number, by Percent (n=92)

Minimum Salaries	Number	Percent
Less than \$50,000	8	9%
\$50,000 - \$59,999	30	33%
\$60,000 - \$69,999	23	25%
\$70,000 - \$79,999	16	17%
\$80,000 - \$89,999	8	9%
\$90,000 - \$99,999	1	1%
\$100,000 -	6	7%

Salary, Classification

An examination of position advertisements, using the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) classifications, identified some general trends in librarian salaries. The majority (58 percent) of minimum salaries were between \$50,000 and \$70,000. The highest paid job type was administration/management. For the 19 jobs classified as administration/management (below dean/director level), the average beginning salary was \$79,050.00. For the seven systems/digital resources positions the average beginning salary was \$72,849.37. In the eight emerging positions in scholarly communication, open education resources (OER), and data the average beginning salary was \$65,051.88. For the seven technical services positions (e.g. cataloging, metadata, or serials/e-resources) the average beginning salary was \$60,750.00. For the 32 public services librarian positions

(e.g., reference, instruction, or subject liaison) the average beginning salary was \$59,027.31. For the 12 special collections and archives positions, the average beginning salary was \$53,901.58.

The lowest advertised salary was for an archivist position with a minimum of \$38,319. The highest was \$115,000 for two associate dean positions.

Table 7

Job Type by Total Number, by Minimum Salary (n=85)

Job Type	Number	Minimum Salary
Administration/Management	19	\$79,050.00
Systems/Digital Resources	7	\$72,849.37
Scholarly Communication	8	\$65,051.88
Technical Services	7	\$60,750.00
Public Services	32	\$59,027.31
Special Collections/Archives	12	\$53,901.58

Work Modality

Job advertisements indicated that librarian positions were predominantly on-site. Only eight percent of the advertisements indicated that the position offered a hybrid work option; no positions indicated a completely remote option. The few announcements that indicated a hybrid work option included positions in all areas; 27 percent of the jobs were electronic services, 53 percent were public services, and 20 percent were technical services. This breakdown matches the overall division of positions, suggesting that the hybrid option was not based on job type.

The issue of remote and/or hybrid work has not been widely studied in the library profession. However, Petersen (2023) found that for health science librarians, remote/hybrid work was offered in only 1.2 percent of national job advertisements in 2018–2019 but 16 percent of advertisements in 2021–2022. The smaller percentage of remote/hybrid options (eight percent) found in recent Southeastern advertisements may be an indicator of an evolving view on remote work, post-pandemic, with less continued support for remote/hybrid options.

Recent data from WFH Research (Hansen, et al., 2023) indicated that 8.9 percent of job advertisements in the education sector offered remote/hybrid options in 2022 and a similar 9 percent of job advertisements in 2023 offered the options. For all occupations nationally, Hiring Lab reported 8.3 percent of advertisements featured remote options in late 2023 (Culbertson, 2023). It is worth noting that Reiter and Zabel (2017) reported libraries provided more flexible work options than were mentioned in their job advertisements. This may be the case for hybrid/remote work post-pandemic.

Job Requirements

Work Experience

Job advertisements were coded for the presence of work experience and then further classified into required or preferred. If work experience was not mentioned, then positions were coded as not stated. There were very few jobs that did not prefer or more commonly require prior experience. An examination of the available positions found a scarcity of what might be deemed “entry-level” jobs. Only two percent of positions in electronic services and three percent of public services appeared to be available to candidates with no experience. All positions in technical services either preferred (nine percent) or required (91 percent) prior experience.

Table 8

Prior Work, Experience by Division (n=182)

Prior Work Experience	Electronic	Public	Technical	Overall
Not required	3%	2%	0%	2%
Not stated	10%	3%	0%	4%
Preferred	15%	23%	9%	18%
Required	73%	72%	91%	77%

Education, Degree

Educational requirements examined included an American Library Association (ALA) accredited master's degree, another advanced degree and knowledge of a foreign language. The ALA-accredited master's degree was required for 85 percent (155) of the positions; only seven percent (13) did not require the degree while the requirement was unclear or unstated in eight percent (14) of advertisements. For the advertisements where the minimum educational requirements were clear, the master's degree was required 92.3 percent of the time.

This percentage of jobs requiring the ALA degree was less than the 94.8 percent found in 2015 by Triumph and Beile and 98 percent found in 1992 by Reser and Schuneman. While the days of the ALA-accredited master's degree being an almost universal requirement may have passed, it appears that the degree is still maintaining importance as a minimum requirement for academic librarian positions.

For the 14 job titles that did not require an ALA-accredited degree, most involved working with archives and special collections or specific technologies. Titles included the following:

- Archivist
- Assistant Archivist
- Assistant University Archivist
- Collection Services Coordinator
- Data Scientist & Visualization Specialist
- Data Services Specialist
- Digital Capture Specialist
- Digital Publishing Manager
- Director of Moving Image Research Collections
- Instructional Technology Librarian
- Manager, Library Technologies
- Systems and Website Librarian
- Web Applications Developer

While the requirement for an ALA-accredited master's degree remains high, the study identified a decline in the need for a second advanced degree and/or foreign language skills. Only ten percent of advertised positions listed an additional degree in the qualifications with two percent requiring and eight percent preferring additional credentials. The small percentage of positions requiring an additional advanced degree is striking given the relatively large number (18 percent) of subject specialist/liaisons in the job advertisements. In Triumph and Beile's 2015 study, 23.1 percent of position announcements listed other academic credentials as either preferred (16.6 percent) or required (6.6 percent).

Foreign Language

Job announcements were also coded for any mention of foreign language skills, whether required or preferred. Only four percent of positions preferred applicants with foreign language skills. The decline in importance of language skills is notable as past studies found significantly higher demand. Reser and Schuneman (1992) reported 24 percent of advertisements listed the qualification; Beile and Adams (2000) found 16 percent, and Triumph and Beile (2015) found ten percent listed foreign language skills as a required or preferred qualification.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of job advertisements posted in 2022 and 2023 provides insights into the post-pandemic job market for academic librarians in the Southeastern United States. This study, which draws on similar research, examined job types, salaries, job requirements, and working conditions.

The majority of job advertisements were from large research universities. Public service posi-

tions with subject specialist/liaison roles constituted the majority of jobs advertised. While the demand for an ALA-accredited master's degree remains high, there is a decreasing trend in requiring additional advanced degrees or foreign language skills. Salaries varied across positions, with administrative and systems/digital roles generally commanding higher starting salaries. The scarcity of entry-level positions and the consistent demand for prior experience highlight the competitive nature of the job market.

The limited prevalence of remote work options, compared to the widespread adoption during the pandemic, suggests a nuanced approach to flexible work arrangements in academic libraries. Notably, DEI considerations were prevalent in job advertisements, signaling a growing awareness of diversity and inclusion issues within academic libraries in the Southeast United States.

This study indicates that while roles and responsibilities continue to evolve, many traditional positions, expectations and priorities remain. The content analysis not only provides a snapshot of the post-pandemic job market for academic librarians in the Southeast but also offers insights for both job seekers and institutions seeking to navigate the evolving landscape of academic librarianship.

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