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Why Library and Information Science? Results of a Career Survey of MLIS Students Along with Implications for Reference Librarians and Recruitment

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Recommended Citation

Ard, Allyson; Clemmons (Smith), Susan; Morgan, Nathan; Sessions, Patrick; Spencer, Brett; Tidwell, Tracy; and West, Patricia J., "Why Library and Information Science? Results of a Career Survey of MLIS Students Along with Implications for Reference Librarians and Recruitment" (2006). *University Library Faculty Publications*. 27.
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Why Library and Information Science?

The Results of a Career Survey of MLIS Students Along with Implications for Reference Librarians and Recruitment

Hearing why the librarians of tomorrow chose the library profession is vital, because understanding their motivations provides librarians with a glimpse of the future as well as ways to improve that future for the profession. This article therefore seeks to communicate the career motivations of MLIS students by reporting the results of a survey conducted at the University of Alabama's School of Library and Information Studies. Library administrators and others responsible for hiring information professionals will want to hear the library students' reasons for entering the field, their salary expectations, geographic preferences, perceptions of the job market, and interest in various subfields. However, all librarians should seek to learn more about students' career motivations and professional interests so that they can recruit more people to the profession and accommodate the needs of new colleagues. By using the survey results as a springboard, we propose several recruitment strategies with an emphasis on the key role of reference librarians in future campaigns. We also recommend that RUSA sponsor annual surveys similar to our own questionnaire so that the profession can adopt an informed approach to the recruitment dilemma.

Librarians often have fascinating stories about how they made their decision to enter the profession:

Reference & User Services Quarterly, vol. 45, no. 3, pp. 236–48
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“A number of people influenced my decision, both directly and indirectly, to become a librarian. They range from family and friends who urged me to continue my education and pursue my M.S.L.S, to librarians whom I came to respect and admire for their attitudes toward and visions of librarianship.”¹—Adam Glazer, Reference Librarian, National Library of Medicine

“Working in the records room for a downtown Chicago law firm drove me into children’s services—I’ve never looked back.”²—Amy Alessio, Youth Services Librarian, Schaumburg Township (Ill.) District Library

“I’ve always loved books and libraries.”³—Ellen O’Brien, Former LIS student at School of Communication, Information, and Library Studies at Rutgers University, New Jersey

“I spoke to one of the college librarians, and she made it sound so wonderful.”⁴—Karen Klapperstuck, Library Director, Bradley Beach (N. J.) Public Library

“I love the environment, I’m a book fiend. . . . I was just sitting there at home looking at my books one day, and



I said, 'Wait a minute! Librarian!'"⁵—Anonymous Student, Dominican University, River Forest, Illinois

Stories like these pique interest, prompt a grin or nod of recognition, and lead us to reflect back on our own decision to embark upon a library career path. Yet, listening to the testimonies of new librarians and LIS students provides for far more than passing entertainment or a reason to reminisce; their stories reveal why people enter librarianship and thereby furnish ideas for winning more recruits to the profession. Clearly, grasping the reasons that currently attract people to the field as well as expectations about such issues as salaries will help library administrators make strategic choices about recruitment and retention. However, reference librarians should also learn more about students' career motivations and professional expectations so that they can help usher new colleagues into the field. For this reason, our study presents the motivations and beliefs of current students in the University of Alabama's School of Library and Information Studies and harnesses these findings to propose a list of strategies that reference professionals can use to recruit new librarians.

Few factors affect the health of a particular library as much as the quantity and quality of the staff. The people working in the library create the level of morale and the caliber of service. Their attitudes determine whether the library will be forward- or backward-looking, dynamic or static, user- or inward-focused—in other words, whether the library will be an information powerhouse or a dreary warehouse. When considering reference departments in particular, sufficient staffing is critical because "lesser service resulting from understaffing can quickly erode public relations, expectations, and support, which could possibly lead to a downward spiral of understaffing, leading to lower levels of services, which leads to poorer public relations leading to lower funding and hence lower staffing."⁶ Administrators and managers accordingly make job searches one of the top priorities in their organizations. Many librarians serve on search committees at some point and recognize the importance of the hiring process to their particular library.

While the importance of recruitment on an institutional level is obvious, the necessity of recruitment on a profession-wide scale comes into sharp resolution when considering the staffing crisis looming over the field. "In 2009 over 25 percent of librarians will reach or pass age 65, and nearly two out of three current librarians will retire by 2017."⁷ The exodus of baby boomer librarians will spawn a personnel shortage that will strike home to almost every library staff.

Symptoms of this problem have already become evident in several corners of the profession. For instance, the ALA Job Placement Center has had more open positions than interested candidates at every Annual Conference and Midwinter Meeting since 1998.⁸ In a recent survey of human resource directors, 73 percent of respondents reported difficulty in hiring librarians at their institutions

within the past six months.⁹ The example of the Queens Borough Library, which has had fifty to sixty open professional jobs at one time, also foreshadows the crippling staff shortages that will beset more libraries in the future.¹⁰ The growing dearth of librarians has even gained a place on the national news scene as revealed by recent articles in *The New York Times* and *U.S. News and World Report*.¹¹

Other developments threaten to exacerbate the recruitment crisis. New challenges, in the form of the USA PATRIOT Act and the Internet, swell while the population of librarians dwindles. Furthermore, libraries must increasingly compete with private information companies attempting to lure MLIS holders with attractive salaries.¹² In addition, despite limited hiring pools, many academic libraries often prefer candidates with second master's degrees or additional certifications beyond the MLIS.¹³ Libraries face the task of recruiting not only a sufficient work force but also a diverse work force that reflects the changing demographics of the United States.¹⁴

The crisis has sparked a scramble for solutions. John Berry, a recent president of ALA, established the Recruitment and Diversity Task Force to coordinate efforts to meet the crisis. In 2002 the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) organized "Recruiting and Educating Librarians for the 21st Century," an emergency summit of leaders from various library associations to tackle the issue.¹⁵ Schools of library and information science are also imploring their alumni and students for greater help with recruiting.¹⁶ President George Bush and First Lady Laura Bush, a former librarian herself, have also joined the recruitment drive by enacting a new student grant program administered through the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science.¹⁷ The profession needs more such initiatives in order to persuade sufficient numbers to join the ranks of librarians, and it needs empirical evidence to guide these efforts.

This article therefore contends that part of the solution to the "staffing anemia" in libraries lies in using surveys to find out what factors currently stimulate students to launch a career in LIS. Taking into account the next generation's career motivations and professional beliefs will empower all librarians—particularly those in reference—to boost recruitment by making LIS a more visible and attractive field for prospects.

Literature Review

As with the current study, previous authors have used surveys to illuminate LIS professional interests and career choices. In the past, the number of surveys dealing with LIS career decisions increased as staffing levels ebbed and decreased as staffing levels rose. Accordingly, the past two decades have witnessed a gradual rise in the tide of LIS career studies.



In 1985, Dewey called attention to the relationship between career choices and the availability of new librarians in her article "Selection of Librarianship as a Career: Implications for Recruitment." In a three-year survey of students at Indiana University's School of Library and Information Science, she confirmed previous findings that contact with a librarian has the strongest impact on a student's decision to join the profession. In recognition of the role of librarians as *de facto* recruiters, she also prescribed more library and information science initiatives to convey relevant information about the job market, schools' counseling services, and other professional issues to practitioners.¹⁸

Van House conducted a systematic, four-year survey of LIS students at the University of California at Berkeley and found that intrinsic interests, such as enjoyment of the nature of library work, ranked foremost in students' minds when they chose an LIS career.¹⁹ A year later, ALA's Office for Personnel Resources produced *Occupational Entry: Library and Information Science Students' Attitudes, Demographics and Aspirations Survey*, an extensive investigation that gathered baseline data from 3,484 LIS students in fifty-four schools for the purpose of enhancing recruitment efforts. The questions elicited data about students' motivations for entering LIS, geographic preferences, expected income, and opinions on current recruitment strategies.²⁰ As a follow-up, the authors prepared a report for reference librarians that revealed that students had the greatest interest in reference services as compared to other subfields (although they note that many LIS students exhibit a "somewhat vague specialization affiliation").²¹

More recently, the editors of *American Libraries* published an article, "Looking Ahead," that showcased career testimonies from Generation X librarians. The Gen-Xers listed an assortment of reasons for entering LIS, ranging from traditional motives like enjoyment of reading to a very unusual rationale about the influence of the *Star Wars* movie trilogy! Most Xers exuded optimism about their own careers as well as the future of the profession.²²

In a reflection of the increasing shortage of librarians, three major career studies appeared in 1999. Gordon and Neisbitt queried 391 librarians and found that the interest arising from pre-professional library jobs provided the number one impetus for pursuing an MLIS. Many respondents also gravitated to LIS because of their love of reading, but, even in today's highly wired world, only a tiny number said they entered librarianship because they enjoyed technology.²³ Houdyshell, Robles, and Hua conducted an e-mail query of librarians that challenged their respondents to ponder, "What were you thinking? If you could choose librarianship again, would you?" In justifying their decision to join the field, only about 25 percent of respondents listed salary as a significant incentive. More powerful motivations included the opportunity to serve others (95 percent), intellectual challenge (82 percent), the nature of library work (81 percent,) and pre-

vious library experience (62 percent). The survey also revealed that public and academic librarians had encouraged many respondents to enter the field.²⁴ In a separate poll, Weihs identified the following factors that spurred respondents to become librarians: influence of another librarian, previous work in libraries, a desire for career change, process of elimination, a love of reading, LIS matched interests and abilities, always wanted to be a librarian, and misconceptions. Of the people who entered LIS because of the influence of a librarian, some said that a relative or friend working in a library persuaded them while others said that a librarian's service attitude had inspired them. The three respondents who slipped into LIS due to misconceptions about the field said that they thought they could read all day if they became a librarian, believed that LIS induced less stress than other professions, and hoped to earn more money than their father who was a college professor.²⁵

In a few cases, MLIS students have taken the initiative to share their reasons for joining librarianship through testimonies in e-zines and school of library and information science newsletters. In *Ex Libris*, one LIS student, Ellen O'Brien, highlights the inspirational examples of librarians and love of reading that propelled many of her classmates into the library profession.²⁶ On a more formal scale, an enterprising group of LIS students conducted a class survey, "The Graduate School of Library and Information Science Future of the Profession Survey: Report," at the University of Texas in 1999. Their report depicted an optimistic, flexible, predominately female class of soon-to-be-professionals. Important findings included: 60 percent of respondents planned on using job placement services at conferences, 50 percent had changed their minds about what specialty track they wanted to pursue while in the LIS program, 76 percent viewed the job market optimistically, and 90 percent saw themselves working in the LIS field in five years.²⁷

We conducted a similar survey that would contribute more information about students' initial decision to enter LIS, choices about subfields and schools, and professional interests. Like the Texas study, we chose to focus on library and information science students so that the findings could help the profession discern what factors currently shape new recruits' career decisions as well as what librarians "coming down the pipe" expect as they stream out into the field. We drew upon these findings to develop a list of recruitment strategies that reference librarians can use in their own libraries.

Method

A sample of master's students enrolled in the University of Alabama's School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS) program completed a nineteen-item career ques-



tionnaire based on the earlier study done at the University of Texas in 1999. The original survey gathered information such as the factors that attracted MLIS students to the library profession as well as data about demographics, particular subfields, and students' expectations of the profession. In response to the Texas authors' suggestions and our own curiosity, we added questions about salary expectations, geographic preferences, and opinions about types of libraries.

As a ready-made team of six SLIS graduate reference assistants, an intern, and a reference librarian serving as supervisor, we divided up all the MLIS courses offered by SLIS in the spring of 2004. Each of us attended some of the MLIS courses and administered the questionnaire, which took approximately ten minutes to complete. Both full-time and part-time students filled out the survey. While the SLIS program technically includes some students working toward a Master of Fine Arts degree in Book Arts, our research focused only on MLIS classes.

In addition, due to logistical limitations, the survey did not encompass MLIS students who only attend classes at remote classroom locations nor students only attending weekend classes. Most people taking only these classes attend school part-time, probably because personal or professional considerations (such as having a family or a full-time job) may deter them from full-time study. They also probably completed their undergraduate (or first graduate) experience long before entering the SLIS program. These factors likely mean that they would not fall within the younger age bracket indicated on the survey, and that they would likely answer "yes" to the question about LIS as a second career choice. Thus, while we cannot know for sure, the exclusion of these off-site students likely skewed the sample young as well as underestimated the number of people considering librarianship as a second career. Surveying these students might also have produced more results that reflect the perspective of school librarianship because most of the off-site SLIS students take media specialization courses.

Ninety-six MLIS students completed the questionnaire. In the following discussion, we present the motivations and expectations reported by these students and then compare their responses with data from earlier surveys and official sources such as *The Occupational Outlook Handbook* and *The Bowker Annual*. As current or aspiring reference service providers, we give special attention to students' ideas about our subfield. While we cannot generalize to all American LIS students based on the results of this survey, we can add to the existing knowledge about LIS career motivations as well as rouse other investigators to build a more complete picture of the decision-making process of LIS students. After reviewing the results, we will also offer many practical suggestions about how reference librarians can carry out recruitment through their interactions with student workers, paraprofessionals, and patrons.

Results

Demographics

More than half of the respondents (52 percent) had taken courses in the MLIS program for two semesters or less (either part-time or full-time). Female students comprised 75 percent of respondents. Nearly half of the respondents (48 percent) were in their twenties, 26 percent of respondents said they were in their thirties, and 24 percent reported being over forty. These findings suggest that many students cross over to LIS after working in other professions. Although we had anticipated a high no response rate when asking for age, only 2 percent elected not to respond to this question.

In all, 56 percent of respondents held a BA degree, and 38 percent held a BS. While MLIS students traditionally transfer from liberal arts backgrounds such as English or history, a substantial number apparently come from fields such as business or science, a finding that bodes well considering the dearth of science librarians in the field.²⁸ In this study, 14 percent of the respondents held MA or MS degrees; 2 percent, who were presumably Ph.D students, already held an MLIS. Other degrees included AS (8 percent), JD (2 percent), MEd (1 percent), BSN (1 percent), DMD (1 percent)—a variety of specializations that reflects the diversity of MLIS programs.

Choosing LIS

Nearly nine out of every ten participants (89 percent) first decided to pursue an LIS career during or after college; 31 percent did not even consider a LIS career until five or more years until after college (figure 1). Only 3 percent listed an LIS career as a lifetime ambition, and just 2 percent listed LIS as a goal since high school. These findings prompt an intriguing question: why do many people wait until later in life to become a librarian? When asked, young people often express a desire to be a doctor, lawyer, astronaut, pilot, and so on—but why not a librarian? In the eyes of many youth, maybe librarians lack the glamour of these other disciplines, or perhaps people with more life experience have had more opportunities to develop a deeper appreciation of the nature of library work.

Not surprisingly, our survey also showed that working in libraries significantly elevates the chances of entering the LIS profession: 31 percent felt that prior library work had "strongly" shaped their decision to enroll in a library and information science program (figure 2).

This finding largely confirmed our own hunches as well as the empirical findings of several previous authors. For example, Gorgon and Neisbitt (1999) identified pre-professional work as the number one impetus for LIS career selection, while Houdyshell, Robles, and Hua (1999) listed it as a significant motivation for 62 percent

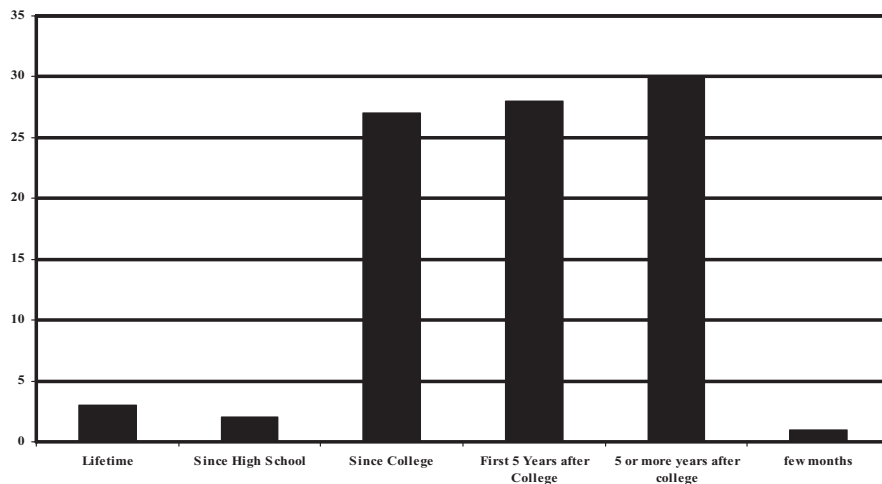


Figure 1

How long has library and information studies been a career goal?

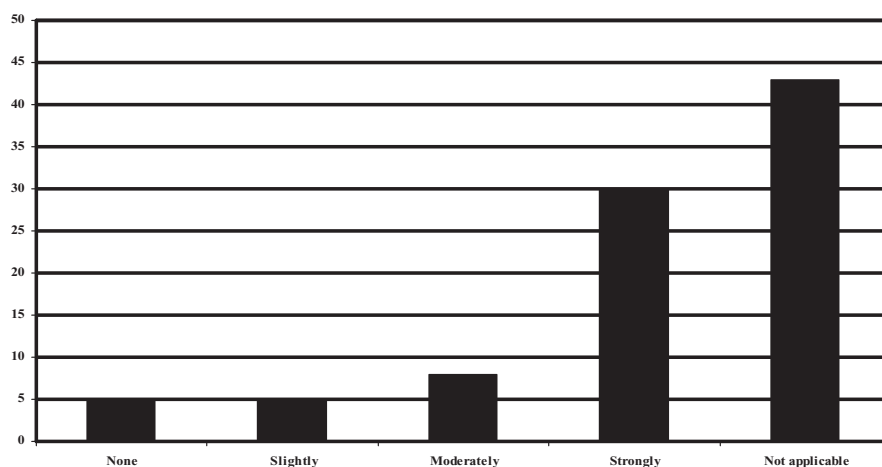


Figure 2

If You Worked in a Library Prior to Library School, How Much Did that Experience Influence Your Decision to Attend Library School?

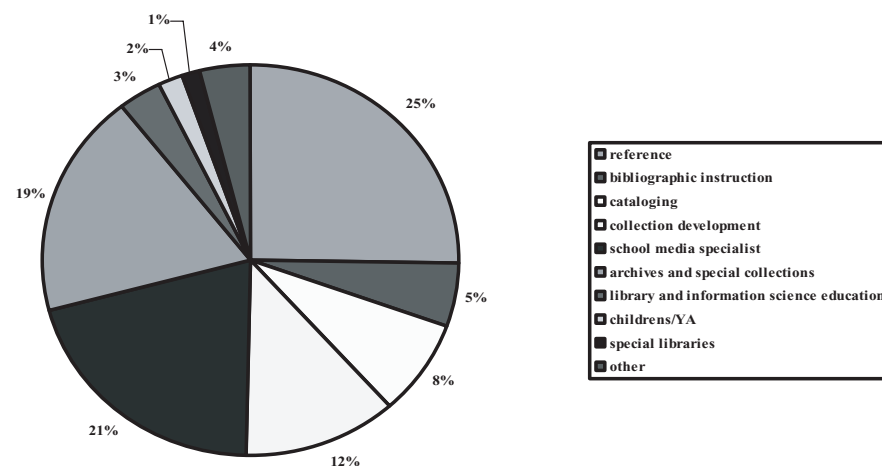


Figure 3

What Specialty or Track Are You Currently Pursuing? (Respondents could choose more than one answer.)

of their respondents. When people have the opportunity to taste librarianship through a pre-professional job, many apparently find the field appealing. Students who have worked in libraries may also hope to capitalize on their work experience by becoming professional librarians. Yet in view of the high number of respondents who checked “not applicable” on this question (45 percent), only about half of the students surveyed had worked in a library before starting SLIS. This finding indicates that other factors must play a significant role in many students’ decisions to select LIS.

Interest in Various Subfields

We also asked students what specialization they were currently pursuing and allowed them to checkmark several answers in case they had an interest in multiple subfields (figure 3). The highest number of respondents (40 percent) marked reference. LIS students thus seem to lean toward reference services today just as they did in 1989 when ALA’s Office of Personnel Resources identified reference as the number one preference among subfields. Reference offers a number of incentives that may entice LIS students, including the chance to work with the public. The popularity of reference may also result from the visibility and helpfulness of reference librarians—many of the respondents have likely received timely assistance from a search expert.

In looking at other responses to question 7, bibliographic instruction received a low number of responses (8 percent), but the inclusion of bibliographic instruction in the overall duties of reference librarians perhaps explains the low response. The second highest number of responses (32 percent) went to school media specialist, which is not surprising since SLIS offers an active school media program. Archives and special collections appealed to 29 percent of the respondents. Students expressed a relatively low level of interest in cataloging (13 percent). Technical services, outreach, information specialist, other



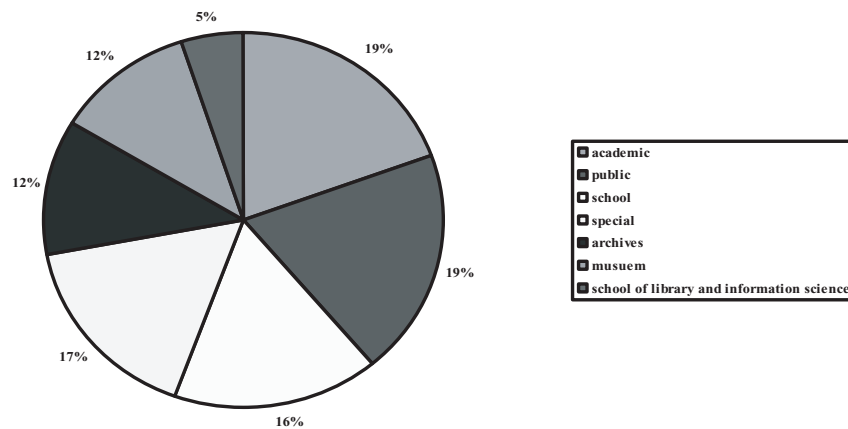


Figure 4
What Type of Library Would You Like to Work in After Graduation?

degree, and director each received one write-in response (roughly 1 percent for each), but no respondents penciled in acquisitions, circulation, or interlibrary loan (probably because paraprofessionals increasingly perform these functions, except for management positions).

In addition to specialty tracks, the survey probed students for the types of libraries that they wanted to work in after graduation (figure 4). Respondents could indicate more than one preference. Along with the finding that most respondents had an interest in multiple subfields, the scattered responses show that many students have an open mind about what types of institutions they would like to work in after graduating. Academic and public libraries tied for the highest number of votes (41 percent each), and school and special libraries also had a high level of responses (34 percent each). Archives and museums received an unexpectedly large number of responses (24 percent for each). Unfortunately, the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* points out that competition for archival and related positions will intensify in the near future as the pool of applicants grows larger than the number of available positions.²⁹ One hopes that these students will land archival-related positions, but many may have to settle for employment in other library subfields.

Interestingly, 10 percent of respondents indicated that they would welcome a position in LIS education even though only 5 percent listed LIS education as a specialty area they were currently pursuing, thus hinting at the potential for greater recruitment in this subfield. Nevertheless, although a few have an interest in a PhD, most of the students apparently plan on leaving full-time LIS study after earning their MLIS. Aside from these major specialties, one student (1 percent) hoped to freelance, and another (1 percent) hoped to work for a vendor.

When asked, 74 percent of students said they had not changed their mind about what specialty track they wanted to pursue since starting the MLIS program; however, only 52 percent of students reported that they actually knew

what specialty track they wanted to pursue when they began the MLIS program. This discrepancy may have occurred because some of the students had not selected a specialty track when starting an LIS career and still had not settled upon one by the time of the survey. Many students' specializations apparently remain malleable while they are enrolled in an LIS program as McCook and Moen hinted at in 1989.³⁰

Factors Shaping Career Decisions

When asked to mark all of the significant reasons why they chose LIS or a particular subfield, respondents overwhelmingly reported that job functions provided the major incentive (figure 5). Not surprisingly, most LIS students do not "go into it for the money"—only 24 percent of students listed compensation as a major influence. Houdyshell, Robles, and Hua (1999) also had a nearly identical result (25 percent) when they asked their respondents about the influence of salary expectations on their career decision. The promise of an interesting job draws far more people into librarianship than compensation, clientele, or prestige. This finding evokes hope since the profession will benefit from the inflow of intrinsically motivated people who enjoy the nature of the work and will likely stick with the profession even if the salaries and the public image of librarians do not improve dramatically in the next few years.

In an earlier survey, Weihs (1999) revealed that the influence of other librarians apparently had a major impact on people's decision to enter LIS.³¹ Accordingly, our study found that 34 percent of students claimed that a recommendation from a mentor, professor, coworker, or friend figured into their decision to pursue a career in LIS. Any future survey may wish to offer respondents the option of indicating which specific groups had the greatest impact on students' choices. "Love of books," cited as a major incentive by Weihs and other previous authors, attracted only about 2 percent of students in the Alabama study. Six other catalysts listed by respondents included a weak job market in another field, change, previous experience, personal interest, service, a desire to improve research skills, and an attempt to avoid the business world (1 percent each).

Conference Attendance

An unexpectedly high percentage of SLIS students (65 percent) have attended or plan to attend a professional conference while in school despite the financial and time constraints that face many of them as students. This high level of participation may stem in part from the travel



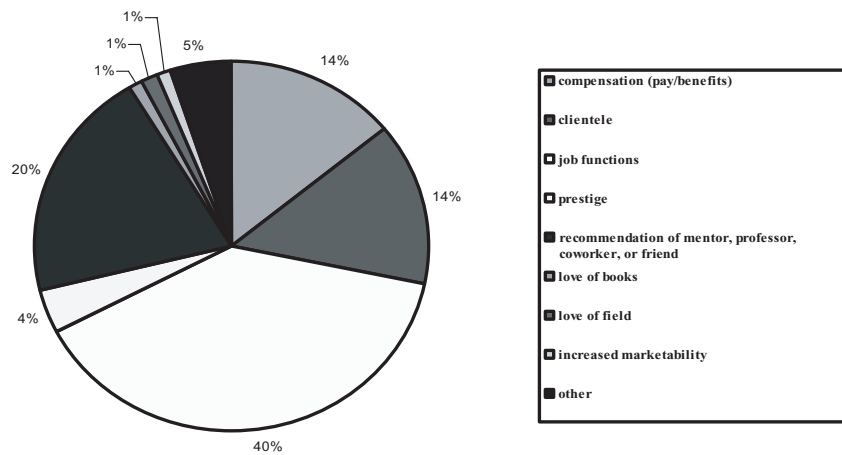


Figure 5

What Factors Affected Your Decision to Pursue Librarianship as a Career?

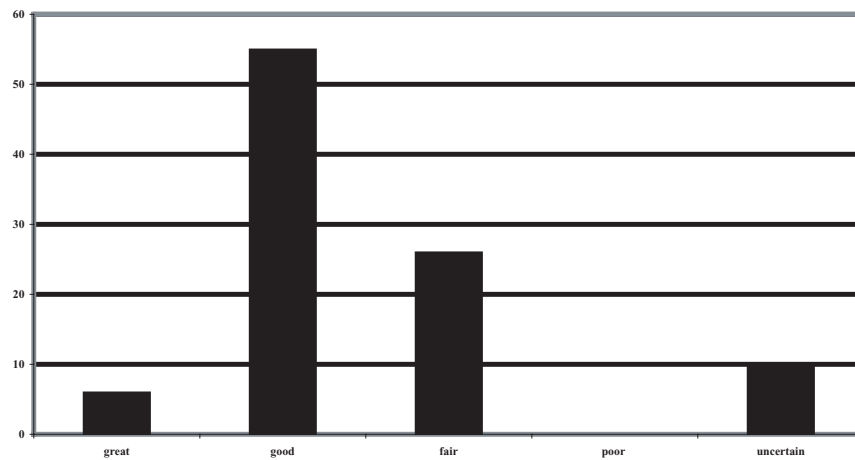


Figure 6

How Do You Think the Job Market Looks for Librarians?

assistance provided by SLIS’s Jewell Sandoval Fund, a special account that covers a portion of the travel expenses and registration costs for interested students, as well as ALA’s travel scholarships for students. The students’ conference attendance gives them opportunities for building professional networks, offers them job placement services, and helps acclimate them to the field in general.

Our study found that only 33 percent plan to take advantage of these services, even though many more intend to go to a conference. In comparison, a much larger group (60 percent) of the students in the earlier Texas survey expressed an intention to participate in job placement services. It is unclear why the conference-bound Alabama students do not use placement programs more often. ALA sponsors a job fair at each Annual Conference that gives students opportunities to meet with potential employers for a brief interview, but perhaps some of the students plan to attend the Alabama Library Association Conference or another state, regional, or specialized conference that lacks career services.

The Job Market

The survey revealed a great deal of confidence about the job market: 61 percent of students ranked the job market for librarians as “good” or “great” (figure 6). No one viewed the job market as “poor,” although 11 percent expressed uncertainty and 2 percent did not respond. The overall optimism of SLIS students proves well founded when considering the *Occupational Outlook Handbook’s* forecast of a vibrant job market over the next decade.³² However, the Alabama respondents viewed the job market slightly less optimistically than did respondents to the Texas survey (76 percent viewed the job market favorably).

On another question, 61 percent of respondents reported that participation in the master’s program had infused them with even more hope about the future of the field. Our SLIS faculty have indeed encouraged us to be optimistic about our future employment. LIS courses also expose students to many new opportunities for MLIS holders that students may not have heard of before starting the program.

As revealed by figure 7, 78 percent of respondents said that they expected to be working in a library and information science setting in five years. In comparison, 90 percent of respondents in the Texas survey expected to be working in the field in five years. While Alabama students thus had a slightly lower expectation in this regard, the majority of the respondents in our study saw themselves staying in the profession for an extended time. This finding reflects both long-range confidence about the job market and an earnest enjoyment of the nature of librarianship.

Salaries

We included a question on the controversial issue of salaries. When presented with a scale of seven different salary ranges, the largest number of respondents (32 percent) indicated that they expected to make between \$30,000 and \$34,999 as starting librarians (figure 8). In looking at responses overall, a higher number of respondents anticipated making salaries below \$34,999 (55 percent) than anticipated making above this level (45 percent). One pessimistic student expected to make less than \$19,999 while a more optimistic respondent expected to rake in a salary



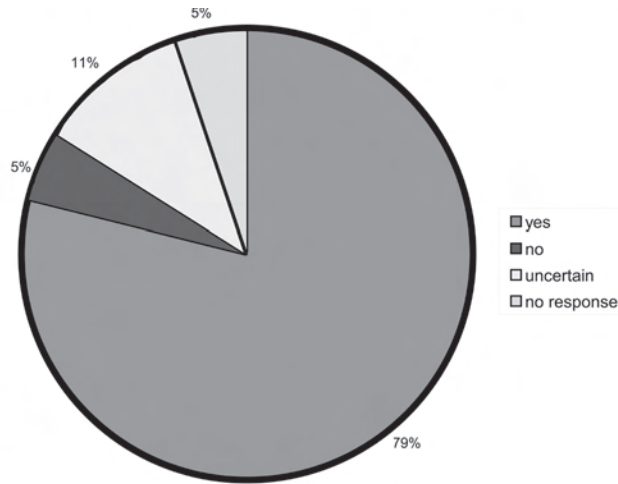


Figure 7

Do You See Yourself Working in a Library Setting in Five Years?

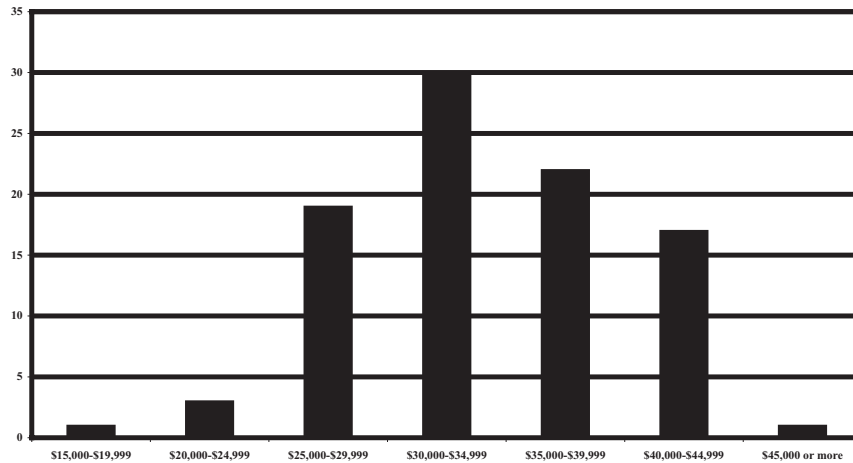


Figure 8

Salary Expectations

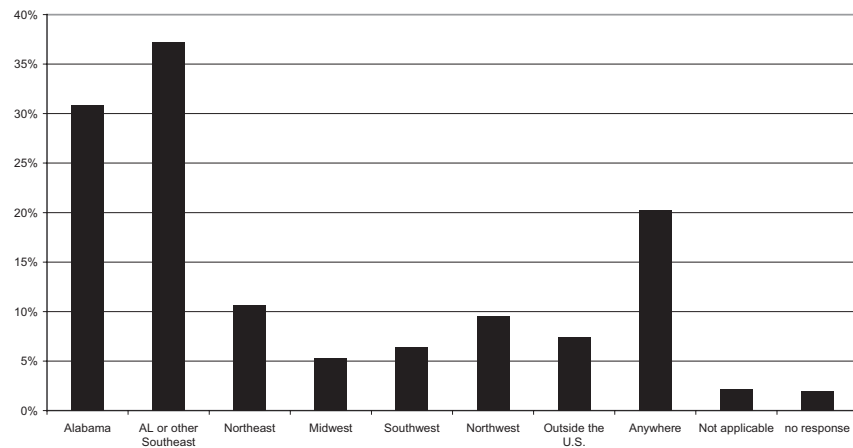


Figure 9

What Part of the Country Would You Like to Work In After Graduation? (Respondents could choose more than one answer.)

in excess of \$45,000. In interpreting all these results about salaries, one member of our survey team reminded the rest of us that our questionnaire uncovered what students *expect* to make, but many students *hope* to make much more!

At first glance, the students' overall expectations about salaries seem slightly lower than the wages that they should expect. *The Bowker Annual* listed the average starting salary for a librarian as \$36,818 for 2001.³³ On the other hand, librarians earn lower salaries in the Southeast than in other areas of the country, and a high proportion of these students hope to work in libraries in this part of the country, as seen in figure 9. According to *Bowker*, the median salary of 2001 LIS graduates in the Southeast is \$33,000.³⁴ Students' salary expectations thus roughly match what they will likely earn in their first professional library job if they remain in the Southeast. The students have an accurate awareness of salary ranges, perhaps from listening to practicing librarians or from reading job advertisements.

Geographic Preferences

In addition, we asked the students what regions they wanted to work in after graduating and allowed them to express more than one preference. Our investigation yielded some good news for Alabama employers by revealing that 68 percent of respondents hope to work in either Alabama or somewhere else in the Southeast (figure 9). On the other hand, many job-hunting experts strongly encourage students to be mobile, and only 20 percent of respondents said that they would work "anywhere."³⁵ Despite higher salaries in other regions, LIS students had a low preference for relocating to other regions of the country.³⁶ Only 7 percent expressed a willingness to relocate outside of the United States. Many of the students reside in Alabama or surrounding states and hope to remain in this region, perhaps because of family ties or familiarity with the area. Part of the interest in Alabama may also arise from the large number of students pursuing the school media track since this specialty area has certifications particular to the state. For whatever the



exact reason, location comprises a major consideration for students hunting for jobs.

Learning about SLIS

In an attempt to gather information that might help SLIS with recruitment, we asked respondents how they found out about SLIS and discovered that most students (61 percent) had heard about SLIS by word-of-mouth (although students could check more than one answer). The university's course catalog received the second highest number of responses (19 percent). Of the respondents, 13 percent had heard about SLIS through a directory of LIS programs or the Web, and only 2 percent said that they found out about SLIS from a family member or professor. Interestingly, 34 percent said that a recommendation from someone else had influenced their overall decision to enter the LIS field (figure 5). To our surprise, one respondent claimed to have heard about UA SLIS from Auburn University, the University of Alabama's biggest rival!

Discussion

Overall, the results offer good news about the recruitment problem in the library profession. Soon-to-be job applicants bring a diversity of educational backgrounds to the library field. Many of the respondents who will soon enter professional positions are flexible individuals who truly enjoy the nature of library work and want to stay in the library field for the long run (figure 7). According to *Bowker* and the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, current salaries for starting librarians equal or exceed what students anticipate. In regard to subfields, employers will have a better chance finding applicants for reference positions than for other types of jobs because so many students have an interest in that subfield (figure 3), and employers seeking to fill archival positions will enjoy an especially large pool of applicants. Many up and coming job seekers have an interest in two or more subfields (figure 3), reducing the possibility of a particularly excessive surplus or shortage in most subfields (except for cataloging). This openness to several subfields also means that many job seekers might be open to positions, often found in smaller libraries, that require juggling diverse tasks.

However, though all of this data is enlightening and interesting, its ultimate importance to the writers of this paper lies in using the data in the future recruitment of librarians. So how can it be used? To begin with, this survey suggests ways that individual library administrators and search committees can successfully attract new librarians to their libraries. For instance, the salary expectations uncovered by this survey can help administrators procure appropriate funding from higher-level administra-

tors. If a library has only been authorized to offer \$28,000 to candidates for a reference position, the library administrator can use the findings in this article to lobby for a salary of at least \$30,000 because that is what most respondents expected. Since so many fledgling librarians have geographic preferences (figure 9), employers could also bolster recruitment by giving more attention to marketing the community as well as by offering generous moving stipends and assistance with house mortgages. These incentives might induce more librarians to move to other parts of the country.³⁷ Our survey also showed that only a fraction of students plan to participate in job placement services at conferences. Could ALA and library employers collaborate more to defray expenses for students willing to participate in job placement services? In today's tight job market, employers might even do well to send personnel teams to schools to conduct preliminary interviews rather than requiring students to travel to job fairs.

Though administrators and managers should harness the data for creative changes in recruitment policies, the search for the librarians of the future must be broadened. On a profession-wide level, the campaign to spur recruitment should go beyond administrative circles and schools of library and information science. Reference librarians cannot expect administrators and schools of library and information science to do all the work of recruitment, especially since many schools and administrators focus much of their efforts on prospects who have already decided to enter the field but just need a place to attend school or find a job.³⁸ For this reason, former ALA President John Berry boldly calls upon each librarian "to be an ambassador for the profession and recruit at least two new librarians a year."³⁹ In attempting to mobilize recruitment drives, Berry explains that:

The public must be made more aware of librarianship as a career. ALA's public-education campaign, the Campaign for America's Libraries, emphasizes the role of librarians as trained information specialists who are ready to help patrons take advantage of the many services offered at today's libraries. We are identifying groups (high school and college students, paraprofessionals already employed in libraries, and adults seeking a career change) who may be receptive to working in the field and are actively recruiting them. We must communicate excitement and pride in our profession, stressing that the new information technologies have made librarianship a more dynamic career choice.⁴⁰

Reference librarians, by nature of their job, must spearhead these recruitment campaigns. Reference librarians, like colleagues in technical services, can influence paraprofessionals who work in their departments to consider LIS. However, frontline professionals have an especially important role to play in recruitment because they have so many opportunities to promote LIS to the public through one-on-one reference interviews, group instruction ses-

sions, and Web or print publicity. Figure 5 revealed that the influence of other people has a significant impact on students' decision to choose LIS, and reference librarians have the chance to provide this persuasive personal contact. Furthermore, figure 5 demonstrated that the nature of library work drew most respondents into the profession, and public service librarians have ample opportunities on a day-to-day basis to carry out their work in front of patrons. In addition, reference services attracted more interest than other subfields in figure 3. For all these reasons, reference librarians must take up the mantle of leadership in recruitment campaigns. Suggestions on how reference librarians can "sell librarianship" include:

- ❖ **Being a Great Example.** One recent recruit to the profession puts it simply: "Good librarians, those who are patient, helpful, and love to read are great advertisements."⁴¹
- ❖ **Encouraging Student Workers and Paraprofessionals.** Previous literature and the current survey show that working in a library increases the likelihood of choosing an LIS career (figure 2). This finding leads one to believe that many libraries already have potential librarians working as paraprofessionals, part-time workers, volunteers, or student workers. Reference librarians can sway these prospects through informal conversation, displaying LIS promotional posters in break rooms, distributing promotional brochures to all employees periodically, or discretely attaching these brochures to the evaluations of outstanding employees (many free brochures and fliers are available through ALA's Human Resource Development and Recruitment Office, 1-800-545-2433, ext. 4282).

Some librarians have also developed recruitment programs that provide paraprofessionals and student workers with financial assistance, flexible work schedules, and even emotional support while they earn an MLIS.⁴² For example, Southern University and Louisiana State University (LSU) have created a collaborative program to recruit more librarians and increase diversity in the profession. So far, they have converted more than sixteen paraprofessionals or student workers into full-fledged librarians. The program achieved this success by helping participants enroll in LSU's School of Library and Information Science, matching each participant with a librarian-mentor, and integrating support for students into the work flow of Southern University's librarians.⁴³ Public librarians have enacted similar programs that have reaped a bounty of new librarians, as exemplified by the programs at the Broward County System in Florida and the Public Library Staff Education Program in California.⁴⁴ As these examples illustrate, many paraprofessionals already enjoy their work, and a nudge from a librarian can help them take the dive into librarianship.

- ❖ **Taking Advantage of Reference Interviews.** Reference librarians at colleges often have a chance

to chat with students about their choice of majors, and reference librarians in public and school libraries routinely help students researching career choices. Reference librarians should seize upon these opportunities to broach librarianship as a career choice.⁴⁵ Talking to patrons about group instruction, readers' advisory, Web page design, virtual reference, collection development, or other services beyond just reference desk duties will stir interest in many patrons.

- ❖ **Boosting LIS during Library Instruction.** In introducing themselves in front of classes, reference librarians should take the opportunity to explain their reasons for entering the profession, rave about how much fun they have in their jobs, and mention a few of the benefits of working as a librarian. Simply exuding enthusiasm about librarianship in front of classes can win many converts (as the authors' personal experiences show).
- ❖ **Increasing the Visibility of Recruitment Web Sites.** ALA's Human Resource Development and Recruitment Office has created an index of recruitment Web pages.⁴⁶ Some of the more creative sites show librarians riding skateboards or posing with their motorcycles so that viewers will discard stereotypical images of librarians and realize that the profession has room for those seeking a dynamic lifestyle.⁴⁷ The Public Library Association has developed Web-mounted recruitment material, and the Association of College and Research Libraries has even produced a streaming video, "Faces of a Profession," to persuade more students to become academic librarians.⁴⁸ Reference librarians can spotlight these sites by installing links to these pages on their libraries' home pages or floating the links on nonlibrary listservs.
- ❖ **Targeting Job-Starved Disciplines.** Our survey showed that many LIS students migrate to the field after earning degrees in other disciplines. Accordingly, academic reference librarians should utilize their liaison relationships to advertise LIS to students or recent graduates from other disciplines. Sometimes, this outreach may be as simple as placing recruitment posters and other materials in departments like history, English, American Studies, and other departments that have an overload of graduates for the number of available positions in their fields. At other times, a presentation offered in a departmental lounge or seminar room may prove fruitful. Whatever medium is used, highlighting the opportunities for subject-specialized reference, library instruction, and collection development will catch the attention of many students. Reference librarians can also open the doors of their libraries to internships that allow prospects from these departments to "test drive" a library career. In a similar vein, information professionals can collaborate with schools in designing programs, similar to those offered by some MBA programs that allow prospects to complete

an abbreviated master's curriculum that supplements their original degree.⁴⁹

- ❖ **Sowing Seeds among Youth.** Librarians should also strive to hook more young people on librarianship because few respondents listed LIS as a lifetime goal or as a goal since high school in our study (figure 1). By simply exciting some of their youngest patrons about libraries, reference librarians can sow many seeds among children and lay the groundwork for a future harvest of professionals. "I want little kids to know that this is an option," explains one Chicago librarian.⁵⁰ In targeting older ages, a couple of innovative recruiters recommend "job shadow days" that allow teenagers to work with librarians for a day.⁵¹ In another creative effort aimed at youth, the State Library of Ohio offers a recruitment video for high school groups, "*Me? A Librarian*," which features two teenage hosts who interview librarians about their work.⁵² A recent book, *Stop Talking, Start Doing*, suggests ways of marketing library and information science to minority high school students.⁵³
- ❖ **Creating LIS Career Displays.** Displays that illustrate what librarians do on a typical day, list statistics on job placement, and showcase the variety of jobs available in LIS will help pique interest in passersby.
- ❖ **Cooperating with Career Centers.** Many high schools and colleges offer career centers for students. Consulting the staff in these centers will help reference librarians find out about useful literature, design outreach strategies, and participate in campus career fairs.
- ❖ **Sponsoring In-House Career Fairs.** The University of Virginia Libraries created their own career fair, featuring refreshments and PowerPoint presentations as well as testimonies by librarians. The fair resulted in several students enrolling in LIS programs.⁵⁴

In all of these marketing venues, reference librarians should accentuate the exciting capabilities offered by new information technology, the positive impact that reference librarians have on patrons' lives, and the strong market demand for librarians over the next decade. Furthermore, reference librarians should remember that they need not adopt an aggressive sales approach like that found in the retail world, but can carry out proactive recruitment while keeping a "personal manner that is respectful of our own personality preferences and demonstrates an interest in others."⁵⁵

Virtual reference, the Internet, and the USA PATRIOT Act vie for the attention of reference librarians these days. Nevertheless, recruitment demands as much—if not more—attention from reference librarians because the success of recruitment efforts will determine whether the profession has a team large enough and skilled enough to tackle these other issues. While most librarians already encourage interested paraprofessionals to join the professional ranks, the growing shortage of librarians behooves reference providers to look beyond the current *staff* in their libraries to the *patrons* in their libraries. The finding

that many new recruits already work in libraries (figure 2) gives weight to the idea that librarians should do more to publicize the profession to patrons who will not have any opportunities to work in libraries. Reference professionals have the responsibility to market librarianship to these patrons by making the most of reference interviews and other interactions with the public.

All reference librarians should find some way to pitch in and help prevent the coming famine of librarians. Indeed, the quest to find future colleagues warrants a concerted campaign by information professionals. We therefore second the call of Van Fleet and Wallace in an earlier issue of *Reference and User Services Quarterly*:


We encourage the RUSA Board of Directors and the leadership of all RUSA sections and committees to examine the role of the Association in recruiting professional reference and user services librarians and in supporting local recruitment activities of the Association's members. To not do so is to risk a future in which there are no more reference and user services librarians to be supported by and to support RUSA.⁵⁶

To fulfill this mission, surveys must continue to ascertain the factors shaping students' career choices so that the profession can devise new ways of marketing librarianship and adjust to the changing needs of incomers with agility. Without the insights uncovered by such questionnaires, the profession pilots its recruitment campaigns in the dark. We thus hope that other LIS students, faculty, and librarians will undertake similar grassroots surveys and take advantage of the grant funding offered for recruitment studies by IMLS's "Librarians for the Twenty-First Century" program.⁵⁷ A survey like ours offers a snapshot of a particular group of soon-to-be librarians, furnishes a few preliminary suggestions about recruitment, and indicates directions for future study. However, we believe that the profession must go beyond sporadic, local questionnaires. RUSA should collaborate with the Office of Recruitment to formalize an annual survey of schools of library and information science and post the responses on a Web site, thereby creating a gauge that would supply a continuous stream of ideas to recruitment-conscious librarians. Keri Lynn Paulson, a new librarian herself, also sounds a bugle for querying newcomers: "Why not survey us to find out why we recently joined the ranks? Our comments may give the profession fresh ideas and renewed vigor for recruiting the next generation of librarians."⁵⁸ If reference librarians rally to her call, the profession will enlist a force with sufficient strength to overcome the information challenges of the next century. ■

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