A Statistical Portrait of Librarians

WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

by Michael D. Cooper

In the 1870 U.S. Census of Population, 213 individuals were recorded as librarians (they responded to the questionnaire, no doubt, in the "library hand"). Now, 106 years later, we number more than 115,000. We are, relatively, a small group, amounting to 0.1% of all those employed and 1.1% of all professionals, but our services are supplied to almost every sector in society. A whopping 88% of us work in the educational sector, 6% in health-related fields, and the remaining 6% in organizations serving a wide variety of interests such as agriculture, forestry, chemicals, law, banking, textiles, and transportation. Although our numbers are heavily concentrated in the educational field, we represent a small portion of the total number of professionals employed in the educational services—librarians are only 1.78% of the total, while teachers constitute approximately 49%.

As librarians, we classify ourselves in many different ways. We can say that 45% of us are school, 23% are public, 17% academic, and 15% special librarians. Another scheme of categorization tells us that there are some 890 law librarians, 3,000 professionals in health science libraries, 3,200 federal librarians, and 670 library school faculty members. There are 9,500 Special Library Association (SLA) members, 3,100 Medical Library Association (MLA) members (1975), 4,500 American Society for Information Science (ASIS) members (February 1976), and more than 28,000 personal ALA members (1975).

The diversity of divisions and groups within the major library associations reveals the breadth of our professional interests. For example, ALA members belong to the American Association of School Librarians, the Association of College and Research Libraries, the Public Library Association, and to the divisions of Information Science and Automation, Library Administration, Reference and Adult Services, Resources and Technical Services, and Young Adult Services, among others. ASIS member interests are similarly expressed in special interest groups on Automatic Language Processing, Behavioral and Social Sciences, User On-Line Interaction, and Cost, Budgeting, and Economics. The MLA has special interest groups on the History of Medicine, Nursing, Hospital Libraries, Pharmacy, Medical Library Education, and Veterinary Medical Libraries. SLA divisions include those concerned with Science and Technology, Business and Finance, Museums, Arts and Humanities, Biological Sciences, and Social Sciences.

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WHERE WE WORK

45 percent in school libraries
17 percent in academic libraries
23 percent in public libraries
15 percent in special libraries

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WHERE WE ARE

There is no one state in the U.S. that employs a much larger percentage of librarians than any of the others. In 1970 there were more librarians in New York State than in any other state (12,169, or 9.9% of the total). California followed with 10,631 (8.6%) librarians. Broken down by region, 7% of all librarians work in New England, 18.9% in the Middle Atlantic area, 18.9% in the East North Central, 8.5% in the West North Central, 16.2% in the South Atlantic, 5.2% in the East South Central, 8.3% in the West South Central, 4.7% in the Mountain States, and 12.3% in the Pacific area. States with the smallest number of librarians include Alaska (173), Nevada (272), and Wyoming (279).

WHERE THE MLS LIBRARIANS ARE

95 percent of all academic librarians have MLS degrees

80 percent of all public librarians have MLS degrees

20 percent of all school librarians have MLS degrees

WE ARE 84 PERCENT WOMEN

Our ranks are composed of about 84% female and 16% male librarians nationwide. This compares to an average of 40% females for all professionals in the U.S. There are wide variations in this percentage, however, depending on library affiliation. A total of 93% of school librarians are women, as are 86% of all public librarians, 76% of all special librarians, and 66% of all academic librarians. Within these library affiliations there are significant differences in the female percentage distribution according to rank. In 1970, 92% of the chief administrators of large academic libraries were male, as were 63% of the heads of special libraries, and 61% of the heads of public libraries. School libraries were the exception, with 81% female heads. Interesting patterns are also observable in the ranks of library school faculty members. Some 69% of all instructors are female; about 46% of all lecturers, assistant professors, and associate professors are female; but only 33% of all full professors are female. The average for library school faculty is about 44.5% female. Two years ago, 79% of the graduates of MLS programs, 72% of graduates of sixth-year certificate programs, and 36% of those earning doctorates were women.

OUR ETHNIC BACKGROUND

Most library professionals in the United States are white (about 90.5%, according to the 1970 Census); 7.7% of the women and 1.8% of the men are nonwhite. Some 68% of the ethnic minorities in the profession are black. About 91% of the full-time library school teachers are white, and 93% of the part-time teachers are white. Composition of recent library school graduating classes is slightly different from the present labor force: 89% of the 1973-74 crop of MLS graduates were white, 5.4% black, 2.2% Asian American, and 1.3% Spanish surnamed. There were more ethnic minority graduates of the sixth-year certificate programs (18.6%) than master’s programs (13.3% black). Doctoral graduates from ethnic minorities were about 17% of the total number of graduates. These last figures indicate that ethnic minorities in the profession already are, more than the average, returning to library schools to upgrade academic skills.

HOW WE ARE EDUCATED

One of the interesting aspects of the statistics on educational level is that less than half of the librarians in the U.S. have MLS or equivalent fifth-year degrees. Depending on whom you consult, the numbers vary, but the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 40–50% of the librarians have master’s degrees. The 1970 Census showed the figure to be 42% (a gain from 35% in 1960). The Census data indicates variations in the educational patterns of men and women: 52% of the male librarians have five or more post-secondary years, while only 39% of the women have a similar educational level.

There are also variations by type of library. In public libraries with an operating budget of less than $45,000, only 20% of the professionals had MLS degrees (1973), while the average for all public libraries was about 80%. In academic libraries, 95% of all librarians had MLS’s; in school libraries, 20% had them, and 15% had a master’s in other subjects, but no MLS’s. Overall, in 1970, 17 years of school were completed by male and 16.6 years by female librarians.

Library school faculty members, it seems, are not as au-
gust an academic group, on the average, as one might ex-
pect. In 1974, about 47% of the faculty had as their high-
est degree only an MLS or other master's, while about 49% had doctorates.

As one might expect, ALA and SLA members have more education than the average librarian. In 1970, 78.5% of ALA members, and in 1973, 70% of SLA members, had at least five years of college.

**WHAT WE EARN**

There is some feeling among librarians that salaries are low relative to other professions and low for the education that we have and skills we possess. The questions of whether we deserve more, or whether our salaries are depressed because there are so many of us, are open for discussion. In any event, the average salary of those librarians working 50–52 weeks during 1969 (Census Data) was $7,004 for women and $10,964 for men. (The median salary for women was $6,941). This compares quite favorably with the salaries of other professionals. The median salary for all professional men was $11,752, while a similar figure for women was $6,872. The median salaries for female and male college and university teachers in 1969 were $6,638 and $13,126 respectively.

ALA and SLA members were much better off, in terms of salaries, than the average persons who described themselves to the Census as librarians. In 1970, ALA members averaged $11,758 per year (women $10,878, men $14,471). Within the ALA survey, college and university librarians had the highest average at $13,148, with special librarians second at $12,084, public librarians at $11,135, and finally school librarians at $10,623.

The 1973 SLA salary survey showed its members averaging $14,000 (women $12,900 and men $17,200). Geographically, SLA members in the South and Mid-Atlantic states had the highest salaries, while those in the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Illinois, and Missouri were at the low end of the spectrum. SLA members employed in the education and services sector of the economy were the highest paid ($14,400), while those employed by manufacturing industries averaged $13,700 and by non-manufacturing industries, $12,400. SLA members with doctorates averaged $20,600, and those with master’s degrees earned an average of $13,900.

Law school librarians in 1974 had a median salary of $11,216.

Faculty members in ALA-accredited library schools (1974–75) did pretty well with respect to salaries. Deans and directors averaged $29,029 a year, while nine-month appointees at the professor, associate professor, and assistant professor levels averaged $23,009, $17,748, and $15,081 respectively. Instructors averaged $12,685, and lecturers $14,654.

Individuals who had just earned MLS degrees and were entering the job market in 1974 averaged $10,040 as a starting salary ($9,908 for women and $10,605 for men). Starting salaries were highest in the Northeast ($10,398), followed by the West ($10,095), Midwest ($10,041), Southwest ($9,461), and Southeast ($9,416).

We can, from this salary data, make certain inferences. Historically, there has been a good sized differential in the salaries paid to men and women in librarianship. The Census data for 1969 showed an average salary difference of $3,900, the 1970 ALA salary survey indicated $3,597, and the 1973 SLA survey, $4,300. Some of this difference may, perhaps, be explained by a difference in educational level (recall that 52% of male and 39% of female librarians have five or more years of college) or by a difference in tasks performed. But most of it is probably due to sex discrimination in hiring and promotion. A salary differential still exists, but there has been improvement—the differential between men and women for those new MLS graduates entering the labor force in 1974 was only about $700.

There is a correlation in librarianship, as in other professions, between salary and formal educational training. In the ALA salary survey of 1970, salaries of individuals with bache-
lor’s degrees averaged $9,563 ($9,404 for women, $11,652 for men), while earnings of those with five or six years of college ranged from about $12,300 to $12,800 per year (about $10,800–$12,300 for women and $13,400–$15,900 for men). Ph.D.s averaged $18,513 ($15,492 for women and $19,649 for men). SLA members (1973) showed the same pattern. The mean salary for members with bachelor’s degrees was $13,600; for those with master’s degrees, $13,900, and for those with doctorates, $20,800. In general, the more education one has, the higher the yearly income.

There are several other factors influencing salary levels, including number of years of professional experience and area of specialization. The ALA survey found those working in circulation to be the lowest paid, averaging $9,491 in 1970, with reference librarians next, at $9,593. Acquisition and serials librarians and catalogers averaged around $10,000, and those identified as technical services librarians averaged $11,623. (Note: although administrators generally command the highest salaries, there was no such category in the ALA survey.) SLA members (1973) working in acquisitions, cataloging, and reference had a mean salary of $12,700.

It is apparent that the number of years of experience in the profession influences one’s earnings. ALA member data show that salaries increase 16% after five years of experi-
ence, 11% over the previous level after 5–10 years experience, 10% after 10–15 years, and only 1% for the last five-year increment. Similar SLA percentages are 21%, 8%, 12.5%, and 4.9%. While salaries do increase with experience, the rate of increase is more dramatic in the early years and tapers off after 20 or so years.

**OUR PATTERNS OF EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT**

We have only sketchy information on the rate of unem-
ployment of librarians. Based on national labor patterns, we can infer that because we are professionals we will have a rate lower than the national unemployment average and lower than clerical workers. Also, our unemployment rate will be lower than the average because we have more years of education than the average worker. But aside from these general inferences, there is very little solid information. The exception is the SLA salary survey of 1973, in which it was found that among SLA members there was a 1.1% unem-
ployment rate. Between January 1, 1971, and March 31, 1973, however, around 13% of the members had been unem-
ployed for some period of time.
The major source of evidence on the supply-demand relationship for librarians comes from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. During the period 1970 to 1985 the BLS projects 11,200 new graduates of library programs and 11,200 openings. Assuming 80% of the graduates actually enter the library profession, there would be 2,200 job vacancies in the 15-year period, or about 147 more jobs than people per year in the entire U.S. The Bureau’s lower estimate of job openings yields about 15 more jobs than graduates per year.

Since close to 88% of our jobs are education-related, it is useful to look at the projections for the educational sector. Assuming a birth rate of 2.1 children, the U.S. National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) in its 1974 edition of Projections of Educational Statistics makes some interesting estimates of enrollment and staffing for the years 1983-1984. Elementary and secondary school enrollment grew at a rate of 8% from 1963 to 1973, but is expected to decrease by 10% from 1973 to 1983. The number of high school graduates is expected to decline 13% in 1973-1983, compared with a 35% increase in the previous 10 years. Degree credit enrollment in higher education (colleges and universities) increased 90% from 1963 to 1973 but is expected to increase only 5% in the next 10 years. The most dramatic change expected in higher education enrollment is in the two-year community colleges, where a 10% growth in the next decade will replace a 208% growth in the previous one.

The NCES does not publish projections of expected employment levels of librarians, but it does make projections for teachers. Their estimates are that there will be a 5% increase in elementary teachers, and a 7% decrease in secondary school teachers in the period up to 1983-1984. This compares to a 22% and 45% increase, respectively, in the period 1963 to 1973. Instructional staff for higher education, which grew at 102% during the previous 10 years, is now expected to grow 3% during the next 10 years. If enrollment and teaching staff size are dropping or remaining constant, we should be aware of the possibility that the employment of librarians may move in the same way.

This survey has concentrated on a statistical portrait of today’s librarians employed in “traditional” library jobs. The reason for the limited character of the survey is that we do not have adequate data to document the nontraditional positions that library school graduates take, or into which library professionals move. For example, a library school graduate with systems analysis/information science training, engaged in developing a machine-readable data archive for a non-library-related institution, would not be counted as a “librarian” in most institutional reports, and would only be counted as a “librarian” for Census purposes if that title was chosen by the individual concerned. The example is one of many, but the problem will become larger. An expanded concept of the role of a librarian is more than just a statistical necessity.

A Bibliography for More on Who We Are

The survey above has taken a very general look at the characteristics of librarians and has, in many cases, omitted qualifications that must be attached to the interpretation of published statistics. The bibliography below is intended as a starting point for readers desiring more detailed statistical information on professional librarians.


