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Assignment 2: LIS Career Study and Personal Objectives
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LIS Career Study and Personal Objectives

Introduction

Who would have thought that “librarian” would have made U.S. News & World Report’s list of “31 Careers With Bright Futures”? This career of “aging spinsters [who wear] their hair in a bun”¹ was listed as one that offers a strong outlook and high job satisfaction.² So, what can a library and information science (“LIS”) graduate expect? This report summarizes the librarian job market situation (current employment, outlook, pay, and placement of graduates), typical required qualifications based on a review of fifteen job postings, and steps that this author should take in order to prepare himself for an appropriate position.

The key features of the fifteen job postings are summarized in Tables 1 and 2 of the Appendix at the end of this report.

Scope

The following should be noted regarding the report’s scope: 1) the bulk of the job-market discussion refers to national trends, with limited references to Hawaii, 2) the open positions referred to are located mainly at institutions in Hawaii and, with the exception of the U.S. Library of Congress positions, on the U.S. West Coast (mainly California), and 3) the specialty focus is quite broad, as I am presently undecided as to a specialty.

The Librarian Job Market

Size and Growth Prospects: in 2006, there were 158,373 individuals categorized as librarians in the U.S., and that number was expected to grow by approximately 4 percent between 2006 and 2016, to 164,000.³ In contrast, the average-range growth rate of all occupations in the U.S. for

that period is projected to be 7 to 13 percent.⁴ Factors weighing on job growth are the increasing self-sufficiency of information seekers, who are increasingly bypassing librarians by using libraries' electronic resource, many of which can be accessed remotely, or the Internet.⁵ On the other hand, a large number of retirements (two-thirds of librarians are at least 45 years old) will create openings.⁶ Also, the number of opportunities will increase with non-traditional employers (e.g., business, nonprofit organizations, consulting firms, etc.) and functions (especially those involving information technology).⁷

Hawaii's annual average growth rate is, likewise, expected to be slow, at 1.2 percent (from 700 in 2002 to an estimated 790 in 2012) for librarians, versus 1.3 percent for all occupations (from 558,210 to 638,060), with an average of 30 openings per year.⁸ As with the national trend, most (66.7 percent) are expected to be vacated, existing positions, with the remainder being newly created.⁹ Presumably the bulk of these positions will be with the state government, so the impact of the recently declared public library hiring freeze will likely constrain employment opportunities for librarians even further.¹⁰

Placement of Graduates: placement of recent cohorts of graduates from Master of Library and Information Science ("MLISc") programs appears to be fairly high. According to an article in *Library Journal*, the 2006 overall placement rate was 90.8% (all types of employment), whereas the placement ratio of graduates who were employed in library organizations was 89.9% (down from 92.9% in the 2005 survey results).¹¹ Negative trends, however, include an increase in graduates in nonprofessional (e.g., technical assistant, clerk, etc.), temporary, and multiple part-time positions, and an increase in the job-search time. One reasons for graduates accepting nonprofessional positions was lack of experience necessary for a "professional" position requiring the MLISc degree, and advice is given for intended MLISc-degree holders to obtain

relevant experience, network with professionals in the field, and actively participate in professional organizations.¹² With respect to University of Hawaii MLISc graduates, Andrew Wertheimer, Ph.D., chair of that university's MLISc program, believes that possibly 95 percent or more of that program's recent graduates are employed in libraries, but not necessarily in full-time positions and that this is particularly the case for those remaining in Hawaii, where it is not uncommon for a graduate to work in a temporary or "emergency hire" position for year or two before obtaining a full-time position.¹³ Of the fifteen openings reviewed for this report, only one, at a California community college (No. 15, in Tables 1 and 2), was part time.

Pay Trends: according to a summary of the American Library Association's "Librarian Salary Survey," the mean annual salary for all types of librarians was \$58,960 in 2008, up approximately 2 percent from the \$57,809 reported in the 2007 survey.¹⁴ The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports a median value of \$49,060 as of May 2006.¹⁵ Of note is the pay potential of the U.S. Government (noted separately), the average being \$80,873 in 2007.¹⁶ In Hawaii, the mean was \$49,550 as of May 2005.¹⁷ Annual pay for the ten positions for which this information was available ranged from a low of \$32,640 (no. 13: Librarian II, University of Hawaii at Hilo) to a high of \$130,211 (Tables 1 and 2, no. 8).

What is of more immediate concern to current LIS students, however, is starting pay of recent graduates. The average annual full-time salary increased 2.2% for new graduates in 2006 to \$41,040, with the median being \$40,000.¹⁸ Those figures for University of Hawaii MLISc graduates that year were a respectable \$41,591 and \$40,500, respectively.¹⁹

Promotion potential: generally, the promotion potential of most positions surveyed was not clear. Presumably the entry-level positions (such as no. 3 in Tables 1 and 2) would lead to higher

positions. The federal (Department of the Air Force) positions did indicate a maximum pay grade within the federal pay scheme.

Skills, qualifications: the MLISc (referred to variously as “MLS” or “MLIS,” depending on the employer) was generally required. A few exceptions did exist, such as the entry-level GS-7 pay grade for the positions with the federal government (nos. 6, 7, and 8). As noted elsewhere, however, relevant experience in and practical knowledge of library operations and management (collection development, library automation systems, cataloging, etc.) is typically indispensable. For some higher-level positions at academic libraries, a second master’s degree or doctorate is also desirable (nos. 10, 12, and 13). Although not enumerated in Tables 1 and 2, many of the original listings also require personal qualities such as “people skills,” team-orientation, and time management skills.

Personal Objectives

Objective: while I am still in the process of determining a specialty, my initial inclination when applying to the MLISc program was to pursue academic librarianship with an emphasis in Japanese language materials and/or business, as such emphasis would allow me to use my background in those areas. I am also open to employment at a special library (such as a corporate information center) or public library.

Assessment: based on the state of the U.S. librarian job market and the review of job listings, I would make the following career assessment of myself:

1. Strengths: my Japanese language reading skills might be useful in certain academic positions.

It is my understanding, however, that such positions are rare and typically are given to Japanese native speakers. My business background (experience, degree), however, might have more possibilities, either in an academic or corporate setting. Interpersonal skills

developed through my experience in sales would also be a forte in dealing with both patrons and co-workers. Fact-finding is another useful skill that I developed in sales: in reference, for example, a librarian would be most effective if he or she can ferret out the patron's underlying needs and intentions. Additionally, PC skills are, of course, indispensable to any occupation these days, and I have facility with a number of commonly used applications (such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and e-mail).

2. Weaknesses: as this is my first semester in the MLISc program, I will need to start from "the ground up." I lack the basic knowledge of library and information science (such as familiarity with standard reference sources, classification/cataloging, library automation, electronic information sources, etc.). Then there is always the unknown factor of being unfamiliar with the physical processes and environment of a new work setting that can cause uneasiness and adversely affect one's personal manner and effectiveness.

A solution to such shortcomings will involve both academic and practical measures over the short (immediate through the following semesters) and medium (up through program completion) terms. The short- to medium-term countermeasure will, of course, be to take all of the required LIS courses and learn the material well. To build on the basic foundation, I will need to select advanced courses that have broad application, such as LIS 647 (Systems Analysis for Information Management) and 663 (Basic Database Searching). Medium-term, I would continue the academic countermeasures by taking other specialized advanced courses to complete the program but add a practical aspect through appropriate part-time employment or an internship. Since "correct practice makes perfect," the hands-on experience thereby gained would allow me to solidify the knowledge gained from my classes through repetition (such as the fielding of reference questions), and to gain confidence. This

practical experience would also help to position me better as a job candidate upon graduation. Like any other type of career, a librarian might have a varied career path over a number of years: one academic librarian mentioned that she had worked as a research librarian in the private sector for five years, as an academic business/reference librarian for two-and-a-half years, and as an academic reference librarian in another position for five months before her current position as Japan Specialist Librarian.²⁰

Conclusion

MLISc candidates need to prepare themselves for a difficult job search. A slow economy will reduce government revenue collections and slow librarian job growth further. To keep oneself from falling into the disadvantageous position of being unemployed or underemployed after graduation, an MLISc candidate needs to inventory his or her knowledge of library science and any other fields that might distinguish him or her in the job market. One librarian told me that, in the future, specialization will be key to survival, so any specialty area will work to one's advantage.²¹ Any deficiencies or gaps in one's knowledge, though, should be shored up, and as much relevant work experience as possible should be gained while still in the MLISc program.

¹Rubin, Richard E., *Foundations of Library and Information Science*, 2nd ed. (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 2004), 32.

²"31 Careers With Bright Futures," *U.S. News & World Report*, <http://www.usnews.com/features/business/best-careers/best-careers-2008.html> (accessed September 14, 2008).

³ *National Employment Matrix, employment by industry, occupation, and percent distribution, 2006 and projected 2016, 25-4021 Librarians, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-09 Edition*, <http://bls.gov/oco/ocos068.html> (accessed September 14, 2008).

⁴ *Key phrases in the Handbook, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-09 Edition* <http://bls.gov/oco/ocos068.html> (accessed September 15, 2008).

⁵ *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-09 Edition*, <http://bls.gov/oco/ocos068.html> (accessed September 14, 2008).

⁶ *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-09 Edition*, <http://bls.gov/oco/ocos068.html>, (accessed September 14, 2008).

⁷ *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-09 Edition*, <http://bls.gov/oco/ocos068.html>, (accessed September 14, 2008)

⁸ *HireNet Hawaii – Job Market Trends*, <http://www.hirenethawaii.com/occprofiledata.asp?session=occanalyzer&geo=1501000000&oescode=31502&onetcode=25402100> (accessed September 13, 2008).

⁹ *HireNet Hawaii – Job Market Trends* <http://www.hirenethawaii.com/occprofiledata.asp?session=occanalyzer&geo=1501000000&oescode=31502&onetcode=25402100> (accessed September 13, 2008).

¹⁰ The Hawaii State Public Library System (“HSPL”) announced that, for the 2008-2009 fiscal year, its budget will be reduced by 6.9 percent compared with the 2007-2008 fiscal year, to \$28.3 million because of state-government spending constraints. According to Keith Fujio, the state’s administrative services officer for libraries, part of the reduction will come from the HSPL not filling its 56 current vacancies. He also said that approximately 35 percent of HSPL’s employees are in the state’s retirement age range. While this source did not state the duration of the hiring freeze or the number of librarian-position vacancies, this development illustrates the harsh hiring climate that local librarian-job seekers are likely to face.

“Libraries May Have to Cut Services Again,” *The Honolulu Advertiser*, September 15, 2008, A2.

¹¹ Stephanie Maatta, “Placements & Salaries 2006: What’s an MLIS Worth?” *Library Journal*, October 15, 2007, <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6490671.html> (accessed September 14, 2008).

¹² Maatta, Stephanie “Placements & Salaries 2006: What’s an MLIS Worth?” *Library Journal*, October 15, 2007, <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6490671.html> (accessed September 14, 2008).

¹³ Andrew Wertheimer, Assistant Professor and Chair, Library and Information Science Program, Department of Information and Computer Sciences, University of Hawaii at Manoa, e-mail message to author, September 14, 2008.

¹⁴ ALA-APA Salary Surveys, <http://www.ala-apa.org/salaries/alaapasurveys.html> (accessed September 13, 2008).

It should be noted that these figures include some individuals who do not hold an ALA-accredited Master of Library Science degree.

¹⁵ *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-09 Edition*, <http://bls.gov/oco/ocos068.html> (accessed September 14, 2008)

¹⁶ *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-09 Edition*, <http://bls.gov/oco/ocos068.html> (accessed September 14, 2008).

¹⁷ *HireNet Hawaii – Job Market Trends*

<http://www.hirenethawaii.com/occprofiledata.asp?session=occanalyzer&geo=1501000000&oescode=31502&onetcode=25402100> (accessed September 13, 2008).

¹⁸ Maatta, Stephanie “Placements & Salaries 2006: What’s an MLIS Worth?” *Library Journal*, October 15, 2007, <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6490671.html> (accessed September 14, 2008).

¹⁹ Maatta, Stephanie “Placements & Salaries 2006: What’s an MLIS Worth?” *Library Journal*, October 15, 2007, <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6490671.html> (accessed September 14, 2008).

²⁰ Tokiko Y. Bazzell, Japan Specialist Librarian, University of Hawaii at Manoa, e-mail message to author, September 15, 2008.

²¹ Carol Schroeder, Reference Librarian, Orange County Public Library (Cypress, California), in discussion with author, February 21, 2008.