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The Devaluation of the Library Degree_Konata.pdf

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The Devaluation of the Library Degree
By
La Loria Konata

My first professional library position was as the librarian for the departments of Public Administration & Urban Studies and Economics at an urban research university. I'm convinced that one of the primary reasons that I was hired was not because I already worked in that library, but because I was a recent graduate of one of the programs I would be working with – Public Administration. At the time, I thought it was an added bonus for me to have a Master of Public Administration (MPA) degree. But, what I've witnessed while serving on librarian search committees proves that assumption erroneous. Having the MPA may have been a necessity in my hire.

The Masters of Library Science (Information Technology) is the terminal degree to become a librarian. There is a PhD available in Library Science, but it is not required to work as a professional librarian. The library degree is supposed to equip one with the skills and knowledge that it will take to work in a library. If you followed the academic track in library school, you should be able to work in an academic library just like if you followed the public library track in library school, you should be able to work in a public library. Then, why is it that we are "semi-requiring" the "other" advanced degree? In most job descriptions that I see posted for a subject/specialist librarian position, the "other" advanced degree is listed as preferred not required. <See **Figure 1**> From what I've seen, it may as well be listed as required. In some cases, the MLS degree is not even required if you have an advanced degree in another field. <See **Figures 2 and 3**> Sure, having a master's degree in one of the subject areas that you're covering can be advantageous, but it doesn't mean that the non-degreed person can't do the job. "Speaking specifically about job performance, one manager noted, 'I currently manage more than thirty in

their collection management responsibilities. . . . The ones with advanced degrees have not been noticeably more effective in their jobs than those who lack them (Mayer and Terrill 2005, p.66)."

Having the other advanced degree can actually be a hindrance. In my case, I may have had a bit of tunnel vision. That is, I recommended the sources that I knew and had used in school and didn't take the time to search for other, possibly better resources. We've all encountered that faculty member who has designed a class assignment based on tools used in graduate school that in some cases may no longer exist. How many advanced degrees should a person have? No one will have an advance degree in all of their subject areas. So, doesn't logic say that the same way that person develops the skills and knowledge to cover the other areas, they can cover one more area without having the advanced degree?

I think we have overlooked great potential candidates by focusing on the second master's degree. As noted in Lindquist and Gilman (2008), "...one of the main difficulties academic library directors encounter in hiring is that requirements for these degrees and foreign-language skills, often desiderata of the teaching faculty, tend to eliminate otherwise good candidates (p.33)." This is also a hindrance to bringing diversity to libraries. Minorities will be at a disadvantage. If we are serious about achieving diversity in libraries, we have to look at skills other than the second advanced degree. And we have to be realistic. Being a librarian is a great career, but to "require" two advanced degrees, the financial benefit has to match the education required. Right now, it does not. There are quite a few librarians with PhDs. I would argue that being over-qualified brings some frustration to these candidates and the students they serve. They may be overly concerned with doing research rather than outreach that contributes to student success.

If I hadn't gotten my other master's first, there's almost no chance that I would have gotten another graduate degree after I began my professional career. The only exception may be if I had thoughts of being a dean or library director. That's the only exception because the salary increase you get when you're dean of a research university even a low level research university is the only sane way to justify the cost of the degree. And when I say cost, I'm not only talking about just the cost of tuition as many universities offer free tuition to employees. But I'm also including the cost of books, the time away from your family and friends and other opportunity costs. It just isn't worth it and really shouldn't be required.

I know of no other profession that values a non-related degree more than the terminal degree required. Attorneys with a masters in history are not more desirable to litigate property cases than those without it: just as a medical doctor with a masters in English doesn't have an edge over other doctors performing brain surgeries. The one area where maybe we should put the emphasis on additional advanced degrees, we do not. With a PhD available in library science, I think that should be a requirement for becoming a library director or dean. Or, the very least, an additional masters in management as a requirement. But, there doesn't seem to be a managerial requirement. Sure, it's nice for the library director or dean to have a PhD. In part, so they can be on the same level as other deans at the university. But, a PhD in music or French, really isn't beneficial to running a library. So, why then does a subject librarian position require a subject related masters' degree when arguably the most important position in libraries does not? I'll wait. Ok, crickets. Moving on.

Figure 1: 2016 African Studies Librarian Job Description



Minimum Qualifications:

Master's degree from a program accredited by the American Library Association or from a master's level program in library and information studies accredited or recognized by the appropriate national body of another country. Knowledge of the history, politics, economics, literatures and cultures of Sub-Saharan Africa. Good knowledge of French or of a major African language. Excellent oral and written communication skills; outstanding interpersonal communication skills including the ability to be flexible in a dynamic and changing environment; exceptional commitment to customer service; ability to work enthusiastically and effectively with diverse faculty, students, and staff; ability to work collaboratively and independently; ability to prioritize and balance various unit needs; attention to detail; preparation and commitment to conducting independent scholarship consistent with a library faculty appointment; capacity and commitment to engage independently in continuing professional development. For Librarian II, three years of successful professional library experience.

Desired Qualifications:

Graduate degree in African Studies; professional experience or travel in Africa; familiarity with digitization projects; experience with grant proposals or fund raising; willingness to do original cataloging in area of expertise.

Figure 2: 2016 Social Sciences and Data Services Librarian Job Description

Reporting to the Head of Academic Integration, the Social Sciences & Data Services Librarian (SS&DSL) serves as the Library's expert on the research, learning culture, and information practices in the social sciences. S/he maintains an active outreach program and develops innovative marketing strategies with the social sciences community to ensure their awareness of library services. S/he will create a data services program with resources and tools to support numeric, qualitative, and spatial data research on campus.

The SS&DSL plans, coordinates and participates in course-integrated information-related instruction, and creates virtual instructional materials to facilitate student and faculty research. S/he participates in a collaborative model of reference and research support. The SS&DSL selects, assesses and deselects assigned subject collections to support the research and curricular needs of faculty and students in the social sciences. S/he contributes to programs and initiatives of | and professional organizations, as appropriate.

Required Qualifications:



- MLS/MLIS from an ALA-accredited institution, or an advanced degree in social sciences with a willingness to pursue an MLS/MLIS.

Figure 3: 2016 Research Data Services, Team Leader Job Description

Required Qualifications:

- Demonstrated experience working collaboratively with faculty and other data experts
- Experience building successful relationships across disciplines
- Experience leading successful workshops and training for an academic audience
- Thorough understanding of current issues, trends, and technologies impacting higher education and academic libraries
- Thorough understanding of the software tools used in analyzing quantitative, qualitative, business, and spatial/GIS data
- Thorough understanding of the research data lifecycle, from identifying to creating, processing, analyzing, preserving, providing access to and ensuring reuse of data
- Excellent communication, presentation and interpersonal skills
- Minimum 3 years relevant professional experience
- ALA-accredited Master's in Library and/or Information Science or relevant graduate degree in a related field
- Ability to pass a background check

Preferred Qualifications:

- Supervisory experience in an academic library
- Demonstrated expertise in two or more quantitative, qualitative, business, and spatial data software packages
- Grant writing experience
- Second advanced degree



References

Gilman, Todd, and Thea Lindquist. 2010. "Academic/Research Librarians with Subject Doctorates: Experiences and Perceptions, 1965-2006." *Portal: Libraries And The Academy* no. 4: 399. *Project MUSE*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 17, 2016).

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