The trending academic library job market: An analysis of library position announcements from 2011 with comparisons to 1996 and 1988

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Introduction

Problem Statement
A column on the best and worst masters degrees that appeared in the June 8, 2012 issues of Forbes stated “Library and information science degree-holders bring in $57,600 mid-career, on average... and there are expected to be just 8.5% more of them by 2020. The low pay rank and estimated growth rank make library and information science the worst master’s degree for jobs right now.” Faced with reports like this and anecdotal complaints that library jobs are growing increasingly scarce to find the researchers decided to update studies conducted by Beile and Adams (2000), who analyzed ads from 1996, and Reser and Schuneman (1992), who used1988 data, by analyzing academic library position ads from 2011.

Study Objectives
The primary objective of the study was to describe the number, types and titles of jobs, qualifications and salaries of positions advertised on the ALA JobList and ARL Job Announcements web sites and in the Chronicle of Higher Education in 2011, for purposes of determining the current state of the academic library job market. Another objective of the study was to compare results of the analysis to findings of earlier studies to document changes in the academic library job market over time.

Methods
Job advertisements for four year institutions were collected and duplicate, part time and temporary positions were removed. Information that was collected but not included in the analysis were two-year college positions and ads for deans and directors (as the 1996 and 1988 studies did not include these positions).

Results

Analysis revealed that the number of positions advertised in 2011 (n=957) increased by 6.3% compared to 1996 (n=900), but was 15.5% lower than 1988 (n=1133). The number of positions advertised by region of country has remained fairly constant over time, as has the number of positions advertised by division (electronic, public, and technical).

The number of job announcements in 2011 that either preferred or required previous work experience was 706, or 73.6%, which is a decrease when compared to 1996 (n=719, 79.9%) and 1988 (n=932, 82.3%). The presence of administrative responsibilities (defined as head or assistant head of a unit, department, section, etc.) was mentioned in 248 (26%) of positions advertised, compared to 719 (76%) in 1996 and 436 (39%) in 1988.

Degree requirements appeared in 910 ads. Of them, 861 (89.9% of all ads) required an ALA MLS; the remaining 49 positions ranged from a bachelors degree to a variety of advanced degrees. The ALA MLS degree was required in 90.6% of 1996 ads and 98% of 1988 ads.

Conclusions

Possibly the most interesting trend noted by the authors is the increase in the number of job titles over time (twelve in 1988, 22 in 1996, and 30 in 2011), which serves as an indication that today’s library jobs require new job skills and are becoming increasingly specialized. Some of the job titles that first appeared in the 2011 study include digital, electronic resources, emerging technologies, metadata, scholarly communication, and web services librarians, thus indicating that the primary drivers of this trend are new technologies and digital materials.

The results of this study should be of interest to library science students considering an area of specialization, to library schools when designing curricula to support needs of academic libraries and trends in employment, and to librarians and administrators interested in learning more about trends in the academic library job market.

Bibliography