

Changing Roles in Research Libraries

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Late in 1998, the ARL Research Library Leadership and Management Committee conducted a brief, informal survey to discover whether or not research libraries have radically defined professional positions and, if so, how many positions had been redefined or were completely new. This survey was sent to all ARL library directors and the ARL office received 52 responses out of the 122 libraries polled. The responses indicate the beginnings of a change in how professional positions in research libraries are being viewed and redefined.

Since January 1996, the 52 responding libraries posted more positions than the Committee expected: 621 professional librarian positions--an annual average of four positions per library--and 197 administrative professional positions (other than librarian)--an annual average of one and one-quarter positions per library. This "quick and dirty" survey shows that turnover in academic libraries does exist and, while we have no longitudinal data on job descriptions to confirm a trend, it is clear that positions are being redesigned to meet changing times and user needs.

Since the Committee was interested in the extent to which libraries had redesigned positions to meet evolving needs, it is interesting to note that the 52 responding libraries reported that they had radically redesigned 156 professional librarian positions and 87 administrative professional positions other than librarian. These positions were retooled for a mix of new and experienced professionals. ARL received 94 redesigned job descriptions from survey respondents, summarized in [Table 1](#). Technology-related and user services positions each account for one-quarter of these descriptions, with collection development and technical services also composing significant portions of the redesigned job descriptions.

The survey asked respondents to describe the types of positions they would choose to fill should they have a sudden influx of financial resources. The resulting wish list, summarized in [Table 2](#), is a mix of traditionally defined positions and newer titles primarily dealing with electronic resource services and technology in general. Collection development and user services positions rank high on this list as well.

Later this year, ARL will publish a [SPEC Kit](#)--with detailed job descriptions and case studies--on the subject of changing roles in research libraries.

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