

# Salary Trends Highlight Inequities--Old and New

by Martha Kyrillidou, Senior Program Officer for Statistics and Measurement

The *ARL Annual Salary Survey* provides useful data for tracking trends in ARL library professionals' salaries over the last 20 years. The *Salary Survey* is the most comprehensive and thorough guide to current salaries in large U.S. and Canadian academic and research libraries, and has proven to be a valuable management and research tool for human resource professionals in these institutions.

The most recent publication, *ARL Annual Salary Survey, 1999-2000* (Washington: ARL, 2000), reports salary data for 8,595 professional staff members from the 111 ARL university libraries, including law and medical libraries (814 staff members reported by 69 medical libraries and 660 staff members reported by 72 law libraries). For the 10 nonuniversity ARL libraries, data were reported for 3,737 professional staff members. A [summary of the findings from this year's Salary Survey](#) is included in this issue of *ARL Bimonthly Report*.

This article highlights trends in university research librarian salaries by examining the data retrospectively. Salaries for ARL professional staff are examined across two dimensions--institutional and human attributes. There are a number of institutional characteristics that affect salaries differently such as geography, locus of control, size of the institution, or type of library. Human attributes, such as sex and race/ethnicity, are another set of factors that have historically been related to salaries. An informed awareness of how these issues affect salaries for professionals in ARL libraries is the first step towards understanding and improving our work environments.

ARL membership consists of both U.S. and Canadian libraries; Canadian salaries are converted to U.S. dollars for most of the tables in the *ARL Annual Salary Survey* publication. For the purpose of the longitudinal analysis presented in this article, the U.S. and Canadian data are analyzed separately, as the larger economic contexts of the two nations create interesting differences in the results.

An overarching finding of this analysis is that the purchasing power of professionals working in ARL libraries has stayed ahead of inflation. However, average salaries are increasing at a faster rate than median salaries, indicating that higher salaries are rising more quickly than lower salaries. This dynamic widens the spread between the highest and lowest salaries and consequently has a greater impact on women and minorities, who have been historically disadvantaged in earnings and are now attempting to bridge the earnings gap under adverse conditions.

## Canadian ARL University Librarians

Canadian ARL membership has been stable over the past 15 years--13 Canadian libraries have been members of ARL since 1985. McGill and Toronto were among the founding ARL members in 1932 and, in 1985, Laval was the last Canadian institution to join ARL.

Over the last decade, the Canadian economy has not fared well compared to the U.S. economy; Canadian ARL members have faced a tougher economic climate than their U.S. counterparts. The Canadian-U.S. exchange rate hit a record low of 1.5103 in 1999. The exchange rate was somewhat more favorable for Canadians in the early 1990s but, since 1992-93, it has steadily declined.

Despite the exchange rate constraints, the median Canadian ARL professional salary (in U.S. dollars) was higher than the median U.S. ARL professional salary until 1994-95. The median Canadian salary has remained lower than the median U.S. salary, declining sharply over the last three years. (See [Chart 1](#).) Canadian librarians earn about \$6,600 less than their U.S. colleagues in 1999-2000.

In the past 15 years, Canadian libraries have downsized 11% in terms of the number of librarians they employ--in the aggregate 737 staff members are employed in 1999-2000, about 100 professionals less than in 1985. Canadian professionals tend to have more years of professional library experience (about 18.9 years for women and 19.6 years for men) compared to their U.S. counterparts (16.8 for women and 16.7 years for men) and, as a group, they tend to be older (see [The Changing Profile of Research Library Professional Staff](#) by Stanley Wilder, on pages 1-5 of this issue). At the same time, they are less mobile, having worked on average only three years in another library as compared to five years for their U.S. counterparts.

The gender gap in salaries is almost bridged in Canadian ARL libraries--women are now making the equivalent of 99% of men's salaries. This small differential is parallel to a differential in experience, as male library professionals have, on average, slightly more years of experience than female library professionals in Canada.

Explanations for the Canadian salary trends include the weak Canadian dollar as compared to the U.S. dollar, early retirement plans, and a very low turnover rate.

### **U.S. ARL University Librarians**

The composition of U.S. ARL member libraries has changed over the past 20 years as 10 libraries were added to the ARL membership. The change in membership composition has not significantly affected the salary data, however. Holding constant the data set of U.S. ARL libraries for the entire history of the *ARL Annual Salary Survey* data collection (88 libraries), the overall median salary is almost the same as that for the entire membership.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the general trend of librarians' salaries outpacing inflation still holds true.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Number of U.S. ARL University Librarians Increased 15%...*

Holding constant the U.S. libraries studied, we can see that the number of professionals as reported in the *ARL Annual Salary Survey* has increased about 15% over the last 15 years. However, certain regions increased faster than others in terms of the number of professionals employed--New England, the South Atlantic, and the West South Central increased by one-third--while the Pacific region was the only U.S. geographic area where the number of professionals declined.

#### *Pacific Region Has the Highest Salaries but the Slowest Increases...*

Professional salaries differ across U.S. ARL libraries due to many reasons. One obvious factor is the geographic location of the library. The highest salaries are found in the Pacific region, followed by New England and the Middle Atlantic. All three of these areas have overall average salaries higher than \$50,000, with the Pacific area averaging as high as \$58,605. Within the U.S., salaries in the West South Central and East South Central regions tend to be the lowest.

However, examining salary increases over a span of 15 years shows that the rate of increase has yet a different pattern across the regions of the country. Although U.S. ARL professional librarians' salaries overall have outpaced inflation, salaries in the Pacific region have increased the least over the last 15 years--primarily because during the last three years they have not kept up with salary increases in the rest of the country. Also, in the West South Central and Middle Atlantic regions, salaries have increased less than average salaries in the rest of the country. The West South Central region historically has had the lowest salary increases, especially from 1991 to 1996. The Middle Atlantic, for the most part, had above-average salary increases during the last 15 years but salary growth rates were much lower for the last three years.

#### *Mountain Region Salaries Increasing the Fastest...*

On the other hand, ARL professionals' salaries in the Mountain and New England regions have increased faster than salaries in the rest of the U.S. The Mountain region experienced below-average increases until 1995 but during the last few years it reversed the trend, realizing the largest increases among all U.S. ARL professional librarians salaries in 1999-2000. The New England area has traditionally led the way in terms of salary growth, only slipping to second to the Mountain region for the first time this year.

There is potential for strains developing in the East South Central and West South Central regions. These two regions have experienced large increases in the number of professionals they employ but salaries have not risen as quickly as elsewhere in the country. Coupled with the fact that these are the two regions with the lowest salaries, they might have a hard time retaining professionals.

#### *Large Private University Libraries Pay More...*

In 1980, U.S. ARL professionals earned more in public institutions than in private institutions. Salary increases, though, have been consistently higher in private institutions and, since 1988, those working in private university libraries have earned more. The gap between salaries in private and public institutions was sustained in the early 1990s when salary increases in public institutions did not keep up with those in private institutions. Although 1999-2000 salary increases were higher in public U.S. university libraries (3.98%) than those in private ones (3.04%), private universities continue to pay higher salaries.

In general, library size as measured by the number of professionals employed has a positive relationship with salary level, with larger institutions paying more, on average, than smaller institutions. A more careful examination of library size by type of institution (private vs. public) shows that the highest salaries are paid by the medium-sized and large private university libraries, whereas large state university libraries on average pay the least. Salaries in large state university libraries have fluctuated a bit over the last 20 years but, for the most part, their salaries have been among the lowest. Salary increases in large state university libraries, though, have been greater than average during the last three years. The rate of salary increases has been the lowest among medium-sized public and private institutions.<sup>3</sup>

#### *University Law Librarians Earn the Most*

The ARL Annual Salary Survey collects data on three major groups of libraries--law, medical, and main libraries.<sup>4</sup> Law and medical librarians' salaries are collected separately, as these libraries often are administratively independent from the main library and report to the professional schools they serve. Of the three groups, law librarians have historically had the highest salaries during the last 20 years, earning an average salary of \$57,494 in 1999-2000, compared to \$51,927 for librarians working in the main library system and \$51,501 for those working in medical libraries. The rate of salary increase has also been higher in U.S. law university libraries since 1989, thereby sustaining and enlarging their compensation advantage.

#### **Salary Differences by Sex**

Librarianship is a predominantly female profession; female professions are undervalued and underpaid. A variety of reasons have been offered as to why these trends persist, most notably the perceptions that work is peripheral in a woman's life; women are not as committed to their careers; women have less education, experience, and training; and women are less mobile.

Theories that attempt to explain sex differences in salaries can be viewed in terms of a number of dimensions: sociological vs. economic, supply-side vs. demand-side, etc. Sociological explanations tend to emphasize the importance of gender role socialization and point out that the choices individuals make are limited by their environment. As Reskin and Padavic note, "to the extent that women's and men's jobs reflect their preferences, these are preferences formed in response to the opportunities that

employers provide" because "women, like men, accept the best jobs that are open to them."<sup>5</sup>

Economic explanations tend to emphasize that individuals act of their own free will and make rational decisions that aim at maximizing economic benefits. Economic thinking has offered two major ways of viewing and explaining differences in occupational distributions and earnings: supply-side and demand-side explanations. Supply-side economics emphasizes that different groups (women/men, race/ethnic groups, etc.) come to the labor market with different tastes and qualifications--such as education, formal training, and experience--and other productivity-related characteristics. Wage differentials and occupational segregation are viewed as the result of rational choices by the members of a group. Demand-side explanations emphasize that employers, employees, or customers may have certain preferences for members of a specific group, based either on their likes and dislikes or on correct or incorrect assumptions about the productivity of the members of the group. Thus, wage differentials are viewed as the result of the prejudices that employers, employees, and customers may have in interacting with members of a specific group.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear that no single theory offers an adequate explanation--yet the gender gap persists in U.S. academic institutions in general, not only in their libraries, and there is a sense that a renewed commitment to resolve the problem is needed.<sup>7</sup>

The scarcity of men in the library profession has been well documented in many studies. The largest percent of men employed in ARL libraries was 38.2% in 1980-81; since then, men have consistently represented about 35% of the professional staff in ARL libraries. Yet men working as professionals in U.S. ARL university libraries enjoy a compensation advantage that is proving hard to eliminate.

#### *U.S. Salary Gap Closing , but Slowly*

As noted previously, the salary differential between men and women in Canadian university libraries is almost bridged, with women earning 99% of men's salaries. In the U.S., the salary differential between men and women has also been closing, but very slowly--in the last 20 years it changed only seven percentage points. In 1980-81 the average salary for professional women in U.S. ARL libraries was 86% of that of their male counterparts, and in 1999-2000 it is only 93% (See [Chart 2.](#)) Although the *ARL Annual Salary Survey* publications have noted that the salary gap is closing, it is apparent that, when we exclude the Canadian data, the U.S. data show smaller gains for women professionals.<sup>8</sup> The salary gap appears even larger in the face of the closed experience differential between men and women over the last 20 years. There is no experience differential between U.S. ARL professional men and women in 1999-2000. On average, both men and women have a little less than 17 years of professional experience, compared to 11.8 years of professional experience for women and 12.8 years for men in 1980-81 (See [Table 1.](#))

Although the rate of salary increase has been slightly higher for women than men since 1985 (See [Chart 3](#)), it has not been enough to eliminate the salary differential and achieve equity between women's and men's salaries. At the current rate it may take another 20 years or so for women professionals in U.S. ARL libraries to bridge the earnings gap.<sup>9</sup>

One of the reasons that has been used in the past to explain why women's salaries are lower than men's is women's lower turnover and reduced mobility; yet, the trends regarding turnover and mobility have been reversed between U.S. ARL university professional women and men, with no apparent impact on respective earnings. In 1985, the first time "years in library" information was collected on the Salary Survey, U.S. women had fewer years of experience in another library compared to men (only 3.8 years compared to 4.35 years for men). In 1998-99 women had worked slightly more than five years in another library compared to men who had worked slightly less than five years.

In ARL libraries, women continue to be underrepresented in the top positions of the organizational hierarchy although the salary differential has been bridged for men and women directors. With the exception of the director position, however, the rest of the top administrative positions continue to have more and better paid men compared to women.

### *Gendered Job Categories*

Two positions warrant elaboration just as other articles in this special issue of the *ARL Bimonthly Report* highlight them: the functional specialist and reference librarian positions. Both of these positions pay relatively similar salaries to men and women, but functional specialists pay much higher salaries to both men and women compared to reference librarians (See [Table 2.](#))

The distribution of men and women in these job categories also points to sex segregation. A disproportionate number of men are reported in the functional specialist position (17.4% of all men are reported as functional specialists and only 11.4% of women). And a disproportionate, yet reverse, trend appears in the reference librarian position (17% of all men are reported as reference librarians compared to 23% of women). Functional specialists often tend to be those professionals with increased technological sophistication whereas reference librarians have a strong service orientation. Are we seeing a typical intra-occupational, job-level segregation trend where women and men choose and/or are assigned jobs that are sex? (See [Chart 4.](#))<sup>10</sup>

### **Trends in Salaries for Racial/Ethnic Groups**

ARL university libraries employ a small number of minority librarians compared to other academic libraries. Recent race and ethnicity data on academic libraries from the American Library Association (ALA) confirm this by showing that the sample of academic libraries surveyed by ALA has a higher representation of Blacks, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and American Indians/Alaskan Natives than ARL libraries.<sup>11</sup>

Salaries for Caucasian professionals in U.S. ARL university libraries have been consistently higher than those for any other race/ethnic group since the early 1990s (prior to that, Asian professionals, as a group, earned the highest salaries). Asians' salaries are slipping into the third position and Hispanic professionals' salaries are increasing rapidly--Hispanics have the second highest average salary in 1999-2000 (see [Table 3](#)). Since 1984, the rate of salary increases has been the largest for Hispanic professionals and the smallest for Black professionals (See [Chart 5.](#)) As a result, Blacks had the lowest salaries during the last two years. To some extent, the low salaries for Black professionals can be explained by fewer years of experience as compared to most other ethnic/racial groups. However, Hispanic men also had fewer years of experience than most other groups, yet this did not prevent their average salary from increasing faster than the other minority groups.

Minority professionals in research libraries are distributed disproportionately around the U.S. and, in some ways, salary differentials by minority group can be explained by geographic distribution. For example, Blacks are located largely in the South, an area with lower salaries historically. Asians, on the other hand, are to be found in larger numbers in the West, where salaries traditionally have been higher than in the rest of the country. However, geographic and racial/ethnic distributions do not readily explain sex-based salary differentials.

### *White Women, White Men, Black Women, Black Men*

The literature outside librarianship has often found pronounced differences in salaries when grouped in the categories White women, White men, Black women, and Black men, with Black women receiving the lowest salaries most of the time. U.S. ARL University librarians' salaries conform to this general observation, with Black women earning \$46,979, the lowest salary of all groups, followed by Black men at \$50,417, Caucasian women at \$51,448 and Caucasian men at \$55,045. The years of experience

differential may explain some of these disparities but it does not explain the difference between salaries for Black men and women, as Black women have more experience compared to Black men.

## Conclusion

Overall, North American research librarians' salaries are increasing faster than inflation, most likely due to an increased demand for technologically savvy professionals. This may not translate into gains for women and minorities, especially if the more highly paid jobs are excluding women and minorities from their ranks through under-representation in the top positions and gendered job categories. Women and minorities are trying to bridge the earnings gap in the face of a rising earnings inequality, i.e., while the earnings gap between high- and low-paying positions is getting larger.<sup>12</sup> These trends point to the need to define more clearly the values of the profession and how they affect the salaries of the different groups within the library workforce. The profession needs more diversity throughout its workforce, a renewed commitment to equitable salaries, and careful monitoring to ensure that the "new," more highly paid, technology-intensive jobs are open to women and minorities--a commitment to bridging the "digital divide."

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## Endnotes

1. For the purposes of this article, we hold constant the data set of U.S. ARL member libraries to the 88 libraries reporting data throughout the entire history of the survey data collection (1980 to present) unless otherwise noted. Readers can consult the *Annual Salary Survey* publications for data on the entire membership for each year.
2. See Table 3 in the *ARL Annual Salary Survey, 1999-2000* (Washington: ARL, 2000).
3. Libraries were grouped into four groups based on the number of professional staff reported for the main library system in 1999-2000. The four groups are: (a) staff over 110, (b) staff 75-110, (c) staff 50-74, (d) staff 24-49. The phrase "medium-sized libraries" refers to the two middle cohorts.
4. The main library may include various departmental libraries in a multi-departmental library campus environment.
5. Barbara F. Reskin and Irene Padavic, *Women and Men at Work* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Pine Forge Press, 1994): 78.
6. Francine D. Blau, Marianne Ferber, and Anne E. Winkler, *The Economics of Women, Men, and Work* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1998).
7. Yolanda Moses, "Salaries in Academe: The Gender Gap Persists," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (12 Dec. 1997): A60.
8. The number of libraries reporting data used in this analysis was held constant throughout the last 20 years.
9. Professional women in Canadian ARL libraries earned 93% of their male counterparts' salaries 20 years ago--it took 20 years for these women to earn 99% of men's salary.
10. A similar yet less pronounced trend is taking place regarding the subject specialist and cataloger

positions.

11. Mary Jo Lynch, "Librarians' Salaries Smaller Increases this Year," *American Libraries* (Nov. 1998): 68-70, <<http://www.ala.org/alaorg/ors/racethnc.html>>.

12. For example, female directors' salaries were 2.7 times those of female reference librarians' salaries in 1984. Fifteen years later, the ratio has increased to 3.2. The higher salaries are rising more quickly than the lower salaries reflecting, to a small extent, the much larger earnings inequality that is taking place in the U.S. economy. For more information on the rising earnings inequality trends see James Lardner, "The Rich Get Richer: What Happens to American Society When the Gap in Wealth and Income Grows Larger?" *U.S. News and World Report* (21 Feb. 2000): 39-43. See also, Blau et al., 234-243.

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