



Library Support Staff Position Classification Studies

A SPEC Kit compiled by

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SURVEY



SPEC Kit 252

Library Support Staff Position Classification Studies

Executive Summary

Introduction

Classification schemes provide a basis for creating new positions, making recruitment and hiring decisions, establishing salary scales, and delineating common standards for performance review and career advancement. A review of the previous SPEC Kits on related topics, *Personnel Classification Schemes in ARL Libraries* (SPEC Kit 85, June 1982) and *Job Analysis in ARL Libraries* (SPEC Kit 135, June 1987), reveals little noticeable change over time in the purpose of job analysis for developing classifications. Libraries, however, have changed.

Technology has brought about a dramatic change not so much in what libraries do, but in how libraries do it. Duties and responsibilities remain essentially the same, but the skills and abilities necessary to accomplish the required tasks have altered. Partly, an institution's software and hardware have made the work more complex. Shared bibliographic information, for instance, has blurred the lines not only between support staff positions (no M.L.S. required) and librarians (M.L.S. required), but among support staff as well. Partly, internal reorganizations have resulted in greater expectations for positions, including the need for continual staff training and upgrading of skills. Staff members in all areas of the library are expected to have a broad understanding of operations throughout the system in order to perform their jobs satisfactorily. As a result, job classifications need to be revised periodically now more than ever to reflect the complexity, impact, and resourcefulness demanded of today's library staff, including support staff.

While the two previous SPEC studies of job classification focused on the differences between research librarian, support staff, and student level positions, this study looked closely at only support staff in an attempt to determine how the levels of this classification group are currently defined and distinguished. The survey gathered data on library support staff classification specifications in

ARL libraries, the process for classifying these positions, and salary and title comparisons with similar positions outside of the library. It also asked when the last classification study was performed within the library, what triggered the process, who was involved, and what were the results of the classification study in both economic and human terms.

The survey was distributed to all ARL libraries in June 1999. Of the 122 member institutions, 59 (48%) responded.

Survey Results

Classification Systems. All respondents reported using a position classification system for their library support staff. Ninety-five percent have used a system for eight or more years, while 5% have used a system for the past four to seven years. The levels of support staff positions among libraries vary widely, with the highest percentage (29%) having five levels; 27% have four levels; 14% have three levels; 7% have six levels; and 3% have two levels. Twenty percent indicated a number greater than six levels. The wide range of classification levels may be influenced by outside guidelines since 41 respondents indicated that their classifications must fit into a larger classification scheme imposed by another system: state system (24%), higher education system (22%), campus system (20%), or other system (34%).

Classification Study Process

Although 18 institutions have performed a classification study within the last three years, 41 have not. In fact, nearly half of the respondents have not performed a study within the last six years—a period of great technological change.

Impetus. Concern over equitable pay levels, both within the larger institution and within the library, was the primary motivator for performing a classification study. Administration and human resource departments were

almost equally responsible for driving the study (48% and 44% respectively). A union was least likely to drive a study (10%).

Time Factor. The length of time to complete a classification study can take from as little as six months to more than three years. The average length of time reported by respondents was 22 months. Not surprisingly, there seems to be a correlation between the number of people involved in the process and the length of time a study takes. Other influencing factors, such as the timing of union negotiations, affected completion of some studies as well.

Participants. Representatives from library administration and campus human resources offices comprised the majority of participants involved in a classification study. The numbers for these groups were closely followed by numbers for library human resources officers, supervisors and managers, and department heads. Employees, an appointed committee or task force, and an outside consultant came next. Union involvement was relatively low, but they do have an effect on support staff classifications. Of the 23 libraries (47%) who said support staff were unionized, 50% declared that unionization has an impact on the classification study process.

Point factoring was mainly done by campus human resources or unspecified, other participants, followed closely by library human resources departments.

Methodology. Normally more than one method is used to perform a classification study, but the majority of respondents indicated that a review of previous job descriptions was made. Interviews with supervisors came next in frequency, followed by individual staff reports and desk audits. The use of other methodology accounted for 16 answers.

Criteria. As one might anticipate, the majority of respondents considered the complexity of tasks involved in a position as the first criteria for distinguishing between classification levels. This was closely followed by increased independence in decision making and supervisory responsibilities. Technical expertise in a particular area and advanced subject knowledge of a particular area or collection were also important factors.

Salary Comparisons

Among U.S. libraries, the 11 respondents with five levels of support staff had salary ranges from a minimum of \$1,284 per month to a maximum of \$3,524 per month.

The average minimum was \$2,006 per month; the average maximum was \$2,781. For the 16 U.S. institutions with four levels of staff, monthly ranges ran from a minimum of \$965 to a maximum of \$5,696. The average minimum was \$1,846, and the average maximum was \$2,817. For the seven U.S. institutions with three levels of support staff, \$1,031 was the minimum end of the range per month and \$3,275 the maximum. The average minimum was \$1,482, and the average maximum was \$2,239. Three responding U.S. institutions do not have maximum ranges.

For the four Canadian institutions with five levels of support staff, the minimum salary per month was \$1,662 and the maximum was \$4,860. The average minimum was \$2,317 and the average maximum was \$3,052. (All figures are in Canadian dollars. See charts for specific comparisons.)

When compared to campus, system, or organizational ranges for clerical position classifications, 74% indicated that the salary ranges for library support staff were about the same. Twenty-two percent, however, indicated library classification ranges were higher in general than clerical salary scales, while 4% indicated library ranges were lower in general.

As could be expected, when respondents compared library support staff salary ranges to campus, system, or organization computer or information technology ranges, 73% considered the library salary ranges to be lower in general. Twenty-seven percent considered the ranges for these classification groups to be about the same, but no one considered library ranges higher in general.

Outcome

The responses for the question concerning the outcome of a classification study support the view that support staff positions have become more complex and important in the library. Twenty-seven respondents (61%) indicated that pay levels were raised as a result of the study, although 17 respondents indicated that there was no change to pay levels. No one indicated pay levels were lowered. Where pay levels were increased, the raises were funded by the library (55%), the parent organization (48%), the state (14%), or another source (3%).

Issues and Trends

It is interesting to examine the terminology used in support staff classifications. Clerical and technical termi-

nology is, for the most part, disappearing. By far, Library Assistant was the most common classification title for library support staff. Some libraries use a combination of library technician and library assistant classifications and/or library supervisor or manager classifications. Much of this is most likely influenced by union representation in those systems. It is also worth noting that the more upper level classifications (such as Library Assistant II through V) are used, instead of lower levels.

One of the greatest, reported needs in revising classification schemes was to account for the importance of interpersonal versus technical skills and the integration of the two skill types. No one type of skill is considered more important now than another, and benchmarks for valuing these position classifications have changed. As noted above under survey results, 29% of all responding libraries use five levels of library support staff. Rather than a trend appearing for the collapse of classification systems, there appears to be an expansion. Perhaps, the greatest trend of all is that libraries recognize the need for an expansion in classification levels in order to cover the complexity and/or variety of duties performed by support staff at the same time that they are willing to pay for the upgrades and reclassifications themselves.

Conclusion

Many institutions still work with outdated library support staff classifications—20-year-old systems in some cases. As a result, these organizations need to deal with equity issues across classification ranks generated by the dated system, changes in computer technology, and a competitive information technology marketplace.

Undertaking a classification study, however, is labor and time intensive, and the process must be tailored to each institution. In preparation for a review of its technician series during the spring of 1999, the University of Oregon Library discovered no current articles or reports by academic or research libraries to serve as a guide. The lack of current information indicates the difficulty of the task.

Based on the experiences of survey respondents who have recently conducted classification studies, however, a library should be the instigator in revamping its system. This ensures the likelihood of establishing classification specifications that accurately reflect the work being performed and fit within appropriate salary schedules, thus attempting to satisfy both employees and the institution.