



The M.L.S. Hiring Requirement

A SPEC Kit compiled by

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SURVEY



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Executive Summary

Introduction

How important is the M.L.S. degree for employment in research libraries? On a periodic basis, both those individuals planning library careers and those seeking to employ the best person for a position ask this question. Traditionally, academic research libraries have been expected to require the M.L.S. for any professional position. For example, the Association of College and Research Libraries's Statement on the Terminal Professional Degree for Academic Librarians (January 1975) states that "The master's degree in library science from a library school program accredited by the American Library Association is the appropriate terminal professional degree for academic librarians."¹ However, as libraries create new types of positions, especially for those with significant technology components, library directors and personnel officers have begun to question whether the M.L.S. degree is as necessary as other degrees or experiences.

In 1994, a SPEC survey was conducted to determine if research libraries were hiring non-M.L.S. degreed applicants into professional positions. Those institutions responding "yes" were sent a follow-up survey in the summer of 1995, and the results appeared in *Non-Librarian Professionals* (SPEC Kit 212, December 1995). At that time, 59% of the 95 responding libraries indicated that they were willing to consider applicants without the M.L.S. degree for professional positions and supplied a variety of positions to which that consideration would be applied.

To determine if hiring requirements have changed since this topic last was covered, a Quick SPEC survey was conducted on behalf of New York University in November 1999. All ARL member libraries were surveyed and responses were received and tabulated for 111 academic institutions for a response rate of 92%. Institutions were also asked to supply documentation for both faculty ranking systems and tenure review processes. Consequently, this Kit includes the survey results and

selected documents addressing institutional policies and procedures for the hiring and appointment process, as well as criteria for the promotion and reappointment processes in a variety of institutional settings. Cross-tabulations of the data revealed more information about the relationships between requiring the M.L.S. for hiring, on the one hand, and faculty status, promotion, and tenure requirements, on the other.

M.L.S. Degree Requirement

Is the M.L.S. degree a hiring requirement for ARL libraries? The survey results revealed that of the 111 members responding, 73 libraries (66%) do require an M.L.S. or equivalent library degree for all librarian positions. (Readers should note that this survey asked whether there was a *strict* M.L.S. requirement for hiring, although a few institutions remarked that the use of the phrase "or equivalent" was in conflict to the term "strict".) These results contrast to the 1995 SPEC Kit results in which 56 out of 95 respondents (59%) indicated that they were willing to consider non-M.L.S. degreed candidates. ARL libraries in general responded to the 1999 survey with an indication that their preference is for the M.L.S. "or equivalent" (the equivalency language was common in nearly all of the supporting documents supplied).

Some respondents commented that they had classification systems in which all professionals were placed on the same level and no distinction was made for librarians without an M.L.S.

Faculty Status

Just over half (53%) of the libraries reported that they have faculty status at their institution. Of these 59 libraries, 42 (71%) require the M.L.S. for hiring. Conducting a cross-tabulation of the 73 institutions that strictly require the M.L.S. at the time of hiring, 42 institutions (58%) have faculty status. Those with faculty

status for librarians responded that their professional standing is in general similar to that of the teaching faculty, but not necessarily equivalent in terms of the qualifying criteria and requirements for the different ranks. Supporting documents show that librarian positions are covered by the faculty handbook at those universities where they have faculty status.

Promotion

Of the 72 institutions that indicated the M.L.S. was required at the point of hire, only 10 made it a strict requirement for subsequent promotion. Although this SPEC survey did not ask any additional questions about the promotion process, the documents supplied by the respondents do provide some additional information. Documents for promotion include a range of details—many specific to an institution—but some general observations can be made. In most cases, the review timeframe includes annual performance reviews for new hires with tenure activities built into a three-, five-, or six-year cycle. The areas of performance cluster into three: job performance (teaching or education) or general librarianship, scholarship (research and contribution to the profession), and service to the community (outreach). Depending on the institution, different weights are applied to the areas and to the level of effort necessary within them. It is clear from most of the documents supplied that the review and promotion process is a lengthy one, with significant individual and institutional effort put into preparing the necessary documentation and involving supervisors and peers (both internal and external) in the activity.

The *ARL Annual Salary Survey* reports on the most commonly used ranking structures. The three most common ranking systems are three-step, four-step, and five-step, with the four-step being the most common (39% of the librarians in the 1999–2000 survey occupied this structure).² Documents represented in this Kit reflect these more common structures.

Tenure

Forty-two of the responding libraries (38%) indicated that librarians were awarded tenure at their institutions. In 20 libraries (18%), another status is conferred—most often called “continuing appointment”—that is similar to tenure. For 47 research libraries (42%), librarians are not

awarded tenure. Comparing library degree requirements and tenure, of the 42 libraries that reported that they have tenure, 33 do require the M.L.S. at the point of hire, and of the 72 institutions that require the M.L.S. at the point of hire, 33 institutions offer tenure.

In the March 1992 SPEC Kit, *Academic Status for Librarians in ARL Libraries*, 35 out of 99 institutions (35%) reported “yes” to the question, “Do librarians at your library have faculty status and are they eligible for tenure?” For those who did not say that they had tenure, 31 institutions reported academic status with continuing appointment, and others claimed various other categories. Results from this 1999 survey indicate that there has been no significant change in the number of institutions that report their librarians have tenure. In a cross-tabulation of this survey’s data for faculty status and tenure, 39 of the 59 libraries (66%) with faculty status have tenure as well.

Relationship of Policy to Practice

In a recent article for *ARL: A Bimonthly Report*, Martha Kyrillidou examined the relationship between the data gathered in this survey and the data on educational credentials ARL gathers from members periodically through its *ARL Annual Salary Survey*. The empirical evidence there contradicts the results of this SPEC survey: while ARL libraries asserted a rather strict requirement for hiring in response to these questions, they are, in fact, adding non-M.L.S. degreed professionals to their ranks in significant numbers.³ Whether their policies of requiring an M.L.S. at the time of hire exist to encourage a continued reliance on the M.L.S. as the appropriate degree or are just based on historical circumstance and have not yet changed to reflect current activities can only be determined by time.

Documentation

This SPEC survey asked ARL institutions to supply documents on faculty ranking systems and the tenure review process. In general, two types of documentation were supplied: those that address library appointments, promotion, and tenure in particular and those that come from general university policies on hiring academic appointments. While only a few years ago it was difficult to obtain these documents since they had to be requested from personnel offices either within the library or the university, most institutions now make their policies and pro-

cedures available on websites. This makes the information more accessible to the campus community, but also allows individuals to make comparisons among institutional policies and practices.

Trends

Whether or not a library requires an M.L.S. or offers faculty status, it appears most important, after examining the documentation and associated websites, that the library or institution provide support for the hiring and promotion process, that the processes for hiring and review be revisited on a regular basis, and that information be available for librarians to know what is expected of them. Although the documents supplied do not necessarily reflect it, the specific institutional culture weighs heavily on the hiring, promotion, and tenure process in research libraries. With more material available electronically, those seeking employment in ARL libraries will be well-advised to look at documents from the institution in which they are interested to see the requirements for success.

As expected, results from this survey indicate that ARL libraries still do not hire nonlibrarians (i.e., non-M.L.S. degreed individuals) into librarian positions, although they are willing to hire individuals without the M.L.S. for other professional positions. The discussion about what a library professional is will undoubtedly continue, but it is clear that while ARL libraries have policies that indicate their hiring preferences are for an M.L.S. or equivalent, the “equivalent” may become more prevalent.

(Footnotes)

¹ <<http://www.ala.org/acrl/guides/termdegr.html>>

² Martha Kyriallidou, ed., *ARL Annual Salary Survey 1999–2000* (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 2000), 20.

³ Martha Kyriallidou, “Educational Credentials, Professionalism, and Librarians,” *ARL: A Bimonthly Report on Research Library Issues and Actions from ARL, CNI, and SPARC* 208/209 (February / April 2000): 12–13.