

Recruitment and Retention

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SURVEY RESULTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

It is not news to the research library community that the recruitment and retention of qualified librarians is a pressing concern in academic libraries. These intertwined issues have been the topic of conversation for the better part of a decade, the focus of symposia and journal articles, and, over the past few years, the charge of task forces at both the local and national level.

This survey was distributed to the 124 ARL member libraries in May 2003 to gather information about recruitment and retention concerns and techniques that have been used successfully by academic and research libraries to attract and hold on to librarians. The survey also sought to determine factors that lead to successful hiring and retention of both new and experienced librarians. The survey is in three parts. The first part addresses recruitment issues and techniques; the second focuses on retention issues and techniques; and the third explores some strategies that libraries might use to encourage individuals to seek an MLIS in order to enter progressively more responsible positions in an academic or research library. Sixty-nine libraries (56%) responded to the survey.

Recruitment

Respondents were asked to focus on factors that affected recruitment for the last three librarian positions advertised. The 69 responding libraries reported a total of 204 position vacancies, of which

three were announced in 2000, 31 in 2001, 131 in 2002, and 39 thus far in 2003. Most of these positions were entry-level (49%), followed by mid-career (34%) and management (15%). Only a handful were for late-career, non-management positions (2%). The openings covered all job categories. The category with the highest number of openings was reference (40 or 20%). Cataloging was second with 20 positions (10%), followed by area studies (12 or 6%), instruction and special collections (11 each), and electronic resources (10).

The survey presented a list of job-related factors and asked which ones seemed to have the most impact for recruiting librarians at different stages of their careers. The five factors that most enhanced the recruitment effort for entry-level positions were the benefits package and opportunity for professional development/advancement (62% of responses); an MLS/MLIS requirement (55%); and the library's geographic location and assistance with moving expenses (46%). The local cost of living (41%) took fourth place. Faculty status, a tenure or permanent status track, and an opportunity for research tied for fifth (36%).

The salary range was considered an enhancement and a barrier by an equal number of respondents (20 or 29%). After salary, the highest impact barriers to recruitment for entry-level positions were the duration of the search process and size of the applicant pool (29% of responses), followed by the diversity of the applicant pool (28%). The local

cost of living and the library's geographic location potentially also had a somewhat negative impact on recruitment (20%).

Similar choices of high impact factors were made for recruitment of mid-career, late-career, and management positions, though in slightly different orders. Benefits, an MLS/MLIS requirement, and the geographic location were all in the top five enhancements to recruitment for upper-level positions and were joined by assistance with moving expenses (second to third place). Tenure and work schedule were also either in or just below the top five. As with entry-level positions, salary had roughly the same impact as both an enhancement and barrier at these levels. After salary, the size and diversity of the applicant pool and duration of the search process were the primary barriers.

Two factors that were considered to have a fairly low impact either as enhancements or barriers at all levels (including management) were a requirement of a second master's degree or Ph.D. In addition, one respondent stated that they did not require an MLS/MLIS now for certain technical positions, but requested an "ALA accredited MLS/MLIS degree or equivalent combination of education and experience" in their job postings.

Outcomes of the last three recruitment efforts were requested by the survey. Sizes of the applicant pools ranged from between 1 and 107 (for Effort 1) to between 1 and 80 (for Effort 3), with a mean of 23.1 to 25.6 for the three positions. The duration of the search process took over three months in the majority of cases (158 or 77%). Half of the searches (104) took three to six months. Only 12 (6%) took less than six weeks. Most positions were filled by the library's first choice candidate (153 or 77%) in all three efforts. In 26 cases (13%), a new search was started to fill the position. Some libraries reported that their positions were filled internally either after an external search was unsuccessful or without an external search being attempted. Managerial and technical services positions were often the hardest to fill.

Techniques that have been successful in overcoming recruitment barriers include increasing salaries; conducting a speedy search process; internal recruitment; and wide advertising through discussion

lists (both nationally and internationally), Web sites, and publications—all fairly predictable techniques. Some libraries have tried more innovative strategies, however, such as providing internship programs and tuition remissions or scholarships to attend library school. One respondent remarked that its library made an effort to make candidate visits more positive and friendly. Another mentioned that they had had good success with word of mouth campaigns, while still another noted that their librarians' involvement in ALA activities and divisions had been helpful for recruitment.

A library school at the institution was considered a big asset. However, libraries that did not have one locally were also able to overcome recruitment barriers by taking the time to visit with regional library schools. Networking, or word of mouth, and having recent transplants talk with candidates about the geographic location of a library also helped. Finally, one library indicated that although they generally didn't have a problem with recruiting qualified applicants, achieving diversity was the biggest barrier for their recruitment efforts.

Retention

The survey next asked which of a list of factors seemed to have the most positive impact on retaining librarians at different stages of their careers. The single most important retention factor for entry-level positions was support for professional development (68% of responses). This correlates with its perceived importance as an enhancement for filling entry-level vacancies. Position responsibilities and salary also have a high impact (46%), followed closely by benefits (42%), and work environment and relationships with colleagues (41%). The reputation of the library (38%) and mentoring support within the library (35%) were other significant retention factors for entry-level positions. A second tier of factors includes the potential for promotion, the reputation of the institution, the geographic location, and the relationship with the supervisor (33%–30%).

Professional development and mentoring appear to be more important for the retention of newer librarians. While support for professional development is the top retention factor for both

entry-level and mid-career librarians, it falls to fifth place for late-career and management levels. Mentoring support within the library barely registers: 13% at mid-career and 2% at both late-career and management levels. This is consistent with their lesser impact on filling higher-level positions. Position responsibilities, salary and benefits, the work environment, relationships with colleagues, reputation of the library, and geographic location have a much higher impact on retention of librarians in mid-career, late-career, and management positions.

Tenure and faculty status have a relatively equal retention impact across all upper-level positions (23%–26% and 16%–17%, respectively). Sabbatical, professional, and/or research leave becomes less important as a career progresses (19% for mid-career down to 6% for managers). Opportunity for career change and support for further education follow a similar pattern (16% down to 4% and 15% to 6%, respectively).

As with recruitment, the survey asked which retention efforts had been particularly successful. The more successful efforts include salary increases and counter offers, support for professional development and continuing development, and change in position assignments.

Forty-seven percent of respondents perform exit interviews at least some of the time while 34% always do them. Of those who do perform them, 63% say they have been useful in identifying factors in the work environment that could be changed to improve retention of qualified librarians. In the case of one library, an informal interview is always given, followed by a formal one if the exiting employee requests it. Many respondents stated that comments that were received in exit interviews helped the library assess their situations and make changes if deemed necessary. For instance, one library raised its salaries in response to exit interviews while another started a new employee orientation program. In one instance, exit interviews are undertaken by the Human Resources Department at the university level, but comments weren't passed down to the relevant campus department (which makes one wonder the point!). Some respondents noted that

many librarians left for reasons that were personal and beyond the library's control, while others cited salaries and enhanced job responsibilities as the chief factors. One library did state that it didn't have a retention problem; we think they are very fortunate!

Strategies for Recruitment to the Profession

From a list of strategies for attracting individuals to librarianship, respondents were asked to select ones they had used and indicate which ones had worked best. The **most successful** strategies were to provide support for further education (48 of 51 responses), provide mentoring support within the library (35 of 47), provide internship opportunities (32 of 39), provide a general initial orientation (14 of 29), and perform outreach (13 of 23). These answers are reminiscent of the factors that seemed more important for entry-level recruitment and retention—professional development and mentoring.

Other strategies that respondents have tried to recruit people into the profession include the provision of a flexible work schedule as a means of support for further education (this wasn't rated among the highest factors for recruitment or retention of librarians, but work schedule, flexible schedule, and support for further education were all in the middle tier of impact factors); the establishment of a Peer Information Counseling Program to hire minorities to work at the library; partnering with the local library school; offering residency programs; and hiring people with master's degrees in another discipline with a requirement to complete the MLIS in three years. One library has a program whereby classified staff get an MLS through another university while working at their library, although these staff then get a professional job elsewhere.

Respondents were also asked to describe three particularly successful efforts to recruit an individual to the profession. The most successful recruitment efforts had common elements of tuition remissions or payments for staff to attend library school, and internships. These translate roughly into financial assistance and experience that can be cited on resumes and at interviews. Also successful were efforts to mentor student and support staff and encourage them to attend library school.

Conclusions

In the responses to the questions on recruitment factors, it was somewhat surprising that the benefits package was perceived to be a more important enhancement for entry-level positions than salary, but even more surprising that opportunities for professional development and advancement were much more important than salary at this level. This could suggest that entry-level librarians care more about development as a librarian during their initial job than they do about salaries, or that there is relatively little difference among starting salaries at ARL member libraries. It could also indicate that entry-level salaries in academic libraries as a whole are relatively flat.

While opportunities for professional development and advancement were of the highest importance for recruitment of entry-level (62%) and mid-career (53%) librarians, they were perceived to be lower for late-career (13%) and management (17%) level librarians, suggesting perhaps that the longer librarians are working in the field the less time they need to pursue advancement activities.

To lower one barrier to recruiting, libraries are more flexible about candidates' qualifications. One respondent stated that they did not require an MLS/MLIS now for certain technical positions, but requested an "ALA accredited MLS/MLIS degree or equivalent combination of education and experience" in their job postings. Another commented that they have relaxed requirements for some positions so they can "hire for potential as well as experience."

While salary and benefits were important for retention at all levels (41%–49% of responses), other work life factors were close seconds for mid-career to management positions, suggesting that librarians from the responding institutions may care less about money than other aspects of their jobs. It could also suggest relatively flat salary ranges in ARL institutions as compared to private industry. However, we do not wish to suggest that salaries are

not an important retention factor, for salary always rated highly (just not the highest), while other factors rose and fell around it.

It is interesting that position responsibilities are less important for retention of entry-level positions (46%) than for upper-level positions (59%–61%). This may suggest that newer librarians are more concerned with professional development early in their career, and then, as they progress, they become more concerned about their responsibilities, perhaps because they have had the chance to develop particular areas of interest and skills. Professional development represents potential, so to speak, while professional responsibilities are that potential realized.

In the comments, some respondents indicated confusion with the survey questions since they were judging by their impressions rather than asking the candidates their reasons for accepting or refusing an offer. As one respondent wrote, "...in other cases it was difficult to say unless the person volunteered the information (e.g., childcare facilities) since by law we cannot ask certain personal questions during the interview." Since this survey is based on impressions of those doing the hiring, subsequent research would need to be done with job applicants in order to learn what their reasons were for accepting or declining job offers.

Authors' Note

At the time that this SPEC survey was carried out, the Librarians' Forum at the University of Michigan was undertaking a similar survey on recruitment and retention internally within the University Library. Their charge was threefold: to survey staff with MLS degrees in librarian positions to determine what attracts librarians to the U. Michigan library; what keeps them there; and of those that have resigned, why do they leave? For further information, contact Barbara Beaton <barabara@umich.edu> or Helen Look <hlook@umich.edu>.