



Association of Research Libraries
Proceedings of the 143rd Membership Meeting

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Fred Heath, University of Texas-Austin
ARL President, Presiding

ARL MEMBERS DISCUSS
"OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUPPORT STAFF:
A REPORT ON RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE
3RD CONGRESS ON PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION"
OCTOBER 16, 2003

Discussion leaders and facilitators:

Camilla Alire, University of New Mexico
David Ferriero, Duke University
Virginia Steel, Washington State University

INTRODUCTION

Nearly twenty ARL directors met during the October 2003 ARL Membership Meeting to discuss the report from the 3rd Congress on Professional Education regarding Opportunities for Support Staff. The conversation focused on two specific areas of the report: Workplace Issues (recruitment, career paths, classification/job descriptions and compensation) and Credentialing (which includes certification, accreditation of library support staff education programs, and competencies).

BACKGROUND

In 2001, the American Library Association (ALA) approved the recommendation from the Support Staff Interests Round Table (SSIRT) to fund a third congress on Professional Education with a specific focus on issues concerning professional opportunities for support staff in libraries. After appointing a steering committee and developing objectives, ALA

moved forward with planning. ALA is now in the implementation phase of the study. Early in the process, the committee reached out to several library associations to form collaborations for input and invited ARL members to join the steering committee. Camila Alire, David Ferriero, and Virginia Steel have represented ARL interests in these discussions.

RESEARCH LIBRARY PERSPECTIVES

As library workloads shift within academic libraries, the support staff member's role is changing. Currently, the support staff workload is very similar to the tasks that were performed by entry-level librarians 20 years ago. This shift in work duties has placed greater emphasis on having properly trained support staff. Considering that 75% of the staff members in ARL libraries are support staff, this is a pressing issue within the ARL libraries as well as within the profession as a whole. With these newly developed roles, libraries will have to hire staff members who have either entry-level or specialized skills. Who will develop the necessary educational opportunities? The point was made that this issue is a microcosm of what is happening in the U.S. job market. A bachelor's degree is becoming equivalent to the threshold that was previously represented by a high school diploma.

DISCUSSION POINTS

2.0 WORKPLACE

2.1 Recruitment

- How can ARL include library support staff recruitment in its initiatives similar to those geared towards recruiting MLS graduates?
- Are the support staff positions in ARL libraries that much different from support staff positions in other libraries?

2.2 Career Paths

- How to differentiate between librarian and support staff career paths?
- It is important to discuss the skill sets needed for support staff and to clearly identify their role in libraries. This clearly defined role will assist the library with developing a specific career path for support staff.
- Are there opportunities within ARL libraries for career advancement for support staff? How is advancement defined and judged?
- Are there career training and development opportunities for support staff? How could libraries ensure that support staff has access to the courses and professional development opportunities that are offered on campus, at conferences, or even specialized workshops for their campuses?

2.3 Classification/Job Descriptions

- Could we identify any ARL libraries that classify support staff positions in relation to those elsewhere on their campus and even within the same

municipality? Duke University does this for IT staff; are there other examples?

[Note: For example, see the ARL SPEC Kit 252, Library Support Staff Position Classification Studies, October 1999. Time to update this Kit?]

2.4 Compensation

- Does ARL clearly identify support staff compensation in its annual salary survey?

[Note: Excerpt from the General Instructions for completing the ARL Annual Salary Survey. "This survey is concerned with professional positions only. Since the criteria for determining professional status vary among libraries, there is no attempt to define the term "professional." Each library reports the salaries of those staff members it considers professionals, irrespective of faculty status or membership in a collective bargaining unit, including, when appropriate, staff who are not librarians in the strict sense of the term, such as computer experts, systems analysts, budget officers, etc."]

3.0 Credentialing

3.1 Certification

- How can ARL libraries work with community colleges and universities that offer either an AA or BA in library science to hire library trained persons who are prepared to handle the newly developing role for support staff in libraries?
- If ARL were involved with a certification program for library support staff, what would that look like?
- What would this new certification model look like?
- How would it be accredited and would the profession support it, similar to hiring MLS only graduates for professional positions?
- To get a documented perspective on the issues surrounding certification, ALA or ARL should review the evolution and creation of certification programs for support staff in other professions (i.e. Dental Assistant, Physicians Assistant, Nursing Assistant) and how these roles have evolved over time.

3.2 Accreditation of Library Support Staff Education Programs

- Who or what entity would be responsible for this accreditation process?

3.3 Competencies

- There are so many stakes associated with credentialing consider developing competencies without credentialing.

The discussants at the ARL meeting concluded that the topic clearly was an important one for

ARL to address; the discussion leaders said that they would seek opportunities to include it in the ARL agenda for 2004.

--- Summary prepared by Jerome Offord and Jaia Barrett

Attached:

A Few Numbers About Support Staff in ARL Libraries, prepared by Virginia Steel, Director of Libraries, Washington State University Libraries.

A Few Numbers about Support Staff in ARL Libraries

- In 2002, the amount ARL libraries spent on salaries and wages for support staff totaled \$490,509,050. The amount spent per library ranged from a high of \$19,101,800 to a low of \$1,340,980 with the median at \$3,302,840 and the mean at \$4,302,711. ARL libraries spent more on professionals (\$549,340,660 in 2002), but the amounts spent are within the same ballpark.
- ARL libraries employed a total of 17,454 support staff in 2002. The number of support staff employed per institution ranged from a high of 657 and a low of 55, with the median at 127 and the mean at 152. By comparison, ARL libraries employed 10,793 professionals, with the number per institution ranging from a high of 528 to a low of 32 (with a median of 79 and mean of 94). As a percent of total staff (professional plus support plus students), support staff account for up to 71 percent as the high and 16 percent as the low, with the median at 50 percent and the mean at 49 percent.
- Support staff salaries and wages account for anywhere from 33 percent of a library's total expenditures down to 7 percent, with a median of 19 percent. As a percent of total salaries and wages, support staff salaries account for a high of 65 percent down to a low of 15 percent, with a median of 43 percent.
- ARL libraries spend more on support staff than they do to buy monographs: in 2002 ARL libraries spent \$256,991,243 to buy monographs and almost twice as much on support staff salaries and wages (\$490,509,050).

These data come from the ARL Statistics website at:

<http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/cgi-local/arlbin/arl.cgi>

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